

The Role of Gender, Class, and Religion in Biracial Americans' Racial Labeling Decisions

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Abstract

Racial attachments are understood to be socially constructed and endogenous to gender, socioeconomic, and religious identities. Yet we know surprisingly little about the effect of such identities on the particular racial *labels* that individuals self-select. In this article, I investigate how social identities shape the racial labels chosen by biracial individuals in the United States, a rapidly growing population who have multiple labeling options. Examining national surveys of more than 37,000 respondents of Latino-white, Asian-white, and black-white parentage, I disentangle how gender, socioeconomic status, and religious identity influence racial labeling decisions. Across biracial subgroups and net of all other influences, economic affluence and Jewish identity predict whiter self-identification, whereas belonging to a religion more commonly associated with racial minorities is associated with a minority identification. Gender, however, is the single best predictor of identification, with biracial women markedly more likely than biracial men to identify as multiracial. These findings help us better understand the contextual nature of racial identification and the processes via which social identities interact with racial meanings in the United States.

Keywords

identity, race/ethnicity, gender, religion, minority groups

That race is endogenous to historical and social dynamics and can be redefined via political processes is a long-standing premise in social science (Brubaker 2009; Omi and Winant 1994). Prior research also reveals that the meanings individuals attach to race are influenced by its intersection with other social categories (Haney López 2006). Accordingly, placement into such identity categories as gender (Gay and Tate 1998; Saperstein and Penner 2012), social class (Dawson 1994; Wilson 1980), and religion (Chong 1998; Harris-Lacewell 2006) may reinforce or weaken racial attachments depending on the way these intersect with race.

There is an important relationship between these social identities and the significance of race, but less is known about the effect of such identities on the particular racial *labels* individuals choose. In the United States, racial labels have traditionally been treated as an ascribed characteristic, with group membership either devoid of choice or structured by legal

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and social norms such as hypodescent (Snipp 2003; Williams 2006). Group membership was especially stringent for people of mixed African ancestry, who were typically identified as singularly black (Davis 2001). Changes to the U.S. Census in 2000, however, which permit multiple-race classification, show that racial labels are no longer a disjoint construct in U.S. politics and culture.

How do central nonracial identities—specifically, gender, socioeconomic status, and religion—affect the choice of racial labels? I examine this question by focusing on the rapidly growing number of biracial Americans—individuals whose parents are from two racial categories.¹ Biracials have a range of racial labels from which to choose.² Assessing the labeling decisions of biracials allows us to better understand how social class, gender, and religion inform personal understandings of race in the United States. Prior research that examines biracials' labeling choices emphasizes the importance of family, peers, and environmental context, but gives little attention to the influence of nonracial social identities. This gap in the literature can be attributed to the fact that available data have not allowed an in-depth analysis of the effects of these factors until now.

Drawing on identity theory and other research in sociology and social psychology, I argue that biracials negotiate their identifications based on interpersonal encounters, neighborhoods, and places of worship, classifying themselves in relation to their peers and adopting the label deemed most acceptable in a given context. To examine the effects of social identities on racial construction, I leverage national surveys of more than 37,000 Asian-white, Latino-white, and black-white biracial college students. These surveys allow me to include important variables lacking in previous studies, extending the literature in three ways. First, I separate the effect of parents' marital status, family income, and religion on respondents' self-labeling. Second, to ascertain how socioeconomic context shapes identification, I examine the effect of neighborhood median income. Third, I empirically

assess the determinants of exclusive white identification, a racial label about which we currently understand relatively little, but that has major implications for the future U.S. racial structure (Cross 2002; Gans 2012). More generally, I examine how biracial young adults are choosing to assert their identification in the twenty-first century, and the degree to which hypodescent influences their choices.

This research also contributes to our understanding of identity construction among biracial Latinos, a group often excluded from multiracial identity studies. Because most surveys use a two-question approach in which Hispanic origin is distinguished from race, it is often impossible to separate respondents of Latino/non-Latino parentage from respondents who have two Latino parents and identify their ethnicity as Hispanic but their race as white, black, Asian, or other. Because survey question formats preclude these distinctions, multiracialism scholars commonly refrain from analyzing Latinos in their studies. The exclusion of Latinos leaves a substantive void in our understanding of biracial identification. This gap is significant for two reasons. First, 43 percent of intermarriage pairings in the United States are between whites and Latinos; second, the rapid growth rate of the Latino population can be attributed, in part, to the rising number of children born to Latino-white couples (Wang 2012). The surveys I assess have a combined race and Latino-origin question, allowing me to pinpoint individuals who are explicitly of Latino/non-Latino parentage. Thus, the present work heeds Harris and Sim's (2002) call for better understanding biracial Latino identity.

This article reports three core findings. First, racial identification is gendered in significant ways: all else being equal, biracial women are much more likely than biracial men to identify as multiracial. The gender disparity exists across biracial category combinations but is greatest (2x) for black-white biracials—pointing to the rigidity of the black/white boundary for African American men. Second, I demonstrate the importance of religion for

racial identification: biracials who practice “ethnic” religions are more likely than non-religious biracials to identify with only one racial group. Finally, I provide robust evidence that affluence—as measured separately by household income and median neighborhood income—“whitens” racial self-identification. Other studies (notably Schwartzman 2007) have found that “money whitens.” These studies typically rely on samples from Spanish-speaking America or Brazil and use education as a proxy for income. In contrast, the data I use are U.S.-based and estimate the effects of income while holding educational attainment constant.

Taken together, these findings inform our understanding of how racial categories are used in the contemporary United States. The approach I take in this article highlights the importance of carefully disentangling the meanings attached to core social identities. Finally, these findings clarify how racial labels can be the product of social group attachments while being intimately linked to social class, religion, and gender.

RACIAL POPULATION OF INTEREST

The issue of proper definitions and consistent terminology is a persistent challenge facing scholars of race and ethnicity (Omi and Winant 1994; Waters 2000). Race, by itself, is not intrinsically meaningful, and its significance is socially constructed—yet racial labels have real consequences. There is thus a tension between acknowledging that racial boundaries are fuzzy and labels are subjective, while developing a definition of “biracial” so as to enable a clearer understanding of the individual components of identification.

Here, I differentiate between people who are *immediately* mixed, who identify their parents with different races, and those who are more *remotely* mixed, at the level of grandparents or earlier generations (Spencer 2004). I focus on predicting identification outcomes among immediately mixed individuals, whom I refer to as “biracial.” Given the myriad

number of mixed-race subgroups—the survey I assess has a total of 127 possible racial combinations—I center my attention on the largest biracial groups: Asian-whites, Latino-whites, and black-whites.³ Together, these groups compose the majority of the multiple-race population.⁴

Examining the racial labeling decisions of these three groups helps clarify the processes via which racial identification patterns are constructed. In concentrating on these groups, however, my intention is not to fix the reference of the term “biracial” as applicable primarily to people who are white and non-white, rather than individuals belonging to multiple minority groups.⁵ Nor is it my aim to essentialize race by focusing on first-generation biracials.⁶ Instead, my intent is pragmatic: narrowing the scope to these subgroups facilitates a more straightforward analysis and a cleaner assessment of the findings.

I assess the construction of racial *identification*, or how people publicly articulate their race to others, such as on a form or in a survey. One’s expressed identification does not always perfectly correlate with one’s racial *identity*, or internal beliefs and perceptions about race, but the two phenomena often overlap. Although these survey data do not enable an analysis of the processes of identity development, understanding the choice of public racial labels among biracials is of great importance. Sociology has a long tradition of taking racial labels seriously as a dependent variable, precisely because it is a meaningful way individuals assert their public identity (Campbell and Rogalin 2006; Clark and Clark 1939; Francis and Tannuri-Pianto 2013; Landale and Oropesa 2002; Lee 1993; Nagel 1995).

Public racial identification is also consequential for the allocation of political resources and the implementation of legislation (Perlmann and Waters 2005; Williams 2006). Racial identification is cited in research used to develop and inform federal policies, such as legislation aimed at addressing racial health disparities. States use race statistics to fulfill legislative redistricting obligations and

enforce anti-discrimination laws in employment, education, and housing (Fred and Clifford 1996; Goldstein and Morning 2005; Massey and Denton 1993). Racial identification is thus both an expression of subjective group connections and an act with very real political ramifications. To accurately ascertain the impact of race in society, we must first understand how such labels are chosen.

