ARTICLE

Multiple racial identities as sources of psychological resilience

Margaret Shih[1] (iD) | Leigh S. Wilton[2] | Serena Does[1] (iD) |
Brianna M. Goodale[3] | Diana T. Sanchez[4]

[1] University of California, Los Angeles

[2] Skidmore College

[3] Cairn Labs, LLC

[4] Rutgers University

Correspondence
Margaret Shih, UCLA Anderson School of
Management, 110 Westwood Plaza, A416, Los
Angeles, CA 90095.
Email: margaret.shih@anderson.ucla.edu

Abstract

Much of the research on multiracial individuals has focused on the impact of a multiracial background on psychological well-being. This work, often using clinical samples, identified a higher prevalence of negative psychological outcomes among multiracial individuals, such as low self-esteem, poor grades, or self-hatred, and has emphasized that these negative outcomes stem from the unique challenges associated with navigating multiple racial identities. However, research on nonclinical samples finds that multiracial individuals fare as well as monoracial individuals on these, and other, outcomes. We put forth a synthesizing theory aimed at understanding how multiracial individuals develop adaptive coping strategies, which help them learn to navigate multiple identities and maintain positive psychological outcomes. In the current contribution, we build on existing research to theorize that multiracial individuals can engage in two psychological strategies that increase resilience: (a) switching between multiple racial identities and (b) reduced essentializing of race. Evidence and consequences of these two strategies are discussed. Taken together, in contrast to traditional *depletion models* of coping, this work highlights the unique experience of multiracial individuals and the potential psychological benefits of belonging to multiple racial groups in a racialized world.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Since the U.S. Supreme Court repealed the anti-miscegenation laws in 1967, the number of multiracial individuals and families has risen significantly (U.S. Census, 2012), and with it, so too has research studying this population. This work has largely focused on how perceivers racially categorize multiracial individuals (e.g., J. M. Chen, Pauker, Gaither, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2018), how multiracial individuals racially self-identify (e.g., Pauker, Meyers, Sanchez, Gaither, & Young, 2018), and the unique hardships and negative psychological outcomes associated with multiracial identity. Such hardships include disapproving social attitudes (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013), disapproval from relatives (Root, 2001), exclusion from neighborhood and community (McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton, 1999), and psychological distress (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006).

Rather than strictly focusing on the factors that lead multiracial individuals to harm, we propose that researchers should also focus on factors that lead to multiracial individuals' resilience. A greater understanding of what protects and contributes to the resilience of individuals coping with stigma can provide a fuller, more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of multiracial individuals. In the current contribution, we examine two strategies that can serve as resources of psychological resilience for multiracial individuals to overcome challenges associated with navigating multiple identities: (a) switching among multiple racial identities and (b) de-essentializing race (i.e., correcting one's belief that the distinctions between racial groups are natural, inalterable, and informative).[1]

We deem it important to emphasize that, similar to most monoracial individuals, multiracial individuals can face both positive and negative experiences associated with their racial identity, as a function of the interaction between a given individual and their context. The current paper focuses on highlighting the ways in which these multiple memberships across racial groups can serve as resources. By doing so, we aim to add balance in the literature on multiracial identity, which currently focuses more on harms than benefits associated with having a multiracial identity.

2 | LIMITED EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR THEORETICAL FOCUS ON HARDSHIPS AND NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

Theories of identity development propose that multiracial individuals need to integrate their multiple identities (Cheng & Lee, 2009) in order to develop a stable self (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; see Sanchez, Shih, & Wilton, 2014). At least four reasons have been proposed as to why the developmental process is more complicated for multiracial individuals than for their monoracial peers (Kich, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). First, multiracial individuals have fewer race-related role models than monoracial individuals (Harris & Sim, 2002; Ingram, 2000; Townsend, Markus, & Bergsieker, 2009). Second, multiracial individuals do not fit easily into preexisting racial categories eliciting ambiguity around self-categorization. For example, an individual with one Black and one White biological parent may identify as either Black or White, as equally with both races or with neither racial category (e.g., identify as "biracial"). Third, multiracial individuals are often a dual minority. They are not only a minority member in the majority community but also a minority member within minority communities. Thus, multiracial individuals often face a lack of social guidelines about their racial niche (Harris & Sim, 2002; Ingram, 2000). Fourth, multiracial individuals can encounter a conflict between their private self-definition and the definition imposed upon them from the outside world (Gaskins, 1999; Nakashima, 1992; Song & Aspinall, 2012). For example, their phenotypic appearance might lead others to miscategorize them as monoracial or as an alternative category containing none of their actual racial groups (e.g., an Asian and White multiracial individual being categorized as Latinx; Nicolas, Skinner, & Dickter, 2018).

While it is a common assumption, there is limited empirical support for the notion that multiracial individuals have worse psychological outcomes than monoracial individuals. Possessing multiple identities is associated with better psychological outcomes, including higher life satisfaction and self-efficacy (Adelmann, 1994), higher self-esteem

and job satisfaction (Benish-Weisman, Daniel, Schiefer, Möllering, & Knafo-Noam, 2015; Miller, Moen, & Dempster-McClain, 1991), and lower rates of psychopathology (Sachs-Ericsson & Ciarlo, 2000). In addition, multiracial individuals have more diverse social networks (Doyle & Kao, 2007; Quillian & Redd, 2009), and multiple identities and roles can indicate that an individual is socially integrated (House & Kahn, 1985) and bring purpose, direction, and meaning to individuals' lives (Thoits, 1983). Indeed, if harmonious and of importance to the self-concept, holding multiple identities—either in different domains or in the same domain, such as is the case with multiracial individuals—can boost psychological well-being (Brook, Garcia, & Fleming, 2008). How then can we reconcile the findings that multiracial individuals have worse outcomes than monoracials with these findings suggesting the opposite? In this section, we discuss moderators, potential confounds, and evidence showing that multiracial individuals have similar, if not better, psychological outcomes than monoracial individuals.

