

MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY AS A FACTOR IN BODY IMAGE AND DISORDERED
EATING

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major Department:
Department of Human Development and Family Science
Option: Developmental Science

November 2022

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

Multiracial Identity as a Factor in Body Image and Disordered Eating

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood is a significant developmental stage where both ethnic-racial identity development and body dissatisfaction/disordered eating are salient. Past research suggests that there are links between identity development and body image/disordered eating (Palmeroni et al., 2020). Additionally, studies in the body image/disordered eating field have begun to examine differences among ethnic-racial groups (see Bucchianeri et al., 2016). However, there is limited research with Multiracial individuals (i.e., individuals with two or more ethnic-racial backgrounds). It is undetermined how Multiracial identity development influences body image and disordered eating behaviors. Thus, two studies were conducted to explore such connections. Participants included 174 Multiracial emerging adults ($M = 21.8$ years, $SD = 2.08$ years) in the U.S. Most participants were women (73.6%). The most common Multiracial identities were Asian-White (36.2%) and Black-White (23.0%).

Study 1 was a mixed-method study that tested the racial identity-related factors of ethnic-racial identity achievement (i.e., feeling secure in one's identity), racial ambiguity, racial incongruity, race esteem, and self-rated impact of identity and their associations with body dissatisfaction, body appreciation, and disordered eating. Furthermore, participants provided their overall thoughts and feelings on the impact of their Multiracial identity on their body image. Study 2 was a qualitative study that further explored Multiracial participants' lived experiences with exoticization, racial ambiguity, and racial incongruity and how those experiences influenced their feelings towards their bodies. Quantitative results showed that ethnic-racial identity achievement and race esteem were positively associated with body appreciation. The qualitative findings provided mixed evidence, with an array of diverse appraisals and feelings ranging from positive to negative. Together, this research illuminates the

ways in which being Multiracial plays a role in body image and disordered eating. The overall findings have implications for medical professionals, families, prevention and intervention programming, and Multiracial individuals themselves. Research with Multiracial participants is particularly important given that the U.S. Multiracial population is growing at a swift pace and that body image/disordered eating issues are prevalent for emerging adults.

Keywords: Multiracial, identity, development, body image, disordered eating

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Beth Blodgett Salafia, who is truly the best advisor I could ever ask for. Thank you for believing in me. Thank you to my additional committee members: Drs. Heather Fuller, Carrie Anne Platt, and Wen Wang who generously gave expertise, support, and encouragement throughout this journey. Additionally, this endeavor would not have been possible without the support of the Department of Human Development and Family Science, who funded my research.

Special thanks to my wonderful family and friends, who have cheered me on the whole way. I would not have succeeded without your endless love and support. I am also grateful for the students and faculty within my department for their enthusiasm and interest in my research. I am lucky to have such a warm, welcoming environment.

Lastly, I would like to recognize the Prolific Academic participants who partook in this research study for their valuable contributions.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my fellow Multiracial friends; those I know and those I have yet to meet. I hope this work makes you feel seen.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence (approximately ages 10 to 18) and emerging adulthood (approximately ages 18 to 25) are significant periods of development, in which young individuals explore and determine their identity and undergo physical and social changes that influence their body image. Generally, adolescence is characterized by puberty, identity development, gaining independence, and the reliance on and salience of peers. Emerging adulthood is considered a transition period between adolescence and adulthood, with increasing independence, cognitive advancement, and furthering identity development. Ethnic-racial identity, or one's thoughts and feelings about membership in an ethnic-racial group, is particularly salient for minorities at this time because it influences how individuals interact within their contexts (citation?). However, ethnic-racial identity development does begin earlier in childhood (Yip, 2018). Further, exploring and reaching identity achievement is crucial as having a strong sense of self benefits the individual.

Just as identity is relevant in adolescence and emerging adulthood, body dissatisfaction (i.e., one's negative views and evaluations of their body; see Stice & Shaw, 2002) and disordered eating (i.e., negative eating thoughts and behaviors, such as restriction) are prevalent as well, and there may be connections between ethnic-racial identity and one's body image/disordered eating. Past research has examined ethnic-racial identity development and group differences in body image and disordered eating during adolescence and emerging adulthood (see Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; van den Berg et al., 2010); however, there is a lack of research regarding the body image and disordered eating behaviors specifically of young Multiracial individuals in the United States (U.S.).

The Multiracial population deserves attention in research as it is one of the fastest growing demographics in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2017). Gaining an understanding of

how a Multiracial identity influences body image and disordered eating is a necessary step in finding ways to best foster positive body image in this group and serve this population. Since poor body image and disordered eating behaviors are widespread and are linked to other negative outcomes such as poor mental health (see Stice et al., 2000), it is crucial that efforts are made to prevent these outcomes. Thus, this proposed research study aims to better understand the connection between having a Multiracial identity and body image and disordered eating in order to address a gap in the literature.

Definitions

In the current study, race is defined as a group based on phenotypic characteristics, such as skin color and hair, and a shared history because of these characteristics (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). The U.S. census currently considers Black, White, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native as racial categories (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The present study will also include Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) and Latino as distinct races due to their shared experiences, including racialized experiences, and because other work supports them to be racial categories (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). Further, regarding the Latino population, most of the Hispanic population in the U.S. considers Hispanic/Latino origin as a racial category (Hitlin et al., 2006) and Woo et al. (2011) suggests that reclassifying Hispanic/Latino as a racial category could help better involve them in Multiracial studies. Ethnicity is defined as a group of individuals who have a common ancestry, shared traditions, history, and culture (e.g., language, music, food, etc.) (Cokley, 2007). Hispanic is considered to be an ethnicity, although is often seen as a racial category to the general public (Hitlin et al., 2007). Given that race and ethnicity are overlapping concepts and are difficult to separate (Cokley, 2007), the term “ethnic-racial” will be used. The term “Multiracial” refers to an

individual whose ancestry is of two or more races and will be used in the present study. However, there are multiple other colloquial terms used for Multiracial individuals, including “mixed,” “biracial,” “hapa,” etc. For the purposes of this study, “Multiracial” is used to refer to both “Multiracial” and “multiethnic.” When referring to specific backgrounds, a hyphen will be used to represent an individual’s or a group’s heritages (e.g., Black-White).

It is important to note that race/ethnicity is a social construction and is not based in human biology. Yet, there are real implications and experiences related to race and racial stratification that is acknowledged in this study. For Multiracial individuals, they face special racial issues such as identity invalidation (i.e., others denying one’s identity), discrimination, and being questioned about what their race is (Jackson, 2009; Root, 1990). Further adding to the uniqueness of the Multiracial experience is that there is fluidity in their choices across the lifespan, and they seemingly have numerous choices of how they wish to identify—although they often feel pressured to pick a single racial identity (Clayton, 2020; Doyle & Kao, 2007a; Hall; 2005; Root, 1990). This pressure may be decreasing though as social acceptance of Multiracial individuals may be increasing (Charmaraman et al., 2014). Also, it must be recognized that the following literature refers to the U.S. context and is based on racial dynamics and hierarchies within the U.S.

Models of General Identity Development

Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial stage theory covers the lifespan and is characterized by different crises that individuals must contend with at each life stage. In adolescence, a time where identity development is particularly salient, Erikson labeled the crisis as Identity versus Role Confusion. In this stage, adolescents are faced with the task of achieving a sense of self with the support of others (Erikson, 1968). The crisis during emerging adulthood is Intimacy

versus Isolation, in which emerging adults work to achieve a sense of closeness and connection to others (Erikson, 1968).

Alongside the influential work of Erikson was James Marcia. His identity model placed emphasis on adolescent development and includes four statuses of identity development, focusing on the aspects of exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to an individual taking interest and considering their possible identity while commitment refers to an individual being devoted to an identity. The four statuses are: diffused (no exploration or commitment), foreclosed (commitment without exploration), moratorium (exploration, no commitment), and achieved (commitment with exploration) (Marcia, 1966). Both models conceptualize general identity development in adolescence/emerging adulthood and provided a foundation for more specific aspects of identity development. The models also emphasize a sense of achievement in meeting identity-related goals.

Building a sense of self intensifies in adolescence, continuing into emerging adulthood, and is an important task for youth. One facet of identity that develops in adolescence and emerging adulthood is race/ethnicity. Emerging adulthood is a time for intense identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). For instance, specifically for those who pursue higher education, the college environment provides many opportunities to explore one's ethnic-racial identity as one can join cultural student organization groups (e.g., Filipino American Association) and take language or ethnic studies courses that may not have been offered in high school (Harper, 2016). Even for those who do not pursue higher education, ethnic-racial identity exploration can still occur, but may look differently in that they may explore through independent learning or through family members. Multiple theoretical models on ethnic-racial identity development have been proposed, historically beginning with models on monoracial (i.e., single race) identity

development and then later on Multiracial identity development. Such models show their relevance during the adolescent/emerging adult life stage as well.

Models of Monoracial Identity Development

A sense of ethnic or racial identity is an identity that youth acquire, as they are not born already knowledgeable of their ethnic or racial identity. For the purposes of this study, they will be referred to together as ethnic-racial identity. Ethnic-racial identity encompasses one's thoughts, attitudes, and feelings about membership in an ethnic-racial group as well as the importance of ethnicity/race to one's identity (Yip, 2018). Several theoretical models describe ethnic-racial identity development, particularly for monoracial individuals.

Nigrescence Model

The Nigrescence model focuses on Black adults. The term nigrescence refers to the process of becoming a Black individual in a psychological sense (Cross, 1971). Born out of the experiences of Black Americans in the 1960s and 1970s as they sought out their true identity, Cross (1971) developed a model to describe the stages Black Americans progress through to find their Black identity. The model consists of five stages: Pre-encounter (identify with White culture), encounter (event removes individual from old worldview and explores being Black), immersion-emersion (engage with Black culture and denigrate White culture), internalization (resolution of conflicts between worldviews and internalize Black culture), and internalization-commitment (individual is committed to think of Black individuals as a group and fighting against oppression) (Cross, 1971).

Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity

Sellers and colleagues (1998) also developed a model for racial identity in Black Americans in which there are four dimensions that compose one's group identity. The four

dimensions include: Salience (how relevant race/ethnicity is to one's self-concept), centrality (the level to which one sees race/ethnicity as normative and a constant aspect of identity across time and context), regard (how positively or negatively one feels toward their racial group), and ideology (the beliefs and attitudes about how a racial group should behave) (Sellers et al., 1998).

Ethnic Identity Model

Cross' (1971) and Seller's (1998) models focus only on one racial group, but Phinney's (1989) Ethnic Identity Model expands to include more ethnic-racial minority groups, namely Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic. Highlighting adolescent/emerging adult development, Phinney (1989) developed a model comprised of three stages: Diffusion (individual has little to no exploration of ethnicity)/foreclosure (little to no exploration, but is sure about one's own ethnicity), moratorium (time of exploration and possible confusion about ethnic identity), and achievement (exploration with acceptance and security in one's ethnicity). These concepts and stages are reminiscent of Marcia's (1966) model but explain specific ethnic identity development whereas Marcia's model described identity development more generally. Phinney's (1989) work demonstrated that the process of identity development is comparable across minority groups and that individuals who reached the achievement stage have positive psychological outcomes, such as quality peer and family interactions, sense of mastery, and high self-evaluation. It is worth noting that the Ethnic Identity Model posits that White youth do not progress through these stages, thus suggesting that racial/ethnic identity development is relevant only for racial minority individuals (Phinney, 1989).

These early theoretical perspectives are applicable because they are the foundation for later theories to be formed. The earliest identity theories by Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966) set the stage by describing identity development in general and emphasizing a sense of

achievement in fulfilling identity development. Their work was followed by Cross (1971), Sellers et al. (1998), and Phinney (1989) who suggested that ethnicity and race are unique aspects of identity to be developed. These ethnic-racial identity development models still had limitations as they primarily applied to single-race individuals, thereby calling for the formation of more recent models of Multiracial identity development that begin to address concepts such as racial ambiguity, incongruity, fluidity in identification, and social contexts.

Multiracial Identity Development

Ethnic-racial identity development may look differently for youth who are not monoracial. In the U.S., the Multiracial population is growing rapidly, with 33.8 million adults reporting two or more races in the 2020 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). This is a massive leap from the 9 million Multiracial individuals counted in the 2010 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Indeed, there are more infants born to parents of two or more different races or ethnicities (14%) today than previous decades, due in part to increasing rates of interracial marriages (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Theories of Multiracial Identity Development

In recent decades, theoretical frameworks have been developed specifically for Multiracial identity development. In some ways, these theoretical models are characteristic of previous monoracial ones (e.g., progressing through stages, importance of context, and ultimate acceptance of identity), but account for the complexities of being of more than one ethnicity or race, including having an ambiguous physical appearance and social interactions with others.

Biracial Identity Model

Poston (1990) criticized previous theories which focused exclusively on monoracial individuals and proposed a model specifically for biracial identity development. Poston's (1990)

model has five stages: Personal Identity (self-esteem is the basis of identity instead of race/ethnicity), Choice of Group Categorization (pushed to choose one race/ethnicity based on culture, physical appearance, and social network), Enmeshment/Denial (having feelings of shame, guilt, and self-hatred over previous identity selections), Appreciation (time of exploration of races/ethnicities), and lastly Integration (recognize and value multiple identities). This model has a lifespan focus and emphasizes that the developmental process of identity progresses in a healthy way for most individuals (Poston, 1990).

Ecological Model of Multiracial Identity

Some theorists advocate for an ecological approach in the Multiracial literature. For example, Root's (1990; 1998) model highlights the importance of context for Multiracial identity development, in the style of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model which posits that development occurs in nested systems of influences. Major contexts include generation, class, regional history of race relations, and gender (Root, 1998). Within these contexts are microlenses that filter an individual's experiences: inherited influences (i.e., the situations one is born into, e.g., phenotype, given name, etc.), traits (i.e., genetic or environmental factors attributed to one's personality, e.g., temperament, talents, etc.), and social environments (e.g., school, home, etc.). The dynamic interactions of these microlenses and contexts shape a Multiracial individual's identity development (Root, 1990; 1998).

As an outcome of those experiences within contexts, Root (1990) proposes four possible resolutions to identity: acceptance of the identity society assigns (often the minority status), identification with both racial groups (e.g., Asian and White), identification with one racial group (individual actively chooses identity), and identification as a new racial group (e.g., Hapa Haole; Asian-White individuals in Hawaii). These outcomes are not mutually exclusive and may

vary over time. For example, a recent college graduate may have a different resolution than when they were in high school, and this could be due to new experiences and conflicts which promote an identity resolution (Root, 1990).

Biracial Identity Across the Lifespan Model

Like Root's Ecological Model of Multiracial Identity, Hall's (2005) theoretical model takes an ecological perspective, emphasizing that Multiracial individuals must be understood in context, with various dynamic factors which impact identity development over time. Such contexts include culture, community and neighborhood, and social networks (e.g., family and peers). This model also has a lifespan perspective, positing that there is fluidity in how a Multiracial individual identifies over the course of their life and that historical events influence identity development (Hall, 2005).

These theoretical models of Multiracial identity development will help inform and guide the present study by providing a theoretical foundation for understanding Multiracial youth. First, physical appearance is mentioned in Poston's (1990) and Root's (1990; 1998) models as a factor that influences identity choice and as a lens which influences one's experiences. The current study will seek to determine the strength of physical appearance as a factor to ethnic-racial identity. Second, Root's (1990; 1998) and Hall's (2005) models highlight the importance of context in one's development. The social context will be examined by asking about racial ambiguity (i.e., not physically appearing as one race to others) and racial incongruity (i.e., being misclassified by others), which are forms of appearance-related feedback from others. Third, Phinney's (1989) model guided the methodology of the current study in that identity development will be measured. Findings from the study may also extend these models by revealing how racial identity development influences how an individual feels about their body,

and their pride as it relates to their body, which has not been captured by current theoretical models.

Influences in Multiracial Development

There are several influences on a Multiracial individual's identity development, such as physical appearance, the social network including family and peers, and the level of cultural exposure to their respective heritages. These influences are especially relevant during adolescence and emerging adulthood as youth develop their ethnic-racial identity.

Physical Appearance

Physical appearance may play a major role in a Multiracial youth's development, as specific characteristics (e.g., skin color, hair, and facial features) are frequently attributed to certain races (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Physical appearance is an inherited trait that impacts experiences, according to Root's (1990; 1998) theory. Often, Multiracial individuals possess ambiguous physical features which do not fit into one clear category, contributing to perceptions of racial ambiguity. Such an appearance leads to experiences including being asked, "what are you?" by strangers or surprise and disbelief when a Multiracial individual states their identity, saying comments such as, "you don't look (racial group) you look more (different racial group)!" (Bradshaw, 1992; Root, 1990). Such an invalidating comment illustrates racial incongruity, a type of appearance-related feedback in which Multiracial individuals are misclassified by others (Norman & Chen, 2020). Additionally, Multiracial individuals may hear comments such as, "you look interesting," or "mixed children are so pretty," which emphasizes their otherness because they look different or more "exotic" than others (Root, 1990). These types of social interactions are commonplace and may not be beneficial for a Multiracial individual as the "self" is challenged by others (Bradshaw, 1992). Internalizing that type of

attention may be harmful to one's identity (Bradshaw, 1992). Further, a potential harm could be that Multiracial individuals then have low race esteem, that is, feeling low levels of pride about their racial identity (Ross, 1994).

Research has examined physical appearance as a factor in Multiracial identity development. For example, AhnAllen et al. (2006) studied Japanese-White adults and found that physical appearance contributed to one's identity and that physical appearance may be especially critical for a sense of belonging to European American groups. However, physical appearance may be affected by gender as well as the cultural context of a Multiracial individual. Specifically, Black-White girls express more difficulty accepting their physical features than boys, suggesting that racial features may have a stronger effect on Multiracial girls than boys (Bowles, 1993). Cultural context may impact the effect of physical appearance in that a Black-White individual coming from a predominately Black context may view their skin color as lighter and able to pass as White, whereas a Black-White individual in a predominately White context may see their skin as darker (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001). These results suggest that it is not skin color per se that influences identity, but rather an individual's perception of how others view their appearance (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001).

This raises the issue of "passing." Passing describes an attempt to achieve acceptability by claiming membership in a desired group while suppressing other racial elements thought to be undesirable (Bradshaw, 1992). In other words, an individual who appears to fit into one group may hide their true identity to belong in a group and may be perceived by others as belonging to that group. For instance, an Asian-White individual may pass as only White if they lack common physical features attributed to Asians (such as dark hair or almond shaped eyes). Therefore, they are considered to be White-passing. Factors that determine one's ability to pass include both

physical and non-physical attributes: body size and structure, skin tone, facial features, language ability, name, and level of assimilation (Bradshaw, 1992). The ability to pass is not equal to all individuals. In terms of White-passing, access to White communities differ in that Asian-White individuals have easier access than Black-White individuals due to likely having a more ambiguous appearance, thus having a greater ability to classify themselves as White (Bradshaw, 1992; Qian & Lichter, 2011). These studies illustrate the importance of one's context in how they identify, relating to Root's (1990; 1998) and Hall's (2005) theoretical models.

Family and Peers

The social context of family members and peers also influences one's Multiracial identity development. The importance of parents/caregivers in a child's ethnic-racial identity development is in line with developmental theories which highlight the family as a highly influential context (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Neblett et al., 2008). It is often through the family environment that youth learn about their heritage and background (Cauce et al., 1992; Jackson, 2009). Parents also aid in ethnic-racial socialization, which refers to how messages about ethnicity and race are conveyed by parents/caregivers to children (see Neblett et al., 2008). This construct is also referred to as "racial socialization," "cultural socialization," "ethnic socialization," or "family/familial ethnic socialization" (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). Such messages can be explicit or implicit, and include teaching about the meaning of ethnicity and race, preparation to cope with bias, racism, and discrimination, what it means to be a member of a certain ethnic-racial group, etc. (Neblett et al., 2008). Ethnic-racial socialization may also be associated with high race esteem or pride in youth (Jackson et al., 2020). Ethnic-racial socialization is prevalent among ethnic-racial minority families (Hughes et al., 2006), yet is understudied in Multiracial families (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). However, socialization among Multiracial youth needs to be

understood because they also face discrimination and racism like other people of color (Jackson, 2009).

A 2019 review by Atkin and Yoo found that families play a large role in socialization of Multiracial children. Although limited research exists regarding the frequency of socialization messages received, one study found that one third of parents with Multiracial children reported talking to their children about their heritage several times a year, and another third reported talking several times a month (Lesane-Brown et al., 2010). Only 10% to 12% reported talking to children several times a week or more, almost never, or never (Lesane-Brown et al., 2010). A more recent study with Black-White Multiracial families found similar results, in that almost a third of parents talked to their children about their heritage several times a year and a quarter of parents do it several times a month (Csizmadia et al., 2014). Taken together, these studies show that many parents do socialize their Multiracial children about ethnic-racial identity fairly often.

The pattern of ethnic-racial socialization may vary based on the ethnic-racial background and gender of the parents. For example, Jackson and colleagues (2019) found in a sample of Multiracial Mexican American families that monoracial minority fathers and mothers provided the most socialization messages, followed by White mothers, Multiracial mothers, Multiracial fathers, and White fathers in the U.S. This innovative study by Jackson and colleagues (2019) shows the relevance of ethnic-racial socialization among minorities and suggests that the father's role is meaningful in socialization processes; it is also the first to thoroughly explore potential gender differences among parents in their socialization practices.

It is worth noting that the parents of a Multiracial child are likely to be monoracial, not Multiracial, which may present some parenting challenges. Difficulties with conflicting parenting styles due to cultural differences or overprotection due to parental fears of

discrimination and racism may complicate an adolescent's identity development and lead to conflict between parent and child (Cauce et al., 1992). To foster identity construction and psychological health, Jacobs (1992) recommends that parents of Multiracial children provide or present a biracial (Multiracial) label to their child, support their child's racial feelings, foster ego strength by building secure attachment, and expose the child to a multiethnic community.

The role of parents can be positive or negative, as found in a qualitative study by Jackson (2009). Some Multiracial participants shared that they learned values from both parental backgrounds, while others described unsupportive experiences such as shying away from discussing race (Jackson, 2009). Parental support, in regard to the context of Multiracial families, is defined as how parents listen, understand, accept, and validate their Multiracial child's experiences and offer advice or take action to help develop their child's ethnic-racial identity and navigate racial issues (Atkin & Jackson, 2021). For Multiracial emerging adults, Atkin & Jackson (2021) discovered, through interviews, three specific types of parental support: connection support (affirmations that supported the connections between parents and child), Multiracial identity expression support (parents giving their child freedom to choose how to identify and highlighting that all of their child's heritages were important), and discrimination support (empathizing and validating child's experiences of discrimination). Experiencing parental support may be beneficial for Multiracial youth and foster a sense of pride, or high race esteem.

