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Stop pathologizing us because we're 'mixed': What research really shows about multiracial youths' adjustment

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Stop pathologizing us because we're 'mixed': What research really shows about multiracial youths' identity, belonging and well-being

Multiracial youth are the largest or most rapidly growing demographic of young people in many countries, particularly in countries serving as hubs of immigration such as the USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Adekoya, 2021; Hou et al., 2023; Parker et al., 2015). Holding multiple or mixed racial backgrounds, multiracial youth also simultaneously experience multiple cultural and ethnic identities that may be associated with their racial backgrounds.¹ Although often considered heralds of an integrated society that values diversity and multiculturalism, past research on multiracial youth has shown that many struggle during development and as adults, even in societies that are culturally diverse (Fryer Jr. et al., 2012; Morley & Street, 2014). For example, multiracial youth report that they face heightened risks of mental health problems over the course of their lives, while also confronting marginalization, cultural homelessness and challenges with others rejecting their mixed-race identities (Albuja et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2019; Vivero & Jenkins, 1999; Whaley & Francis, 2006).

However, these findings are not always consistent (Gaither, 2015; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Some research demonstrates that compared to youth of a single racial background, multiracial youth experience similar levels of positive affect and well-being (Pearce-Morris & King, 2012; Soliz et al., 2017). Many multiracial youths also report feeling proud of their mixed heritage, celebrating the unique backgrounds that shapes their self-identity (Soliz et al., 2017). Yet, the stigmatization of multiracial people persists in modern society, with pathologizing stereotypes about multiracial youth. That is, they are often portrayed in media and society as struggling with identity conflict, mental health problems, and loss of sense of belonging as they experience societal rejection of their racial identities (Gaither et al., 2020; Johnston-Guerrero & Combs, 2023).

Despite such pathologizing, it is clear from social science literature that while some multiracial youth may indeed struggle, many yet flourish. Gaining a balanced and fulsome understanding of the existing literature on both strengths and challenges that multiracial youth navigate as they develop is crucial to better conceptualize how to support their resilience and successful psychological adjustment. This balanced perspective is certainly important in societies worldwide that increasingly rely on immigration to bolster population growth—these societies are likely to see increasing numbers, perhaps even double or more, of multiracial youth forming their population in the coming years (Parker et al., 2015).

In this systematic review, we aimed to synthesize existing research evidence on multiracial youths' narratives and experiences in diverse societies with the goal of providing this comprehensive and balanced understanding of multiracial youths' identity, belonging, and well-being. As previous syntheses of multiracial adolescent development (e.g., Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Atkin & Yoo, 2019) have not been systematic in nature, a comprehensive review was much needed that could encompass diverse multiracial youths' experiences from diverse societies. Further, even the most recent reviews on multiracial youth have not considered multi-layered factors influencing their experience and development (as suggested in Csizmadia, 2011), often omitting intimate to distant correlates of multiracial youths' development, from family

¹ We note here that while race, ethnicity, and culture are distinct from one another, they are often conjoined constructs. For example, a Moroccan-Japanese mixed-race youth living in the United States of America would be considered multiracial and may have associated Moroccan and Japanese ethnic and cultural identities, as well as an American cultural identity.

relationships to neighbourhood characteristics. The present work aimed to provide an updated and comprehensive systematic literature synthesis that could be used for future policy, practice, and research planning to appropriately and fairly assess the present state of development among multiracial youth.

We focused on three interrelated yet independently critical aspects of multiracial youths' positive development: identity development, sense of belonging, and well-being. Rather than using census-like self-categorization into racial categories (i.e., as done in national censuses), our review focused on multiracial youths' own narratives or own experiences with understanding and adjusting to their identity. We were particularly interested in identity integration, the process by which an individual can harmoniously incorporate diverse aspects of their identities—in this case, racial, ethnic, or cultural identities (Berry & Hou 2017; Phinney, 1996). The ability to cohesively marry one's multiple identities has been shown to be key for ethnoracial minority youths' adjustment (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005), including for multiracial youth. In psychology research focused on multiracial young adults, those capable of successfully integrating their multiple racial, ethnic, and cultural identities have tended to report higher levels of well-being and fewer mental health risks (e.g., Albuja et al., 2019; Coleman & Carter, 2007; Yampolsky et al., 2013). Understanding how multiracial youth negotiate, navigate, and explore their racial identities, and the challenges and obstacles they may face as they learn to integrate their identities, were considered especially important for understanding their positive psychological development.

Second, we examined multiracial youths' sense of belonging, including experiences of peer connectedness, discrimination, and marginalization. Sense of belonging is a critical predictor of adjustment among all youth, including multiracial youth. In recent statistics from Canada, where some cities saw a 35% increase of the multiracial population from 2016 to 2021 (City of Toronto, 2022), one in three youth reported a lack of belonging, feeling lonely and socially isolated from peers (Lin, 2023). Among minoritized youth, including multiracial minoritized youth, this rate has likely become even higher, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when minoritized youth were disproportionately more affected by isolation (Maffly-Kipp et al., 2021; Gibson et al., 2021). Increasing social connectedness and sense of belonging can help youth improve their mental health and overall positive development as they enter adulthood (Velotti et al., 2021; Franssen et al., 2020). However, it has been suggested that multiracial youth may not consistently experience this protective sense of belonging due to marginalization and rejection from some or all racial groups to which they belong (Jackson et al., 2012; Franco et al., 2021). Understanding whether multiracial youth successfully find a sense of belonging in their surroundings is thus crucial for identifying how to best support their positive development.

The third and final aspect of multiracial youths' experience we examined was their well-being. Psychological and emotional well-being is a key predictor of later overall adjustment among youth. Children reporting greater well-being in early adolescence report better physical and mental health, better grades, and more satisfying and higher quality relationships with others as they get older, even into adulthood (Hoyt et al., 2012; Kansky et al., 2016; Suldo et al., 2011; 2014). Accordingly, youth in multicultural societies have identified that their psychological well-being should be one of the top priorities for governments to address in the years to come (Youth Secretariat, 2020). But how much do multiracial youth struggle with or flourish in terms of their well-being? A review of the literature on how multiracial youth characterize and experience well-being, with distinction between mental health and other types of well-being (e.g., positive

self-concept, social and emotional competence) would provide important insights into how to support their positive outcomes over time, even in their transition into adulthood.

Additionally, we considered theoretical models on multiracial youths' development by Csizmadia (2011) and others in informing our selection of correlates of identity, belonging, and well-being under examination in this review. Youth development does not occur in isolation—rather, there are factors beyond the individual that can foster or impede one's positive outcomes (consider Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model). Understanding the evolving narratives of multiracial youths thus requires insights into various local and distal influences, in intimate familial and peer settings as well as the social and community setting more broadly. While past research has identified the importance of parent racial-ethnic socialization for multiracial youths' identity development (see Atkin & Yoo, 2019), community influences, including peer relationship quality and family relationship quality are also important to consider (see theoretical models by Csizmadia, 2011 and Gonzalez-Backen, 2013). Additionally, societal influences such as regional perceptions of and biases about multiracial individuals (Gonzalez-Backen, 2013; Pauker et al., 2018; Skinner et al., 2020) are factors that may facilitate or hinder well-being and positive identity conceptualizations among multiracial youth. Consequently, our research synthesis also reviews the potential familial, peer, and societal factors that multiracial youth identify as best fostering their identity, belonging, and well-being across diverse contexts.

Importantly, we emphasize multiracial youths' voice in this synthesis. As many existing studies on familial and societal factors relating to multiracial child and youth development highlight parents' voices, multiracial youths' direct observations and experiences of their own development have been diminished in previous work. In line with Atkin and Yoo's (2019) perspective that multiracial youth may not always agree with their caregivers, and evidence that child self-reported experiences are more strongly linked than parent reports to children's developmental outcomes (Miller, 2017), this synthesis emphasized child and youth self-reported experience, and if not available, parents' witnessed or second-hand reporting of youths' verbalizations of their experiences.

