Juggling Multiple Racial Identities: Malleable Racial Identification and Psychological Well-Being

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The authors examined the link between malleable racial identification and psychological well-being among self-identified multiracial adults. *Malleable racial identification* refers to the tendency to identify with different racial identities across different social contexts. Results across three studies suggested that malleable racial identification was associated with lower psychological well-being. Study 2 found that *unstable regard* (i.e., fluctuating private regard about their multiracial background) was the mechanism through which malleable racial identification predicted lower psychological health. Results of Study 3 suggested that dialectical self-views played an important moderating role that determines whether malleability is associated with negative psychological outcomes. The present studies uniquely show that malleable racial identification among multiracial people is maladaptive for psychological health, but that this may depend on whether or not people have tolerance for ambiguity and inconsistency in the self.

Keywords: multiracial identity, dialectical self-views, well-being, racial identity, self concept stability

Multiracial people face the unique challenge of having multiple racial identities. For example, a multiracial person of Black/Asian descent has two component identities (Black and Asian) as well as an overarching multiracial identity (being both Black and Asian). Yet, very little is known about how people of multiracial descent negotiate their multiple racial identities. For example, the stability of racial identification among multiracial people is relatively understudied. The present study examines the association between malleable racial identification and psychological well-being among multiracial people. *Malleable racial identification* refers to the tendency to identify with different racial identities depending on the social context. For example, a person of Asian/White background who has a malleable racial identity feels closer to their Asian identity in one context and closer to their White identity in a different context. The model tested in the current studies proposes that malleable racial identification is associated with unstable feelings about being multiracial and thus, promotes lower psychological well-being. In addition, we examine whether having little tolerance for self inconsistency, contradiction, and change (less dialectical self-views; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-

Rodgers, Peng, Wang, & Hou, 2004) moderates the link between unstable racial identification and psychological health.

Given the increasing number of people with multiracial backgrounds (Jones & Symons Smith, 2001), the known challenges associated with coming from a multiracial background (Shih & Sanchez, 2005), and the dearth of research on the malleability of racial identification, understanding the link between malleable racial identification and well-being will fill an important gap in the literature on multiracial health and hold implications for work, more broadly, concerned with the malleable nature of self and identity.

Fluidity of Multiracial Identities

Although there have been many qualitative studies suggesting that multiracial people experience greater flexibility and fluidity as a result of their multiple racial identities (Basu, 2004; Collins, 200; Gibbs & Hine, 1992; Newsome, 2001; Renn, 2000), only two quantitative studies have examined the extent to which multiracial adolescents' racial identification is flexible, that is, whether racial self-categorization moves across social contexts and time. Multiracial adolescents examined over a period of 5 years were five times more likely to change their racial categorization than keep it constant (Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006). According to this research, it is more common for someone of Black/White racial heritage to identify as Black at one point and White at another point than it is for that person to maintain a constant label. Moreover, it is also common for social contexts to influence the racial self-categorization of multiracial people. Harris and Sim (2002) found that multiracial adolescents who were interviewed at home and school were more likely to change their racial categorization between contexts than to maintain constant racial catego-

rization in both contexts. Thus, work suggests that multiracial people have flexible racial identities. Across days and contexts, multiracial people change their racial self categorization.

Given this recent evidence regarding the flexibility and malleability of racial identification among multiracial people, it is important to examine whether malleability is associated with psychological well-being, the possible processes underlying this relationship, and the individual differences that may moderate these links. In Study 1 and Study 2, we tested whether multiracial people's self-reported flexibility of racial identification predicted psychological well-being (indexed by depressive symptoms). In Study 2, we also tested the hypothesis that the association between malleable racial identification and psychological well-being was mediated by unstable regard (unstable feelings toward one's multiracial background). In Study 3, we examine whether dialectical self-views moderate whether having malleable racial identification predicts unstable regard and psychological health (indexed by measures of depressive symptoms and well-being).

For the purposes of this paper, we define multiracial as those who identify as multiracial and have biological parents from different racial backgrounds. Defining multiracial identity is particularly challenging given that multiracial people and identity challenge current constructions of race and race relations (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). We based the current studies' operationalization and definition of multiracial identity on previous conceptualizations in multiracial identity research (e.g., Herman, 2004; Root, 1992; Shih et al., 2007). Root (1992) defines multiracial people as "people who are of two or more racial heritages" (p. xi). We narrowed our inclusion criteria to participants whose biological parents had differing racial background to target those who are in essence first generation multiracial. Using biological parents' race to determine multiracial status is relatively common (e.g., Herman, 2004; Shih et al., 2007) because it provides researchers with the opportunity to separate self categorization as multiracial from multiracial heritage. In addition, people who are first-generation multiracial experience life as the child of an interracial marriage and thus, the person's multiracial background is potentially more salient than it would be for 5th generation multiracial people. Finally, our participants self-identified with the multiracial community as they were all members of multiracial groups and organizations (Study 1 and 2) or responded to flyers and emails for multiracial participants (Study 3).

Malleable Racial Identification

With respect to monoracial people, considerable theorizing and research suggests that the social context influences racial identification (Pittinsky, Shih, & Ambady, 1999; Shelton & Sellers, 2000; Yip, 2005). In fact, early models of social identity emphasized the context-bound nature of social identity (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; see also Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). That is, the salience and thus, the importance of one's social identity can be influenced by the social context such as the presence of others from the same social group. For example, the presence of racially similar peers and engagement in race-related activities increased the prominence of one's racial identity for people of Chinese descent (Yip, 2005). However, some people may have a greater sensitivity to their social context than others

such as those who have compartmentalized or chameleon identities. Roccas and Brewer (2002) suggest that some people with multiple identities may adopt a strategy of identification called "compartmentalization," which means that some social identities become more important in certain contexts than others. Similarly, some bicultural people are more likely to have a chameleon-like cultural identity, which means that their cultural identification depends on the social context (Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi & Cree, 2004; Downie, Mageau, Koestner, & Liodden, 2006).