Friendships and acceptance of peers is critical during the periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Generally, racial homophily, selecting friends who share a similar racial background, is common (Giordano, 2003). However, for a Multiracial adolescent, they may have a wider pool of potential friends than a monoracial child because they have access to more than

one ethnic-racial group, unlike a monoracial child (Sebring, 1985). This is evidenced by one study which showed that Black-White children were more popular with Black children than their White peers as well as more popular with White peers than their Black peers (Sebring, 1985). Two more recent studies have examined the friendship choices of Multiracial adolescents. Doyle and Kao (2007b) found that Multiracial children are fairly integrated into monoracial groups and found evidence of three friendship patterns. Homophily (choosing a best friend who is Multiracial) applied to Multiracial Native Americans in particular. Blending (likely to choose a best friend from either group) applied to Black-White, Asian-White, and Asian-Black participants. Blending is a pattern different than those of monoracial children that bridges the gap between their monoracial counterparts Amalgamation (choosing a best friend of one of their races more than the other) applied to all Multiracial groups (Doyle & Kao, 2007b).

Nishina and Witkow (2021) found that Multiracial adolescents were less likely to demonstrate homophily in their best friendships, assessed by perceived (i.e., participant reported that their best friend was the same ethnic-racial background as them) and objective racial match (i.e., target participant's reported race/ethnicity was the same as the nominated best friend's reported race/ethnicity). Further, the participants' homophily did not have a significant impact on the friendship characteristics of closeness and conflict (Nishina & Witkow, 2021). Additional research finds that Multiracial adolescents are socially accepted, just as popular as monoracial minority peers, and report having a greater number of friends than monoracial individuals (Cheng & Klugman, 2010; Cheng & Lively, 2009, Schlabach, 2013). Taken together, this research suggests that Multiracial individuals are socially connected and have positive peer/friendship experiences.

However, some research suggests negative peer/friendship experiences, such that Multiracial children may not have strong peer networks and are at risk of being rejected by members of all races (Gordon, 1964; Lyles et al., 1985). However, this may not be as prevalent today possibly because of shifting attitudes and perspectives of the general public and researchers (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Interestingly, in a review of Multiracial studies, Shih and Sanchez (2005) found that in qualitative studies conducted prior to 1995 were more likely to report social rejection, whereas studies after 1995 were likely to report social acceptance and rejection (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Yet, the risk of rejection and weak peer networks may be due to being seen by peers as different, or “other,” in line with the marginal man hypothesis, which posits that Multiracial individuals are an out-group because of their multiple backgrounds, becoming marginalized in society (see Park, 1931). This “otherness” may be a result of racial ambiguity and experiences of racial incongruity from others in the social context. Consequently, Multiracial youth may experience social isolation and alienation.

Qualitative studies show that Multiracial individuals experience alienation from multiple ethnic-racial groups (Buckley & Carter, 2004; Miville et al., 2005). A specific type of alienation, cultural homelessness (i.e., the feeling that one does not have a racial group to belong to), may be felt by Multiracial individuals (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011). Social isolation and alienation may be due in part to Multiracial individuals’ unique heritage, thus creating a challenge with fitting in with traditional communities (Miville et al., 2005). Another potential consequence could be that Multiracial youth develop a preference for friends who are also Multiracial like them (i.e., homophily), as is suggested by Doyle and Kao (2007b) or adapt by making diverse social networks that are not characterized by race at all (Buckley & Carter, 2004).

Further, Multiracial youth may experience situations where they encounter discrimination or racism from a peer or friend. Jackson (2009) found themes of discrimination and racism through interviews with Multiracial emerging/young adults. Every participant (N = 10) reported experiencing direct (e.g., being called a racial slur) or indirect (e.g., overhearing a racist comment) racism and discrimination, with the majority of those events occurring during adolescence and coming from a peer or close friend (Jackson, 2009). Further, participants described their youth as a time in which they struggled with their identity, and experiencing discrimination or racism left a significant impression, making them realize they were different (Jackson, 2009). Such negative experiences may harm Multiracial youths' mental health and make them feel less proud to be who they are (i.e., low race esteem).

Another study by Franco (2019) found that for Multiracial adults, discrimination was associated with fewer social connections, including close friends, acceptance, and commonality with White individuals and more social connections with minority groups except for Asian individuals. The author stated the model minority myth (i.e., Asians have more positive outcomes that other minority groups should emulate) as an explanation for this exception (Franco, 2019). Also, it is worth noting that Multiracial individuals can experience discrimination from both majority and minority groups (Brackett et al., 2006). Such experiences of discrimination and racism may be a result of the ambiguous appearance of Multiracial individuals, thus being seen as different, as suggested by Jackson (2009). Altogether, peer/friendship experiences are varied, with possible positive or negative outcomes in the peer context as a result of having multiple ethnic-racial backgrounds. This work supports theories of Multiracial identity development that highlight the relevance of the peer context (see Hall, 2005).

Cultural Exposure

The level of exposure to one's respective cultures or heritages is another environmental factor influencing Multiracial identity development. Exploration is a crucial stage for an adolescent or emerging adult to progress through to reach identity achievement (see Erikson, 1968), and part of that process includes learning about and engaging with one's heritage and cultural traditions. Dance, music, language, cultural values, and holidays are some examples of cultural exposure (Stephan, 1992). The college environment also allows for cultural exposure and a source of support, and many Multiracial students take ethnic studies courses; Hall (2019) suggests that culture can be appreciated more when it is voluntarily learned. Additionally, families play a role in the transmission of culture (Jackson et al., 2020; Jackson, 2009; Stephan, 1992). Cultural exposure provides an opportunity for a Multiracial individual to interact with others within the racial group and may increase feelings of belonging and acceptance from that group (Khanna, 2004; Stephan, 1991; 1992).

Research suggests that increasing cultural exposure is associated with positive outcomes such as stronger ethnic-racial identification and pride (i.e., race esteem). Khanna (2004) tested the connection between cultural exposure and identity, and found that for Asian-White adults, more Asian cultural exposure was significantly associated with a stronger identification as Asian than as White. These results support prior research conducted with Multiracial college students in Hawaii in which more cultural exposure supported ethnic-racial identity development (Stephan, 1991). Moreover, cultural exposure may result in a greater sense of pride and positively impact Multiracial identity development (Jackson et al., 2020). Interestingly, Jackson and colleagues (2020) found that grandparents were a primary source of exposing Multiracial

youth to aspects of their heritage, and participants felt grateful and nostalgic for the opportunities to learn and connect with their culture.

However, cultural exposure does not necessarily have to be for the ethnic-minority culture. For example, qualitative interviews by Jackson (2009) showed that in homes with an ethnic-minority parent and ethnic-majority parent (i.e., White), cultural influence came from both cultures. For example, one participant expressed how her religious identity was connected to her Catholic White mother (ethnic-majority) more than her Muslim Arab father (ethnic-minority) (Jackson, 2009). Although cultural exposure is an influential factor, Stephan (1991) proposes that it is not absolutely necessary for ethnic-racial identity development, as about 15% of college-age participants in her study reported no identification with the groups they had cultural exposure to. Such weakened association may be due to negative experiences such as stereotyping, negative family interactions, or limited cultural exposure (Stephan, 1991).

Implications of Ethnic-Racial Identity Development

Adolescent/emerging adults' ethnic-racial identity development interacts with their context and influences their well-being. Mental health, attractiveness, and exoticization are examples of areas impacted by ethnic-racial identity development and that are pertinent to adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Mental Health

Ethnic-racial identity development has been shown to be connected to mental health outcomes. Mental health has comorbidities with eating disorders as well, therefore it is an important implication of ethnic-racial identity development. For monoracial groups, research has illustrated that establishing a secure ethnic-racial identity in adolescence and emerging adulthood predicts better mental health and higher self-esteem, in line with theoretical perspectives

proposing the importance of achieving an identity (e.g., Greig, 2003; Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Similarly, having a secure ethnic-racial identity may be connected to high race esteem. Gillen-O'Neal et al. (2015) found no evidence of racial identity confusion or conflict and high rates of pride in Multiracial early adolescents in their qualitative study, yet this cannot provide evidence of a causal relationship. Further, ethnic-racial identity may act as a protective and promotive (i.e., better outcomes in the context of normative development) factor against experiences of discrimination, which are harmful to one's mental health (Neblett et al., 2012; Yip, 2018). Additionally, Multiracial individuals may experience specific discrimination termed "Multiracial discrimination," as a result of having multiple backgrounds in a society with rigid racial hierarchies (Franco, 2019; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). However, being in a state of exploration is associated with greater vulnerability to the negative effects of discrimination (Yipp, 2018).

For Multiracial individuals, Fisher et al. (2014) found that exploration was significantly positively related to greater mental health issues, whereas affirmation (i.e., achievement) was negatively associated with mental health issues. Compared to their Black and White peers, Multiracial individuals reported higher levels of depressive symptoms and higher levels of anxiety than their Black peers (Fisher et al., 2014). Similarly, previous work has found Multiracial adolescents have adjustment problems, school problems, and more counseling use than others (Cooney & Radina, 2000; Milan & Keiley, 2000). These negative outcomes may stem from the struggle to balance and reconcile one's Multiracial background and achieve a secure sense of identity. Theoretical perspectives indeed suggest that Multiracial youth may struggle to find their identity and take longer to explore (see Root, 1990).

On the other hand, even if one has an established ethnic-racial identity, there may be negative implications for mental health. Experiences of not being seen and acknowledged as a member of an influential in-group (i.e., identity denial) and/or stereotyped as always being an outsider (i.e., perpetual foreigner stereotype) can result in poor mental health outcomes for monoracial individuals (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Kim et al., 2011; Yip, 2014). These types of experiences are especially relevant to U.S. immigrants such as Asian Americans or Latinos, who may not speak fluent English, or have an accent (Armenta et al., 2013; Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Kim et al., 2011). Such instances may be similar, or apply to, Multiracial individuals with Asian or Latino backgrounds as well.

Attractiveness and Exoticization

Developing romantic relationships and building intimacy is an essential task in emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Ethnic-racial identity development has been shown to impact dating outcomes for emerging adults as well as adolescents. For example, in a study with monoracial White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American adolescents, those involved in interracial relationships were less likely to meet their partner's parents, less likely to show commitment in public spaces, more likely to keep their relationships private, and more likely to end their relationships than those involved in same-race relationships (Wang & Kao, 2006). Additionally, minority women in particular have to contend with harmful sexual stereotypes when dating, such as the hypersexual Black woman (i.e., the Jezebel), the docile and sexually adventurous Asian woman, and the "hot and spicy" Latina woman (Beltrán & Fojas, 2008; Childs, 2009; Collins, 2005; Hall, 2019; Museus & Truong, 2013).

Little research has explored romantic relationships specifically among Multiracial individuals. One qualitative study with Multiracial women found themes of worldview, power,

familial influences, and positive and negative aspects of dating as a Multiracial (Roberts-Clarke et al., 2019). Interestingly, the authors found that most of the participants were open-minded to potential partners of any race and felt freedom from their families to date a partner of any race. Also, these women shared that they were viewed as being attractive to partners because of their Multiracial heritage (Roberts-Clarke et al., 2019). Indeed, some research has shown that Multiracial daters are more favored in comparison to monoracial daters (Curington et al., 2015; McGrath et al., 2016) and even simply identifying as Multiracial may result in being perceived as more attractive (Reece, 2016). Although these findings appear positive, this brings into question the concepts of the biracial beauty stereotype, exoticization, and racial fetishization.

The biracial beauty stereotype refers to the stereotype that Multiracial individuals are deemed physically attractive, as evidenced by being called “fascinating” or “exotic” (Bradshaw, 1992; Sims, 2012). Multiracial individuals, often women, are considered exotic because they are racially ambiguous and look different from others. Some Multiracial individuals may enjoy being perceived as exotic (Rockquemore & Arned, 2002), while others do not (Hall, 2019). However, there is racism in the criteria of what is considered “attractively” exotic versus “unattractively” exotic with their ambiguity in that not having full ethnic minority features (e.g., Asian eyes) and having lighter skin tone is seen as more beautiful (Hall, 2019; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Reece, 2016; Tate, 2007). In other words, the more Eurocentric a Multiracial individual appears, the more attractive they are perceived by others. The biracial beauty stereotype, along with sexual stereotypes (e.g., the hypersexual Black woman), allows for Multiracial individuals to be fetishized by others, meaning that they become an object of desire (Buggs, 2017). Fetishization may lead to inauthentic relationships in which their partner seeks them to fulfill a fantasy (Buggs, 2017). Perhaps it is for these reasons that some Multiracial women who are

dating feel like an outsider (Roberts-Clarke et al., 2019). These issues are based on a Multiracial individuals's ambiguous appearance, which relates to Root's (1990; 1998) theory stating that inherited traits (phenotype) interact with one's context (dating), impacting the individual. It is also possible that Multiracial daters experience low race esteem or instances of racial incongruity which could have a negative impact on their identity and well-being. Taken together, the research on ethnic-racial identity and romantic relationships highlights possible barriers and challenges to dating, especially for Multiracial individuals.

Body Image and Disordered Eating in Emerging Adulthood

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are both significant periods for ethnic-racial identity development, as well as body image/disordered eating issues. Body dissatisfaction is likely to occur as girls and boys gain weight, grow in height, and develop secondary sexual characteristics (e.g., breast growth, hair growth) (Grossbard et al., 2009; Jones & Crawford, 2005). Body dissatisfaction is an aspect of body image which refers to one's negative views and evaluations of their body (e.g., weight, figure, waist, etc.) (Stice & Shaw, 2002). In the U.S., feeling unhappy with one's body is so prevalent for girls and women that it is considered normative or typical (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Thompson, 1990). One of the reasons for this widespread discontent is American culture's emphasis and promotion of the thin ideal, which is the belief that thinner bodies are more attractive and desirable than larger bodies, yet the level of thinness deemed desirable is nearly unattainable naturally without dieting or surgical procedures (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Thompson, 1999). Moreover, although it is normal and expected that girls gain weight during puberty, this moves them farther away from the thin ideal. Societies that emphasize the thin ideal have higher rates of body dissatisfaction as well as disordered eating (Stice & Shaw, 2002). Disordered eating refers to a number of eating thoughts and behaviors,

such as restriction, preoccupation with food, feeling shame and guilt around food, etc. (Garner, 1982).

Body dissatisfaction is of great concern for researchers and clinicians because it is a prominent risk factor for disordered eating, which may result in clinically diagnosed eating disorders (Stice & Shaw, 2002). Further, body dissatisfaction is associated with poor mental health outcomes, such as depression and anxiety (Siegel, 2002; Stice et al., 2000). Additionally, longitudinal work shows that poor body image and disordered eating behaviors in adolescence may have negative impacts on later mental health in young adulthood (Linardon et al., 2021). Thus, addressing body image and disordered eating in youth and targeting efforts to prevent body dissatisfaction at this age is necessary.

Experiences of body dissatisfaction may differ by gender. Generally, college-age women show higher levels of body dissatisfaction than men (Bucchianeri et al., 2013; Gillen & Lfkowitz, 2012; Lowery et al., 2005; Garner, 1997). Women's and men's experiences of body dissatisfaction may also vary in that young women are more likely to be unhappy with their size and shape, whereas young men are likely to be concerned with muscularity (Frederick et al., 2007; Jones & Crawford, 2005; Mayo & George, 2014). Indeed, one study found that 90% of American college-age men desired to be more muscular (Frederick et al., 2007). Although women report higher rates of body dissatisfaction, it is possible that men underreport due to perceptions of body image being a feminine issue (Frederick et al., 2007). Gender minorities (e.g., transgender, nonbinary, etc.) experience body dissatisfaction as well, although research is limited (Nagata et al., 2020; Romito et al., 2021; Witcomb et al., 2015). Body dissatisfaction may likely occur for gender minorities not only because of shape and weight concerns, but also having body parts that may not align with their gender identity (Goldhammer et al., 2019).

The prevalence of disordered eating behaviors may differ by gender as well. Although young women show more prevalence of disordered eating than young men (Lewinsohn et al., 2002; Striegel-Moore et al., 2009), this does not mean there should be no concerns for young men. One study found that 3% of college-age men reported purging behavior and about 25% engaged in binge eating (Lavender et al., 2010). Also, Cain et al. (2012) found that 31% to 34% of college-age men had a high likelihood of limiting attempts (i.e., limiting calories, types of food, or amount of food) and a moderately high likelihood of overeating, and 4 to 6% had strong bulimic-like concerns. Interestingly, women tend to be more likely to seek treatment than men (Lewinsohn et al., 2002). For this reason, along with the possibility that men are underreporting disordered eating symptoms similarly to body dissatisfaction, men should not be ignored in body image and disordered eating research. Likewise, gender minorities are under researched in the disordered eating literature. A 2020 review on sexual and gender minorities suggests that disordered eating is common among this group (Nagata et al., 2020). Disordered eating among this group may be a result of body dissatisfaction as well as disapproval from society because of their identity (Testa et al., 2017). Thus, the present study will be inclusive of all gender identities.

Additionally, general identity development may be associated with body image and disordered eating outcomes. A recent study by Palmeroni and colleagues (2020) found that in adolescents and emerging adults, identity formation predicted disordered eating behaviors. Further, body dissatisfaction explained the relationship between identity formation and disordered eating, in that having a lack of identity (i.e., identity disturbance; individuals who feel empty or broken) increased body dissatisfaction, which in turn positively predicted bulimia symptoms and drive for thinness (Palmeroni et al., 2020). Past work also supports the connection

between identity status and body image/disordered eating. Kamps and Berman (2011) found that college-age participants in moratorium had significantly higher overweight preoccupation than participants with a foreclosed identity and also that identity distress was a significant predictor of overweight preoccupation, body areas satisfaction, and appearance evaluation. Specifically looking at different styles of identity exploration (information-oriented, normative, and diffuse-avoidant), Verstuyf and colleagues (2014) found that the normative style (i.e., conforming to norms of others instead of exploring what matters to one personally) predicted increases in endorsement of the body ideals. This in turn predicted increased appearance-focused eating regulation (i.e., eating behaviors for the goal of being physically fit and attractive). Promoting healthy identity development may be an overlooked aspect of eating disorder prevention, as Corning and Heibel (2016) argue. If general identity is associated with body image and disordered eating, it seems likely that ethnic-racial identity would impact body image and disordered eating as well.

Monoracial Group Differences

Substantial research has examined potential differences in levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among various ethnic-racial groups in the U.S. with some mixed results. In studies with adolescents, both Black girls and boys generally show lower levels of body dissatisfaction than other ethnic-racial groups (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Nishina et al., 2006; Story et al., 1995). Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and White girls and boys report greater body dissatisfaction than Black youth, although ranked order of most to least body dissatisfaction varies between studies (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; van den Berg et al., 2010). For disordered eating, Hispanic girls and boys report comparable disordered eating behaviors to White youth (Smith & Krejci, 1991; Story et al., 1995). Asian

girls and boys typically show more binge eating, weight-control behaviors, and weight-related concerns than White youth (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Story et al., 1995). Interestingly, Bucchianeri et al. (2016) found that Black boys specifically have a significantly weaker association between body dissatisfaction and disordered eating compared to other ethnic-racial groups, but no differences were found for girls.

However, some studies had results suggesting that there are little to no significant differences among adolescent ethnic-racial groups regarding body dissatisfaction. For instance, although Nishina and colleagues (2006) found similar trends in levels of body dissatisfaction among ethnic-racial groups, such that Asian adolescent girls reported the highest levels of dissatisfaction, followed by White, Latina, Multiethnic, and Black girls, they found significant ethnic-racial group differences among only girls, not boys. Robinson et al. (1996) found that Hispanic girls were moderately significantly more dissatisfied with their bodies than White girls, but no other significant group differences were found between Hispanic, Asian, and White girls.

Similar trends have been shown with emerging adults. Black women tend to have more positive body image and are less likely to diet than White or Latina women (Ackard et al., 2002; Duncan et al., 2003; Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2012; Ramsayer Winter et al., 2019). Black men also tend to have more positive body image than White men (Aruguete et al., 2004; Harris et al., 1991). A possibility for these findings could be that the thin ideal is less endorsed in Black culture (Craig, 2006). Asian women tend to report high levels of body dissatisfaction, on par with White women (Koff et al., 2001; Yates et al., 2004). Findings with Asian men are less consistent, with some studies showing more body image concerns and disordered eating than White individuals and others showing no differences (Ricciardelli et al., 2007). A review by Ricciardelli and colleagues (2007) on men concluded that men from minority groups participate

in more binge eating and body change strategies than White men, but that it is difficult to find a consistent pattern perhaps because of mediating and/or moderating variables. Interestingly, one study found that race/ethnicity was a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction longitudinally, specifically for Asian men and women and Multiracial men (Quick et al., 2013). In other words, Asian girls and boys and Multiracial boys were at increased risk of body dissatisfaction later in emerging and young adulthood.

However, there are a few studies that suggest there are no meaningful differences among monoracial groups regarding body dissatisfaction. For instance, a meta-analysis on young women found overall little difference in body dissatisfaction between White and non-White groups (i.e., Asian, Black, Hispanic), with effect sizes close to zero. The largest effect size ($d = .29$) was for the comparison between White and Black women, with White women being more dissatisfied than Black women (Grabe & Hyde, 2006). Additionally, Caldwell et al. (1997) studied middle to upper class Black and White women and found no significant group difference in body dissatisfaction or body discrepancy (i.e., discrepancy between actual and ideal shape). The authors suggest that perhaps socioeconomic status is a stronger predictor of body dissatisfaction than race or ethnicity and that other work confounds race and socioeconomic status (Caldwell et al., 1997). Although these are interesting results, the study's sample had more White participants and a higher-than-average income which does not reflect the general U.S. population.

Some ethnic-racial groups are still understudied in the literature, such as Native American and Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) groups. The few studies with Native American women show that they experience body dissatisfaction and disordered eating at similar or higher rates than White women (Becker et al., 2003; Bennett & Dodge, 2007; Striegel-Moore

et al., 2011). There is a lack of research on Native American emerging adult men, but similar findings occur in adolescent boys (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Smith & Krejci, 1991; Story et al., 1995). Interestingly, one recent study with Native American college-age participants found that, while controlling for body mass index (BMI), White women reported greater body dissatisfaction and disordered eating than Native American women and greater body dissatisfaction than Hispanic women (Smith et al., 2020). To the author's knowledge, no published studies have examined MENA youth in the U.S.

Differences in estimates of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating could be a function of differing cultural body ideals. In White and Asian cultures, thinness is the ideal body type, and Asians may endorse thinness even more than White individuals (Evans & McConnell, 2003). On the other end of the spectrum, Black culture tends to endorse thicker, bigger body ideals (Craig, 2006). Perhaps this is a reason why Black individuals report the lowest rates of body dissatisfaction. Latino culture has similar body standards to Black culture (Craig, 2006; De Casanova, 2004). However, this does not explain why Latino individuals report high rates of body dissatisfaction. As for Native American and MENA cultures, there is little published work on their cultural body ideals. Despite varying cultural body and beauty ideals, being an ethnic-racial minority in the U.S. may place pressures to adhere to the White American ideals of thinness.

In sum, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating are prevalent in adolescence and emerging adulthood, with apparent gender and ethnic-racial differences among single race individuals. However, some studies suggest that there are few meaningful differences in body dissatisfaction specifically among ethnic-racial groups in both adolescent and emerging adult samples. Taking these potential ethnic-racial differences into consideration, it raises the question

of how Multiracial individuals feel about their bodies and whether they engage in disordered eating similar to monoracial individuals.

