



What Are You? Multiracial Identity Development

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Abstract

Race is a social construct, allowing humans to categorize and organize themselves and others based on physical appearance. In the U.S., the dominant population has historically used these categories to oppress and marginalize people of color. Nevertheless, in the post-Civil Rights era, it has become more common for couples of different races to have children. In the 2000 U.S. Census, individuals were able to identify as multiracial for the first time, and over 6 million people did so. By the 2010 U.S. Census, this number had increased to 9 million people. The increase of biracial or multiracial people in the U.S. has important implications for social work practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. How multiracial people come to understand themselves, how society views people who are multiracial, and the effect on social policy are all different areas that could affect social work practice. This study explored the experience of multiracial university students, a subsection of the larger population of multiracial people in the U.S. This was an action research study regarding the development of racial identity in a group of university students who are multiracial, as well as the development of advocacy strategies to encourage awareness of multiracial people in the larger university community. Seven university students in a mid-sized, western state university participated in this study and completed a PhotoVoice project to raise awareness of the multiracial student population at the university. This study seeks to expand the knowledge base of multiracial identity development and inform social work practice with this population.

Keywords: Multiracial identity, Appreciative inquiry, Multiracial, higher education, Student services, Action research

What Are You? Rainbow Students, Services, And Identity

“What are you?” asks the boy in my 4th grade class, staring at me intently, and in what seems morbid fascination. Strange. Weird. Unnamed. Indeed, what am I? “Human,” I respond, “And what are you?” The boy’s mouth turns inward, in a perfect O, matching his eyes, which become saucer surprise. He walks away without a word. He knows how to respond, he is “Caucasian” or “White.” But I am White, too. And Yellow. And Brown. And Red. I stare at the demographic form in front of me and read the words I later learned to dread, “Select One.” Which part of my heritage do I deny today? The literature shows that this experience is not unusual for multiracial people in the United States. This study explored the issue of multiracial identity development and community awareness in higher education for people who identify as multiracial.

Background of the Problem

Race is largely a social construction in the United States. Placing people into categories of race allows the dominant category to separate itself from the rest of the population and marginalize other populations [1]. This marginalization is evident in the 21st Century, through over-representation of people of color in prison populations, higher poverty rates, and lower average rates of pay [1,2]. For people who have parents of different races, the process of understanding the social construction of racial categories, responding to the stereotypes of different racial categories that comprise their heritage, and developing an identity all comprise unique challenges due to the dual nature of their heritage. Multiracial individuals are defined as “people who identify with two or more racial heritages, based on socially constructed racial criteria” [3]. In the 2000 U.S. Census, people were able to identify as multiracial for the first time. Over six million people identified as multiracial in this Census [4,5]. Forty percent of this total was under 18 years old [1,6,7]. By 2010, over 50% of the multiracial population was under 18 years old, and the number of multiracial people had swelled to over 9 million [6,8]. While this seems to be a large number of people, it is widely assumed to underestimate the number of multiracial people in the U.S. due to several factors. Historically, in the U.S., people have been assigned to monoracial categories based on the “one drop rule,” which ensured mixed race people were assigned to the devalued race of their parentage, thus ensuring segregation from White society [1,6,7]. The Civil Rights Movement and the dismantling of the Jim Crow laws led to increased interaction between people who had been historically segregated. Meanwhile, court cases such as *Loving v. Virginia*, affirmed the right of people to marry a member of the opposite gender regardless of race [7]. By 2050, it is estimated that one in five people in the U.S. will be biracial or multiracial [6,9,10].

Most researchers believe that the number of multiracial individuals was underreported in the 2000 Census, and the same reasons for this belief are likely relevant to the 2010 U.S. Census [6], for a detailed account of the U.S. Census issues surrounding the category of multiracial Americans. First, there was general distrust in communities of color regarding government use of the information. Some groups were fearful that the information would be used to dismantle civil rights gains made by monoracial groups [3,6]. Others were concerned that the political influence of monoracial groups would be diminished due to large numbers of people identifying as multiracial instead of monoracial. In fact, these groups encouraged multiracial people to identify as monoracial on the Census to protect their

political influence and civil rights gains [3,6]. Second, many multiracial people self-identify as monoracial, even if given the opportunity to identify as multiracial. These people likely identified as monoracial on the Census, reducing the accuracy of the count of multiracial people in the U.S. [3]. Given the range of possibilities in racial identification for multiracial people and pressures to “pick” an identity (or have one chosen for them), experiencing guilt for choosing one racial identity over another, or feeling rejected by both racial groups of their heritage, it appears multiracial identity development differs from monoracial identity development [11].

Statement of the Problem

Multiracial students appear to be attending higher education in greater numbers [1,12,13]. This perception is well documented in the literature, but cannot be proven because institutions of higher education have historically collected data on students based on monoracial categories. That is, students entering higher education were forced to select only one racial category with which to describe themselves and multiracial student data was historically collapsed into monoracial categories for national reporting purposes [14,15]. As a result, there are no historical baselines with which to compare the current enrollment of multiracial students. The population of multiracial students is likely contained in a portion of the racial categories of people of color, as many multiracial people consider themselves to be people of color [16]. Currently, institutions of higher education provide services to students from non-Caucasian races, as historically these populations have attended college at lower rates than Caucasian students, and are less likely to complete their degree program. These student services provide information, referral, and support for students of color under the assumption that students who feel supported by the college will matriculate at higher rates (Bean & Lee, 2009; Hurd, 2012; Townsend, et al., 2009). A number of studies reported that multiracial students who felt supported in their identification as a multiracial person are more likely to have higher self-esteem, more motivation, and perform better on tasks in a research setting [15,17]. Providing support to multiracial students could therefore increase self-esteem, retention rates, and matriculation of multiracial students. One way to support these students could be through increased awareness of multiracial students and through student services specific to multiracial students on campus.

Not all universities provide multiracial student services, and this can pose a problem for those students due to the nature of identity development. Multiracial individuals may develop identity differently from monoracial people. Researchers have found that going to college actually precipitated a racial identity crisis among multiracial people, as they were unsure where they fit in the larger student population, often divided by race [11,18]. Demographic forms can also pose a problem for multiracial students in higher education because, while individual colleges may have demographic forms that allow students to identify multiracially, the data is collapsed and reported in only monoracial categories for some institutional or national statistical reporting [14]. Additionally, while multiracial student services appear to be increasing in higher education, the provision of services is inconsistent [13,19]. Some universities offer services to a population they assume are monoracial, while other universities have services that specifically target multiracial students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to increase awareness of multiracial students on campus, increase the supportive environment for multiracial students, and to contribute to the social work knowledge of working with multiracial people. Through the creation of a multiracial student awareness project, it was hoped that the wider campus community would become aware of the multiracial students on campus. Brittan, et al. [11] found that racial demographics and peer culture in higher education are important factors in providing support

for multiracial students. This multiracial student project also proposed action steps for further policy or awareness advocacy activities to be conducted once the study was completed. This provided the students with ongoing support and opportunities to engage in community outreach projects even after the study had been completed. The PhotoVoice project provided students with an opportunity to describe their experiences with being multiracial, and also provided a project to be utilized in campus and community awareness projects. Through the campus awareness project, multiracial students would hopefully increase their visibility on campus, which would then reduce feelings of isolation or invisibility of their multiracial heritage. The qualitative focus of this study provided rich data to inform social work practice regarding interventions that are helpful with multiracial identity development and supportive environments to increase social inclusion.