We consider multicultural and multiracial as distinct constructs. Multiracial people belong to more than one racial group. Racial groups have ethnicity-based cultural meanings and practices associated with them. Thus, multiracial people are always multicultural; however, multicultural people are not necessarily multiracial. For example, an Asian American person has one racial identity but multiple cultural identities (American and Asian). A Japanese/Chinese person has one racial identity but two ethnicities with multiple cultural identities associated with them. While cultural and racial identities are distinct constructs, levels of identification within such identities may be similarly malleable. Thus, some multiracial people may have context bound racial identification.

We explored whether malleable racial identification among multiracial people was associated with negative psychological well-being. Because previous work on chameleon-like identities and self-inconsistencies found them to be related to lower psychological well-being (Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003; Downie et al., 2004, 2006), we hypothesized that malleable racial identification among multiracial people would be associated poorer psychological well-being. Specifically, malleable racial identification was expected to predict unstable regard toward one's multiracial identity because instability of racial identification may underlie a conflicted and compartmentalized multiracial identity (Downie et al., 2004, 2006; Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

It should be noted, however, that we also believe that there are benefits associated with shifting between identities or having multiple identities more generally. Having multiple identities can buffer individuals from the pernicious effects of stereotypes on performance. This has been specifically demonstrated for Asian women examining the multiple identities considering race and gender. Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) found that when gender identity is made salient to Asian women, they exhibit stereotype threat and underperform on a math test consistent with society's negative stereotypes about womens' math abilities. However, when Asian women's racial identity is made salient, they show performance boosts consistent with society's positive stereotypes about Asians and math ability. In addition, perceptions of people with multiple identities can change through the subtle activation of social identities (Pittinsky, Shih, & Trahan, 2006). For example, participants misremembered more positive verbal SAT scores for an Asian woman when her gender was made salient and more positive quantitative SAT scores when her race was made salient. Although the selective salience of various identities may have benefits for personal performance and perceptions of ability, having malleable racial identifications may predict worse psychological well-being because of the little tolerance individuals typically have for self-inconsistencies. Thus, we focus our paper on exploring malleable identification and psychological well-being.

Malleable Racial Identification and Psychological Well-Being

Although the relationship between racial stability and well-being has yet to be empirically investigated among multiracial populations or even monoracial populations, several theories have developed in the self-concept literature to suggest that consistency among aspects of the self is adaptive for psychological well-being (Campbell et al., 2003; Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). Because racial identity is an aspect of the self-concept and cognitive consistency models have been used to explore multiple social identities in the past (e.g., optimal distinctiveness theory; Roccas & Brewer, 2002), the self-consistency literature informed our investigations of malleable racial identification among multiracial people.

Work examining self-complexity finds little support for the buffering role of many selves. Rather, research on self-complexity suggested that people who had many selves may have a more fragmented sense of self and thus, worse psychological outcomes including depressive symptoms (see Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002 for review). Indeed, instability and inconsistency among aspects of the self promotes poor psychological health (Campbell et al., 2003). Inconsistency and instability of the self-concept has been found to predict lower self-esteem across cultures although the link is usually stronger for Westerners (Campbell et al., 1996). Similar processes may be at work in the racial self-concept such that unstable and malleable racial identification would create inconsistency and instability in private racial regard and thereby undermine well-being. Consistent with this view, multiracial adolescents who changed their racial categorization in a 5 year period, either by adding or subtracting racial identities, reported lower self-esteem than multiracial adolescents who reported consistent racial categorization (Hitlin et al., 2006). Thus, the purpose of Study 1 was to examine whether reports of unstable racial identification would be associated with poorer psychological health among multiracial adults.

Moderating Role of Dialectical Self Views

Although previous work typically finds that many selves predict lower psychological well-being (Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002), individual differences may moderate this relationship. For instance, people may differ in their tolerance for self-inconsistencies. Work on cultural orientations suggests that some individuals have greater tolerance for ambiguity, change, and contradiction in the self (dubbed *dialectical self views*; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). This work finds that people from Eastern cultures and traditions may be more likely to have dialectical self-views than those from Western cultures because of deep rooted Eastern religious and philosophical traditions that promote acceptance of contradiction and change (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). In addition, Easterners report greater variability in self-aspects across contexts (English & Chen, 2007). Thus, we expected Asian multiracial people to have greater fluidity in their racial identifications than non-Asian multiracial people because of Asian people's presumably higher recognition of change and self-inconsistency. More importantly, in Study 3, we examined whether dialectical self-views moderated the link between malleable identification and psychological health. We expected that malleable racial identification would predict lower psychological well-being especially for those with low dialectical-self views or little tolerance for change and inconsistency.

Study One

Study 1 was designed to test our initial proposal that malleable racial identification among multiracial people would be associated with lower psychological well-being. In addition, we examined whether Asian multiracial participants showed the highest levels of malleable racial identification.

Method

Participants

There were 159 multiracial participants who completed an Internet survey over a 9 month period (October 2003-June 2004). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 59 years ($M = 25.17$, $SD = 6.34$), and consisted of 39 males (25%), 115 females (72%), and 5 (3%) unknown gender.

Demographic Information

Participants were asked to report their personal racial identity as well as their biological parents' racial identity. Fifty percent of our participants indicated a mixed-African American background. In total, participants indicated 18 different racial identity combinations. All participants indicated that their biological parents were members of different racial groups. Therefore, all participants were included in the final analyses. Participants reported a median income (personal income or parent's income if supported by parents) between $40,000 and $50,000. Participants also reported highest educational attainment on a scale from 0 (*some high school*) to 6 (*completed graduate school*) with a median of 4, which indicated completion of college ($SD = 1.22$).