IDENTITY AND MIXED-RACE HERITAGE

According to identity theory, the self is a multidimensional construct shaped by social interactions (Burke 1980; McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker 1968, 1980; Stryker and Serpe 1982). Individuals are performers in particular roles, and the meanings associated with identities are learned from the reflected appraisals of others (Burke 1981; Burke and Stets 2009). One's commitment to specific identities develops out of interpersonal contact and experiences, which can confirm, reinforce, or alter these self-identities (Foote 1951). Indeed, 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).

Over the past two decades, an emerging literature has examined processes of racial identification among biracials. Some research assesses determinants of the labels that parents impart onto their children, including the racial composition of a child's school (Brunsma 2005), parent's level of educational attainment (Roth 2005), and proximity to the immigrant experience (Xie and Goyette 1997). Characteristics of the ethnic minority parent are also important: among non-white/white married couples, those in which the minority spouse is male, U.S.-born, or has no white

heritage are more likely to label their children as racial minorities than are couples in which the minority spouse is female, non-U.S.-born, or has some white heritage (Qian 2004). Having a biracial parent also decreases the likelihood of identifying as multiracial, relative to having parents of two different single-races (Bratter 2007).

In addition to the predictors of labels given to biracial children, scholars have examined the determinants of children's *self*-labeling practices. Such work finds that family members and peers are the main reference groups shaping self-labeling practices (Bratter and Heard 2009; Funderburg 1994; Root 1992, 1996). Belonging to a racially heterogeneous peer group is predictive of a non-white or singular minority identification (Herman 2004; Renn 2004). And when asked what race best describes them, black-white biracials are more inclined than American Indian-white biracials to name their minority background (Harris and Sim 2002). The order in which multiple races are listed (Campbell 2007), experiences with racial discrimination (Panter et al. 2009), phenotype (Khanna 2004; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008), regional and neighborhood racial surroundings (Harris and Sim 2002), and spouse's race (Campbell 2007) are also consequential. Moreover, self-identification is contextual; being in the presence of family members or peers influences the momentary self-identification of biracials (Harris and Sim 2002; Twine 1996). Finally, biracials who come from more disadvantaged class backgrounds, as given by mother's education, are more likely to change their identification over time (Doyle and Kao 2007).

In spite of this growing line of research, many important questions regarding biracials' identification remain unanswered. Prior research has given scant attention to the roles that gender, social class, and religion play in shaping racial identification. This limitation can be attributed to the fact that the data commonly used to examine biracial Americans yield insufficient sample sizes or do not include important sociodemographic indicators. For example, in studying the U.S. biracial population, scholars

often use the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (also known as Add Health), due to its vast set of questions and multiple measures of racial identity (Doyle and Kao 2007; Fryer et al. 2012; Harris and Sim 2002; Hitlin, Brown, and Elder 2006). Yet Add Health includes only a few hundred biracial respondents, with studies lacking sufficient sample size to generate statistically significant and robust results (Burke and Kao 2013).

Census samples have also been used to study biracials' identification (e.g., Qian 2004; Roth 2005; Saenz et al. 1995; Xie and Goyette 1997). These data boast thousands of observations as well as neighborhood contextual variables, but they do not explicitly inquire about parents' race. Researchers thus typically confine analyses to households that include a child currently living with two interracial married adults, presumed to be the child's biological parents. As Harris and Sim (2002) note, such research cannot be generalized to single-parent households. This is problematic because a nontrivial subset of biracials have divorced or never-married parents. Qualitative studies are restricted to nonrandom samples, limiting the capacity to make inferences about incidence or rates generalizable to the population as a whole (Khanna 2004; Rockquemore and Brunson 2008).

CONSTRUCTION OF RACE AMONG BIRACIAL AMERICANS

I focus on the effects of gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and religion on racial identification for several reasons. Gender and SES are status characteristics highly correlated with racial identity (Crenshaw 1989; Saperstein and Penner 2012); together, these markers compose what Penner and Saperstein (2013:321) call "the original trinity of intersectionality." Despite there being strong evidence that gender and SES are central components of racial identity, little research explores whether and how these traits shape biracials' identification.

Religion is less commonly studied alongside racial identity. Yet it too interweaves with

race and is a vital component of adolescent and early adulthood identity development (Erikson 1968; Sciarra and Gushue 2003). Religious institutions also play an important role in the construction of identity among members of some racial and ethnic communities. Religion and spirituality are dominant components of self-identity for black college students in particular (Sanchez and Carter 2005; Spencer, Fegley, and Harpalani 2003). Places of worship in the United States are strikingly racially homogeneous; approximately half of U.S. congregations are composed entirely of a single racial group (Dougherty and Huyser 2008), and in 90 percent of congregations, 4-in-5 members belong to the same race (Emerson and Woo 2006).⁷ Given the strong intersection between religion and race, I argue that the racial homogeneity of certain religious denominations may foster a collective racial identity among biracial group members.

Gender

Men and women encounter distinct challenges affecting their approach to race and ethnicity (Crenshaw 1989; hooks 1981; Portes and Rumbaut 2001), and research suggests that racial boundaries are less malleable for men. Interviewers are more likely to classify women as non-black than men, all else being equal (Penner and Saperstein 2013), particularly if the women are well-educated (Telles 2004). Similarly, when observers label people of biracial or racially ambiguous backgrounds, women are less likely than men to be perceived as racial minorities (Ho et al. 2011; Villarreal 2010).

Several explanations have been proposed to account for these differences in classification, one of which is the gendered nature of racism in the United States. Men of color are substantially more likely than women of color to report experiencing discrimination, witnessing displays of fear from whites, and being unfairly treated by the police because of their race (Kennedy 1997; Weitzer and Tuch 2002). Waters (1999) argues that such negative interactions help explain the construction

of an African American identity among second-generation West Indian boys but not girls. Waters shows that due to the heightened racism males face, West Indian boys are seen as “simply black” by outsiders, prompting them to embrace a black identification.⁸

In addition to men’s and women’s differing encounters with racism, physical attractiveness is a more important social resource for women than for men, and skin tone is a crucial trait in the evaluation of attractiveness (Hunter 2007; Wolf 1991). Studies show that East Asian cultures venerate Eurocentric features as reflecting high status for women (Fraser 2003; Rafael 2000), and light-skinned black and Latino women are perceived as more desirable than dark-skinned women (Hunter 2004). For men, however, skin tone has a mostly insignificant effect on attractiveness ratings (Hill 2002) or no effect at all (Maddox and Gray 2002). Fair skin tone is also associated with greater self-esteem among black women but not among black men (Thompson and Keith 2004). Indeed, Rockquemore (2002) shows that such skin tone stratification, along with high rates of intermarriage among high-status black men, make the experiences of black-white biracial women different from those of biracial men. Khanna (2011) finds that whereas black-white biracial men are usually embraced by their self-identified black male peers as “one of them,” biracial women can face hostility or rejection from self-identified black women.

Taken together, prior research indicates that men and women in the United States are racialized in systematically distinct ways. This work suggests that biracial women may have an easier time blurring and crossing racial boundaries. Perceived as men of color, biracial males may be more susceptible to discrimination and stereotypes tied to criminality; as a result, others may tend to label them exclusively as members of the racial minority category—denying their white heritage. In contrast, the value placed on Eurocentric features may enable biracial women to be seen as an ambiguous racial Other who is not necessarily categorized as belonging to a

single racial minority group. Following the model of identity construction via reflected appraisals from others, I thus expect that biracial women will be more likely to identify as multiracial than comparable biracial men, who will tend to adopt a singular minority identification.

Socioeconomic Status

The social status and networks associated with income and education also shape racial outlooks (Schwartzman 2007). Specifically, affluence may discourage biracial individuals from selecting a “darker” label (e.g., black or brown) in favor of a “lighter” one (e.g., brown or white). Economic affluence may “whiten” identification by allowing individuals to display external markers of wealth—such as wearing designer clothes and owning the latest technology—leading others to label biracials as white or multiracial. Affluence can also facilitate contact with well-to-do white peers, via private schools or membership in prestigious social clubs.

