

Perspectives and Research on the Concept of Race within the Framework of Multiracial Identity

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Abstract

In recent years, according to U. S. Census reports, the number of people who classify themselves as “mixed race” is rapidly increasing. As a consequence, scholars have become increasingly interested in the nature of racial identity. Currently, scholars and laypersons tend to view the concept of race from a biological perspective, from a social-constructivist perspective, or from a mixture of the two. In this paper, we address several questions: How do political, religious, and legal experts classify various people (racially)? How do men and women (especially those of mixed ancestry) decide to what race they belong? Does one’s own identity, be it monoracial or multiracial, influence one’s perception of race as socially constructed or biologically determined? In order to understand how the concept of race is viewed in the U. S.—especially as the American landscape becomes increasingly complex—we reviewed 40 studies, conducted from 1986-2006, that explored the nature of racial and ethnic identity.² This comprehensive review suggested that: 1. Americans often find it difficult to classify people of mixed ancestry. 2. Men and women (of mixed race) generally possess a complex view of race. They generally agree that race is, at least in part, a social construct. Nonetheless, they are well aware that (at least in society’s eyes) ancestry, appearance, “blood,” and genetic make-up also play a part in one’s racial classification. 3. Multiracials appear to be more flexible in “choosing” a racial identity than are their peers. How they choose to present themselves depends on their physical appearance, how accepting their family and friends are of their claims, and how profitable they think it will be to identify with various aspects of their racial heritage.

Keywords: multiracial identity; ethnic identity, racial identity; race; ethnicity

Social psychologists have long been interested in Americans attitudes toward race and ethnicity. In the wake of World War II, for example, they studied the impact of Americans’ social attitudes and prejudices on the treatment of various racial minorities (Allport, 1954; Sherif, 1958; Tajfel, 1970.)

Once, scholars assumed that most Americans would identify with a *single* racial group. (say, Caucasian, Negro, or Asian . . .) This is no longer true. Since the repeal of

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² Researchers often distinguish between “race” and “ethnicity”—assuming one is primarily based on ancestry, the other on culture. Others use the terms interchangeably. Here, to avoid tiresome repetition we will generally use a single term, “race,” instead of endlessly repeating “race and ethnicity.”

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all anti-miscegenation laws in 1967, the number of interracial unions (and thus the number of multiracial progeny) has steadily increased (Kennedy, 2003; Root, 1996, 2001). In 1970, for example, the U. S. Census reported that there were only 500,000 men and women of multiracial heritage living in the U.S.; by 2000, the number had swelled to more than six million (as cited in Jones & Symens Smith, 2001).

In those days, too, scholars generally conceived of race as a simple construct (i.e., people's race depended on ancestry, appearance, and biological heritage.) Recently however, many scholars have begun to argue that race is more a social construction than a biological reality. They contend that societies create definitions of race, in part to promote their own political, religious, and personal agendas (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Pinker, 2002).

In this article, we will discuss: (1) A number of theories as to the nature of race. (2) The clues society utilizes in classifying people racially. (3) How people choose their own racial classification(s). (4) Whether people of mixed ancestry possess a more complex view of race than do their peers. Specifically we ask: Are people of mixed race more likely to accept the notion that "race" is, at least in part, a social construction than are their peers?

I. Defining Race

Reber (1985) defines "race" as:

A term born in anthropological innocence and meant simply to designate the major subdivisions of *Homo sapiens*. A race was defined as any relatively large division of persons that could be distinguished from others on the basis of inherited physical characteristics such as skin pigmentation, blood groups, hair texture and the like. In actual practice, it is nearly impossible to classify or distinguish individual persons by such physical characteristics (p. 629).

As Reber observes, it is often quite difficult to decide how to classify people. John Friedrich Blumenbach (1865) partitioned *Homo sapiens* into five distinct races: the Caucasian (white race), the Mongolian (yellow race), the Malayan (brown race), the Negro or Ethiopian (black race), and the American Indian (red race). He also rated various societies as to moral characteristics, intelligence, and achievement, concluding

that the Nordic race (a subtype of Caucasian) was a superior race, while the Negro was an inferior one (Ripley, 1899 as cited in Brace, 2005).

Through time, the U. S. Census has classified citizens (racially) in a variety of ways. In 1870, people were sorted into five groups: white, colored (blacks), colored (mulattoes), Chinese, and Indian (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1872, pp. 606-609). By 1980, America could claim to be a more diverse society. People could be classified as: white, black, Hispanic, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, American Indian, Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, Eskimo, Aleut, and Other.

A stunning increase in the number of citizens from different races (and of different racial mixtures) motivated scholars to ask: “How appropriate are traditional U. S. Census categories for assessing the race of multiracial individuals?” As a consequence of such soul searching, for the first time the 2000, U. S. Census: (1) allowed people to choose which *one* (or more than one) of seven categories fit them; (2) If none of those seemed appropriate, they could indicate how they wished to identify themselves. Allowing people to claim *multiple* identities was not without controversy. Civil rights leaders, such as Jesse Jackson and Kweisi Mfume, worried that these changes would decrease the political clout of minority groups (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). For others, this increased flexibility was all to the good: it allowed multiracials to embrace their complex racial heritages (Gaskins, 1999) and increased the accuracy of demographic data (Holmes, 1997).