One important moderator to consider is whether the sample is clinical or not. While studies using clinical populations show evidence of negative health outcomes, studies recruiting nonclinical participants showed no differences in long-term well-being between multiracial and monoracial individuals (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). No significant differences were observed in school performance, identity development, self-esteem, or the formation of peer relationships between multiracial and monoracial individuals. Thus, the nature of the sample is important to consider when examining multiracial individuals' outcomes.

Another moderator to be considered is which monoracial and multiracial samples are being compared. Multiracial Americans show higher rates of substance use compared to monoracial African and Asian Americans but lower rates compared to monoracial Native Americans and European Americans. Similarly, multiracial adolescents showed higher rates of problem behaviors when compared to monoracial White and Asian American adolescents but no difference when compared to monoracial Latino adolescents (Choi, He, Herrenkohl, Catalano, & Toumbourou, 2012). Similarly, Cooney and Radina (2000) found that multiracial adolescents had significantly higher rates of counseling use, were more likely to be held back a grade, receive more disciplining in school, and had higher rates of depression, only in comparison with their monoracial White peers, not in comparison with their monoracial minority peers. In contrast, there were no differences between multiracial and monoracial adolescents on measures of attitudes towards school, grades, delinquent behavior, popularity, happiness and satisfaction, and frequency of substance abuse. Thus, which specific racial groups are being compared to multiracial groups contributes to the type of differences that are observed between multiracial and monoracial individuals.

3 | PROPOSING TWO ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES: IDENTITY SWITCHING AND DE-ESSENTIALIZING RACE

In the current contribution, we aim to resolve the inconsistencies between the theoretical and empirical research on the well-being and adjustment outcomes of multiracial individuals. We theorize that multiracial individuals can benefit from the difficulties inherent in defining their racial identity. To this end, we explore two psychological strategies that may be sources of resilience for multiracial individuals having to navigate a racialized world: (a) switching among multiple racial identities and (b) de-essentializing race (i.e., lessening one's belief that the distinctions between racial groups are natural, inalterable, and informative).

The concept of gaining strength from overcoming adversity is well established in other areas of research. For instance, Garmezy and colleagues identified multiple factors that lead high-risk adolescents to develop competence and healthy adjustment outcomes (e.g., Garmezy, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Moreover, disadvantaged individuals who are able to "shift and persist"—reappraising a situation and sticking with it optimistically despite conditions of adversity—show resilience and greater well-being than their peers; they are less likely to develop serious, chronic health problems like cardiovascular disease (Chen & Miller, 2012). Similarly, we expect the strategies of identity switching and de-essentializing race to serve as buffers for multiracial individuals facing challenges in a racialized world.

3.1 | Switching among multiple identities as a pathway to well-being

In identity switching, individuals emphasize the identity that is most valued in a given situation (Gaither, Sommers, & Ambady, 2013; Hong, Zhan, Morris, & Benet-Martínez, 2016; Sanchez, Shih, & Garcia, 2009; Wilton, Sanchez, & Garcia, 2013). Often from a very early age, multiracial individuals are confronted with the fact that they have multiple identities as they navigate through social environments. Feedback from parents, peers, teachers, and bullies can all contribute to multiracial individuals' awareness of their perceived racial fluidity (Collins, 2000; Johnson, 1992; Root, 1990) and, thus, the possibility of identity switching. Identity switching allows multiracial individuals to achieve several goals.

First, it enables individuals to access a socially adaptive identity in response to a potentially hostile situation. Identity switching can help multiracial individuals as well as their peers reframe their multiple racial categorization as advantageous. For instance, minority/White multiracial individuals vary their identification with their different component races depending upon their levels of stigma consciousness and identity threat in their social context (Wilton et al., 2013). Identity switching provides multiracial individuals with an adaptive strategy for navigating potentially threatening situations, emphasizing a less stigmatized part of their identity, thereby affording them the opportunity to remain in a valuable social context that might otherwise be hostile.

Second, identity switching can help the maintenance of self-esteem. Individuals strive to maintain a positive sense of self-worth (Baumeister, 1995). Because self-esteem is intricately tied to group membership (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), situations that threaten a social identity can be harmful to individuals' self-esteem. One way to maintain a positive sense of self-worth is through the management of group memberships. Therefore, it is likely that when a social identity is stigmatized, individuals will seek mobility within their social identity (e.g., distance psychologically from that identity or emphasize another identity; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Third, identity switching may help multiracial individuals avoid performance decrements. Work on stereotype threat has found that negative stereotypes about a group can hurt the performance of individual members (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, work on stereotype susceptibility has also found that members of a negatively stereotyped group can avoid performance decrements by focusing on an alternate identity. Shih et al. (1999) found that Asian American women scored worse on a math test when their female identity was made salient and significantly better when their Asian identity was made salient, suggesting identity switching has behavioral as well as emotional consequences. Similarly, Black–White biracial individuals exhibited improved test performance—that is, stereotype boost—when their White (but not their Black) identity was made salient (Gaither, Remedios, Schultz, & Sommers, 2015). Multiracial individuals may identity switch before an important test or social interaction, aligning their sense of self with a positively or neutrally stereotyped component identity instead. Indeed, research has found that multiracial individuals were less susceptible to stereotypes threat than monoracial individuals (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007).