Materials

Malleable Racial Identification was assessed with five items designed by the authors for the present study (see Table 1). Because past research suggests that specific activities and the racial composition of the group affect racial identification (Yip,

Table 1

Factor Loadings for Malleable Identification Measure in Study 1

	1-Factor solution
1. In different situations, I will identify more closely with one of my racial identities than another.	.82
2. I often identify more with one racial identity than another depending on the race of the person I am with.	.82
3. Depending on the activity, I feel closer to one racial identity than another.	.76
4. I feel that I adapt to the situation at hand by identifying as one racial identity or another.	.73
5. One racial identity can be more important than another in the moment depending on the race of the people I am with.	.67

2005), we created items to address whether situations, activities, and time-points influenced racial identification. Participants indicated their agreement to statements such as, "In different situations, I will identify more closely with one of my racial identities than another" on scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher numbers indicated greater malleable identification in social situations.

Psychological well-being. Psychological well being was assessed with the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). Participants were asked the frequency with which they experienced depressive symptoms during the week on a response scale from 1 (*rarely or none of the time; less than once a day*) to 4 (*most or all of the time; 5–7 days/wk*). Example item are, "I could not shake off the blues even with the help of my family or friends," and "I felt depressed." The final measure was an average of the responses and had strong reliability ($\alpha = .92$).

Procedure

We recruited participants for Study 1 over the Internet by posting the web link to the study on message boards for 33 different multiracial Yahoo groups catering to multiracial people living in the United States. Participants did not receive monetary or any other compensation for participation. Recruiting multiracial respondents over the Internet provided us with a unique opportunity to examine multiracial people in larger numbers as well as examine people who are identified with their multiracial identity. Recent studies suggest that Internet research is just representative if not more representative than other recruitment methods (e.g., Gosling, Vazire & Srivastava, 2004). To enhance reliability of results, we followed scientific standards for Internet survey collection procedures (Eysenbach, 2004). Participants who self-identified as multiracial and had biological parents of different racial backgrounds were encouraged to complete the online survey.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analyses

Exploratory factor analysis using varimax rotation suggested that all of the items measuring *malleable racial identification* loaded highly on one factor using an eigenvalue cutoff of 1.00, which explained 66.27% of the variance. All items loaded on the factor with components $> .6$. Means on depressive symptoms suggest that the multiracial participants were well within the normal range for nonclinical samples. Although we had 18 different racial combinations among our multiracial sample, the largest groups ($N > 15$) of mixed-race people were of Black/White ($N = 32$), Latino/White ($N = 18$), Asian/White ($N = 36$), Black/Latino/Native American descent ($N = 16$). We ran an ANOVA comparing these groups on their level of malleable identification, and psychological well-being. The results were significant only for malleable racial identification, $F(3, 100) = 5.66$, $p < .001$. Using the Bonferroni correction, two significant differences emerged for malleable racial identification. First, people of Asian/White descent reported greater malleable racial identification ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.76$) than people of Black/White ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.76$,

$p = .023$) and people of Black/Latino/Native American descent ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.85$, $p = .002$). These findings are consistent with previous work on the self-concept suggesting that people of Asian descent generally have greater awareness of the extent to which the self is bound to the context than people of White/European descent (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004).

Our primary interest was to test our prediction that malleable racial identification would be associated with psychological well-being and the direction of the link. Consistent with work on self-concept stability, if we were to extend it to race, malleable racial identification was associated with greater depressive symptoms ($r = .23$, $p = .004$). Because we found that Asian/White participants reported the greatest amount of malleability in their racial identification, we were concerned that Asian/White people alone may be driving these effects; thus, we excluded Asian/White participants and found that malleability in racial identification was still correlated with depressive symptoms ($r = .27$, $p < .003$). In addition, we examined whether having an Asian racial heritage more generally (not just having an Asian/White background) was responsible for the relationship and found that malleability in racial identification was still correlated with depressive symptoms ($r = .24$, $p < .02$) excluding Asian mixed participants.

In summary, we found support for the hypothesis that malleability predicted worse psychological health. In addition, we found that Asian/White people were most likely to have malleable identification but they did not have worse psychological health.

Study Two

In Study 2, we sought to determine whether the relationship between malleable racial identification and psychological well-being could be explained by unstable attitudes toward one's multiracial background. Numerous conceptualizations of multiracial identity and development suggest that the ultimate goal of healthy racial identity is to foster pride in one's racial background (Collins, 2000). We argue that malleable racial identities may be associated with poor psychological outcomes by fostering an unstable sense of regard for one's multiracial identity (*unstable regard*; Rosenberg, 1979). If a person of Asian/White background feels more Asian than White in one context than other, we believe this is a sign that being Asian is seen as at odds with being White in certain contexts. Thus, we argue that these feelings of conflict about one's component identities (Asian, White) would lead to unstable regard about their overarching identity as Multiracial. Changing racial identification may underlie discomfort and tension about their multiracial identity. In addition, people who have malleable racial identification may also have great instability in other aspects of the self more generally, which may include feelings of negative and positive regard for one's multiracial background. Having unstable private regard may be detrimental for psychological health because racial regard is understood as a stronger predictor of well-being than levels of identification in monoracial populations (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Sellers et al., 1997).

Study 2 also includes a measure of participants' racial centrality (the importance of their multiracial identity) to isolate the unique affect of malleable racial identification from the overall prominence of one's multiracial background. It is possible that people who score high on malleable racial identification measure may just generally feel that their multiracial identity is more important or

central to their identity, and that it is this centrality that is underlying the effects that we observed in Study 1. Therefore, we controlled for multiracial centrality to rule out this alternative explanation of our findings. The hypothesized model for Study 2 proposes that the path between identity malleability and lower psychological well-being would be mediated by unstable regard for one's multiracial background controlling for overall centrality of identity (see Figure 1).