II. Race: A Social or a Biological Construct?

Today, scholars are engaged in a fierce debate as to the nature of race. Should scientists view race through the lens of biology—searching for the cluster of geographical, physical, and genetic markers that define race? (e.g., Rowe, 2002) Or should race be considered a social construction—devised in part to promote society’s own political, religious, and personal agendas? Or is race both—a social construction, partially based on biological realities?

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A. *Race as a Biological Construct.*

In the 19th and 20th centuries, most North Americans—be they Christian clerics quoting Scripture or Social Darwinians debating *The Descent of Man*—tended to accept the notion that people’s race was based on their ancestry and biological heritage or (later) writ in their genes. In the United States, the U. S. Congress and state legislatures passed laws prohibiting inter-racial marriages, in the hope of maintaining America’s “racial purity.” Many physicians claimed that such marriages would prove sterile or produce defective progeny (Castle, 1926).³

What if American citizens were already of mixed race? What then? How did people deal with that? Sometimes, the U. S. courts were called in to settle disputes. In such cases, jurists generally relied on “common-sense” or utilized such physical traits as skin color, hair texture, or facial configurations in settling disputes. In 1806, for example, Justice Tucker, in *Hudgins v. Wright*, concluded that those of African ancestry possessed “kinky hair, dark skin color, and broad nose shape.” Thus, when three slave women of African ancestry, who did not possess kinky hair, sued for their freedom, the Judge obliged. (They were not “African” and thus could not be sold as slaves.) These early court decisions were critical in determining whom people could marry, where they could work, how much they must be paid, and whether they could live free or cast into slavery.

In the deep South, judges often invoked the “one-drop rule” in assigning race: i.e., one drop of Negro blood and one *was* a Negro. This rule (a.k.a. “the rule of hypodescent”), produces certain anomalies. In a perhaps apocryphal story, Papa Doc Duvalier, the Haitian dictator, was said to have declared that Haiti, a country settled by African slaves, was “96% white.” *How so?* “Papa Doc explained that in Haiti they used the same system that Americans did in counting blacks—anyone with a drop of white blood, *was* white” (Kessen, 1993).

Today, on occasion, the U. S. Congress still sometimes assigns race on the basis of “blood quantum” (Fernández, 1996). In 1985, for example, Congress passed The *Quarter Blood Amendment Act*, which dictates that only Native Americans who possess a “Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood,” may attend the free Bureau of Indian Affairs schools or participate in Indian educational programs.

³ Even in that era, however, a few scientists spoke of “hybrid vigor” (Krauss, 1941).

In spite of Lewontin's (1972) insistence that there is no basis for assigning people to one race or another (see also Hinds et al., 2005; Jorde et al., 2000), today a few scientists still contend that country of origin (race) is associated with distinctive clusters of genetic traits (say, physical appearance) and perhaps even with such personality traits as character, intelligence, temperament, sexual behavior, aggression, and longevity (Hirschfeld, 1996; Rushton, 1995). Needless to say, such proposals are controversial.

The Human Genome Diversity Project promises to answer some prevailing questions as to the nature of race (Cavalli-Sforza, 2005). Based on geography and a knowledge of pre-historic migratory patterns, population geneticists are currently attempting to categorize *Homo sapiens* into a few distinctive groups, based on their analyses of genetic material like HLA (human leukocyte antigens) and other blood-based genetic material. Rosenberg and his colleagues (2003) point out that human genetic differences derive mainly from gradations in allele frequencies. These differences appear to be a product of evolution, mating patterns (e.g., homogamy versus heterogamy), environmental or natural pressures, disease, and various mutations (Olson, 2002; Pääbo, 2001; Templeton, 1998). But, as population geneticist Cavalli-Sforza observed: "The classification into races has proved to be a futile exercise" (Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, and Piazza, 1994, p. 19.). Society's notions of "race" do not seem to map well with differences in the human genome. Scientists continue to confirm that there is far more genetic variation *within* races than *between* the supposed "races" (Pääbo, 2001; Zyphur, 2006).

In spite of the warnings of geneticists and biologists, most Americans still find the "common sense" notion that people can profitably be racially classified (on the basis of country of origin, physical appearance, and genetic make-up) an intuitively appealing one. Consider these examples: The FBI and police officers routinely ask witnesses: "What was the criminal's race?" Most witnesses find it relatively easy to make a judgment, based on the perpetrator's appearance, voice, or possibly behavioral cues. Alas, people are not very accurate in their observations and judgments; they turn out to be wrong almost 40% of the time (Poe, 2006). Forensic scientists routinely conduct skin color, skull shape, fingerprint, DNA, and voice print analyses, in order to classify perpetrators as to race (Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Rowe, 2002). Physicians argue that people of different ancestries are more (or less) susceptible to various diseases (such as heart attacks, hypertension, sickle cell anemia, malaria, or diabetes); that they

metabolize drugs differently, and thus should be assigned to different treatment regimens (Holden, 2003).