Research Design

Students for the study were self-selected, and they were recruited two different ways. First, a general announcement for the multiracial study was posted on bulletin boards throughout the University. Snowball sampling techniques were also used to meet the participation rate of at least seven multiracial students. In 2011, there were 5,230 students enrolled at the university, of which 1.8%, or 96 students, were identified as multiracial. The seven students recruited for this project would appear to comprise about 7.3% of the total known population of multiracial students at the university. Students were informed that they were participating in a research study regarding multiracial students, identity, and social inclusion, and signed an informed consent form. Additionally, an IRB request was approved by the university. Each student completed an initial interview with the researcher, where the researcher described the study, and conducted an initial interview regarding the student's experiences as a multiracial person. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, then reviewed for themes. These general themes were shared at the final focus group meeting, and participants had an opportunity to review them, as well as suggest alternate or additional themes. Participants were introduced to the concept of Photo Voice during the first focus group and provided an opportunity to participate in a PhotoVoice project. The Photo Voice project was designed to capture the student experiences as a multiracial person and an opportunity to educate the larger campus about multiracial people. The completed PhotoVoice projects were displayed in the university student center. Campus observers of the Photo Voice project were invited to share their perceptions and thoughts to add to the qualitative data in this study. Completed Photo Voice projects were also analyzed for themes.

Data for this study were first analyzed using QDA Miner 4, software specifically designed for qualitative data analysis. The data was then analyzed by the researcher to confirm themes, code alternative themes, or discover additional themes. There were six artifacts coded for themes in this study: the initial focus group transcript, the personal interviews transcripts, the PhotoVoice projects, campus observers' perceptions and thoughts, the final focus group transcript, and the researcher's research journal.

This was a qualitative, action research study of multiracial university students, their identity development, and the campus environment. This study explored the experience of students and the campus community regarding awareness of multiracial people and the students' sense of belonging on campus. This study also explored the students' understanding of their experience of being multiracial and their identity development during the Photo Voice project. The variables included students' understanding of their experience of being multiracial, the reaction of the campus community to the PhotoVoice project, and the experience of students' participation in the PhotoVoice project. The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- How does being a member of a student awareness project affect multiracial students' sense of belonging?
- How do students experience the awareness project, especially in relation to their sense of identity?
- How does the community awareness activity increase students' sense of self-efficacy?
- How does the awareness activity increase the university community's awareness of multiracial students on campus?

Definitions of Terms

The following terms and definitions will be helpful in reading this study:

- **Multiracial:** "people who identify with two or more racial heritages, based on socially constructed racial criteria" [3]. This study will treat biracial people as multiracial, as well as people who have racial heritage from multiple backgrounds.
- **Identity:** the relation established by psychological identification [20]. This study defines identity as the students' perception of their racial identity.
- **Empowerment:** to promote the self-actualization or influence of [20]. Empowerment is defined in this study as the students' ability to educate others regarding multiracial people and advocate for services for the population.
- **PhotoVoice:** use of photography to empower people to understand and describe their experiences.

Literature Review

The topic of multiracial identity development lends itself well to participatory action research. Participatory action research is known by many names, including action research, collaborative inquiry, and contextual action research [21,22]. Participatory action research usually consists of a partnership between researchers, who have the technical skills to conduct empirical research, and practitioners, who have access to clients and access to information regarding current conditions in the field. Participatory action research also includes participants as partners in the research process. This can be empowering for multiracial persons, and could also help researchers ensure the inclusion of variables that multiracial people identify as relevant to them. For example, multiracial participants can help select variables for investigation and help define the variables. Multiracial people who identify as monoracial may be more willing to discuss their multiracial identity and what this means to them if they are included as partners in research. This could increase the validity of the study, as one limitation of most studies is that they do not include multiracial people who identify as monoracial.

Theoretical Orientation for the Study

Greenwood et al. [23] and Eikeland [24] stated that a precise definition of action research is difficult to characterize, but all action research includes participants as researchers and results in action to address the issue or problem at hand. Stringer et al. [25] and Thiollent [22] describe action research as research that includes action to address the issue or problem being studied. This type of research is well-suited for the study of multiracial student services, as the students themselves acted as informants and change agents regarding services that are best suited for populations like themselves. This also ensured that the information obtained from the study did not just result in increasing understanding about the topic but would result in real provision of services that will be helpful to multiracial students.

The method that appears most appropriate for the research on multiracial students in higher education appears to be educational action research [23,24]. This method was selected for several reasons. First, this research focuses on adult learners, which comprises the population in higher education. Second, the preliminary interviews with multiracial students in preparation for the research implied one solution that would be suggested by multiracial students in the higher education environment is a student club created specifically

for multiracial students. This would seem to fit the definition of a support group, as the group of multiracial people would be coming together to provide support to each other, and perhaps to educate the community about multiracial people and their specific identity challenges. Finally, the research was conducted in the context of higher education, and this method of research may better inform the study than others. Educational action research comprises a broad field from prekindergarten to adult learners [23,24]. The focus of educational action research is organizational change or reform of institutions [23,24]. Based on the historical service provision to multiracial students in higher education and the institutional practice of reporting students based on monoracial categories, it appears some type of organizational change or institutional reform would be warranted. Therefore, based on the field in which the research was conducted, the action research compatibility with the NASW Code of Ethics, and the focus on organizational change or institutional reform, educational action research appears to be the most appropriate research framework for this study.

Looking Glass Theory

The use of educational action research is also aligned with the theoretical orientation of the study. Cooley's Looking Glass theory of identity development is a good fit with the idea of social construction of race and educational action research. Cooley's Looking Glass theory has also been utilized in studies of multiracial populations to gain understanding of the experiences of multiracial people [26-28]. Looking Glass theory is useful to understand how the social construction of race impacts people who are multiracial. According to the Looking Glass theory, identity is formed through a process of internalizing the perception of others [28]. Based on the way others in society treats a person, the person learns whether they are valued in society or not. In the case of people who are multiracial, they may be treated as monoracial based on their phenotype or be subjected to questioning about their racial ancestry when their phenotype is ambiguous due to the community's lack of knowledge about multiracial people. In fact, there is some evidence that multiracial people develop their identity based on how others treat them, not by phenotype [11]. The general assumption of monoracial ancestry results in negating the multiracial person's full identity and limits their racial choices.

Theories on identity development can basically be divided into two categories, stage models or fluidity models [6,10,29-31]. The stage models describe tasks related to identity development and generally ascribe age categories to each stage. As people age, they become more aware of their sense of self, and begin to develop a consistent way of looking at themselves, generally in relation to the way others respond to them, such as Cooley's Looking Glass Self. Theorists who view identity as more fluid describe phases of identity development through which individuals may move throughout their lifespan. When applied to multiracial people in particular, fluid theories of identity allows for the individual to identify themselves as multiracial, monoracial, or simply as "human" at various times throughout their lifetime.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Most of the studies regarding multiracial identity development have been small qualitative studies (40 or less participants), and most studies have included research only on biracial individuals. Almost all of the studies have recommended quantitative or mixed-methods studies on the topic with a larger pool of respondents. Almost all of the studies have also included participants up to 21 years old. This does not provide a comprehensive view of human development and the formation of identity. It is possible that multiracial identity changes throughout the lifespan but one cannot know this until there have been a number of studies on older adults.