Method

Participants

There were 317 participants who completed an Internet survey over a 3 month period (July 2006-October 2006) as part of a larger project on *Multiracial Identity and Experiences*. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 62 years ($M = 29.13$, $SD = 9.16$), and consisted of 57 males (18%) and 260 females (82%).

Demographic Information

Participants were asked to report their personal racial identity as well as their biological parents' racial identity. Participants were allowed to indicate more than one racial identity utilizing the U.S. census race options. Thirty-one percent of our participants indicated an Asian/White background. In total, participants indicated 24 different racial identity combinations.

Participants reported highest educational attainment on a scale from 0 (high school completed) to 6 (PhD, M.D., PsyD or equivalent) with a median of 3, which indicated completion of college. Our sample was largely drawn from the United States with 92% of the sample indicating currently living in the U.S and 83% being born in the United States.[1]

Materials

Malleable racial identification was assessed following the procedure of Study 1. Study 2 used a response scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .89$).[2]

Unstable Multiracial Regard was measured with an adapted version of the Rosenberg Self-Concept Stability Scale (Rosenberg, 1979). We changed the items to refer to feelings about their multiracial identity. Participants were asked their agreement with the statements on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The following items were used: "Some days I am happy with my multiracial identity and other days I am not," "My feelings about my multiracial identity seem to change very often," "Some days I feel one way about my multiracial identity, and other days differently," "Some days I have a good opinion of my multiracial identity and other days I do not," and "I am often unsure about my multiracial identity" ($\alpha = .93$).

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being was assessed with an abbreviated version of the depression scale in Study 1 ($\alpha = .88$).[3]

Multiracial Centrality was measured with 4-item centrality subscale from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale–Race Version (CSE-R; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7

(*strongly agree*) to statements such as, "My multiracial background is an important reflection of who I am" ($\alpha = .70$).

Procedure

We recruited people to participate in the Internet survey by advertising through newsletters and email lists at various different multiracial organizations such as the Mavin Foundation and Swirl Boston who are dedicated to serving the multiracial community.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analyses

Consistent with Study 1 and previous reviews of multiracial populations (Shih & Sanchez, 2005), multiracial participants were well within the normal range for nonclinical samples on measures of well-being. The largest groups ($N > 15$) of mixed-race people were of Asian/White ($N = 100$), Latino/White ($N = 24$), American Indian/White (19), Black/White (72), and Black/White/American Indian ($N = 39$) descent. ANOVA revealed that groups differed on malleable identification, $F(4, 232) = 6.26$, $p < .001$. Using the Bonferroni correction, two significant differences emerged. People of Asian/White descent reported greater malleable identification ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.46$) than people of American Indian/White ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.72$, $p = .007$) and people of Black/American Indian/White multiracial descent ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.94$, $p < .001$).

See Table 2 for correlations among the variables derived from the measurement model. (see Footnote 1) As in Study 1, exclusion of Asian/White participants did not alter the results. In fact, exclusion of Asian/White participants improved the correlation between malleability and depressive symptoms ($r = .15$, $p < .05$). Excluding all participants of any mixed Asian background, we found that malleability still predicted depressive symptoms and the link was even stronger ($r = .21$, $p < .01$).

A Model of Malleable Racial Identification and Psychological Well-Being

To test whether unstable regard mediated the relationship between malleable identification and psychological well-being, we used structural equation modeling (SEM; see Figure 1). Structural

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[1] The relationships among the variable remained largely the same if we exclude participants who failed to indicate their component identities or participants with more than two races (Study 1 and 2), when men and women were compared (Study 1 and 2), and when we examined specific multiracial groups separately (Study 1 and 2), when we excluded Latino as a "racial" identity (Study 1 and 2), when comparing U.S. region (Study 2), when comparing results depending on the order of questionnaires (Study 2), and when excluding people who were not from or living in the United States (Study 2).

[2] Factor analyses performed on the Study 2 and 3 measures of malleable racial identification were very similar to Study 1 and thus, not included in the results.

[3] Factor analyses were performed on the Study 1 measures of depression and self-esteem to determine the highest loaders on the depression scale. The number of items in each scale was reduced by 50% to create a shorter survey to increase item response rate with the highest factor loading items.
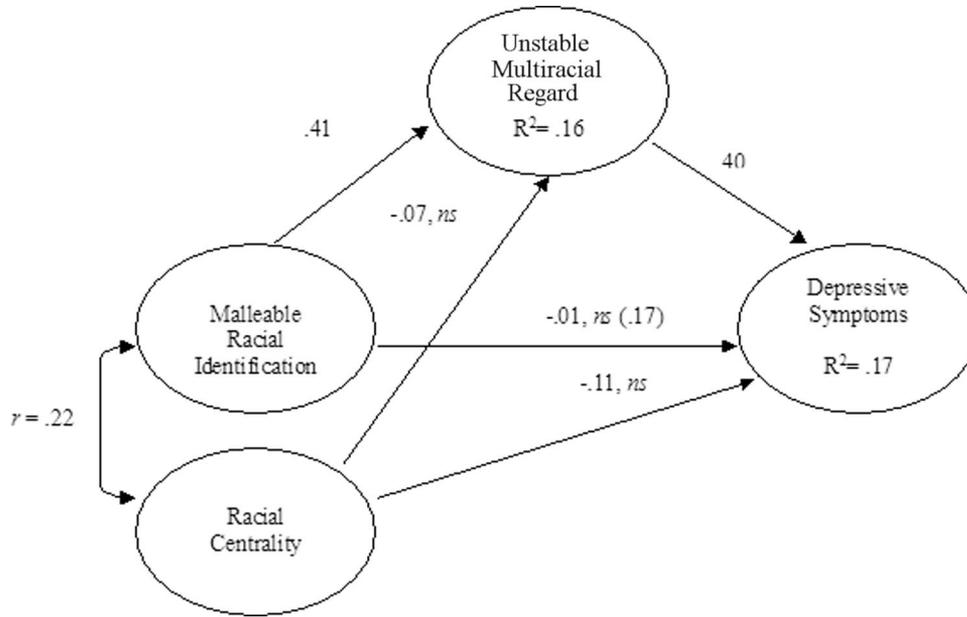
Figure 1. Malleable racial identification and depression: Unstable multiracial regard as a mediator. Betas are significant at $p < .05$ unless noted otherwise. The beta in parentheses represents the relationship between malleable racial identification and depression in the direct effects model.