Methods

Transparency and Openness

We report the methods of this systematic search according to PRISMA protocol preparation and reporting guidelines. The review was preregistered in PROSPERO [link masked for review; masked and attached to the supplementary materials] prior to beginning database searches. All research materials are available in the supplementary materials.

Literature Search

Peer-reviewed journal articles and theses or dissertations published up to May 1, 2024 were identified through systematic searches by the first and fourth author in PsycINFO (via EBSCO), MEDLINE (via Ovid), CINAHL (via EBSCO), Social Services Abstracts (via Proquest), Humanities & Social Sciences Abstracts (via EBSCO), Sociological Abstracts (via Proquest), Anthropology Plus (via EBSCO), and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Abstracts and Index (via Proquest), using database-specific subject headings where appropriate and keywords in natural language.

The search strategy was designed collaboratively with the fourth author, a psychology specialty librarian. A PRESS peer-review of the search strategy was conducted by a second librarian at a tertiary institution at which none of the authors were affiliated. Terms for the multiracial background concept included, for example, mixed-culture, mixed race, multiethnic, biracial, triracial, and other terms. Youth age range concept terms included, for example, youth,

child, adolescent, teen or teenager, kid, preadolescent, toddler, schoolchildren, and other terms. Similarly, terms related to identity (e.g., identity, self, self-concept, etc.), belonging (e.g., connectedness, belonging, alienation, social, alone or loneliness, etc.), and well-being (e.g., wellbeing, welfare, mental health, anxiety, life satisfaction, happiness, flourishing, etc.) were cast widely. Search terms and concepts were combined using Boolean logic (e.g., mother OR maternal) or proximity searching (e.g., mental N3 health) and truncation (e.g., multi-ethnic*) was used. A full listing of the search strategy and all terms and subject headings used in each database is depicted in Appendix A.

Inclusion criteria for each study were: youth participants up to 24 years of age (in line with United Nations definitions; see <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>), multiracial or biracial sample separately examined from a larger sample (if applicable), journal articles or dissertations, and clear measure of identity, belonging, or well-being based on the operationalization for this project. Studies on parent reports of multiracial or biracial children's experiences with identity, belonging, or well-being were included. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were included. No search filters were used, however only articles published in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Ukrainian, and Croatian were included based on fluency of the authors and coders.

Exclusion criteria were: participants being 25 years of age or older, multiracial or biracial sample not examined independently or as subgroup of the overall sample, participants do not include or are not multiracial youth, record is book chapter, book review, conference abstract, meta-analysis, or review, no measure of identity, belonging or well-being based on our operationalization, historical analyses of demographic data (i.e., population statistics using historical census data), and studies testing or examining outcomes of therapy or interventions.

Title, Abstract, and Full-Text Screening

We used Covidence to manage records, for de-duplication, and to extract data for analysis. The second and third authors individually screened each title and abstract located in the database searches. Records that did not meet criteria were excluded. Conflicts were discussed and resolved among the first three authors at this stage. Full texts were obtained for all articles that were deemed eligible during the title and abstract screening phase. Of those studies included at abstract screening stage, 29 studies were excluded from the full review as they were not available as full-texts online or through interlibrary loans (see Figure 1). All full texts that were located were screened by the second and third authors for further inclusion. Full texts that did not meet criteria were excluded and conflicts were discussed and resolved among the first three authors.

Data Extraction & Quality Assessments

After locating full texts, three team members (second author and two additional coders) conducted data extraction by splitting up the identified studies amongst themselves. Once data extraction was completed, it was transferred to a second coder to confirm accuracy and correct for inconsistencies. Data that was extracted included: participant information (e.g., total sample size and subsamples, child age and % of girls represented, ethnic origins, etc.), type of study, measure information (for identity, belonging, or well-being as well as any measured familial, peer, or societal correlates), and any findings reported on multiracial youths' identity, belonging, or well-being experiences (including comparisons to monoracial minoritized youth) as well as links between these experiences and familial, peer, or societal correlates (if measured). Disagreements were discussed and resolved among all three team members and the first author.

Quality assessments were conducted using the Joanna Briggs Critical Appraisal Tool for both cross-sectional studies and for qualitative studies (Aromataris et al., 2015). The same three team members conducted quality assessments by dividing the studies amongst them. Once quality assessment was completed by one coder, it was similarly transferred to a second coder who confirmed accuracy and corrected for inconsistencies. Studies were assessed on seven criteria for quantitative studies and ten criteria for qualitative studies, with each criterion coded as “yes”, “no” or “N/A”. Example criteria for quantitative studies included, “Were the criteria for inclusion in the sample clearly defined?”, and “Was the exposure (independent variable) measured in a valid and reliable way?” Example criteria for qualitative studies included, “Is the study methodology appropriate for addressing the research question?”, and “Does the researcher acknowledge that their beliefs/values, etc. influence the study?” For each study a total quality assessment score was provided by summing the coding for each question (yes = 1, no = 0). Disagreements were discussed and resolved among all three coders and the first author.

Analytic Plan: Meta-synthesis

In synthesizing included studies, we integrated qualitative and quantitative evidence under the same overarching themes using a holistic narrative approach (Noyes et al., 2019). For qualitative studies, we synthesized themes identified by study authors and examined their consistency across studies, rather than synthesizing each participant’s quoted excerpts. As such, our qualitative synthesis can be considered a meta-thematic analysis that identifies similar or different themes drawn across studies, providing a holistic perspective on recurrence or divergence of themes across sets of studies rather than sets of participants. We approached quantitative syntheses similarly with the aim to provide a comprehensive meta-synthesis of prior findings across qualitative and quantitative types of studies. As we disentangled the synthesis into themed sections of identity, belonging, and well-being, some studies appear more than once across the three sections—for example, if a study assessed both identity diffusion and anxiety, it appears once in both the identity and well-being sections in our results below.

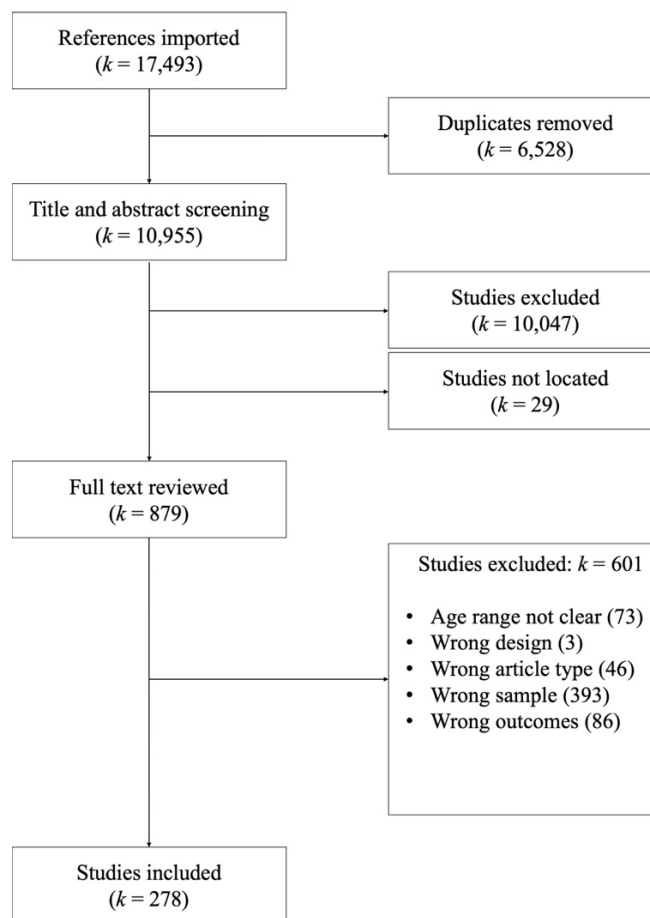


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram.