The research on comparison of multiracial individuals who identify as monoracial versus those who identify as multiracial is limited.

Most research described the social and psychological differences between multiracial and monoracial individuals. Cheng et al. [32] discussed in-group categorization as fostering self appreciation. For multiracial people, such in-group categorization can be advantageous if they are accepted by groups that comprise their heritage, but if they are rejected this could result in lowered self-esteem. In their study of biracial individuals, Cheng et al. [32] results showed that Black and White biracial adolescents displayed more depressive symptoms than monoracial adolescents, but that depressive symptoms are confounded by socioeconomic status and gender.

Overall, self-identified multiracial youth showed more psychological issues than those who self-identified as monoracial and showed less positive beliefs about the quality of their social relationships. Self-identified multiracial youth also had either comparable or greater sociability than self-identified monoracial youth, and had comparable behavioral profiles regarding negative educational outcomes. Youth who attend integrated schools or live in integrated neighborhoods, come from lower socio-economic class, reported supportive relationships with their parents, and were connected to their ethnic culture are more likely to self-identify as multiracial and to engage in fluid identity processes through the lifespan. This supportive social environment, where schools, neighborhoods, and parents encouraged youth to explore their identity and culture may have resulted in an increased level of comfort with multiracial identities for these youth, leading to higher likelihood that these youth identify as multiracial.

Multiracial youth who reported connection with a degree of politicalization regarding race, who had phenotypical characteristics resembling monoracial individuals, reported social pressures to self-identify monoracially, and who experienced racism at a young age were more likely to self-identify as monoracial [9,33]. These social pressures appeared to result in a moratorium in identity development, leading youth to halt exploration of their multiple racial identities. However, identifying monoracially with one group may also serve as a buffer against racism [33]. The trauma related to racism and discrimination affected youth psychologically, resulting in increased acting out behaviors, depression, and lower educational outcomes [9,32].

Racism is especially relevant to this population, as multiracial individuals often reported racist comments or actions from racial groups from their same racial heritage [32]. This type of racism was unique to multiracial individuals who often reported racist comments or actions from biological parents who were phenotypically different from the youth, or reported discomfort in observing racist acts against a parent of color [9,34]. Miville, et al. [33] conducted an exploratory qualitative study with 10 self-identified multiracial adults. The authors found that four primary themes emerged in their interviews: encounters with racism; reference group orientation; the “chameleon” experience; and the importance of social context in identity development. Participants reported racism from both dominant and minority racial groups, even from their own parents and family, who were of different racial background than the participant. For example, one child who was Black and White experienced rejection from the White part of the family. The participants also reported feeling that they had more in common with multiracial people in general (even if they were from different racial backgrounds) than with people from the racial groups from the participants’ backgrounds.

Multiracial participants also described being able to move between racial groups much more easily than monoracial groups, and described the importance of parental, family, and peer influence on their racial identity development. Finally, multiracial participants described believing that they were more open to a variety of experiences and viewpoints than monoracial individuals. Root [35], in a widely cited study of biracial siblings, found that multiracial siblings often racially identify differently. There were several reasons for this difference. First, the experience of trauma tended to affect racial identification. Abuse or neglect appeared to cause a person to

negatively color code the experience. For example, a child who is emotionally or physically abused by a parent of color tended to generalize the experience to all people of that parent’s racial group. The person then appeared to reject that racial label and identify monoracially with the non-abusive parent.

Another example of trauma is hazing or authenticity testing. Multiracial people often reported being tested for ethnic authenticity by members of different racial groups regarding their taste in music, their choice of friends or dating partner, ability to speak a language, and other cultural values and beliefs. When the multiracial person “fails” the authenticity testing, they were often socially excluded from that racial group. Second, family dysfunction affected racial identity. Children from families with dysfunction also tended to racially identify with the parent who was less dysfunctional. This dysfunction could be drug or alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and divorce. Especially when there is a divorce, children tended to racially identify with the part of the family with which they had most contact. Finally, growing up in the post-Civil Rights Era tended to affect racial identity. Multiracial people became more common during the period after the Civil Rights movement, and therefore there were more peers and social support for people who were of mixed-race parentage.

Critique of Previous Research

Based on the literature presented here, it appears multiracial identity development is under-researched. Most information on populations were monoracial or biracial studies, and many of the theories of biracial identity development have been adapted to multiracial populations. These studies discussed the feelings of conflict in multiracial people regarding loyalties to their different ethnic heritages, rejection or ambivalence in acceptance by the ethnic groups that comprised the multiracial person’s heritage, and discrimination by parents or ethnic groups that comprised the multiracial person’s heritage. These issues increased the feeling of social isolation in multiracial people, who often felt they had more in common with other multiracial people instead of with groups that comprised their racial heritage [33].

Research on self-esteem of multiracial persons is mixed. Some studies have found that the multiracial person experiences lowered self-esteem when rejected by ethnic groups that comprised their heritage, but if a multiracial person is accepted by the various ethnic groups, they experienced increased self-esteem and sense of belonging. Almost all of the research studies have found that somehow multiracial people have muddled through identity development in later life, and developed an identity with which they feel most comfortable. For some, this was identifying as monoracial, for others it was utilizing other aspects of personality to devise an identity, to proudly identify as multiracial, or to simply identify as “human.” These different ways of identifying make a case for the need to develop a better understanding of multiracial identity development and the development of theories that are specific to this population.

Summary

The population of multiracial individuals is increasing in the U.S. In the 2000 Census, over six million people identified as multiracial. As this population continues to grow, it is imperative that social workers conduct research into the unique experiences of this population in order to devise culturally competent and effective services to this population. Currently, research has not kept abreast with the growth rate of this population, and most of the research that has been conducted have focused on specific groups within this population (White and Black biracial individuals) and have compared this population to monoracial individuals. More research on relevant theories is needed, as well research to understand identity development and ecological affects on this population. This research has already not kept pace with the growth in the multiracial population, so it is imperative that social workers turn their attention to this issue. The growth of this population and the potential for the

bearing on policy are too great for social workers to ignore.

By 2050, it is estimated that in the U.S., one in five people will be biracial or multiracial [9]. This will lead to an increase in the number of biracial or multiracial students in institutions of higher education. King [18] found that going to college actually precipitated a racial identity crisis among multiracial people, as they were unsure where they fit in. Currently, institutions of higher education provide services to students from different races, as historically these populations have attended college at lower rates than Caucasian students, and are less likely to complete their degree program. These student services provide information, referral, and support for students of color under the assumption that students who feel supported by the college will matriculate at higher [15,17]. A number of studies report that multiracial students who feel supported in their identification as a multiracial person are more likely to have higher self-esteem, more motivation, and perform better on tasks in a research setting [15,17]. This can pose a problem for students in higher education because, while individual colleges may have demographic forms that allow students to identify multiracially, the data is collapsed and reported in only monoracial categories for institutional or national statistical reporting [14]. Additionally, while multiracial student services appear to be increasing in higher education, the provision of services is inconsistent [12,19]. Some universities offer services to a population they assume are monoracial, while other universities have services that specifically target multiracial students. An action research study that supports the multiracial student's identity development while increasing awareness on campus to facilitate provision of services for this population is sorely needed, and has great potential to inform the sparse literature available on this topic.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to increase awareness of multiracial students on campus, increase the supportive environment for multiracial students, and contribute to the social work knowledge of working with multiracial people. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- How does being a member of a student awareness project affect multiracial students' sense of belonging?
- How do students experience the awareness project, especially in relation to their sense of identity?
- How does the community awareness activity increase students' sense of self-efficacy?
- How does the awareness activity increase the university community's awareness of multiracial students on campus?