Body Image and Disordered Eating in Multiracial Individuals

Although there is adequate research on ethnic-racial group differences in the body image and disordered eating literature, very few studies have concentrated explicitly on the Multiracial population. Multiracial samples tend not to be the center of many studies, but instead often appear to be a catch-all, “other” group. Multiracial participants’ results are included, but discussions generally do not go in depth for this group. Body image and disordered eating in this group is worth exploring though. Experts posit that Multiracial individuals may be highly likely to experience poor body image due to identity and emotional issues connected to balancing two cultures and two different standards of beauty much like ethnic-racial minorities in the U.S. (see Ramseyer Winter et al., 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2007). For instance, a Black-White individual must contend with their White heritage endorsing the thin ideal while their Black heritage does not endorse the thin ideal. This experience may be similar to a monoracial Black individual who lives in American culture that endorses the thin ideal.

Work that included Multiracial individuals with other monoracial groups has found interesting results. Ramseyer Winter and colleagues (2019) asked Multiracial and monoracial women about their satisfaction with different aspects of their body, and Multiracial women had the lowest skin tone satisfaction, significantly lower than all other groups. Mucherah and Frazier (2013) found opposite results in Multiracial women with Black heritage, in that they were most satisfied with their skin color compared to other African heritage groups. In another study, Multiracial youth in England had significantly lower BMIs and higher disordered eating attitudes than White youth (Thomas et al., 2002). However, some work with racially diverse youth

including Multiracial individuals showed more similarities than differences in body dissatisfaction (Nishina et al., 2006).

There are interesting results among Multiracial male samples in comparison to other groups regarding body dissatisfaction. For example, Yates, et al. (2004) found that Multiracial girls with higher BMI reported higher body dissatisfaction; however, that was not the case with Multiracial boys. Nagata et al. (2019) found that Multiracial high school boys were more likely to attempt weight gain than White boys but did not provide a possible explanation for that finding, which highlights the lack of attention to the Multiracial group. Perhaps this finding suggests that Multiracial boys feel more pressure to change their shape and weight or have high body dissatisfaction. Indeed, Quick et al. (2013) found that Multiracial boys were at risk for body dissatisfaction in emerging adulthood compared to other ethnic-racial groups.

To the author's knowledge, only three published studies have specifically examined Multiracial individuals not as an extra group for comparison. First, AhnAllen and colleagues (2006) specifically studied Japanese-White adults and found, through mixed-methods, that physical appearance and feelings of exclusion contributed to ethnic-racial identity development. Japanese-White participants with more of an Asian appearance identified with the Japanese group, and those with a more White appearance identified with the White American group (AhnAllen et al., 2006). This study adds to the Multiracial literature because much of the previous work has studied Black-White individuals. However, the study has a narrow focus with the inclusion of only Japanese-White participants. Although there is the benefit of learning about a specific group, the results of this study may not apply to other Multiracial identities. Therefore, there is still a need to include Asian-White individuals of different heritages as well as other Multiracial identities such as Asian-Black, Hispanic-Black, Native American-White, etc.

Second, Ivezaj and colleagues (2009) explored racial (White, Black, Multiracial) and gender differences with endorsement of binge eating, weight status, and mental health. Results showed that Multiracial and White women who were not overweight or endorsed binge eating behaviors had significantly higher levels of appearance evaluation and shape concerns than Black women and White men and greater overweight preoccupation than all other groups (Ivezaj et al., 2009). For those who were overweight and did not endorse binge eating behaviors, Multiracial and White women had higher levels of self-classified weight (i.e., one's own perception of their weight from very underweight to very overweight) and anxiety than men. For the group of those who were not overweight but endorsed binge-eating behaviors, Multiracial and White women scored lower on appearance evaluation than Black women and White men. The last group of those who were overweight and endorsed binge-eating behaviors, Multiracial and White women showed greater self-classified weight and body image dissatisfaction than White men and Black women (Ivezaj et al., 2009). These findings suggest that Multiracial women are on par with White women with risk for poor body image and mental health.

The afore-mentioned study claims to focus on the Multiracial group; however, that group accounted for only 6.1% of their sample ($n = 40$), and they did not provide any background literature or relevant theories about Multiracial identity. Additionally, their sample of Multiracial men was too small to be included in statistical analyses (Ivezaj et al., 2009). Although the results of this study are noteworthy and add to the literature, the limitations show there is a need for further research with larger samples and with more male participants.

Lastly, a more recent study conducted by Burke et al. (2021) examined eating disorder prevalence among Multiracial emerging adults/adults, specifically investigating specific Multiracial combinations to see if there is unique risk among distinct identities. The authors

found that some minority-minority groups (i.e., American Indian/Alaskan Native-Hispanic/Latinx, Black-Hispanic/Latinx, Black-Asian) showed higher prevalence of high eating disorder pathology (Burke et al., 2021). This finding is interesting because the prevalence is higher than expected based on the lower prevalence estimates from the respective monoracial groups (Burke et al., 2021). Conversely, some identities (i.e., Asian-White and MENA-White) showed lower than expected prevalence of eating disorder pathology because of their high prevalence estimates from their respective monoracial groups (Burke et al., 2021). These findings illuminate the complex ways ethnic-racial identity may influence eating disorders and this study greatly advances the work on Multiracial individuals and eating disorders.

Overall, these few studies suggest the possibility that Multiracial identity influences body image and disordered eating behaviors. Further, they suggest that there may be meaningful differences between Multiracial individuals and other ethnic-racial groups and gender differences as well. Multiracial individuals may experience high levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, as some of the limited evidence suggests. However, it remains unclear, and definitive conclusions cannot be drawn. It is also possible that Multiracial youth are satisfied with their bodies and have less body dissatisfaction and disordered eating than other groups perhaps because they appreciate their uniqueness and feel secure in their identity. Moreover, if a Multiracial individual has Black heritage, perhaps that identity, which has the lowest rates of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, may be a buffer. Further, it remains unclear what specific aspects of identity may play a role in a Multiracial youth's body image and disordered eating.

The Present Study

Previous research in the body image/disordered eating field has explored racial differences among monoracial groups in the United States (see Bucchianeri et al., 2016). However, the current body image and disordered eating literature is slim with regard to research specifically focusing on the Multiracial youth population. Further, although various theories regarding Multiracial identity development exist and inform the present study, they are limited in that they do not discuss how ethnic-racial identity plays a role in body image and disordered eating. This study seeks to extend those theories. Additionally, although some research (e.g., Palmeroni et al., 2020) has identified certain attributes (e.g., identity disturbance) related to identity development that are associated with body image and disordered eating, there are no known studies that specifically examine such attributes among Multiracial adolescents and emerging adults. Thus, the present study will be the first to investigate attributes such as ethnic-racial identity achievement and its association with body image and disordered eating among Multiracial individuals.

With the Multiracial population being one of the fastest growing demographics in the U.S. and gaining visibility (see Pew Research Center, 2017), it is crucial to conduct more research identifying the connection between holding a Multiracial identity and body image and disordered eating. The unique challenges of grappling with multiple racial backgrounds, affirming one's identity, appearing racially ambiguous, and being misidentified by others may translate to Multiracial individuals holding negative feelings towards their bodies. Such feelings may then result in body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, which are salient predictors of future clinically diagnosed eating disorders (Stice & Shaw, 2002).

Conversely, there is a possibility that Multiracial individuals may feel secure in their racial identities and in appearing racially ambiguous to others. Perhaps they do not have many experiences with being misidentified by others. Taking a strengths-based or resilience perspective, perhaps Multiracial individuals view their identity and bodies as unique, positive aspects of themselves which they take pride in. Therefore, these Multiracial individuals may not experience body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, but rather have positive body image and healthy eating behaviors. Additional research needs to be conducted with Multiracial samples to investigate these competing hypotheses.

Thus, to address the lack of research focusing on Multiracial individuals' body image/disordered eating, the present study examined whether having a Multiracial identity predicts poor or positive body image and disordered eating behaviors in emerging adults, and the factors or pathways underlying that association. Study 1 was mixed methods. For Study 1, the main research question asked, what racial identity-related factors (e.g., ethnic-racial identity achievement (i.e., whether one has affirmed their identity or not), racial ambiguity, racial incongruity, race esteem, and self-rated impact of identity) influence one's body image and disordered eating behaviors? Study 2 was a solely qualitative exploration with three open-ended survey responses to understand the lived experiences of Multiracial emerging adults. For Study 2, the central research question asked, what role does being Multiracial play in how young individuals feel about their body?

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Participants included 174 Multiracial emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 25 within the United States ($M = 21.8$ years, $SD = 2.08$ years). See Table A1 for participant ethnic-racial demographics. The sample was majority women (73.6%), with (21.3%) men, (3.4%) nonbinary, (1.1%) transgender, and (.6%) genderfluid. The sample had varied educational backgrounds, with (56.3%) obtaining a high school diploma, (35.1%) a bachelor's degree, (2.3%) a graduate degree, (5.2%) a GED, and (1.1%) who did not graduate high school.

The participants were recruited via Prolific Academic, an online crowdsourcing platform for researchers to distribute their studies to individuals in the United States or the United Kingdom. Prolific Academic is a viable crowdsourcing method as it produces high data quality, diverse participants, and naivety (i.e., unfamiliarity with commonly used research measures) (Peer et al., 2017). To target the specific sample of Multiracial emerging adults, screening parameters were set on Prolific Academic to ensure the correct sample. The parameters included identifying as Multiracial, aged 18 to 25, and residing in the United States. By setting those parameters, Prolific Academic users who fit that profile were able to view the study description/invitation and choose to participate.

Eligible participants accessed a Qualtrics survey on Prolific Academic's website. After consenting to partake in the study, they were given the survey. Once the survey was completed and Prolific Academic verified that the survey was complete, participants were compensated \$10 as a thank you for their time and effort. Compensation occurred through PayPal via Prolific Academic.

Measures

Body Image

The Body Dissatisfaction Subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI) by Garner et al. (1983) included 20 items measuring individuals' attitudes toward different aspects of their physical body, such as the buttocks, thighs, and waist. Sample items included, "I think my hips are too big," and "I think my stomach is just the right size." Responses were on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*), such that higher scores indicate higher body dissatisfaction. Garner and colleagues (1983) demonstrated high reliability with Cronbach's alphas above .90 in their sample of female eating disorder patients and a comparison group.

The Body Appreciation Scale (BAS-2) by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) assessed body appreciation, or respect towards one's body. The BAS-2 included 10 items measuring participants' positive body image. Sample items included, "I am comfortable in my body," and "I respect my body." Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*), such that higher scores indicate higher body appreciation. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) demonstrated high reliability in their sample of men and women, with Cronbach's alpha scores of .97 for women and .96 for men.

Disordered Eating

The Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT) by Garner et al. (1982) included 26 items measuring eating attitudes and behaviors. Sample items included, "I feel extremely guilty after eating," and "I cut my food into small pieces." Responses were on a 6-point scale, ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 6 (*Always*), with higher scores indicating higher endorsement of disordered eating behaviors. In a sample of emerging adult females with anorexia nervosa, high internal consistency was found, $\alpha = .90$ (Garner et al., 1982).

Race Esteem

To assess race esteem, one item adapted from Ross (1994) was used. Race esteem refers to holding a high regard or a sense of pride in one's racial group. The item stated, "I am very proud in every respect to be a member of all the racial groups that I belong to." Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*). Higher scores represent higher race esteem.

Ethnic-Racial Identity Achievement

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) by Roberts et al. (1999) was adapted from Phinney (1992) and included 12 items assessing two factors: ethnic identity search and affirmation, or achievement. Sample items included, "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me," and "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to." Responses were on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 3 (*Strongly Agree*), with higher scores demonstrating greater affirmation, or belonging and commitment to one's ethnic-racial group. In racially diverse samples of high school and college students, Phinney (1992) demonstrated high reliability, $\alpha = .81$ and $.89$, respectively. Although typically used for monoracial individuals, this scale has been used with Multiracial adolescents (see Fisher et al., 2014).

Multiracial Identity

Norman and Chen's (2020) Racial Ambiguity scale included three items assessing the extent to which others are unable to determine the individual's race. A sample item included, "Many people can't tell what race I am." Responses were on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*), with higher scores representing greater racial

ambiguity. Norman and Chen's (2020) sample of Multiracial young adults demonstrated reliability ($\alpha = .71-.80$).

Racial incongruity is another form of appearance-related social feedback, which occurs when one's racial identity contrasts from their observed race by others. The two item Racial Incongruity scale by Norman and Chen (2020) measured the frequency of one's experiences with being misclassified by others. A sample item included, "How often do you racially identify differently than strangers expect you to identify?" Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*Almost Never*) to 4 (*Extremely Often*), with higher scores representing a higher contrast between one's racial identity and observed race. The two items were strongly correlated in a sample of Multiracial young adults, $r(138) = .67, p < .001$ (Norman & Chen, 2020).

An additional single item was created for the present study to assess another aspect of Multiracial identity, called self-rated impact of identity. We asked to what extent has their Multiracial identity impacted how they feel about their body on a 4-point scale ranging from (*Not at All*) to 3 (*A Lot*).

Qualitative Open-Ended Questions

Four open-ended questions asked, 1) "Overall, how do you feel your racial identity has impacted the way you feel about your body?" 2) What are your experiences with others calling you "exotic" or saying that you were especially attractive because of your Multiracial identity? How have these experiences made you feel? 3) Do you feel you look racially mixed, or do you feel you look primarily like one race/ethnicity? How has this impacted the way you feel about your body? 4) What are your experiences with other people misclassifying your racial identity, if any? How have these experiences impacted the way you feel about your body?

Personal Characteristics

Demographic items included age, height, weight, race/ethnicity, education, and gender. The race/ethnicity of each biological parent and whether the parent identifies as Multiracial was also asked. Additionally, an item asked if the participant has or had a diagnosed eating disorder.

STUDY 1: INFLUENCE OF RACIAL IDENTITY-RELATED FACTORS ON BODY IMAGE AND DISORDERED EATING

Abstract

Previous research has examined body image and disordered eating with monoracial youth. Yet, Multiracial individuals (i.e., racial identity of two or more racial backgrounds) remain largely understudied in such work. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore body image and disordered eating in a sample of Multiracial emerging adults in the United States. Specifically, we explored how racial identity-related factors such as ethnic-racial identity achievement, racial ambiguity, racial incongruity, race esteem, and self-rated impact of identity were associated with body image and disordered eating. Participants (N = 174) completed an online survey with established scales and open-ended questions. The open-ended question asked how participants' identity impacted their feelings towards their body overall. Quantitative results showed that greater ethnic-racial identity achievement and higher race esteem predicted greater body appreciation. Some qualitative themes revealed that many Multiracial emerging adults (50.6%) felt positive or neutral about their body in relation to their racial identity, which complements and supports the quantitative results. Overall, this study demonstrates that Multiracial individuals' positive body image is associated with racial identity development, which holds implications for prevention and intervention. Research and programming that take a strengths-based approach and emphasize healthy identity development may aid in preventing negative body image and disordered eating in the Multiracial population.

Introduction

In the United States (U.S.), the Multiracial population is one of the fastest growing groups (Pew Research Center, 2017). In the 2020 census, 33.8 million American adults reported

two or more races – a massive leap from the 9 million Multiracial individuals counted in the 2010 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). It is estimated that about one in five individuals in the U.S. will have a Multiracial background by 2050 (Lee & Bean, 2004). “Multiracial” refers to an individual whose ancestry is of two or more races and will be used in this study, although there are numerous other colloquial terms for Multiracial, such as “mixed,” “biracial,” “hapa,” etc. When referring to specific backgrounds, a hyphen will be used to represent an individual’s or a group’s heritages (e.g., Asian-Black). Additionally, given that race and ethnicity are overlapping concepts and are difficult to detach (Cokley, 2007), the term “ethnic-racial” will be used. For the purposes of this study, “Multiracial” is used to refer to both “Multiracial” and “multiethnic.”

It is important to acknowledge that race/ethnicity is a socially constructed concept not based in human biology. Yet, there are still real experiences and implications related to racial identity and racial stratification that is recognized in this study. Specifically for Multiracial individuals, they face unique racial issues including being perceived as ambiguous, being questioned about their race, and being incorrectly categorized by others. Moreover, it must be recognized that the following literature largely refers to the U.S. context and is based on racial dynamics and hierarchies within the U.S.

Ethnic-racial identity, or one’s thoughts and feelings about membership in an ethnic-racial group, begins developing in childhood and continues through adolescence and emerging adulthood (Yip, 2018). Identity development is salient during adolescence and emerging adulthood; exploring and reaching identity achievement is an essential task, as having a strong sense of self benefits the young individual. Just as identity development is prominent at this stage of the lifespan, body image issues are also highly relevant. Specifically, body dissatisfaction (i.e., one’s negative views and evaluations of their body due to a discrepancy between desired and

actual appearance or weight; see Stice & Shaw, 2002; Grogan, 2017) and disordered eating (i.e., negative eating/food thoughts and behaviors, such as restriction) are prevalent among adolescents and emerging adults.

Although body dissatisfaction and disordered eating are widespread, it is important to also examine body appreciation (i.e., the acceptance, respect, and favorable attitudes towards one's body; see Avalos et al., 2005), because promoting body appreciation may help foster positive body image and take a strengths-based approach in prevention. During adolescence and emerging adulthood, past research has examined ethnic-racial identity development and group differences in body image and disordered eating (see Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; van den Berg et al., 2010); however, there is a lack of research regarding the body image and disordered eating behaviors specifically of Multiracial individuals in the U.S. Further, there may be connections between ethnic-racial identity and one's body image and disordered eating behaviors.

Thus, the present study sought to examine the connection between holding a Multiracial identity and body dissatisfaction, body appreciation, and disordered eating in order to address a gap in the literature. Gaining a better understanding of how a Multiracial identity influences body image and disordered eating is a vital step in finding methods to best foster positive body image and healthy eating in this growing group and serve this population. Since body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors are widespread and are linked to other serious negative outcomes such as poor mental health (see Stice et al., 2000), it is imperative that efforts are made to prevent these outcomes in Multiracial individuals, specifically emerging adults.

Theoretical Background of Ethnic-Racial Identity Development

Multiple theoretical models describe the ethnic-racial identity development of monoracial individuals, including Cross' (1971) Nigrescence Model and Sellers and colleagues' (1998) Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity. However, these models focus specifically on the identity development of Black Americans. Phinney's (1989) Ethnic Identity Model applies to Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic identities and is a relevant theoretical model used in the current study. Highlighting adolescent and emerging adult development, Phinney (1989) developed a model comprised of three stages: Diffusion (individual has little to no exploration of ethnicity)/foreclosure (little to no exploration, but is sure about one's own ethnicity), moratorium (time of exploration and possible confusion about ethnic identity), and achievement (exploration with acceptance and security in one's ethnicity). Phinney's (1989) work demonstrated that the process of identity development is comparable across minority groups and that individuals who reached the achievement stage have positive psychological outcomes, such as quality peer and family interactions, sense of mastery, and high self-evaluation. Although the Ethnic Identity Model originally involved monoracial individuals, it has been applied to Multiracial individuals as well (see Fisher et al., 2014).

To address the limitation of theories highlighting only monoracial individuals, newer theoretical models have been developed for Multiracial identity development to account for the complexity of holding two or more ethnic-racial identities. Multiple models inform this study, providing a background for the importance of physical appearance and context in identity development. Root's (1990; 1998) Ecological Model of Multiracial Identity highlights the importance of context for Multiracial identity development, such as generation, class, regional history of race relations, and gender (Root, 1998). Within these contexts are microlenses that

filter an individual's experiences: inherited influences (i.e., the situations one is born into, e.g., phenotype, given name, etc.), traits (i.e., genetic or environmental factors attributed to one's personality, e.g., temperament, talents, etc.), and social environments (e.g., school, home, etc.). The dynamic interactions of these microlenses and contexts shape a Multiracial individual's identity development (Root, 1990; 1998).

Like Root's Ecological Model of Multiracial Identity, Hall's (2005) Biracial Identity Across the Lifespan Model adopts an ecological perspective, emphasizing that Multiracial individuals must be understood in context, with various dynamic factors which impact identity development over time. Such contexts include culture, community and neighborhood, and social networks (e.g., family and peers). Lastly, Poston's (1990) Biracial Identity Model takes on a lifespan perspective, emphasizing that the developmental process of identity progresses in a healthy way for most individuals. Poston's (1990) model has five stages: Personal Identity (self-esteem is the basis of identity instead of race/ethnicity), Choice of Group Categorization (pushed to choose one race/ethnicity based on culture, physical appearance, and social network), Enmeshment/Denial (having feelings of shame, guilt, and self-hatred over previous identity selections), Appreciation (time of exploration of races/ethnicities), and lastly Integration (recognize and value multiple identities). Enmeshment/Denial and appreciation may be the most salient stages for adolescents and emerging adults.

Together, these Multiracial identity development models guide the present study. Phinney's (1989) model was used in the methodology in that identity achievement was measured using an established questionnaire based on Phinney's (1989) model. Poston's (1990) and Root's (1990; 1998) models both include physical appearance as a factor that impacts Multiracial individuals' choice in how to identify and as a lens influencing their experiences. Thus, this

study aimed to measure the strength of physical appearance in identity development. Similarly, social context is an important factor in Multiracial individuals' development, as highlighted by both Root (1990; 1998) and Hall (2005). Racial ambiguity and incongruity are dependent on one's context as these concepts are forms of appearance-related feedback from others in their social world and was measured in this study.

Although the racial identity development theories apply to a range of life stages from childhood to adulthood, emerging adulthood is the focus of the present research. Racial identity development is a prominent process during emerging adulthood because of the meaningful social and cognitive changes occurring during this transitional life stage. For instance, an individual entering college may encounter many new opportunities to explore their ethnic-racial identity by joining specific cultural student organization groups. College is considered a "consciousness-raising environment" because students are prompted to engage and reflect on their ethnic-racial identity due to the increased cultural and peer diversity (Azmitia et al., 2008; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Although, emerging adults not attending college also can still engage with exploring their identity, but it may be done individually or from learning from family members. Experts in emerging adult development argue that emerging adulthood is a time for extensive exploration and reflection of identity (Arnett, 2000; Azmitia et al., 2008). Thus, the sample of the present study specifically included Multiracial emerging adults.

Unique Aspects of Ethnic-Racial Identity

Multiracial individuals may have distinctive experiences as they interact within the social world and hold unique self-perceptions of their identity. Ethnic-racial identity achievement, ambiguity, incongruity, and race esteem are relevant, defining attributes of ethnic-racial identity that may shape one's experiences and feelings as well as one's feelings towards their body.

Ethnic-Racial Identity Achievement

The concept of ethnic-racial identity achievement stems from Phinney's (1989) theoretical research and is the final stage in racial identity development. Ethnic-racial identity achievement, or affirmation, occurs after an individual has explored their heritage and becomes secure and comfortable in their identity (Phinney, 1989). Further, Phinney proposes that White adolescents/emerging adults do not progress through these stages, only racial minority individuals (Phinney, 1989). Ethnic-racial identity achievement is the ideal goal for individuals because feeling secure in one's identity is associated with positive outcomes such as high sense of mastery, high self-evaluation, and quality peer and family relationships (Phinney, 1989). A strong sense of racial identity also serves as a protective factor against racial discrimination for racial minorities (Neblett et al., 2012; Yip, 2018).