Residing in a more economically prosperous neighborhood may similarly lighten identification by increasing social mobility and permitting a transition into higher status social circles, where others view biracials as white or multiracial (Telles 2002, 2004). Well-off whites may impose a “whiteness standard” on their biracial peers, and the desire for group acceptance may compel these individuals to choose a lighter self-label (Schwartzman 2007). All else being equal, biracials from more affluent families and who live in wealthier areas will perceive greater commonality with their white peers and be less apt to identify as singular racial minorities.

There is reason to believe that education will have a countervailing effect to that of income. For instance, better-educated parents may encourage their biracial children to adopt a non-white label, because education raises awareness of racial discrimination and inequality (Bailey and Telles 2006; Dawson 1994). Education is also likely to stimulate outside-the-box racial thinking (Roth 2005),

such that a minority or multiracial consciousness may resonate more strongly among college-educated parents. These parents may be more inclined than less-educated parents to pass a non-white self-identification on to their children—one that is either reflective of their minority racial heritage or unconstrained by hypodescent.

Religion

Places of worship function as sites for the formation of social networks connecting individuals to others who share their ethnic background (Calhoun-Brown 1999). Congregations provide a community where immigrants can meet, offer support from ethnic and racial discrimination, and potentially develop friendships with co-ethnics (Alba and Nee 2003; Foner and Alba 2008). For example, Chong (1998) finds that Korean ethnic Protestant churches help transmit Korean culture and values to second-generation Korean Americans. Participation in church programs can also lead to stronger ethnic identification by increasing use of native languages (Bankston and Zhou 1996).

For biracials in the United States, religious identity has theological and racial dimensions, providing a source of spiritual fulfillment while also instilling and strengthening a sense of ethnic community. Biracials belonging to ethnic religions—religions that are racially homogeneous and accentuate a shared cultural heritage, history, or homeland—may emphasize their religious culture by embracing the racial identification of their religious peers. Accordingly, the religious faiths that should have the most influence on biracials' identification are Baptist for black-whites; Catholicism for Latino-whites; Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism for Asian-whites; and Judaism for all biracial subgroups.

In the African American community, the black church—especially the Baptist church—has historically been instrumental in forging beliefs about black group identity, interests, and leadership (Harris-Lacewell 2006; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; McDaniel 2008). In

fact, separate black Baptist congregations were first formed to establish and maintain a distinctly spiritual racial community in the wake of the Civil War. Black-white biracials who are Baptist may thus feel stronger racial rapport with African Americans and be more inclined than nonreligious black-white biracials to identify as singularly black.

Being Catholic may similarly reinforce a minority racial self-identification among Latino-white biracials, as Catholicism is a major component of Hispanic/Latino cultural identity: 68 percent of Latino Americans are Catholic, compared to only one-quarter of all Americans (Pew Research Center 2007a, 2007b). Likewise, identifying with a religion more commonly practiced among Asian ethnic groups—specifically, Hinduism, Islam, or Buddhism—may strengthen a singular Asian identification for Asian-white biracials (Kurien 2005; Ying and Lee 1999).

In a different way, the racial homogeneity of the Jewish American community may promote the adoption of a singular white label among Jewish biracials. Judaism is a socially closed ethnoreligious group, in which membership is strictly determined by birth or conversion and characterized by a common ethnic ancestry (Gans 1979; Hartman and Kaufman 2006). Because 94 percent of American Jews identify as non-Hispanic white (Pew Research Center 2013), Jewish biracials may be more inclined than similarly non-religious biracials to identify as singularly white.

Additional Influences on Racial Identification

Beyond these three primary sources of social identities, other familial, sociocultural, and environmental factors should shape biracials' identification. Parents' race is central for children's ethnoracial self-identification. The labels given by parents to Asian-white and Latino-white biracial children most often match children's paternal race, because surname—a powerful symbolic indicator of ethnic heritage—is typically inherited from the father (Qian 2004; Xie and Goyette 1997).⁹

However, findings are mixed regarding the labels given to black-white biracials, for whom surname is less likely to disclose race (Brunsma 2005; Roth 2005). Notably, some of the leading activists in the multiracial movement of the 1980s and 1990s were white mothers upset that their biracial black children were expected to “deny” their background (Williams 2006). Black-white biracial children may be particularly encouraged to develop an identification inclusive of their mother’s race. The matrilineal line of influence should similarly shape identification as it relates to parents’ marital status. Because children with divorced or never-married parents tend to be raised primarily by their mother, biracial children whose parents separated may identify with their mother’s race at greater rates than biracial children with married parents.

Societal attitudes toward race-mixing—which reflect the broader environment in which biracials develop their identities—may also be predictive of self-labeling. A concentration of racial minorities in one’s neighborhood increases the likelihood that parents will identify biracial children with a minority race (Qian 2004). In light of the strong relationship between residential segregation, racial discrimination, and racial unity (Gay 2004; Tate 1993), living in an area with a higher proportion of minority residents should increase biracials’ solidarity with their minority peers, encouraging the adoption of a singular minority identification.

Region also captures racial dynamics. A multiple-race label may be a less viable option for biracials living in the South, given the region’s traditional resistance to interracial marriage and strong adherence to the hypodescent rule (Davis 2001). In contrast, the racial diversity and high intermarriage rates of the Pacific West reflect an environment that places a positive emphasis on multiracialism.¹⁰ Biracials in the Pacific West should thus be more likely to use the multiracial label.

Finally, ethnic identities are communicated through language (Howard 2000), which is a prominent measure of cultural

exposure (Khanna 2004; Saenz et al. 1995). For Asian and Latino biracials, being a native English speaker may be indicative of social distance from the immigrant experience, or acculturation to U.S. society, and be predictive of a non-Asian or non-Latino racial label.

DATA AND METHODS

To assess the effects of these factors on racial identification, I examine data from the CIRP Freshman Surveys, which are conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA and completed every year by thousands of incoming college freshmen across the United States (Sax et al. 2003; Sax et al. 2001, 2002). The surveys are administered at hundreds of higher-learning institutions, including two- and four-year colleges; research universities; public, private, and religious schools; single-sex schools; and historically black colleges and universities. The surveys encompass a wide range of topics, including questions about students’ socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, educational history and career goals, social and behavioral interests, and values and attitudes. The surveys are completed during registration, freshman orientation, or the first few weeks of classes, before students have had much exposure to the college experience. Full details on the Freshman Survey methodology and sample are available in the online supplement (<https://people.stanford.edu/ldd/research>).

These surveys are arguably the best available data source for studying the attitudes and behavior of the U.S. biracial population. Pooling data from the three years in which respondents were asked their parents’ race (2001, 2002, and 2003) yields more than 37,000 Asian-white, black-white, and Latino-white biracials—a sample size unparalleled in studies of self-identification and public opinion. I also append census sociodemographic measures for population density, racial composition, and median household income at respondents’ parents’ home zip-code level.

Like many other studies that examine the identities of mixed-race adolescents, my

analyses focus on college students (e.g., Cheng and Lively 2009; Cooney and Radina 2000; Doyle and Kao 2007; Harris and Sim 2002; Hitlin et al. 2006; Khanna 2011; Rockquemore 2002; Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2008). Given the youth of the biracial population (Fryer et al. 2012), surveying respondents in their late teens and early twenties helps yield a larger sample size.

There are some drawbacks of focusing on college freshmen. In particular, these data do not include the roughly 10 percent of students who drop out of high school (National Center for Education Statistics 2014), making the findings not quite generalizable to the entire population of 17- to 19-year-olds. That said, given that about two-thirds of students who graduate high school enroll in college immediately after their senior year (National Center for Education Statistics 2014; Norris 2014), the findings are still generalizable to a good portion of the relevant age group. The participation of community college freshmen in these surveys helps ensure a socioeconomically diverse sample. In addition, unlike many other census-based studies (e.g., Roth 2005; Xie and Goyette 1997), these surveys include children with unmarried parents, increasing the representation of students coming from less advantaged backgrounds (McLeod and Kessler 1990).