It is important to consider the context (e.g., test taking, athletic performance situation, and family gathering) when thinking about identity management strategies (such as identity switching), in determining which specific strategies are beneficial. In terms of stereotype boosts, a Black–White individual might experience stereotype threat when their Black identity is made salient in an academic context but might experience stereotype boost when this same identity is made salient in an athletic performance situation. This type of strategic identity switching also carries challenges, such as reinforcing stereotypes and protecting the racial status quo, that complicate these situations.

3.2 | (De)essentializing race as a pathway to well-being

Psychological essentialism refers to the perception that for members of a group, there is an "elementary nature or essence, which is underlying, deep and unobserved, that *causes* natural entities to be what they are" (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011, p. 800). Among the key aspects of essentialism, the belief that members of certain groups share

deep-seated, unchangeable, and inborn similarities leads individuals to make genetic attributions about socially constructed categories. Race is one of the most highly essentialized human categories (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000, 2002); individuals who subscribe to the idea of racial essentialism tend to believe that the perceived characteristics associated with different races are natural, immutable and determined, and observable on the basis of physical characteristics (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011; Markus, 2008; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). Moreover, essentialist views about race are related to racist attitudes and beliefs (Jayaratne et al., 2006), increased stereotyping (Eberhardt, Dasgupta, & Banaszynski, 2003; Haslam et al., 2000; Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998), greater in-group bias (Keller, 2005), and decreased interest in interacting with out-group members (Keller, 2005; Lee, Wilton, & Kwan, 2014; Verkuyten, 2003; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008).

In the West, many laypeople think of race as an objective, unchangeable attribute based upon biological characteristics, assigning meaning and importance to racial categories (Markus, 2008; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). This belief has dominated thinking about race since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with lay theories claiming the existence of four to five different racial "types" (Harris & Sim, 2002; Spickard, 1992). Each racial type was believed to have a distinct gene pool and race-specific characteristics, with possible different evolutionary origins (Spickard, 1992). Although people commonly categorize individuals into racial groups on the basis of physical characteristics (e.g., skin color and hair texture; Smedley & Smedley, 2005), researchers have yet to find a cultural or physical marker of race that all members of one group share and members of another group do not (Zack, 1995). In fact, on any given characteristic, there is greater variance within a racial group, than between different racial groups (Goodman, 2000). Modern developments in genetic testing similarly show that genetic variance on a given allele does not cluster neatly into human-defined racial or ethnic categories; instead, genetic similarities appear between racial groups that researchers or doctors may not have included in the same category a priori (Risch, Burchard, Ziv, & Tang, 2002). Thus, advancements in the availability and knowledge surrounding genetic testing are inconsistent with lay theories of race as a biological trait. Moreover, researchers have begun calling for the removal of racial terminology from biological sciences all together (e.g., Yudell, Roberts, DeSalle, & Tishkoff, 2016).

We propose that the unique experiences of multiracial individuals can serve to reduce the extent to which they essentialize race. Moreover, we posit that de-essentializing race (i.e., perceiving race as a social rather than biological construct) can provide a buffer against negative racial stereotypes by challenging the legitimacy of essentialist beliefs about racial groups.

Note that by pointing out the importance of de-essentializing race, we are not arguing that people should deny the concept of race entirely. Rather, we argue that it is crucial to acknowledge that race is a flexible construct that changes based on social factors (e.g., politics, economics, history, and nationality) as fixed notions of racial categories lend themselves to racial bias, discrimination, and unfair disparities. From this perspective, the notion of de-essentializing race stands in contrast to a "colorblind" approach, which consists of focusing on the ways all people are similar, regardless of race (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Indeed, one critical way in which our notion of de-essentializing race differs from the notion of colorblindness is that the former is about challenging the existence of the biological underpinnings of race while acknowledging its social significance, while the latter is about challenging the social importance of race (Apfelbaum et al., 2012; Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Wilton, Apfelbaum, & Good, 2018). Moreover, essentialism is the belief that racial groups are distinct and, thus, that it is impossible for people to move between categories. These are beliefs that multiracial people challenge by their very existence: They move flexibly between categories, thereby defying stereotypes and other essentialist constructs.

Prior research shows that multiracial individuals' lower endorsement of racial essentialism can increase their psychological health and adaptive responses to diversity (Sanchez et al., 2009) and increase their creativity (Gaither, Remedios, Sanchez, & Sommers, 2015). We propose that a decreased belief in racial essentialism may also help protect multiracial individuals against racial stigmatization. For example, Shih et al. (2007) have shown that reducing racial essentialism reduces the consequences of race-based stereotypes. Through a series of studies, the authors also

showed that participants who argued race was not a social construct (and therefore biologically created) were significantly more likely to succumb to stereotype threat and show performance decrements. In contrast, raising awareness of race as a social construct reduced the impact of race-based stereotypes on performance. In parallel, Dar-Nimrod and Heine (2006) found that reducing essentialist thinking about gender differences and math leads to less stereotype susceptibility and increased math performance in women. Taken together, these findings suggest that educating people about race as a social rather than a biological construct can be an effective way in reducing susceptibility to race-based stereotypes.

