

**The Double-Edged Sword of Duality: An Exploration into the Identity Processes for Asian-white Biracial Individuals and the Impact on Self-Conceptualization**

By

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**Abstract**

Asian-white biracial individuals are one of the fastest-growing racial groups in North America. Biracial individuals have distinct experiences that influence their racial identity, self-appraisal, and subsequently their mental health. Biracial populations have commonly been treated as a homogenous group in psychological literature. It is insufficient to assume that biracial populations are racialized in the same ways, and that self-conceptualization develops similarly. Asian-white biracial individuals face unique identity processes that impact their self-appraisal and mental health. This paper explores the various forms of identity invalidation that Asian-white biracial individuals face and investigates how these invalidation experiences affect self-conceptualization and mental health outcomes. Systemic invalidation, social group membership denial, microaggressions, and identity fluidity are all examined in relation to self-conceptualization. A discussion on cultural humility, multicultural competency, and anti-oppressive approaches in the therapeutic space follows in response to the research themes. This capstone concludes with a proposed resource that builds upon the analysis of the research using a systems and anti-oppressive lens. The resource is a questionnaire for practitioners to utilize in their care for Asian-white biracial clients in therapeutic contexts.

*Keywords:* Asian-white, biracial, multiracial, identity invalidations, self-conceptualization

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**Dedication**

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This capstone is an exploration of the unique identity experiences of Asian-white biracial people and how they self-conceptualize. Biracial and multiracial individuals exist in dualities and multitudes, which distinguishes their identity processes from their monoracial peers. The identity experiences of biracial and multiracial individuals often result in identity invalidations that can affect mental health outcomes and self-appraisal. These experiences can be formative yet are often overlooked in the counselling field due to teachings and research that are focused on monoracial minorities and/or generalized multicultural practices (Harris, 2018; Law et al., 2021). Racial groups are distinct in their cultural and societal characteristics, meaning their mental health and identity processes should not be conflated. Thus, this capstone will focus solely on Asian-white biracial individuals. In this chapter, I will provide historical context for biracial identification and Asian-white biracial identity processes, state the significance of this topic to the therapeutic landscape, locate my positionality to the topic, define key terms, state theoretical lenses and models used in the analysis, and provide an overview of chapters 2 and 3.

### **Context of Asian-white Biracial Identity Processes**

Northern American populations have been steadily diversifying over the last two decades. The U.S. Census Bureau projected in 2015 that the “White” population will become a minority group within the next thirty years (Levy & Myers, 2021). In 2018, almost 11 million Americans self-identified as biracial - approximately 3.4% of the US population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Further, three million people identified as biracial Asian Americans. Asian-white biracial people made up the second largest group of biracial individuals, second to Black-white biracial individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). In Canada, almost half of all immigrants were born in Asia (Statistics Canada, 2016). Statistics Canada (2011) surveyed 4.5 million households in the

country and found that 4.6% of the unions/marriages were “mixed unions”. A mixed union is defined as a couple where one partner belongs to a visible minority group while the other does not; alternatively, partners both belong to different visible minority groups (Statistics Canada, 2011). These statistics indicate a consistent and significant growth of biracial and multiracial populations. While growth in these populations is evident and topical in the present day, multiracial and biracial populations have always been present in North America (Battle, 2016; Deer, 2015; Hollinger, 2005, as cited in Garay & Remedios, 2021). Biracial and multiracial populations have a history of discrimination and invalidation. While Asian-white biracial individuals have distinct identity experiences from other biracial populations, many of the discriminatory laws and systems were initially in response to controlling Black populations in the U.S. (Jordan, 2014).

### ***Miscegenation***

Miscegenation is defined as the mixing of two or more races, originally used in 1863, in a pamphlet titled, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro* (Kaplan, 1949, as cited in Bhusal, 2017). Anti-miscegenation laws were introduced to prevent interracial marriages and protect white supremacy (Bhusal, 2017; Curington, 2015; Garay & Remedios, 2021). These laws were not considered discriminatory to minority groups at the time because these laws were applied to all races, including white people (Bhusal, 2017). However, the myth of white superiority and the falsified “evidence” of physical and mental inferiority of the Black population informed and reinforced anti-miscegenation laws; non-white inferiority beliefs were a rationale used to justify these discriminatory legislations (Bhusal, 2017). The White superiority complex and belief in non-white inferiority also extended to mixed-race children. Similar “evidence” created to denigrate the Black population was applied



to mixed-race children, indicating that mixed-race children were less intelligent. The children of interracial marriages were marginalized because they were viewed as threats to racial purity and to sociopolitical systems that reinforced white power and privilege (Bergkamp et al., 2020).

Anti-miscegenation laws are an integral part of multiracial identity history because the laws were marginalizing the identities and existence of mixed-race children before their birth, through their parents. For example, Nevada was the first state to ban marriage between Whites and Asians; the discrimination was rooted in vilifying the Asian population for taking employment away from white people (Sohoni, 2007, as cited in Bhusal, 2017).

### ***One-Drop Rule***

In addition to anti-miscegenation laws aiming to discourage and prevent interracial marriages, they also aimed to prevent and/or marginalize the existence of mixed-race children. Underlying miscegenation laws was the one-drop rule, a codified law that attributed minority group racial categorization to any mixed-race children (Bergkamp et al., 2020). The *one-drop rule* instructed that any person with any suspected or explicit Black ancestry was legally categorized as Black (Jordan, 2014). The one-drop rule's underpinnings were formed throughout generations of colonization but were formally entrenched in the U.S. South in the 1910s and 1920s (Jordan, 2014). As Jordan (2014) reiterated, "the social standard for individuals is superficially simple: if a person of whatever age or gender is believed to have any African ancestry, that person is regarded as Black... Any person of racially or ethnically mixed descent" is regarded as Black (p. 99). Therefore, the one-drop rule was a formative law because it laid the foundation and informed how Black-white biracial individuals were categorized in the USA. The rule framed Black-white individuals as Black, reflecting monoracial and essentialist norms. By socially categorizing Black-white individuals into their minority racial group, biracial status was

eclipsed and monoracial structures were reinforced with whiteness at the pinnacle (Garay & Remedios, 2021; Jordan, 2014; Winston, 2020).

### *Hypodescent*

The one-drop rule illustrated the concept of hypodescent. *Hypodescent* is a form of racial categorization where multiracial and/or racially ambiguous individuals are categorized as their lower-status racial group (Young et al., 2021). Hypodescent underscores the one-drop rule in categorizing Black-white biracial people as “Black”. Through laws like the one-drop rule, hypodescent acted as a mechanism to prevent Black-white individuals from accessing White privilege (Chen et al., 2018). Hypodescent and the one-drop rule are integral to the history of multiracial categorization because they illustrate the systemic measures taken to protect White privilege for White monoracial people (Garay & Remedios, 2021). The one-drop rule and the concept of hypodescent are rooted in historical U.S. race relations and were an outcome of anti-miscegenation laws (Young et al., 2021). While these tenets were originally created to restrict the rights of Black-white biracial people, hypodescent has been examined through other psychological literature as an overarching racial categorization pattern (Young et al., 2021). Psychological research has applied the hypodescent framework to examine how other multiracial individuals (e.g., Asian-white biracial people) are categorized within and outside of North American contexts (Chen et al., 2018; Ho et al., 2011, as cited in Young et al., 2021). Through this research, hypodescent was applied as a predictor as to how perceivers racially categorize multiracial people; hypodescent continues to be used in psychological research to examine how a minority status label affects perception from others and subsequently how it affects self-appraisal (Albuja et al., 2018; Davenport, 2016; Young et al., 2021). In Canada, there were no explicit laws against interracial marriage, however, anti-miscegenation was enforced through the

Supreme Court, via laws like the Indian Act (Thompson. 2008). As Thompson wrote, “anti-miscegenation laws... were not enacted in Canada, though an informal and extra-legal regime ensured that the social taboo of was kept to a minimum” (Walker, 1997; Backhouse, 1999; Walker, 2000, as cited in Thompson (2008), p. The historical discriminatory laws surrounding interracial marriage and mixed-race identity were eventually dismantled in the US in 1967. however, the tenets of these frameworks continue to inform social contexts and identity experiences and processes for biracial people (Bergkamp et al., 2020; Garay & Remedios, 2021; Winston, 2020).

### ***Model Minority Myth***

Another significant racially discriminatory sociocultural perspective that has influenced this topic is the model minority myth (MMM) (Poon et al., 2016). MMM is the stereotype of Asians being the “best” kind of minority because of their work ethic and high intelligence (Kiang et al., 2017; Poon et al., 2016). This label defines Asians (primarily in North America) “as a monolithically hardworking racial group whose high achievement undercuts claims of systemic racism made by other racially minoritized people” (Osajima, 2000, as cited in Poon et al., 2016, p. 469). This stereotype is pervasive because it has been used as a sociopolitical tool to drive dissent between racial minority groups and tokenize Asians as a homogenous, passive, and acceptable type of minority (Chen et al., 2019; Davenport, 2016; Harris, 2018; Poon et al., 2016). While the MMM has been linked to themes of pride and privilege for Asians, the stereotype has also been linked to themes of invalidation, identity restriction, and incongruence (Kiang et al., 2017). Further, the myth encourages the identity of Asians being passive, quiet, and deferential (Wong et al., 2012, as cited in Kiang et al., 2017). The assumptions associated with the model minority myth include that Asians are socially and economically successful (Shih et al., 2019).

With the generalization of intelligence, weakness, and compliance, Asians are granted the "honorary whites" label, indicating that they are "better" than other minorities (Davenport, 2016; Tuan, 1998 as cited in Poon et al., 2016). This aspect of the MMM is polarizing and damaging for several reasons, and an in-depth analysis of this is beyond the scope of the capstone. Generally, being viewed as the higher status minority group offers Asians false access to White privilege, as they have to be deferential to be awarded something akin to white power (Kiang et al., 2017). Further, it reinforces problematic racial stratifications (one minority group being worth more than another as perceived by whites). These assumptions lead to the belief that Asians are problem-free and do not suffer from difficulties like other minority groups, overgeneralizing their racial and social experiences (Shih et al., 2019). The generalization of Asians having no challenges is illustrated through Asians being positioned in proximity to White privilege. MMM is significant to this capstone because it illustrates how Asians, as a minority group, are placed in a racial hierarchy to other minority demographics. The connotations outlined above associated with MMM are pertinent to Asian-white biracial identity processes because these stereotypes inform how biracial individuals are expected to be, relative to White privilege (Miville et al., 2005; Törngren, 2018). The upward mobility on the social hierarchy of Asians through MMM extends to Asian-white biracial individuals because of their typically more White-passing appearance (Davenport, 2016; Chong & Song, 2022). The association between Asian-white biracial people and White privilege frames the Asian-white identity experience in relation to and in obtaining White privilege and White identification (Chong & Song, 2022). This association illustrates the influence of MMM over Asian-white biracial identity processes; MMM is a significant, foundational stereotype, that influences the identity invalidation experiences for Asian-white biracial people.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this capstone is as follows: (a) to illustrate identity experiences of Asian-white biracial individuals (AWBI) that contribute to self-conceptualization, (b) to examine how these identity experiences contribute to negative mental health outcomes for AWBI, and (c) to provide an integrative tool for counsellors to better support Asian-white biracial clients and relevant identity concerns. This is not meant to be an exhaustive review but is intended to capture the overarching processes that occur for AWBI.

### **Contribution to the field**

As noted in the topic overview, over three million individuals identified as Asian biracial, with Asian-white biracial individuals making up the second largest biracial group in the USA (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). It is undeniable that the North American population is diversifying rapidly (Levy et al., 2018). In response to diversification, the counselling field has adapted in some ways to account for diversifying client populations yet continues to fall short. Counselling competencies have incorporated guidelines for multicultural and social justice intersections within therapeutic contexts (Ratts et al., 2016). Research has firmly established that identity intersections (e.g., race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.) have significant influences on mental health outcomes and health disparities, like increased rates of anxiety, major depressive disorder, and higher rates of suicidal ideation (Conron et al., 2010; Hankivsky et al., 2010, as cited in Ratts et al., 2016). Racial identity within counselling contexts is thoroughly discussed due to the mental health implications associated with race (Kung et al., 2018). However, racial identity research is heavily focused on monoracial groups (Garay & Remedios, 2021). While biracial research has increased, most of the biracial identity research uses Black-white biracial identity experiences, which are then generalized for all biracial people (Law et al.,

2021; Wilton et al., 2013; Young, 2015). Biracial people are not racialized in the same way (Law et al., 2021); this capstone intends to shed light on one group of biracial people to move away from generalizing all multiracial people as homogenous. AWBIs are a large and growing demographic that have their own unique identity experiences (Davenport, 2016). The proximity to White-passing privilege, the model minority stereotype, and oppression through essentialist norms all contribute to self-conceptualization (Davenport, 2016; Harris, 2018; Kung et al., 2018). Despite these distinct experiences, the discussion and research on how practitioners are acknowledging and working with these intersections and experiences are negligible (Garay & Remedios, 2021). While multicultural counselling competencies guide counsellors to address contextual implications for racialized individuals, racialized groups deserve specific and informed discussions surrounding their identity and social experiences (Law et al., 2021; Ratts et al., 2016; Seto et al., 2022). The research shared in chapter 2 will illustrate the different identity experiences of AWBI and demonstrate how they pertain to their specific identity locations. While there is natural overlap with other biracial groups, this research will show how AWBI contend with distinct identity experiences in their self-conceptualization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I am using ecological systems theory (EST) with an intersectional lens to analyze the literature. Bronfenbrenner (1979) posited EST after years of observing and researching how individuals reside in their respective environments and systems. Themes like social and historical context, the “activeness” of a person, and the human need for social belonging/participation within their systems informed the tenets of EST (Darling, 2007). EST theorizes that four environmental levels surround an individual’s development: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Each of these levels impacts the

individual in different ways. The *microsystem* encompasses one's immediate environment, "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). The *mesosystem* represents the interrelations that the individual participates in within their environments: "the mesosystem refers to relations among microsystems or connections among contexts such as the relationship between family experiences and school experiences... For instance, children who are bullied at school (school experiences) might withdraw from their parents (family experiences)" (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013, p. 4). The *exosystem* represents connections between a social setting that the individual does not have an active role or control over and their immediate context (i.e., the stress of a partner's workplace influencing the individual's home life) (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Lastly, the *macrosystem* captures larger cultural contexts that the individual is surrounded by (e.g., ideologies, societal norms, policies, and laws) (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Conceptually, each of these levels creates circles around the individual at the center (Neal & Neal, 2013). Through these systems, self-conceptualization is influenced and shaped to form the "individual". This theory highlights that individuals typically exist in multi-system realities that each have their own form of influence over their sense of self. I use systems theory to inform my therapeutic approach, as it maintains client-centeredness without ignoring crucial systemic, environmental, and social influences. Clients occupy multiple identity locations at once, within different contexts and systems. The dynamics between one's identity locations and relative contexts are known as intersectionality. Intersectionality was defined by feminist activist and lawyer, Kimberlé Crenshaw, who posited that social positions (race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) exist on a hierarchy of social power and jointly shape the human experience (Crenshaw, 1991, as cited in Bauer et al., 2021).