equation modeling is superior to traditional regression techniques because, for example, SEM takes into account measurement error and the correlations between independent variables when modeling relationships between IVs and DVs.

Before testing the fit of structural equation models, we first tested how well the indicators relate to the latent variables in the measurement model. Measurement models do not include any direct paths between factors but instead essentially test a confirmatory factor analysis of all of the latent variables in the model linked by covariances (Kline, 2005). Each item from the scale was an indicator of the factor, except for depression. We parceled the items measuring depression into two indicators. Parceling items into indicators improves the goodness of fit and reduces bias in estimations of structural parameters, compared to using individual items (Bandalos, 2002). Good fitting measurement models are necessary to proceed to structural equation modeling analyses. The

measurement model fit the data well, $\chi^2(99) = 207.95$, $\chi^2/df = 2.10$, NNFI = .99, CFI = 1.0, and RMSEA = .06.

Following the goodness of fit standards set forth by Hu and Bentler (1999; see also Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004), we tested the first two steps of mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) in a *direct effects model* using EQS software. We tested the third and fourth steps in the *indirect effects model*. The significance of the mediation is then tested by Sobel's Test (Sobel, 1982). To isolate the effects of unstable multiracial regard and malleable identification, we controlled for centrality of one's multiracial identity to ensure that the relationships observed between malleable identification, unstable racial regard and psychological well-being were not merely a byproduct of racial centrality.

The direct effects model tested the link between malleable identification and psychological well-being, controlling for centrality. The direct effects model also included the path from malleable racial identification to unstable multiracial regard. As expected, malleable racial identification predicted greater symptoms of depression ($\beta = .17$) and greater regard instability ($\beta = .41$). This model fit the data well, $\chi^2(100) = 245.10$, $\chi^2/df = 2.45$, NNFI = .99, CFI = .99, and RMSEA = .07. To test the third and fourth steps of mediation in the indirect effects model, the path from regard instability to depressive symptoms was included. Consistent with our hypotheses, malleable racial identification no longer predicted depressive symptoms ($\beta = -.01$, *ns*) when the path between multiracial regard and psychological health was included ($\beta = .40$, $p < .05$). Although centrality was correlated with malleable identification ($r = .22$, $p < .05$), centrality was not a significant predictor of psychological health or unstable regard. The indirect effects model fit the data well, $\chi^2(99) = 207.95$, $\chi^2/df = 2.10$, NNFI = .99, CFI = 1.0, and RMSEA = .06. As

Table 2
Intercorrelations and Descriptive Statistics for All Variables in Study 2

	1	2	3	4
1. Malleable identification	1.00			
2. Unstable multiracial regard	.40***	1.00		
3. Centrality	.22***	.02	1.00	
4. Depressive symptoms	.12*	.39***	.01	1.00
Means	4.33	3.15	5.27	−0.10
Standard deviation	1.68	1.69	1.37	0.83
Variance	2.83	2.88	1.87	0.69

Note. The covariances were taken from the measurement model.
* $p < .05$.   *** $p < .001$.

predicted, the indirect effects model was a superior fit to the direct effects model, $\chi^2(1) = 37.15$, $p < .001$, further supporting our mediation hypothesis. In addition, the Sobel's t test (1982) confirmed mediation by unstable regard, $t = 5.40$, $p < .0001$.

As hypothesized, the relationship between malleable identification and psychological well-being was fully mediated by having unstable racial regard. These findings support the research suggesting that fostering a stable racial self-concept is important for multiracial people and that, when thwarted, psychological repercussion may arise. In addition, these findings suggest that malleable racial identification was accompanied with unstable regard, simultaneously disliking and liking one's multiracial background.

Study 3

Across two studies, we found that malleable identification was associated with greater depressive symptoms; yet Asian/White people who had consistently reported the greatest amount of malleability did not report the greatest amount of depressive symptoms. At first glance, these findings appear contradictory and perplexing. In addition, results from Study 2 suggested that excluding Asian mixed participants may, at times, make the link between malleability and depressive symptoms stronger. Taken together, these findings can be explained by considering research on dialectical self-views.

Previous work on dialectical self-views suggests that people from more Eastern traditions (e.g., Asian Americans, Mainland Chinese) show the greatest recognition and tolerance of ambiguity and change (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). For that reason, we hypothesized that people of Asian multiracial backgrounds would show the greatest fluidity in racial identification; however, people who have such tolerance and recognition of ambiguity and change in the self may not show negative outcomes arising from change and fluidity in racial identification. This is consistent with our finding that Asian multiracial people showed the greatest fluidity but not the highest depressive symptoms. One could deduce that their dialectical self-views may have buffered them from the negative effects of having malleable racial identification. For those who have little recognition and tolerance of self-change and inconsistency, malleable racial identification may be particularly harmful for psychological well-being and a sign of unstable regard for one's multiracial identity. For those who have greater tolerance of inconsistency and have more chameleon-like selves, changing the self may not be maladaptive at all. Thus, Study 3 examines whether dialectical self-views moderate the link between malleable identification and psychological well-being. In addition, Study 3 employs a cross-sectional community sample to improve the representativeness of our multiracial Internet samples in Study 1 & 2.