Consistent with our theory, past work shows that compared to monoracial people, multiracial individuals are less likely to subscribe to racial essentialism and more likely to believe that race is a social construction (Markus, 2008; Nakashima, 1996; Shih et al., 2007; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Spickard, 1992; Weisman, 1996; Zack, 1995). The realization that racial categorization lacks genetic basis can be seen in how multiracial individuals identify themselves and others. Multiracial adults rely less on racial labels or cues when remembering faces of other people than their monoracial peers (Pauker & Ambady, 2009). Moreover, greater facial recognition by multiracial individuals resulted from their lowered belief in racial essentialism, with multiracial individuals appearing to encode facial cues in the aggregate, rather than separately. In terms of self-categorization, many multiracial people deconstruct race and refrain from defining themselves along racial lines completely (Gaskins, 1999; Renn, 2000). We propose that the adversities multiracial individuals experience reduce the extent to which they think about race as a valid, permanent, and biological human category. We further posit that this de-essentialized view of race protects multiracial individuals from the harmful effects of racial stigmatization by undermining stereotypes' legitimacy.

De-essentializing race can lessen the impact of race-based stereotypes on the individual. Research has shown that identification with a domain moderates stereotypes' influence on individual behavior. For example, stereotype threat research found that awareness about negative performance stereotypes hurts the performance of those being stereotyped (Steele & Aronson, 1995). How much an individual identifies with the stereotyped group moderates performance decrements, though, such that individuals identifying less with the stereotyped identity show fewer negative consequences (Schmader, 2002). It could be that multiracial individuals who de-essentialize race may also be less likely to suffer from stereotype-related performance blows and decrements to well-being. Relatedly, endorsing greater equality rather than differences between racial groups has been found to be positively associated with well-being among multiracial individuals (Villegas-Gold & Tran, 2018).

Other work on inter-group judgments has found further evidence that individuals who place less emphasis on race in social judgments rely less on stereotypes. Reducing essentialist thinking with regard to gender differences and math led to less stereotype susceptibility and increased math performance in women (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2006). Shih et al. (2007) extended these findings to understand how reducing racial essentialism affects the consequences of race-based stereotypes. Through a series of studies, they examined the relationship between the awareness of the social construction of race and the impact of race-based stereotypes on performance. In keeping with our theory, they found that multiracial individuals were more likely to believe that race was a social rather than a biological construction. Shih and colleagues further demonstrated that the salience of race impacted the performance of monoracial, but not multiracial, participants. The authors also showed that when participants argued race was not a social construction (and therefore biologically created), they were significantly more likely to succumb to stereotype threat and show performance decrements. However, raising awareness of race as a social construction reduced the impact of race-based stereotypes on performance among monoracial as well as multiracial participants. These findings suggest that reducing essentialist thinking about race can reduce susceptibility to race-based stereotypes. Furthermore, they complement prior research that demonstrates how multiracial individuals' lowered belief in racial essentialism can increase their psychological health, their adaptive responses to diversity (Sanchez et al., 2009), as well as increase their creativity (Gaither, Remedios, Sanchez, & Sommers, 2015).

4 | CONCLUSIONS

The current contribution explores how the experiences of multiracial individuals may shape the strategies they develop to cope with stereotypes and stigmatization. We review the traditional literature on multiracial individuals, focusing on identifying and understanding the consequences that multiracial individuals face when defining their racial identity. The first empirical studies on multiracial individuals supported these predictions, but these studies focused mainly on clinical samples. As noted, clinical samples, self-selected for psychological difficulties, may not be representative of the general multiracial population. Consequently, a review of this literature may offer little insight into the experience of nonclinical individuals with multiracial backgrounds.

Although empirical work on multiracial individuals using nonclinical samples is relatively scarce, the existing work does not show that multiracial individuals have lowered self-esteem as some theorists would expect (see Cooney & Radina, 2000). To explain the lack of empirical support for the negative predictions made by traditional theories, we suggest that individuals with multiracial identities may use two unique adaptive strategies to protect themselves from the negative consequences: (a) switching among multiple identities and (b) de-essentializing race. We posit that multiracial individuals may adopt either or both of these strategies as they navigate their social world and may do so consciously and less consciously. It seems likely that multiracial individuals are taught and/or socialized by their peers and others on how to engage in these strategies and under what conditions they are most adaptive. Future work should explore which conditions predict more and less conscious decisions by multiracial individuals to use the two proposed identity management strategies.

Presented in the current contribution is an alternative perspective to the prevention-focused models of coping. Namely, early theories of multiracial identity predicted that these experiences would translate into negative outcomes. These theories took a coping perspective towards understanding the effects of overcoming adversities. Coping models propose that stigmatized individuals adopt strategies to cope with stigmas in order to avoid negative consequences (Oyserman & Swim, 2001). Thus, coping models adopt a perspective of prevention, proposing that individuals are motivated to avoid negative consequences, rather than create positive ones. Thus, stigmatized individuals adopt strategies to cope with the adversities that stigmas introduce into their lives; however, over time, employing these strategies is a draining process that hurts individuals.

Departing from traditional *depletion* models of coping, we theorize that multiracial individuals may *gain strength* from navigating multiple racial identities in a racialized world. This empowerment perspective views stigmatized individuals, not as passive targets of prejudice focused on avoiding negative outcomes but rather as active participants in society who seek to understand their social world and create positive outcomes (Oyserman & Swim, 2001). The proposed model posits that overcoming adversity can be an enriching process enabling individuals to develop a sense of mastery and self-efficacy in their accomplishments (Corrigan, Faber, Rashid, & Leary, 1999). It is likely that stigmatized individuals who are thriving in society despite their stigmatized status adopt the empowerment model over the coping model.