The social positions that intersect on the individual level are influenced by larger structural and interpersonal systems of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism) (Bauer et al., 2021). EST is conducive to the topic of Asian-white biracial identity experiences and self-conceptualization because it acknowledges how racialization, and thus self-appraisal, occurs at different levels for individuals (Darling, 2007). Further, EST inherently accommodates an intersectional lens because of how the systems of a person's reality overlap and interact with one another (Darling, 2007).

While EST has aspects of intersectionality built into its framework, many early system theories overlook the systems of oppression and inequity within one's environment, emphasizing universality and heterogeneity (Santos & Toomey, 2018). Bronfenbrenner (1979) did highlight how individuals are embedded in multiple systems, however, a further emphasis on the influence and effects of structural and systemic oppression is critical (Santos & Toomey, 2018). In conjunction with EST, I will use an anti-oppressive lens to analyze the research regarding existing therapeutic approaches for multiracial demographics. This lens will also support the analysis of research examining identity invalidations, like microaggressions and systemic invalidation. Applying EST along with an anti-oppressive lens for the literature review will generate a holistic analysis with consideration of structures of oppression.

### **Positionality Statement**

I am an Asian-white biracial, cisgender female settler, writing and studying on the traditional, ancestral, stolen lands of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), səliłwətaʔl təməx<sup>w</sup> (Tsleil-Waututh), S'ólh Téméxw (Stó:lō), and Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíxw (Squamish) peoples (Native Land, 2023). I am an individual that has benefitted from the colonization of Indigenous lands as I reside on the stolen territory. Locating myself within systems of oppression and power is important in understanding the literature and research of this capstone. I am a young, middle-



class person, who is able-bodied, straight-sized, and neurotypical. I am the daughter of a first-generation Chinese immigrant from Malaysia.

The topic of this capstone is deeply personal to me. My motivations in exploring the identity experiences of Asian-white biracial people are informed by my lived experiences as a White-passing, biracial person. I did not have labels or vocabulary to make sense of the racialization that occurred in my youth. This racialization continues presently and having access and autonomy to make sense of these identity experiences and how they have impacted my self-appraisal is necessary for my mental health and wellness. The ambiguity associated with being biracial, in my experience, has opened the doors for others to speculate, judge, and assert my identity. I believe that racial ambiguity is a threat to essentialist society as it challenges categorization (Garay & Remedios, 2021). Asian-white biracial people are racialized in unique ways because of our duality in being close enough to Eurasian appearances to be “desirable” (as a minority) but simultaneously not “enough” to occupy our racial group membership (Curington, 2016; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). While this is my belief, I am cognizant and aware that generalizing racial identity experiences only promotes harmful, homogenous perspectives on race. My experiences as an Asian-white biracial woman can be entirely different from another Asian-white biracial woman. Naming this is imperative because I am aware of how my own lived experiences may influence how I analyze and present the literature on this topic.

I believe race is a socially constructed identity evolving through different contexts (Kung et al., 2018). Race has been historically defined by appearance, which positions race as a fixed social category (Kung et al., 2018). Multiracial people contradict an essentialist, fixed perspective on race because of their inherent multifaceted identity and duality. Fixation from peers and the larger society to label and categorize multiracial people is a source of identity

invalidation for multiracial populations (Chen et al., 2019; Norman & Chen, 2020). For Asian-white biracial people specifically, their self-appraisal can be influenced by how they are best perceived by their peers and environment (Davenport, 2016; Törngren, 2018). I expect that the research will illustrate the multifaceted nature of identity experiences for Asian-white biracial people and the subsequent mental health outcomes. My hope is that it will incite a meaningful discussion on how these experiences show up in therapeutic contexts. Further, I hope that the research presented highlights how specific, informed practices are necessary to make space for Asian-white biracial clients and the range of their self-conceptualization to provide mental health care that is trauma-informed and anti-oppressive.

### **Key Terms Defined**

#### **Asian-White Biracial**

A person who has one parent of Asian ancestry and another parent with white ancestry (Law et al., 2021; Lo, 2021).

#### **Biracial**

A person with two different racial backgrounds (Albuja et al., 2019b).

#### **Hypodescent**

A form of racial categorization where multiracial and/or racially ambiguous individuals are categorized as their lower-status racial group (Young et al., 2021).

#### **Identity Integration**

The level to which one's identities are self-appraised as compatible, accessible, and harmonious (Albuja et al., 2019b; McDonald & Chang, 2022).

#### **Identity Invalidation**

The denial and/or misperception of one's racial identity (Franco & O'Brien, 2018)

**Intersectionality**

The theoretical concept that one's identity is a confluence of multiple social locations that simultaneously affect and are affected by one another (Muirhead et al., 2020). The social locations (i.e., race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, etc.) exist on a social hierarchy that intersects with each other and larger systems of power (i.e., racism, capitalism, sexism) (Muirhead et al., 2020). Intersectionality was first defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black feminist and legal scholar (Crenshaw, 1989, as cited in Bauer et al., 2021).

**Microaggressions**

Daily slights, behaviours, offenses, invalidations, and/or put-downs that occur between various parties where there is an existing stigma and/or power imbalance (Sue et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2007; Williams, 2020).

**Model Minority Myth**

A stereotype that is built upon the idea that Asians are deferential, hardworking, passive, and problem-free (Kiang et al., 2017). This stereotype implicates Asians as “honorary Whites” (Tuan, 1998, as cited in Poon et al., 2016).

**Monoracial**

A term to describe something or someone as a single race (Albuja et al., 2019b; Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010; Skinner et al., 2020).

**Multiracial/mixed race:**

A person with two or more different racial backgrounds. A biracial person can also be referred to as multiracial (Song, 2021).

**Phenotype**

Physical characteristics; typically used in contexts related to racial appearance (Harris, 2018).

### **Racial Essentialism**

The belief that racial categories are fixed and based on an underlying biological or genetic characteristic that makes the racial group what they are. Racial essentialism posits that racial identities can be categorized through genetic and/or biological traits (Pauker et al., 2017; Tadmor et al., 2013)

### **Self-Conceptualization**

The process where one's perceptions of themselves, their relationships to others and to the world, and the attached meanings/values inform "who" they are (Rogers, 1959 as cited in, Prochaska & Norcross, 2018).

### **Systemic Oppression**

The societal structures that systematically reinforce the "permanent subordination, humiliation, and domination of certain social groups due to their socially constructed lower position in society on account of the socially constructed higher position of the oppressing group" (Liedauer, 2021, p. 101).

### **White-Passing**

When a person of one, non-white race (or multiple races) identifies and presents themselves as white. White-passing is typically dependent on physical appearance (Törngren, 2018).

### **White Privilege**

The access to power and resources that people of colour in the same contexts and positions, do not have, or have less of (Collins, 2018; Kendall, 2013).

### **Outline of Capstone Chapters**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the topic which is the AWBI identification has been influenced by systemic monoracial norms, historical race relations of both Black and Asian groups, and Asian stereotypes. This chapter introduces these historical and contextual factors and how they are foundational to the exploration of AWBI self-conceptualization. In addition, this chapter presents how the counselling field has primarily utilized biracial research, focused on Black-white populations, to inform approaches in working with all multiracial groups, which has the potential for harm in generalization. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review that includes recent and relevant scholarly, peer-reviewed sources, primarily from the US. The analysis will investigate the different identity experiences for AWBI and how they impact self-conceptualization and mental health outcomes. While some of the research involves general biracial and multiracial topics, the focus will be on Asian-white populations. Chapter 3 will then be a discussion of the aforementioned findings, focusing on the learnings discovered in the current research. This will include a discussion of the approaches that address the mental health concerns of AWBIs. Further, I will propose an accessible, integrative tool for practitioners to use in their work with AWBI in the form of a questionnaire having addressed the three research questions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

What does it mean for a person when their world is more concerned with the answer to “what are you?” instead of “who are you?”. For Asian-white biracial individuals (AWBIs), and other multiracial people, the fixation on their “what” captures their unique identity processes (Lo, 2021). The problem with “what”, aside from being intrusive, is that it prompts a static answer (Johnson, 2019). Social identity theorists position racial identity as fluid, informed by social contexts and interactions (Albuja et al., 2018; Harris, 2018; Hornsey, 2008). However, society still operates within essentialist norms, maintaining monoracial categorization (Kung et al., 2018). These norms create experiences for biracial individuals that challenge their inherent dual identities and subsequently inform how they self-appraise. Earlier research on biracial identity processes focuses predominantly on Black-White biracial people (Skinner et al., 2020). While this research has been seminal in overall multiracial identity development, it would be ignorant to assume that Black-White identity experiences and conceptualizations are identical to other multiracial groups. AWBIs occupy different social locations because of components like their phenotype and Asian stereotypes, distinct from the Black-White identity locations. The focus of this literature is to outline different identity experiences for AWBIs and how they impact self-conceptualization. This The topic of AWBI self-conceptualization matters in the field of counselling for several reasons. Firstly, the global population is diversifying at a rapid rate; between 2000-2010, the U.S. Asian-white population grew by 87% to 1.6 million individuals (Jones & Bullock, 2012, as cited in Chong & Kuo, 2015). With the consistent growth of AWBIs, counsellors will most likely work with this demographic, and may not know the different identity processes and experiences AWBIs face. Secondly, utilizing multicultural frameworks does not capture how nuanced multiracial identity processes are overall and in comparison to different

multiracial populations. Utilizing research on Black-white biracial experiences is a form of erasure and can exacerbate identity denial processes for AWBIs in the counselling context (McDonald et al., 2019; Seto et al., 2022). Lastly, AWBIs' identity experiences include invalidations, denials, and questioning (from others and from the self) of how they fit into their social contexts (Albuja et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2019; Davenport, 2016). Simultaneously, AWBIs can view their identities as positive, special, and adaptive (Albuja et al., 2019a; Miville et al., 2005). When working with conflictual conceptualizations, counsellors need to understand and work to make safe spaces for clients' dualities, both in their racial identities and their meaning-making towards it (McDonald et al., 2019). These salient identities ideally will be met in the counselling relationship with openness instead of pathology (McDonald et al., 2019); if counsellors are aware of these intersections, AWBIs clients can show up as they are in a counselling space.

This literature review aims to outline the different identity processes of AWBIs and demonstrate their uniqueness and their impact on self-conceptualization. It aims to answer the research questions RQ: 1 "What are the identity experiences of AWBIs? RQ: 2 how do these identity processes impact AWBI self-conceptualization?". The answers to these research questions will provide a starting point in supporting AWBIs in the therapeutic context in autonomous and fulfilling self-conceptualization.

### **Essentialism**

Biracial individuals inherently challenge essentialist perspectives on racial identity. Essentialism posits that race is a fixed essence of individuals and is indicative of traits and abilities (Kung et al., 2018). Essentialist beliefs position race as an unalterable attribute that differentiates people into meaningful social groups (Kung et al., 2018). These social groups are

rooted in monoracial labels and structures (i.e., Asian, Black, White, etc.) to construct the paradigm of race (Harris, 2017). These monoracial definitions and categorizations of race subsequently erase non-monoracial populations. The normalization of a monoracial-only paradigm of race ignores the multiracial existence and experience (Harris, 2017). As biracial people inherently do not fit monoracial categories, the biracial identity experience is fraught with monoracism (Ford et al., 2019; Harris, 2017). Ford et al. (2019) confirmed the work of Hamako (2014) and Johnston and Nadal (2010) in developing the concept of monoracism as the systemic privileging of things (i.e., people, practices, spaces) that are racialized as “single-race” while systemically oppressing things that are racialized as more than one-race (Hamako, 2014; Johnston & Nadal, 2010, as cited in Ford et al., 2019). The one-race “things” can include social structures like educational and governmental contexts, social discourse, and even anti-discrimination policies (Hamako, 2014, as cited in Ford et al., 2019; Harris, 2017). Biracial people contradict the monoracial structure, which typically results in identity invalidation experiences. This means that biracial people face unique identity processes, informed by how they are perceived and how they self-conceptualize within monoracial criteria.

### **Identity Invalidation**

For this literature review, identity invalidation is defined as the undermining and/or denial of one’s self-determined racial identity (Franco et al., 2016). Identity invalidation is an experience that minimizes an individual’s self-identified identity location and subsequently fosters identity processes centred on external perception (Albuja et al., 2018; Franco & O’Brien, 2018). As AWBIs navigate multiple intersections of White-passing privilege, model minority stereotypes, and in-and-out group membership uncertainty, identity invalidation is particularly significant (Davenport, 2016; Law et al., 2021). Consequently, this reinforces an internal



perception held by many that AWBIs do not fit the “box” of race cleanly, normalizing the experiences of external questioning and stereotyping for AWBIs to process (Law et al., 2021; West & Maffini, 2019). Thus, identity invalidation creates an environment that is conducive to self-doubt and identity negotiation, which is another integral experience of AWBIs. This portion of the literature review will explore three types of identity invalidation that have emerged in the literature: systemic invalidation, social group membership denial, and microaggressions.