A few other caveats are worth mentioning. Racial labels are one aspect of racial identity, and these surveys access respondents' self-reporting of their race/ethnicity at a single point in time, preventing me from speaking to the stability of identification across contexts. Although these college freshmen have nothing at stake when filling out their surveys, some might be influenced by the college application process, in which students see their racial identification as part of the admissions game (Panter et al. 2009). During college, young adults are "finding themselves" and navigating a new racial environment; for some, figuring out "who they are" racially may be especially salient at this time.

In addition, the shared social meanings of identity, and the degree of importance that an individual places on that identity, may shape

one's subsequent attitudes and behaviors. For example, most college freshmen have not had significant experiences in the labor market, which might affect their racial self-presentation. This research cannot speak to the extent to which identification is manipulable due to instrumental or employment considerations. Finally, these data do not tap into respondents' phenotypic features (e.g., skin tone, eye color, hair color/texture, and nose shape), which can influence how people of mixed-race are treated in society and can restrict their identification options (Khanna 2004; Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2008). Future work would do well to explore the relationship between these traits and racial identification outcomes.

Variable Descriptions

Dependent variable. The outcome of interest is respondent self-identification. This variable is constructed from three racial labels: singularly white, singularly minority (i.e., either Asian, Latino, or black, depending on the race of the non-white parent), or multiracial.¹¹ These analyses exclude an additional 2 percent of each biracial subgroup who identify with any other race or races, as well as respondents who identify at least one parent with multiple races.¹² Only respondents who report one parent as white and the other parent as either Asian, Latino, or black are included in the analysis.

Primary independent variables. The key predictors are gender, religion, and socioeconomic status. An indicator variable for *gender* is coded one for women and zero for men. *Religious affiliation* is coded into six categories reflecting the largest and most racially homogeneous religious categories in the United States: Baptist, Catholic, other Christian (including Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, LDS, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Seventh Day Adventist, Unitarian, and United Church of Christ), Jewish, some other religion (including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam), and no religion (the reference).

I use three indices of socioeconomic status. *Family income* is self-reported in four categories: less than \$30,000 (the reference); \$30,000 to \$59,999; \$60,000 to \$99,999; and \$100,000 or more. *Median neighborhood income* is a continuous zip-code level variable taken from Census 2000 figures. *Parents' education* is coded categorically for both white and minority parents in four categories: high school or less (the reference), some college or associate's degree, bachelor's degree, and some graduate work/degree.

Additional independent variables. I also adjust for other covariates related to family and sociocultural environment. *Parents' marital status* is a binary variable indexing whether parents are married (not married is the reference). To gauge whether respondents are more likely to identify with the race of a single mother, I created an interaction term between *parents' marital status* and *parents' race*. *Native English speaker* is an indicator variable (non-native English speaker is the reference). *Region* is a categorical variable coded as Pacific, Midwest, Mountains/Plains, Northeast, and South (the reference). *Percent minority race*—the population of each biracial subgroup's minority race (e.g., percent Asian for Asian-white biracials)—is measured at the respondent's home zip-code level and categorized into quartiles. I also include year of survey and zip-code population density in the regression models.¹³

RESULTS

Parents' Race and Self-Identification

I begin by examining identification patterns across biracial categories (see Figure 1). Several findings here are worth noting. First, regardless of category, biracial respondents are more likely to identify as a minority rather than as white. Latino-white biracials are the most likely to do so, with 45 percent identifying as Latino only. Latino-whites are also the most likely to adopt an only-white label: approximately 1-in-5 Latino-whites self-label as white, compared to 1-in-10 Asian-whites

and 1-in-20 black-whites. Such stark variation suggests that the boundaries of whiteness are more permeable for Latino-white biracials and more rigid for biracials with an Asian or black parent. That black-white biracials are the least likely to adopt a singular white identification is to be expected, given the legacy of hypodescent, historical norms against "passing" as white, and the greater tendency for black-white biracials to be categorized as non-white by others (Ho et al. 2011).

Nevertheless, most Asian-white and black-white biracials select a multiracial label—black-white biracials overwhelmingly so, at 71 percent. Black-white biracials are also the least likely to identify exclusively with their *minority* race, a finding that indicates the one-drop rule does not define their identification.¹⁴ Still, the rule continues to constrain black-white biracials' identification decisions, as evidenced by the fact that 95 percent identify as non-white. However, black-white biracials are not necessarily seeking to distance themselves from their minority heritage: most identify as *both* white and black—and by implication, as *neither* white *nor* black.

Table 1 breaks down identification by mother's and father's race, demonstrating that Asian-white and black-white biracials are more likely to identify with their mother's race. Panel A shows that relative to Asian-white biracials who have an Asian mother, those with a white mother are 3.1 percent more likely to identify as white and less likely to identify as Asian.¹⁵ Panel B shows that having a white mother has a slightly different effect for black-white biracials.¹⁶ Relative to black-white biracials with a black mother, those with a white mother are 6 percent less likely to identify as black and 6.7 percent more likely to identify as multiracial.

Latino-white biracials are more likely to identify with the race of their *father* (see Panel C of Table 1). Relative to Latino-white biracials with a white father, respondents with a Latino father are 7.1 percent more likely to identify as Latino, 3 percent less likely to identify as white, and 4.1 percent less likely to

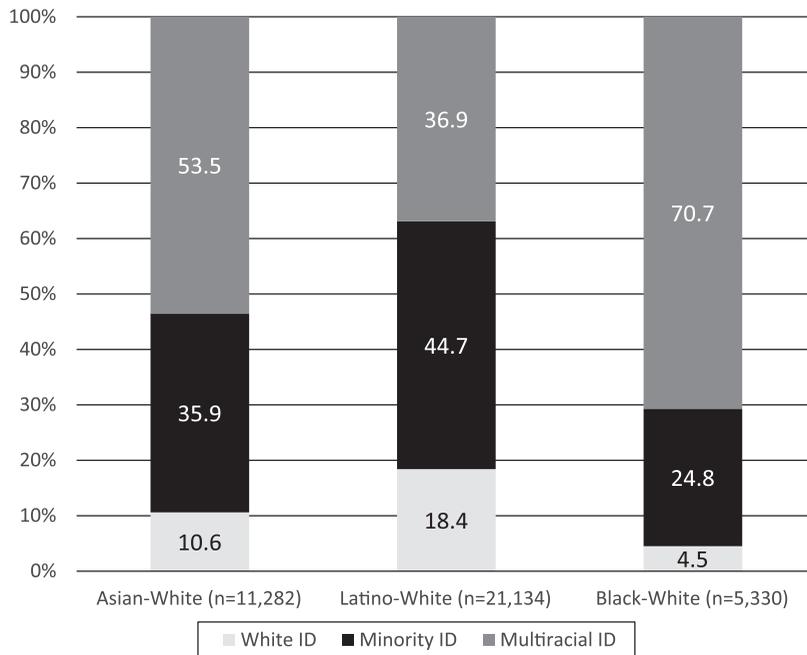


Figure 1. Respondent Self-Identification, by Racial Background

identify as multiracial. These differences are all statistically significant, and they parallel prior research showing that labels used by parents to describe Latino-white children most often match the father's race or ethnicity.¹⁷

Multivariate Model and Results

To predict identification for each biracial subgroup, I specified multinomial logistic regressions with a three-category outcome variable: white, multiracial, or minority. These models estimate the differences between respondents who self-label as either white or multiracial, relative to a reference group identifying with only the minority race.¹⁸ Given the hard to interpret nature of multinomial logistic regression coefficients, I present results in terms of more conceptually interpretable relative risk ratios.¹⁹ Given the large sample size, many of the differences found are statistically significant. In the following sections, I assess the more prominent substantive findings within each biracial subgroup. In the Discussion section, I review the patterns that persist across groups.

Asian-white biracials. Table 2 presents regression results predicting non-Asian racial identification.²⁰ Findings indicate that relative to men, biracial women are much more inclined to adopt a non-white identification: women are 15 percent less likely to self-label as white, and 31 percent more likely to self-label as multiracial, than to self-label as Asian.