Phinney's (1989) research originally applied to monoracial groups, and thus it brings into question how ethnic-racial identity achievement applies to Multiracial individuals, who have more complex identities. Fisher and colleagues (2014) found that Multiracial adolescents experienced greater identity exploration but less achievement than Black participants, yet more achievement than White participants. Additionally, the authors found a positive relationship between exploration and mental health (i.e., depressive symptoms and anxiety) in that more exploration was associated with more mental health problems (Fisher et al., 2014). The link between ethnic-racial identity achievement and mental health has been researched, but the relationship between ethnic-racial identity achievement and body image/disordered eating is undetermined. Since ethnic-racial identity achievement is linked to positive outcomes, it is reasonable then that it may be a factor in experiencing positive body image. Thus, the present

study aims to explore this connection. In addition, this study will gather participants' personal perception on how their identity impacts how they feel about their body.

Racial Ambiguity

It is a common experience for Multiracial individuals to have others, even strangers, ask, "What are you?" This is an example of a racial identification inquiry, where the goal is to determine one's racial background (Tran et al., 2016). These inquiries occur because the perceiver cannot categorize the Multiracial individual due to their ambiguous appearance. Racial ambiguity refers to physical appearances that defy easy categorization within monoracial categories (Villegas-Gold & Tran, 2018). Racial ambiguity is a type of appearance-related social feedback, meaning that the feedback from one's social world on their ambiguous appearance influences their identification (Norman & Chen, 2020). According to Root's (1990; 1998) theory, physical appearance is an inherited trait that impacts experiences, and ambiguity is a highly shared and meaningful experience for individuals with multiple backgrounds (Tran et al., 2016; Young et al., 2013).

Indeed, ethnic-racial identity development is impacted by socially perceived appearance. For instance, Multiracial individuals are more likely to identify as monoracial if they look more like a particular group and if they perceive others see them as monoracial (AhnAllen et al., 2006; Brunsmas & Rockquemore, 2001; Good et al., 2010). Conversely, Multiracial individuals are likely to identify as Multiracial if they perceive themselves as ambiguous and believe others see them as ambiguous (AhnAllen et al., 2006; Brunsmas & Rockquemore, 2001; Good et al., 2010). Further, Multiracial individuals who believe others see them as ambiguous may show stronger identification with being Multiracial, as found in a study by Norman and Chen (2020).

However, what is virtually unknown in the literature is how racial ambiguity plays a role in Multiracial individuals' body image and disordered eating. From theories of Multiracial identity development, it is known that physical appearance is an important a factor in identity development (see Root, 1990; 1998), so it is reasonable then that one's ambiguous physical appearance can influence how one feels about their body, leading to either body appreciation or body dissatisfaction. In turn, eating behaviors may be affected, in that feeling dissatisfied with one's body could lead to disordered eating as a way to change one's shape or size. The influence of ambiguity may be either positive, negative, or neutral, and understanding the connection between racial ambiguity and body image/disordered eating will be informative and lead to greater understanding of the Multiracial group.

Racial Incongruity

Surprise and disbelief may follow when a Multiracial individual discloses their heritage. The inquiring stranger may respond with comments such as, "you don't look (racial group) you look more (different racial group)!" (Bradshaw, 1992; Root, 1990). Such a response is an example of racial incongruity, which is another type of appearance-related feedback wherein Multiracial individuals are misclassified by others (Norman & Chen, 2020). It is possible to experience racial incongruity without physically appearing ambiguous. For instance, an Asian-Latina woman may appear to be Asian yet personally identify with being Latina. Therefore, she can experience incongruence due to having a physical appearance that does not match how she identifies (Norman & Chen, 2020). This mismatch may translate into negative feelings towards the body, which may then lead to disordered eating behaviors as body dissatisfaction and disordered eating are intimately linked (cites).

Using an Asian-Latina example, perhaps this woman wishes she looked less Asian and more Latina so that she does not experience racial incongruity which she perceives as negative. Or perhaps the Asian-Latina woman does not feel bothered by such situations, appreciates her body, and does not engage in disordered eating. To the author's knowledge, previous research has not examined the connection between racial incongruity and body image/disordered eating. Therefore, the present study seeks to understand this connection to expand the body image/disordered eating and Multiracial literature as well as inform those working with Multiracial emerging adults.

Race Esteem

Race esteem, or having pride in one's ethnic-racial group, is a concept originating from Ross' (1994) work. Race esteem is argued to be a distinct concept from global self-esteem, but they are still positively correlated in that those with high race esteem also likely have high global self-esteem (Wright, 1985). In more recent literature, the term racial pride or racial self-esteem is also used. Multiracial pride has also been shown to be positively correlated to self-esteem (Salahuddin & O'Brien, 2011). Although historically Multiracial individuals were marginalized and believed to exhibit low self-esteem and identity issues (see Herring, 1992; Thornton, 1996), recent perspectives are shifting and there is evidence of high race esteem within this group. For instance, Gillen-O'Neal et al. (2015) found an overall observation of pride and a focus on positive aspects of their identity in adolescents in their qualitative study. Moreover, Cheng and Lee (2009) showed that Multiracial participants who felt positive feelings related to pride expressed greater harmony between their respective backgrounds. Therefore, race esteem may be an important identity factor for Multiracial individuals.

Since low global self-esteem is well-connected to poor body image and disordered eating (French et al., 2001; Lowery et al., 2005; Paxton et al., 2006; Shea & Pritchard, 2007; Thompson & Smolak, 2001; van den Berg et al., 2010), it is possible that race esteem also influences body image and disordered eating in a similar direction. However, the effect of race esteem on body image and disordered eating has not been studied with Multiracial samples. Based on general self-esteem and body image/disordered eating work, it can be hypothesized that higher race esteem is correlated with less body dissatisfaction and less disordered eating behaviors, or greater body appreciation. Thus, the present study seeks to investigate this question.

Body Image and Disordered Eating in Multiracial Individuals

Substantial research has examined potential differences in levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among various ethnic-racial groups in the U.S. Generally, in studies with adolescents and emerging adults, Black individuals show lower levels of body dissatisfaction and dieting than other ethnic-racial groups (Ackard et al., 2002; Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2012; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Nishina et al., 2006; Ramseyer Winter et al., 2019; Story et al., 1995). Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and White adolescent girls and boys report greater body dissatisfaction than Black adolescents, although ranked order of most to least body dissatisfaction varies between studies (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; van den Berg et al., 2010). For disordered eating, Hispanic adolescents report comparable disordered eating behaviors to White adolescents (Smith & Krejci, 1991; Story et al., 1995). Asian adolescents and emerging adults typically are on par or show greater body dissatisfaction and disordered eating than White adolescents and emerging adults (Cummins & Lehman, 2007; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Story et al., 1995). Taking these potential ethnic-racial differences into consideration, the question emerges of how Multiracial individuals feel about

their bodies and whether they engage in disordered eating in similar levels to monoracial individuals. It is also relatively unknown the extent to which Multiracial emerging adults perceive their identity impacting how they feel about their body, which is termed “self-rated impact of identity” for this study.

Insufficient studies have concentrated explicitly on the Multiracial population. Multiracial samples tend not to be the center of many studies, but instead often appear to be an extra catch-all, “other” group. Multiracial participants’ results are included, but discussions largely do not go in depth for this group. Experts speculate that Multiracial individuals may be highly likely to experience poor body image due to identity and emotional issues connected to balancing multiple cultures and different standards of beauty similar to monoracial ethnic-racial minorities in the U.S. (see Ramseyer Winter et al., 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2007). If Multiracial individuals experience poor body image, it is likely they may engage in disordered eating as well. Indeed, Thomas and colleagues (2002) found that Multiracial adolescents had higher disordered eating attitudes than White adolescents.

To the author’s knowledge, only three peer-reviewed studies have purposely examined Multiracial individuals as a target population, not as a comparison group to monoracial groups. First, AhnAllen and colleagues (2006) specifically studied Japanese-White adults and found, through mixed-methods, that physical appearance and feelings of exclusion contributed to ethnic-racial identity development. Japanese-White participants with more of an Asian appearance identified with the Japanese group, and those with a Whiter appearance identified with the White American group (AhnAllen et al., 2006). Although there is the benefit of learning about a specific group, the results of this study may not apply to other Multiracial identities.

Therefore, there is still a need to include other Multiracial identities such as Asian-Black, Hispanic-Black, Native American-White, etc.

Second, Ivezaj et al. (2009) explored racial (White, Black, Multiracial) and gender differences with endorsement of binge eating, weight status, and mental health. The overarching findings suggest that Multiracial women are comparable to White women regarding risk for poor body image, disordered eating, and poor mental health. The study claims to focus on the Multiracial group; however, that group accounted for only 6.1% of their sample ($n = 40$), and they did not provide any background literature or relevant theories about Multiracial identity. Additionally, their sample of Multiracial men was too small to be included in statistical analyses (Ivezaj et al., 2009). Although the results of this study are noteworthy and add to the literature, the limitations show there is a need for further research with larger samples and with more male participants.

Lastly, a more recent study conducted by Burke et al. (2021) examined eating disorder prevalence among Multiracial emerging adults/adults, purposely investigating specific Multiracial combinations to see if there is unique risk among distinct identities. The authors found that some minority-minority groups (i.e., American Indian/Alaskan Native-Hispanic/Latinx, Black-Hispanic/Latinx, Black-Asian) showed higher prevalence of eating disorder pathology, while some identities (i.e., Asian-White and MENA-White) showed lower than expected prevalence of eating disorder pathology (Burke et al., 2021). These findings illuminate the complex ways ethnic-racial identity may influence eating disorders, and this study advances the work on Multiracial individuals and eating disorders.

In sum, these few studies suggest the possibility that Multiracial identity influences body image and disordered eating behaviors. Further, they suggest that there may be meaningful

differences between Multiracial individuals and other ethnic-racial groups, between different combinations of Multiracial identities, and gender differences as well. Multiracial individuals may experience high levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, as some of the limited evidence suggests. However, definitive conclusions cannot be drawn. It is also possible that Multiracial emerging adults are satisfied with their bodies and have less body dissatisfaction and disordered eating than other groups perhaps because they appreciate their uniqueness and feel secure in their identity. Further, it remains uncertain what specific aspects of identity (e.g., racial ambiguity, racial incongruity, race esteem, self-rated impact of identity) may play a role in a Multiracial emerging adults' body image and disordered eating.

The Present Study

Previous research in the body image/disordered eating field has explored racial differences among monoracial groups in the United States (see Bucchianeri et al., 2016). However, the current body image/disordered eating literature is slim regarding research specifically focusing on the Multiracial emerging adult population. Further, although various theories regarding Multiracial identity development exist and inform the present study, they are limited in that they do not discuss how identity plays a role in body image and disordered eating. With the Multiracial population being one of the fastest growing demographics in the U.S. and gaining visibility (see Pew Research Center, 2017), it is crucial to conduct more research identifying the connection between holding a Multiracial identity and how one feels towards their body and their disordered eating. Thus, the present study will be the first to investigate racial identity-related attributes and their association with body image and disordered eating among Multiracial emerging adults.

There are two possible hypotheses for how Multiracial emerging adults feel about their bodies in relation to their identities. The distinctive challenges of reaching identity achievement, appearing racially ambiguous, and being misidentified by others may elicit negative feelings towards Multiracial individuals' bodies. Such negative feelings may then result in body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. Conversely, there is a possibility that Multiracial individuals may feel secure in their racial identities and racial ambiguity. Possibly, they do not have many experiences with being misidentified by others. Taking a strengths-based or resilience perspective, perhaps Multiracial individuals view their identity and bodies as unique, positive aspects of themselves which they take pride in. Consequently, these Multiracial individuals may not experience body dissatisfaction, but rather have body appreciation and therefore do not engage in disordered eating.

Additional research needs to be conducted with Multiracial individuals to investigate these competing hypotheses. Therefore, the present study will examine whether having a Multiracial identity and its unique experiences predicts poor or positive body image and eating behavior in emerging adults. The main research question asks, what racial identity-related factors (e.g., ethnic-racial identity achievement (i.e., exploration with acceptance and security in one's ethnicity), racial ambiguity, racial incongruity, race esteem, and self-rated impact of identity) are associated with one's body image and eating behavior? Specifically, the body image and eating behavior outcomes examined were body dissatisfaction, body appreciation, and disordered eating. A secondary research question asks whether there are any differences between men and women in the outcome variables.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Multiracial participants between the ages of 18 and 25 were recruited via Prolific Academic, an online crowdsourcing platform for researchers to distribute their studies to individuals in the United States or the United Kingdom. Prolific Academic is a viable crowdsourcing method as it produces high data quality, diverse participants, and naivety (i.e., unfamiliarity with commonly used research measures) (Peer et al., 2017). To be a participant on Prolific Academic, a user must be at least 18 years old. To target the specific sample of Multiracial emerging adults, screening parameters were set on Prolific Academic, including: identifying as two or more races/ethnicities, aged 18 to 25, and residing in the United States. Eligible participants accessed a Qualtrics survey on Prolific Academic's website, where they first provided consent before taking the survey. Upon completion of the survey, participants were compensated \$10 via their Prolific Academic account as a thank you for their time and effort.

Our sample consisted of 174 Multiracial emerging adults ($M = 21.8$ years, $SD = 2.08$ years). Participants were majority women (73.6%), with (21.3%) men, (3.4%) nonbinary, (1.1%) transgender, and (.6%) genderfluid. See Table A1 for Multiracial demographics. The sample had varied educational backgrounds, with (56.3%) obtaining a high school diploma, (35.1%) a bachelor's degree, (2.3%) a graduate degree, (5.2%) a GED, and (1.1%) who did not graduate high school.

Study Design

The present study utilized a mixed-methods design, involving quantitative questionnaire measures and one qualitative open-ended question together in one Qualtrics survey. This study received ethics approval from the university's Institutional Review Board.

Survey Measures

Ethnic-Racial Identity Achievement

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) by Roberts et al. (1999) was adapted from Phinney (1992) and included 12 items assessing two factors: ethnic identity search and affirmation, or achievement. Sample items included, “I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me,” and “I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.” Responses were adapted to a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*), with higher scores demonstrating greater affirmation, or belonging and commitment to one’s ethnic group. In high school and college students, Phinney (1992) demonstrated high reliability, $\alpha = .81$ and $.89$. Cronbach’s alpha for the current study’s sample was $.90$. Although typically used for monoracial individuals, this scale has been used with Multiracial adolescents (see Fisher et al., 2014).

Racial Ambiguity

Norman and Chen’s (2020) Racial Ambiguity scale included three items assessing the extent to which others are unable to determine the individual’s race. A sample item included, “Many people can’t tell what race I am.” Responses were on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*), with higher scores representing greater racial ambiguity. Norman and Chen’s (2020) sample of Multiracial young adults demonstrated evidence of reliability across two studies ($\alpha = .71-.80$). Cronbach’s alpha for the current study’s sample was $.83$.

Racial Incongruity

The two item Racial Incongruity scale by Norman and Chen (2020) measured the frequency of one’s experiences with being misclassified by others. A sample item included,

“How often do you racially identify differently than strangers expect you to identify?” Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Almost Never*) to 5 (*Extremely Often*), with higher scores representing a higher contrast between one’s racial identity and observed race. The two items were strongly correlated in a sample of Multiracial young adults, $r(138) = .67, p < .001$ (Norman & Chen, 2020). Cronbach’s alpha for the current study’s sample was .79

Race Esteem

To assess race esteem, or holding a sense of pride in one’s racial group, one item adapted from Ross (1994) was used. The item stated, “I am very proud in every respect to be a member of all the racial groups that I belong to.” Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*). Higher scores represent higher race esteem.

Self-Rated Impact of Identity

One self-rated item was created to determine how one perceives their Multiracial identity’s impact on their feelings towards their body. The item asked, “to what extent has your Multiracial identity impacted how you feel about your body?” Responses were on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*Not at All*) to 4 (*A Lot*). Higher scores represent a greater impact identity has had on one’s body image as perceived by the participant.

Body Dissatisfaction

The Body Dissatisfaction Subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI) by Garner et al. (1983) included 9 items measuring individuals’ attitudes toward different aspects of their physical body, such as the buttocks, thighs, and waist. Sample items included, “I think my hips are too big,” and “I think my stomach is just the right size.” Responses were on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*), such that higher scores indicate higher body dissatisfaction. Garner and colleagues (1983) demonstrated evidence of high reliability with

Cronbach's alphas above .90 in their sample of female eating disorder patients and a comparison group. Cronbach's alpha for the current study's sample was .86.

Body Appreciation

The Body Appreciation Scale (BAS-2) by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) included 10 items measuring participants' positive body image. Sample items included, "I am comfortable in my body," and "I respect my body." Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*), such that higher scores indicate higher body appreciation. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) demonstrated evidence of high reliability in their sample of men and women, with Cronbach's alpha scores of .97 for women and .96 for men. Cronbach's alpha for the current study's sample was .93.

Disordered Eating

The Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT) by Garner et al. (1982) included 26 items measuring eating attitudes and behaviors. Sample items included, "I feel extremely guilty after eating," and "I cut my food into small pieces." Responses were on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 6 (*Always*), with higher scores indicating higher endorsement of disordered eating behaviors. In a reliability generalization study, high mean internal consistency was found in analysis of nonclinical samples, $\alpha = .85$ (Gleaves et al., 2014). Cronbach's alpha for the current study's sample was .85.

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic items included age, height, weight, race/ethnicity, education, and gender. In addition, one item asked if the participant has or previously had a diagnosed eating disorder.

Qualitative Data

We created one open-ended question at the end of the survey to expand on Multiracial participants' feelings on their identity and body image. We asked, "Overall, how do you feel your racial identity has impacted the way you feel about your body?"

Analytic Approach

Data analysis included a combination of inferential statistical tests using SPSS v.27 and thematic analysis of the qualitative data using Microsoft Word and Excel. We examined associations between ethnic-racial identity variables and body image and disordered eating outcomes using a series of separate linear regressions for each outcome variable. Qualitative analysis began with open coding, a data driven (i.e., inductive) approach in which the text is read first to find relevant categories within the text (Gibbs, 2018). Responses were read multiple times for the researcher to become familiar with the data along with memo writing to take notes during the entire process. A codebook was developed including definitions, descriptions, and example quotes for each code. The constant comparative method was used to check that the responses under the same code were alike and did not drift from the code definition. Then, themes were collated, and major themes and subthemes emerged from the data. To establish positionality, the author is a self-identified Multiracial, cisgender woman. She is a first-generation American with Asian and White racial backgrounds. Also, the author was raised in the Midwest region of the U.S. in a predominantly White, middle to upper-class community.

Results

See Table A2 for the properties of the study variables. See Table A3 for the correlations among the predictor variables.

Body Dissatisfaction

A series of hierarchical regressions were conducted to examine the association between Multiracial identity and body dissatisfaction. In step 1, BMI and gender were included to control for differences in weight and gender among the sample. In step 2, one predictor variable was included. This model was repeated individually with each predictor. See Table A4 for regression results.

Results indicated that the association between race esteem and body dissatisfaction was approaching significance after controlling for BMI and gender, $p = .085$. Increasing race esteem predicted decreasing body dissatisfaction, $p = .08$. Self-rated impact of identity also was approaching significance after controlling for BMI, $p = .08$. The greater that participants felt that their Multiracial identity impacted their feelings towards their body, the higher body dissatisfaction they reported, $p = .08$. Ethnic-racial identity achievement, ambiguity, and incongruity did not significantly predict body dissatisfaction.

Body Appreciation

A series of hierarchical regressions were next conducted to examine the association between Multiracial identity and body appreciation. In step 1, BMI and gender were included to control for differences in weight and gender among the sample. In step 2, one predictor variable was included. This model was repeated individually with each predictor. See Table A5 for regression results.

First, results indicated that ethnic-racial identity achievement significantly contributed to the regression model after controlling for BMI and gender, $p < .05$. Feeling more secure in one's identity predicted greater body appreciation, $p = .036$. Second, race esteem significantly contributed to the model after controlling for BMI and gender, $p < .05$. Higher race esteem

predicted higher body appreciation, $p = .018$. Ambiguity, incongruity, and self-rated impact of identity did not significantly predict body appreciation.

Disordered Eating

A series of hierarchical regressions were then conducted to examine the association between Multiracial identity and disordered eating. In step 1, BMI and gender were included to control for differences in weight and gender among the sample. In step 2, one predictor variable was included. This model was repeated individually with each predictor. See Table A6 for regression results.

Results indicated that the association between self-rated impact of identity and disordered eating was approaching significance after controlling for BMI and gender, $p = .05$. The greater that participants felt that their Multiracial identity impacted their feelings towards their body, the higher levels of disordered eating they reported, $p = .05$. Ethnic-racial identity achievement, ambiguity, incongruity, and race esteem did not significantly predict disordered eating.

Gender Differences

Men and women showed expected differences in the outcome variables of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. Women showed greater body dissatisfaction ($M = 9.3$, $SD = 6.4$) than men ($M = 7.1$, $SD = 5.5$) with approaching significance, $t(163) = 1.9$, $p = .061$. Men and women significantly differed in disordered eating, with women ($M = 11.2$, $SD = 8.9$) demonstrating higher levels of disordered eating than men ($M = 6.5$, $SD = 5.2$), $t(163) = 3.0$, $p = .003$. There were no significant differences for body appreciation or BMI among men and women.

Qualitative Findings

173 participant responses were gathered and analyzed. The thematic framework for the open-ended question, “Overall, how do you feel your racial identity has impacted the way you feel about your body” is presented below with a sample of specific participant quotes to exemplify each theme or subtheme. Four broad categories emerged: positive feelings (27.6%), negative feelings (38.5%), neutral feelings (23.0%), and conflicting feelings (10.3%). Percentages refer to the percent of participants under each category. The following major themes and subthemes fit within these broader categories.

Theme: Intrinsic Positive Feelings

Participants who expressed positive feelings about their Multiracial identity and body image shared inward, internal qualities such as appreciation of one’s body. Two subthemes emerged: body appreciation and growing towards self-love.

Subtheme: Body Appreciation

Positive feelings about identity and feelings towards the body included the internal feeling of body appreciation and having respect for the body. Participants felt pride in being unique and were secure in their ethnic-racial identities, leading to loving their bodies as they are. For example, these two participants described how their ethnic-racial identities made them appreciate their bodies:

“If anything, my racial identity has led me to care for my body even more. I have the skin of my ancestors, the eyes of my people. I want to pay respect to my ancestors by honoring and loving my Inuit features.”

— American Indian-White, 20, woman

“I feel it has impacted the way I feel about my body in that I am proud of each and every feature that I have and that they all make me who I am. I love my body and I would not want to change a thing.”

— Asian-Black, 21, man

These excerpts illustrate the positive connection between holding multiple backgrounds and appreciating one’s body. The woman with American Indian heritage seeks to honor her Inuit ancestors by caring for her body, and the man with Asian and Black heritage feels proud of his physical features that make him unique. However, what is unknown with these participants is whether they have always felt positively or if their feelings have changed over their lifetime.

Subtheme: Growing Towards Self-Love

Other participants shared their journey to accepting themselves and moving towards self-love and appreciation for their ethnic-racial identity and body. Even though these responses also are aligned with body appreciation, they touch on a developmental change or transition within the participants. The pattern of developmental change often referred to negative states when younger and moving towards more positive attitudes as they grew older. In the following excerpt, one woman describes this change:

“I think it was mostly detrimental for me growing up because I had 2 different sides, 2 different types of people scrutinizing my body and how it was different than what is ideal. Now I think I am comfortable enough with myself and happy in my body so I am happy to have features of both. But growing up it was hard to navigate if I was 'pretty' or even happy with my appearance because I don't really look like anyone else.”