In spite of scientists' cautions, companies like Genetree.com and Familytreedna.com are proliferating. These services generally cost about \$200. Using AIMS (ancestry-informative markers) geneticists claim to be able to map human populations into specific geographical locations (Rosenberg et al., 2002). Companies ask clients to submit samples of DNA, with the promise that they will analyze the DNA and provide information as to their clients' racial ancestry. These services are very popular. Most people wish to discover more about their roots. A few report that they have been able to parlay their discoveries into college scholarships and set-asides, traditionally reserved for Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and blacks (Harmon, 2006).

B. Race as a Social Construct

According to Reber (1985), social constructivists contend that: "there is no such thing as a knowable objective reality. Rather . . . all knowledge is derived from the mental constructions of the members of a social system (p. 157). Other social constructionists, such as, say, Paul Spickard, Janet Helms, C. Loring Brace, and Audrey Smedley, argue that Western society "invented" the concept of race (and that it is maintained) because it serves society's deepest, most chauvanist, political and social needs.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, world travelers like Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta were aware that the Chinese, Asians, and Africans they met in distant lands, differed in class, religion, *and* appearance (Brace, 2005, p. 20). (Ancient maps—illustrated with sea monsters, dragons, and exotic peoples—often presented other peoples as fantastic monsters, possessing, say, one huge eye, three heads, or cradling their severed heads in their arms.) Yet, not until the Enlightenment, did the terms "race," "species," "type," and "class" come into common usage (Allen, 1994, 1997; Hannaford, 1996; Poliakov, 1982; Smedley, 1999a, 1999b). Some social constructionists argue that the West "invented" notions of "superior and inferior races" to serve a Western hegemonic agenda. Such definitions allowed Western adventurers to claim to be doing "God's work," while they cheerfully appropriated the lands of "savages" and pillaged their gold, crops, and labor. If another is a savage one feels entitled to rape, pillage, and

torture with impunity (Allen, 1994, 1997; Fredrickson, 1988, 2002; Haller, 1971; Morgan, 1975; Smedley, 1999b; Spickard, 1992).

Since Darwin's time, scientists have attempted to attempted to categorize people (racially) on the basis of such physical traits as cranial size, skin color, hair texture, brain mass, and (even) body lice (Gossett, 1963, p. 81). They, too, sometimes possessed a political agenda. Samuel George Morton's (1850), for example, collected skulls from all over the world. On the basis of cranial size, Morton declared that Europeans were the most intelligent race; Africans the least. Henry T. Finck (1887) was the first to propose a Darwinian theory of beauty. Reading Finck is a perverse pleasure; it makes one feel smugly superior to encounter a personage so self-righteous, so opinionated . . . and so wrong. It was Fink's singular thesis that primitive people were nature's "experiments." In the beginning, he argued, mankind was exceedingly ugly. But *Homo sapiens* continued to evolve, becoming more perfect, better looking, all the time. Man's character, intelligence, and good looks reached a pinnacle in the upperclass English gentleman. (By a stroke of luck, Finck "just happened" to belong to this category.) In a short 467 pages, he managed to insult every existing ethnic group: The Hungarians are "of a repulsive ugliness" . . . "The typical Jew is certainly not a thing of beauty. [Look at] the bloated lips almost suggesting a Negro . . . The Jews have proportionately more insane, deaf mutes, blind, and colour-blind than any other Europeans" (p. 89). "The women of France are amongst the ugliest in the world" (p. 390.) *What of Americans?* "Their pale, bloodless faces suggest consumption, scrofula, anaemia, and neuralgia" (p. 445). Today, Finck is considered a foolish figure of fun. Often, however, pseudo-scientific theories of race have been used to justify unspeakable cruelties. In the Nazi era, for example, politicians used "scientific" data to argue that Jews were inferior, both intellectually and morally, leading to the Holocaust. In our own lifetime, people have twisted scientific theories as to the nature of race to justify mass slaughter. We have only to speak the names "Serbia and Bosnia," "Cambodia," "Rwanda," "Palestine and Israel," and the "World Trade Center" to despair. (Religious differences, of course, also figure powerfully in these tragedies.)

In sum: Social constructionists consider race to be a "social invention," designed to further Society's selfish political and social goals. (It should also be noted that some social constructionists are not free of the changes that they, too, possess their own political agendas, even if they be more benign than other agendas.)