While only 1.8% of the student body at study site identifies as multiracial, the literature suggests that this number is actually quite a bit higher due to the propensity of multiracial people to identify monoracially or not at all. [3]. The study site was a public state university, and has a designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution. About 80% of the students receive some sort of financial assistance, such as loans, grants, and scholarships. The University has a five year matriculation rate of 31.2 percent. In the U.S., only about 41% of low income students who enroll in a baccalaureate program managed to complete their degree in five years [36,37]. Twenty-eight percent of full-time students in the U.S. drop out before attaining their degree [38]. These numbers indicate that the students at this institution are at high risk to drop out or fail to matriculate in a timely manner. By developing an environment of social inclusion, students may be more likely to stay enrolled in school [17,13]. One way to begin developing an environment of social inclusion is through helping the campus become aware that there is a population of multiracial students on campus. In this study, the PhotoVoice community awareness project provided a voice to multiracial students on campus to inform the wider campus community about multiracial people. This study also helped the participants create an action plan for next steps in the creation of a supportive environment for multiracial students. This will provide the students with ongoing support and opportunities to engage

in community outreach projects even after the study was completed. The PhotoVoice project provided students with an opportunity to describe their experiences with being multiracial, and also provided a project that was utilized in campus awareness. Through the campus awareness project, multiracial students increased their visibility on campus, which may have reduced feelings of isolation or invisibility of their multiracial heritage. The qualitative focus of this study provided rich data that can inform social work practice regarding the experience of being multiracial, interventions that can be helpful with multiracial identity development, and supportive environments that increase social inclusion.

Target Population and Participant Selection

The target population was multiracial students on campus. Students were recruited using two methods, which increased the credibility of the research design. First, students were recruited by general information on campus billboards, requesting their participation in the study. Second, snowball sampling techniques were used by identifying multiracial students on campus, asking for their participation, and then asking the students to either invite others or provide information regarding other multiracial students on campus so the researcher could invite these students to participate. The self-identification of sampling was supported by the literature, as multiracial students can sometimes be difficult to identify [14,15,39,40]. Some multiracial people identify as monoracial, while phenotype is not always a reliable indicator of mixed race. Almost two percent of the student body of about 5,230 students at the study institution self-identify as multiracial. A sample size of about 7 students comprised about 7.3% of the population of multiracial students, who self-identify as such, at the institution.

Procedures

The intervention for this study was an educational action research framework, utilizing a group of multiracial students to help inform and develop student services specific to multiracial people. Flyers were placed on billboards and multiracial students whom were known to be multiracial were invited to participate in the study as well as to help recruit other multiracial students. Students who indicated they were interested in the study were invited to join the study and participate in the PhotoVoice project. This provided opportunity to describe their experience of being multiracial and increase the awareness of multiracial students on campus. Participants were also invited to help develop services and information for multiracial students who attend the university. Qualitative data was collected throughout the process, recording student's feelings about their perceived level of acceptance as a multiracial person, their understanding of support available, and their personal feelings of their progress of identity development as a multiracial person.

An informed consent form was provided to students participating in the project, and data was collected throughout the study. Data was collected from an initial focus group, as well as during interviews with specific students in the group, review of the PhotoVoice artifact, analysis of the comment book data left by viewers of the PhotoVoice project in the student center, from the second focus group, and review of the researcher's field journal. This ensured integrity of the research data by triangulating data sources [25,41]. There was not a control group in this study, which utilized a format similar to the single-subject design.

Qualitative data was coded based on themes, and students in the focus group participated in the coding and the analysis of the data. Data was initially coded using software (QDA Miner4 lite), then reviewed by the researcher and participants to verify and complement the software analysis. The participation of the students in the coding and analysis of the data was crucial, as they brought specific insight to the understanding of the data as insiders. Data was stored on a password protected computer in a locked office, and the data file was also password protected to ensure security of the information.

Distribution of the results of this study was completed in several different ways. First, the participants were provided with the data at the second focus group to assist in development of an action plan for future work. Second, there will be a paper written and submitted to peer-reviewed journals of social work and action research. This step would be taken to inform educators and practitioners about the results of the study. Third, the study will be submitted to national conferences for presentation. This step would be taken to inform practitioners who do not have access to peer-reviewed journals, and to inform students who may be present at these conferences.

Ethical Considerations

There were several issues to consider in protection of the research participants and the data that was collected from this study. In particular, issues of informed consent and confidentiality were important, as well as the researcher's position as an insider in this action research proposal.

Informed consent

To ensure informed consent, the researcher met personally with interested students to obtain initial consent from them. At this time, students were also screened to ensure they were not in the researcher's classes and that there was no possibility that the students would be enrolled in the researcher's classes in the future. This technique was utilized to ensure students did not feel coerced or manipulated to participate [42,43]. Because this was an action research study, consent was obtained at several times during the study, whenever the participants decided on a course of action, or to change a course of action [44,45].

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Identifying information was removed during the study when the participants reviewed the data. Throughout the study, students were informed and reminded of confidentiality and the use of their information. Because action research includes the participants as researchers, the participants had opportunities to discuss anonymity and confidentiality and determine how the information was reported in the final report [22,41,42,44]. Data from the study was located on a password protected computer, in a password protected file, except for the PhotoVoice project itself. This project was designed to be displayed in public. PhotoVoice project materials were returned to the participants upon completion of the study.

Right to Knowledge of Findings

The participants actively participated in the review and coding of the qualitative data that was generated from this study. Action research "is premised on the principle that the parties in an environment carry out the investigation themselves" [46]. As a result, the participants in this study were invited to provide insight regarding the data, as well as join with the researcher in reporting findings.

Research Site

The research site was the researcher's place of employment. This is not unusual in action research, and extra precautions were in place to ensure protection of the participants due to the nature of the research site [46]. The researcher teaches upper level social work classes at the baccalaureate level at the research site. Therefore, only students who were not social work majors, or whom have already completed the upper division social work classes were eligible to participate in the study. IRB approval was obtained through the research site's IRB, due to the research site being an institution of higher education, which obtains at least some of its funding from federal sources [42,46].