4.1 | Potential pitfalls

We note that de-essentializing race, in and of itself, does not necessarily ensure prejudice's erasure. Instead, the strategy of emphasizing race as a social construction can and has been used to undermine the need for promoting minority rights. Morton, Hornsey, and Postmes (2009) found that prejudiced individuals changed their beliefs regarding racial essentialism in response to whom it includes or excludes. In particular, when shown an ambiguous biracial individual, prejudiced participants were more likely to report lower essentialism scores if told the individual was discriminated against because of his majority racial status than if the discrimination occurred because of his minority racial status. Furthermore, Verkuyten (2003) argued that racial assimilation hinges on the belief in racial de-essentialization. Through a series of focus groups, he demonstrated how White Dutch people view assimilation as a necessary means for racial minorities to integrate into the population and how this view suggests that the racial

majority cannot believe their culture has essentialist, predetermined, and innate components. He warns, however, of the inherent danger to minority cultures, with de-essentializing race and assimilation readily becoming the erasure of minority culture. Moreover, Verkuyten cautions against universally lauding de-essentialization as progressive and racial essentialism as oppressive, recognizing that strategically employed by a racial majority both strategies can undermine racial minority groups' rights. Thus, a heavy emphasis on the de-essentialization of race could backfire for multiracial individuals, with their argument being used against them in an agenda to undermine the validity of their racial and cultural differences.

Moreover, while the central premise of our rationale is that the strategies outlined above can result in positive outcomes for multiracial individuals, we acknowledge that there can also be costs associated with these identity management strategies. Code switching requires cognitive effort (Molinsky, 2007) and can be depleting after a period of prolonged or frequent switching. It can also exert a psychological toll on a person, particularly when code switching is at odds with and individuals' internalized beliefs, values, or views of one's own authenticity (Molinsky, 2007). For example, people experience internal conflict when their behavior is inconsistent with their values (Baumeister, Shapiro, & Tice, 1985), and a multiracial person who shifts between racial identities may risk feeling inauthentic. These issues may be particularly salient for multiracial people, who switch their racial identity more frequently than monoracial people and who often do not fit into traditional racial categories or have race-related role models. Additionally, identity switching may lead to reinforcing stereotypes and upholding the racial status quo. As described earlier, Gaither, Remedios, Schultz, and Sommers (2015) found that Black–White biracial people performed better on a test when researchers emphasized their White (but not their Black) identity. However, now consider a case where a biracial person emphasizes her White identity in a classroom setting because she feels that her Black identity is devalued in that context. This identity management strategy, while adaptive in the moment, may also be experienced as stigmatizing or reinforce pernicious racial stereotypes that associate White identity, and not Black identity, with intelligence. It may also make it less likely that people will address or challenge racial inequality more directly (e.g., through collective action). Future work should further examine the potential tension between multiracial individuals' identity management strategies on the one hand and their willingness to engage in actions that promote social change in contexts marked by racial inequality on the other hand.

4.2 | Future directions

Future work should examine the generalizability of the processes outlined here. We expect that differences between cities, regions, and/or countries in terms of which racial groups are present, the hierarchy among those groups, and levels of social segregation between those groups will shape the ways in which multiracial individuals are regarded, treated, and the ways in which these individuals manage their racial identities. For example, while the multiracial population is growing at three times the rate of the general population, it is still a relatively novel and small minority of the population in most places in the United States (Parker, Horowitz, Morin, & Lopez, 2015). However, with nearly one in four individuals identifying as being multiracial, Hawai'i is home to the largest multiracial population in the nation (24%; Parker et al., 2015). We expect that in an environment where multiracial identity is very common (i.e., Hawai'i), multiracial individuals are less likely to be, and feel, singled out than in a predominantly monoracial environment (e.g., the Netherlands).

Relatedly, when White people moved from a less diverse location in the continental United States to the more diverse Hawai'i, they expressed lower race essentialist beliefs over time because they made more racially diverse friends (Pauker et al., 2018). Scholars also have begun to study cultural variation in the way U.S. (smaller multiracial population) and Brazilian (larger multiracial population) use ancestry and phenotype to categorize people as Black, White, or biracial (Chen, Couto, Sacco, & Dunham, 2017). Future work should examine the interplay between contextual (e.g., demographic composition) and individual (e.g., identity management strategy) factors in shaping multiracial individuals experiences and outcomes. Future research should also explore how

multiracial individuals make sense of their own identities in these different contexts and how this may influence their health and general well-being.

Another important future direction is to examine what the directionality is of the relationships that we are proposing. On the one hand, it could be the case that multiracial identity gives rise to switching between identities, which reduces or corrects, racial essentialist beliefs, which in turn, leads to improved well-being. On the other hand, it could be the case that multiracial identity corrects racial essentialist beliefs, giving rise to identity switching, resulting in improved well-being. What we are proposing, and future work will have to test, is that both directions occur. Namely, we propose a cyclical relationship between racial essentialism and identity switching. Such that greater identity switching (in terms of frequency for example) will likely lead to a correction of racial essentialist beliefs, and the more one realizes that race is not a fixed, but rather a fluid construct, the more one will engage in identity switching. Future research will need to test the proposed cyclical relationship between identity switching and racial essentialism.