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In this preliminary survey, we decided to explore the way in which American men and women of mixed ancestry have viewed race, from 1986 to the present. We plan to explore three questions: (1) How does American society classify people of mixed racial ancestry? (2) What factors influence men and women's own racial identities? (3) Do people view race differently, depending on their own racial backgrounds? Specifically, we propose that, given their social experiences, multiracials will be more likely to view race as a social construction than do their (monoracial) peers.

III. Racial Identity in Multiracial Populations: Theory and Research

A. Methods

Our first step was to review all interviews and surveys conducted by scholars from 1986-2006 relevant to the questions we wished to explore.

1. Literature search. Several methods were used to assemble studies relevant to understanding the multiracial experience. First, we conducted computer searches of PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and ProQuest using the keywords: *biracial*, *multiracial*, *biracial experience*, and *multiracial experience*. This search yielded 665 documents, of which only 12 were relevant to our interests. Second, using the same keywords, we searched the University of Texas at Austin's library catalog. Once we found an appropriate book or article, we searched nearby stacks in the hope of finding additional material. Third, we then searched these articles and books in search of other appropriate references. By this method, we secured 40 studies that seemed appropriate to our interests. Thirty-one used qualitative methods, while nine used quantitative methods.

2. Selection criteria. The following criteria were used in deciding whether or not an article was deemed relevant to our inquiry. The study must have been conducted in the United States in the period from 1986-2006. (For a discussion of earlier research, see Greenwald & Oppenheim, 1968; Gunthrope, 1978). At least a few participants must be of mixed ancestry; they must have talked (in some way) of their attitudes, feelings, or experiences with regard to race. Clinical case studies (or studies of mentally ill patients and clients) were not included. (For an excellent review of this clinical research, see Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Finally, social commentators' essays about racial

identity (e.g., Alba, 1990; Gans, 1979; Okamura, 1981; Waters, 1990), were not included.

3. *Information coded.* We recorded the following information for each study: (a) authors' names; (b) where the study was conducted; (c) sample size; (d) sex of participants; (e) age of participants; (f) racial breakdown of participants; (g) statistical analyses (for quantitative data); (h) measures used (for quantitative data); (i) publication source; and (j) year of publication.

Table 1. *Studies Included in Survey*

Study	<i>n</i>	Location	Age Range	Multiracial Identity	Type of study
Basu (2000) (unpublished dissertation)	14	Northeastern U.S.	18-43	Multiple races	Qualitative
Buckley & Carter (2004)	5	New York City	18-28	Black/White	Qualitative
Collins (2000)	15	Northwestern U.S.	20-40	Japanese mix	Qualitative
Field (1996)	93	Colorado	13-18	Black/White	Qualitative
Gibbs & Hines (1992)	12	California	18-25	Black/White	Qualitative
Gibbs (1998)	4	U.S.	13-19	Black/White	Qualitative
Gillem et al. (2001)	2	--	17-19	Black/White	Qualitative
Hall (1992)	30	Northwestern U.S.	18-32	Black/Japanese	Qualitative
Henricksen & Trusty (2004)	7	Southwestern U.S.	18-22	Black/White	Qualitative
Jacobs (1992)	10	U.S.	3-8	Black/White; Asian/White	Qualitative
Kerwin et al (1993)	9	Northeastern U.S.	5-16	Black/White	Qualitative
Knaus (2003) (unpublished dissertation)	8	Northwestern U.S.	20-28	Multiple races	Qualitative
Korgen (1998)	3	U.S.	18-46	Black/White	Qualitative
Mass (1992)	53	California	18-42	Japanese/White	Qualitative
McRoy & Freeman (1986)	1	U.S.	7	Black/White	Qualitative
Miville, Constantine, Baysden & So-Lloyd (2005)	10	U.S. Northwestern	20-54	Multiple races	Qualitative
Newsome (2001)	72	U.S.	20-28	Multiple races	Qualitative
Pinderhughes (1995)	3	U.S.	15-28	Black/White	Qualitative
Renn (2000)	24	Northeastern U.S.	19-23	Multiple races	Qualitative
Roberts-Clarke et al. (2004)	8	Eastern U.S.	23-56	Multiple races	Qualitative
Rockquomore (1998)	14	Midwest	18-22	Black/White	Qualitative
Standen (1996)	8	U.S.	19-23	Korean/White	Qualitative