Action Plan

This was a qualitative research project, utilizing the educational action research method [23,47]. Students were recruited by notices on billboards and known multiracial students were approached to participate and/or provide referrals to other multiracial students. Once the students were recruited for the study, the initial meeting consisted of an overview of the study, informed consent, and confidentiality

policy. Students who agreed to participate engaged in a focus group, then completed a PhotoVoice project, documenting their understanding of their experience of being multiracial. Students who volunteered were also interviewed in detail regarding their experiences of the project and of being multiracial. A second focus group was conducted to allow participants to review the data and to create an action plan for future activities. It was anticipated that students would suggest specific services that would be helpful to the population of multiracial students, to help the Multicultural Student Services develop appropriate services for the population, and suggest more activities to increase campus awareness of multiracial students. When the PhotoVoice projects were completed, they were displayed for one week in the University Student Center, to help increase campus awareness regarding the presence of the multiracial student population at the university and their experiences. Data was collected by observation at the focus group meetings, review of the PhotoVoice artifacts that the students created, audiotaped interviews with the volunteer students, review of the researcher's field journal, and review of the comment book data from the Student Center display of the PhotoVoice project. The student participants also participated in analysis and coding of the data from the study and drawing conclusions for reporting of results.

Insider Role

The researcher's role as an insider posed important ethical concerns for the students who were involved in the study. As an Assistant Professor in the institution of higher education, there was a possibility that the students who were involved in the study could be enrolled in the researcher's classes. Therefore, certain precautions were taken to ensure the students do not feel coerced to participate in the study. First of all, the students were recruited mainly through billboard postings. When students expressed an interest in the study, they were informed that the researcher was a professor in the social work department. Students were informed that if they were currently enrolled in any of the researcher's classes, or if they could be enrolled in the researcher's classes in the future, that they were ineligible for participation in the study. This ensured that the students were aware that their participation, or lack of participation, would not affect their academic standing in any way. Barring social work majors from participation in the study was an option that was considered, but was not feasible. There were approximately 96 students enrolled at the university who identify as multiracial. Barring social work students would skew the population of students available for participation in the study due to the small population size. Limiting the participants did have an effect on the sample size. There were approximately 10 multiracial students in the researcher's classes who expressed an interest in the study, but were unable to participate due to their enrollment in the researcher's classes.

Results

The study participants were varied regarding age, gender, and ethnic heritage. Two of the participants were male, and five were female. Five of the participants identified as bi-racial, and two identified with three races. The participants represented all five of the major racial and ethnic categories utilized by the U.S. Government Census: Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. The students ranged from 22 to 40 years of age, with a mean of 30 years. All were full time students enrolled at the University, and all but one commuted to campus for courses from their own residence. Two of the students were actively involved in campus activities and student groups, and the other five did not have active involvement in student activities. All of the participants described being intrigued by the topic of the research and the opportunity to inform the University regarding multiracial students and their needs. Several of the students remarked that they had never heard of another student identifying as multiracial, and that the opportunity to participate in this study piqued their interest in learning about the experience of other multiracial people.

Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis

Three major themes were discovered in analyzing the data. These themes were coded as wholeness, identity, and needs. The theme of wholeness contained sub-themes of racism and belonging, while the theme of needs contained sub-themes of awareness and services. These themes emerged throughout the study with the exception of the theme of wholeness. Interestingly, this theme emerged during the personal interviews and were also coded in the artifact analysis of the Photovoice project, both of which occurred at the end of the study. As supported by the literature, themes of racism, belonging, and identity were often discussed by the participants. These themes arose mostly at the beginning of the study. Finally, themes of services, awareness, and needs emerged during discussion of the action planning phase, which was integral to the action research focus of this study. These themes suggested that participants experienced racism, conflict in their understanding of identity, and social exclusion. Action issues, such as increasing awareness of the participants and the community regarding the presence of multiracial populations, identification of needs and services, and beginning to integrate their identity as a multiracial person (wholeness) with other aspects of their personality emerged once the participants felt a sense of belonging and support with the other participants.

The theme of wholeness was used to describe the participant's integration of their multiracial heritage with their personality and developing an understanding of their connection to the rest of society. This is distinct from development of identity as a multiracial person. Identity, in this study, relates to the person's understanding of their racial and cultural background, whereas wholeness indicates the person's ability to integrate racial and cultural background into their understanding of themselves and their position in the larger society. Wholeness was demonstrated by a participant comment, "My three cultures are the same, actually, in the sense of family [meaning the value of family is shared among the participant's three racial heritages]." Another participant chose to include a quote by Martin Luther King, Jr. in her Photovoice project that likened the United States to a quilt, "woven together by a common thread." The theme of wholeness was used by participants to describe their struggle to integrate their multiracial heritage into an identity that encompassed not just their understanding of who they are, but also connected them to the larger society. One participant remarked, "Everyone is multicultural, they just don't know it. Culture in America is borrowed from all over the world." These statements demonstrated a yearning within the participants to be included in the larger society and for recognition of areas of commonality with others, rather than exclusion for the ways in which people are different.

Participants did describe examples of situations in which they felt were not accepted by others, which was coded under the sub-theme racism. All of the students were people of color, but surprisingly, racism from the larger society was mentioned only peripherally, while racism from within the participant's racial heritage groups were discussed at length. Comments from the awareness project seemed to support a lack of racism regarding multiracial populations, with most comments being supportive of the project. One commenter noted, "[m]ultiracial – multicultural – more to share!" Every participant either described a situation of racism or rejection from people within their racial heritage, or they confirmed another participant's description of such a situation, however. One participant, describing a class in which racism was discussed, described the professor as generalizing national statistics to all people from that racial background. This was a background shared by the participant, who said,

I felt that she was being harder on my Mexican side, saying that I did not have the choices as everyone else, whereas I'm here, going to college, I've been accepted. I'm excelling and you're telling me that this is not where I should be, I should be lower than where I am.

This incident demonstrated the complexity of phenotype and multiracial backgrounds. The participant's phenotype was Caucasian, but she strongly identified with her Mexican background. The issue of phenotype and acceptance by others of one's racial heritage was a strong theme in this study. For example, another participant stated,

I've been told when they've asked me what my race is that I look at them and I tell them that I am Spanish and Mexican and German. And they tell me, "you're not that, you're completely German." And that is what my DNA represents. But I still have this other side. Where do you think I get my green eyes from? Because Germans have blue eyes. My Oma has the deepest of blue eyes. I didn't get these because I'm all German. I got them from my Spanish grandfather. So, it's they decide for me sometimes what I am. You're not tan enough to be Spanish and Mexican. My skin tone really says, well, she's just white or she's completely German, and that's not who I am.

This was mirrored with the authenticity testing of groups within the participant's own racial heritage, who may not believe the multiracial person is really a part of that racial group. This led to confusion on the part of the multiracial person. Still another participant described her thoughts when interacting with her peers,

I can't go into a Latino group and say 'hey, homie, what's up?' and it's just not who I am and not how I identify at all. It's like a part of me is saying, 'Yes, you're Mexican, but you're not Mexican enough. Or you're White, but you're not White enough.'

This belief was developed over time, when the participant was told she did not belong to a specific racial group, or when parents provide messages to the multiracial individual that a part of their racial heritage is less valued or should be denied. Often, the participants described this behavior as well-meaning on the part of the parent, who believed the participant would have greater chance of success by identifying with the Caucasian racial heritage.

I mean, at times everybody thinks I'm Italian, and I'm not. But that's the only time that I may think about it [race]. Just as a kid growing up, you know, we were expected to identify and behave as White children. My dad spoke Spanish, still does. He's a Spanish teacher. Never taught us because it was always his view that we were going to get ahead as White children.