Results

Among a total of 17,493 records located using our search strategy, we identified a total of $k = 278$ studies that were deemed appropriate for inclusion after abstract screening ($k = 10,955$) and full text-review ($k = 879$; see Figure 1 for PRISMA diagram), representing a total of 154,302 multiracial youths. Study characteristics for the final set of 278 studies are presented in Appendix B. Of included studies, 91 qualitative studies represented 1393 youth of multiracial backgrounds, and 165 quantitative and 20 mixed-method studies represented 152,909 youth of multiracial backgrounds. Youths' ages varied in range across studies, 4 to 24 years. A handful of the included studies (54 of 276) focused only on youth at the transition to adulthood, i.e., college and university attending youth, while the remainder were focused on childhood and early to middle adolescence. Overall interrater agreement on the title, abstract, and full-text screening phases were excellent. At the title and abstract screening phase, inter-rater reliability was $\kappa = .76$, with 96.5% agreement, and at the full-text screening phase, inter-rater reliability was $\kappa = .76$, with 96.4% agreement.

Quality Assessments

Appendix C presents quality assessments decomposed into quantitative and qualitative studies. Among quantitative studies, 96.9% of studies clearly defined their criteria for sample inclusion; 97.9% of studies described in detail the study subjects and the setting; 75.8% of

studies used a validated measure to capture acculturation gap; 85.4% of studies identified confounding factors; 82.4% of studies stated strategies to deal with confounding factors; and 73.0% of studies used a validated method to measure the outcome variables of our interest within the current review. Finally, all studies were deemed to have utilized appropriate statistical analysis that corresponded well with their stated research questions. The mean quality assessment score across all included quantitative studies was generally good, with a score of 5.51/7.00.

Among qualitative studies, all included studies demonstrated theory and method congruence; utilized appropriate methods relevant to their study objectives; demonstrated congruity between the method and data collection process; showed consistent analyses based on their proposed method; and presented conclusions based on the true data collected in their study. However, 99.1% interpreted their findings consistently with their proposed method; 49.5% of studies reported on the role of the researcher's identity and values on the research; 46.7% of studies acknowledged the researcher's influence over the study and vice versa; 95.0% of studies represented participants using direct quotes from participants; and 41.0% of studies explicitly stated their ethical approval. Despite this, overall, the mean quality assessment score across included qualitative studies was acceptable, with a score of 8.31/10.00.

Meta-Synthesis by Theme

For concision, study characteristics are not discussed further in the results section, and can be examined using the study characteristics table in Appendix B. In the next sections, we present our meta-synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative findings based on thematic clustering of identity, sense of belonging, and well-being experiences of multiracial youth. Within each section, we provide cohesive quantitative and qualitative evidence of familial, peer, and societal correlates for these identified experiences.

Multiracial youths' identity development

Quantitative Findings

For multiracial youths' identity outcomes, quantitative findings generally portray a mixed picture. Across four cross-sectional studies of undifferentiated multiracial youth backgrounds, diverse samples of multiracial youth consistently reported lower ethnic identification when compared to monoracial majority or minority groups (Austin & Palmer, 2021; Booth et al., 2022; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Dai, 2021; Jones, 2000; Kawakami-Schwaber, 2003; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Spencer et al., 2000; Subica, 2011). Conversely, in some studies, multiracial youth as a whole reported stronger identity strength (compared to monoracial majority and minority youth; Zapolski et al., 2017), identity affirmation (compared to monoracial Black youth; Blazek, 2020), and racial identity pride (compared to monoracial White and Black peers; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017). However, in several studies, strength of identification was similar across monoracial and multiracial youth (James et al., 2000; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Moon et al., 2023; Subica, 2011; Tynes et al., 2008), while in one study multiracial youths' strength of identification fell between monoracial majority and minority youth (in New Zealand; Peterson, 2018). In one subgroup comparison analysis (Snyder, 2006), multiracial American youth as a whole reported weaker ethnic-racial identification than White, Latino and Asian Pacific American youth, but stronger identification than African American youth. In one study comparing multiracial boys and girls, multiracial boys and older youth were more likely to think and feel positively about their ethnic-racial identity compared to White youth and multiracial girls (Ho, 2009).

Studies examining identity exploration similarly highlighted a range of findings. Multiracial adolescents often reported higher levels of identity exploration compared to White youth, but lower levels of commitment compared to monoracial minority youth (Dai, 2021; Jensen et al., 2023; Mills & Murray, 2017; Moon et al., 2023). In two studies, the role of personal identity exploration in identity development was examined. In one, Black-White youths' identity exploration was linked to their successful identity achievement (Harrison, 1997). In the second, personal identity resolution and affirmation were associated with higher identity acceptance among biracial Latino-White and Asian-White emerging adults (Brittian et al., 2013).

Longitudinal studies cast a light on the developmental trajectories of multiracial youths' identity exploration and negotiation. Generally, older adolescents appear to display more positive and secure racial identity attitudes (Fatimilehin, 1999; Ho, 2009). Accordingly, among Black-American Indian youth, identity transitioned from more fluid to more fixed over a two-year period (Munoz-Miller, 2009), while mixed-race youth in the UK expressed uncertainty about their ethnic identity over time (Booth et al., 2022), suggesting fluid and evolving identity exploration across multiracial youths' development. Multiracial youth also appear to value their racial identities more strongly than some monoracial youth. Multiracial Black-White youth in the USA were more likely to report a strong emphasis on race and racial pride, compared to White adolescents (Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017). Over time, diverse groups of multiracial youth have also been found to report an increase in the importance of their racial identity, becoming more prominent and meaningful across development (Rogers et al., 2021b; Ho, 2009).

Identity development among multiracial youth also varied within samples when using data-driven, person-centered analyses to create profiles and clusters. Biracial children with mixed Arab-European heritage in Israel reported often experiencing marginalization, with some identifying more strongly with either their Arab or European backgrounds, and others developing an integrated identity (Abu-Rayya, 2006a). Youth of Black-White background in the USA showed similar patterns, with some endorsing a strong biracial identity but moderate Black identity, others endorsing Black identity strongly while distancing from a biracial identity, some embracing both Black and biracial identities equally, and others showing little connection to either identity, indicating uncertainty (Clinton, 2006). In de Anda and Riddel (1991), youth of other multiracial backgrounds, such as Asian-White, Black-White, and Latino-White youth, generally experienced low levels of conflict between their White and minority ethnic-racial identities.

Some studies have investigated whether multiracial youths' self-identified racial category is related to their identity development. While Grove (1991) found no such association, Harrison (1997) reported that multiracial Black-White youth self-categorizing as Black had higher levels of ethnic-racial identification compared to youth who self-categorized as biracial or White. In another study, biracial Black-White individuals categorizing themselves as White experienced more inner conflict (de Anda & Riddel, 1991), suggesting that self-categorization as part of one's minoritized racial background may be more adaptive for positive identity development. However, this finding appears to be limited, at least to Black-White multiracial youth, with Marsiglia and colleagues (2004) reporting an opposite trend—that multiracial adolescents with Mexican heritage who self-categorized as being mixed tended to feel less connected to their Mexican background.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative studies reporting on multiracial youth's identity negotiation painted a similar mixed picture as quantitative studies. In several societies, including racially homogeneous

locations such as South Korea, China, and Japan, multiracial youths' identity narratives revealed limited exploration of their identities, tension, ambivalence, and an 'in-betweenness' regarding their mixed identities (Greer, 2012; Lee, 2017a; Lee, 2020; Oikawa & Yoshida, 2007; Reichmuth, 2023; Su et al., 2022; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995). Discrimination may play a role in these experiences—among African-Chinese adolescents in China, stares and scrutiny from strangers contributed to a distorted self-image and identity crisis, fostering a divided sense of self, leading to feelings of being caught between two worlds (Su et al., 2022). A lack of opportunities to connect with their ethnic-racial heritage may also play a role—multiracial youth have reported suffering and disappointment in not being able to learn the language of their minoritized background (Nystad et al., 2017) or not being able to trace their specific heritage (Wagner et al., 2020).