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Stephan & Stephan (1989) sample 1	57	Hawaii	17-29	Japanese/White	Qualitative
Stephan & Stephan (1989) sample 2	54	New Mexico	17-29	Hispanic	Qualitative
Stephan (1991)	36	Hawaii	17-49	Multiple races	Qualitative
Storrs (1999)	27	Northwestern U.S.	--	Multiple races	Qualitative
Tashiro (2002)	20	Northwestern U.S.	45-95	Black/Asian	Qualitative
Thornton & Gates (2001)	61	U.S.	20-33	Black/White	Qualitative
Twine (1996)	25	U.S.	18-27	Multiple races	Qualitative
Williams (1996)	10	California	20-28	Multiple races	Qualitative
Williams & Thornton (1998)	20	U.S.	--	Asian/Black/White	Qualitative
Bracey et al. (2004)	2,119	Southwestern U.S.	13-20	Multiple races	Quantitative
Brunsmas & Rockquemore (2001)	177	Detroit	--	Black/White	Quantitative
Grove (1991)	51	New England	17-22	Multiple races	Quantitative
Herman (2004)	1,496	California and Wisconsin	--	Multiple races	Quantitative
Jaret & Reitzes (1999)	487	Georgia	--	Multiple races	Quantitative
Lopez (2003)	638	California Southern	14-15	Multiple races	Quantitative
Phinney & Alipuria (1996)	860	California	14-19	Multiple races	Quantitative
Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers (2004)	66	U.S.	--	Multiple races	Quantitative
Xie & Goyette (1997)	7,808	U.S.	N/A	Asian/White	Quantitative

4. *Methods of coding qualitative data.* Generally, scholars relied on case studies or semi-structured interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended that scholars should take a “grounded theory” approach in developing and testing theoretical notions. They should not *start* with a theory, but should develop a theory based on “emergent categories”—i.e., after categorizing participants’ responses into meaningful categories. Thus, in categorizing data, we followed this procedure: We began by scanning the articles, attempting to gain a deep understanding of people’s views about racial identity and race. Then we attempted to sort descriptions, phrases, and instances into appropriate categories. Specifically, participants were assumed to be viewing racial identity as a *social construct* if: They explicitly stated that they viewed race as a social construct. Or if they observed that in their youth they hadn’t considered race to be important, but soon discovered that society requires one to choose an identity (or identities.) Or if they chose an identity that they knew would please parents, family, or friends. Or if they thought of themselves differently in different situations. Or if they admitted to playing different “roles” at

different times and in different situations, in the hope of reaping social rewards (i.e., pretending to be white at school and black when “hanging out” with their pals.) (Paden, 1967, in his discussion of “situational ethnicity,” alerted us to many of these markers [quoted in Okamura, 1981] . Phinney (1990) and Wilson (1984) provided additional assistance in identifying potential social constructivist markers.)

Participants were assumed to be viewing race from a “common sense,” “*natural*,” or “*biological*” perspective, if they observed that traditional racial categories were “commonsense,” “natural,” “reasonable,” and “obvious.” Or if they assumed race was shaped by geographical origin, biological heritage, or clusters of genes. Or if they assumed that racial identities were unchanging and immutable (Hirschfeld, 1996, alerted us to many of these markers).

If the authors of the studies did not report respondents’ actual words, we accepted the authors’ interpretation of interviewees’ words at face value.

Initially, two raters (KA-R and her assistant) independently coded the data. Coders’ sorting of responses into categories were in agreement 98% of the time. After a discussion as to appropriate criteria, coders were able to reach 100% agreement as to how quotations should be coded. These final joint categorizations were used in this research.

5. Methods of coding quantitative data. Only nine studies utilized traditional survey techniques and data analysis. In coding these studies, we simply attempted to identify those factors (both personal and situational) which: (1) shaped people’s views as to whether race was socially constructed or biologically constructed; and (2) influenced their own racial identities. A few studies (in which both monoracials and multiracials were interviewed,) allowed us to test the hypothesis that people of mixed race would find the social constructionist perspective more appealing than would their peers.

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B. Results⁴

1. Qualitative Studies

Although not all scholars provided demographic information, our best guess is that participants were fairly evenly split as to gender; 58% of those interviewed were women or girls; 42% were men and boys.

a.. Social constructivist views of race

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) once spoke of a “looking glass self.” He observed that people’s self identities are shaped in their interactions with others. Our review suggests that this is true—at least in part. Social context appears to be a critically important determinant of people’s racial identities.

Some participants claimed that in their youth they hadn’t even known that a concept such as race existed. As they got older, however, they discovered that other people considered one’s race to be critically important. Sometimes, when they moved to a new neighborhood, they found themselves “odd-man-out.” One woman stated: “I just don't remember if we ever really said anything about being black or being Filipino in our house growing up. It wasn't that we weren't proud or nothing like that. It just wasn't there. When I had to face society outside of my house, I got a pretty heavy dose of race-this and race-that” (Williams & Thornton, 1998; p. 262).

Buckley and Carter (2004) reported that three of the five biracial women they interviewed claimed that they’d never worried about what race they were, until others confronted them, and they felt obliged to make a choice. As one woman said, “I’m always questioning who I relate to and how I get along with people. Filling out things that asked me to describe my race, I always said ‘black’ because that’s what other people said” (p. 51). Miville, Constantine, Baysden, and So-Lloyd (2005) interviewed 10 multiracial men and women. They, too, found that many people just “go along to get along”—accepting others’ definitions. As one Asian/white/Hawaiian man noted: “Suddenly I’m ‘Minority Guy’ and for some reason that is really important to them

⁴ To avoid tedious repetition, when we speak of “people,” unless otherwise indicated we mean “participants in our samples,” all of whom are multiracial.

