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# 'I feel like I don't belong': Examining the Social and Cultural Experiences of Bicultural and Biracial College Students

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Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/cara\\_maffini/20/](https://works.bepress.com/cara_maffini/20/)



## Literature Review

- In higher education across the U.S., there is a growing presence in racial/ethnic minority and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant students (NCES, 2015; NCES 2012)
- Bicultural individuals navigate between culture-of-origin and mainstream U.S. culture (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993)
- Growing number of students that identify as more than one race experience additional challenges of discrimination and micro-aggressions (NCES, 2015; Santos, Ortiz, Morales, & Rosales, 2007)
- Developmental nature of college – academic, social, identity (Conley, Kirsch, Dickson, & Bryant, 2014)

### Experiences of Bicultural & Biracial College Students

- Perceived racial discrimination associated with increased suicidal ideation, anxiety, and depression (Hwang & Goto, 2009; McKenzie, 2009)
- Lack of support and community engagement affect sense of belongingness, academic achievement, and psychological well-being (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2011)
- Negotiating identity between groups to avoid social oppression (Ellis & Chen, 2013)

### Cultural Case Conceptualization Model

- We imposed a cultural lens on a CBT framework with a relational emphasis to guide our understanding of this populations' experiences.

## Cultural Case Conceptualization Model

### Cognitions

Beliefs  
Values  
Attitudes  
Stereotypes

### Relationships

Engagement in communities  
Relationships with people from each culture  
Cultural expectations of relationships

### Emotions

Cultural expectations of expression  
Language – salience and vocabulary of emotions  
Feelings about culture

### Behaviors

Traditions  
Rituals  
Gender roles  
Social Expectations

## Hypotheses

1. Greater levels of ethnic and American identity (thoughts and behaviors), bicultural social connectedness, and positive feelings about both cultures would be positively and significantly related to increased self-esteem and decreased psychological distress.
2. Negative feelings about both cultures, and lower levels of culturally-oriented thoughts, behaviors, and relationships would be associated with greater psychological distress and lower self-esteem.

## Method

### Participants

- Students enrolled in higher education were eligible to participate
- $N = 147$ , 76.9% female, age range 18-38 ( $M = 21.13$ ;  $SD = 3.29$ )
- Biracial (6.1%); Bicultural/monoracial (93.9%) including Asian American (47.8%), Latino/Hispanic (44.2%), Black/African American (3.6%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (2.9%), Native American (.7%), and those who identified as other (3.6%)

### Variables & Measures

- Cultural cognitions and behaviors (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised [MEIM-R]; Phinney & Ong, 2007; American Identity Measure [AIM]; Phinney & Ong, 2007)
- Feelings about culture (Feelings About Culture Scales [FACS]; Maffini & Wong, 2014)
- Cultural relationships (Bicultural Self-Efficacy Scale [BSES] – Social Groundedness subscale; David, Okazaki, & Saw, 2009)
- Psychological well-being (Rosenberg Self-Esteem; Rosenberg, 1965; Brief Symptom Inventory; Derogatis, 2000)

## Results

### Increased Psychological Distress

- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Bi/multiracial students
- Greater levels of negative feelings toward ethnic culture

### Self-Esteem

- Lower self-esteem
  - Bi/multiracial students
  - Younger students
  - Negative feelings toward ethnic culture
- Higher self-esteem
  - Greater ethnic identity (thoughts and behaviors)
  - Bicultural social connectedness
  - Positive feelings toward ethnic culture
  - American identity (thoughts and behaviors) marginally related

Hierarchical Regression Model Examining the Influence of Cultural Factors on Self-Esteem

	B	SE	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.08	.08**
Age	.12	.05	.20*		
Bi/multiracial	-.12	.05	-.22*		
Step 2				.11	.03 <sup>†</sup>
BSES-Social	.10	.05	.16 <sup>†</sup>		
Step 3				.12	.02
MEIM-R	.07	.05	.11		
AIM	.03	.05	.06		
Step 4				.19	.07*
FACS-EC(P)	.06	.09	.09		
FACS-EC(N)	-.20	.07	-.33**		
FACS-MAC(P)	-.07	.10	-.11		
FACS-MAC(N)	.05	.08	.08		

## Discussion

- Biracial respondents reported lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress than their monoracial counterparts.
  - Biracial individuals may feel more marginalized, and less accepted by members of either cultural group
  - Previous research indicates complexities and variations with regard to self-esteem among this population indicating the need for more research on this heterogeneous group (Bracey, Bámaca, & Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Lusk, Taylor, Nanney, & Austin, 2010)
- Hierarchical regression conveys the different ways cultural thoughts, behaviors, feelings, and social relationships impact self-esteem
- For bicultural and biracial individuals, having a strong connection to their heritage culture instead of mainstream American culture is important to identity development and impacts psychological well-being

### Future Research

- Better understanding of psychosocial experiences (feeling marginalized/disconnected)
- Disaggregation the social connectedness individuals experience in relation to each culture
- Understand the varying influences each cultural dimension has on one's psychological well-being

### Counseling Implications

- When conceptualizing clients, factor in ways culture impacts cognitions, behaviors, emotions, and interpersonal interactions
- Consider ways that cultural thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships relate to psychological well-being
  - What does each culture expect of you?
  - In what language do you think? dream?
  - How do you feel about each culture? What does each culture say about how you should show emotions? What feelings do you experience most in each culture/language?
  - What values or beliefs do you like about each culture? What values or beliefs are you questioning? What values or beliefs do you dislike or want to change?
  - When you think about your identity, what parts of each culture do you most like? What parts of each culture do you hate?
- Help client explore possible conflicts in cultural schema for each culture with which they identify
- Facilitate exploration of how cultural schema may be similar
- Encourage client to develop strategies to frame-switch effectively or reconcile ways to integrate both cultures into their identity