Among diverse multiracial youth in the USA, many similarly report feeling stuck “in-between” (Lehn, 2010), preferring to identify with the majority to avoid societal biases (Whitlow, 2007), or facing pressure to adopt a monoracial identity to align with one parent (Winn & Priest, 1993). Conversely, some youth resist conforming to a single race (Olsen, 2012). According to many youth, a tension around identity begins in the early to middle adolescence (Crane 2008; Gillem et al., 2001; Halldórsdóttir Gudjonsson, 2018; Hsieh, 2016; Jourdan, 2006; Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2007; King, 2011; Kouri, 1995; Rogers et al., 2021a; Simons, 2016; Stanley & Robbins, 2011; Tefera, 2004), and as an ongoing, complex negotiation process that can even extend into emerging adulthood (Banks, 2010; Stanley & Robbins, 2011). Some multiracial youth expressed frustration and even shame over the disconnect between their self-perception as a multiracial person and society's tendency to categorize them as representing a single race or discriminate them for being multiracial (Basu, 2010; Park, 2012; Rysst, 2022).

Despite these reports of negative identity development, some studies have shown that multiracial adolescents also feel positively about their identity. For many, their multiracial identity poses little to no challenges, as they interpret and negotiate their identities without significant conflict (Emery, 2018; Gillen-O'Neel et al., 2015; Johnson-Connor, 2004; Kerwin, 1991; Nero, 2001; Wagner Hoa, 2010; Whitlow, 2007). While many identity-related challenges existed over the course of development, a sense of appreciation for their multiracial identity and pride in their unique identity appeared to emerge across childhood into young adulthood—even among children as young as 4 to 9 years of age (Anderson, 1997; Banks, 2010; Benjamin, 2007; Black, 2016; Gillen-O'Neel et al., 2015; Gudjonsson, 2013; Kane-Williamson, 2010; Kunstman, 2017; Lambe Sarinana, 2014; Lopez, 2001; Martinez, 2001; Mauricio-Pizaña, 2018; Nystad et al., 2017; Ross, 1995; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995; Wagner Hoa, 2010 ; Winn & Priest, 1993). Some youth even viewed their mixed identity as a strength that allows them to fluidly move between—and fit into—different cultural contexts (among Chinese-Caucasian youth in the USA; Chee, 2016), particularly among diverse multiracial youth from the United Kingdom (Ali, 2000; Choudhry, 2006; Whittingham, 2014). Among mixed Black multiracial youth in the United Kingdom, actively attempting to integrate their identities even allowed for strength in resisting others' stereotypes about their Black heritage (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019). Despite experiencing inner conflict about their multiracial identities, many reported being able to successfully resolve these conflicts and come to embrace an integrated, cohesive multiracial identity (Ang & Lee, 2022; Clarke, 2014; Gillem et al., 2001; Greer, 2012; Hubbard, 2012; Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2007; Park, 2013; Kiyama, 2019; Oikawa & Yoshida, 2007).

Correlates of multiracial youths' identity development and perceptions

Family factors. Parental involvement, family structure, and parent-child socialization practices were identified as playing a significant role in shaping multiracial youth's identities. Some participants reported that home was the initial place where they felt compelled to develop their ethnic identity (Choudry, 2006; Jones & Rogers, 2023; Laurenceau-Medina, 2014). Family events, like parents' divorce, influenced ethnic identification of some adolescents, as they often aligned with the identity of the parent they lived with post-divorce (Anderson, 1997; Booth et al., 2022). Likewise, living with both parents was linked to more proactive racial socialization and stronger ethnic identities for multiracial youth (Fatimilehin, 1999). Explicit parental communication about race also shaped youth's identity. Those who teach their children about their heritage tend to foster stronger connections to ethnic backgrounds and more integrated and positive identities, while avoidance of such conversations generally leads to a weaker tie to ones heritage and difficulty in identity development (Atkin et al., 2022; Bratter & Heard, 2009; Clarke, 2014; Elias et al., 2022; Emery, 2018; Fisher et al., 2019; Green et al., 2022; Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2020; Jourdan, 2006; Kane-Williamson, 2010; King, 2013; Simons, 2016; Stokes, 2022; Wagner Hoa, 2010).

Differences between mothers' and fathers' influences on identity development were also observed in some studies. For Black biracial youth, mothers' ethnic-racial socialization was especially influential in encouraging Black racial identification (Harrison, 1997), while paternal promotion of racial pride influenced biracial adolescents' strength of identification with their multiracial Black identity (Winchester et al., 2023). In a number of studies, fathers' involvement fostered youths' identification with their fathers' racial identity or with being multiracial, while maternal involvement fostered a more integrated, hybridized identity perception (Abu-Rayya, 2006c; Bratter & Heard, 2009; Oware, 2008). Notably, a number of studies also reported no effect of parental factors on ethnic identity development (González et al., 2006; Kvernmo & Heyerdahl, 1996; Oware, 2008), suggesting that perhaps factors that were not studied in these works may play a role (e.g., general family relationship quality; neighborhood racial composition). Beyond the direct role of parents, learning from older siblings or grandparents also influenced identity-related curiosity and identity development, but sometimes led to more challenges when grandparents did not comprehend biracial experiences (Chee, 2016; Simons, 2016).

Peer factors. Peers, including friends, have also been found to affect multiracial youths' identity development. Peers' acceptance appeared to be related to more identity exploration for some multiracial youth (Anderson, 1997), but not others (Fisher et al., 2019), while peer support appeared to be linked to identity affirmation (Gillem et al., 2001). Choudhry (2006) further found that multiracial adolescents often aligned their identity with the racial peer group that showed the most acceptance. Similarly, engagement with ethnically diverse peer groups was related to identifying as non-White among a diverse group of multiracial preteens (Herman, 2009). The level of discrimination or outcasting received from peers has been linked to a number of identity-related outcomes, such as resistance to identify with a certain group (particularly the target of discrimination; Jones & Rogers, 2022a), self-reflection about one's identity (Wagner Hoa, 2010), and hindered general identity formation (Bookheim, 2004; Joplin, 2013; Moore, 2006). However, two studies on the same dataset concluded the quality of peer relationships had no significant association with multiracial youths' identity development (Huang, 2012 & Huang et al., 2023).

Societal factors. Diversity in school and neighborhood contexts has been found to shape multiracial youths' identity development, fostering inclusion (Chee, 2016; Harris, 2015; Moore,

2006; Wagner Hoa, 2010), particularly with the dominant racial group represented in the surroundings (Harrison, 1997). Multiracial youth in diverse environments were found to be more likely to maintain multiracial identity, even if they felt their racial identity was less fluid (i.e., less likely to shift depending on situational factors; Dadlani, 2012). However, Felkey (2023) found that multiracial youth engaged in more identity exploration in schools with lower levels of racial-ethnic diversity. Multiracial youth in social environments that support diversity and multiracial identity report stronger and more positive racial identities (Diggs, 2019; Fernandes, 2005; Hentz, 2019; John, 2012; Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2020; Smith & Stones, 1999), while those in oppressive environments may experience more fluid identities that shift with the situation (at least among Black-non-American Indian youth and White-Latinx youth; Lechuga, 2010; Munoz-Miller, 2009). Other societally determined factors such as socioeconomic status and media-cultural messaging have also been studied, with lower socioeconomic gaps between one's two racial identities related to stronger multiracial identification (Chee, 2016), and with youth gaining information about their racial identity through mass media representations and messaging (Ali, 2000).

Multiracial youths' sense of belonging

Quantitative Findings

Connectedness, acceptance, and belonging. Research on belonging and connectedness highlight that multiracial youth face several challenges. Multiracial youth report low connectedness with the dominant racial group in their society (Bell, 2016), and there appears to be some mixed findings on whether multiracial girls versus boys have a more difficult time in feeling connected to others (Bonner, 2018; Lyda, 2008). Multiracial youths' stability in their strength of identification with their background appears to have little association with their sense of belonging (Burke & Kao, 2013; Kramer et al., 2015), but those having a consistent racial identity in the home environment reported feeling more socially accepted at school (Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006). Findings are mixed on whether youth should align themselves with a particular racial background peer group, which may be dependent on the multiracial combination—Burke and Kao (2013) and Felkey (2023) found that Black-White adolescents identifying as Black (vs. White) felt more like they belonged and less lonely with peers, while de Anda and Riddel (1991) found that multiracial youth felt accepted regardless of the racial background of their peer groups.