The effect of parents' educational attainment depends on their race. Compared to biracials with a *white* parent who has at most a high school diploma, those with well-educated white parents are less likely to identify as white and more likely to identify as multiracial (relative to Asian). Yet having an *Asian* parent with at least some college is predictive of selecting a white or multiracial label over an exclusive minority identity. Higher family income also lowers the odds of selecting exclusive minority or multiracial identifications. After accounting for other factors, higher income is associated with a greater likelihood of identifying as white. The likelihood of adopting a white label is similarly higher among biracials who reside in more affluent neighborhoods.

Table 1. Mother's Race and Father's Race as Predictors of Respondent Self-Identification

<i>A: Asian-White Biracials</i>				
Identification	White Mother, Asian Father	Asian Mother, White Father	Difference	<i>P</i> -value
White	12.6 (<i>N</i> = 488)	9.5 (<i>N</i> = 703)	3.1***	.000
Asian	33.8 (<i>N</i> = 1,308)	37.1 (<i>N</i> = 2,746)	-3.3**	.001
Multiracial	53.6 (<i>N</i> = 2,074)	53.5 (<i>N</i> = 3,963)	.1	.900
<i>B: Black-White Biracials</i>				
Identification	White Mother, Black Father	Black Mother, White Father	Difference	<i>P</i> -value
White	4.4 (<i>N</i> = 180)	5.1 (<i>N</i> = 61)	-.7	.301
Black	23.5 (<i>N</i> = 968)	29.5 (<i>N</i> = 355)	-6.0***	.000
Multiracial	72.2 (<i>N</i> = 2,978)	65.5 (<i>N</i> = 788)	6.7***	.000
<i>C: Latino-White Biracials</i>				
Identification	White Mother, Latino Father	Latino Mother, White Father	Difference	<i>P</i> -value
White	16.9 (<i>N</i> = 1,803)	19.9 (<i>N</i> = 2,092)	-3.0***	.000
Latino	48.2 (<i>N</i> = 5,130)	41.1 (<i>N</i> = 4,310)	7.1***	.000
Multiracial	34.9 (<i>N</i> = 3,712)	39.0 (<i>N</i> = 4,087)	-4.1***	.000

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed tests).

As hypothesized, for Asian-white biracials, religious affiliation is strongly predictive of racial identification. Relative to biracials who choose "no religion," affiliated biracials are more likely to identify as Asian over multiracial—except for Jews. Among Jewish biracials, affiliation has a whitening effect; Jewish biracials are 2.7 times as likely as nonreligious biracials to identify as white. In addition, relative to non-native English speakers, Asian-white biracials whose first language is English are 2.4 times as likely to identify as white and 5.1 times as likely to identify as multiracial.

Geographic effects on Asian-white biracials' identification are also notable. Non-Southerners are more likely than Southerners

to identify as multiracial, as are biracials who live in neighborhoods where Asians make up a larger percentage of the population.

Latino-white biracials. Table 3 shows that racial/ethnic identification among Latino-white biracials tends to be inherited patrilineally.²¹ Relative to those with a single white mother, biracials with a single Latina mother have 31 percent higher odds of identifying as white and 18 percent higher odds of identifying as multiracial. Respondents with a married Latina mother and white father have 24 percent higher odds of identifying as multiracial than as Latino.

Gender also shapes Latino-white biracials' identification. Compared to men, women

Table 2. Relative Risk Ratios of Identifying as Non-Asian among Asian-White Biracials

Predictors	White vs. Asian	Multiracial vs. Asian
Parents' Race/Status (excluded = single white mother)		
Single Asian Mother	.734* (.105)	1.018 (.102)
Married White Mother/Asian Father	.809 (.107)	1.190 (.113)
Married Asian Mother/White Father	1.042 (.177)	1.028 (.121)
Female (excluded = male)	.847* (.064)	1.312*** (.065)
White Parent's Education (excluded = high school)		
Some College	.838 (.106)	1.014 (.087)
College Degree	.927 (.110)	1.227* (.099)
Graduate Education	.705** (.090)	1.194* (.100)
Asian Parent's Education (excluded = high school)		
Some College	1.640*** (.206)	1.268** (.101)
College Degree	1.855*** (.214)	1.247** (.092)
Graduate Education	1.571** (.205)	1.529*** (.124)
Family Income (excluded = under \$30,000)		
\$30,000 to \$59,999	1.164 (.172)	.932 (.086)
\$60,000 to \$99,999	1.330 (.196)	.998 (.092)
\$100,000 or more	1.584** (.238)	1.097 (.104)
Median Household Income in Zip Code (continuous)	1.103* (.046)	1.033 (.028)
Religion (excluded = no religion)		
Baptist	1.141 (.178)	.764* (.080)
Catholic	1.191 (.127)	.777*** (.053)
Other Christian	1.262* (.124)	.742*** (.046)
Jewish	2.743** (.834)	1.199 (.284)
Other Religion (including Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim)	.640* (.123)	.773* (.081)
Native English Speaker (excluded = non-native English)	2.428*** (.589)	5.067*** (.773)
Region (excluded = South)		
Pacific	.763* (.091)	1.883*** (.140)
Mountains/Plains	.835 (.152)	1.217 (.146)

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Predictors	White vs. Asian	Multiracial vs. Asian
Northeast	1.121 (.117)	1.508*** (.111)
Midwest	.732** (.085)	1.285** (.098)
Percent Asian in Zip Code (excluded = 1st quartile)		
2nd quartile	.832 (.113)	1.066 (.105)
3rd quartile	.869 (.130)	1.371** (.144)
4th quartile	.833 (.140)	1.990*** (.228)
Constant	.094*** (.030)	.064*** (.014)

Note: $N = 8,731$. Standard errors are in parentheses. Multinomial logistic regressions also account for zip-code population density and year surveyed.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

Table 3. Relative Risk Ratios of Identifying as Non-Latino among Latino-White Biracials

Predictors	White vs. Latino	Multiracial vs. Latino
Parents' Race/Status (excluded = single white mother)		
Single Latino Mother	1.310*** (.100)	1.178** (.073)
Married White Mother/Latino Father	.935 (.063)	.940 (.050)
Married Latino Mother/White Father	1.129 (.106)	1.237** (.093)
Female (excluded = male)	.970 (.042)	1.393*** (.050)
White Parent's Education (excluded = high school)		
Some College	.941 (.062)	.899* (.047)
College Degree	1.031 (.068)	1.064 (.057)
Graduate Education	.910 (.067)	.939 (.056)
Latino Parent's Education (excluded = high school)		
Some College	1.010 (.063)	1.047 (.052)
College Degree	1.015 (.066)	.945 (.050)
Graduate Education	.946 (.068)	.904 (.053)
Family Income (excluded = under \$30,000)		
\$30,000 to \$59,999	1.078 (.083)	1.014 (.061)
\$60,000 to \$99,999	1.197* (.095)	1.107 (.069)
\$100,000 or more	1.420*** (.118)	1.065 (.070)

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Predictors	White vs. Latino	Multiracial vs. Latino
Median Household Income in Zip Code (continuous)	1.024 (.024)	1.000 (.019)
Religion (excluded = no religion)		
Baptist	1.338** (.130)	.881 (.077)
Catholic	.770*** (.047)	.825*** (.040)
Other Christian	.945 (.062)	.874* (.047)
Jewish	1.481** (.201)	.902 (.115)
Other Religion (including Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim)	1.084 (.131)	.920 (.093)
Native English Speaker (excluded = non-native English)	3.477*** (.519)	3.136*** (.340)
Region (excluded = South)		
Pacific	1.029 (.064)	1.710*** (.085)
Mountains/Plains	.831* (.078)	1.088 (.083)
Northeast	1.432*** (.089)	1.961*** (.105)
Midwest	.621*** (.047)	1.259*** (.075)
Percent Hispanic in Zip Code (excluded = 1st quartile)		
2nd quartile	.760** (.067)	1.109 (.090)
3rd quartile	.851 (.072)	1.314*** (.102)
4th quartile	.686** (.059)	1.508*** (.117)
Constant	.134*** (.026)	.113*** (.017)

Note: $N = 16,719$. Standard errors are in parentheses. Multinomial logistic regressions also account for zip-code population density and year surveyed.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

have 39 percent higher odds of identifying as multiracial than as Latino. Having a higher family income, however, increases the likelihood of identifying as white.