— Asian-White, 23, woman

The participant struggled with managing multiple backgrounds and not fitting into body ideals in her younger years but shows that she has come to terms with her background and welcomes having both Asian and White physical attributes. Feeling “comfortable enough” with herself illustrates body appreciation.

Theme: Extrinsic Positive Feelings

Although many participant responses discussed internal positive feelings, some responses showed more externally influenced positive feelings. For instance, the participants’ positive feelings were derived from the positive attention or messages received from *others* about their body and racial identity. One participant discussed how specifically being White and Asian (“wasian”) is viewed as an attractive quality by society:

“I feel that my racial identity has positively impacted my view of my body. Unlike some other mixed people, wasians are considered to be beautiful. As a wasian, I feel proud of what ethnic features I do have and I usually enjoy the attention that I receive for being mixed.”

— Asian-White, 23, woman

Similarly, some participants mentioned how they feel positively about their bodies because they fit into the body/beauty standards for their ethnic-racial backgrounds. One American Indian-Black-White, 19-year-old woman wrote, “It always had a positive impact on how I feel about my body since I always fit in with the standards for my racial backgrounds.” This is externally derived because body/beauty standards are created by others in society, not from within.

Theme: Impossible Beauty Standards

Not all feelings and perspectives were positive. The theme of impossible beauty standards fits under the broader negative feelings category, illustrating how such standards lead

to negative feelings like low self-confidence. One American Indian-Black-White, 24-year-old man shared, “I feel it has impacted mostly my self-confidence when I realize I lack a lot of those desirable traits in any identity. I feel it has made me confused about who I really am due to being multi-racial.” Participants mentioned how they do not meet the ideals of their respective heritages, the difficulty in managing conflicting ideals (e.g., curvy ideal vs. the thin ideal), and a desire for different physical features:

“Overall, I feel like it has had a negative impact. I would want to only be one so that I could look more ‘normal.’ But also at the end of the day, I can't help but partly desire to look ‘more White.’ This is due to social media and our society that constantly tells us that White features are desired and features from other racial groups are not.”

— Asian-Hispanic/Latino, 18, woman

This participant brings up an interesting perspective of desiring to appear more White than Hispanic/Latino because American culture views White body/beauty ideals as the most attractive and “normal.” This response also touches on the strong impact that the media/social media has on one’s body image.

In addition to social media, messages of impossible beauty standards can be transmitted through family members to the Multiracial participants. Participants shared stories of family members hurting their body image because they did not meet expectations:

“Since I grew up with Korean culture, I feel the need to be skinny. Ever since I was a child, my mom would always tell me I was fat and make comments about how I got that from my African American side. We would sit down so she can go through pictures that were taken of me and comment on my legs and arms and compare them to the Asian and white kids. As a result, I shower in the dark at night, I don't take pictures of myself, and I

never show my legs. I have also developed severe hatred for my body (which has gotten better).”

— Asian-Black, 23, woman

Here, the participant’s mother compared her to Asian and White body ideals—which is thinness for both cultures—and communicated how her daughter did not meet such standards. As a result, the participant developed a negative body image. Interestingly, a number of these types of responses came from individuals with an Asian background, possibly suggesting a cultural difference. Indeed, Asians do have high rates of body dissatisfaction (see Cummins & Lehman, 2007; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Story et al., 1995).

Theme: Feeling Othered

Perhaps not fitting well into prescribed body/beauty standards due to their racial ambiguity may lead Multiracial emerging adults to feel like outsiders in their social world. Several participants described a lack of belonging as well as feeling a mismatch in how they perceive themselves to be on the inside compared to how they look on the outside. For instance, one participant described how she looks different from her family:

“I feel like it has impacted my features more than my body size or shape. I think my hair and eyes are the biggest things that have been impacted. I was really self-conscious about my hair because it is very curly and different from my family, which are all very white with straight hair. I look different from my family and that made me self-conscious and different from them. My physical differences tied to my mental and emotional differences.”

— MENA-White, 23, woman

Due to having different characteristics from her family, this woman describes feeling othered for not fitting in. In turn, negative feelings of self-consciousness arose. Although the participant states that her body size and shape was not as affected by her identity, some features (hair and eyes) were still impacted.

Theme: Neutral Feelings

Instead of feeling positively or negatively about one's identity and body, numerous participants expressed neutral attitudes. Participants under this theme conveyed that how they feel about their body was not impacted by their ethnic-racial identity. There were many similar responses like one Asian-White, 22-year-old man who said, "My racial identity has never really affected how I feel about my body." Further, a few responses showed that identity and body image were separate constructs. As one Asian-White, 23-year-old woman stated, "I think that my body's appearance is unrelated to my race so it has not affected it." However, one Black-White, 20-year-old woman pondered, "I don't think it's related, but it could be." The brief responses exhibited a more neutral tone or affect, possibly demonstrating how these participants' body image are neither positively nor negatively impacted by their Multiracial identity.

Theme: Conflicting Feelings

Conversely, a few participants expressed a mix of both positive and negative aspects in their responses. These opposing thoughts and feelings show the internal conflict some participants face because of their Multiracial identity. One Asian-Black-American Indian, 19-year-old woman shared, "I feel like it has given me confidence in being 'different' as no one looks like me and I embrace that. But I also feel as if I do not fit in sometimes and it is ostracizing to not have a group." Additionally, one Black-White, 25-year-old transgender participant explained:

“It's a mixed bag but more negatively I'd say. Because I hate my skin tone so much that I can't even look at pictures of myself some time and I feel the need to apologize and explain when I show a new online friend a picture with me in it. But I do like being mixed in general and that makes me feel good when that's respected so, ya know, little back and forth there.”

Both excerpts show mixed feelings towards having Multiracial identities in that sometimes the participants are confident and enjoy being Multiracial, yet they also hold negative attitudes because they feel ostracized or do not feel comfortable with a part of themselves (e.g., skin tone). Responses in this theme highlight the complexity of the Multiracial experience as space is held for an array of feelings that may clash with each other.

Discussion

This exploratory study investigated the impact of several racial identity-related factors on body image and disordered eating in Multiracial emerging adults. The objective was to assess the associations between ethnic-racial identity achievement, ambiguity, incongruity, race esteem, and self-rated impact of identity with body dissatisfaction, body appreciation, and disordered eating. Qualitatively, the objective was to examine Multiracial emerging adults' perspectives of their overall feelings about their identity and body and was used to help understand the quantitative results. Overall, quantitative results revealed that greater feelings of security in one's Multiracial identity (i.e., ethnic-racial identity achievement) and higher race esteem predicted greater body appreciation. Racial ambiguity and incongruity did not predict body appreciation, body dissatisfaction, or disordered eating. Further, none of the racial identity variables (ethnic-racial identity achievement, racial ambiguity, incongruity, race esteem, and self-rated impact of identity) significantly predicted body dissatisfaction nor disordered eating. Themes from the

qualitative data included intrinsic and extrinsic feelings, impossible beauty standards, feeling othered, neutral feelings, and conflicted feelings. Together, these findings provide evidence that Multiracial identity factors influence aspects of body image and that Multiracial individuals experience positive feelings about their identity and body.

A key finding is the quantitative result indicating associations between ethnic-racial identity achievement and race esteem with body appreciation. Appreciating and respecting one's unique appearance has a relationship to feeling assured in their ethnic-racial identity and having a sense of pride in their ethnic-racial group. The present results are consistent with Phinney's (1989) work demonstrating how identity achievement was linked to positive psychological outcomes, considering body appreciation as a positive psychological outcome. The race esteem finding supports and extends past work showing the connection between self-esteem and body image (French et al., 2001; Lowery et al., 2005; Paxton et al., 2006; Shea & Pritchard, 2007; Thompson & Smolak, 2001; van den Berg et al., 2010). Although not statistically significant, increasing race esteem trended towards an association with *decreasing* body dissatisfaction as well, which complements the results for body appreciation.

The themes of intrinsic and extrinsic feelings from the qualitative data expand and deepen the understanding of the positive connection between a Multiracial identity and body image. Many participants (27.6%) conveyed that they appreciate their bodies and love their unique physical features, which suggests that they feel secure in their Multiracial identity or, in other words, have greater ethnic-racial identity achievement. Additionally, the theme of neutral feelings provides evidence that Multiracial participants may not suffer from poor body image. These participants may not exhibit explicitly positive feelings, but they shared that their attitudes towards their bodies was unaffected by their Multiracial identity. Together, just over half of

participants (50.6%) felt either positively or neutral. This may help explain why there was no evidence of statistical significance with body dissatisfaction or disordered eating in the quantitative data.

Past research, although limited, proposes that Multiracial individuals may be at risk for negative body image and disordered eating. Experts hypothesize that the emotional and identity concerns associated with balancing multiple backgrounds makes Multiracial individuals highly likely to suffer from poor body image (see Ramseyer Winter et al., 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2007). Burke and colleagues (2021) found high eating disorder prevalence for Multiracial participants with a minority-minority background. Similarly, earlier work from Ivezaj et al. (2009) demonstrated that Multiracial women were at risk for poor body image/disordered eating as well as mental health similar to White women. However, the collective evidence of this study largely contrasts from previous research by illuminating a relationship between Multiracial identity and body appreciation, providing more of a strengths-based perspective. A possible reason for the surprising findings could be due to the inclusion of ethnic-racial identity achievement as a factor, which the aforementioned research did not examine. Perhaps the samples of past research included Multiracial participants who largely did not have strong identity achievement and the current sample showed greater identity achievement. Thus, this is an important conclusion, especially considering that previous research may have operated with a deficit perspective, meaning that researchers and experts focus on the risks and harms of the Multiracial population. Although it is important to identify potential risk factors to prevent negative outcomes such as poor body image and disordered eating, it is just as important to find the strengths and resilience factors to achieve the same goal.

Although the present study's overall findings offer a strengths-based perspective, the qualitative themes suggesting negative body image cannot be entirely ignored as they were endorsed by 38.5% of participants. Some participants felt that there were impossible beauty standards for their respective backgrounds that are difficult to achieve, such as thinness or curviness. Also, some participants reported feeling like an outsider because of how they look, which is likely due to appearing ambiguous and not like monoracial groups. These themes are not surprising given the prior knowledge of the harm of body ideals (e.g., the thin ideal; see Cash & Smolak, 2011; Thompson, 1999) in addition to the prevalent Multiracial experience of feeling excluded or isolated (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Nadal et al., 2011). Multiracial participants also showed conflicted feelings (10.3% of participants), highlighting the difficulty in navigating the space between one's body image and Multiracial identity. Even though there was no quantitative evidence of body dissatisfaction or disordered eating due to identity achievement, ambiguity, incongruity, race esteem, or self-rated impact of identity in the present study, there may still be meaningful impacts for some Multiracial emerging adults. Indeed, the associations between race esteem and body dissatisfaction as well as self-rated impact of identity with both body dissatisfaction and disordered eating all approached significance. It is possible that participants who showed negative feelings were struggling with coming to terms with their identity or, in other words, reaching identity achievement. Or, the direction could be in reverse, with poor body image impacting ethnic-racial identity achievement.

The results that racial ambiguity and incongruity are not significant factors in Multiracial emerging adults' body image and disordered eating are unexpected. This is surprising given the theoretical perspective of physical appearance being a salient factor in identity development (Root, 1990; 1998) and past work showing that experiences of being misclassified is a

meaningful and common experience (see Tran et al., 2016; Young et al., 2013). Yet, the qualitative themes touch on possible effects of ambiguity. The theme of feeling othered describes the negative feeling of not belonging or fitting in, referring to physically appearing different from others in their social world. Conversely, the themes under positive feelings suggest that some Multiracial participants may appreciate appearing ambiguous. Thus, there may still be meaningful connections between racial ambiguity and incongruity and body image/disordered eating. Perhaps there are mediating or moderating variables such as gender impacting the relationship between ambiguity/incongruity and body image/disordered eating that should be further explored.

Theoretical Support

Some specific findings of the study are well aligned with the theoretical background of Multiracial identity development. The Biracial Identity Model (Poston, 1990) and the Biracial Identity Across the Lifespan Model (Hall, 2005) both adopt a lifespan perspective. The theme of growing towards self-love illustrates a developmental change that occurred from childhood to adulthood. As some Multiracial participants matured, they learned to accept their identity and make peace with their body. The positive change experienced by these participants also supports Poston's (1990) belief that the developmental process of identity progresses in a healthy way for most individuals. Further, the qualitative positive feelings category could suggest that participants reached identity achievement in Phinney's (1989) theory. Similarly, participants may have reached Poston's (1990) stages of appreciation (time of exploration of races/ethnicities), or integration (recognize and value multiple identities). It is worth mentioning that existing theoretical perspectives of Multiracial identity development do not include the topic of body image and disordered eating. This study addresses a gap in the literature on Multiracial body

image/disordered eating and could contribute to the development of new theoretical models in the future.

Strengths of the Study

The main strengths of the current study include its novelty, depth, and its unique sample. First, this study provides new insights into the relationship between racial identity-related factors and body image and disordered eating in the Multiracial population. Previous body image/disordered eating research has examined monoracial group differences, but no published studies have specifically explored the relationship between Multiracial identity development along with its unique aspects such as ambiguity and incongruity and one's body image and disordered eating behaviors. Second, identity and body image were fully examined by including multiple variables related to identity, race, and body image. Third, the sample was inclusive of various ethnic-racial combinations rather than focusing on solely one specific identity (e.g., Black-White) as past work has done. Some participants even reported three or more ethnic-racial backgrounds, which is not often gathered or reported in other studies. Further, this sample included participants with Middle Eastern or North African or Arab/Arab American (MENA) and American Indian/Alaska Native heritage. Both are underrepresented groups in the literature and deserve greater visibility and inclusion.

Additional strengths include the use of Prolific Academic, in which data was collected from emerging adults across the United States with varying levels of education and a wider age range (18-25 years old) as opposed to undergraduate students from one university or location. There was also an adequate sample size ($N = 174$) both for the quantitative and qualitative data. Lastly, the mixed method design was a strength in that it provided nuanced findings that better capture the complex Multiracial experience. Mixed method study designs include strengths such

as offering rich insights that one single method may miss, enhanced validity, and increased generalizability (Caruth, 2013; Cronholm & Hjalmarsson, 2011).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are at least five limitations concerning the outcomes of the present study. First, there was a gender imbalance in the sample, with only 37 (21.3%) male participants. It was anticipated that there would be fewer male participants than females, as this is typical in body image/disordered eating research. Although there were significant statistical differences between men and women in expected directions for body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, future studies should include more male participants to establish whether gender is a factor in body image and disordered eating for Multiracial emerging adults. Second, although the sample was inclusive of many different Multiracial identities, there should be caution in generalizing the study's findings to the whole Multiracial population as there were not enough participants to represent each specific background. Additionally, the current study did not explore group differences. Therefore, an avenue for future research is to include ample participants for various Multiracial combinations and compare the groups, much like the work of Burke and colleagues (2021).

Third, the qualitative data analysis was conducted primarily by one researcher with the support and supervision of other PhD researchers. However, steps were taken to ensure valid and reliable analysis, such as developing a codebook, constant comparisons of the data, acknowledging positionality, and memo writing. Fourth, in the quantitative analyses, not all possible covariates were included. For example, age and education could be covariate factors and this should be considered in future studies. The last limitation is that this study was cross-sectional in design. Given the noteworthy qualitative finding that some participants experienced

a change in their feelings over time, it would be interesting to explore that phenomenon further with longitudinal studies. Despite these limitations, the present study has enhanced the understanding of the relationship between Multiracial identity and body image/disordered eating.

Study Implications

The outcomes of this study have several potential applications. The results indicate a positive association between ethnic-racial identity achievement and race esteem with body appreciation, which leads to the recommendation to promote healthy ethnic-racial identity development for Multiracial emerging adults along with adolescents as identity development is especially significant at those stages in the lifespan. These findings can inform prevention and education efforts for Multiracial emerging adults as well as adolescents and younger children. In particular, body image/disordered eating programming could include lessons and activities to encourage acceptance of one's ethnic-racial identity and be considerate of those with multiple backgrounds. There are useful applications for clinical settings as well. Medical professionals in the body image/eating disorder field working with Multiracial patients could benefit from the knowledge that a Multiracial identity may impact one's body image in significant ways compared to monoracial individuals and encourage a strengths-based approach to providing care.

Further, the results of this research have implications for parents and caregivers of Multiracial individuals. It is notable that some responses in the qualitative data mention the harmful effects of families on one's body image. Parents and caregivers can assist in fostering healthy ethnic-racial identity development in their children which in turn can help promote a positive, healthy body image in emerging adulthood. It is important to bring knowledge and offer support to parents and caregivers on the topic of body image and Multiracial identity.

Finally, there are important implications for Multiracial emerging adults at the individual level. Historically, Multiracial individuals have lacked visibility, and research as well as the public has operated under a deficit perspective with this group, believing they have psychological adjustment issues (see Thornton, 1996). The study results offer up an alternative perspective: a strengths-based perspective. It is conceivable for a young Multiracial individual to reach ethnic-racial identity achievement, have high race esteem, and have positive body image, and this knowledge may educate as well as provide hope to Multiracial individuals that there is strength in their distinctive background.

Conclusion

This research aimed to identify whether racial identity-related factors are associated with Multiracial emerging adults' body image and disordered eating using a mixed method design. This study addresses a few limitations of previous studies by focusing on the Multiracial group and being inclusive of various ethnic-racial combinations. Our overall conclusion is that greater ethnic-racial identity achievement and race esteem is associated with higher body appreciation and qualitatively that Multiracial emerging adults experience positive or neutral feelings regarding their identity and body image. These findings have important implications for prevention programming, medical professionals, and Multiracial emerging adults themselves. The present study represents a first attempt at addressing a crucial gap in the body image and disordered eating literature, and further research examining these issues may shed light on the risk and protective factors for Multiracial individuals' body image and disordered eating. As the Multiracial population in the U.S. is ever growing, it is imperative to continue investigating how holding multiple ethnic-racial backgrounds influences body image and disordered eating. In

doing so, the Multiracial population will be better supported and better represented, and such efforts will aid in reducing body dissatisfaction and disordered eating in the U.S.

STUDY 2: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MULTIRACIAL EXPERIENCES AND BODY IMAGE

Abstract

Experiences such as exoticization, racial ambiguity, and racial incongruity are defining qualities in Multiracial individuals' lives. As such experiences relate to one's physical appearance, it is possible that they impact how one feels about their body. Yet, research is limited in exploring the connection between exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity with Multiracial individuals' attitudes towards their bodies. The present study qualitatively explored Multiracial emerging adults' lived experiences and their feelings toward their bodies. 174 Multiracial men and women ($M = 21.8$ years, $SD = 2.08$ years) residing in the United States responded to open-ended survey questions. Responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity are shared experiences among Multiracial emerging adults and that there are varied emotional responses ranging from negative (e.g., feeling anger, disgust, othered, etc.) to positive (e.g., feeling special, welcoming the attention, etc.) regarding how they feel towards their bodies as a result of exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity. As the Multiracial population continues to grow in the United States, it is imperative that Multiracial individuals are represented in the literature and that research examines their unique experiences.

Introduction

In recent decades, there has been increasing visibility of Multiracial individuals (i.e., an individual whose heritage consists of two or more ethnic-racial backgrounds) in the literature and the public. Social acceptance of the Multiracial group may be growing as well (Charmaraman et al., 2014). This may be due in part to the immense growth of this population in the United States

(U.S.), in which the number of American adults reporting a Multiracial identity went from 9 million in the 2010 census to over 33 million in the following 2020 census, which is a 276% increase (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). This census data is also significant because it was not until the 2000 census that Americans could select more than one race provided (Pew Research Center, 2020), exemplifying how the Multiracial population was largely ignored historically.

Ethnic-Racial Identity Development in Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a transition period in the lifespan between adolescence and adulthood, and ethnic-racial identity development is an important task at this time with intense identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). Ethnic-racial identity refers to one's thoughts and feelings about their membership to a certain ethnic-racial group. The term "ethnic-racial" is used because race and ethnicity are interconnected concepts that are difficult to tease apart (Cokley, 2007). For emerging adults in the college setting, there are many opportunities to explore one's ethnic-racial identity, including taking language courses, joining cultural student organizations, and meeting other students from a wide range of backgrounds (Harper, 2016). For those who do not attend college, exploration may still occur, but it may be through independent learning or learning from family members and peers instead.

For Multiracial individuals, there is much fluidity in their ethnic-racial identity development: shifting racial categories over time, generational differences in how Multiracial individuals identify, changing how one identifies over their lifetime, and fluidity in the labels one chooses (Heilman, 2022). Studies highlight how Multiracial individuals' identity can change during adolescence and emerging adulthood (see Clayton, 2020; Hitlin et al., 2006; Doyle & Kao, 2007a; Terry & Winston, 2010), further signifying the importance of this time in the lifespan for ethnic-racial identity development.

Establishing a strong identity (i.e., ethnic-racial identity achievement; see Phinney, 1989) is a beneficial task in emerging adulthood, and ethnic-racial identity has implications for mental health outcomes. In monoracial individuals, ethnic-racial identity achievement is associated with higher self-esteem and better mental health (Greig, 2003; Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). It is possible this applies to Multiracial individuals as well. Fisher and colleagues (2014) examined identity development of Multiracial individuals and found that greater ethnic-racial identity achievement was negatively associated with mental health problems. Conversely, greater exploration (i.e., engaging with and learning about one's identity) was positively associated with greater mental health problems (Fisher et al., 2014). Some scholars propose that young Multiracial individuals may take longer to explore their identity and struggle to reach ethnic-racial identity achievement (see Root, 1990), yet others believe identity development typically progresses in a healthy way for most Multiracial individuals (see Poston, 1990).

Adding to the unique experiences of Multiracial individuals are the racial identity-related concepts of exoticization, racial ambiguity, and racial incongruity. Exoticization is the action of other individuals perceiving as well as calling Multiracial individuals exotic. Racial ambiguity refers to a racially mixed physical appearance. Racial incongruity is when a Multiracial individual is misclassified or misidentified by others, often because of their ambiguous appearance. These may be defining qualities and experiences of the Multiracial population that impacts their ethnic-racial identity development. Further, exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity may impact how Multiracial emerging adults think and feel about their body. However, there is a lack of research investigating the connections between these lived experiences and body image in Multiracial emerging adults. Thus, exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity will be explored in the current study.

Body Image of Multiracial Individuals

Emerging adulthood is a significant time for body image concerns along with ethnic-racial identity development. In general, quantitative studies on body image of Multiracial individuals (e.g., Ivezaj et al., 2009; Quick et al., 2013; Yates et al., 2004) suggest that this group may be at risk for body dissatisfaction, which can be defined as feeling unhappy because of a discrepancy between one's desired and actual appearance (see Grogan, 2017). Experts hypothesize that the reason is because of the difficulty in balancing multiple heritages, leading to emotional and identity related issues (see Ramseyer Winter et al., 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2007). However, research on Multiracial individuals' body image is limited and leaves a crucial gap in the literature. Moreover, the intersection of racial identity-related experiences (i.e., exoticization, ambiguity, incongruity) and body image in Multiracial individuals is not well known. Such experiences rely on one's ethnicity/race and physical appearance; thus, it is possible these are factors shaping how Multiracial individuals perceive and feel about their body. Additionally, it is unclear whether exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity are negatively or positively related to how Multiracial individuals feel about their bodies.