### **Systemic Invalidation**

As outlined in chapter one, race is socially and systemically understood through a monoracial paradigm, that reinforces White economic and social power (Atkin & Jackson, 2021; Garay & Remedios, 2021). Institutions have been found to maintain the monoracial (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Johnson, 2019; Norman & Chen, 2020). With a deep history of hypodescent laws and socio-political boundaries like the One-Drop rule and anti-miscegenation laws, biracial people have existed in a system that has not historically validated their existence (Garay & Remedios, 2021; Norman & Chen, 2020). The literature highlights the importance of these structures over biracial identity processes, noting how they have created and maintained systemic invalidation and denial processes for non-monoracial individuals (Albuja et al., 2019b; Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Johnson, 2019).

Despite the rapidly growing biracial population, biracial—or multiracial—identities were not institutionally recognized or validated until recently in the United States, where the Census survey only included multiple racial identity selections in the year 2000 (Norman & Chen, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The inclusion of multiple race identification in the Census was opposed by several major American civil rights organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Asian Pacific

American Legal Consortium (Literate, 2010). These movements opposed the inclusion of multiracial designation on the survey because the arbitrary selection of multiracial identity would result in “racial flight”, which means individuals who would have previously identified as “Asian” would be lost to the categorization of “multiracial” (Literate, 2010, p. 117). This racial flight was perceived as a significant threat to the efforts of civil rights movements in advocating for their minority, monoracial communities, and civil rights (Franco et al., 2019; Literate, 2010). Further, political-right-leaning groups advocated for multiracial categorization as a way to de-racialize political and social policies and enact more “colour-blind” public policy processes (Literate, 2010). Expanding on Literate’s findings, Franco et al. (2019) reiterate how the dissent expressed by anti-oppression groups towards the inclusion of a multiracial identity category for the US Census reflects how institutional-level monoracism has implications for racial coalitions between multiracial people and their monoracial peers. Both Franco et al. and Literate’s presented how racial identity is fundamentally a socially constructed classification. The critical role of racial classification based on social and political definitions impacts policy and institutional mechanisms (Franco et al., 2019). The debate over biracial and multiracial identity as a validated categorization highlights how the existence of this racial identity threatens the parameters of a monoracial society (Literate, 2010). Even though multiracial identification was included, debating the legitimacy of an identification lays the foundation for invalidation at an institutional and systemic level. Updating the US Census survey to include multiple racial identities was significant because it demonstrated the verification of biracial at arguably the highest governmental and system level.

Acknowledgement of multiracial identities at an institutional level is relatively recent in the US, having only occurred on the Census survey in 2000 (Norman & Chen, 2020). The

inclusion in the survey demonstrates how recently denied and invalidated multiracial identity was at an institutional level. As Norman and Chen (2020) highlighted:

Until recently, Multiracial as a racial identity was neither institutionally nor interpersonally validated in the United States. Race in America has been historically defined by a limited set of mutually exclusive, monoracial categories... American institutions have historically maintained boundaries between these monoracial groups. (p. 503)

While the inclusion of multiracial on the Census survey signals an acknowledgement — and arguably a verification — of the biracial and multiracial identity at an institutional level, it did not eradicate monoracial normativity within institutions and systems (Ford et al., 2019). For example, ten years after the inclusion of multiple racial identifiers, Sanchez and Bonam (2009) conducted two studies that assessed how biracial college applicants (i.e., who disclosed their racial identity) were considered for diversity scholarships and whether they were considered “diverse” enough by panels. Using the Stereotype Content Model, which measures warmth and competence, their findings indicated that biracial applicants were perceived as “colder and sometimes less competent than both white and corresponding minority applicants... [and] were also perceived as less qualified for minority scholarships than other racial minorities” (p. 129). Of their two studies, one focused solely on Asian-white participants; they found that Asian-white applicants were perceived as less worthy of minority scholarships than Asian applicants and were perceived as less competent (Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). While this example is specific to biracial college applicants, Sanchez and Bonam’s exploration provided critical insights into how biracial and multiracial populations were invalidated within institutional environments. Further, they examined specific systemic invalidations towards AWBIs.

Education policies and systems are other predominant examples of systemic racial invalidation against biracial people. Despite the U.S. Census survey adjusting their racial selections to include multiracial identification in 2000, many federal, state, and local education policies do not have multiracial options for their data collection and surveys (Sanchez et al., 2020). This is significant because these surveys influence the development of educational systems from kindergarten to graduate-level programs (Renn, 2009; Sanchez et al., 2020). Systemic invalidation arises when certain institutional authorities do not recognize data that does not fit into monoracial terms. For example, the Educational Testing Service, an administrator of standardization of educational assessments for both educational and governmental purposes, does not allow for participants to select more than one race (Sanchez et al., 2020). Biracial people are forced to self-report as a monoracial label to participate in institutional systems, simultaneously invalidating their racial identity and forcing a choice into how they will be perceived (Law et al., 2021; Lopez, 2003, as cited in Renn, 2009).

### ***Systemic Invalidation in Research***

Systemic invalidation also occurs within the research field of racial topics. In general, meaningful research on biracial individuals is lacking references. Evans & Ramsey (2015) conducted an exhaustive analysis of 10 major research journals released between 1991 and 2013. Evans and Ramsey found that there were merely 10 published articles, spread through only four journals, addressing biracial and multiracial individuals. While research on these populations is growing, biracial individuals are often lumped into categories with monoracial, minority peers in research contexts (Evans & Ramsey, 2015; Harris, 2017). Identity frameworks in research typically fall short of capturing meaningful lived experiences of biracial individuals because these frameworks are constructed in monoracial terms and position identity as a fixed factor

(Albuja et al., 2018). When multiracial people are categorized in monoracial terms, it results in an erasure of existence and experience. The limited research that does exist on biracial and multiracial lived experiences indicates that they are distinct from their monoracial peers (Harris, 2017).

The way research systemically invalidates the biracial identity originates from essentialist norms that perpetuate White power and privilege. White-centring research practices are prevalent in social psychology and frame research to align and focus on topics in relation to whiteness (Garay & Remedios, 2021). When analysing biracial and multiracial populations, the research tends to focus on how and why dominant groups (i.e., white) perceive, interact, and categorize minority groups (Chen et al., 2019). For example, Kteily et al. (2014) investigated the different predictors of White individuals ascribing characteristics to different profiles of racially and nationally ambiguous criminals. While their study provides valuable insights into how White, British, nationalists perceive ambiguity and interact with profiles differently, depending on their proximity to looking White, the focus is on the white perception of racial ambiguity and the social and political implications of the White reaction. The centralization of White perceptions in multiracial research maintains the focus on the White perspective on multiracial issues/populations. Winston (2020) summarized and criticized the racial essentialization of mainstream research and how it reflects “scientific racism”. Winston illustrates the persistent and historic patterns within the scientific literature, citing how early theorists popularised theories on brain size, intelligence, and predispositions for committing heinous crimes (Rushton & Bogaert, 1989, as cited in Winston, 2020). Winston’s overview highlights how themes of hypodescent infiltrate modern research in that Whiteness is positioned as the baseline norm or centre of the racial spectrum.

Supporting Winston's observations, Cheon et al. (2020) examined the generalizability of psychology literature. They stated that "psychological science has been criticized for the persistent practice of overrepresenting and overgeneralizing findings from an extremely narrow subset of the human population" based on five characteristics: western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (referred to through the acronym "WEIRD") populations (p. 928). They posited that drawing conclusions on human behaviour from primarily WEIRD populations leads to the assumption that findings apply to non-WEIRD populations. They compared over 5000 titles of published psychology articles and found that research from the United States was less likely to name the racial identities of White participants than non-White participants. This practice reflects the maintenance of Whiteness as the neutral identity to non-white participants (Garay & Remedios, 2021; Winston, 2020). Structuring research from this positionality maintains and encourages hypodescent themes at a research level reference. Further, white-centring practices affect power structures in multiracial research. For multiracial participants that are White-and non-White, research tends to show how these participants are treated more positively by their White peers in comparison to multiracial participants who are not partially White (Pew Research, 2015, as cited in Garay & Remedios, 2021). This is "white-centring" in that it positions multiracial identity as beneficial when White peers approve of and/or accept multiracial identity. (Garay & Remedios, 2021). These practices demonstrate how systemic invalidation of biracial people can occur in research and academia.

### **Social Group Membership Denial**

The importance of social group membership has been explored by identity and social identity theorists (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, as cited in Hornsey, 2008). Social identity theory focuses on how social context and intergroup relations interact and inform self-conceptualization

(Hornsey, 2008; Jensen et al., 2021). Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979, as cited in Hornsey, 2008) posited that human interactions existed on a spectrum, with one end being purely interpersonal and the other end being purely intergroup. This spectrum of interactions was theorized to affect self-appraisal and peer appraisal, as Hornsey (2008) summarized:

A purely interpersonal interaction (which Tajfel and Turner believed to be rare) involves people relating entirely as individuals, with no awareness of social categories. A purely intergroup interaction is one in which people relate entirely as representatives of their groups, and where one's idiosyncratic, individualizing qualities are overwhelmed by the salience of one's group membership. It was argued that sliding from the interpersonal to the intergroup end of the spectrum results in shifts in how people see themselves and each other. (p. 206)

The interactions that one has with their individual or group identity affect the appraisal of the "self" and their group. The individual identity and the intergroup identity are integral to self-conceptualization based on this theory. Social identity theory argues that the individual motivation behind identifying with a social group and being distinct from outgroups is a positive and secure self-concept (Albuja et al., 2019b; Hornsey, 2008; Jensen et al., 2021). Finding group membership supports self-conceptualization and informs social location for an individual's in and out groups (Albuja et al., 2019b; Hornsey, 2008). Social identity theory complements and aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory as they both posit that identity and self-conceptualization are affected by environment and interaction (Hornsey, 2008; Ratts et al., 2016)

### ***Racial Identification in Social Groups***

Racial identity processes, like other components of identity, are inherently social in that contextual and interpersonal factors contribute to self-conceptualization (Albuja et al., 2019a; Norman & Chen, 2020). There is a significant body of research on the process of single-group identification, whereas the process is less understood for multiple-group identification (Hirsch & Kang, 2016). Biracial individuals typically can identify with two racial groups. For example, AWBIs have the potential to occupy their dominant (white) and non-dominant (Asian) racial locations. However, since biracial individuals have a choice in their racial identification, the duality of their choice challenges the monoracial structures embedded in racial identity (Albuja et al., 2019a). The ability to occupy more than one racial space is an option monoracial peers do not have. Dual social group identification and racial malleability have been associated with increased feelings of autonomy, empowerment, and overall higher psychological adjustment (Albuja et al., 2019a; Albuja et al., 2019b). However, some social structures, particularly concerning race, have struggled to support individuals who identify with two groups within one social domain (Albuja et al., 2019a). For racial and ethnic options to be considered acceptable, Törngren (2018) stated that “the ethnic option is achieved only when the ethnic identities are recognized and validated by the wider society” (p.753). In other words, self-identification in more than one racial group is impacted and facilitated by social validation. For biracial people, identity validation can thus be dependent on group membership and/or acceptance from ingroup peers.

Social group membership denial is an integral part of biracial identity invalidation. Individuals who are denied membership in a racial group they have self-identified with are forced to contend with their self-conceptualization (Albuja et al., 2019a; Sanchez & Bonam,



2009). The denial of membership to racial groups can happen at an institutional level, which can then inform interpersonal denials (Norman & Chen, 2020; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009).

Throughout studies on ingroup identification, the effects of denial from monoracial group rejection had varied effects on biracial self-identification. Norman and Chen (2020) found that ingroup monoracial rejection (i.e., White or Asian racial groups) resulted in increased multiracial identification. Further, they found that when White ingroup members were the source of discrimination, participants had the strongest multiracial identification levels in comparison to non-White sources. What their results demonstrate is how social group membership denial can affect the strength of multiracial identification and labelling. Increased multiracial identification may be a way for AWBIs to de-racialize their identity and find ownership in identifying as “mixed”. This stronger identification was potentially associated with biracial individuals interpreting their rejection as not being “enough” for membership, and thus de-racializing their identities and subscribing to their multiracial positionality (Norman & Chen, 2020). Whereas other studies have found that ingroup membership denial does not strengthen multiracial identity, and instead can lead to individuals assimilating into their more accepted identity (Davenport, 2016; Franco & O’Brien, 2018; Miville et al., 2005). Albuja et al. (2019a) found this duality in biracial group denial and stated:

The results suggest that both bicultural and biracial participants who were denied their American or White identity (self-relevant identities) reported greater stress than participants who were denied an irrelevant identity... Being denied membership in an important cultural or racial group leads to greater self-reported stress than being denied membership in an identity-irrelevant group. (p. 1182)

Albuja et al. (2019a) also found that identity reassertion of biracial people had mixed results. Some participants showed increased positive affect and reported an increased sense of autonomy, whereas others were unmotivated to reassert their identity after group denial (Albuja et al., 2019 a). Their study reflects the overall literature on how group denial elicits complex identity mechanisms for biracial individuals.