With respect to religion, after accounting for other factors, Catholic Latino-white biracials are more prone to identify exclusively as Latino than are their non-affiliated counterparts. In contrast, being Jewish or Baptist is predictive of a higher likelihood of identifying as white. As with Asian-whites, Latino-white biracials who

are native English speakers are considerably more likely to identify as white or multiracial—compared to their peers who are not native English speakers—over two times more likely.

Region of residence affects the racial identification patterns of Latino-white biracials. In general, after accounting for other factors, residing outside the South increases the odds of multiracial identification, living in the Northeast has a whitening effect, and people who live in the Mountains/Plains and

Midwest are more likely to choose a Latino label. Beyond the influence of geographic region, living in a neighborhood with a higher proportion of Latinos lowers the odds of identifying as white and increases the odds of identifying as multiracial.

Black-white biracials. Table 4 presents regression results for black-white biracials.²² Findings indicate that the gender effect on racial identification is substantial, with women being about twice as likely as men to identify as multiracial.

For black-white biracials, the effect of parent's education depends on parent's race. Having a highly educated black parent has no significant influence on racial labeling, but having a highly educated white parent reduces the likelihood of white identification. Relative to having a white parent who has earned at most a high school diploma, having a white parent with at least some graduate education lowers the odds of identifying as white by 53 percent and increases the odds of identifying as multiracial by 30 percent.

Interestingly, we do not see a significant difference in identification between biracials in lower- and middle-income families. Nevertheless, biracials in more affluent families (e.g., those earning at least six-figure incomes) have a greater likelihood of identifying as white. Residing in a more affluent neighborhood also decreases the odds of black identification.

In contrast to non-affiliated black-white biracials, Baptists have 56 percent lower odds of identifying as white. Jewish biracials, however, are more than three times as likely to identify as white than as black. The odds of identifying as multiracial decline by 44 percent for Baptists, by 18 percent for other Christians, and by 46 percent for Jews.

In terms of region, I find that relative to black-white biracials who reside in the South, biracials in the Midwest are significantly less likely to identify as white and more likely to identify as multiracial. In addition, living in a neighborhood with a higher proportion of black residents decreases the likelihood that black-white biracials will identify as white.

DISCUSSION

Table 5 summarizes the results. The results show that racial label use depends on multiple social, cultural, and economic factors—particularly gender, socioeconomic status, religion, and region of residence.

Gender

As Table 5 shows, gender is a significant predictor of racial identification for all three biracial subgroups. The + under each M column for Asian-white, Latino-white, and black-white indicates that biracial women are significantly more likely than biracial men to self-label as multiracial rather than only their minority race.²³ Overall, this finding is consistent with Penner and Saperstein's (2013:333) claim that "'Blackness' in general is stickier for men." It also corroborates Waters's (1999) argument that it is more socially acceptable for women to live in multiple racial cultures simultaneously. That biracial women are more inclined than men to identify as multiracial is consistent with the interactive model of identity, which contends that an individual's multiple marginalized identities interact synergistically (Crenshaw 1989; Reid and Comas-Diaz 1990; Settles 2006).

Although some research shows that biracial women negotiate their race differently or are more likely to identify as multiracial, it is often impossible to know where the gender difference comes from. Some studies sample on multiracial self-identification, but others sample on parental race, focusing on how parents label their children. Because this large biracial Freshman Survey sample has parents' race and self-identification, we can be confident that the gender findings are not an artifact of regional or non-representative data. Given previous research showing that biracial men and women are categorized differently (Ho et al. 2011; Rockquemore 2002), these gender differences likely reflect the differential effects of phenotype for men and women, as well as external judgments about racial authenticity. Biracial men may be relatively

Table 4. Relative Risk Ratios of Identifying as Non-Black among Black-White Biracials

Predictors	White vs. Black	Multiracial vs. Black
Parents' Race/Status (excluded = single white mother)		
Single Black Mother	.682 (.213)	.571*** (.072)
Married White Mother/Black Father	1.100 (.223)	.902 (.084)
Married Black Mother/White Father	1.761 (.694)	1.433* (.253)
Female (excluded = male)	1.229 (.201)	1.996*** (.152)
White Parent's Education (excluded = high school)		
Some College	1.068 (.242)	1.128 (.122)
College Degree	.823 (.193)	1.026 (.114)
Graduate Education	.471* (.143)	1.299* (.168)
Black Parent's Education (excluded = high school)		
Some College	.972 (.225)	.977 (.105)
College Degree	.975 (.232)	.947 (.106)
Graduate Education	.816 (.227)	.815 (.105)
Family Income (excluded = under \$30,000)		
\$30,000 to \$59,999	1.100 (.268)	.970 (.103)
\$60,000 to \$99,999	.985 (.266)	.959 (.113)
\$100,000 or more	1.824* (.530)	1.195 (.167)
Median Household Income in Zip Code (continuous)	1.264** (.111)	1.210*** (.050)
Religion (excluded = no religion)		
Baptist	.441** (.137)	.560*** (.068)
Catholic	.945 (.243)	.885 (.107)
Other Christian	.907 (.195)	.820* (.082)
Jewish	3.247** (1.348)	.537* (.159)
Other Religion (including Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim)	1.598 (.511)	.838 (.145)
Native English Speaker (excluded = non-native English)		
	.669 (.326)	1.757 (.519)
Region (excluded = South)		
Pacific	.656 (.187)	.990 (.134)
Mountains/Plains	.822 (.294)	.884 (.162)

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

Predictors	White vs. Black	Multiracial vs. Black
Northeast	.875 (.200)	1.192 (.131)
Midwest	.558* (.150)	1.288* (.148)
Percent Black in Zip Code (excluded = 1st quartile)		
2nd quartile	.658 (.172)	.985 (.149)
3rd quartile	.504* (.136)	1.117 (.167)
4th quartile	.375** (.107)	1.343 (.205)
Constant	.375 (.235)	.729 (.259)

Note: $N = 4,084$. Standard errors are in parentheses. Multinomial logistic regressions also account for zip-code population density and year surveyed.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

more inclined to identify as Asian, Latino, or black because they are more likely to be culturally perceived as “men of color,” whereas biracial women may be viewed as exotic ethnic “others” and internalize this perception of difference.

Family SES

Economic prosperity has a distinct racial whitening effect on biracials’ self-identification, as indicated in Table 5 by the + under the W columns for the variables *family income* and *median household income in zip code*. All else being equal, coming from a family earning at least \$100,000 increases the likelihood of identifying as white, and living in a higher-income zip code is also predictive of a whiter label for black-white and Asian-white biracials. Note that these whitening effects persist independently of one another.

These findings can be explained by the dynamics of “boundary crossing”—that is, biracials become whiter as they acquire traits (in this case, income and neighborhood affluence) that allow them to bridge racial boundaries separating them from “white” status markers (Love-man and Muniz 2007). This boundary crossing is likely aided by societal shifts in attitudes about racial categories—the once-rigid rules for white identification have broadened to include

groups previously assigned as non-white (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gans 2012).

Asian-white and black-white biracials who have a well-educated white parent are more likely to select a multiracial label over a minority one. However, as Table 5 shows, biracials who have a well-educated white parent are also more likely to choose a minority label over a white one. Taken together, these results suggest that education may generate a racially liberal consciousness for white parents, leading them to foster patterns of minority or multiple-race identification in their children (for Asian-white and black-white biracials). Such findings support the idea that one need not be a member of a minority group to espouse racially liberal principles (Shelby 2005).

For Latino or black parents, educational attainment has a null effect on the racial identification of their children. This finding may be attributed to the fact that these two groups face relatively higher levels of prejudice than do Asians and whites. That is, Latinos and blacks who are parents of biracial children may possess a hyperawareness of racism and discrimination that is unaffected by additional years of formal schooling.