Exoticization and the Biracial Beauty Stereotype

Holding a Multiracial identity presents the possibility of experiencing exoticization and the biracial beauty stereotype. Exoticization refers to Multiracial individuals being viewed by others as exotic, striking, and different. The biracial beauty stereotype refers to the stereotypical belief that Multiracial individuals are physically attractive, more so than monoracial individuals (Bradshaw, 1992; Sims, 2012). These two concepts are interwoven as Multiracial individuals are deemed more attractive because they are also perceived as exotic. Multiracial individuals, often women, are considered exotic because they are racially ambiguous and look distinctive from

others. It is critical to note that there are racist criteria of what is considered “attractively” exotic versus “unattractively” exotic with their ambiguity in that not having *full* ethnic minority features (e.g., Asian eyes) and having *lighter* skin tone is seen as more beautiful (Hall, 2019; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Reece, 2016; Tate, 2007). To put it simply, the more Eurocentric a Multiracial individual appears, the more attractive they are seen by others.

Previous research has found empirical evidence of the biracial beauty stereotype. Studies have discovered that Multiracial faces are perceived as more attractive than monoracial faces – observed in both real-life faces and computer-generated morphed faces (Lewis, 2010; Rhodes et al., 2005; Sims, 2012). In a recent study, Skinner et al. (2020) explored biracial stereotypes and also found that several biracial groups (e.g., Black-White, Asian-White, Black-Hispanic, Asian-Black, Asian-Hispanic, White-Hispanic, Asian-White) were stereotyped as attractive. This may be a universal stereotype as these studies were conducted in the U.S., United Kingdom, Japan, and Australia.

As for an explanation as to why this phenomenon occurs, Lewis (2010) proposes that the biological process of heterosis, the Darwinian idea that crossbreeding results in more genetically fit offspring, may apply to humans. Multiracial individuals may be seen as more attractive due to heterosis because genetic fitness is related to attractiveness in that greater attractiveness indicates greater genetic fitness (Lewis, 2010). In other words, Multiracial individuals have greater genetic fitness because of their multiple ancestries, and that genetic fitness influences attractiveness. However, Lewis’ (2010) explanation may play into the dangerous notion that race is biological and should be considered with caution.

To note, there is an interesting commonality among studies testing the biracial beauty stereotype. The majority, if not all, of the participants were White. Further, most of the stimuli

included Multiracial faces with a White racial background (as opposed to a minority-minority background). Knowing this context puts the results into perspective. If the participants were White, it is likely they rated Multiracial faces as more attractive based on the premise that the more Eurocentric a Multiracial individual appears, the more attractive they are to others. This limitation insinuates that the biracial beauty stereotype is one created by the ethnic-racial majority and applies to Multiracial individuals with White heritage.

Multiracial Attitudes Towards Being Perceived as Exotic

Multiracial individuals' attitudes and experiences towards being perceived as exotic by others varies. Waring (2013) qualitatively examined exoticization in ambiguous Black-White young adults and found that they internalized the exotic label and that it shaped their dating preferences towards dating someone monoracial, either due to composition of their community or who expressed interest in them. Participants described being seen as exotic as an advantage in romantic endeavors because they were perceived as especially attractive (i.e., the biracial beauty stereotype) (Waring, 2013). Similarly, Rockquemore and Arend (2002) found in two case study interviews with Black-White emerging adult women that they enjoyed appearing exotic. Appearing exotic may even contribute to positive body image, which Hall (1997) found in her mixed methods study where Japanese-Black young adults felt positively about their appearance and that they had the best of both backgrounds. More recently, Hall (2019) discussed how some women may enjoy the attention from appearing exotic while others may not enjoy such attention. Interestingly, college-age Multiracial women are more likely than men to be offended by being called exotic (Basu, 2010).

Indeed, Curington (2020) found that some Multiracial women are against being called exotic and reject it because they related it to being objectified and fetishized. Such results relate

to Johnston and Nadal's (2010) theoretical taxonomy of microaggressions (i.e., brief, and common daily verbal or behavioral indignities that communicate derogatory racial slights and insults toward racial minorities; see Sue et al., 2007), in which exoticization and objectification is one category of microaggressions. Together, past work shows the range of perspectives of Multiracial individuals on being perceived as exotic. However, more research is necessary to better understand how experiences of being called and labeled as exotic influence Multiracial emerging adults' attitudes and feelings their bodies.

Fetishization of Multiracial Individuals

Due to the biracial beauty stereotype and being exoticized by others, Multiracial individuals may also face fetishization. Fetishization refers to a quality becoming the object of desire by others, in this case, being Multiracial (Buggs, 2017). A qualitative study by Williams and colleagues (2022) noted that themes of fetishization were found in ambiguous, cisgender women, which highlights how appearing racially ambiguous may play a role in being exoticized. Jones and Rogers (2022) also found fetishization to be a theme in their qualitative work on stereotypes with Multiracial adolescents. The authors highlighted a poignant example from one girl who shared experiences of others asking her background and saying that they desire to have "mixed babies" (Jones & Rogers, 2022, pp. 16). The authors state how desiring mixed children commodifies Multiracial individuals and makes Multiracial children as "things than can be obtained and owned" (Jones & Rogers, 2022, pp. 16). Fetishization also plays out in the dating context, as Curington (2021) found many Multiracial daters felt fetishized by others. Multiracial fetishization can be harmful by creating inauthentic romantic relationships in that the fetishized partner may not be viewed as a whole human being and is desired by their partner only to satisfy

a fantasy (Buggs, 2017). Taken together, Multiracial individuals are subject to being fetishized, exoticized, and stereotyped as exceptionally beautiful.

Racial Ambiguity and Incongruity

Multiracial individuals disrupt rigid, traditional racial categories by encompassing multiple backgrounds, which is often due to a racially ambiguous physical appearance that cannot be easily categorized. Experts agree that racial ambiguity is a meaningful and frequent experience within the Multiracial population (Paragg, 2017; Tran et al., 2016; Young et al., 2013). Racial ambiguity can lead to questions about one's ethnic-racial background, and such inquiries are often seen as undesirable by Multiracial individuals because it is a form of microaggression (Heilman, 2022). These questions can also lead to feelings of "otherness," like one does not belong to any group or they feel like an outsider (Bradshaw, 1992; Root, 1998). However, racial identification inquiries can be a time when a Multiracial individual can express pride in their heritage (Tran et al., 2016). Ambiguity impacts how one identifies as well, in that those who look more monoracial and perceive that other people see them as monoracial are likely to identify as such (AhnAllen et al., 2006; Brunnsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Good et al., 2010). Alternatively, those who look more Multiracial and believe other people see them as ambiguous are likely to claim a Multiracial identity (AhnAllen et al., 2006; Brunnsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Good et al., 2010).

A related concept to racial ambiguity is racial incongruity. Racial incongruity refers to situations in which a Multiracial individual is misclassified or misidentified by others (Norman & Chen, 2020). For example, consider a Black-Latino man who is asked by a stranger what his race is. Upon sharing that he is Black and Latino, the stranger is shocked and says, "No way, you do not look Latino. You look like you are half White." The Black-Latino man is misclassified by

the stranger, experiencing incongruence with how he personally identifies and how he is categorized by others. Racial incongruity is a common experience for Multiracial individuals and has been linked to poor mental health and well-being, even an identity crisis (Does et al., 2021). Thus, Norman and Chen (2020) argue that racial ambiguity and incongruity are some defining attributes of a Multiracial identity. What is not well known, however, is how experiences of racial ambiguity and incongruity intersect with Multiracial emerging adults' feelings towards their bodies.

Theoretical Background

The prominent theoretical framework guiding this study is appraisal theory of emotion. There are numerous appraisal theory perspectives (see Arnold, 1960; Scherer, 2009; Roseman, 2013). In general, appraisal theory proposes that there are stimuli in which an individual assesses (i.e., the appraisal) and then emotions are caused and differentiated based on the appraisal (Moors, 2017). The appraisal of a stimulus is a process involving whether the stimulus matches one's goals and expectations, and other factors such as control (i.e., whether the stimulus is easy or difficult to control) and agency (i.e., caused by other people, themselves, or other circumstances) (Moors, 2017). Appraisal theory accounts for the individual variation in reactions to appraisals. Said another way, emotion is subjective; two adults may appraise the same situation differently and react in a multitude of ways depending on their values. Further, this process often occurs automatically and unconsciously and does not always require complex cognitive effort (Scherer, 2009).

Experiences such as being called exotic by someone else, viewing oneself as ambiguous, or being misclassified by others are significant situations that may elicit unique appraisals and emotional responses from Multiracial emerging adults. The present study investigates how

Multiracial individuals perceive those situations and consequently how it makes them feel about their bodies. Further, the qualitative nature of the study design will allow for an in-depth exploration and provide nuanced responses from Multiracial individuals on these topics.

The second theoretical framework guiding the current study is objectification theory. Objectification theory proposes two major ideas: 1) women's bodies are sexually objectified by others, meaning that their bodies are perceived as objects to be enjoyed, not as a whole human body worthy of respect and care, and 2) women's bodies are subjected to "the gaze," in which their bodies are visually inspected by others, particularly men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Objectification harms women and can impact their daily lives, especially if internalized (i.e., accepting objectification culture's view of women's bodies and consequently viewing their own bodies as objects) (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). For example, self-objectification may lead to sexual dissatisfaction, less awareness of bodily states (e.g., hunger and thirst), and eating disorders (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Although objectification theory pertains mostly to gender, particularly women, it can apply to ethnicity/race as well. Multiracial individuals experience objectification based on their racial background. Objectification is incorporated in Johnston and Nadal's (2010) taxonomy of microaggressions, referring to when Multiracial individuals are made to feel abnormal and that their race is put on display for the consumption of others. An example of this is when strangers make inquiries about the racial background of Multiracial individuals (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Multiracial individuals may feel objectified for being different and for appearing ambiguous or exotic. Thus, objectification theory is relevant to the concepts of ambiguity and exoticization that are being explored in the present study.

Similar to the gaze in objectification theory, there is also the racial, or colonial, gaze which is relevant to Multiracial individuals. Paragg (2017) explored how Multiracial Canadians responded to racial identification inquires (i.e., “What are you?”) and posits that these types of questions reflect the racial gaze. The racial gaze aims to imagine and find the Multiracial individual’s original “point of racial mixing” (Paragg, 2017). Multiracial individuals are expected to explain their existence (Williams, 1996). The disruption of discrete racial categories creates a crisis for the gazer (Paragg, 2017; Williams, 1996). Paragg credits the work of Fanon (1967), who theorizes that the racial gaze is an assertion of power, and it is something that freezes those who are subject to it (e.g., Multiracial individuals), resulting in internalization of how others perceive them (Paragg, 2017). The concept of racial gaze provides greater understanding to the motives and functions of racial identification inquires towards Multiracial emerging adults.

The Present Study

Due to the U.S. Multiracial population gaining visibility in the public and being one of the fastest growing demographics (see Pew Research Center, 2017), it is imperative to conduct more research identifying the relationship between Multiracial identity and body image. Multiracial individuals face unique challenges such as grappling with multiple racial backgrounds, exoticization, appearing ambiguous, and incongruency. Yet, it is undetermined how these particular issues impact Multiracial individuals’ feelings towards their bodies. Thus, the present study sought to understand the lived experiences of Multiracial emerging adults in the U.S. regarding being called exotic, appearing ambiguous, and being misclassified. The central research question asked, what role does identifying as Multiracial play in how young individuals feel about their body? Subsequently, we sought to understand how specific Multiracial

experiences of being called exotic, appearing racially ambiguous, and being misclassified or misidentified by others influence how Multiracial individuals feel about themselves and their bodies.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The current study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Multiracial emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 25 were recruited via Prolific Academic, an online crowdsourcing platform for researchers to disseminate their studies to adults in the U.S. or the United Kingdom. To target the specific sample of Multiracial emerging adults, the following screening parameters were set on Prolific Academic to ensure the appropriate sample: identifying as Multiracial, aged 18 to 25, and residing in the U.S. Eligible participants opened a Qualtrics survey on Prolific Academic's website, where they initially provided consent before taking the survey. Upon completion of the survey, participants were compensated \$10 via their Prolific Academic account. As this was an online survey, there was no existing relationship or interaction between the researchers and participants.

The sample consisted of 174 Multiracial emerging adults ($M = 21.8$ years, $SD = 2.08$ years). See Table A1 for Multiracial demographics. Participants were majority women (73.6%), with (21.3%) men, (3.4%) nonbinary, (1.1%) transgender, and (.6%) genderfluid, respectively. The sample had wide-ranging educational backgrounds, with (56.3%) obtaining a high school diploma, (35.1%) a bachelor's degree, (2.3%) a graduate degree, (5.2%) a GED, and (1.1%) who did not graduate high school.

Measures and Analysis

Participants responded to the following open-ended questions in the survey: 1) What are your experiences with others calling you “exotic” or saying that you were especially attractive because of your Multiracial identity? How have these experiences made you feel? 2) Do you feel you look racially mixed, or do you feel you look primarily like one race/ethnicity? How has this impacted the way you feel about your body? 3) What are your experiences with other people misclassifying your racial identity, if any? How have these experiences impacted the way you feel about your body? The open-ended, short answer format was chosen as most appropriate to gather data on the topics of exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity, because it allowed participants to describe their experiences in their own words.

Participant responses were downloaded into separate Word documents and organized by question. An interpretive constructivist approach to inquiry was used, which is the philosophy that individuals build their understanding of the world, and the core of understanding is learning about how individuals interpret what they encounter and assign meanings to events, objects, or values (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each question was analyzed separately using the inductive (i.e., data driven) approach of thematic analysis without the aid of qualitative data analysis software. Codes were developed through open coding, a process in which the text is read in order to find relevant categories and the codes are data driven instead of being developed before reading the data (Gibbs, 2018). Coding was conducted by hand using Microsoft Word and organized using Excel.

For each open-ended question, a detailed codebook was constructed by the first author to organize all the codes into a list with definitions, descriptions, and example quotes of each code to increase reliability (Gibbs, 2018). The constant comparative method was also used to check

that the responses under the same code had matched each other as well as the definition of the code. Codes were then examined holistically to determine overarching themes of the data to answer the research question. The entire coding process was conducted on one question at a time by the first author, with the supervision of two additional PhD researchers. To establish positionality, the first author is a self-identified Multiracial, cisgender woman. She is a first-generation American with Asian and White racial backgrounds. Moreover, she was raised in the Midwest region of the U.S. in a predominantly White, middle to upper-class suburb community. The first author acknowledged her closeness to the study topic and reflected on how her biases may impact data interpretations throughout the study.

Findings

The thematic framework for each of the three open-ended questions is described below with a sample of specific participant quotes that best exemplify each major theme.

Experiences of Exoticization

Participant responses were organized into two major categories: those who had experienced being called exotic or especially attractive and those who had not had such experiences. The category of participants with lived experience of being exoticized revealed multiple themes, whereas the theme of “no experience” became the single theme for the group of those reporting no experience being exoticized by others.

Theme 1: No Experience

Some participants stated that they did not have any past experiences of being called exotic due to their Multiracial identity. As a result, these responses were brief and lacked further detail. As one Black-White, nonbinary, 19-year-old simply said, “I’ve never been referred to as exotic.” Many men fell under this theme, with some comments specifically mentioning how the

experience of being called exotic may be more likely for women than men. As one Asian-White, 22-year-old man said, “I’ve never had someone say that to me. I think it might be a more gendered thing (I’d assume more female-identifying people are called exotic).” Similarly, a 23-year-old man with a White background and an unknown non-White mother supposed, “None. Males tend not to get that kind of attention, or at least I didn’t!” These two responses from men raise an interesting perspective that being exoticized may be a gendered experience.

Theme 2: No Impression

A small group of participants experienced being called exotic or especially attractive, yet they reported that it did not leave a significant impression on them. These responses gave a sense of being unbothered by such remarks and having neutral feelings. As one Hispanic/Latino-White, 23-year-old transgender individual said, “I have not been called exotic that much, and it hasn’t affected me greatly.” Like this response, other responses were concise with little story or details of their experiences provided. The brevity of these responses further shows that participants endorsing this theme did not feel highly impacted by being exoticized either way.

Theme 3: Dehumanization

Most participants identified one or more times when they were referred to as exotic or especially attractive. Oftentimes, participants shared that this was a recurring experience throughout their lifetime. Of those who had experienced being called exotic, many responses shared perceptions of such situations as dehumanizing. To be dehumanized is to be deprived or stripped of one’s humanness and not be seen as a positive, whole person. Instances of objectification, racial sexualization, or fetishization are examples of dehumanizing processes that were frequently described in participants’ responses. One Black-White, 22-year-old woman

stated, “I feel as if I am seen only as a sex object. This makes my self-worth go down.” In the following excerpt, one nonbinary participant shared how they felt objectified:

“When I was much younger, I used to take it as a compliment and would even look up ‘how to look more exotic.’ I know now that that’s not the case. The people who say anything along those lines to me seem very slimy. There have been times when I would be out with my Filipino organizations and the guys would find out that I’m half Hispanic, to which they would make unnecessary comments on how that was ‘hot.’ It felt very objectifying.”

– Asian-Hispanic/Latino, 22, nonbinary

This individual showed a negative appraisal of the situation where they were exoticized. Men stereotyped them once the information of having a Multiracial identity was disclosed.

Interestingly, this participant also mentioned how they used to embrace being called exotic, but that has shifted over time.

Although it appeared that more women than men shared feelings of being objectified, sexualized, and fetishized, some men also shared similar feelings. As one Hispanic/Latino-White, 22-year-old man shared, “On dating sites people have told me they wouldn’t be as attracted to me if I was fully White. It made me feel a little strange to have someone only be interested in me because I was half Hispanic.” Another Asian-White, 22-year-old man felt objectified, acutely touching on how being called exotic is dehumanizing, saying, “Made me feel as if I was not human but something to be spectated at.” These quotes show how men also face being called exotic and appraise those situations negatively, viewing them as dehumanizing.

Similar to the previous quote mentioning being spectated at, another prominent pattern illustrating dehumanization was feeling like a zoo animal or a circus animal for others to view:

“I have talked to many men who see my race to be my greatest quality. All they saw when they looked at me was my race and ethnicity. This made me feel like an animal at the zoo or some strange prize they believe they won. Due to these experiences, I sometimes feel as though my multiracial identity is all that I am.”

– Asian-White, 18, woman

This woman feels reduced to only her race/ethnicity by others, which appears to have negatively impacted her relationships or interactions with men. Feeling like an animal in the zoo is an apt metaphor for Multiracial individuals who may feel dehumanized by being viewed exotic by others.

Theme 4: Negative Responses and Feelings

Many participants consequently felt an array of negative emotions as a reaction to experiences of being exoticized. Such feelings included anger, disgust, and feeling uncomfortable. Other negative responses included feeling like being called exotic was a weird or strange situation to begin with. Perhaps the most powerful responses came from participants who showed strong emotional responses and shared specific stories that have stuck with them. For example, one woman shared an uncomfortable comment from a man:

“I find it weird to call people ‘exotic.’ People who fetishize people of backgrounds make me uncomfortable in general. I once talked to this white guy on social media that told me ‘We would have little Keanu Reeves babies if we got together’ (because K.R. is 1/4 Asian I believe (?)), and I blocked him immediately. I don't tolerate that kind of fixation on race.”

— Asian-White, 21, woman

This woman took the action of blocking the man on social media because she felt uncomfortable. The man in the story fixated on this woman's ethnic-racial identity instead of her as a whole person. Also, this woman stated she does not tolerate others fixating on race, implying that this comment angered her because it fetishized her.

Theme 5: Positive Responses and Feelings

Conversely, some participants expressed more positive appraisals of being called exotic and had positive emotional responses as a result. Some reasons these participants felt positively included feeling like they are special and unique. As one Asian-Hispanic/Latino-White, 20-year-old man conveyed, "It does not happen very often, but in the cases that this has been true it has made me feel unique and positive." Further, some participants perceived exotic comments as a compliment, like one Asian-White, 23-year-old woman who said, "I took it as a compliment and it boosted my confidence." Viewing exotic statements as compliments differs from those under the "negative responses and feelings" theme, who did not appraise exotic remarks as compliments. This specifically illustrates the variation in appraisals and emotions to the same type of experience. One woman shared a distinct perspective:

"This actually makes me feel fine since it validates my experiences that I am mixed. I understand how it can be a bit offensive or ignorant since these words are a bit rude and devaluing, but it helps me affirm my identity."

— Asian-White, 21, woman

This woman acknowledged that exotic comments towards Multiracial individuals is negative because it is "offensive or ignorant," yet she personally has a positive response. Being called exotic validates her experiences, signifying that she feels seen by others.

Theme 6: Conflicting Feelings

While many participants were grouped into opposing negative and positive themes, some showed a mix of both feelings. For example, these participants may feel both valued and fetishized simultaneously. As one Asian-Hispanic/Latino, 18-year-old woman said, “I’ve had many people call me special or especially attractive because of my background. On one hand, they make me feel special and appreciated, but on the other hand, I can sometimes feel a little fetishized.” Similarly, in the following excerpt, one woman explicitly stated how she has mixed feelings:

“People have told me that I am attractive because I am being mixed, and these experiences have elicited mixed feelings from me. When I was younger, I appreciated the compliments and it made me feel really pretty. Now that I am aware of the fetishization of Asian women and mixed people, it makes me feel weird when people compliment me because of my mixed racial identity.”

— Asian-White, 18, woman

The conflict here is that being called exotic made this woman feel attractive, but on the other hand, she feels “weird” because of fetishization. This woman has Asian heritage, and she is knowledgeable of how common it is for Asian women to be fetishized by others. Interestingly, this response also touches on a developmental shift in perspective from positive to negative feelings, which were gained with learning about the concept of fetishization.

Self-Perceptions of Racial Ambiguity

Participant responses were grouped into two categories based on the racial ambiguity open-ended question: those who identified as physically appearing more mixed (i.e., ambiguous) or more like one race (i.e., monoracial). There were overlapping themes for both groups,

including neutral feelings, negative feelings, positive/unique, mixed feelings, and context dependent. A distinct theme of being othered emerged for those who said they looked ambiguous. Another distinct theme of barriers in appearing monoracial emerged for the group who said they looked more like one race.

Theme 1: Neutral Feelings

In both the ambiguous and non-ambiguous groups, several participants simply stated that whether they look racially ambiguous or not had no impact on how they felt towards their bodies. From the ambiguous group, one Black-White, 25-year-old man simply said, “I look racially mixed, and it has not impacted me in any way.” The following example is from a woman from the group that looks primarily monoracial:

“I think I look more white than mixed. This hasn't had a huge impact on how I feel about my body. I think both my parents are beautiful and would not care if I looked ‘less white’ or ‘more white.’”

— MENA-White, 21, woman

This response is interesting because this woman shares how she views her parents as beautiful and that how her appearance would not matter to them. Perhaps this perspective and the security in knowing her parents are not bothered by her appearing more White is the reason this woman does not feel very impacted.