### ***Social Group Denial Implications***

For AWBIs, group denial research centres on their ability to pass as white. AWBIs have been cited as the most fluid of biracial groups due to their white-passing appearance (Davenport, 2016; Miville et al., 2005). While this fluidity is positioned as a privilege due to its flexibility, there has been growing research on the negative implications of dual identification. With the one-drop rule informing Black-white biracial experiences, AWBIs exist within the context that duality is negative (Albuja et al., 2018; Garay & Remedios, 2021). Moreover, as AWBIs have typically more white-passing appearances and tendencies, their ability to occupy white spaces and identities is easier (Davenport, 2016). However, the dual representation of “white-and” can be perceived as a misrepresentation or deception (Albuja et al., 2018). Albuja et al. (2018) described this by stating:

Given biracial people’s full membership in their respective racial groups, a contextual presentation of their identity is not truly dishonest because biracial people often view themselves as full members of both groups. Thus identifying with one identity in the moment (a common occurrence) is not necessarily considered a misrepresentation. (p. 135)

This quote illustrates how AWBIs experience identity invalidation through group membership denial. Despite self-identifying as both racial identities, the burden of verification falls on

biracial people to present themselves in a way that fulfils membership expectations. Törngren's (2018) qualitative study explored the passing and racial options of Japanese-white individuals. Participants in the study outlined their reasoning for claiming and discarding parts of their identity due to group invalidation and negative perceptions of others. One interviewee highlighted that despite strongly identifying as Japanese, they would never fully claim it because their appearance prohibits them from being identified as Japanese. Another interviewee described how he chose Japanese as his dominant racial identity because it allows him to assimilate into social scenarios more comfortably. This interviewee covered his whiteness through his behaviour, which caused him to behave "very Japanese" even though he did not "feel Japanese" (p. 765). Törngren's (2018) research demonstrates how social group membership denial can invalidate AWBIs' self-identification and result in identity negotiation to obtain membership. This aligns with Albuja et al.'s (2018) research on how biracial individuals tend to present their identity based on circumstance and group validation. Both Albuja et al. and Törngren's findings capture how social group membership denial can influence AWBI, despite their self-identification. The way social group membership denial influences self-conceptualization has implications for how AWBIs show up in social and therapeutic contexts. In addition to the invalidation of being denied group membership, AWBIs do not necessarily escape the prejudices towards their minority identity (Chong & Kuo, 2015; Lo, 2021; Miville et al., 2005). Being prescribed prejudice, stereotypes, and discriminations that do not align with how AWBI identify has been linked to internal experiences of shame and anger (Franco et al., 2021; Miville et al., 2005). The research on social group membership denial indicates that it is a part of identity invalidation experiences for AWBIs (Collins, 2000; Davenport, 2016; Miville et al., 2005; Törngren, 2018). In considering how this affects self-conceptualization, it is clear from

the research that it is a complex form of invalidation and can be internalized and interpreted differently on an individual level.

In studying group membership denial and acceptance processes, Chen et al. (2019) hypothesized:

That Asian Americans' perceptions of [Asian-White] biracials' loyalties and identity preferences would predict their categorizations of the biracials. We reasoned that the more Asian Americans perceived AWBI as wanting to identify as White and as disloyal to Asians, the more they would categorize biracials as White relative to Asian. (p. 828)

Chen et al. (2019) conducted four studies that provided the first systematic exploration of Asian Americans' perceptions of AWBI and how categorization between in-and-outgroup membership can occur. Chen et al. concluded that their evidence "provided consistent support for the following causal chain: perceived discrimination → perceived identity preferences → perceived disloyalty → categorization" (p. 837). This investigation is one of the few meaningful research sources that articulate the dynamics of how social group membership denial occurs. It also focused on the perception of the minority ingroup (Asians) versus the white perception. While Chen et al.'s research provide one process of group membership denial, it contributes to the overall validity of membership denial occurrence.

AWBIs are positioned in research as a "higher-status" biracial group since they are paradoxical in their privilege in proximity to whiteness (Chen et al., 2019; Törnngren, 2018). Despite their proximity to white privilege, this does not guarantee white membership; AWBI can be simultaneously perceived as privileged and/or lower status (Collins, 2000; Young, 2015). This type of denial creates a unique identity invalidation process for AWBI where they are denied valid racial groups from monoracial peers for not being enough for either group membership.

These denial experiences are integral to self-conceptualization and identity processes because a lack of access to social belonging has been linked to lower mental health outcomes (Albuja et al., 2019a; Law et al., 2021). Multiracial individuals have been found to report greater depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and lower levels of motivation when their identity choices have been perceived as oppressed (Albuja et al., 2019a; Townsend, 2009). Albuja et al. (2018) found that biracial and bicultural participants who experienced more frequent group identity denial and questioning reported feeling less freedom in choosing their identity and reported higher inner conflict between their identities, which were associated with higher depressive symptoms and stress. In addition, Chen et al. (2019) added to the literature in their findings of a causal link between minority group perception of AWBI and their perception of white loyalty over Asian identification. These findings demonstrate the importance of social group membership in biracial identity processes but also add a lens that shifts away from a white-centring perspective.

### **Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are an intrinsic part of oppressive and discriminatory experiences. The term “microaggression” stems from psychiatric and psychological research origins (Dominguez & Embrick, 2020). Chester Pierce is often referred to as the creator of the term as he conducted significant research on racism and how macro-offenses informed racial attitudes and perpetuated racial discrimination (2020). Pierce’s original definition of microaggressions described Black-White interactions that involved put-downs, and negative commentary by White people (Pierce 1974, as cited in Williams, 2020). The definition of microaggressions has expanded to describe interactions that occur “between various groups where there exists stigma and/or a power imbalance” (Williams, 2020). Sue et al. (2007) defined racial microaggressions as daily slights, insults, and offensive behaviours that people of colour experience in their everyday life. Further

Sue et al. (2019) added that “microaggressions may also be delivered environmentally through social media, educational curriculum, TV programs, mascots, monuments, and other offensive symbols” (p. 129). Examples of microaggressions include but are not limited to, assumptions of racial identity based on appearance (ex. Hair texture, skin colour, eye shape), behaviours (ex. Black people are good at basketball; Asians are bad drivers), and denial of multiracial existence (ex. a multiracial being labelled as monoracial despite the disclosure of multiple racial identities) (Harris, 2017; Williams 2020). Microaggressions are not solely interpersonal behaviours, they can also be systemic or broad actions that maintain patterns of oppression and invalidation. Microaggressions are controversial because many critics believe they are no different from trivial offenses that are no different from everyday, rude interactions (Campbell & Manning, 2014; Lilienfeld, 2017; Schacht, 2008, as cited in Sue et al., 2019). However, microaggressions go beyond everyday offenses because they carry racial meanings and implications. Racial microaggressions are one-way modern racism prevails as it is no longer acceptable to be “openly” racist (Harris, 2017; Sue et al., 2019; Williams, 2020). Conflating microaggressions with trivial offenses minimizes the racial discrimination and oppression microaggressions can carry. It is important to note that microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional (Sue et al., 2019; Williams, 2020). It is important to name that no matter the intention, racial microaggressions can still reinforce the “othering” of non-White individuals/groups (Sue et al., 2019).

### ***Impacts of Microaggressions***

Microaggressions are an insidious part of the experiences of individual and marginalized groups and are essential to any discussion of oppression because they are acts that maintain systemic power structures (Dominquez & Embrick, 2020; Sue et al., 2019). For receivers of

microaggressions, it can be difficult to identify these acts because of their subtlety or ‘unintentional’ outward harm by perpetrators (Sue et al., 2019). What makes microaggressions particularly dangerous and harmful for marginalized individuals is how they can then result in the victim questioning their reality, internal experiences, and the legitimacy of their invalidation (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007; Sue, 2010; Yosso et al., 2009, as cited in Akoury et al., 2019). For example, in Harris’ (2017) qualitative study, one participant shared her experience with a peer who questioned the texture of her hair. While this question made the participant uncomfortable, she cited that she was unsure about the intent behind the question and therefore did not vocalize her discomfort.

Microaggressions act as markers of belonging, bringing attention to who/what belongs and who does not. Dominguez and Embrick (2020) stated:

In this respect, it may not matter that the perpetrator of racial slights is aware or unaware of how their responses may be hurtful. But the message is often more clear to those who do not fit into normative whiteness—you are not welcome here, you do not belong here, or some iteration of the two. (p. 3)

This quote reiterates the impact of racial microaggressions, which is the further marginalization and oppression of non-dominant groups. Additionally, one study found that race-based microaggressions were significantly more harmful than non-raced-based microaggressions because of how racial microaggressions draw attention to the hierarchy of lower social status tied to race and served as a reminder of the inherent subjugation and persecution of their identities (Wang et al., 2011, as cited in Sue et al., 2019).

Microaggressions are a central and harmful part of identity invalidation processes (Albuja et al., 2019a; Johnson, 2019). Racial microaggressions are the daily “insults, putdowns, and

offensive behaviours that people of colour experience in daily interactions with generally well-intentioned White [people]” (Sue et al., 2019, p. 129). Microaggressions can also be conveyed through environmental and systemic channels, like educational curriculums, public symbols, and media (Sue et al., 2019). Systemic invalidation is a form of microaggression, however, is conveyed differently than interpersonal microaggressions (Harris, 2017). The above definition captures the interpersonal tone of microaggressions but fails to acknowledge that microaggressions are not solely inflicted by white and/or dominant perpetrators. Within the AWBI experience microaggressions are committed by both white and Asian peers (Moosavi, 2022). As outlined in the previous section focusing on ingroups, Asian members can engage in microaggressions towards biracial individuals due to AWBI not presenting as “enough” for membership fulfilment (Chen et al., 2019). While systemic and group invalidations contribute to environmental hostility for biracial individuals, microaggressions on an interpersonal level have distinct effects on identity processes and relationships (Chen et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2019).

### ***Microaggressions Research***

The impact of microaggressions has been challenged by some research critics, equating them to everyday negative interactions (Sue et al., 2019). In Lilienfeld’s (2017) article, he argued that microaggression research does not have significant connectivity to psychological science and does not warrant application into the real world. Lilienfeld’s perspective compares microaggressions to general prejudice or callous commentary because microaggressions are subjective in interpretation. Further, Lilienfeld (2017) (year) argued that the term *microaggression* is contradictory because, despite the unintentional nature of some microaggressions, they suggested that “all contemporary definitions of aggression in the social psychological and personality literature propose... that the actions comprising this construct are



intentional” (p. 147). Lilienfeld’s arguments reflect the lack of awareness overall within race research and add to further trauma due to the questioning of harm. Microaggressions can be simultaneously subtle and unintentional or overt and unintentional (Sue et al., 2019). These characteristics do not result in their lack of existence nor does their subjectivity (for interpretation) mean they are unworthy of scientific research. In the context of biracial/multiracial individuals, microaggressions are a significant part of identity experiences. This is often the case because of the assumed unintentional nature of these acts. This uncertainty perpetuates feelings of self-doubt from the recipient of the act, who could second guess whether their reaction is warranted (Akoury et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2019). Likening racial microaggressions to trivial rudeness ignores the systemic, historical, and white-centring components of racial microaggressions (Harris, 2017; Sue et al., 2019; Williams, 2020). Further, research critics of the validity of racial microaggressions cite the lack of empirical support; the lack of “evidence” for racial microaggressions has been used throughout research as grounds to gaslight multicultural researchers, activists, and individuals (Thomas, 2008, as cited in Sue et al., 2019). Sue et al. (2019) asserted that microaggressions are:

- (a) constant and continual in the lives of people of colour, (b) cumulative in nature and represent a lifelong burden of stress, (c) continuous reminders of the target group’s second-class status in society, and (d) symbolic of past governmental injustices directed toward people of colour (enslavement of Black people, incarceration of Japanese Americans, and appropriating land from Native Americans). (p. 130)

This outline of racial microaggressions captures how they can be daily, interpersonal actions or experiences within broader contexts. Racial microaggression research indicates that these interactions are normalized in western society and are an inherent part of the non-white identity

experience (Harris, 2017; Sue et al., 2019). The normalization of racial microaggressions has made it difficult for targets, perpetrators, and bystanders to address microaggressions and even more difficult to recognize when they are being enacted because they are so common within racially-centred interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Harris, 2017; Sue et al., 2019). While the research sheds light on how “normal” racial microaggressions are for non-white individuals, the research indicates that consistent racial microaggressions have detrimental effects on people of colour’s well-being (Albuja et al., 2019b; Harris 2017). Throughout the literature on racial microaggressions, strategies for challenging and disarming these acts of prejudice are under-researched (Sue et al., 2019).

Research on monoracial racial microaggression experiences has been increasing, however, multiracial and biracial racial microaggression research grows at a slower rate (Harris, 2017; Kim-Breunig & Vittrup, 2022). The literature on biracial experiences with racial microaggressions stems from studies on identity development and mostly qualitative studies focusing on racialized experiences of multiracial populations (Albuja et al., 2019a; Harris, 2017). Harris (2017) conducted a study that explored the qualitative narratives of multiracial women and their experiences with multiracial microaggressions. These microaggressions were defined as denials of a multiracial reality, assumption of a monoracial identity, and not fitting the monoracial standard to fit in with racial social groups (Harris, 2017). These three experiences are indicative of how racial microaggressions invalidate multiracial identity. Harris found that “these individual microaggressions [were] deleterious because they externally categorize[d] multiracial women, forcing them to either claim and adequately perform a monoracial identity or risk exclusion and isolation” (p. 440). What this study contributes to overall racial microaggression

research is that distinct multiracial microaggressions exist because of the monoracial paradigm of race.