Comparisons between multiracial and monoracial groups also revealed mixed findings. In some cases, multiracial youth reported less belonging and more exclusion compared to monoracial peers (Rogers et al., 2021a; Rozek & Gaither, 2021; Schlabach, 2013; Wang, 2014). These results may depend on the comparison group of monoracial peers—in studies of multiracial high school and college students, youth reported significantly less belonging compared to White peers but showed a decreasing trend in belongingness that was relatively similar to monoracial minoritized peer groups (Cheng & Lively, 2009; Edwards, 2022; Ruedas-Gracia et al., 2023). In contrast, Cooke and colleagues (2014) found that a diverse sample of multiracial youth experienced significantly less rejection compared to their African American peers. Surprisingly, multiracial youth expressing more pride in their identity also experienced more loneliness (Edwards, 2019). Findings are not consistent across all studies, with a number of studies also reporting no differences in belonging across multiracial and monoracial minoritized youth (Choi, 2001; Dai, 2021; Parks, 1994).

Discrimination, prejudice, and racism. On the other side of the coin, many multiracial youths experienced incidents of discrimination, prejudice, and racism, as young as 4 years of age

and even from family members and friends (Chen, 2010; Karasaki, 1997; Kim & Won, 2019; Liu et al., 2023; Peterson, 2018). A number of longitudinal studies expand on these trends, suggesting that discrimination persists across adolescence to a larger degree compared to monoracial majority and minority peers (Fu et al., 2021; Goodhines et al., 2020; Grilo, 2019; Ho, 2009; Sanchez et al., 2024; Stein et al., 2007; Wedel et al., 2022). However, other studies have found that discrimination rates are higher among multiracial youth only in comparison to White youth, but not minoritized youth (particularly Black monoracial youth in the USA; Fuligni et al., 2022; Jensen et al., 2023; Mpofu, 2022). Meanwhile, a smaller group of studies have reported lower rates of victimization among multiracial youths compared to monoracial minoritized youth (Mereish et al., 2022; Wells, 2016; Woo et al., 2020), or even no differences between multiracial youth versus any monoracial youth regardless of background (Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009).

Multiracial youths' identification with their backgrounds appear to play a distinct role in their experiences of discrimination. Those with stronger and more defined identities (Vásquez, 2012), those with stronger identification with their minoritized racial background (e.g., Black among Black-White youth; Herman, 2004; Herman 2009), and those foreign-born but fluent in the majority culture language (among Korean multiracial youth in South Korea; Park et al., 2016) were more likely to experience discrimination. Yet, among multiracial youth in South Korea (Park & Han, 2023) and the USA (Huang, 2012), there was no link between strength of identification and experiences of victimization or discrimination.

Qualitative Findings

Belonging, acceptance, and connectedness. In qualitative studies, adolescents described feelings of disconnection, cultural homelessness, invisibility, isolation, and marginality, often rooted in challenges with acceptance (Anderson, 1997; Clarke, 2014; Olsen, 2012; Wagner et al., 2020). Many struggled to gain acceptance from monoracial minority peer groups (Chee, 2016; Gudjonsson, 2013; Harris, 2017; Joseph-Salisbury, 2019; Jourdan, 2006; King, 2013; Kinnear, 2004; Lambe Sarinana, 2014; Shao-Kobayashi, 2013) and also faced rejection from the dominant culture broadly or from monoracial majority peer groups (Crane, 2008; Harris, 2019; Jackson, 2017; Lee, 2017a; Lehn, 2010; Lewis & Demie, 2018; Nystad et al., 2017; Su et al., 2022; Walton, 2020; Whitlow, 2008). Among monoracial minority settings, multiracial youth were often questioned about their authenticity or fitness within that peer group based on language proficiency or knowledge of culturally normative behaviors (King, 2013). Because of the limited opportunities to belong to their respective majority and/or minoritized monoracial peer groups, multiracial youth reported feeling culturally homeless—that is, doubly othered and not feeling a true sense of belonging to any racial group (Motoyoshi, 1990; Park, 2012). Some multiracial youth even reported feeling that they did not feel they belonged in their family when they were questioned or rejected by extended family members based on their identity or appearance (Jourdan, 2006; Whittingham, 2014).

Not all multiracial youth shared these negative experiences—while some multiracial youth experienced exclusion from various racial groups, this experience was not ubiquitous (Black, 2016; Kane-Williamson, 2010; Simons, 2016). King (2011) reported that although some struggled to achieve belonging at earlier ages, most multiracial youth eventually found acceptance in diverse peer groups where they felt embraced. Wagner and colleagues (2022) interviewed Congolese mixed children of UN peacekeeper fathers, who despite experiencing alienation from local communities, felt a strong sense of belonging to their fathers' high-status minority group. Contrasting much of the literature above, other research has also found that some

multiracial youth feel a greater sense of belonging within various and racially diverse groups (Austin et al., 2021; Gadsden, 2017).

Some studies noted no experiences of marginalization or lack of belonging, instead reporting that multiracial youth felt accepted or did not feel socially isolated in their surroundings (Ang & Lee, 2022; Kerwin, 1991; Whitlow, 2007). Among Black-White multiracial youth in the USA, the majority generally felt belonging to both White and Black peer groups, although some expressed segregation from Black peers (Benjamin, 2007; Field, 1996; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995).

Discrimination, bullying, and racism. Multiracial youth of diverse backgrounds, from diverse societies and of a wide range of ages (4 years of age to young adulthood) reported past and ongoing experiences of racism (Crane, 2008; Gudjonsson, 2013; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Kiyama, 2019; Motoyoshi, 1990; O'Malley, 2022; Terry, 2008; Tran et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2020; Wagner et al., 2022). Discrimination manifested in blatant forms, such as verbal and physical aggressions, to more subtle forms of discrimination like unequal treatment (Oikawa & Yoshida, 2007). Ross (1995) found that the frequency of such incidents might vary by age, with older youth reporting more occurrences compared to younger adolescents. Targets of discrimination also appear to be dually cast, with direct and indirect acts of discrimination and stereotyping directed at both their multiracial identity and their minoritized racial identity (Atkin & Jackson, 2021; Benjamin, 2007; Butler-Sweet, 2017; Harris, 2016; Harris, 2017; Johnston-Connor, 2004; Lee, 2017a; Newman, 2019; Rysst, 2022; Whittingham, 2014). In one case, multiracial youth reported fighting against such stereotypes—one Black-White athlete youth reported deliberately underperforming in a sport to avoid reinforcing stereotypes about the athletic successfulness of Black athletes (such as their physical prowess and talents; Stanley & Robbins, 2001). As a standalone example, one study found that White-Asian youth in the USA viewed discrimination as a sometimes neutral and sometimes positive experience that could highlight their uniqueness through discussion with their parents (Kasuga-Jenks, 2012).

Similar to quantitative findings, in qualitative studies, multiracial youth reported experiencing racism, discrimination and microaggressions from both majority and minority racial groups (Gudjonsson, 2013), and even from their own family members (Kiyama, 2019; Rosen & Greif, 2023). In school settings, multiple studies have reported multiracial youths' experiences of racism, discrimination, microaggression from classmate and peers (Benjamin, 2007; Campbell, 2018; Gillem et al., 2001; Harris, 2017; Hubbard, 2012; John, 2012; Kouri, 1995; Nero, 2001; Rosen & Greif, 2023; Walton, 2020). Discrimination also extended to teachers or administrators, who perpetuated biases against multiracial students (Basu, 2010; Bell, 2016; Cho 2018; Lewis & Demie, 2018; Seiger, 2019; Weisberg, 2016).