5 | CODA

We offer the current perspective in an attempt to add balance to the literature about the ways in which multiracial individuals can experience their racial identity. While most work has focused on potential detrimental effects of belonging to multiple racial groups, we highlight how multiracial identity can serve as a source of positive self-regard and can facilitate beneficial outcomes, including health outcomes. We note that the processes outlined in the current contribution are not exclusive to multiracial individuals. For example, Black Americans may engage in similar identity management strategies when they move between predominantly White environments and predominantly Black environments. However, we posit that when it comes to race, multiracial individuals often face situation in which others challenge, question, or contest their membership in certain racial groups—something that is less likely for monoracial individuals.

ENDNOTE

[1]As an aside, it is interesting to note, however, that while participants in the multicultural condition endorsed stereotypes more, they were also more accurate in their evaluations and showed less in-group favoritism than participants in the colorblind policy. These results suggest that the use of stereotypes is not always associated with a negative orientation towards the outgroup.

ORCID

Margaret Shih https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8182-5068
Serena Does https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7770-9577

WORKS CITED

Adelmann, P. (1994). Multiple roles and physical health: Gender and ethnic comparisons. *Research on Aging*, *16*, 142–165. https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027594162002

Apfelbaum, E. P., Norton, M. I., & Sommers, S. R. (2012). Racial colorblindness: Emergence, practice, and implications. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *21*, 205–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411434980

Baumeister, R. F. (1995). Self and identity: An introduction. In A. Tesser (Ed.), *Advanced social psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Baumeister, R. F., Shapiro, J. P., & Tice, D. M. (1985). Two kinds of identity crisis. *Journal of Personality*, *53*, 407–424. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1985.tb00373.x

Benish-Weisman, M., Daniel, E., Schiefer, D., Möllering, A., & Knafo-Noam, A. (2015). Multiple social identifications and adolescents' self-esteem. *Journal of Adolescence*, 44, 21–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.06.008

Bratter, J. L., & Eschbach, K. (2006). 'What about the couple?' Interracial marriage and psychological distress. *Social Science Research*, 35(4), 1025–1047. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2005.09.001

Brook, A. T., Garcia, J., & Fleming, M. A. (2008). The effects of multiple identities on psychological well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(12), 1588–1600. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208324629

U.S. Census (2012). The two or more races population: 2010. 2010 Census Brief. Retrieved online August 1, 2018 from http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-13.pdf.

Chen, E., & Miller, G. E. (2012). "Shift-and-persist" strategies: Why low socioeconomic status isn't always bad for health. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 7, 135–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612436694

Chen, J. M., Couto, M. C. P. D. P., Sacco, A. M., & Dunham, Y. (2017). To be or not to be (black or multiracial or white) cultural variation in racial boundaries. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9, 763–772.

Chen, J. M., Pauker, K., Gaither, S. E., Hamilton, D. L., & Sherman, J. W. (2018). Black + White = Not White: A minority bias in categorizations of Black–White multiracials. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 78, 43–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2018.05.002

Cheng, C. Y., & Lee, F. (2009). Multiracial identity integration: Perceptions of conflict and distance among multiracial individuals. *Journal of Social Issues*, 65(1), 51–68. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.01587.x

Choi, Y., He, M., Herrenkohl, T. I., Catalano, R. F., & Toumbourou, J. W. (2012). Multiple identification and risks: Examination of peer factors across multiracial and single-race youth. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41(7), 847–862. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-012-9750-2

Collins, J. F. (2000). Biracial Japanese American identity: An evolving process. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 6, 115–133. https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.6.2.115

Cooney, T. M., & Radina, M. E. (2000). Adjustment problems in adolescence: Are multiracial children at risk? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 70(4), 433–444. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0087744

Corrigan, P. W., Faber, D., Rashid, F., & Leary, M. (1999). The construct validity of empowerment among consumers of mental health services. *Schizophrenia Research*, 38(1), 77–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0920-9964(98)00180-7

Dar-Nimrod, I., & Heine, S. J. (2006). Exposure to scientific theories affects women's math performance. *Science*, 314(5798), 435–435. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1131100

Dar-Nimrod, I., & Heine, S. J. (2011). Genetic essentialism: On the deceptive determinism of DNA. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(5), 800–818. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021860

Doyle, J. M., & Kao, G. (2007). Are racial identities of multiracials stable? Changing self-identification among single and multiple race individuals. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 70(4), 405–423. https://doi.org/10.1177/019027250707000409

Eberhardt, J. L., Dasgupta, N., & Banaszynski, T. L. (2003). Believing is seeing: The effect of racial labels and implicit beliefs on face perception. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 360–370. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167202250215

Field, C. J., Kimuna, S. R., & Straus, M. A. (2013). Attitudes toward interracial relationships among college students: Race, class, gender, and perceptions of parental views. *Journal of Black Studies*, 44(7), 741–776. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934713507580

Gaither, S. E., Remedios, J. D., Sanchez, D. T., & Sommers, S. R. (2015). Thinking outside the box: Multiple identity mind-sets affect creative problem solving. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6(5), 596–603. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550614568866

Gaither, S. E., Remedios, J. D., Schultz, J. R., & Sommers, S. R. (2015). Priming White identity elicits stereotype boost for biracial Black–White individuals. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 18(6), 778–787. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430215570504

Gaither, S. E., Sommers, S. R., & Ambady, N. (2013). When the half affects the whole: Priming identity for biracial individuals in social interactions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(3), 368–371. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.12.012

Garmezy, N. (1991). Resiliency and vulnerability to adverse developmental outcomes associated with poverty. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 34, 416–430. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764291034004003

Gaskins, P. (1999). *What are you? Voices of mixed-race young people*. New York: Holt & Co.