### **Identity of Appearance**

Phenotype, or physical appearance, is a significant factor in conceptualizing racial identity. Physical appearance is often cited as a restriction within how multiracial individuals can and will identify (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Russell-Cole et al., 2013, as cited in Harris, 2018). For AWBI, their ethnic ambiguity can be the focus of invalidations from peers, systems, and social groups because their appearance does not mirror the typical phenotype of their racial groups. “What are you?” is a common question for multiracial people. “What are you?” is an invasive, curious question at its best, and at its worst is dehumanizing and objectifying (Lo, 2021). Appearance for biracial people can influence self-identification in race and facilitate acceptance and rejection by racial group members, thus inducing a subsequent self-appraisal experience (Khanna, 2004; Law et al., 2021; Norman & Chen, 2020). Further, the exoticization of a minority group, particularly Asian women, has implications for the Asian-white phenotype experience. For biracial individuals, their physical appearance can be more Asian, more white, or ambiguous presenting. It is easier for an individual to choose a monoracial identity if their appearance and cultural knowledge reflect these identifiers (Harris, 2017; Harris, 2018; Khanna, 2004). For example, in Khanna’s (2004) mixed method study on AWBI, she found that participants who spoke the language and physically looked more Asian (as participants described) were more likely to claim a monoracial, minority identity. Khanna also found that individuals who did not have the connection of language or typical physical presentation experienced rejection from ingroup members. This resulted in minimizing their Asian heritage and defining themselves within the study as white. Since biracial individuals can occupy more

than one racial group, how they look, behave, and vocalize their identification contributes to how ingroup members perceive their “loyalty” to their monoracial groups (i.e., Asian and/or white) (Chen et al., 2019; Young, 2015). If biracial individuals do not present in a way that fits the ingroup members’ expectations, denial experiences are a risk.

Physical appearance is an important part of identity processes for AWBI. Appearance often dictates acceptance and/or rejection into racial groups (Davenport, 2016; Törngren, 2018). As outlined earlier, denial from these groups can result in significant identity formation implications for biracial individuals (Albuja et al., 2019a, Harris, 2017). Specifically, ambiguous appearance seems to signal to others that it is permissible to inquire about identity. Lo (2021) highlights how in her personal experience in the clinical field a client’s “curiosity gives [them] the right to know about my exotic face” (p. 72). Lo’s anecdotes demonstrate the harmful inclination of others to attempt to locate a person’s ambiguous appearance; with this knowledge, the perceiver will subsequently judge whether the individual fits both their perception of them and the self-categorization of the individual. The judgement and categorization of others on whether one is “enough” to fulfil their racial identification can be damaging. The dynamic between AWBI self-identification and perception of others is an important interaction because of how the reaction of others to their physical appearance can influence identity formation (Davenport, 2016; Khanna, 2004; Törngren, 2018). If multiracial individuals assert a racial identity that differs from how others perceive them, they are likely to be challenged with microaggressions, doubt, and judgment (Bradshaw, 1992, as cited in Khanna, 2004; Law et al., 2021; Young, 2015).

AWBIs are racialized differently from other biracial groups due to model minority stereotypes and racial ambiguity (Davenport, 2016; Törngren, 2018). While the racial ambiguity

of AWBI lends identity fluidity to self-conceptualization, there are implications in social group membership and self-appraisal. Chen et al. (2019) found that AWBI were perceived as more white than Asian by Asian group members, which affected perceptions of loyalty and identity preferences. These biases resulted in Asian group members categorizing AWBI as outgroup members. The denial of group membership can affect self-conceptualization. Like Chen et al.'s findings, Khanna (2004) found that this type of denial, based on appearance, led to Asian-white participants self-identifying with their more accepting, phenotypically congruent racial group. Ultimately, this contributes to the notion of being white-passing. White-passing can be a tool and a benefit of being biracial and/or ethnically ambiguous (Garay & Remedios, 2021). However, for AWBI who have been found to have the most malleability in phenotypic identification, their ambiguity can lead to inner conflict, incongruence to external perception, and loss of autonomy (Albuja et al., 2019b; Davenport, 2016; Young, 2015).

### ***Exoticization***

Racial exoticization and sexualization have been historically prevalent processes for minority populations (Root, 2004). Asian-white women, in particular, have been positioned by the media and the judicial system as hypersexualized figures (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021). The 1875 *Page Act* prohibited Chinese women from immigrating to the U.S. due to moral duplicity and the assumption of engaging in prostitution (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021). While immigration laws changed after World War II, Asian women were still positioned and associated sexually as a threat and/or as meeting the needs of white men. Further, the *War Brides Act* of 1945 allowed “alien spouses” to enter the U.S., but then the 1986 *Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendment* was enacted due to the government’s belief that Asian women were pursuing marriage to white men solely to obtain spouse-based immigration, and thus taking advantage of “the loneliness of

American men” (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021, p. 572). The systemic level at which Asian women have been historically hypersexualized remains significant today. Azhar et al. (2021) found through an analysis of 3,156 tweets containing discriminatory content towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs) that one of the major themes was the exoticization and hypersexualization of API women. The prevalence of the hyper-sexualization of Asian women is meaningful to the sexualization of Asian-white biracial women. Asian-white women are met with dual exoticism processes while also occupying white, Eurocentric, beauty standards (Davenport, 2016; Johnson, 2019; Root, 2004). The sexualization of Asian racial identity intersects with the proximity to whiteness. Curington et al. (2015) captured this intersection, finding that Asian-white online daters were prescribed a “heightened status” by whites in comparison to other multiracial profiles (p. 765). This positioning reflects the value of AWBIs’ physical appearance from peers and society; that their attractiveness is based both on their exotic appeal and their proximity to whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Curington et al., 2015; Law et al., 2021).

In the context of multiracial self-conceptualization, exoticization is a process that makes a multiracial person “feel dehumanized or treated like an object (e.g., a biracial white/Asian female is constantly asked “What are you?”)” (Nadal et al., 2011, p. 37). Johnston and Nadal (2010) conceptualized three sub-themes of exoticization and objectification: “a) Race on display, b) Sexual objectification, and c) Objectifying multiracial people as the ‘racialized ideal’” (p. 41). These three sub-themes capture how exoticization can take different forms. ‘Race on display’ describes how multiracial self-disclosure or presentation warrants inquiry from others (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). ‘Sexual objectification’ is the reduction of multiracial individuals to exotic, sexual objects and focuses individual value on physical appearance (Curington, 2020; Johnston

& Nadal, 2010). Exoticization can result in the ‘racialized ideal,’ which objectifies multiracial individuals as “poster children” for a post-racial society (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 135). The racialized ideal centres on describing multiracial individuals as the best of both worlds. Multiracial people are viewed as the ideal mix of “white-and”. This perspective positions multiracial people as the solution to racism because they check the boxes of diverse, white-oriented, and beautiful. They are the “perfect” example of being non-white (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). The racialized ideal encompasses the hierarchical racialization of appearance in that ambiguity is exoticized as an “ideal” mix because of its proximity to white appearance (Curington, 2020). In a mixed methods study, Nadal et al. (2011) examined these three themes and found that all three were prevalent in multiracial experiences, particularly for Asian-white participants. Tran et al. (2016) conducted a similar study on ‘race on display’, using one of the most common and frequently cited questions of biracial people, “What are you?”. This question is significant to the theme of race on display because it implicitly objectifies biracial individuals as a “what” versus a “who”, as well as positioning the asker with power over the biracial as their identity is ambiguous and thus on display and open to inquiry. Tran et al. (2016) found that of 40 biracial participants, 87.2% reported a high frequency of racial identification inquiries. An Asian-white participant shared in the qualitative portion of the study that “very few people guess [her] heritage correctly, but everyone feels like they should try” (Tran et al., 2016, p. 30). This study also captured responses and reactions to the question, designating positive and negative categories, along with how participants perceived the questioner’s motive. A significant portion of their participants (69.2%) expressed negative reactions to racial inquiries and categorized them as microaggressions and dehumanizing. Tran et al. (2016) found that a minor portion (5.1%) viewed racial inquiries positively. One participant (Asian-white male) stated that he was

“more than happy to share about [his] ethnic background because [he was] very proud of it” (Tran et al., 2016, p. 31). This small group (5.1%) of participants viewed exoticization as a curious inquiry and as an opportunity to affirm identity to others. The motivations of the questioners were perceived by participants in a variety of ways: hostility, curiosity, poor social skills, or genuine interest (Tran et al., 2016). This study captures the complex and varied internal experiences of racial inquiry and exoticization. “What are you?”, is a blunt, simple question that can evoke charged and wide-ranging responses for multiracial people. It is important to learn about these responses because this question is common in the multiracial experience and has significant implications for self-conceptualization via internal and external appraisals.

Exoticization can be negatively internalized by biracial individuals. For sexualized exoticization, Nadal et al. (2011) found that both male and female AWBI experienced overt descriptions of their appearance as being exotic, yet their data showed that only female participants described negative feelings towards it. In contrast, in a qualitative study by Museus et al. (2016) they found that all participants (both male and female) experienced exoticization with similar frustrations. One male Asian-white participant cited feeling sexually exoticized by a romantic partner during sexual activity, resulting in feelings of discomfort and frustration. Another female Asian-white participant highlighted that she was simultaneously and distinctly exoticized for her Asian identity and her mixed identity (Museus et al., 2016). The majority of participants in both studies were found to associate sexual exoticization with connotations of dehumanization and objectification. This negative internalization can include shame in their minority identity and/or manifest in their preference for appearing “more” white (Davenport, 2016; Johnson, 2019; Lo, 2021).



Both Nadal et al.'s (2011) study and Museus et al.'s (2016) study also found that exoticization did not always carry negative connotations for participants. For some, exoticization carried the message of uniqueness and resulted in welcomed attention. Supporting this, other research has found biracial women have positive connotations towards their "exotic" presentation, citing feelings of uniqueness and flexibility (Iijima Hall, 2004; Johnson, 2019; Skinner et al., 2020). The findings of both positive and negative connotations in exoticization experiences demonstrate how exoticization can have a varied impact on self-conceptualization.

The exoticization of AWBIs carries multifaceted implications for self-conceptualization and further research is essential in understanding AWBI self-conceptualization. The majority of research that investigated exoticization is primarily on biracial women (Davenport, 2016; Iijima Hall, 2004; Johnson, 2019). This can be attributed to women's physical appearances being more salient and commodified than males (Pan, 2000, as cited in Iijima Hall, 2004). The ambiguity of being "mixed" can result in the constant authentication of racial identity through appearance (Iijima Hall, 2004). External perception has been well-established as a major influence in general identity formation. For AWBI, ambiguity and fluidity contribute to further intersections of how self-appraisal will form. Exoticization can contribute to psychological distress and/or foster a tendency to seek validation in their "exotic" identity (Bradshaw, 1992, as cited in Museus et al., 2016; Root, 2004). These findings highlight how AWBIs are left to contend with how exoticization impacts them and their subsequent meaning-making processes.

Whether it is sexualized or objectified, the focus on appearance and racial ambiguity can affect disclosure, self-appraisal of appearance and racial identities, and internalized objectification (Davenport, 2016; Harris, 2018; Young, 2015). These processes affect self-conceptualization as being observed as solely a body has negative mental health risks and

increases body monitoring (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Objectification Theory posits that “women react to societal objectification by taking on an observer’s perspective of their bodies to determine self-worth” (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, as cited by Ponterotto, 2016, p. 139). As self-objectification is taking on an observer’s view of oneself, when biracial individuals are exoticized and sexualized these views become internalized and individuals may become preoccupied with (and identify with) appearance-based sexualized appraisals.

### **“Fluid” Identity**

Positioning race as a social construct means that it is shaped by phenotype, context, self-perception, and the perception of others (Cooley et al., 2017). With these factors, racial identity is fluid because of its shifts over time and within contexts (Sanchez et al., 2009). Davenport (2016) found that biracial people generally negotiated their identities through social encounters, adopting fluidity depending on contextual and interpersonal needs. Similarly, when studying how Black-white biracial individuals self-conceptualized, Rockquemore and Brunson (2004) proposed four different racial identity options as follows: “a singular identity (exclusively Black or exclusively white), a border identity (exclusively biracial), a protean identity (sometimes Black, sometimes white, sometimes biracial), and a transcendent identity (no racial identity)” (p. 92). These categories capture the multidimensional nature of biracial identity and have informed how non-monoracial identities are formed (Franco & O’Brien, 2018; Harris, 2018). For AWBI, their fluidity typically stems from their phenotype. AWBI were found to have more flexibility in how they racially present occupying different racial identities based on appearance, in comparison to darker tone biracial individuals (Davenport, 2016; Harris, 2018; Young, 2015). The implications of the one-drop rule follow hypodescent constructs that do not typically extend

to Asian-white because of their white-passing appearance, supporting their fluidity (Collins, 2000 Gullickson & Morning, 2011).

Miville et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative inquiry into the racial identity themes of multiracial people, which suggested some positive implications of fluidity. Through their research, they coined “the chameleon experience” as a significant theme for participants. Miville et al. (2005) described this theme as how participants “develop[ed] strategies to help them fit in with more than one racial or cultural group (i.e., ‘both/and’ thinking rather than ‘either/or’ thinking)” (p. 512). They found that participants, including AWBI, used these strategies to better fit their social boundaries and adapt to social expectations of their ambiguity. The chameleon experience enabled participants to cross social boundaries effectively. Miville et al. hypothesized that their findings seemed “to demonstrate how a multiracial identity may enhance psychological functioning by, for example, developing increased cognitive flexibility and openness” (2005, p. 512). However, Miville et al. also noted that a limitation of the chameleon experience was that the ability to fit into both social groups based on how they presented, was that participants also cited they did not necessarily feel like a complete part of either racial group. Similarly, McDonald and Chang (2022) expanded on Miville’s exploration of the chameleon experience by examining the complexities of being multiracial and the unique challenges and discriminations. However, they also noted that multiracial individuals position their identity as a source of pride and advantage (Parker et al., 2015, as cited in McDonald & Chang, 2022). The positive outcomes associated with fluidity seemed linked to an individual’s multiracial identity integration (MII) (McDonald & Chang, 2022). Cheng and Lee (2009) proposed this initially as a way to explain how multiple identities are integrated:

Identity integration comprises two underlying and distinct dimensions: conflict and distance. Conflict refers to perceptions that the two identities represent values and norms that fundamentally contradict one another, whereas distance refers to perceptions that the two identities are separated from one another. High levels of identity integrations are characterized by low levels of perceived conflict and distance. Thus, individuals with high identity integration perceive the two social identities as largely compatible and complementary. (p. 53)

Based on this description of MII, fluidity may be perceived as harmonious and beneficial for biracial if they perceive their identities as compatible. This is important for self-conceptualization because of MII's relationship to mental health outcomes. Multiracial individuals have been found to report positive mental health outcomes with high MII, with some studies finding multiracial identity as a protective factor facilitating psychological well-being (Harris et al., 2021; Villegas-Gold & Tran, 2018, as cited in McDonald & Chang, 2022). This is pertinent to AWBI self-conceptualization because of their higher levels of identity fluidity. How AWBI view their passing abilities and/or fluidity may be affected by their MII.