Several of the participants remarked that they were unaware of the cultural behaviors or values from one or more of their racial heritage, which made acceptance by others more difficult.

Belonging was one of the most often coded themes in this study. Participants displayed a variety of attitudes regarding belonging, which ranged from stating they no longer cared if they belonged to a specific group, to a yearning for others to better understand and accept their multiracial background. Participants described difficulty with gaining acceptance with specific groups, especially those that were comprised of monoracial individuals. One participant described seeing other multiracial individuals identify as monoracial "because they identify that way because of their friends and if they identify as multiple, then their friends won't accept them." Participants also appeared acutely aware of their acceptance from others based on specific criteria other than race. They believed that others could accept them as individuals or in specific roles, but did not sense acknowledgement or acceptance of their multiracial heritage. Overall, participants felt that there was a lack of understanding from others regarding the presence of multiracial individuals on campus. Their sense of belonging tended to be attributed to criteria other than their multiracial heritage: "Last semester I was having trouble finding myself and finding myself here. I didn't get a lot of feeling of belonging as a multiracial person as much as a student." The focus groups appeared to proxy as a support group for multiracial individuals, allowing them to describe their struggles with social inclusion and explore their understanding of what it means to be multiracial. One participant summed up the experience as,

I think it's interesting to see who is kind of coming together from it.

It's interesting to see other people in the same situation, that are like, "Wait a minute! You're right! There is something else going on here. Other than the one size fits all boxes.

This was further demonstrated in the Photovoice project, where one participant depicted a stop sign with a caption asking others to stop treating multiracial people as "one thing, a singularity." Researcher notes from the first focus group meeting also reflected a prolonged discussion by participants about finding "a place" to be accepted without feeling as if they had to "pass" by declaring themselves monoracial. The data appeared to support the need for participants to feel supported and accepted by the larger society, but also a struggle within the multiracial participants regarding their racial identity.

Identity, like belonging, was also one of the most often recorded themes in the study. Participants described the struggle of figuring out where they fit within different racial categories, especially in relation to filling out demographic forms.

It's hard to be just one. Some days I'll wake up and look at myself in the mirror and I am one thing and the next day I'm something else. Sometimes it's hard to fill the form out [forms on race].

However, participants also described being multiracial as an advantage in some areas, such as when applying for scholarships, joining clubs based on ethnicity, or other race/ethnicity based opportunities.

I identify with Caucasian when it suits me better and I identify with Hispanic when it suits me better, you know, on certain forms when I know I'll have an advantage either way, I'll play both sides of the fence.

Despite this apparent advantage, participants described stress and confusion when asked to fill out race based demographic forms, especially when they were requested to "select only one." After a lifetime of filling out demographic forms, participants tended to report consistently filling out forms in the same way, which then led to less connection and knowledge about the race they did not report on forms. "It's like we push one side away so that the dominant side will stick out, it's whatever they check on the paper is what they are. And the other part doesn't show up." Participating in the study led most of the participants to begin exploring their varied racial heritage.

I want to try and find out what part of Mexico that we're from and talking to my dad and finding out in detail where he is from. Hear about him growing up and about why they never taught me Spanish or whatever.

The study appeared to also "give permission" to the participants to begin exploring their mixed racial heritage. "We're always taught that it's ok to explore different religions and different ways of education, so why is it not ok to explore your own cultures if you're multiracial?" By the end of the study, participants reported being more comfortable with this exploration and expressed interest in learning as much as possible about their own history. During the interview, one participant reported the study, "opened my eyes to see how little I knew about one culture versus the other. I want to learn more about my other cultures. The study helped me feel like I can identify as more than one now if I want." For others, their experience in the study confirmed their racial identity of choice, "I don't identify any differently, but I am more open to the question now. Like if I see it on a census, I'm going to think a little bit harder about how I want to identify myself as." One participant reported that being part of the study helped him write a paper on his self-identified culture because he had not really explored how varied his background was until the focus group. Each of the participants confirmed that the study profoundly affected their curiosity about their varied background and that they had begun to learn more about their genetic make-up and history. The participants also expressed frustration with the larger society's insistence that each person select just one racial category for identification, and agreed that there was a need for more awareness about multiracial people in the campus community.

Even after the Photovoice awareness project, the participants expressed that this did not bring enough awareness to the campus, and that more such awareness projects were needed in the future. The Photovoice project comment book supported this need, with many comments noting that observers had been unaware of multiracial students on campus, that observers had not considered the perspective of multiracial people, and that more such projects should be displayed in the student center to increase awareness. Along with increased awareness projects in the future, participants described the need for more supportive services, such as a multiracial student club on campus, which could offer support for multiracial students as well as increase the awareness of the campus community. Interestingly, participants appeared even more interested in developing services for all disadvantaged racial and cultural groups on campus, not just for multiracial students. During the interviews, one participant stated, "maybe offer not only language, like pamphlets in different languages, but also tutors who can speak different languages" as a way of helping international students become more comfortable on campus. Participants described a need for different celebrations each month, showcasing a specific culture, initiating a Multicultural Awareness Month, inviting guest speakers to discuss their culture, and providing materials to the multicultural center to help students from all backgrounds understand the different ways they can become involved on campus. The participants described a multicultural student group as an initiator of these types of activities, and that if a sponsor could not be found to develop the multiracial student group, then the Student Social Work Association should be approached to begin developing some of these activities. Each of the suggestions from the participants included collaborating and cooperating with other organizations on campus, most notably the multicultural center and the Student Social Work Association.

Discussion

The three major themes in this study indicated that participants were struggling with integrating their racial identity into their perception of who they were (wholeness), their understanding of what their racial identity means to them (identity), and the needs of different racial populations within the United States. Within these themes, participants described experiences of racism, belonging, awareness, and services. The theme of racism was especially interesting, as participants were more interested in describing experiences of racism with populations comprised of their own racial background, rather than their experiences with racism from the larger society stemming from their phenotype as a person of color. The literature mentioned this intergroup racism as an important difference in multiracial versus monoracial identity development and experiences [9,32-34]. The sub-theme of racism seemed to suggest that participants felt a lack of acceptance and belonging within racial groups comprised of their own racial heritage, much like a citizen without a country. Participants felt they could not be accepted by any racial groups of their heritage, which could have led to some participants' initial insistence in identifying as human rather than a racial category. Another outcome of the lack of acceptance was the participants' concern for all racial groups when considering an action plan for awareness activities on campus. The participants were interested in increasing campus awareness of all populations, including international students, rather than focusing solely on multiracial populations. Utilizing the Looking Glass theory of identity, it appeared participants internalized the rejection from the racial groups of their heritage and developed a cosmopolitan identity. Brittain, et al., [11] discussed the propensity of multiracial people to identify based on how others in society viewed them, not necessarily based on their phenotype. In this context, the participants' suggestions of a multiracial student club and their concern regarding all racial populations in the campus community were viewed as attempts to create communities where they would feel belonging and acceptance.

This was a qualitative, action research study of multiracial university students, their identity development, and the campus environment.