Method

Participants

There were 104 participants who were recruited to participate in a weeklong study on multiracial identity in exchange for $50. For the purposes of this study, we report on only the Time 1 data collected from this sample. Participants were recruited from the Rutgers University community via flyers and email list serves.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 37 years ($M = 22.46$, $SD = 6.56$), and consisted of 35 men (34%) and 69 women (82%).

Demographic Information

Participants were asked to report their personal racial identity as well as their biological parents' racial identity. Participants were allowed to indicate more than one racial identity utilizing the U.S. census race options. In total, participants indicated 10 different racial identity combinations. Our sample consisted of 22 Black/White, 31 Asian/White, 28 Latino/White, 8 Black/Latinos, 6 Asian/Latinos, 2 Native American/White, 1 Black/Native American, 1 Black/Native American/Asian, 1 Black/Latino/Asian, and 4 who identified as multiracial but did not indicate their component identities.

Materials

Malleable Racial Identification was assessed with the same measure as Study 2 ($\alpha = .78$; see Footnote 2).

Unstable Multiracial Regard was measured with the same measure as Study 2 ($\alpha = .93$).

Psychological well-being. Psychological well-being was assessed with the CES-D as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .88$) and the Well-Being Scale (Bradley & Lewis, 1990). The well-Being scale consisted of 12 items and had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .83$). Participants were instructed to think about how often they felt each statement applied to their life (e.g., "I have lived the kind of life I have wanted to") on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 3 (all of the time).

Dialectical Self Views were measured using the 32-item scale developed by Spencer-Rodgers et al. (2004). On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), participants were asked their agreement with items such as "I often change the way I am, depending on who I am with," "I often find that things will contradict each other, " and "I have a strong sense of who I am and don't change my views when others disagree with me (reverse-scored)." These items were designed by Spencer-Rodgers et al. to assess behavioral change, contradiction, and cognitive change, respectively. In the present study, we used the scale in its entirety as a measure of dialectical self views ($\alpha = .84$).

Results and Discussion

We compared means for Asian/White, Latino/White, and Black/White individuals but, unexpectedly, no differences were found among the three groups on any of the measures. Table 3 shows the correlations among the variables. Malleable identification was associated with lower psychological well-being and greater regard

Table 3
Zero Order Correlations for Study 3

	1	2	3	4
1. Malleable identification	1.00			
2. Unstable multiracial regard	.34***	1.00		
3. Well-being	−.20*	−.29**	1.00	
4. Depressive symptoms	.17†	.40***	−.78***	1.00
5. Dialectical self-views	.19†	.19†	−.32**	.25**

$^* p < .05.$ $^{**} p < .01.$ $^{***} p < .001.$ $^† p < .10.$

instability. To test our main hypothesis that dialectical self-views would moderate the link between malleable racial identifications and well-being, we calculate simple slopes effects and interaction terms following procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991). We standardized dialectical self-views and malleability and created an interaction term from the product of these two standardized variables. Analyses were conducted using stepwise hierarchical linear regressions. We regressed well-being, depression, and unstable multiracial regard on malleable identification at Step 1, dialectical self views at Step 2, and the interaction term at Step 3 in three separate hierarchical regression equations (see Tables 4–6). In each analysis, dialectical self-views moderated the link between malleable identification and the outcomes.

To examine whether malleable racial identifications predicted negative outcomes, especially for those low in dialecticalism, we conducted simple slopes analyses (see Figures 2–4). As expected, we found that, for people low in dialecticalism, greater malleable racial identification predicted greater unstable multiracial regard ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$), lower psychological well-being ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .01$), and greater depressive symptoms ($\beta = .32$, $p < .01$). For people high in dialecticalism, malleable racial identification did not predict regard instability ($\beta = .11$, $p = 43$, ns), well-being ($\beta = .19$, $p = .17$, ns), or depression ($\beta = -.21$, $p = 14$, ns). These findings support our hypothesis that malleability would predict negative outcomes for those who had little tolerance for change, inconsistency, and contradiction within the self (see Figures 2 to 4).

General Discussion

The present findings provide unique evidence to suggest that greater malleable racial identification is associated with poorer psychological well-being for those low in dialecticalism who have little tolerance for change, inconsistency, and contradiction within the self. The relationship between malleable racial identification and psychological well-being appears to be weaker, nonsignificant, and often in the opposite direction for those high in dialecticalism. These studies represent an important first step in examining the psychological health implications of malleable racial identification, a phenomenon that may be unique to multiracial populations and relatively common among multiracial adolescents (Harris & Sim, 2002; Hitlin et al., 2006). However, it is important to note that most multiracial populations are psychologically healthy experiencing similar levels of depressive symptoms as their minority monoracial peers (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Although

our research cannot make causal claims and the usual caveats regarding self-report measures apply, the results of these three studies provide compelling preliminary evidence that greater malleable identification is associated with poorer psychological health, and that this relationship is stronger among those who have low dialectical self-views.

These findings might be surprising in light of work suggesting that multiple identities can be adaptive or utilized in ways to avoid negative stereotypes and take advantage of majority identities to foster status (e.g., Cross, Smith, & Payne, 2002; Shih et al., 1999). However, such work examines identities across different social categories and domains such as how Asian women can navigate their gender identity and racial identity in concert. Instability of racial identification among multiracial people represents the less common occurrence of multiple identities in a single domain (i.e., race), which may undermine the stability of that domain. For example, we find that malleable racial identification with one's respective racial identities (e.g., an Asian/Black person feeling more Asian than Black on occasion) was associated with the stability of their regard for their multiracial background. These findings are important in thinking about the construction of identities and the implications of multiple identities within and across social categories. In addition, the present study represents the first examination of regard instability in the domain of social identities, and the domain of race in general.