Goodman, A. H. (2000). Why genes don't count (for racial differences in health). *American Journal of Public Health*, 90, 1699–1702.

Harris, D. R., & Sim, J. J. (2002). Who is multiracial? Assessing the complexity of lived race. *American Sociological Review*, 67, 614–627. https://doi.org/10.2307/3088948

Haslam, N., Rothschild, L., & Ernst, D. (2000). Essentialist beliefs about social categories. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *39*, 113–127. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466600164363

Haslam, N., Rothschild, L., & Ernst, D. (2002). Are essentialist beliefs associated with prejudice? *The British Journal of Social Psychology*, *41*, 87–100. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466602165072

Hong, Y. Y., Zhan, S., Morris, M. W., & Benet-Martínez, V. (2016). Multicultural identity processes. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *8*, 49–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.09.020

House, J. S. & Kahn, R. L. (1985). Measures and concepts of social support. In S. Cohen, S. & S.L. Syme. (Eds.) *Social support and health* (pp. 85–108). New York: Academic Press

Ingram, P. D. (2000). Valuing a growing population: Biracial youth. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, *92*, 10.

Jayaratne, T. E., Ybarra, O., Sheldon, J. P., Brown, T. N., Feldbaum, M., Pfeffer, C. A., & Petty, E. M. (2006). White Americans' genetic lay theories of race differences and sexual orientation: Their relationship with prejudice toward Blacks, and gay men and lesbians. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *9*(1), 77–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430206059863

Johnson, R. (1992). Offspring of cross-race and cross-ethnic marriages. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 239–249). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Keller, J. (2005). In genes we trust: The biological component of psychological essentialism and its relationship to mechanisms of motivated social cognition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *88*, 686–702. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.4.686

Kich, G. K. (1992). Development process of asserting biracial bicultural identity. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 304–317). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lee, T. L., Wilton, L. S., & Kwan, V. S. (2014). Essentializing ethnicity: Identification constraint reduces diversity interest. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *55*, 194–200. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.07.001

Levy, S. R., Stroessner, S. J., & Dweck, C. S. (1998). Stereotype formation and endorsement: The role of implicit theories. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*, 1421–1436. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1421

Luhtanen, R., & Crocker, J. (1992). A collective self-esteem scale: Self-evaluation of one's social identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *18*(3), 302–318. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167292183006

Markus, H. R. (2008). Pride, prejudice, and ambivalence: Toward a unified theory of race and ethnicity. *American Psychologist*, *63*, 651–670. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.8.651

Masten, A. S., Best, K. M., & Garmezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology*, *2*, 425–444. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579400005812

McNamara, R., Tempenis, M., & Walton, B. (1999). *Crossing the line: Interracial couples in the South*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Miller, M. L., Moen, P., & Dempster-McClain, D. (1991). Motherhood, multiple roles, and maternal well-being: Women of the 1950s. *Gender & Society*, *5*, 565–582. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124391005004008

Molinsky, A. (2007). Cross-cultural code-switching: The psychological challenges of adapting behavior in foreign cultural interactions. *Academy of Management Review*, *32*, 622–640. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.24351878

Morton, T. A., Hornsey, M. J., & Postmes, T. (2009). Shifting ground: The variable use of essentialism in contexts of inclusion and exclusion. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *48*, 35–59. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466607X270287

Nakashima, C. L. (1992). An invisible monster: The creation and denial of mixed-race people in America. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *The multiracial experience: Racial borders as the new frontier* (pp. 162–180). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nakashima, C. L. (1996). Voices from the movement: Approaches to multiraciality. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *The multiracial experience: Racial borders as the new frontier* (pp. 79–97). Newbury Park, CA: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483327433.n6

Nicolas, G., Skinner, A. L., & Dickter, C. L. (2018). Other than the sum: Hispanic and Middle Eastern categorizations of Black–White mixed-race faces. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1948550618769591

Oyserman, D., & Swim, J. K. (2001). Stigma: An insider's view. *Journal of Social Issues*, *57*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00198

Parker, K., Horowitz, J. M., Morin, R., & Lopez, M. H. (June 11, 2015). Multiracial in America: Proud, diverse, and growing in numbers. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/multiracial-in-america/.

Pauker, K., & Ambady, N. (2009). Multiracial faces: How categorization affects memory at the boundaries of race. *The Journal of Social Issues*, *65*(1), 69–86. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.15404560.2008.01588.x

Pauker, K., Meyers, C. K., Sanchez, D. T., Gaither, S. E., & Young, D. M. (2018). Multiracial malleability: Identity, categorization, and shifting racial attitudes. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *12*, e12392. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12392

Quillian, L., & Redd, R. (2009). The friendship networks of multiracial adolescents. *Social Science Research*, *38*(2), 279–295. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2008.09.002

Rattan, A., & Ambady, N. (2013). Diversity ideologies and intergroup relations: An examination of colorblindness and multiculturalism. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 21, 12–21.