This study explored the experience of students and the campus community regarding awareness of multiracial people and the students' sense of belonging on campus. This study also explored the students' understanding of their experience of being multiracial and their identity development during the PhotoVoice project. The variables included students' understanding of their experience of being multiracial, the reaction of the campus community to the PhotoVoice project, and the experience of students' participation in the PhotoVoice project. The study answered the following research questions:

- How does being a member of a student awareness project affect multiracial students' sense of belonging?

The participants initially appeared surprised at the number of other participants in the study, which implies that they believed their multiracial status to be unique. During the first focus group, participants utilized non-verbal communication, such as head nods, smiles, and eye contact, to indicate understanding and acceptance of each other's experiences. Verbal communication was expressed by comments such as, "exactly!" or indicating that an experience reminded them of a similar experience of their own. One participant remarked, "look how many of us there are!" By the second focus group, participants were interested in including other multiracial people and expanding their concern for services to populations throughout the campus. One of the interventions selected by participants was the creation of a multiracial student club, and the participants are actively seeking a sponsor for this club.

- How do students experience the awareness project, especially in relation to their sense of identity?

Initially, many of the participants described themselves as identifying monoracially or as human. There appeared to be a strong feeling that describing the population as multicultural or multiethnic was not acceptable, however. Most of the participants believed that using terms other than race would diminish the impact of their experiences. The participants described experiences of feeling rejected by groups comprised of their own racial heritage. Because of these experiences, the participants tended to proactively identify as monoracially to avoid rejection with new groups. The literature described the college experience as an opportunity to experiment with new identities, and it appeared some of the participants decided to adopt a monoracial identity with their new friends. However, for most of the participants, the college experience, combined with the participation in this study, allowed them to begin exploring their heritage and consider a multiracial identity. Some participants approached their family with this new information, asking questions about their heritage or searching on genealogy sites to learn more about their ancestors. While the study did not lead to a drastic change in the participant's identities, it did lead to a curiosity about their heritage and provided permission for them to identify in a way that supported their current beliefs of who they were. This validation was important for the participants to begin exploring their multifaceted identity.

- How does the community awareness activity increase students' sense of self-efficacy?

The Photovoice project appeared to empower the participants. Through the project, participants were able to find a voice and use it to help others understand that they existed, and how they felt when others were unaware of their existence. There appeared to be a sense of excitement in the participants when they described different activities that could be done on campus to increase awareness of myriad populations. It appeared the activities that were currently being supported by the Multicultural Center or specific student groups were not visible enough on campus, and the participants wanted to make these activities more obvious to the larger campus community. For example, a multicultural dinner activity was suggested even though this event occurs yearly on campus. Other suggestions, such as awareness

month activities and guest speakers, were already taking place sporadically on the campus. The participants suggested utilizing the campus library to increase visibility of the activities. This would be done through either advertisement, or actually locating projects in the lobby of the library. One participant suggested a multicultural fair, much like the spirituality fair that is in its second year on the campus. The participants also appeared to be cognizant of the fact that they would eventually be graduating, and wanted to ensure the activities continued to take place through a multiracial student club or the Student Social Work Association. One of the participants did not attend the semester following the initiation of this study, and stated that she had trouble feeling as if she belonged in higher education. However, she stated the study helped her feel a sense of belonging as a multiracial person, and planned to re-enroll during the next semester. It appeared the study did help the participants feel a sense of self-efficacy and led to the persistence of at least one of the study participants [13,15,17].

- How does the awareness activity increase the university community's awareness of multiracial students on campus?

Based on the comments in the comment book located with the Photovoice project, it appeared the awareness activity did lead some members of the campus community to be more aware of the diversity across campus. One commenter noted, "It makes you think about things we tend to overlook." Most of the comments suggested more such activities, however, and this was echoed by the participants in the study. The awareness activity appeared to make the campus community think about the perspective of others, with another commenter noting, "[d]isplay gives you something to think about. Seeing the world from someone else's perspective leads to self-growth!" Overall, it appeared the campus community was supportive and open to learning more about multiracial populations.

Conclusion

The major themes in this study confirmed the findings in the literature regarding the fluidness of multiracial identity and the lack of acceptance felt by multiracial people within the racial groups of their heritage. The participants described feeling pressure to identify monoracially. The participants also reported feeling as if they were not "enough" of a specific race, which led participants to believe they could not claim membership in a specific racial group. However, this same lack of distinct phenotypical characteristics and membership in specific groups led participants to move fluidly within racial groups and in their racial identification. Demographic forms posed a particular problem for multiracial populations, with participants reporting mixed practices in answering the questions. Some participants consistently identified monoracially on demographic forms, while others reported answering based on what they felt like at that particular point in time. This confirms the contention in the literature that the Census is undercounting the number of multiracial people in the U.S. [3,6,14,15]. This is a significant finding, as inaccurate data suggests a lack of programs and services specific to the population. The tendency for institutions of higher education to collapse demographic data on race for national reporting purposes also affects the ability of the Department of Education to design and implement programs that could be helpful to the population purposes [14,15].

Based on the findings from this study, it appears there are a few specific techniques that could be helpful for multiracial populations. Social workers should bear in mind that this population is largely invisible to the larger community. Awareness activities are crucial to educate others about this population. Increased awareness could also help the population feel a sense of belonging within the community. Participants in this study described feeling more comfortable with their multiracial identity after participating in focus groups and an awareness activity together. Macro and mezzo level interventions that raise community awareness, and social groups that encourage a

sense of belonging would be helpful for this population. For higher education, student clubs or meeting places could provide this sense of community. Multicultural centers are uniquely situated in the higher education to promote and provide awareness and a sense of community. These centers have the information, staff support, and meeting places to facilitate and encourage multiracial student belonging. As multiracial people experience understanding, acceptance, and encouragement regarding their multiracial status, they are likely to internalize this positive reinforcement to develop an integrated and cohesive identity.

Because identity development requires a sense of belonging, awareness activities and community acceptance can help support the identity development of multiracial populations [48,49]. Further research on multiracial identity development is needed, but the results from this study suggest that a fluid identity may be most helpful for multiracial populations [10,50]. The fluidity of identity allows the multiracial person to move among different populations, emphasizing aspects of their multiracial heritage to build commonality among a wide variety of groups. The participants in this study frequently expressed a feeling of commonality among different populations. Their concern for all racial populations, and their attempts to integrate their racial heritages by finding commonality among their various cultures should be viewed as strengths. It may be possible that this commonality could lead to increased understanding and cooperation among all racial populations. Social workers should adopt a client-centered approach when working with this population, affecting a non-judgmental and supportive attitude with regard to the multiracial individual's sense of identity, regardless of how the person identifies racially.

There are specific knowledge and skills that social workers should use when intervening with multiracial populations. First, it is important that social workers be aware of their own values, beliefs, and biases when working with multiracial populations [10,51]. This self-awareness is the first step towards becoming competent with this population. For example, social workers should ask themselves what they think about multiracial people. Does the social worker assume all people are monoracial? Are multiracial people automatically assumed to take on the racial identity of their most racially devalued parent? Social workers must be aware of the historical factors surrounding hypodescent laws, which likely influences the multiracial person's self-identification. The hypodescent racial attitudes could result in the multiracial person being assigned the monoracial identity of their least socially valued parental racial heritage, or the multiracial person could self-assign this label due to their perception of the attitude of people in their immediate and larger society.