[University personnel]. They asked me to just mark one [race]. And I was like ‘you pick one. It’s more important to you that I’m one thing’” (p. 511).

Mass (1992) found that culture and geographical situation had a profound impact on people’s racial identities. If, for example, a man of Japanese/Caucasian ancestry grew up in Hawai’i or Gardena or Montebello (in California)—places with substantial Japanese-American and mixed populations—he tended to think of himself as Japanese or as Japanese/Caucasian. On moving to, say, the Midwest or the deep South, where he confronted more racism, he generally began to think of himself as *either* white *or* Japanese. The identity he adopted depended on how welcoming family and community turned out to be—the Caucasians or the Japanese. Similar results were secured by Hall (1992), who studied 30 Japanese and Black men and women of mixed ancestry. The more accepting the father’s family (say, Japanese) or the mother’s family (say, Korean) was, the more likely multiracials were to identify with their (Japanese or Korean) ancestry. The same was true with friends.

Students of mixed race are often asked: “What are you?” (i.e., a perplexed stranger approaches and asks: “What are you?”) For the 15 biracial (Japanese/Non-Asian) individuals in Collins (2000) study, the “what are you?” experience had a profound impact on their self-perceptions. The Question often made them aware, often for the first time, that people were confused as to how to classify them. Then, it occurred to them that if they chose, they could claim to be Japanese, Non-Asian, or of mixed race—as it suited them. Collins reports: “They were able to easily move between two monoracial groups simultaneously if necessary” (p. 125). In Renn’s (2000) study of 24 multiracial students from four different colleges, people assumed they could choose with which race(s) they wished to identify. As one woman noted: “If you accept race as a social construction, that gives us even more legitimacy in the freedom to choose what you want to identify as, because there’s no biological thing tying you to one or the other background” (p. 411).

Family Influences

Basu (2000) interviewed 14 biracial women and discovered that racial identity is profoundly influenced by family views of race. For example, one woman stated: “I think [my parents] influenced my identity by not stressing a specific nationality...by

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encouraging me to learn about my cultures. . .was their way of saying ‘listen you’re everything, you’re just not one thing’ (Basu, 2000; p. 29).

In Stephan’s (1991) interviews with 36 University of Hawaii students from multiple racial groups, one respondent stated, “When I’m with Japanese people, I guess I feel Japanese, and when I’m with haole [Caucasian] people, I’m haole.” While another noted, “When I’m with my mom’s side of the family I tend to identify with them more...But when I went to my Japanese grandfather, my dad’s family, I get so involved in it. I guess when I’m with my different families I fall back into whatever comes out” (p. 272).

Situational Factors

Several situational factors affected the way multiracials presented themselves to others: these included one’s relationship with (and proximity to) one’s immediate family; one’s neighborhood (Pinderhughes, 1993); and place of schooling (Basu, 2000; Knaus, 2003; Williams & Thornton, 1998).

Stephan and Stephan (1989) and Stephan (1991) argued that situational identity is inherent in the multiracial experience. In Stephan and Stephan (1989), the authors interviewed 57 Japanese/white and 54 Hispanic participants (who considered themselves to be multiracial.) For both groups, students’ racial identities were shaped by situational factors. Hispanics’ identities were shaped by how close they felt to their fathers. For Japanese-white mixed individuals, racial identity was dependent upon the family’s cultural and religious practices. Surprisingly, 15% of those interviewed chose an identity based on cultural preferences rather than biological ties. In a later study, Stephan (1991) interviewed 36 people from Hawai’i and found that their racial identities waxed and waned, depending on their current cultural preferences and with whom they happened to be socializing at the moment. Standen (1996) interviewed eight Korean/white participants. When asked when he thought of himself as Korean, white, or both, one man responded: “Well, like I was saying, a lot of times it’s just when social situations and circumstances present themselves. When I think about my daughter, about who I am, how I want to present myself to my family and as far as my future” (p. 253).

Role-Playing

Men and women of mixed ancestry, assuming that race is (in part) a social construction, sometimes play a role—pretending to be whatever race promises the admiration, respect, or practical benefits they are seeking. Sometimes, people convince themselves that they *are* the roles they play (Festinger, 1957); sometimes they do not.

In the early days, Americans of mixed ancestry often wished to “pass” for white, since that was where the most social rewards lay. Today, that has changed somewhat. Many people are proud of being Asian, Hispanic, or black. (Think of “black is beautiful.”) Although most U. S. blacks are of mixed ancestry, in U. S. Census surveys and interviews most identify themselves as “black” (Davis, 1991; Williamson, 1980, p. 111). In Hawaii, a multiracial community, people are generally proud of their “cosmopolitan,” “local,” or “hapa” heritage (all terms indicating a multiracial heritage); In Hawaii, people sometimes pretend to a multiracial or “local” identity, that they do not possess (Stephan, 1991).