Research examining biracial populations has found that AWBIs have more fluidity in their identities than other biracial groups (Davenport, 2016; Harris, 2018). Self-categorization was influenced by their peers and environments and resulted in adopting a label that was most acceptable within those contexts (Davenport, 2016). In discussing racial self-categorization of biracial children, Davenport (2016) shared:

Extant research indicates that biracial children engage in a sort of racial acculturation, choosing racial labels that reflect the norms and expectations of majority populations in their environment. People of interracial and interethnic ancestry often spend years

grappling with their identities, incorporating or rejecting labels based on their interactions and the settings in which they are socialized”. (Alba, 1992; Bailey, 2008; DaCosta, 2007, as cited in Davenport, 2016, p. 60)

Since situation and interaction impact how biracial people enact fluidity, there are mixed findings on how AWBI present their dual identities. Like the study conducted by Rockquemore and Brunsma (2004), Chong and Kuo (2015) found three unique Asian-white biracial identity groups: the Asian-white integrated, the Asian dominant, and the white dominant. These identity groups are specific to AWBIs and conceptualize how individuals may identify in relation to cultural socialization and associated psychological experiences.

### ***Internalized Oppression***

As noted above, AWBIs are often perceived as closer in proximity to “whiteness” and white-passing privileges (Albuja et al., 2018; Law et al., 2021). When discussing white-passing options for AWBIs, phenotype and appearance are the focus. However, along with the privileges of being white-passing or white-adjacent, there are negative internal implications surrounding whiteness. The fluidity of AWBI has been linked to positive outcomes, like increased feelings of autonomy and access to aspects of white privilege, however, the research indicated simultaneous experiences of denial and negative ingroup appraisal (Davenport, 2016; Young, 2015). Chong and Kuo’s (2015) study examined the effects of internalized oppression in AWBI. These findings revealed that white-dominant biracial individuals had the highest internalized oppression scores, followed by Asian-dominant participants. Asian-white integrated participants scored significantly lower on the internalized oppression measure. The authors also included a marginal identity scale which measured participants’ marginal identity: not identifying with either heritage and experiencing a sense of alienation from their respective heritage groups (Chong & Kuo,

2015). The Asian-white integrated participants (who identified strongly with both parents' heritages) scored low on this scale, suggesting a higher sense of belonging and social connection. The findings of Chong and Kuo's (2015) study indicate that lower levels of internalized oppression and acknowledgement of both parts of one's Asian-white biracial identity imply more harmonious identity integration and self-conceptualization.

Internalized oppression reflects how a biracial individual's self-conceptualization is influenced by social and historical contexts and messaging (Chong & Kuo, 2015). Fluidity is typically categorized as a positive attribute of biracial identity; however, some research has indicated that there are negative outcomes of fluidity such as being perceived as deceptive. The perceived concealment of racial identity has historically been met with negative repercussions (Albuja et al., 2018). Albuja et al. (2018) conducted five studies examining how white perceivers judged contextual racial passing (CRP) of biracial people. CRP "describes identity changes that are influenced by immediate context" (Albuja et al., 2018, p. 132). The researchers found that the CRP of biracial people was socially penalized and negatively judged by white perceivers. Further, the results indicated that it did not matter if biracial individuals were presenting as a high-status or low-status race; overall CRP was interpreted as an intentional misrepresentation. Albuja et al. also found that penalties towards CRP were not dependent on the self-gain motivations of biracial individuals; participants were negatively judged and disliked even if their presentation did not incur social benefits. This finding is significant because it presents the idea that fluidity is perceived as inherently negative and/or deceitful, no matter the motivation or outcome. With this type of external reception, fluidity is not positioned as a benefit to biracial people and holds significant implications for AWBI because of their increased levels of fluidity (Law et al., 2021).

Chen et al. (2019) conducted a similar study, specifically on Asian mistrust of AWBI, where they examined how Asians categorized AWBIs' ingroup membership as "Asian". Chen et al. posited that prototypical members of racial social groups are evaluated positively by members because they fit the criteria of the racial profile. They argued that prototypicality is central to social perception processes and influences the inclusion and exclusion patterns of individuals. AWBI would be considered non-prototypical members in many contexts due to phenotype, cultural knowledge, and/or behaviours (Chen et al., 2019). Further findings indicated that AWBI were perceived as more white than Asian by Asian participants and were perceived as less loyal and more preferential to white membership (Chen et al., 2019). In contrast to Albuja et al.'s (2018) study, Chen et al. found that AWBI were perceived as having a motivation for self-gain in identifying as white (higher status). This study also demonstrates that fluidity is not necessarily a positive option for AWBI. As previously highlighted, social group membership denial is a powerful invalidation for self-conceptualization and feelings of connectedness (Albuja et al., 2019a).

The above studies indicate how fluidity can be negatively appraised by monoracial groups. Lo (2021), a half-Chinese, half-white writer captured the implications of external narratives of fluidity:

'You're Asian. That's why you're so smart,' a staff member says to me... 'Is that a compliment?' I want to say, 'I work hard and it has nothing to do with being Asian!'... I reflect on my upbringing in a white-majority, upper-middle-class town, and cringe realizing that my ability to assimilate with whiteness throughout my life probably privileged me more than my Asianness. I then contend, conflicted, with my colleague's erasure of that half-white ancestry. (p. 73)

Lo's description of her experience and reflection demonstrates how AWBIs can rank their respective identities. The external messaging of her co-worker signals that her intelligence is owed to her Asian identity, erasing not only her white identity but her identity as a hardworking, professional individual. Further, as Lo outlined, the subsequent internal reflection was guilt in that her white identity historically has benefitted her more than her Asianness, leading to a critical examination of her reaction to the co-worker's comment. This is one example of how AWBIs contend daily with external, oppressive narratives about their identities. Multiracial people who feel restricted in how they identify and present reported greater depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and decreased motivation (Albuja et al., 2019b). The fluidity between dual identities can be linked to negative social experiences, like alienation and microaggressions (Albuja et al., 2018; Harris, 2018; Johnson, 2019). The denial of their identity, or unintegrated identity, has been linked to negative mental health outcomes including decreased compatibility with identities, lower levels of social belonging, and a reduced sense of autonomy (Albuja et al., 2019a).

Internalized oppression is a significant threat to harmonious self-conceptualization for AWBI because it informs negative appraisals towards their racial identity and associated privilege, stereotypes, and experiences. Johnston-Guerrero et al. (2020) conducted a study on biracial college students examining how they conceptualized oppression. One of their Asian-white participants described only experiencing oppression from others after she had self-disclosed her non-white identity. Johnston-Guerrero et al. theorized that their participants did not locate their racial experiences within a larger system of oppression because of their own internalized monoracism. Johnston-Guerrero et al. summarized their study, stating "our participants still described "push-back" against claiming biracial or multiracial identities; yet



internalized monoracism may be preventing students from seeing how their identity claims and experiences connect to a larger system of oppression” (p. 29). These findings are important for understanding AWBI self-conceptualization because experiences of multiracial discrimination and oppression have been linked to decreasing mental health and well-being (Franco et al., 2021). In support of Johnston-Guerrero et al.’s (2020) () qualitative findings, Franco et al. (2021) identified that multiracial-specific discriminations aligned with worse mental health outcomes. Their findings showed that “the ‘low discrimination’ class reported statistically less depressive symptoms, anxiety, stress, and negative affect than all other classes, whereas the ‘high discrimination’ class reported the most severe mental health outcomes that were statistically higher than each other class” (Franco et al., 2021, p. 349). Similarly, Law et al. (2021) examined the relationship between racial-ethnic identity, racial invalidations, and mental health of biracial Asians; they found that experiencing racial invalidations was linked to increased depression and anxiety symptoms. These studies highlight how fluidity and internalized oppression are deeply intertwined. With themes of hypodescent and social invalidation, fluidity can be associated with negative self-appraisal of one’s heritage. Further, the research shows that identity integration for AWBIs are associated with less internalized oppression and positive mental health outcomes. For self-conceptualization, internalized oppression and fluidity reflect how AWBI incorporate or reject self-identification based on their socialization and interactions (Davenport, 2016).

## **Psychological Health Implications**

### ***Identity Invalidation and Identity Integration***

In exploring identity invalidation, the identity of appearance, and the fluid identity of AWBIs, there are implications for psychological well-being. The implications for self-conceptualization and mental well-being are significant because of how they can impact each

other (Law et al., 2021). There has been substantial research on the relationship between self-conceptualization and psychological well-being, with meaningful findings that show a positive correlation between identity/trait authenticity and positive mental health outcomes (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003; Deci et al., 2001, as cited in Schmander & Sedikides, 2018). Schmander and Sedikides (2018) described how “state authenticity represents the sense that individuals are truly themselves when valued facets of their identity are congruent with and validated by social contexts” (p. 248). In their overview of psychological well-being and authenticity, the research indicated that higher measures of identity authenticity positively correlated with positive mental health outcomes cross-culturally. Thus, the intersection between self-conceptualization (and validation) and mental health is pertinent to the discussion of AWBI identity processes; how AWBI self-conceptualize, with validated and invalidated identity experiences, will impact mental health outcomes (Albuja et al., 2019a; Albuja et al., 2019b; Law et al., 2021). The importance of identity integration and salience for multiracial individuals is a key consideration for therapeutic practitioners. For example, if AWBIs are experiencing depression, loneliness, or other negative mental health symptoms, exploring their experiences within the context of identity invalidations and how they self-conceptualize to those discriminations may support identity integration processes and/or create space for raised awareness.

Past research has indicated that the strength of one’s racial-ethnic identity integration can predict mental health outcomes (Law et al., 2021). As highlighted in the fluid identity section, high levels of multiracial identity integration (MII) were linked to positive mental health outcomes such as increased positive self-regard and lower depressive symptoms and can act as a protective factor to facilitate mental well-being (Harris et al., 2021; Villegas-Gold & Tran, 2018,

as cited in McDonald & Chang, 2022). Albuja et al. (2019a) examined the physiological effects of identity denial for biracial and bicultural people. They found little to no differences in physiological well-being between biracial participants who reasserted their identities versus those who did not. While they did not find significant effects of identity integration, they did find that individuals' identity denial experiences were linked to greater self-reported stress levels in biracial participants (Albuja et al., 2019a). Albuja et al. (2019b) conducted another study on biracial and bicultural populations to examine how identity denial was associated with poorer psychological health. With the connection between identity denial and lower psychological well-being established in numerous studies (Huynh et al., 2011; Sanchez, 2010, as cited in Albuja et al., 2019b), this study found that biracial and bicultural participants who experienced challenges to their dual identity, or were denied their identity, were associated with a lower sense of identity freedom, decreased perception of harmonious identities, and decreased perception of social belonging (Albuja et al., 2019b). Expanding upon the effects of identity invalidation, mental health effects, and identity integration, another study explored the relationship between MII and colour-blind racial ideology (CBRI), which "describes racial colour-blindness within two domains—colour evasions and power evasion—and is used to understand the perpetuation of discrimination and inequality" (Neville & Awad, 2014; Neville et al., 2013, as cited in McDonald et al., 2019, p. 76). McDonald et al. (2019) found various forms of discrimination (i.e., exclusion, denial of racist issues, stigmatization, etc.) were expressively associated with MII. They found that exclusion and unawareness of blatant racist issues were the most significant predictors of MII with their participants. With ignorance and exclusion as the strong predictors of MII, feeling like an outsider to one's own racial groups, combined with a lack of awareness of systems of oppression, has potential inhibiting effects on identity salience and

integration (McDonald et al., 2019). These studies demonstrate how identity invalidations can challenge identity integration and affect self-appraisal, also revealing how impediments to self-conceptualization can contribute to negative effects on psychological well-being. A major takeaway from these studies on invalidation is the noticeably decreased sense of freedom and social belonging, coupled with increased self-reported stress. These findings are essential to consider in a therapeutic context because they highlight the importance of social group and autonomy in self-identification. Studies may not be capturing the breadth of negative mental health effects of invalidation experiences, like identity denial, because it is a singular event in a relatively controlled environment (Albuja et al., 2019a).

### ***Minority Stress Theory***

While the processes in how identity invalidations impact mental health in multiracial people are varied, it has been found consistently that discrimination is an impactful and common component in the multiracial experience (Franco et al., 2021; Law et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2019). Racial discrimination has been linked to negative mental health outcomes (Harris, 2017; Heilman, 2022). Minority Stress Theory (MST) is a framework for the relationship between racial discrimination and mental health outcomes (Meyer, 2003, as cited in Franco et al., 2021). MST suggests that perceived discrimination contributes to negative internal processes, like identity invalidation, which leads to negative mental health outcomes (Meyer, 2003, as cited in Franco et al., 2021). Further, MST posits that minority stress is represented by an excess, additive, and unique form of stress that individuals with more privileged identities (i.e., White, wealthy, educated, etc.) do not experience (Meyer, 2003, as cited in Franco et al., 2021). Through their study of MII, CBRI, and experiences of discrimination of 288 participants, McDonald et al. (2019) found that all experiences with discrimination (in multiple forms) were

associated with MII: “It appears that discrimination is a universal experience of all racial minority persons (whether multiracial or monoracial) and is associated with MII” (p. 80). Their study supports the consistent and unique characteristics of discrimination MST describes. MST captures how minority populations, including multiracial individuals, have unique experiences that are distinct and tied to racial invalidations.