Social workers should also remember that a person's fluid or monoracial description of their identity does not necessarily mean they are rejecting their multiracial heritage [6]. Rather, the fluid description is a hallmark of multiracial identity, and monoracial identity can be a reflection of the sense of belonging in a multiracial person. Neither way of identifying should be regarded as dysfunctional. Social workers should also be aware that not all multiracial people struggle with their identity, and care should be taken to ensure an assumption of dysfunction is not made simply because the client presents as multiracial. However, assessing the multiracial person's connection to the community and helping build connections to those communities could be helpful [10]. Jackson and Samuels [10] also suggest that social workers refrain from asking multiracial people which racial group they most identify with and changing intake forms to allow clients to select multiracially or non-racially.

For institutions of higher education, [52] suggest ensuring diversity on campus, developing a supportive environment for all student diversity issues, having low tolerance for behaviors that are not supportive of diversity, and understanding that the institution's history of inclusion for diverse populations can have an effect on the sense of belonging for diverse populations. Museus, et al. [13]

suggest campuses normalize discussion of racial issues and actively support multiracial students and student groups on campus.

These interventions for social workers and institutions of higher education are important, because racism and exclusion of multiracial people continue even in the 21st Century. In 2008, Justice of Peace Keith Bardwell, from Louisiana, refused to marry an interracial couple, stating that he was uncomfortable due to the negative environment that might be experienced by any children from the marriage [6]. Pathologizing multiracial people, or engaging in microaggressions by presuming the negative experience of multiracial children results in exclusion and renders the population invisible to larger society. Embracing the many forms of diversity in humans and providing safe, accepting communities aligns with the NASW Code of Ethics.

Limitations

There were limitations in the study related to the participant demographics, location, sample size, limited timeframe of the study, and the researcher's role as an insider. Because the university is a Hispanic Serving Institution, almost all of the participants noted Hispanic as a race. While Hispanic is an ethnicity and not a race, this is not generally well-known within larger society. Additionally, the U.S. Census utilizes a question about Hispanic just before the question about race [53]. The sample size was over-represented in Hispanic ethnicity, with all but one participant describing their multiracial background to include Hispanic. The University also has less than 5,000 students enrolled, and is located in the Southwestern United States. Finally, because a large segment of the multiracial population identifies as monoracial, it is likely that these participants did not necessarily represent the entire population of multiracial students on this campus. These participants were volunteers, who self-selected for the study. Those students who were multiracial, but did not identify as so, were not likely to volunteer for this study. These demographics limit the generalizability of the findings from this study.

This study is not generalizable, but it provides in-depth information about a group of university students and their experiences. As a participatory research project, this study contained only one iteration with the participants. It is possible that if a follow-up round of focus groups, awareness activities, and interviews could have resulted in different suggestions for interventions and increased the participants' understanding of their multiracial heritage. The results of this study should not be taken as opinion of all multiracial individuals in the U.S. Instead, the reader should understand that the opinions of the participants are grounded in their life experiences, geographical location, gender, and other intersecting identities.

The researcher is a full-time, tenured professor at the research site, and is a multiracial person. While this role as an insider provided some benefit to the study, such as intimate knowledge of the services available on campus, the multiple roles as employee, multiracial person, and researcher did lead to some tension in the researcher's role. The researcher's field journal clearly showed the struggle of the researcher in resisting making suggestions or imparting information to the students regarding services and activities available on campus. To mitigate this issue, the researcher provided information only when asked by the participants, and only provided information specific to the question being asked. For example, in one focus group, the participants asked the researcher about the mission statement of the Multicultural Center. This was provided to the participants without commentary regarding the appropriateness of the mission for multiracial populations or an opinion on the quality or visibility of services on campus. This limitation required the researcher to be thoughtful in her interaction with the participants and led to much self-reflection regarding her vision of campus services for multiracial students. Due to the qualitative and action research design of this study, another limitation may have been that the students wanted to please the researcher and provided answers that they believed the researcher

was seeking. To counter-act this limitation, the researcher ensured the students that no answers were incorrect and tried to ensure the students understood the exploratory nature of the study.

Finally, the sample size in this study was very small. Multiple techniques were used to increase the sample size, including engaging with diverse student groups on campus and keeping the recruitment phase of the study open for longer than originally planned. Participant selection was also complicated by the researcher's role as an insider at the research site, necessitating that at least 10 potential participants be eliminated due to their connection with the researcher's courses at the site. In a review of Photovoice projects that contained participatory research methods from 2001-2007, Catalani and Minkler [54] found that out of 42 studies published, 11 contained fewer than nine participants. A sample size of seven is not unusual in qualitative studies, but a larger sample size would have been preferable. Mason [55] describes qualitative sample sizes as small as five and as large as 60 participants, and suggests researchers focus on saturation rather than sample size. The group of seven students for this study comprised almost 10% of the known population of multiracial students on campus, and the population itself is virtually invisible on campus. In addition, the literature is clear that multiracial individuals do have a tendency to identify monoracially, which could have affected the number of people who believed they were eligible for the study. Because of the intensity of the interactions between the researcher and the participants in focus groups and interviews, the researcher is confident that theoretical saturation was achieved [56]. The focus groups and interviews provided rich data, with depth that may not have been achieved if there were more participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are four different gaps in the research on multiracial individuals that should be addressed in future studies. First, the study of multiracial identity development is complicated by the various ways that multiracial people identify. Any study on multiracial identity development should note as a limitation that a segment of the multiracial population identifies as monoracial, and therefore were not included in the study. Developing recruitment techniques for study participants that will capture the population of multiracial people who do not identify as multiracial is one of the most important next steps in the study of multiracial identity development because without this segment of the population we cannot truly describe or understand multiracial identity development. Without this segment of the multiracial population, studies conducted on multiracial people will be limited to describing the racial identity development of only those people who identify as multiracial.

Second, it appears that most of the studies conducted regarding multiracial identity development used children or youth under 18 years of age as study participants. There is a need for studies on the older population, and for studies located over a large geographic area. This study begins to address this gap by including participants in higher education, and included participants up to age 40 years. However, conducting a study on older adults, especially those near end-of-life, could add a new dimension to the understanding of multiracial identity development. Such a study could illuminate the process of multiracial identity development across the lifespan, and describe the effect of historical processes on identity.

Third, one of the largest gaps in the research on multiracial identity development is in the description or development of practice techniques designed to be culturally competent and helpful to the population of multiracial individuals. A research design that studies intervention techniques with this population could address this gap. The results of this study suggest that a client-centered approach would be beneficial for supporting the population's experiences of racism within the racial groups of their heritage and providing them with a sense of acceptance that could be helpful in their identity development.

Finally, despite a diligent search in multiple databases such as SocIndex, Ebscohost, and PsychInfo, no research or peer-reviewed articles on multiracial populations and policy were located. There are a number of articles that discuss policy implications as an aside, but it appears there are no articles dedicated solely to the implications of multiracial populations and policy. Studies on multiracial individuals should include information on the effect of policy on this population, but there is also a need for research that addresses policy as the focus of the study. The potential for this population to change the way civil rights policy is developed and applied is too great for this topic to be relegated as an aside or mentioned as a limitation in research studies.

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