Curiously, having an educated Asian parent is predictive of a white or multiracial label over an Asian label. High levels of academic

Table 5. Summary of Significant Predictors of Racial Identification

	Biracial Subgroup					
	Asian-White		Latino-White		Black-White	
	W	M	W	M	W	M
Female (excluded = male)	-	+		+		+
Family Income (excluded = under \$30,000)						
\$30,000 to \$59,999			+			
\$60,000 to \$99,999			+		+	
\$100,000 or more	+		+		+	
Median Household Income in Zip Code (continuous)	+				+	+
Education of White Parent (excluded = high school)						
Some College				-		
College Degree		+				
Graduate Education	-	+			-	+
Education of Minority Parent (excluded = high school)						
Some College	+	+				
College Degree	+	+				
Graduate Education	+	+				
Religion (excluded = no religion)						
Baptist		-	+		-	-
Catholic		-	-	-		
Other Christian	+	-		-		-
Jewish	+		+		+	-
Other Religion (including Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim)	-	-				
Parents' Race/Status (excluded = single white mother)						
Single Minority Mother	-		+	+		-
Married White Mother				+		+
Married Minority Mother						+
Region (excluded = South)						
Pacific	-	+		+		
Mountains/Plains			-			
Northeast		+	+	+		
Midwest	-	+	-	+	-	+
Percent Minority in Zip Code (excluded = 1st quartile)						
2nd quartile			-			
3rd quartile		+		+	-	
4th quartile		+	-	+	-	
Native English Speaker (excluded = non-native)	+	+	+	+		

Note: Column W = greater likelihood of selecting a white label, and Column M = greater likelihood of selecting a multiracial label, relative to a minority label. + reflects a significantly positive effect on identification; - reflects a significantly negative effect on identification, at a 95 percent confidence level. Shaded cells denote variables that have similar effects for at least two of the three biracial subgroups.

achievement among Asian Americans, coupled with their minority group status, may explain this result. As Zhou (2004) argues, Asian Americans associate “white” with mainstream success and privilege, and thus turn to whites as a model for status attainment. But although Asian Americans are socioeconomically similar to whites, the model minority stereotype distinguishes them as a racial other—increasing the salience of the disadvantages tied to being non-white.

However, intermarriage with whites can enable very well-educated Asians to become integrated into the white mainstream. This in turn may weaken the “otherness” associated with being Asian. Accordingly, while a white identification is out of reach for most Asian Americans, it *is* accessible to those who have a white parent. Because their high-status Asian parent has achieved the socioeconomic success associated with whiteness, Asian-white biracials may be more likely to be culturally identified as white or multiracial, rather than Asian. These biracials may also perceive greater cultural commonality with their white peers than their Asian peers, which could lead to their selecting a “lighter” racial label.²⁴ Asian-white biracials might also be aware of the “Asian penalty” that admissions officers exact on Asian college applicants, because of their overrepresentation at elite schools (Espenshade and Radford 2009). This could lead them to hide their Asianness, at least when identifying their race on college forms.

Religion

Table 5 also provides evidence of the centrality of religion in the construction of race: all else being equal, biracials who affiliate with ethnic religions are more likely than non-affiliated biracials to identify exclusively as a minority. This suggests that the cultural overlap between certain religious identities and racial/ethnic backgrounds—Baptist for blacks; Catholic for Latinos; and Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim for Asians—reinforces identification with that minority group. Churches, temples, and mosques are settings where people with shared interests and backgrounds can

interact. In addition, religion fosters cultural solidarity by underscoring membership in historically oppressed minority groups (Alba 2006). This intersection of religion and race also explains why biracial Jews are disproportionately likely to call themselves white. The influence of religion on racial identification may be due to physical proximity and a high level of sustained interpersonal contact with members of a particular race, as well as the emotional bond that stems from sharing the same spiritual beliefs with co-ethnics.

Places of worship in the United States are highly segregated by race. This suggests that the positive effects of religious affiliation on minority identification may be driven as much by feelings of exclusion as by affection for co-ethnics. Racially homogeneous religions may be less welcoming of non-co-ethnics, especially members of the white majority. Research shows that different-race members of ethnic congregations often feel like outsiders. This may increase their likelihood of exiting, whereas people who are part of the majority ethnic group may remain loyal for a longer period (Scheitle and Dougherty 2010). Accordingly, different-race biracials in ethnic congregations may face greater social rejection, which could cause them to exit their place of worship or religion altogether. Conversely, biracials who are embraced by their religious peers as part of the dominant ethnic or racial group may have a particularly strong ethnic identification.

Other Influences

Beyond the effects of nonracial social identities, family structure has relatively little impact on identification. Latino-white and black-white biracials whose minority mothers are married, however, are more likely than those with single white mothers to identify as multiracial, suggesting a preference for incorporating the race of both parents into their self-identification.

Racial identification is also subject to regional and neighborhood effects. Asian-white and Latino-white biracials who reside in the Pacific West or the Northeast are more likely to

choose a multiracial label, whereas those living in the Midwest are more likely to adopt a non-white or multiracial identification (relative to those living in the South). In addition, as the proportion of same minority race in the neighborhood increases, Latino-white and black-white biracials are less likely to identify as white, indicating that living around more people of one's minority heritage fosters greater solidarity with that group. Yet increased contact with one's minority race does not necessarily translate to a singular identification with that group, as evidenced by the fact that Asian-white and Latino-white biracials living in minority neighborhoods are more inclined to select a multiracial label over a singular minority one.

Finally, Asian-white and Latino-white biracials whose native language is English are significantly more likely, all else being equal, to adopt a whiter racial label than are biracials whose native language is not English, thus illustrating how a shared linguistic background can reinforce shared racial identity.

Sociopolitical Significance of Racial Identification

According to identity theory, the self is composed of multiple identities, and the meaning and influence of a particular identity depends on its relation to other identities (Burke 1980). These identities vary in salience; more prominent identities, at the top of one's hierarchy of available identities, are more likely to be referenced than are lower-ranked identities (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker 1968). Race is but one of several identities an individual can draw on at a given point in time. Other social identities, including those tied to gender and sexual orientation, and role identities tied to occupation, can be pivotal to one's overall outlook.

Racial identification has always been fundamental to the structuring of U.S. society and politics (Du Bois [1903] 1989; Myrdal 1944). As such, it is a core social identity for Americans. Racial inequality is a deep and enduring element of U.S. culture (Alexander 2012; Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and

Shapiro 2006), and the significant influence of racial identification on behavior and attitudes is well-established (e.g., Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Kinder and Sanders 1996; McClain et al. 2009). Disentangling the predictors of racial identification allows us to understand the sociopolitical ramifications of race in a more incisive way.

Furthermore, examining the political positions of those who straddle racial cleavages, such as biracials, can improve our understanding of the role of racial divides in politics. The increasing number of multiracial identifiers raises important questions about the future of racial group solidarity in U.S. politics (Williams 2006). However, does it make a difference whether people call themselves white, minority, or multiracial? How do these labels translate into voting behavior, racial attitudes, and policy opinions? Social identity theory (SIT) suggests that people orient their cognition and behavior toward the social category to which they belong (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979). For instance, research shows that individuals who identify with members of a given social category perceive a strong loyalty and greater dedication to other group members (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 1997; Hogg and Hardie 1992). This suggests that biracials should share the political attitudes of the racial category with which they most strongly identify, and indeed, research in political science has found empirical support for this conjecture (Davenport forthcoming). In light of the well-established relationship between racial identity and political behavior, additional work is needed on the political ramifications of multiracial identification, especially as it pertains to minority group solidarity and voting.

CONCLUSIONS

Traditionally, biracial Americans of part-white parentage have identified culturally and politically with their minority race (Nobles 2000; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1930; White 1948). Some demographers (e.g., Farley 2002) postulate that the 2000 Census change will not lead to a substantive increase in multiracial

identification, but the reality is that millions of Americans now identify this way on census forms (Jones and Bullock 2012).

Although the multiple-race population is small proportionally—3 percent of Americans marked two or more races in 2014—this amounts to a 41 percent increase since 2000, a sharp rate of growth when compared to the single-race population (13 percent) and most other major groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2015). And this overall rate masks striking increases within racial subgroups. Notably, the percentage of respondents who identified as Asian-white more than doubled over this period. In 2000, black-white was just the fourth-most frequently selected multiple-race label; 14 years later it had become the most popular, tripling in size to 2.5 million. Such a high level of black-white identification is remarkable, given decades of legislation buttressed by the rule of hypodescent.