Theme 2: Negative Feelings

The second overlapping theme across both the ambiguous and non-ambiguous groups was negative feelings. Such feelings comprised of feeling “less than” or insecure. Some participants shared that the reason for feeling negatively is due to the influence of specific body ideals for their respective cultures and struggling to meet those ideals. One ambiguous, Black-

White, 25-year-old woman notes this as the reason, stating, “I feel I look racially mixed. I do not know how my body should look. Should I be super skinny like my caucasian family members, or be ‘thick’ like those on my African American side prefer to be.” This woman’s cultural backgrounds have opposing body ideals. She described how it is difficult to balance and compare herself to one side or the other. This response implies that because she looks more ambiguous, it is challenging to fit into either standard.

Even those who are not ambiguous may still feel the influence of cultural body ideals. Additionally, men are subject to this influence like women. In the following example, one non-ambiguous man shared that he feels pressure to meet White body ideals:

“I feel that I do not look racially mixed and that I primarily look white. My skin color is not tan or brown at all and I do not really have any Hispanic facial features as well. By appearing more white I do feel like I have more pressure to appear muscular or in-shape because a majority of male models are white.”

— Hispanic/Latino-White, 22, man

This man’s response shows that because he appears White, he adheres to the body ideals of White men rather than Hispanic/Latino men. He touches on another interesting point that there is a lack of racial minority models, highlighting how White standards of beauty are promoted in the media and popular culture.

Theme 3: Positive Feelings

Other participants, both ambiguous and non-ambiguous, shared positive feelings and sentiments about their ethnic-racial identity and body. Mainly, these participants felt unique, and they appreciated feeling special and different. In the following excerpt, one ambiguous woman shared how she appreciates her body for its ambiguity:

“I definitely look mixed in my facial features. I like being racially ambiguous. But I feel like just my body is more like a tan white person's body. I'm much taller and more filled out than most of the women on the Asian/Pacific Islander side of my family. I feel like I have the best of both worlds.”

— Asian-Pacific Islander-White, 23, woman

This woman specified the ways in which she appears ambiguous. Even though she looks different than others in her family, she feels she has “the best of both worlds.” This participant sees her racial ambiguity as a positive quality, a strength. From the non-ambiguous group, a man shared how he feels unique:

“I feel like I primarily look one race but also that I definitely exhibit some features of my other ethnicity that people sometimes point out. This has made an impact in a way that I appreciate the uniqueness of myself and although one side of my racial identity is more visually prominent, I still have some features of the other side that people notice.”

— Asian-Black, 21, man

Similarly, this man appreciates his identity, calling it unique. Although he describes himself as appearing more like one background, he still exhibits some ambiguity that some individuals notice at times. He does not express a desire to appear more mixed and appears to accept himself for who he is.

Theme 4: Mixed Feelings

The mixed feelings theme refers to feeling confused or uncertain about how one feels regarding their ambiguous or non-ambiguous appearance. As one ambiguous, Asian-White, 18-year-old man said, “I feel like I do look racially mixed because many people are confused as to what I am when they first look at me. It makes me feel special in some ways, but odd in other

ways.” One ambiguous woman discussed how her feelings towards her skin tone change depending on the season:

“I do feel like I look racially mixed for half of the year after I have gotten tan from the sun. I feel confident when I am tan and look half Black. During the months when I am extremely pale, this is when people mistake me for being fully white or some other race. I feel much less confident during winter.”

— Black-White, 22, woman

Here, whether this woman feels positively or negatively about herself depends on her skin tone which lightens or darkens during different seasons. Consequently, she does not like when she appears to be White instead of Black. However, the reason why she feels less confident when she has lighter skin is not elaborated on, yet it is interesting given that Eurocentric beauty ideals are the standard in the U.S. Varying skin tones based on season may be a defining characteristic for Multiracial individuals as one’s skin tone affects how they may view themselves and how others view them.

Theme 5: Context Dependent

Whether one physically appears more ambiguous may also depend on variables such as the time of year, who they are surrounded by, or the racial makeup of where they live. As an Asian-White man said:

“I look pretty obviously mixed, although I can sometimes get away with being white (if it's the summer and I'm tan, I can even get mistaken as partially having Hispanic heritage). However, when I'm with a primarily white crowd, I'll feel more Asian, while on the other hand I'll feel more White if I'm in a predominantly Asian crowd (or really any environment in which Caucasians are not the clear majority). It hasn't really made me

feel differently about my body, but it has made me think if people are just viewing me differently in terms of who I am as a person.”

— Asian-White, 25, man

Here, this man discussed how the shade of his skin changes based on the season, which can result in either appearing White or Hispanic/Latino, although he does not have Hispanic/Latino heritage. There is also variability based on the crowd he is with: he feels more White in an Asian crowd and vice versa. Interestingly, despite this fluidity, he does not feel that his ambiguity has impacted his body image.

Theme 6: Barriers in Appearing Monoracial

Barriers in appearing monoracial was a theme that emerged only for the non-ambiguous group. Under this theme, participants discussed the difficulty in claiming their Multiracial identity, in part because they did not look racially ambiguous. Further, some participants expressed a desire to appear more ambiguous to match their Multiracial identity better. As one woman shared:

“I'm 3/4 Caucasian and 1/4 Japanese. But I look 100% white. This has had some impact on my physical appearance because it feels like I have to prove that I am mixed race. And I feel like I can't claim my Japanese because I don't look it. I don't know if any of that made sense.”

— Asian-White, 20, woman

This White-passing woman feels as though she must “prove” to others that she is also Japanese. Due to her mostly White appearance, she feels as though she cannot claim her Japanese heritage. This demonstrates the strength and importance of physical appearance in how one identifies and feels about themselves and their body. This woman did not elaborate on how her body image

was impacted, but her response suggests that it may be negatively impacted by being White-passing because of her desire to claim her Japanese background.

Theme 7: Being Othered

The feeling of being othered emerged as a theme for only the ambiguous group. Due to being Multiracial and appearing ambiguous, these participants are seen as different from others or an outsider. One man described how he feels disconnected:

“I feel I look racially mixed but that others do not agree; they frequently tell me I look Latino when I am mixed but not with that. It has made me feel almost strange, like I don't see what others see and confused me with self-image for many years.”

— American Indian-Black-White, 24, man

There is a disconnect in how this man perceives himself and how other people perceive him. He acknowledged how these experiences have caused self-image issues. This response also touches on experiences of incongruity, where a Multiracial individual's ethnic-racial identity is misclassified by others, which leads to the final open-ended question asked.

Experiences of Being Misclassified

Participants were grouped into two categories: those who stated they had lived experiences of being misclassified by others and those who did not have such experience. Interactions with racial incongruity were highly common among the sample, and there were different appraisals and emotional reactions to being misclassified.

Theme 1: No Experience

Few participants reported not being in a situation where other individuals misclassified their ethnic-racial identity. Therefore, several of these responses were brief. For example, one Black-White, 24-year-old woman simply said, “People almost never misclassify me. It has had

no effect on the way I see myself.” A 20-year-old, Black-White woman also shared, “I haven't been misclassified with my racial identity, but I do feel like my friends and even myself at some points forget that I'm black.” This response brings up a thought-provoking point with how she feels as though others forget the Black side of her identity. Tying this in with racial ambiguity, it is likely that not being racially ambiguous may prevent Multiracial individuals from instances of misclassification.

Theme 2: Unaffected

Participants who had lived experience with racial incongruity had varied appraisals. Many participants felt unaffected by people inquiring about their identity and misclassifying them. For instance, one American Indian-Black-White, 19-year-old woman said, “All my life, people assumed I was fully or partially Hispanic. That occurring had no impact on how I feel about my body.” Even though this woman had been misclassified as Hispanic multiple times, she did not feel bothered by it and does not think it has impacted her body image. A few participants showed understanding and compassion for those who misclassified their racial identity. As one woman said:

“I have mainly been misclassified as being Hispanic. Only other times have been where they thought I was possibly Caribbean. Because I know that it can be difficult to tell, these comments have not impacted me in any way in how I feel about my body.”

— Black-White, 23, woman

This woman showed understanding by acknowledging that it can be difficult for others to discern her ethnic-racial identity. She had been misclassified as other backgrounds multiple times, yet she stated that the way she feels about her body has not been impacted by these situations.

Theme 3: Welcomed Attention

Some participants with racial incongruity experiences perceived them to be positive situations. These participants believed that it is thought-provoking when others want to know their racial background. These interactions were welcomed by these Multiracial individuals. As one Asian-White, 21-year-old woman shared, “I do not take offense if someone mistakes me for being another kind of asian other than Chinese. I think it's cool when people want to learn my background as I enjoy thinking about it and understanding it too.” Although this may seem comparable to being unbothered, this participant appears to welcome the interactions by saying that she thinks it is “cool” when other people are interested in her heritage. Further, these interactions benefit her as well because she enjoys thinking about her identity.

Theme 4: Negative Feelings and Self-Perceptions

Although some participants experienced no impact or felt positively from social situations of being misclassified, many others expressed negative emotional reactions. Feeling bad, annoyed, confused, or self-conscious were common feelings that emerged. Responses under this theme had particularly powerful excerpts. In the following excerpt, one woman shared her desire to be seen as all her backgrounds:

“Like I said before, many people assume I'm European because I'm white-passing, have freckles, and have brown curly hair. I feel like shouting, "I'M FILIPINO" whenever this happens. Sometimes I wish my skin was darker so I could resemble my relatives more.”

— Asian-White, 19, woman

This woman expresses her frustration by using all caps, illustrating her shouting “I’m Filipino.” As a result of being misclassified, she shared how she desires a darker skin color, bridging how these experiences of racial incongruity impact how she feels about her body, which appears to be

negative. This response also touches on feeling like an outsider because this participant wishes to have greater resemblance to her family.

Another participant with Filipino heritage shared how she feels highly confused when people misclassify her identity:

“When I was traveling abroad I have been hailed in Chinese and even misgendered by foreigners. Two of my coworkers who are old Filipino women were surprised when I told them I was half Filipino. But every time someone misclassifies my racial identity it makes me feel confused, like someone shattered my face and I have to pick up the pieces and put it back together again, basically rearrange and put back my personal perception of my identity.”

— Asian-White, 21, woman

The sharp imagery of one’s face shattering and having to piece it together again is a powerful way this woman described her feelings towards being misclassified. This illustrates the potential harm in experiencing racial incongruity by causing confusion, and possibly disrupting one’s sense of self.

Theme 5: Context Dependent

A smaller, but interesting theme among those who have experienced racial incongruity is context dependent. Participants endorsing this theme discussed how their experiences of being misclassified depended on their context, such as location or who they were surrounded by. One woman describes how being misclassified depends on who she is with:

“It happens to me all the time depending on who I am surrounded by. If I am with my dad people think we are latinx. If I am with my mom people just think I am white. Overall

white people never get it right or even close. I think all of this just really adds to my feeling of being a little lost and not being enough of anything.”

— Black-White, 25, woman

The presence of one of the parents is the context that shapes this woman’s experiences. She shares how White individuals in particular never correctly identify her. Consequently, she feels like she does not fit in. This theme illustrates the fluid nature of the Multiracial experience. It is worth noting that responses under the context dependent theme also fit into either the negative feelings and perceptions theme or the unaffected theme.

Discussion

This qualitative study explored Multiracial emerging adults’ lived experiences with exoticization, racial ambiguity, and racial incongruity, and how those experiences intersected with their feelings towards their ethnic-racial identity and body. As identity development is salient at this age, having poor body image because of these defining experiences may disrupt development into young adulthood (Quick et al., 2013). Overall, findings revealed that experiences of exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity were common and meaningful experiences to Multiracial individuals. There was a spectrum of emotional responses and perspectives ranging from more negative to more positive towards such experiences. Emerging themes related to exoticization included no experience, no impression, dehumanization, negative responses and feelings, positive responses and feelings, and conflicting feelings. Themes for ambiguity included neutral feelings, negative feelings, positive feelings, mixed feelings, context dependent, barriers in appearing monoracial, and being othered. The last set of themes for incongruity included no experience, unaffected, welcomed attention, negative feelings and self-perceptions, and context dependent. Together, the findings advance the understanding of the

Multiracial experience by connecting the concepts of exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity to how they view themselves and their body.

Exoticization

There is evidence for the biracial beauty stereotype (i.e., belief that Multiracial individuals are more beautiful than others) in this study as most participants indeed had memories of being called exotic or especially attractive by other people. Participants recounted times when others desired mixed babies because they thought Multiracial individuals were attractive or when potential romantic partners expressed interest based on their identity. This finding generally supports past empirical and theoretical work providing evidence for the biracial beauty stereotype by demonstrating how Multiracial faces are rated as more beautiful than monoracial faces (see Bradshaw, 1992; Rhodes et al., 2005; Sims, 2012; Skinner et al., 2020). Reactions to being called exotic showed some variation between positive and negative emotional responses, which is akin to attitudes of Multiracial women in past work (Hall, 1997; 2019; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002; Waring, 2013). Yet, the central themes were dehumanization and negative responses and feelings.

Within these two themes, participants shared thoughts on feeling objectified and fetishized when individuals view them as exotic. This key finding is not surprising given previous work showing how Multiracial individuals face objectification and fetishization in the world (Curington, 2021; Jones & Rogers, 2022). Moreover, the negative emotional responses bolster findings from previous research showing that Multiracial women are offended when they are called exotic and take issue with it (Basu, 2010; Curington, 2021). Even the specific fetishization example of other individuals desiring mixed race children that was quoted in this study directly echoes what Jones and Rogers (2022) found in their work. In addition, these

findings support Johnston and Nadal's (2010) theoretical taxonomy of Multiracial microaggressions in that objectification and exoticization is a category of Multiracial microaggressions. Although participants typically did not label experiences as such, their negative affect and descriptions of interactions being undesirable suggests that they have an awareness of microaggressions.

Interestingly, there is evidence for exoticization being affected by gender. More men than women were grouped under the no experience theme, and a few men mentioned how being exoticized may happen more frequently for women than men. Indeed, there is ample research demonstrating that Multiracial women are exoticized, and they often do not appraise such situations positively (Basu, 2010; Curington, 2021; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002; Vasquez, 2010; Waring, 2013). Considering the present sample of emerging adults, there may also be an intersection between gender and age, in that being a young woman and Multiracial perhaps results in a higher likelihood of being called exotic by others than an older woman. However, the present study also shows that some Multiracial men were viewed as exotic and felt objectified as a result, which extends prior studies and objectification theory that tend to focus on women. Objectification seems able to go beyond gender if Multiracial men can also feel objectified and therefore dehumanized. Additional work studying the exoticization of Multiracial men is needed to endorse the findings of the present study and better understand possible gender differences in their lived experiences.

Racial Ambiguity

There is limited work examining how Multiracial individuals perceive their own ambiguity and how it impacts their feelings toward their bodies. Appearing racially ambiguous may lead to feelings of "otherness," or an outsider status, which emerged as a theme and is in

line with work from Bradshaw (1992) and Root (1998). Similarly, being othered connects to Johnston and Nadal's (2010) Multiracial microaggression taxonomy as exclusion or isolation from monoracial individuals is a prevalent microaggression for Multiracial individuals.

Ambiguity and otherness could be related to one's body image. Experts have discussed the difficulty in balancing two or more ethnic-racial or cultural backgrounds, which could lead to issues with body image (Ramseyer Winter et al., 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2007). Indeed, there were participants endorsing the 'negative feelings' theme who shared how they felt difficulty in managing body ideals of different cultures (e.g., thinness for a White background and curviness for a Black background). Some participants desired to look more ambiguous, or more like their respective backgrounds, which may indicate that they feel unhappy with their bodies because they want to change their appearance. As quoted in the findings, some participants felt negatively about their skin tone, which is similar to Ramseyer Winter and colleagues' (2019) finding that Multiracial women had the lowest skin tone satisfaction compared to monoracial groups. For those who appear more monoracial, some felt that they had to prove their Multiracial identity. This need to prove one's Multiracial existence through one's physical appearance demonstrates the strength and importance placed on appearance in determining how individuals are categorized.

However, despite the evidence that racial ambiguity may negatively impact Multiracial individuals' body image, positive feelings was another main theme. Hall (1997) found that some Multiracial women felt they had the best of both worlds in their appearance, meaning they had the best of both ethnic-racial backgrounds. This sentiment was also found in the participant responses under the positive feelings theme. Participants endorsing this theme appreciated their ambiguity and uniqueness. Perhaps a reason for feeling positively is that participants felt secure

in their ethnic-racial identity (i.e., greater ethnic-racial identity achievement) and were at peace with who they are and how they look. This would be a reasonable explanation given that ethnic-racial identity achievement is associated with better mental health and self-esteem outcomes (Greig, 2003; Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). It is also possible that they had more positive body image overall compared to those who felt negatively about their ambiguity.

Racial Incongruity

Both appearing ambiguous and eliciting racial identification inquiries, which can set an individual up for being misclassified by others, is the product of the racial gaze (i.e., the gaze in which one imagines and aims to discover the Multiracial individual's ancestry; see Paragg, 2017). The present study's findings demonstrate that being misclassified by others is a highly shared experience among Multiracial emerging adults, which supports past work showing that incongruity is an inherent part of the Multiracial experience (Campbell & Troyer, 2007; Does et al., 2021; Norman & Chen, 2020). Additionally, the findings connect to the assumption of monoracial or mistaken identity category in the taxonomy of Multiracial microaggressions, further confirming that these situations are prevalent (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Nadal et al., 2011).

Unaffected was a major theme for participants who had lived experience with being misclassified and is a surprising finding. These situations did not have any effect on how these participants felt about their bodies, yet their responses do not elaborate on why. Possible reasons could be that they are secure in their ethnic-racial identity, have positive body image, or those situations were not a frequent enough occurrence. However, that is not to say that a single instance of being misclassified could not make a significant impact. Future work on racial incongruity should explore potential factors to understand why some individuals are not bothered

by being mistaken for other ethnic-racial identities. It is a finding that could have positive implications for Multiracial individuals encountering situations of being misclassified throughout their life.

Although many participants felt unaffected, negative feelings and self-perceptions was another central theme for racial incongruity. Participants under this theme felt an array of negative emotions and situations of being misclassified were described as harmful. Research by Does and colleagues (2021) also found that experiences of being misclassified was connected to poor well-being in their interviews with Multiracial emerging adults/adults. Consequently, participants within this theme shared how their body image was negatively impacted: they desired to look differently, felt self-conscious, and felt like they did not fit in anywhere (i.e., othered). Indeed, Multiracial individuals face feelings of alienation and cultural homelessness (Buckley & Carter, 2004; Miville et al., 2005; Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011). Perhaps the act of another person incorrectly assuming one's identity or denying their identity draws attention to the Multiracial individual's physical appearance and otherness, which triggers body dissatisfaction because their body does not match their identity in the eyes of others.

This raises the question of what makes these participants more vulnerable to reacting to racial incongruity encounters negatively. It is possible that not feeling secure in one's ethnic-racial identity makes one more susceptible to the harms of racial incongruity. Indeed, ethnic-racial identity achievement is correlated to better self-esteem and mental health (Greig, 2003; Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Thus, not feeling secure in one's identity may result in poorer mental health and perhaps body dissatisfaction.

Across the three concepts, there were similar themes such as positive feelings, negative feelings, not having experience, being unaffected or neutral, and context dependent. The context

dependent theme which emerged when asked about ambiguity and incongruity is an interesting and distinct theme, albeit smaller in comparison to the other central themes. This theme elucidates the importance and relevance of one's social (e.g., the racial composition of their community) or environmental (e.g., location, season) context. For example, some participants stated that their skin color changes with the seasons and consequently, they had different feelings towards their skin depending on the time of year. Brunisma and Rockquemore (2001) argue that context is an essential component in the relation between one's phenotype and socially perceived appearance. For instance, the authors found that Black-White participants who had darker skin color tended to come from predominantly White communities, while those who reported lighter skin came from predominantly Black communities (Brunisma and Rockquemore, 2001). Altogether, the concepts of exoticization, racial ambiguity, and racial incongruity are unique and meaningful experiences shared among Multiracial emerging adults.

Appraisal Theory

Among all three concepts explored, there were varied appraisals of the experiences of being exoticized, appearing racially ambiguous, and being misclassified. These findings align with appraisal theory, which proposes that individuals appraise a stimulus, and it results in differentiated emotions (Moors, 2017). Despite the commonality and shared experience among the Multiracial participants, there were spectrums of how they viewed those experiences and consequently how they reacted to them. Further, there was variation in how they felt about their bodies as a result of their appraisals. What is still relatively unknown is what underlying reasons there are for the differentiated responses among Multiracial emerging adults. Overall, these findings add to the Multiracial and body image literature and highlight the richness and nuance in Multiracial emerging adults' lived experiences.

Strengths

There are four main strengths of the current study. First, a diverse sample was included, which contributes to the Multiracial literature. Participants had a range of Multiracial identities, educational backgrounds, and were recruited across the U.S. The inclusion of different Multiracial identities is especially noteworthy because past work on Multiracial individuals has been often limited to only biracial individuals or only specific identities (e.g., Black-White participants). Moreover, American Indian/Alaskan Native, MENA, and Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian backgrounds are underrepresented groups in research that were included in the present study. Second, the current study's sample was robust for qualitative data (N = 174), and saturation was reached.

Third, a common weakness in qualitative research is the influence of the researcher's presence during data collection because it can affect participants' responses (Anderson, 2010). That was not a limitation for this study, as an online survey format was used and thus the participants did not interact with the researcher. Lastly, using a qualitative method allowed for powerful and compelling data because of the participants' personal narratives (Anderson, 2010). Their stories and perspectives are highly relatable experiences, which may not have been captured as well using other study methods.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study should be considered in light of some limitations. First, data was collected via written short answers in a survey. Although there was richness captured, other qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups would allow for even greater depth and the ability to ask follow-up questions. In retrospect, this would have proved useful for when participants responded that they felt unaffected by being exoticized or their ambiguity or others

misclassifying them. In an interview, the researcher could have asked them to elaborate why they felt unbothered. Future work should investigate these types of cases to understand how or why some participants feel this way. Similarly, it may have been challenging for some participants to make the connection between the concepts and their feelings towards their body, and an interview would have allowed for additional connecting or guiding questions to deepen their reflection.

Second, although there was an adequate number of men in the study ($N = 37$), future studies should include larger samples of Multiracial men as well as gender minorities to compare their experiences with exoticization in particular as there may be potential gender differences. Third, a pattern of developmental change in attitudes emerged from the data, and it would be interesting for future research to longitudinally examine these shifts across adolescence to adulthood. The present study is limited by its cross-sectional design, and given the immense fluidity Multiracial individuals face, longitudinal studies would be valuable to the literature.

Implications

The outcomes of the present study hold both theoretical and practical implications to be considered. The findings indicate being exoticized, ambiguous, and misclassified have possible negative effects on Multiracial emerging adults and their body image. Thus, there are practical social and behavioral implications with this knowledge for family members, teachers, clinicians, or anyone interacting with Multiracial individuals. When interacting with Multiracial emerging adults, we recommend refraining from assuming or denying one's ethnic-racial identity and categorizing them by how others see them. It may be best practice to let the Multiracial individual disclose their identity if they wish to without being questioned, and to respond in an affirming manner. Additionally, as many Multiracial participants felt negatively about being

exoticized, another recommendation is to cease calling Multiracial individuals exotic or especially attractive because of their ethnic-racial identity. Perhaps people may reflect on their beliefs and attitudes about Multiracial individuals and question their desire to categorize Multiracial individuals or call them exotic. Relatedly, there are potential policy implications for workplace and school policies regarding discrimination and microaggressions as such behaviors like racial identification inquiries may be viewed as a microaggression.