The theory is important to the identity processes of AWBIs because it highlights how racial invalidation and discrimination that they experience affect mental health outcomes (Franco et al., 2021). MST is a theory that bridges why these discriminations are unique to minority populations and how the mental health outcomes subsequently affect identity (Harris, 2017; Sue et al., 2019). For example, Franco and O’Brien (2018) conducted a study using MST to conceptualize how multiracial individuals experienced racial discrimination and the effects on mental health, finding that there were multiple dimensions of racial discrimination that independently and negatively influenced mental health outcomes. These findings are significant because a perceived threat to one’s identity was factored in as discrimination and was found to be linked to depressive symptoms and loneliness (Franco & O’Brien, 2018). Franco and O’Brien’s study highlights how challenges to racial identity can mediate the relationship between racial identity invalidation and mental health outcomes, through the lens of MST. In the therapeutic context, considering the consistency and uniqueness of racial discrimination, as MST posits, is important because it provides context to how clients may be experiencing racial invalidation in their daily lives. Clients may be vulnerable to the consistent nature of racial discrimination which can lead to presenting issues like internalized racism, detachment, and other maladaptive ways of coping (Harris, 2018; Lei et al., 2022). Further, the research shared demonstrates how racial discrimination and invalidation can be an inherent and consistent part of

racial minority groups' lived experiences (Franco & O'Brien, 2018; Franco et al., 2021; Harris, 2017; McDonald et al., 2019). Counsellors may need to consider how these experiences inform conceptualizing treatment plans and presenting concerns. Additionally, if a counsellor does not occupy a minority identity this may require assessment and consideration of cultural competence/humility in exploring how discrimination can affect clients.

### ***Mental Health Outcomes***

MST posits that minority populations experience unique, additional, and excessive stressors associated with their minority status, which can suggest that these stressors thwart identity integration (Franco & O'Brien, 2018; Franco et al., 2021; McDonald & Chang, 2022). To reiterate, MII captures how identity integration is positive when one's multiple identities are perceived as congruent and integrated versus conflicted and distanced (Cheng & Lee, 2009). When one internalizes identity invalidations of rejection or questioning of their identity, it can lead to less congruence in their sense of self (Law et al., 2021). Law et al. (2021) studied the relationship between racial-ethnic identity, racial invalidations, and the mental health of AWBIs; they hypothesized that experiencing racial invalidations would be correlated with negative mental health. Part of their hypothesis was formed based on how positive MII can be negatively affected by racial discrimination or identity questioning of multiracial individuals (Law et al., 2021). Their hypothesis was supported as they found that racial invalidation experiences were associated with higher depression and anxiety symptoms.

Similarly, Franco et al. (2021) examined different dimensions of multiracial-specific discrimination (familial acceptance, microaggressions, racial identity invalidation) and whether each type of discrimination predicted negative mental health outcomes for multiracial people. As Franco et al. stated, "although research has identified the various types of discrimination that

multiracial people experience (e.g., Franco & O'Brien, 2018; Salahuddin & O'Brien, 2011) the ways each of these forms of discrimination combine to predict mental health outcomes has not been identified" (pp. 349-350). To support their focus on multiracial-specific invalidations, they controlled for general racial discrimination to assess whether multiracial-specific discriminations remained significant predictors for mental health outcomes. They found that each level of discrimination was positively correlated with anxiety, stress, depressive symptoms, and negative affect. Franco et al. (2021) also found that when they examined simultaneous discriminations in their study, familial discrimination, behavioural invalidation, and phenotype invalidation were the only three discriminations that still predicted negative outcomes.

These findings are significant because they demonstrate how multiracial-specific discriminations can affect the mental health outcomes of multiracial individuals and affect self-conceptualization. The research shows that multiracial-specific discrimination impacts the mental health of multiracial people. For AWBIs in counselling contexts, practitioners must make space for the exploration of whether these discriminations are present, and if so, how they are internalized by clients. While having depressive symptoms does not necessarily mean they are caused by racial identity discrimination or invalidation, research demonstrates the potential influence discrimination has on mental health. Understanding how identity invalidation or identity questioning may impact AWBI, and other multiracial people would support practitioners in providing culturally competent care. Further, since AWBI can occupy White-passing identity spaces, racial discrimination may not be understood as a potential stressor.

### **Chapter 3: Discussion and Application**

This chapter will utilize the analysis and research presented in this capstone to discuss a practical approach to AWBI self-conceptualization. I will present an additional questionnaire that is focused on AWBI populations to be used by counsellors with their clients. This questionnaire can be used as part of the intake process or throughout the therapeutic process. Using the themes and research shared in the literature review, this tool will also be informed by existing multicultural competencies and ecological systems theory adapted by multiracial identity theorists (Ratts et al., 2016; Root, 2004). This questionnaire is a response to the gap in tailored tools/interventions that capture the specific racial identity experiences of AWBI.

This questionnaire addresses some of the identity experiences that AWBI can face, like identity questioning, identity denial, and reconciling a fluid identity, in systemic and interpersonal contexts (Law et al., 2021; McDonald & Chang, 2022; Törngren, 2018). Each question is informed by a different theme from chapter two, which will be explained in length in the following section. However, there are potential limitations with the proposed questionnaire. The questionnaire is not a validated tool, meaning that its effects on AWBI mental health and self-conceptualization are unverified. Additionally, AWBI clients with identity-related concerns, may not have experience with explicit questioning or discussion about their perspectives on their racial identity (and related intersections). The questionnaire does have the potential to mimic identity questioning for AWBI clients if they are not prepared or informed by the questionnaire's purpose. To mitigate these limitations, I propose the following suggestions. While the questionnaire is not a validated tool, its purpose is to generate reflection and discussion on the client's self-conceptualization, primarily around their racial identity. Ideally, the questionnaire is utilized by practitioners as an informal assessment tool, to assess the client's awareness of their



racial identity experiences and their self-conceptualization in relation to their AWBI identity. Further, it provides a starting point in mapping social influences and support systems with AWBI identity as the focal point. To mitigate mirroring identity questioning experiences with clients, practitioners should discuss the level of interest in exploring identity experiences with clients prior to using the questionnaire. If the client explicitly states curiosity and interest in further discussion, the practitioner can explain the purpose and nature of the questionnaire to the client. The practitioner can also offer to go through the questionnaire with the client or encourage the client filling it out independently if that is their preference. By framing the purpose of the questionnaire as a tool to generate discussion and reflection, the client can ideally use the tool to assess their own awareness of different identity experiences. As well, the practitioner can informally assess areas of further exploration and support in their therapeutic plan.

Race-specific interventions support relationship building between counsellor and client and illustrate the counsellor's competence in acknowledging that groups are racialized in unique ways (Nadal et al., 2014). The purpose of this tool is to directly create reflection and discussion points about AWBI identity experiences, ideally supporting practitioners in generating informed and safe discussions about clients' identity concerns and/or incongruences. These questions are shaped by the themes in chapter two. This chapter is my interpretation of the research and is my response to how AWBI can be better supported in therapeutic contexts. The tenets of cultural humility and an anti-oppressive approach better support AWBI through open and curious discussions on racial identity and systemic and interpersonal influences that centre on the client's lived experience (Peters, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

### **Anti-Oppression**

Racial identification and self-conceptualization are informed by individual experience as well as the experience of social and systemic perception (Albuja et al., 2018; Law et al., 2021). As presented in chapter 2, identity invalidations—at the systemic and interpersonal levels—are forms of oppression within the AWBI racial identification process (Ratts et al., 2016). Oppression expressed through microaggressions, objectification, identity denial, and/or inequitable laws, all contribute to the mental health of marginalized populations (Franco et al., 2021; Law et al., 2021; Ratts et al., 2016). The response to supporting self-conceptualization for AWBI (and any marginalized group) must include an anti-oppressive lens to acknowledge the mental health implications of oppression and to mitigate further oppression within the therapeutic relationship. Oppression of marginalized groups has negative implications on mental health and well-being, as oppression can generate stressful environments, decreased self-esteem, increased self-doubt, and psychological exhaustion (Albuja et al., 2019a; Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012). Based on the links between mental health and oppression, counsellors embracing an anti-oppressive lens can acknowledge the harm of oppression and inform support for their clients. Additionally, oppression can occur when there is an imbalance of power, either intentionally or unintentionally. The therapeutic relationship intrinsically has power dynamics that often position the counsellor in an “expert” or authority role (Paré, 2013; Ratts et al., 2016). Through adopting an anti-oppressive lens, counsellors will locate themselves within the power dynamic and work to create a non-hierarchical space to avoid exerting undue influence on the client. An anti-oppressive framework addresses, acknowledges, and challenges inequitable systems and simultaneously supports the empowerment of populations marginalized by oppressive systems (Peters & Luke, 2022). For the therapeutic relationship to be a space for

multiracial individuals to explore, express, and process their identity experiences, the counsellor has to present as a safe enough and supportive figure, willing to foster this exploration (Franco & McElroy-Heltzel, 2018). Thus, I believe the response to identity invalidation needs to capture the systems and levels at which these invalidations can occur. Utilizing an anti-oppressive approach in therapeutic contexts can deconstruct the oppressive identity denial narratives of mixed-race individuals (Harris, 2017; Ratts et al., 2016; Siddiqui, 2011).

### **Multicultural Competency**

In general, the counselling field has moved towards an intersectional, contextual approach to helping clients (Ratts et al., 2016; Souto & Sotkasiira, 2022). The intersections of a person's identity and environment have mental health implications, such as an increased sense of social belonging and positive self-appraisal, which can lead to positive psychological symptoms (Law et al., 2021; Schmander & Sedikides, 2018; Ratts et al., 2016). Further, these identity locations can carry intersections of oppression and privilege, which is relevant to AWBI due to white-passing appearances and Asian minority status being held as a "higher status" minority group (Dominquez & Embrick, 2020; Kiang et al., 2017; Ratts et al., 2016). As Ratts et al. (2016) reiterated: "Within these contexts, individuals not only have multiple identities (e.g., African American gay man) but also have intersecting privileged and marginalized status (e.g., male privilege with racial and sexual minority marginalized statuses)" (p. 29). Clinicians working with AWBI have to acknowledge the nuance that comes with dual privilege and marginalization, and how this can impact self-appraisal.

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) posit that there are four essential aspects of counselling for counsellors and clients. Ratts et al. (2016) listed these as:

(a) understanding the complexities of diversity and multiculturalism on the counselling relationship, (b) recognizing the negative influence of oppression on mental health and well-being, (c) understanding individuals in the context of their social environment, and (d) integrating social justice advocacy into the various modalities of counselling. (p. 29-30)

These competencies are broad but capture the essence of multiculturalism and multiracialism in therapeutic contexts and act as the foundation for the proposed intake sheet for AWBI clients.

The competencies of the MSJCC are captured in a conceptual framework highlighting the intersections of identity and positionality within the therapeutic relationship (Ratts et al., 2016).

The intake sheet is intended to support the counsellor's awareness of their client's positionality, which ideally then extends to raised self-awareness within the client. The form is also proposed as a rapport-building tool that demonstrates curiosity and intention to the client about their specific identity locations. The MSJCC's competencies and relevant frameworks inform the structure of the sheet and the relevancy of the questions. I believe my proposed supplemental intake sheet for AWBI answers the MSJCC's call for counsellors to enact multicultural and social-justice-informed beliefs and knowledge, and to develop cultural and change-fostering interventions (Ratts et al., 2016).

### **Cultural Humility**

As highlighted in chapter two, AWBI's identity experiences and the resulting mental health implications are a growing area of research (Harris, 2018; Törngren, 2018). The purpose of this capstone was to present literature on a specific demographic of multiracial people and to illustrate the importance of not generalizing multiracial people into one homogenous group. In supporting AWBIs in a therapeutic context, I believe that maintaining a non-generalizing

approach is critical for harm reduction and centring the client's experience and autonomy in counselling. *Cultural humility* is defined as: "a way of being that involves a willingness, an openness and desire to (a) reflect on oneself as an embedded cultural being and (b) hear about and strive to understand others' cultural backgrounds and identities" (Foronda et al., 2016; Hook et al., 2017; Hook & Watkins, 2015, as cited in Zhang et al., 2021, p. 549). Cultural humility is a vital concept for multicultural counselling because it introduces awareness of and discussion on cultural topics, like racial identity, without assumption (Zhang et al., 2021). It has also moved from a conceptual theory to empirically supported and has been linked to less depressive symptoms and less racial identity stress (Franco & McElroy-Heltzel, 2018; Zhang et al., 2021). While the empirical data remains in its infancy, cultural humility is an approach that clinicians can foster to invite culturally informed discussions into the therapeutic relationship. Thus, counsellors positioning themselves as curious and open to clients' racial experiences reflects cultural humility. As culture and identity are intertwined (Spector, 2017), I used the tenets of cultural humility in constructing the proposed form. The questions will also reflect multicultural competencies, as it is a tool that centres on the client's perception of racialization and their identities.

### **Identity Informed Questionnaire for Counsellors**

I acknowledge that not all AWBI clients seek therapy for identity concerns, nor is the proposed document the only way to discuss identity experiences. The following tool is based on my research and what I perceive to be the relevant implications on therapeutic contexts and relationships. Further, I am utilizing my personal experiences working with AWBI and multiracial clients. As mentioned, the questions are intended for use either at intake or as racial identity discussions arise, for clinicians to make space for AWBI clients to explore their various

identity locations and experiences. Additionally, it is a tool to reflect clinicians' intent to be culturally curious and to do the work to create a safe-enough space for clients' dualities. The literature review informed each of these questions as they aim to capture the client's self-appraisal of their Asian-white identity and how it impacts and intersects with other arenas of the client's life. The review presented how AWBI identity is heavily dictated by social and systemic perceptions. These questions aim to re-centre the client's perspective and experience of their AWBI identity.