Miville and her colleagues (2005), who interviewed black/white participants, spoke of a “chameleon effect.” As one woman noted: “...the black [part of me] came out. I started dating black guys. My preferences in music was hip-hop. I started going to a black hairdresser. And I picked all of it up, I know it was social. It was all my peers teaching me this” (p. 513). Hall (1992), too, found young men and women, yearning to be seen as “black”, preferred to “hang out” with black friends and neighbors and worked hard to master “street-talk”—cues for “nigrescence” (Helms, 1990).

The ability to play many roles allows people to travel in and out of family or monoracial groups. Rockquemore (1998) interviewed 14 students in the Midwest. One black/white respondent explained:

Because of their [his parents'] status, I always learned, you know start with the outside fork and work your way in, and this one is for dessert, you know. So I know, I know not to eat like this [puts his elbows on the table]. But then again, at the same time, [respondent shifts to Black vernacular] when it comes picnic time or some other time and some ribs is on the table, I'm not afraid to get my hands dirty and dig on in and eat with my hands and stuff like that. [respondent shifts back to Standard English] I mean I guess my, the shift is when I'm not afraid to function in either world (Rockquemore, 1998, p. 201).

Multiracial Identity

In the past, light-skinned Negroes who wished to pass as white, generally felt they had to abandon family and friends, claim white attitudes, marry white, and include only white friends in their circle if they did not wish to “blow their cover.” *Birds of a feather*. Today, according to many, the same rules prevail. Roberts-Clarke, Roberts, and Morokoff (2004) interviewed eight multiracial women. The women observed that they were indeed judged by the (dating) company they kept. Twine (1996) interviewed 25 multiracial men and women. They admitted that they had to be very careful in their dating choices. (If they wanted to be accepted as, say, white, they had to date white.) One Jewish/black man noted: “It was hard when I was attracted to white girls because I had to think about my racial identity... and that affected my ability to enjoy my social life... But we didn’t date black girls” (Twine, 1996; p. 295). On the other hand, Korgen (1998) discovered many black/white men who claimed the advantages of biracial identity, as it gave them entrée to an unusually large subject pool. (One thinks of Woody Allen’s quip: “I can’t understand why more people aren’t bisexual. It would double your chances for a date on Saturday night.”)

Successful role playing requires a great deal more than choosing the right friends, of course. Knaus (2003) interviewed eight multiracial students who were struggling with issues of racial identity. As one man noted: “The mainstream definition depends on perception, how people see me, the way I wear my hair, what clothes I wear, what I’m eating, drinking, who I’m hanging out with. It all plays a factor in what they’ll perceive me as, as either I’m going to be this race or that race” (p. 214).

In the Spanish community, facility with the Spanish language appears to be a critical determinant of how one is perceived. Many Spanish multiracials observed that if they could speak Spanish, people would be more likely to think of them as a racial Hispanic than if they did not. As one woman remarked: “They expect me to speak Spanish. And then when I don’t speak Spanish fluently, they sort of like taken aback. If you don’t speak Spanish you can’t get close to a lot of Hispanic people” (p. 56). Another noted: “I think that speaking Spanish is more of an issue than anything. Because that’s the only thing that [Latino people] have... it’s like an insult if you don’t speak the language. It’s like you are trying to deny who you are...” (Knaus, 2003, p. 56).

All in all, many people celebrate the advantages of a mixed identity. When Gibbs and Hines (1992) interviewed 12 black/white adolescents as to what they most enjoyed about their multiracial identity, over a third thought it was “the ability to fit into

different racial groups.” Others focus on the *problems* associated with admitting to a mixed ancestry. There is, of course, a down side, too. When Newsome’s (2001) interviewed 72 multiracial individuals, he found that many suffered when their own visions of self clashed with the expectations of those around them. Multiracials who chose to define themselves in complex ways, and who were allowed to play out different racial roles, appeared to be more content than those who were not permitted to do so.

b. Biological Views of Race

Hirschfeld (1996) is a good guide as to what Americans mean when they talk of “a commonsense, biological view of race.”

Race theory is the . . . folk belief that humans can be partitioned into distinct types on the basis of their concrete, observable constitution. . . Racial differences are thought to be embodied, natural, and enduring, and are thought to encompass non-obvious or inner qualities (including moral and mental ones) as well as outward physical ones (p. 42).

Most people tend to assume that race is, at least in part, a biologically based construct.

Inheritance. Although a few people assume they are free to adopt any identity they wish (say, claiming to be a Cherokee Indian, when they possess no American Indian ancestors [see Hatfield & Rapson, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 1989]), most Americans take it for granted that that identity must be based, at least in part, on inheritance, blood-line, and genetic heritage. Many multiracials consider both culture and biology to be important. As one woman noted: “I feel very uncomfortable when people ask me how [I] identify...because I always feel...[that] I was raised Puerto Rican, but I can’t deny that I have...other blood” (Basu, 2000, p. 48).