In the present study, we found that having high dialectical self-views buffered multiracial people from the negative psychological health outcomes associated with malleable racial identifications. This is consistent with previous work that finds that self-consistency is a weaker predictor of well-being for Easterners (those most likely to have dialectical self-views) as compared to Westerners (those who are less likely to have dialectical self-views). Because Easterners have greater tolerance for contradiction, self-inconsistency is less problematic. In addition, these findings help explain why Asian multiracial people in Study 1 and 2 consistently showed higher malleable racial identification scores but not worse depressive symptoms than other multiracial groups. Presumably, these changes in self-aspects across different contexts can be explained by higher dialectical self views (English & Chen, 2007).

Future Directions

This study sets the stage for several important next steps examining malleability and fluidity among multiracial people's multiple

Table 4

Summary of Hierarchical Regression for Unstable Multiracial Regard

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE (B)	β	B	SE (B)	β	B	SE (B)	β
Malleable identification	.57	.16	.34***	.53	.16	.32***	.46	.16	.28**
Dialectical self-views				.21	.16	.13	.25	.16	.15
Malleable Identification × dialectical self-views							−.28	.14	−.19*
R^2		.12			.13			.17	
F for ΔR^2		13.35***			1.83			4.01*	

* $p < .05$.　** $p < .01$.　*** $p < .001$.

Table 5
Summary of Hierarchical Regression for Well-Being

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	*SE* (*B*)	β	*B*	*SE* (*B*)	β	*B*	*SE* (*B*)	β
Malleable identification	−.10	.05	−.20*	−.07	.05	−.14	−.04	.05	−.07
Dialectical self-views				−.15	.05	−.29**	−.17	.05	−.32**
Malleable identification × dialectical self-views							.13	.04	.30**
R^2		.04			.12			.20	
F for ΔR^2		3.98*			9.04**			10.55**	

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

identities. In the present study, we were particularly interested in capturing changing racial identifications across contexts; however, multiracial people may simultaneously have consistencies within contexts but variability across contexts. For example, a person of Black/White descent may feel more Black than White around Black friends compared to when they around White friends (across situation variability) but they always feel more Black around Black friends and more White around White friends (within situation consistency). Previous work examining self-consistency finds that Asians have high across situation variability (change their self-aspects when around family vs. friends) but greater relational context consistency (are the same around their family and the same around their friends; English & Chen, 2007). Future studies should examine whether relationally consistent racial identification predicts positive interpersonal outcomes for multiracial people.

In addition, changes in racial identification across situations may vary in level of autonomy. Some multiracial people may elect to identify with one racial identity over another while others may feel forced to identify certain ways. Autonomy or perceived control may be an important moderator of whether multiple identities predict positive or negative well-being (McConnell et al., 2005). Another important next step in examining the fluidity of multiple racial identities would be to examine malleability, or shifting, of behaviors ("Some days I *act* more White than Latino") associated with their various identities rather than instability of identifications ("Some days I *feel* closer to my White heritage than my Latino heritage"). Contrary to the results for malleable racial identification, behaviors might emerge as an adaptive way to juggle multiple racial identities. Theorists suggest that minority individuals may

engage in adaptive behavioral strategies such as the use of vernaculars or languages associated with their majority or minority identity in appropriate contexts (termed *code-switching*; e.g., Cross et al., 2002). Code-switching behavior is theorized to benefit people because majority or minority identities may be relatively valued in particular contexts, thus, behaving consistently with appropriate norms could create more positive or successful interactions. In addition, future studies could examine whether shifting behaviors improves social acceptance from the perceivers' perspective.

An additional issue that this work did not address was what causes some multiracial people to have malleable identification in the first place. People who have less integrated racial identities may be more able to shift their racial identification because their racial identities feel more separate and distinct (see Cheng & Lee, in press). Similarly, malleable identification may be more likely among those who live in environments where there is a stronger divide between the racial groups that comprise their identities. For example, in a Black and White segregated neighborhoods, a Black/White person may not believe their Black and White identities overlap or coexist simultaneously. Moreover, how parents education their multiracial children about race may also affect whether their racial identities become malleable. These ideas are speculative and beyond the scope of the current studies and, as such, represent important questions for future research.

In the present study, we found that malleable identification predicted greater unstable regard, especially for those with low in dialectical self views; however, we examined multiracial regard not specific regard for individual component identities. Thus, it is possible that malleable racial identification may occur when one

Table 6
Summary of Hierarchical Regression for Depressive Symptoms

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	*SE* (*B*)	β	*B*	*SE* (*B*)	β	*B*	*SE* (*B*)	β
Malleable identification	.09	.05	.17+	.06	.05	.12	.03	.05	.06
Dialectical self-views				.12	.05	.23*	.13	.05	.26**
Malleable identification × dialectical self-views							−.14	.04	.30**
R^2		.03			.08			.16	
F for ΔR^2		2.19†			5.41*			10.25**	

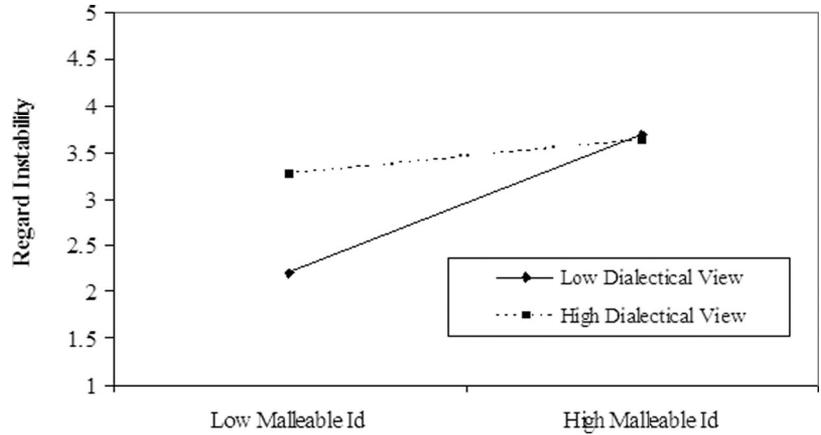* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.   † $p < .10$.