There are useful implications specifically for clinicians and medical professionals as well. Professionals who work with Multiracial patients and clients could gain a greater understanding of the defining experiences impacting Multiracial identity and body image from the findings of this study. For instance, if a therapist is working with a Multiracial client on their body image, the therapist can ask if there is a history of feeling exoticized or misclassified by other people and determine if that history is a possible root factor for poor body image. Conversely, a therapist can also identify and use potential strengths such as valuing one's unique ethnic-racial identity to heal their client's relationship with their body. Such practices could positively change the course of development for Multiracial patients by preventing further body dissatisfaction/disordered eating and moving towards being secure in their Multiracial identity. Having new knowledge and greater awareness of Multiracial issues can improve the quality of care to Multiracial patients and clients.

Finally, there are implications for theory and future research. The finding that Multiracial men also felt dehumanized when called exotic because they were fetishized and objectified is interesting and novel. This highlights the prevalence and strength of objectification as it goes beyond gender to impact race, so strongly that men are objectified if they are Multiracial. It illuminates a new avenue to explore as objectification theory and past studies tend to highlight

women's experiences with exoticization. Future studies need to include more Multiracial men and study their objectification of their race as well as how it compares or contrasts to Multiracial women. Additionally, the findings of the study can broaden research and theory by connecting how body image may be impacted by race-related experiences like exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity. Such endeavors are important because previous identity theories do not explain how Multiracial identity influences body image/disordered eating. As we found some interesting, mixed results, there is ample opportunity for future studies to further investigate Multiracial identity and body image/disordered eating. Further, these endeavors are critical because of the possible developmental implications. If Multiracial emerging adults experience exoticization, ambiguity, and incongruity throughout their life, it could impact their body image/disordered eating as well as their ethnic-racial identity development.

Conclusion

This research examined Multiracial emerging adults' perceptions and attitudes on being exoticized, ambiguous, and misclassified. This study sought to connect these unique experiences to how Multiracial emerging adults felt about their bodies. Overall, findings indicated that exoticization, racial ambiguity, and racial incongruity are prevalent and significant experiences for Multiracial emerging adults and that there are negative and positive impacts on how they feel about their bodies. Negative impacts included feeling dehumanized, othered, feeling self-conscious, and wanting to appear differently. More positive feelings included appreciating one's uniqueness and welcoming the curiosity from strangers. This spectrum of responses shows the immense diversity of experiences and appraisals among Multiracial emerging adults. The U.S. Multiracial population is rapidly growing with 33 million adults identifying with multiple backgrounds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Moving forward, it will become increasingly

important to understand the experiences of Multiracial individuals in the U.S. to increase the representation and visibility of the Multiracial group.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although the U.S. Multiracial population is growing at a fast pace, body image and disordered eating research with this group is inadequate. Therefore, the overarching goal of the present research was to explore the associations between having a Multiracial identity and body image/disordered eating in emerging adults. It is unknown whether Multiracial individuals are likely to have negative or positive body image and eating behaviors as well as what racial identity-related factors may influence their body image/disordered eating. Thus, two studies aimed to address this gap in the literature. Study 1 was an initial investigation into how different racial identity-related factors, such as ethnic-racial identity achievement, racial ambiguity, racial incongruity, race esteem, and self-rated impact of identity, influenced body image (i.e., body dissatisfaction and body appreciation) and disordered eating, along with Multiracial participants' general impression of how they felt their identity impacted their body image. Study 2 further examined how the specific race-related factors of being called "exotic" by others, appearing ambiguous, and being misclassified played a role in how Multiracial participants felt about their ethnic-racial identity and bodies. Together, these studies highlight the Multiracial experience and contribute to the literature.

Influence of Racial Identity-Related Factors on Body Image and Disordered Eating

Study 1 utilized a mixed-method study design. The core research question asked, what racial identity-related factors (e.g., ethnic-racial identity achievement, racial ambiguity, racial incongruity, race esteem, and self-rated impact of identity) influence Multiracial emerging adults' body image and eating behavior? Overall, the results of the study provide greater evidence for the hypothesis that Multiracial emerging adults experience positive body image in relation to their ethnic-racial identity. Stronger identity achievement and higher race esteem

predicted higher body appreciation and supporting themes of intrinsic and extrinsic feelings or neutral feelings about one's body in relation to racial identity were found in the qualitative data. Although, there were additional themes of impossible beauty standards, feeling othered, and conflicted feelings which showed that there still may be meaningful, yet negative experiences for Multiracial emerging adults. Overall, the findings from this study demonstrate the links between racial identity-related factors and body image/disordered eating.

Relationships Between Multiracial Experiences and Body Image

The purpose of Study 2 was to gain a richer understanding of the lived experiences of Multiracial individuals and how these experiences shape their thoughts and feelings towards their ethnic-racial identity and body. Study 2 further elaborates on Study 1 by employing a qualitative study design to dive deeper into the experiences of Multiracial emerging adults. This study observed the factors of racial ambiguity and racial incongruity that were quantitatively tested in Study 1, along with exoticization. The core research question asked, what role does being Multiracial play in how young individuals feel about their body? We found that being exoticized, ambiguous, and misclassified were common experiences among participants. A range of perspectives and attitudes spanning from more negative to more positive emerged. Many participants felt negatively about exoticization, with only a few who felt positively or who had not experienced it. Many participants felt either negatively or neutral/unaffected about appearing ambiguous or being misclassified, while others felt positively. Overall, findings from this study demonstrate that Multiracial emerging adults have shared experiences yet varying attitudes and feelings about their identity and body and provides evidence for a connection between the Multiracial experience and body image.

The Positive/Negative Hypotheses

There are two competing hypotheses that were explored in this research. Multiracial emerging adults may struggle with managing multiple ethnic-racial backgrounds, therefore having trouble with affirming their identity. Or they may face challenges with being misidentified or appearing physically ambiguous. Such challenges may result in negative feelings, which may translate to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. This is the negative hypothesis about the relationship between Multiracial identity and body image/disordered eating. Indeed, some studies suggest Multiracial individuals have worse body image or higher disordered eating compared to other groups (Ivezaj et al., 2009; Quick et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2000; Ramseyer Winter et al., 2019). On the other hand, the positive hypothesis suggests that perhaps Multiracial emerging adults do not struggle with affirming their identity, appearing ambiguous, or being misclassified by others because they see themselves as unique and have pride in their heritage. Then, these individuals would instead experience body appreciation and healthy eating behaviors. Few studies back this claim, but Mucherah and Frazier (2013) indeed found Multiracial women with Black heritage were most satisfied with their skin tone compared to other African groups. However, none of the past studies assess the relationship between ethnic-racial identity development and defining race-related experiences (e.g., exoticization, ambiguity, incongruity) with body image/disordered eating. Instead, they compared ethnic-racial groups to each other.

Across both present studies, there were slightly mixed results for these hypotheses that are not as simple as positive or negative. Overall, Study 1 provided stronger support for the positive hypothesis because there were significant statistical relationships between both ethnic-racial identity achievement and race esteem with body appreciation. The qualitative data from

both studies illuminate more nuance to the story, exposing that it is not black and white.

Although there were positive, as well as neutral, themes showing that Multiracial participants felt appreciative of their bodies, felt self-love, welcomed the attention from others, or they were not bothered at all, there were negative themes that emerged as well. Some participants felt dehumanized, othered, and had barriers to claiming their identity. Further, themes of context dependent and conflicting feelings about being exoticized, ambiguous, or misclassified elucidate the complex relationship between a Multiracial identity and body image/disordered eating. Participants felt *both* positively and negatively or their feelings changed depending on their context, such as their community. The importance of context revealed here relate to Root's (1990; 1998) and Hall's (2005) theoretical models which both stress the power of one's context in Multiracial identity development. For instance, being in a context where the racial makeup of the community is different from a Multiracial individual, they may feel like an outsider which may make it difficult to reach identity achievement. This may have negative implications for health and well-being past emerging adulthood, as having a strong sense of self is beneficial.

Ethnic-Racial Identity Development Link to Body Image and Disordered Eating

Ethnic-racial identity development is an important task in emerging adulthood and is a particularly unique task for Multiracial individuals. We aimed to better understand whether ethnic-racial identity achievement predicted poor or positive body image/eating. Together, both the quantitative and qualitative data from Study 1 suggests that feeling more secure in one's identity is good for body image/eating behaviors. Quantitative results from Study 1 showed a positive relationship between ethnic-racial identity development and body appreciation, such that greater ethnic-racial identity achievement was linked to greater body appreciation. Although the qualitative findings do not demonstrate a causal relationship, participants endorsing the themes

related to positive feelings suggest the possibility that they affirmed their identity and thus feel content with their bodies. Perhaps ethnic-racial identity achievement is due to high parental ethnic-racial socialization and high cultural exposure, which have been found to be linked to high race esteem and stronger ethnic-racial identification (Khanna, 2004; Jackson et al., 2020; Stephan, 1991).

Additionally, these findings are in line with previous studies connecting general identity development to body image/disordered eating. A weak sense of identity and a lot of exploration is related to poor body image and stronger endorsement of body ideals, which in turn predicts disordered eating (Kamps & Berman, 2011; Palmeroni et al., 2020; Verstuyf et al., 2014). The findings of this dissertation extend previous research studies by demonstrating specific links between Multiracial identity development and body image/disordered eating.

Importance of Race Esteem

Similar to ethnic-racial identity achievement, race esteem, or pride, may be an important factor for healthy Multiracial identity development and body image/disordered eating. Study 1 quantitative results showed that increasing race esteem was associated with increasing body appreciation. Findings from Study 2 also suggest evidence of race esteem within the positive themes, as participants mentioned feeling proud of who they are. Although previous work is limited in exploring the link between race esteem and body image/disordered eating, these findings are not surprising when considering the related concept of self-esteem. Self-esteem has an established relationship to body image/disordered eating in that low self-esteem is linked to poor body image and disordered eating (French et al., 2001; Lowery et al., 2005; Paxton et al., 2006; Shea & Pritchard, 2007; Thompson & Smolak, 2001; van den Berg et al., 2010). The present research extends self-esteem studies and adds to the literature by measuring race esteem.

Influence of Ambiguity and Incongruity

The present research examined the influence of a racially ambiguous appearance on body image/disordered eating as ambiguity is a prevalent and salient aspect of the Multiracial experience (see Paragg, 2017; Tran et al., 2016; Young et al., 2013). Between both studies, there were some mixed results. Interestingly, Study 1 did not find significant connections between ambiguity and any of the body image/disordered eating outcomes, yet Study 2 suggests ambiguity is a relevant factor as many participants shared how they felt like an outsider or wished they could look differently. Conversely, other participants appreciated their unique appearance and felt positively. These findings are somewhat unexpected given the theoretical perspective of physical appearance being a salient factor in identity development (Root, 1990; 1998). A possible explanation for these mixed findings could be that ambiguity is not as strong of a factor in body image/disordered eating or there are possible mediators like gender impacting the relationship. For instance, Bowles (1993) found that Black-White girls express more difficulty accepting their physical features than boys, suggesting that racial features may have a greater effect on Multiracial girls than boys. As there is some mixed evidence that ambiguity may impact body image/disordered eating, future research should continue to investigate this concept.

In addition to ambiguity, the present research investigated Multiracial emerging adults' experiences with being misclassified and whether those interactions impact how they perceive and feel about their body. Like ambiguity, quantitative results from Study 1 surprisingly indicated that racial incongruity was not significantly connected to body dissatisfaction, body appreciation, and disordered eating. The qualitative themes of welcomed attention and unaffected also support this claim. This is somewhat unanticipated because research has found

that Multiracial individuals perceive that their mental health is harmed by racial incongruity (Does et al., 2021). Yet, these findings suggest that there may be resiliency factors acting as a buffer to the harms of being misclassified. From a developmental perspective, this is significant because as Multiracial emerging adults may continue to be misclassified throughout their life, being resilient could be beneficial for their identity and well-being.

However, the picture remains unclear as another main theme, negative feelings and self-perceptions, suggests there may be a harmful connection between incongruity and body image/disordered eating. Future work should investigate racial incongruity further to better understand why it affects some Multiracial individuals' body image and not others. Like ambiguity, perhaps gender acts as a mediator to the relationship. Or perhaps context influences experiences of incongruity, such that in more diverse communities, experiences of incongruity may not be as common or meaningful for Multiracial emerging adults. Indeed, the college context which is unique to this life stage may be a diverse context.

Limitations

Certain limitations of the present research could be addressed in future studies in the body image/eating disorder field. First, the study was cross-sectional in nature. Given patterns of developmental change in the qualitative data as well as the knowledge of the fluidity Multiracial individuals experience (e.g., changes in how they identify), longitudinal studies would be fruitful. Second, there was an imbalance of male and female participants, with only 37 men represented in the present research. Future studies should recruit more Multiracial men to better explore potential gender differences. Additionally, factors such as age and education were not examined, which may have influence on the relationship between Multiracial identity and body image/disordered eating. Finally, future studies have the opportunity to involve more participants

of differing Multiracial identities in order to conduct group comparisons as the present research did not explore group differences.

Implications

The findings from this dissertation propose several practical and theoretical implications. At the broad societal level, Multiracial emerging adults can benefit from the representation and greater visibility offered by the two studies. The results demonstrate that no Multiracial individual is alone in their experiences, and that there is strength in their unique identities as evidenced by the Study 1 result that ethnic-racial identity achievement and race esteem were linked to body appreciation as well as the Study 2 positive themes. This is an important implication since, historically, the deficit perspective has been applied to the Multiracial group (Thornton, 1996). Another broad implication is with regard to daily behavioral and social interactions with Multiracial individuals. We found that many participants felt negatively about being called exotic or being misclassified. Thus, we suggest that people should refrain from labeling Multiracial individuals as exotic or exceptionally beautiful because of their race/ethnicity and making assumptions about how they identify. These practices may help improve the public image of Multiracial individuals by reducing stereotypes (i.e., the biracial beauty stereotype) and lessening the harm to their ethnic-racial identity development and body image/eating behaviors.

The results of this research are applicable to body image/disordered eating prevention and intervention programming. We found positive associations between both ethnic-racial identity achievement and race esteem with body appreciation. Some qualitative findings showed that participants felt they had the best of both worlds and loved their ambiguous appearance. Thus, prevention and intervention programming could create activities or lessons which promote

acceptance of one's Multiracial identity and make positive associations between their identity and physical body. Further, programming could also empower Multiracial individuals by promoting messages of how they are worthy of belonging and that they do not deserve to be fetishized or objectified. Such actions could potentially lead to healthy developmental outcomes in adulthood such as stronger ethnic-racial identity achievement and positive body image/healthy eating.

There are similar applications for medical professionals and clinicians in the body image/eating disorder field working with Multiracial patients. Those working with Multiracial patients could gain deeper knowledge about the ways a Multiracial identity may intersect with one's body image and disordered eating behaviors. In therapy spaces, an understanding of the effects of experiences such as exoticization or racial incongruity on one's body image could be beneficial when gathering a patient's history, as those may be defining experiences and points of healing. Additionally, professionals can take a strengths-based approach to care by encouraging healthy ethnic-racial identity development and helping patients see the positives in their special background and appearance.

At the family level, the outcomes of this research may be useful for parents and caregivers of Multiracial emerging adults as well as younger children. Some participant responses within the qualitative data revealed the effect parents had on their ethnic-racial identity and body image. Specifically, participants mentioned the harmful effects of family, such as shaming them for not meeting certain standards of beauty. We recommend that parents/caregivers foster healthy ethnic-racial identity development in their children, supporting all sides of their heritage. An example could be encouraging their child to participate in the cultural traditions of all their backgrounds equally. Indeed, families play an important role in

learning about one's heritage and ethnic-racial socialization, and it may lead to high race esteem (Cauce et al., 1992; Jackson et al., 2020; Neblett et al., 2008). Similarly, parents/caregivers should promote positive body image in their children; for example, parents/caregivers should not compare their child's body to cultural ideals like thinness. Further, nurturing healthy ethnic-racial identity development in youth may in turn help develop healthy body image and eating behaviors later in adulthood.

Lastly, there are theoretical implications and suggestions for upcoming research in the body image/disordered eating field. Previous Multiracial development theories mention the importance of physical appearance (see Poston, 1990; Root, 1990; 1998), but there are no theoretical models related to Multiracial body image and disordered eating. The findings of this research begin to scrutinize the intersection between holding a Multiracial identity and body image/disordered eating. The present research could contribute to the expansion or creation of new theoretical models in the future. Perhaps future theoretical models can establish how Multiracial individuals' identity achievement or lack thereof affects their relationships to their body and eating and determine critical influences of that relationship. Additional research focusing on Multiracial individuals is needed to contribute to future theoretical perspectives.

Conclusion

Together, these two studies reveal a link between Multiracial identity and its defining experiences to body image and disordered eating. Ethnic-racial identity achievement and race esteem appear to be key factors in developing positive body image and healthy eating behaviors. Notably, there is immense diversity in the lived experiences of Multiracial emerging adults which the two studies illuminate. Future research should continue to study and confirm the relationship between having a Multiracial identity and body image/disordered eating, particularly

regarding racial ambiguity and incongruity as there were mixed results overall. Knowledge about how race/ethnicity shapes body image and disordered eating will better serve the Multiracial population by aiding in the prevention of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, which will become increasingly important as this demographic continues to rapidly expand in the U.S.

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APPENDIX

Table A1

Multiracial Demographics

Multiracial Group	N	Percent
Asian-White	63	36.2
Black-White	40	23.0
Hispanic-White	16	9.2
Asian-Black	7	4.0
MENA-White	6	3.4
American Indian-Black-White	5	2.9
Black-Hispanic	4	2.3
Asian-White-Pacific Islander	4	2.3
Asian-Hispanic	3	1.7
Black-Hispanic-White	3	1.7
Pacific Islander-White	3	1.7
American Indian-White	2	1.1
White-Additional Not Mentioned	2	1.1
Asian-MENA	1	0.6
Asian-Pacific Islander	1	0.6
Asian-American Indian-Black	1	0.6
Asian-American Indian-Black- White	1	0.6
Asian-Hispanic-White	1	0.6

Multiracial Demographics Continued

Multiracial Group	N	Percent
Asian-Black-White	1	0.6
Asian-Black-Hispanic	1	0.6
Asian-American Indian-MENA- Black-White	1	0.6
Asian-Hispanic-Pacific Islander- White	1	0.6
American Indian-Black	1	0.6
American Indian-MENA-White	1	0.6
American Indian-Black-White- Additional Not Mentioned	1	0.6
Black-MENA	1	0.6
Black-Additional Not Mentioned	1	0.6
Hispanic-Pacific Islander-White	1	0.6
MENA-Pacific Islander-White	1	0.6

Table A2*Psychometric Properties for Survey Measures*

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Cronbach's α
Multigroup Ethnic Identity	3.4	0.7	1-5	0.90
Ambiguity	5.2	1.4	1-7	0.83
Incongruity	3.4	0.98	1-5	0.79
Race Esteem	3.8	0.94	1-5	NA
Self-Rated Impact of Identity	2.5	1.0	1-4	NA
Body Dissatisfaction	9.0	6.4	1-54	0.86
Body Appreciation	3.4	0.94	1-5	0.93
Disordered Eating	10.4	9.0	1-78	0.85

Table A3*Correlations Between Predictors*

Variable Name	1	2	3	4	5
Ethnic-Racial Identity Achievement	-	-	-	-	
Racial Ambiguity	.02	-	-	-	
Racial Incongruity	-.05	.43**	-	-	
Race Esteem	.43**	-.01	-.03	-	
Self-Rated Impact of Identity	.15*	.21**	.17*	.01	-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Table A4*Hierarchical Regression Results for Body Dissatisfaction*

Model	Variable	B	SE	β	R ²	
Model 1						
	Step 1				.26	
		BMI	.45	.06	.51	
		Gender	-.25	.53	-.03	
	Step 2				.27	
		Ethnic-Racial Identity	-.63	.61	-.07	
		Achievement				
Model 2						
	Step 1				.26	
		BMI	.45	.06	.51	
		Gender	-.25	.63	-.03	
	Step 2				.27	
		Racial Ambiguity	.30	.30	.07	
Model 3						
	Step 1				.26	
		BMI	.45	.06	.51	
		Gender	-.25	.53	-.03	
	Step 2				.26	
		Racial Incongruity	.18	.43	.03	
Model 4						
	Step 1				.26	
		BMI	.45	.06	.51	
		Gender	-.25	.53	-.03	
	Step 2				.27	
		Race Esteem	-.77	.45	-.11	
Model 5						
	Step 1				.26	
		BMI	.45	.06	.51	
		Gender	-.25	.53	-.03	
	Step 2				.27	
		Self-Rated Impact of Identity	.75	.43	.11	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$

Table A5*Hierarchical Regression Results for Body Appreciation*

Model	Variable	B	SE	β	R ²	
Model 1						
	Step 1				.14	
		BMI	-.05	.01	-.36	
		Gender	-.05	.08	-.04	
	Step 2				.16	
		Ethnic-Racial Identity Achievement	.20*	.10	.15	
Model 2						
	Step 1				.14	
		BMI	-.05	.01	-.36	
		Gender	-.05	.08	-.04	
	Step 2				.14	
		Racial Ambiguity	-.01	.05	-.01	
Model 3						
	Step 1				.14	
		BMI	-.05	.01	-.36	
		Gender	-.05	.08	-.04	
	Step 2				.14	
		Racial Incongruity	-.05	.07	-.05	
Model 4						
	Step 1				.14	
		BMI	-.05	.01	-.36	
		Gender	-.05	.08	-.04	
	Step 2				.16	
		Race Esteem	.17*	.07	.17	
Model 5						
	Step 1				.14	
		BMI	-.05	.01	-.36	
		Gender	-.05	.08	-.04	
	Step 2				.14	
		Self-Rated Impact of Identity	-.03	.07	-.03	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$

Table A6*Hierarchical Regression Results for Disordered Eating*

Model	Variable	B	SE	β	R ²	
Model 1						
	Step 1				.03	
		BMI	.21	.10	.17	
		Gender	-.27	.85	-.02	
	Step 2				.03	
		Ethnic-Racial Identity Achievement	.81	1.0	.06	
Model 2						
	Step 1				.03	
		BMI	.21	.10	.17	
		Gender	-.27	.85	-.02	
	Step 2				.04	
		Racial Ambiguity	.70	.48	.11	
Model 3						
	Step 1				.03	
		BMI	.21	.10	.17	
		Gender	-.27	.85	-.02	
	Step 2				.03	
		Racial Incongruity	.21	.10	.17	
Model 4						
	Step 1				.03	
		BMI	.21	.10	.17	
		Gender	-.27	.85	-.02	
	Step 2				.03	
		Race Esteem	.01	.73	.00	
Model 5						
	Step 1				.03	
		BMI	.21	.10	.17	
		Gender	-.27	.85	-.02	
	Step 2				.05	
		Self-Rated Impact of Identity	1.35	.70	.15	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$