Renn, K. A. (2000). Patterns of situational identity among biracial and multiracial college students. *The Review of Higher Education*, 23, 399–420. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2000.0019

Risch, N., Burchard, E., Ziv, E., & Tang, H. (2002). Categorization of humans in biomedical research: Genes, race and disease. *Genome Biology*, 3. comment2007–comment2001

Rockquemore, K. A., & Brunsma, D. L. (2002). *Beyond Black: Biracial identity in America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Root, M. P. P. (1990). Resolving "other" status: Identity development of biracial individuals. *Women and Therapy*, 9, 185–205. https://doi.org/10.1300/J015v09n01_11

Root, M. P. P. (2001). *Love's revolution*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Rothbart, M., & Taylor, M. (1992). Category labels and social reality: Do we view social categories as natural kinds? In G. R. Semin, & K. Fiedler (Eds.), *Language and social cognition* (pp. 11–36). London, United Kingdom: Sage.

Sachs-Ericsson, N., & Ciarlo, J. A. (2000). Gender, social roles, and mental health: An epidemiological perspective. *Sex Roles: Special Issue*, 43, 605–628. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007148407005

Sanchez, D. T., Shih, M., & Garcia, J. (2009). Juggling multiple racial identities: Malleable racial identification and psychological well-being. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 15, 243–254. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014373

Sanchez, D. T., Shih, M., & Wilton, L. S. (2014). Multicultural and multiracial: Integrating theory and research. In V. Benet-Martínez, C. Y. Chiu, & Y. Y. Hong (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural identity: Basic and applied perspectives* (pp. 139–159). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Schmader, T. (2002). Gender identification moderates stereotype threat effects on women's math performance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38(2), 194–201. https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.2001.1500

Shih, M., Bonam, C., Sanchez, D., & Peck, C. (2007). The social construction of race: Biracial identity and susceptibility to stereotypes. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 13, 125–133. https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.13.2.125

Shih, M., Pittinsky, T. L., & Ambady, N. (1999). Stereotype susceptibility: Identity salience and shifts in quantitative performance. *Psychological Science*, 10, 80–83. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00111

Shih, M., & Sanchez, D. T. (2005). Perspectives and research on the positive and negative implications of having multiple racial identities. *Psychological Bulletin*, 131(4), 569–591. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.131.4.569

Smedley, A., & Smedley, B. D. (2005). Race as biology is fiction, racism as a social problem is real: Anthropological and historical perspectives on the social construction of race. *American Psychologist*, 60(1), 16–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.1.16

Song, M., & Aspinall, P. (2012). Is racial mismatch a problem for young 'mixed race' people in Britain? The findings of qualitative research. *Ethnicities*, 12(6), 730–753. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796811434912

Spickard, P. R. (1992). The illogic of American racial categories. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 12–23). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52, 613–629. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.6.613

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 797–811. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.5.797

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel, & W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Thoits, P. A. (1983). Multiple identities and well-being: A reformulation and test of the social isolation hypothesis. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 174–187. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095103

Townsend, S. S., Markus, H. R., & Bergsieker, H. B. (2009). My choice, your categories: The denial of multiracial identities. *Journal of Social Issues*, 65(1), 185–204. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.01594.x

Verkuyten, M. (2003). Discourses about ethnic group (de-)essentialism: Oppressive and progressive aspects. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 371–391. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466603322438215

Villegas-Gold, R., & Tran, A. G. (2018). Socialization and well-being in multiracial individuals: A moderated mediation model of racial ambiguity and identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 65(4), 413–422. https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000277

Weisman, J. R. (1996). An "other way" of life: The empowerment of alterity in the interracial individual. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *The multiracial experience: Racial Borders as the new frontier* (pp. 152–167). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483327433.n10

Williams, M. J., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2008). Biological conceptions of race and the motivation to cross racial boundaries. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *94*(6), 1033–1047. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.6.1033

Wilton, L. S., Apfelbaum, E. P., & Good, J. J. (2018). Valuing differences and reinforcing them: Multiculturalism increases race essentialism. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618780728

Wilton, L. S., Sanchez, D. T., & Garcia, J. A. (2013). The stigma of privilege: Racial identity and stigma consciousness among biracial individuals. *Race and Social Problems*, *5*, 41–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-012-9083-5

Yudell, M., Roberts, D., DeSalle, R., & Tishkoff, S. (2016). Taking race out of human genetics. *Science, 351*(6273), 564–565. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aac4951

Zack, N. (Ed.) (1995). *American mixed race: The culture of microdiversity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Margaret Shih received her Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Harvard University. She is Associate Vice Chancellor, BruinX in the UCLA Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Professor in Management at UCLA Anderson School of Management.

Leigh S. Wilton is an assistant professor of psychology at Skidmore College. She received her PhD from Rutgers University and her BA from Princeton University. Her research interests and recent publications explore diversity, intergroup relations, and multiracial identity.

Serena Does received her Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Leiden University and is currently Senior Researcher in the Management and Organizations area at UCLA Anderson School of Management. Much of her work highlights the ways in which social identities (e.g., racial and gender identities) and contextual cues (e.g., election outcomes and sexual harassment claims) shape people's perceptions of inequality, as well as their motivation to maintain or challenge inequality.

Brianna M. Goodale received her PhD in social psychology at UCLA. She studies how stereotypes about class influence students' sense of belonging and academic performance. In a separate but related line of work, she also focuses on how confronting behavior can increase gender parity in fields traditionally dominated by men.

Diana T. Sanchez is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at Rutgers University. She received her PhD in social psychology and women's studies in 2005 from the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor). Her research program consists of two lines. One examines racial identity and minority status, and the other examines gender roles and identity in close relationships.