Correlates of multiracial youths' sense of belonging

Family factors. Strong family or parent-child relationships (Booxbaum, 2016; Cooke et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2021; Wagner et al., 2020), ease of family communication (Hong et al., 2024b), and general parental support (Hong et al., 2022) were associated with less experiences of racism, less peer victimization and rejection, and a greater sense of belonging among multiracial youth. However, in some cases, Black multiracial youth reported frustration at insufficient parental preparation for racism or challenges connecting with Black communities, particularly when they were raised by their biological non-Black parents (Kunstman, 2017; Winn & Priest, 1993). In contrast, Hong and colleagues (2021) reported that family factors like ease of family communication and generally positive parenting were not linked to victimization. Similarly,

Culver (2015) found no significant effects of negative interactions with parents on perceptions of relatedness to others.

Peer factors. Positive peer relationships were found to enhance feelings of belonging, while negative peer reactions to a youth's multiracial identity diminished belonging (McConnell, 2023). Meanwhile, Hong and colleagues (2021) reported that factors such as the number of close friends, time spent with friends, and ease of communication with peers were not associated with peer victimization.

Societal factors. Generally, representation appears to reduce feelings of rejection and exclusion. Campus culture, including multiracial representation, had an impact on multiracial college-aged youths' feelings of belonging (McConnell, 2023). Racially diverse neighborhood and community environments enhanced belonging among diverse multiracial youth (Clarke, 2014; Fernandes, 2005), while living in a non-diverse community was associated with their feelings of exclusion and less acceptance (Kawakami-Schwarber, 2003). Exposure to Black cultural environments across the lifespan positively correlated with perceived racial belonging among Black multiracial youth (Terry, 2008). At the sociodemographic level, multiracial youth from lower income brackets reported less peer stigmatization (Wagner et al., 2022).

Multiracial youths' well-being

Quantitative Findings

Self-esteem. Some multiracial youths have reported significantly lower self-esteem and more negative self-concepts compared to White and other monoracial peers (Lemos-Miller, 2005; Mereish et al., 2022; Milan & Keiley, 2000; Ward, 2006). However, although multiracial youth score lower in self-esteem compared White peers, their self-esteem levels are still relatively healthy (as assessed by mean scores; Herman, 2009) and show increases over time (Hsieh, 2016). Still yet, some studies have indicated that multiracial youth report more positive self-esteem in comparison to diverse monoracial youth (Coley et al., 2018; Doyle, 2007; Phillips, 2004). Several studies have instead found no differences in self-esteem between multiracial and monoracial youth (Field, 1992; Fields, 1996; Jones, 2000; Nishina et al., 2018; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Sparrold, 2003; Starr & Roberts, 1980; Thomas et al., 2002; Tyrell et al., 2019). Investigations into whether multiracial girls versus boys report better self-esteem have been inconsistent (higher among girls in Doyle, 2007; reversed in Oka, 1994).

Subgroup analyses have shown that while multiracial youth of diverse backgrounds score lower or similarly on self-esteem compared to White monoracial peers, their levels are higher than those of monoracial minority peers (Bracey et al., 2004; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Subica, 2011). De Anda and Riddel (1991) and Downs (2015) found that Asian-White, Black-White and Latino-White youth demonstrated average self-esteem (based on mean levels), with no significant differences among them. Similarly, Chen (2010) observed no notable differences in self-esteem among diverse subgroupings of South-Asian Taiwanese mixed-race youth.

Multiracial youths' identity integration and affirmation arose as a factor that was associated with self-esteem outcomes. Multiracial youth with strong identity integration or affirmation appeared to report higher self-esteem across diverse contexts (Abu-Raaya, 2006a, 2006c; Brittan et al., 2013; Fatimilehin, 1999; Fisher et al., 2017; Harrison, 1997; Hitlin et al., 2006; Sparrold, 2003; Stuppelbeen, 2019; Sullivan, 2014). However, Wong (2000) observed no link between holding a non-integrated identity and self-esteem.

Mental health. Studies examining internalizing problems, such as depression and anxiety, showed that multiracial youth report high levels of anxiety and depression (Abu-Rayya, 2005; Fincham et al., 2008; Hong et al., 2024a), with higher rates among multiracial girls than

boys (Cooney & Radina, 2000; Garcia et al., 2008; Lyda, 2009; Subica & Wu, 2018). However, Abu-Rayya (2005) reported no significant gender differences in internalizing problems. Kim and colleagues (2016) found that older multiracial youth experienced more depressive symptoms compared to younger peers.

Comparisons of internalizing symptoms between multiracial and monoracial youth revealed mixed findings. In a large number of studies, multiracial youth were found to experience more internalizing problems compared to their monoracial peers (Bostwick et al., 2014; Cheng, 2004; Cohen & Thakur, 2022; Garcia et al., 2019; Grunin et al., 2022; Jones & Satter, 2022b; Lam-Hine et al., 2024; Lee, 2017b; Lemos-Miller, 2005; Mereish et al., 2022; Milan & Keiley, 2000; Nishina et al., 2018; Park et al., 2022; Runarsdottir & Vilhjalmsson, 2015; Starr & Roberts, 1980; Tran, 2021; Udry et al., 2003; Wong et al., 2012). However, an equally large body of work simultaneously indicate that multiracial youth and minoritized monoracial youth experience a relatively similar level of internalizing difficulties (Anyon et al., 2014; Csizmadia & Ispa, 2014; de Boo & Kolk, 2007; Downs, 2016; Field, 1996; Jardas et al., 2023; Javo et al., 2000; Jones, 2000; Kaur & Kearney, 2013; McClain et al., 2021; Mills & Murray, 2017; Nazroo et al., 2018; Nero, 2001; Olvera, 2001; Platt, 2012; Polk et al., 2020; Ross, 2014; Sparrold, 2003; Subica, 2011; Thomas et al., 2002; Tyrell et al., 2019; Woo et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Fisher and colleagues (2014) and Schlabach (2013) noted higher depression rates but not anxiety among multiracial youth compared to White monoracial youth. In contrast to this large body of literature, a number of studies have also found that multiracial youth experience few depressive symptoms (Cheng, 2019; Panday et al., 2007), and sometimes even lower depressive symptoms among Black multiracial youth compared to monoracial minoritized youth (Bowie et al., 2013; Cheng, 2009; Grilo et al., 2023).

In studies examining subgroup differences with a mixed group of diverse multiracial youth, a nuanced picture of internalizing problems emerged. Grey and Yates (2014) reported higher depression levels in diverse multiracial youth compared to White monoracial peers, but no significant differences compared to minoritized monoracial peers. Fu and colleagues (2021) reported that diverse multiracial youth experienced more internalizing problems compared to Black and Latinx monoracial peers, but fewer than Asian monoracial peers. Phillips (2004) noted that multiracial youth reported fewer depressive symptoms than White monoracial peers but more somatic symptoms than Hispanic and Asian monoracial youth.

Multiracial youth reported varying mental health difficulties based on their specific racial backgrounds. Doyle (2007) found that Asian-White youth showed higher depressive symptoms compared to both monoracial Asian and White peers, while Black-White multiracial youth had similar levels relative to monoracial Black youth and slightly higher levels relative to White youth. Yao and colleagues (2022) reported that multiracial youth exhibited higher overall difficulties compared to monoracial youth, except for Asian-White multiracial youth who reported fewer difficulties.

Identification factored into experiences with internalizing symptomology. Multiracial youth who integrated and appreciated their multiracial identities were less likely to be depressed compared to youth who rejected one or both of their racial backgrounds (Abu-Raaya 2006c; Brittian et al., 2013; Cho, 2016; Stuppelbeen, 2019; Sullivan, 2014). However, for anxiety symptoms, findings are mixed: multiracial youths' identity was not associated with anxiety in one study (Brittian et al., 2013), but their racial identity-related pride was associated with less social anxiety in another study (Edwards, 2019). Moreover, among Korean multiracial youth,

those who were not fully bilingual experienced higher levels of depression compared to bilingual or Korean-speaking multiracial youth (Park & Han, 2023).