Overall, an estimated 1-in-5 Americans will be of mixed-race by 2050 (Lee and Bean 2004). The findings reported in this article show that the majority of Asian-white and black-white biracials, and a large percentage of Latino-white biracials, now opt to call themselves multiracial. Given that multiracial labels are increasingly accepted and intermarriage rates continue to rise (Wang 2012), it seems that these racial identification patterns reflect not an age effect, but instead a more lasting and transformative cohort effect.

The surveys used here capture one segment of the U.S. population—teenagers entering college—but the sample is large, heterogeneous, and comprehensive. This enables a rigorous empirical assessment of the effects of religious affiliation and income on biracials' self-identification. Results show that for Asian-white, Latino-white, and black-white biracials, identification is predictably structured by socioeconomic status, religion, and, most significantly, gender. These findings shed light on the extent to which the boundaries of racial group membership—once rigidly defined—are now more blurred.

All told, the evidence indicates that a new color line may be materializing in the United

States. The whitening effect of income on racial identification implies that the long-standing black/white divide may be giving way to a more complex hierarchy linking racial categorization and social class. This hierarchy may be sustained if affluent biracials begin to distance themselves from more disadvantaged minority groups by opting out of their minority identification in favor of a singularly white racial label.

What are the consequences of such identification patterns? Scholars of ethnic politics have shown that seeing one's fate as linked to that of other co-ethnics, and identifying with one's ethnic culture, is critical to Latino, Asian, and black political unity (Dawson 1994; Junn and Masuoka 2008; Schildkraut 2012). It is not just the presence of particular racial and ethnic labels, but the *meanings* attached to them, that produce political consequences. Just as racial labels have expanded over time, the political meanings associated with race will continue to evolve. As the biracial population grows in the coming decades, it is important for scholars to continue to assess the relationship between subjective racial group identification and political behavior.

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Data and Code Files

I am grateful to the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA for providing Freshman Survey data access. The analysis dataset for this article is hosted by HERI and can be requested here: <http://www.heri.ucla.edu/gainaccess.php>. Online appendices and analysis files are available at <https://people.stanford.edu/idd/research>.

Notes

1. The term “biracial,” as I use it here, refers to parentage and denotes individuals whose mother and father are reported to belong to two different races. This definition is commonly used throughout identity research (e.g., Allen et al. 2013; Khanna 2011; Nishimura 1995; Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2008; Wardle 1992). For example, a person with one Asian parent and one white parent is “Asian-white biracial.” “Biracial” is hence not reflective of self-identification; people who are biracial may identify in a number of ways. I instead use “multiracial” to signal self-identification with multiple races or with the category “other race.”
2. This is evidenced in the *New York Times*’ declaration, “It is official: Barack Obama is the nation’s first black president” after President Obama marked “black” as his race on the 2010 Census (Roberts and Baker 2010). The *Times* argued that in light of his black-white parentage, Obama could have labeled himself as black only, white only, both white and black, or “some other race.”
3. Because most biracial individuals in the United States are of non-white/white parentage, I list the minority race first to more directly signal the racial subgroup to which an individual belongs. This ordering does not necessarily reflect a respondent’s deeper bond to one race over the other.
4. Among people who married interracially in 2010 in the United States, in 70 percent of couples one spouse was white and the other was Latino, Asian, or black (Wang 2012). Because Hispanic/Latino is considered an ethnic group in the U.S. Census, the precise number of biracials who identify as multiracial, Latino and white is unclear. The American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) population also has a high rate of intermarriage and multiple-race identification (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez 2011). Evidence from the Freshman Surveys indicate that AIAN-white biracials are more likely than other groups to identify with only one of their component races (i.e., either white or AIAN); however, I do not examine AIAN-white biracials here because the overall AIAN population is very small.
5. Individuals identifying with exactly two minority races made up just .5 percent of the total U.S. population in 2010, across a total of 10 racial combinations.
6. Indeed, many people in the United States who typically identify with a single racial group—and an estimated 75 to 90 percent of African Americans—are actually of mixed-race backgrounds (Davis 2001; Spencer 2004).
7. The racially segregated nature of religion in the United States is reinforced by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King’s famous line, “You must face the tragic fact that when you stand at 11:00 on Sunday morning to sing ‘All Hail the Power of Jesus Name’ and ‘Dear Lord and Father of all Mankind,’ you stand in the most segregated hour of Christian America” (quoted in Scheitle and Dougherty 2010:405).
8. Waters (1999) suggests that boys are also ostracized for engaging in stereotypically “white” behavior but girls are not. This ostracism calls into question boys’ racial loyalties and their masculinity. Such social sanctioning, Waters argues, can reinforce an ethnically black American identity for boys but not for girls.
9. Multiethnic whites also experience this patrilineal transmission of ethnicity (Waters 1990).
10. Only 2.4 percent of the overall U.S. population identified with at least two races in 2010, but the states with the highest percentages of multiple-race identifiers—Hawaii (23.6 percent), Alaska (7.3 percent), and California (4.9 percent)—were all in the Pacific West. The two other states in this region, Oregon and Washington, also had multiple-race populations that exceeded the national rate (Jones and Bullock 2012).
11. Multiracial includes marking multiple races or marking “other race.” I combine multiple-race (e.g., black and white) and “other race” identifiers, because comparisons of these two groups reveal no substantive differences and both are considered “interracial identities” that move beyond a mutually exclusive conception of race (Roth 2005). Combining these groups also increases the precision of the estimates and simplifies interpretation of the analyses. Among Asian-white biracials, 20.5 percent identify as other and 33.0 percent identify as Asian and white; among Latino-white biracials, 10.9 percent identify as other and 26.0 percent as Latino and white; and among black-white biracials, 35.4 percent identify as other and 35.3 percent identify as black and white.
12. Respondents are presented with three columns of racial groups and are instructed, “Please indicate the ethnic background of yourself, your father, and your mother. (Mark all that apply in each column.)” Respondents are asked about their own race before that of their parents, which may minimize the chance they feel compelled to mark a multiracial label. The question wording does not specify that the mother and father mentioned be the respondent’s biological parents. Some respondents might provide the race of a step-parent or adoptive parent, but it seems unlikely that many respondents would interpret “mother’s race” and “father’s race” as references to anything other than the races of one’s biological parents.
13. Full question wording, response coding, and descriptive statistics for each subgroup are provided in the online supplement.
14. Such a high level of multiracial labeling is unlikely among older generations of black-white biracials, for whom identification developed under the era of the one-drop rule.

15. Bratter and Heard (2009) similarly find that Asian-white biracials are more likely to self-identify with their mother's race.
16. Because the boundaries of whiteness are less accessible to Americans of black heritage, we should not expect a large percentage of biracials to identify as singularly white.
17. I also ran bivariate analyses that include each of the independent variables. These findings, presented in the online supplement, suggest several interesting predictive relationships. But because some of these bivariate findings may be intercorrelated, I refrain from discussing them at length here. Instead, I concentrate on the multivariate regression results, which will determine whether these effects persist when accounting for systematic differences across covariates among respondents.
18. The minority group is the excluded category, due to the history of hypodescent in the United States.
19. This methodological approach follows that of other researchers of multiracial identification (e.g., Qian 2004; Roth 2005).
20. Even when not stated, findings discussed in this section should be interpreted as relative to identifying as Asian.
21. Even when not stated, findings discussed in this section should be interpreted as relative to identifying as Latino.
22. Even when not stated, findings discussed in this section should be interpreted as relative to identifying as black.
23. Although prior work finds that children generally identify more with their same-gendered parent than their opposite-gendered parent (Starrels 1994), findings here cannot be attributed to respondents simply being more likely to incorporate the race of their same-gendered parent. When the interaction term *female x minority mother* is added to the model, the corresponding coefficients are not significant and overall results do not change for Asian-whites and black-whites.
24. This finding supports some prior research showing that the likelihood of identifying as Asian declines as socioeconomic status rises (Khanna 2004).

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