Figure 2. Interaction between malleable racial identification and dialectical self on regard stability. Plotted one standard deviation above and below the mean.

racial identity in particular is devalued. Future research should examine attitudes toward each component identity as well as how each identity is integrated with the other.

Limitations

These findings should be considered with regard to the use of the Internet as the predominant site for participant recruitment as well as the cross sectional nature of the data. Although Internet survey research provided the opportunity for recruiting large samples of multiracial people and have more diverse and representative populations than, for example, solely using college populations, our sample cannot be said to represent the multiracial community at large. Our samples for Study 1 and 2 were highly self-selective. People who belong to Yahoo Groups based on their multiracial background (Study 1) or members of foundations and organizations that cater to multiracial communities (Study 2) may be particularly identified with their multiracial background or highly inquisitive regarding their multiracial identity. Thus, our findings most likely generalize multiracial populations that cen-

tralize their multiracial identity. However, given the limited research on multiracial populations, the large number of multiracial people sampled in the current study as well as the consistency across the two studies, we have confidence in our findings and the importance of them to work on multiracial identity. In addition, Study 3 utilized a community sample of multiracial people and yielded very similar findings. The studies were also all correlational and utilized self-report measures, thus the usual caveats regarding causality, retrospective bias, and social desirability apply.

In addition, although we found that our measure of malleable racial identification predicted psychological well-being, the measure was created for this study by the authors. Therefore, these measures have not been systematically validated and may not rule out alternative explanations for the results. On the one hand, we replicated consistently negative associations between malleable racial identification and well-being across three different studies suggesting that we are measuring something of psychological significance. On the other hand, it is possible that our measure may
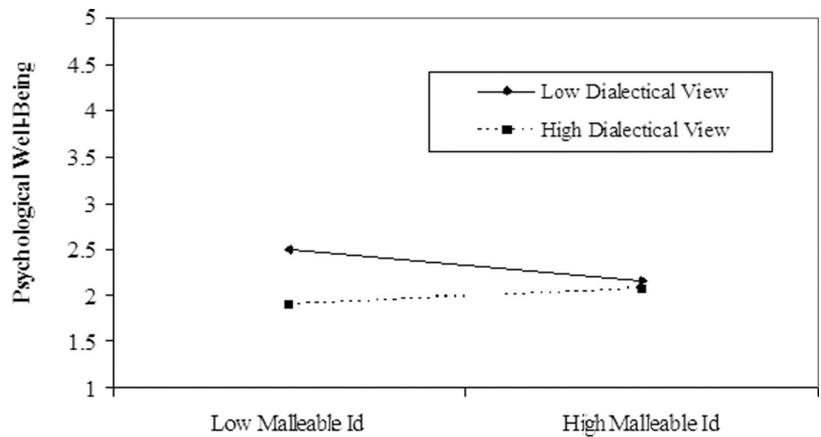

Figure 3. Interaction between malleable racial identification and dialectical self on psychological well-being. Plotted one standard deviation above and below the mean.
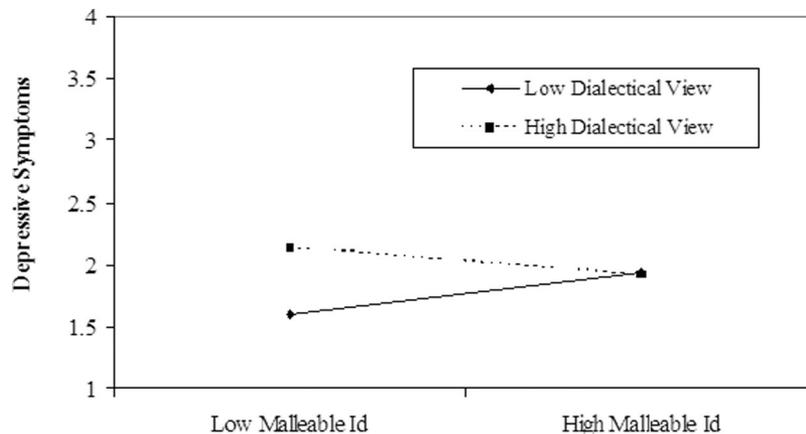
Figure 4. Interaction between malleable racial identification and dialectical self on depressive symptoms. Plotted one standard deviation above and below the mean.

also tap other additional constructs associated with malleable racial identification. For example, the items chosen to assess malleable identification may alternatively assess the valuing of one identity over another consistently rather than the shifting between identities. Thus, one could alternative interpretation of our findings to mean that people who consistently value one identity over another (e.g., Latino/White participants who always value being Latino over being White) show lower psychological well-being. In either case, the take home message may be to have more integrated identities rather than treating them as separate by either valuing one over the other or by switching between them.

Conclusion

Gaining an understanding of how multiracial people contend with their multiple racial identities to foster psychological health is becoming increasingly important as the demographic profile of society becomes more racially integrated (Lee & Bean, 2004). Multiracial people confront unique challenges associated with having multiple racial identities and thus, may develop unique ways of managing those identities. In the present studies, we examine a chameleon-like approach to racial identification among multiracial people. The present research demonstrates that malleable racial identification is associated with poorer psychological well-being for multiracial populations who are low in dialectical self-views. This is an important first step in examining how malleable racial identification affects multiracial people and when this strategy may be associated with negative psychological health.

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