### Figure 1

#### *Identity Informed Questionnaire for AWBI Clients*

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Client Responses</i>
1. How would you describe your racial identity? How do you align with your identities?	
2. What have you learned about your identities from your family, peers, and/or environment?  What have you learned about your identities from your own experiences/learnings?	
3. Do your social groups (friends, community, colleagues, sports teams, etc.) reflect your identities and culture? How so?	
4. Have any events/situations made you question your identity?	

<p>5. How does your racial identity impact your day-to-day life? Has this changed over time?</p>	
<p>6. What are your perspectives on, or experiences with, racial stereotypes/stereotyping towards your Asian, white, and/or biracial identities?</p>	
<p>7. What are your feelings/thoughts toward themes like “duality” or “fluidity”, between your white and Asian racial identities?</p>	
<p>8. How do you feel toward your racial identities?</p>	

*Note: This figure outlines different, informed questions to support clinicians in exploring identity questions and themes with AWBI clients.*

**Context for Questions**

**First Set.** The first set of questions, “How would you describe your racial identity?” and “How do you align with your identities?” are intended to capture the client’s self-appraisal of their racial identity and how they see themselves within their own descriptions. I chose these two questions as the first question provides both the clinician and client with insights into how the client self-describes and offers a reflection point of whether the description is in alignment with felt sense. This question is not posed to assert a label; the client’s response will act as an anchor for other questions on the form. As highlighted in chapter 2, AWBI self-identification is influenced by social interactions and systems (Law et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2019). A

client's description of their racial identity can also be an indication of what has been reflected back to them from peers, family, and society (Albuja et al., 2019a; Harris, 2018; Norman & Chen, 2020).

**Second Set.** The second set of questions, "What have you learned about your identities from your family, your peers, and/or your environment?" and "What have you learned about your identities from your own experiences/learnings?" are intended to raise the client's awareness of who and what influences their racial identification. These questions prompt reflection on what led them to their specific way of identifying and can indicate the significant influences in the client's life. Notably, counsellors can assess for potential sources of support, distress, incongruence, and more in the client's life based on their responses. Identity experiences, like invalidation, can occur on interpersonal and systemic levels (Albuja et al., 2019b; Davenport, 2016). These questions assist both the client and counsellor in illustrating the client's network, influences, and self-appraisal. Further, it can support discussion on where potential identity invalidation narratives are coming from and how the client is internalizing these identity experiences.

**Third Set.** The third set of questions, "Do your social groups reflect your identities and culture? How so?" reflect the importance of social group membership to racial identity and self-conceptualization. In chapter 2, social group membership denial was highlighted as a significant form of identity invalidation (Albuja et al., 2019b; Hornsey, 2008). While AWBI clients have the potential to occupy white and Asian racial locations, several factors like phenotype, cultural knowledge, and language can affect whether AWBIs are validated in their social group membership in their respective racial groups (Törngren, 2018). These questions are intended to get insights into how the client socializes and whether their social groups mirror their own racial



locations. AWBIs can face incongruence between how they feel/identify (i.e., Japanese and white), versus how they are racialized in social settings (i.e., peers deem them white because they ‘look more white’) (Law et al., 2021; Lo, 2021; Törngren, 2018). These questions can support the client in assessing their social landscape with a racial lens and potentially support discussions on how their social groups, and relevant interactions, have shaped their understanding of their identity.

**Fourth Set.** The fourth question, “Have any events/situations made you question your identity?” is a direct inquiry into whether the client has experienced what they deem to be identity invalidations. Identity invalidations can be explicit and/or subtle, in the form of microaggressions, identity questioning, or exoticization (Harris, 2017; Sue et al., 2019). Some clients may not be aware of explicit identity invalidations but may be able to name feelings of discomfort or experiences that have led to questioning. Other clients may have clear recollections of identity invalidations that they can name that have existing implications on their self-conceptualization. This question centers on the client’s experience and awareness levels of any racialization/identity-oriented experiences that have impacted them. Further, it directly invites the client’s identity experiences into discussion. I believe that part of the counsellor’s responsibility when discussing racial identities and associated experiences is to welcome those discussions into the therapeutic space; co-developing the relationship and the therapeutic space with the client aligns with anti-oppressive principles (Peters, 2022). While this question does not intend for meaning-making processes to occur on paper, it begins the welcoming of the client’s reflection on their identity invalidation experiences.

**Fifth Set.** The fifth set of questions, “How does your racial identity impact your day-to-day life? Has this changed over time?” is to better understand, for both the clinician and client,

how race shows up in the client's lived experiences. For AWBIs appearance is typically a major part of identity experiences because of white-passing presentations (Davenport, 2016; Törngren, 2018). However, I do not think that clinicians should assume that AWBI clients have identity experiences related to appearance. With physical appearance being a main focus of AWBI racial discourse, I did not want to format a question specific to appearance, instead offering the client the chance to highlight what they see as the prominent parts of their racial identity and experience. For example, exoticization and objectification are potentially negative identity experiences for AWBI. Further, through including an inquiry on how race has shown up over time the client has an opportunity to reflect on potential changes, which may indicate awareness of racial identity development throughout the life span and potential life events that catalyzed or inhibited racial identity development.

**Sixth Set.** The sixth question, "What are your perspectives on, or experiences with, stereotypes/stereotyping towards your Asian, white, and/or biracial identities?", is intended to provide a reflection on stereotypes and/or roles that the client has been prescribed or internalized. The common stereotypes of AWBI include, but are not limited to, being "exotic", being "just" white, tenets from the model minority stereotype, and the inability to fully fit in/belong to racial groups (Poon et al., 2016; Skinner et al., 2020; Törngren, 2018). This question ideally invites racialization experiences into discussion/reflection. AWBIs can be affected by stereotypes in that they may be seen as "fulfilling" the criteria of a stereotype (both negative and positive factors), and also when they're seen as defying stereotypes (Franco et al., 2021). Stereotypes can contribute to internalized oppression because they tend to highlight negative connotations erroneously prescribed to racial groups (Chen et al., 2019; Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2020). This question also provides an opportunity for the client to assess how stereotypes influence their

perception of racial identity and self-appraisal. My intention with this question is to generate discussion on whether stereotypes have been internalized as part of the client's self-conceptualization. For example, if a prominent stereotype of AWBI is being racially ambiguous and exotic, does the client internalize this stereotype as positive? Does being stereotyped as exotic make them resentful or appreciative of parts of their racial identity? These types of reflection points generate contemplation of the sources of stereotyping and whether it has an impact on self-appraisal.

**Seventh Set.** The seventh question, "What are your feelings/thoughts toward themes like "duality" or "fluidity" between your white and Asian racial identities?" is in relation to the "chameleon" experience of multiracial individuals, particularly AWBIs (McDonald & Chang, 2022; Miville et al., 2005). As mentioned, the intrinsic duality of AWBI identity can carry both positive and negative connotations; this question is intended to prompt how the client feels towards the duality of their racial identity. The fluidity of AWBI identity can be a source of pride and can be seen as advantageous (McDonald & Chang, 2022). Understanding how the client views fluidity, or if they are aware of fluidity in their racial identity, can support the therapeutic work. Significantly, this can offer a foundation for the client and practitioner to work towards identity integration as a potential goal. Higher levels of identity integration, as highlighted in chapter 2, are represented by lower levels of perceived conflict and distance within one's identity (McDonald & Chang, 2022).

**Eighth Set.** The final question, "How do you feel towards your racial identities?" is intended to capture how the client currently interacts with their racial identity. As shown in chapter 2, AWBIs can have simultaneously positive and negative connotations towards their duality (Albuja et al., 2019a; Skinner et al., 2020). This question prompts reflection on the

multifaceted nature of how AWBIs may conceptualize their race and how it may impact their well-being. Further, this is also an informal way to assess any potential internalized oppression that may not have been unearthed in previous questions. Identity experiences, like microaggressions and systemic invalidation, can result in internalized oppression for AWBIs (Chong & Kuo, 2015; Davenport, 2016; Lo, 2021). Lower levels of internalized oppression have been linked to more harmonious identity integration for AWBI (Chong & Kuo, 2015). If internalized oppression exists for the client, their self-conceptualization and identity congruence may be affected. This question supports the client in reflecting on any negative and positive connotations about race. The goal of the question is not to categorize the client's racial identity. The intention is to begin to make space for the processes of reflection and meaning-making around racial identity and racialization within their environments.

### ***Practitioner Considerations***

The questions posed above, as informed by the literature (Albuja et al., 2019a; Törngren, 2018; Skinner et al., 2020), are intended proposed to generate reflections, curiosities, and awareness within therapeutic spaces with AWBI clients. The research question, "What are the identity experiences for AWBI?" was answered through the literature review, which presented the various identity experiences for AWBI. Further, the literature review provided an answer to "How do these identity processes impact AWBI self-conceptualization?", by illustrating the ways in which racial identity invalidations, social group membership, and systemic structures influence self-appraisal and significantly, psychological well-being. The questionnaire utilizes these takeaways to support practitioners in addressing the important and unique identity experiences for AWBI clients. AWBI identity denial is more likely than monoracial peers; practitioners can raise their own awareness around AWBI identity experiences to better facilitate

validating discussion on AWBI identity processes in therapeutic contexts (Law et al., 2021). The questionnaire is also meant to aid practitioners in the preliminary exploration of AWBI clients' identity experiences and incongruences (Chong & Song, 2022; McDonald & Chang, 2022). As highlighted in the previous section, this questionnaire is for clients who have vocalized identity and/or racial identity as a presenting concern or curiosity. The questionnaire can be used as a form for the client to fill out or as a question guide for the practitioner and client to work through together. As highlighted in chapter 2, identity incongruence, identity invalidation, and/or identity questioning can lead to negative mental health outcomes, like increased depressive symptoms, lowered self-esteem, and decreased sense of autonomy (Albuja et al., 2019b; Franco et al., 2021; McDonald & Chang, 2022).

Practitioners can utilize the questionnaire to assess potential relationships between identity incongruences and invalidation experiences and mental health outcomes. Particularly, if AWBI clients respond with negative self-appraisal and/or invalidation experiences within their interpersonal and institutional systems, practitioners can then explore with clients how these factors interact and assess for low affect (Albuja et al., 2019a; Law et al., 2021; Ratts et al., 2016). Clients may not be aware of how their social groups, systems, and self-conceptualization may be related; practitioners should be attuned to cues around decreased psychological well-being when reported identity incongruences exist. Further, as this questionnaire is designed to illuminate how the client views themselves and their racial identity, practitioners should assess whether clients have positive connotations towards their identity experiences as it can be a source of strength and resourcing (McDonald et al., 2019; McDonald & Chang, 2022). The questionnaire can generate reflection points for both the client and the practitioner on how identity impacts psychological well-being. AWBIs, like other multiracial groups, face unique

identity experiences and challenges in comparison to their monoracial peers (Law et al., 2021). These unique identity experiences are connected to how AWBIs self-conceptualize and their mental health outcomes (Law et al., 2021; Miville et al., 2005; Törngren, 2018). This questionnaire is one tool that can be used to address these identity experiences directly and discover how they may be impacting clients' well-being. This tool is not meant for practitioners to give to all their AWBI clients, as assuming that AWBIs (and any multiracial individuals) have identity challenges and/or that their racial identity is important to them in the therapeutic context, poses a risk for harm (McDonald & Chang, 2022; Nishimura, 2004). To use this tool, counsellors must be attuned to their clients' needs and examine whether these questions contribute to building therapeutic safety and rapport, which are essential considerations in conducting anti-oppressive practice (Peters, 2022). This questionnaire is not meant to categorize, but to honour AWBIs' intersecting identity locations, provide reflection points, and to gain insight.

### **Future Recommendations and Conclusions**

My interest in exploring the self-conceptualization of AWBIs was born out of my personal experience and interest in learning about the different identity experiences of AWBIs and the implications for mental health. Multiracial populations are a growing demographic and occupy unique identity locations and experience distinct racialization experiences (Norman & Chen, 2020; Seto et al., 2022). The research has illustrated the historical context of biracial and multiracial individuals, and how societal perception has impacted and informed identity experiences for AWBIs. This capstone examined the various identity experiences of AWBIs and how they impact mental health and self-conceptualization. As noted, since AWBIs inherently occupy dual racial identities, which result in distinct racialization experiences (Davenport, 2016), this population is often faced with being asked "What are you?" versus "Who are you?". Being

viewed through the lens of a “what” leads to consistent identity questioning, identity denial, and other racialization experiences that impact self-appraisal and mental health.

What this capstone shows is the variance in identity invalidations that AWBIs can experience. As well, it illustrates how AWBIs’ fluidity in their racial identity—oscillating between white, Asian, and multiracial—can be influenced by their relative relationships and environments. To support AWBI clients, counsellors must acknowledge how these different racial intersections can impact self-conceptualization and mental health, as racial identity invalidations can greatly impact self-esteem, motivation, and overall psychological health (Albuja et al., 2019a; Franco & O’Brien, 2018; Law et al., 2021). With this in mind, I recommend that researchers continue to conduct studies on AWBIs’ identity experiences and the related mental health implications. The research on multiracial populations remains relatively homogenous, grouping multiracial participants (no matter their racial background) into one group (Garay & Remedios, 2021; McDonald & Chang, 2022). Studies focusing on the specific mental health implications and needs of AWBIs can support clinicians in providing informed care with empirical evidence. Further, I recommend that practitioners revisit approaches that foster cultural humility and anti-oppression to engage with AWBIs and identity exploration. Utilizing these approaches can support counsellors in engaging clients in a meaningful exploration into identity discussions while providing a safe enough space for clients to validate and examine their identities. These steps towards an informed clinical practice will support AWBI clients in having their identity and mental health needs met within therapeutic contexts.

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