Life satisfaction and overall well-being. The reviewed studies also highlight multiracial youth's life satisfaction and overall well-being, with findings again presenting a mixed picture. A small number of studies have found that multiracial youth experience lower life satisfaction (Runarsdottir & Vilhjalmsson, 2015), and generally lower well-being (Cheng, 2004; Dunbar et al., 2018; Fisher, et al., 2014; Karssen, et al., 2015; Sanchez, et al., 2024) compared to monoracial counterparts. However, another set of studies point to opposite findings, with multiracial youth reporting significantly higher levels of life satisfaction, less unhappiness, and more resilience (Jørgensen & Seedat, 2008; Locklear et al., 2020; Tyrell et al., 2019) compared to their monoracial counterparts. Several studies have also found no significant link between youth being multiracial and their life satisfaction levels (Law et al., 2021; Maynard et al., 2007; Ward, 2006), and no difference in well-being between monoracial and multiracial youth (Fuligni et al., 2022; Pearce-Morris & King, 2012; Polk et al., 2020).

Subgroup analyses point to a nuanced picture of well-being among multiracial youth. Cheng (2004) found that multiracial youth reported average happiness levels compared to monoracial White and minority peers, with non-White multiracial youth showing slightly lower happiness levels compared to White multiracial youth. Across the board, stronger identity with multiracial background as marked by identity consistency, racial identity affirmation, and pride and connection to both racial groups was associated with better psychological well-being, positive affect, and higher life satisfaction (Abu-Rayya, 2006b; Binning et al., 2009; Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006; Chung et al., 2020). Additionally, Chen (2010) found that multiracial youth's identification with the disadvantaged racial group to which they partly belonged was associated with lower psychological distress. Rothstein (2011), however, found that the consistency or fluidity of multiracial youth's identity was not associated with their well-being.

Social-emotional outcomes. Several studies explored multiracial youth's social-emotional outcomes. Fusco and Cahalane (2013, 2015) and Schlabach (2013) found that multiracial youth experienced more difficulties with social skills, self-awareness, and decision-making compared to monoracial peers. Davis and colleagues (2024), however, reported that multiracial adolescents had high levels of personal-emotional adjustment, and Karaman and colleagues (2021) found these levels to be even higher for multiracial youth than for monoracial youth. Meanwhile, some studies found no elevated social-emotional problems among multiracial youth (Coley et al., 2018; Karssen et al., 2015). On the other hand, Karssen and colleagues (2017) reported that multiracial youth with a Turkish or Moroccan parent in the Netherlands reported lower levels of social-emotional well-being compared to those with a White migrant parent from a Westernized society.

Findings from some studies highlight variability in social-emotional outcomes. For example, Freeman (2014) found that the strength of multiracial identification was positively correlated with multiracial youths' emotional intelligence. Nazroo and colleagues (2018) found that while mixed-race children generally did not differ from monoracial peers on socioemotional well-being, Pakistani-Bangladeshi multiracial youth experienced more socioemotional difficulties compared to other groups. Lambe Sarinana (2014) similarly found no differences in child psychosocial functioning, but children of heterosexual-identified parents had higher psychosocial functioning scores compared to those of LGB-identified parents.

Qualitative Findings

Very few studies explored multiracial youth well-being using a qualitative approach. Among the few identified such studies, older Black-White youth were found to experience low self-esteem due to identity crises, while younger Black-White youth reported no problems with self-esteem (Gillem et al., 2001; Motoyoshi, 1990). Meanwhile, multiethnic youth appeared to have generally positive self-concepts in one study (Ross, 1995), confirmed in a second study finding that only 30% of the interviewed multiracial youth often felt depressed (Gudjonsson, 2013).

Correlates of multiracial youths' well-being

Family Factors. The quality of parent-child relationships and parental ethnic-racial socialization were found to be correlated with multiracial youth's experienced well-being, although not in consistent directions. Parenting practices emphasizing egalitarianism was linked to better psychosocial functioning (Lambe Sarinana, 2014), and parental linguistic socialization improved ethnic-racial identity regard and self-esteem (Lee et al., 2018). Conversely, preparation for bias and racial mistrust were associated with poorer psychological outcomes (Lambe Sarinana, 2014), and lack of ethnic-racial socialization was linked to lower life satisfaction (Chung et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Simon (2018) found no significant links between parental ethnic-racial socialization messages and depressive symptoms.

Family dynamics were also related to multiracial youths' outcomes, with some multiracial youth viewing their families as a significant source of positivity in their lives (Hsieh, 2016). Positive family relationships, including perceived support for double heritage, parental attachment, trust, and family cohesion were associated with higher levels of self-worth and psychological adjustment (Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006; Jones, 2000; Kaur & Kearney, 2013; Kawakami-Schwarber, 2003; Runarsdottir & Vilhjalmsson, 2015). However, in some studies, family cohesion and parental warmth were not or only weakly related to internalizing problems (Hawkins et al., 2021; Lynch, 2022). Parental attitudes toward diverse ethnic and racial groups positively correlated with youth self-esteem (Tsai-Yuan & Lin, 2015), and parental cultural humility was linked to fewer depressive symptoms via identity pride, but not for youth older than 20 years old (Franco & McElroy-Heltzel, 2019). Adverse family environments, such as those with parental poor anger management, were associated with higher depression and anxiety rates among multiracial youth (Bowie et al., 2013; Weller et al., 2022). In Korea, multiracial youth whose foreign-born parent had low social status reported more depressive symptoms (Park et al., 2016).

Peer factors. Peer experiences have been found to be influential for multiracial youth's well-being outcomes. For instance, negative peer relationships in early adolescence have been shown to predict later depressive symptoms among multiracial youth (Huang, 2012; Huang et al., 2023), while better peer relationships have been linked to higher self-esteem and life satisfaction among these youth (Chen, 2010; Runarsdottir & Vilhjalmsson, 2015). Microaggressions, discrimination, exclusion, and bullying victimization by peers have been associated with heightened depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem (Mereish et al., 2022) increased anxiety (Hawkins et al., 2021), and poorer self-perceptions (Cooke et al., 2014; Crane, 2008). However, Kouri (1995) noted that multiracial youth who successfully dealt with bullying had stronger sense of self-worth. In addition, Ross (1995) reported that multiracial youths' positive self-concepts were not adversely affected by experiences of peer exclusion or discrimination.

Societal factors. Few studies have examined societal factors in relation to multiracial youths' well-being. Kim and Won (2019) reported that multiracial Korean youth living in rural areas reported slightly lower self-esteem but fewer depressive symptoms compared to multiracial

youth from urban areas. School diversity was not significantly related to multiracial youths' mental health (Fisher et al., 2014; Karssen et al., 2016), but those with positive identity perceptions (affirmation) who went to less diverse schools reported better self-esteem (Brittian et al., 2013).

Discussion

Our review casts a balanced view of multiracial youths' experiences of identity development, sense of belonging, and well-being. That is, in contrast to a solely pathologizing approach, our synthesis identifies that while multiracial youth do experience some challenges in navigating their identity, managing peer and social belonging and discrimination, and establishing positive well-being and self-perceptions, quite often these experiences are not comparatively worse than those experienced by monoracial youth. Additionally, in most of these domains—with the exception of peer acceptance and discrimination—multiracial youth often also report positive experiences with identity development and well-being.

Studies reviewed in this work highlight both strengths and challenges in identity development experiences among multiracial youth, with many youths reporting still exploring their multiracial identities and others reporting pride in their unique identity. This is similar to experiences of monoracial youth, especially minoritized monoracial youth, many of whom also explore their identities over adolescence and experience identity-related pride as part of their development (Branje, 2022; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Similarly, despite most multiracial youth experiencing discrimination and racism—from both monoracial majority and minority group peers—a small group of studies report that they do feel connected to and belonging with peers, and no less so than monoracial youth. In terms of well-being, many multiracial youth reported positive self-esteem, general well-being and life satisfaction, and positive socio-emotional outcomes such as resilience; yet they still sometimes differed on these metrics and in internalizing symptoms compared to monoracial peers.

