

Examining Multiracial Identity Development: Key Concepts & Assumptions

Family Social Science

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
+ HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Daniel K. Cooper, MA

UNIVERSITY
OF MINNESOTA
Driven to Discover™



Background

Introduction and Purpose

- Literature on biracial identity development has become more prevalent in recent years due to a growing population of multiracial youth in the United States. Brown and Brown (2011) reported the percentage of biracial children has increased 50% since 2010 and represents the fastest growing age cohort.
- There is a need for new models specific to multiracial individuals, rather than most past models focused on monoracial identity development (Nuttgens, 2010).
- Multiracial individuals often experience stress from having to organize diverse cultural or racial backgrounds into their understanding of self (Allen et al., 2013).
- Multiracial individuals often experience the “forced-choice dilemma,” or the pressure to exclusively identify with one racial group or another (Allen et al., 2013).
- Current theoretical models do not fully capture the complexity of multiracial identity development.

Significance

- A model that captures the intricacies of multiracial development can lead to better understanding of the experiences of these individuals and tailor treatments to help facilitate healthy development



Methods

Model Development – Drawing from Key Findings

Importance of Social Contexts

- Multiracial individuals often feel pressure from family or peers to commit to a monoracial identity. These social pressures have been linked with negative psychological outcomes, such as anxiety (Franco et al., 2016).
- Social context has also been shown to influence how biracial individuals view their identity and choose to identify (Remedios & Chasteen, 2013).

Importance of Validation

- There is evidence that receiving validation is important in creating a stable sense of self. Studies have looked at the effects of inaccurate labeling and negative feedback from others on biracial identity development (Townsend, Markus & Bergsieker, 2009).
- Individuals that identify in a way that is not accepted by others (i.e., unvalidated border identity) tend to experience more negative mental health symptoms, such as lower self-concept and well-being than those with validated identities (Lou & Lolande, 2015).

Importance of the Family

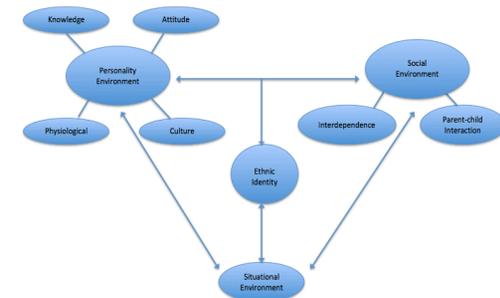
- Family and parent-child interactions can have a significant impact on child development. Families can help children learn more about their cultural histories and can support children in cope with anxiety surrounding their identities.
- Parents who discuss ethnic identity with their children are more likely to explore their identity and have better psychological outcomes (Juang & Syed, 2010; Brittain, Umaña-Taylor & Derlan, 2013).

Putting It All Together

The Systemic Model of Multiracial Identity Development draws from human ecology, symbolic interactionism, and general systems theory and is well positioned to address the complexity of multiracial identity development. This model integrates internal cognitive processes and external factors into understanding identity development.

Findings

Systemic Model of Multiracial Identity Development



Assumptions

1. Social, personality and situational components of an ecosystem constitute the three parts of the individual's total environment
2. Individuals are not born with a sense of self, but develop self-concepts through social interaction
3. Meaning comes for the process of interaction between people
4. Human ecology is about transactional and transformational patterns and processes through time and space
5. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts

Future Directions

Systemic models for biracial identity development can elucidate the unique experiences of multiracial individuals. The proposed model recognizes the role of intrapsychic cognitive processes and social processes in identity development, which is particularly relevant to the multifaceted experiences of biracial individuals. Holistic models to understanding identity development can be used to improve the effectiveness of practice and research with individuals from diverse backgrounds.