The *similarities* between multiracial and monoracial youths highlighted in our review suggests a need to consider multiracial youths' development within the broader context of youth development. As most of our synthesis focuses on adolescence, 10 to 24 years of age, a discussion of our findings relative to this developmental stage is warranted. Adolescence is a time marked by rapid, sustained physiological and psychological changes that ultimately impact youths' developing self-awareness and mental health (Steinberg, 2024). As they enter their adolescent years, most young people—from diverse and many racial or ethnic backgrounds—experience heightened self-judgment and internalizing symptoms (e.g., Ke et al., 2020; Kretzer et al., 2024), as well as identity-related challenges (including exploration and moratorium; Kroger & Marcia, 2011) that mirror many age-related findings reviewed in the present work. Thus, the multiracial youth's development over adolescence can be seen as simultaneously typical of all youths' development, while also uniquely marked by positive elements such as pride and resilience related to their multiracial identity.

While adolescence may be a challenging time for many, children and youth who receive positive social supports from their family, peers, and society are often protected and have more adaptive outcomes, even in the face of elevated risks that could curb psychological well-being or hinder identity development (Butler et al., 2022; Lou et al., 2024; Meeus, 2011; Phinney et al., 2001). In line with these general tendencies, in the present review, multiracial youth generally experienced better identity, belonging, and well-being outcomes when they experienced positive familial supports in the forms of ethnic-racial socialization, positive parenting, and quality

relationships among family members and when they experienced positive peer supports in the forms of having positive peer relationships with schoolmates and friends.

In addition to these micro-level, immediate social supports from families and peers, our review showed that societal factors in Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem such as diversity in the local school community and neighbourhood appear to have a tangible role in multiracial youths' identity development and sense of belonging, although not so much for mental health outcomes. This finding on the role of societal factors for multiracial youths' functioning mirrors a large body of work on monoracial minority youth, for whom representation in the local and expanded community network has been found to be similarly protective against ethnic-racial identity-related challenges and experiences of discrimination (Pasco et al., 2021).

Limitations of Studies and Directions for Future Research

Our thorough examination of 278 included studies yielded several prominent limitations of current literature on multiracial youths' development and functioning. One major limitation that arose was the limited number of studies examining large sample sizes of multiracial youth. Of those that did examine large sample sizes to represent multiracial youth, many used the same large, longitudinal, nationally-representative, yet relatively dated datasets that did not have an a priori purpose to examine specifically multiracial youths' experience, such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health Study (i.e., Add Health). Even in the case of smaller sample sizes, some studies replicated the same sample size across different publications (Abu-Rayya 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). While qualitative studies with smaller sample sizes provided depth and breadth in multiracial youths' experience using narratives, often policy and practice decisions are made on the premise of means-level findings reported in quantitative studies. A future large-scale longitudinal study that has a pre-determined purpose of understanding multiracial youth may be effective in determining how multiracial youth develop in a variety of domains and for whom and when there may be reduced strengths or elevated challenges over the course of development. Such future work may also consider the roles of intersectional identities and specificity in multiracial backgrounds (see Settles & Buchanan, 2014) to assess the unique factors related to adjustment among a diverse sample of multiracial youth.

A related limitation identified through our synthesis is that much of the work on multiracial youth is based on dated data that does not consider the roles of current events or risk and protective factors relevant to the modern world. One of the aims for conducting this review was to understand the roles of recently arising societal correlates such as social media influences or even the COVID-19 pandemic. It is widely understood today that social media can increase youths' mental health problems and negative self-judgments through social comparisons (Boer et al., 2021; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Research during and following the COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted that youth have been experiencing some of the highest levels of loneliness and mental health difficulties in recent years, with particular difficulties among racialized minority youth (see Hawks, 2023). However, with so little recent research that has considered these elements within the scope of multiracial youths' development, there is restricted knowledge on how these youth may be disproportionately affected by such events. Our review identified only one study on the recent pandemic's effects on multiracial youths' depression symptoms (Liu, 2023), and one 24-year-old study on the role of mass media (limited to television programming and televised news) for multiracial youths' identity formation (Ali, 2000). Neither of these papers provide a solid basis for drawing conclusions the developmental sequelae of these factors for multiracial youth. Future research examining these factors may provide crucial groundwork for understanding nuances in multiracial youths' experiences, for example, whether social media

provides a route for increased connection and belonging with other multiracial youth, especially for those living in communities with low levels of diversity or representation.

Although there are a number of other limitations that can be discussed, we focus on one last limitation of synthesized studies: the emphasis on multiracial youths' experience in the USA. Like much other psychology research, our foundational understanding of multiracial youths' experiences is based on WEIRD societies (Henrich et al., 2010) such as the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. This is not surprising, as WEIRD societies often are a hub of immigration, with many ethnic, cultural, and racial groups coming together in intercultural exchange and even interracial unions. While our synthesis could not provide a cohesive summary of whether there may exist differences in multiracial youths' experiences across WEIRD societies versus other societies, it is well understood in cultural psychology literature that a racialized minority individual's experience with their peers, community, and society can vary immensely based on the racial homogeneity of their surroundings (e.g., Pasco et al., 2021). Future comparative studies of multiracial youths' development and functioning across racially and ethnically homogeneous versus heterogeneous societies may further illuminate whether these experiences differentiate across contexts, and highlight potential factors that may support or attenuate positive development differently across contexts.

Strengths and Limitations of the Present Review

The present review has a number of strengths, including its inclusive approach of including all possible quantitative and qualitative literature related to our research questions, and expanding the scope to both peer-reviewed journal articles and theses and dissertations. By considering familial, peer, and societal correlates of multiracial youths' development, we have identified points of potential support for boosting multiracial youths' positive identity, belonging, and well-being outcomes. Our review also identified many positive aspects of multiracial youths' experiences, such as identity-related pride, resilience, and emotional well-being, casting a strengths-focused understanding of their development across childhood and into young adulthood.

However, our review is not without limitations. We did not search for grey literature beyond dissertations or cross-reference citations referred to within our identified studies, which would have improved any file-drawer effects in our synthesis. As our final count of identified studies was so numerous, at 278 journal articles and dissertations, we believe our synthesis to be fairly comprehensive; however, future work that examines open access study registries (e.g., Open Science Framework) and grey literature would provide even more thoroughness in our understanding of multiracial youths' development. As studies often did not identify the specific identities of their multiracial subsample, we were not able to assess whether multiracial youths' experiences differed as an effect of their specific racial backgrounds. It would not be surprising to find that a lumped comparison of monoracial and multiracial youths' functioning would yield different findings from subgroup comparisons based on all possible multiracial identities that could be represented in that sample (e.g., as seen in Doyle, 2008). In our review, whenever possible and such information were reported, we did provide this information in our results or in our complete study characteristics table (Appendix B).

Conclusion

Overall, the present review provides a fulsome and comprehensive synthesis of the state of literature on multiracial youths' psychological development across childhood into emerging adulthood. By taking an inclusive approach to identified studies, combining quantitative and qualitative findings on correlates of and monoracial counterpart comparisons of multiracial

youths' identity, belonging, and well-being, a holistic picture is provided on both strengths and challenges in multiracial youths' development. Our findings challenge the stereotyped view of multiracial youth as a group experiencing heightened emotional and psychological concerns throughout development. Instead, our synthesis highlights that multiracial youth sometimes flourish, not unoften experiencing no more difficulties compared to monoracial youth. Thus, this detailed systematic review serves as a foundation for turning the tides against the pathologizing of multiracial youth and fostering a balanced and strengths-focused approach to understanding their unique experiences throughout development.

PREPRINT

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