Often people will defend themselves from the charge that they aren’t “really” a true _____ (fill in an ethnicity), by appealing to inheritance, “blood,” and genetic heritage. Tashiro (2002) interviewed 20 participants from multiracial backgrounds. When challenged as to identity, many black/white individuals mentioned the “one drop rule.” As this 48-year-old woman noted: “That is one thing I heard from as far back as I

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can remember, one drop of black blood, you are black. That's it" (p. 12). Another woman complained: "What does she mean I'm not as black or I shouldn't be black? Maybe my hair is not as nappy but I still feel, I still feel it [being Black] in my heart, it's running through my blood" (Storrs, 1999, p. 201). One 18-year-old woman, who had just discovered her Puerto Rican ancestry, argued that her blood carried a racial history: "I just think that in my genes and my genetic code are also snippets and bits and pieces of the genetics of all the people who come before me in my line. And I think that those snippets and pieces carry memory with them that can be accessed and that things will trigger that. I truly believe that" (Storrs, 1999, p. 205).

Physical Appearance

Many participants argued that "appearance is destiny." Society judged them by appearance, sometimes to their fury and chagrin. Many Asian/white participants, for example, were thought to be Hispanic or Polynesian—and they objected vigorously. In Basu (2000), one man observed:

The cop asked me if I was a gang member or if I had drugs in my truck. The cop starts calling into his headquarters "One Mexican, 25 year-old male..." When the cop was done I said, "Excuse me sir," real politely, "I'm not Mexican. My father is White and my mother is Japanese." From that moment on, the cop changed (p. 8).

An Asian/white woman noted:

I always thought I looked white, I guess because my Korean friends said I looked really white. They joked about my blondish-brown hair and green eyes. Then one day this white person called me a flat-faced slant-eye. This was a blow to the image I had developed of myself. Sometimes Spanish (Latino) people just start speaking to me in Spanish, so I guess they think I'm Spanish too (Williams, 1996, p. 201).

Such confusions often sparked anger: In Mass' (1992) interviews, Japanese/white individuals felt indignant when friends and acquaintances assumed they could crack anti-Asian or anti-white jokes with impunity. When the Japanese/white individuals complained, joke-tellers would rebuke *them* with: "What do you care, you don't look [Japanese or white] anyway" (p. 274).

Black/white respondents observed that—no matter how they thought of themselves—others persisted in assigning them to racial categories based on skin and hair color. In Knaus (2003), for example, one woman noted: “To be half white, what does that mean? It probably means that I have better hair than I would if I were all black. Which is really a bad thing to say [but] hair is such a focal point in black culture” (p. 262). Another woman noted: “Some people I just have to stay away from because they’re just persistent on it. Some of them will come up and put their hands in my hair just to make sure” (Basu, 2000, p. 60).

Society considers appearance to be so critical that men and women whose attitudes, feelings, and behavior do not “fit” society’s racial stereotypes, may be taunted with being “Oreos,” “bananas,” or “lychees”—black, yellow, or brown on the outside but white inside. One person in Field (1996) noted: “I feel more comfortable in all white than in all black settings, even though it’s sorta weird, because me physically, I am black. I look black, but inside me I am white. I act it. I think it. It’s like in an all-black setting I feel like I look OK but I feel I am acting different. Whereas in an all-white setting they might look at me but like I act the same way [they do]” (p. 223).

Interestingly, many multiracials reported that their racial identities differed from those of their siblings. One sibling might claim to be black, another to be mixed, and a third to white. Generally, the choice was made on the basis of skin color (Knaus, 2003).

From these interviews, it is clear that multiracial men and women generally possess a complex view of race. They are aware that, at least in part, race is a social construction; nonetheless, they were well aware that—at least in the eyes of American culture—inheritance, appearance, “blood,” and genetic make-up play a part, too. Researchers find that at different developmental stages, children, young men and women, and adults may possess very different ideas as to the nature of race (see Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Jacobs, 1992; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993).

2. Quantitative Studies

As we observed earlier, we were able to find only nine studies that interviewed multiracial men and women, using standard survey and/or experimental techniques. Nonetheless, it appears that almost all of the conclusions we came to earlier, found strong support in the quantitative data.

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a. Defining Race

When asked “What are you?” Tiger Woods quipped: “Cablinasian.” (Woods claims a Caucasian/black/Indian/Asian heritage; Kamiya, 1997). Today, men and women of mixed race differ greatly in (1) how important they consider race to be, and (2) whether they prefer to identify with society’s majority, its minorities, or both.

When Jaret and Reitzes (1999) asked 50 black, 48 multiracials, and 389 white respondents: “How important is race to your self concept?” they discovered that for Blacks, “race” was a critical component of identity; for whites it was not. For multiracials, race was sometimes important, sometimes not. Suzuki-Crumly and Hyers (2004) found that black participants (although generally of mixed ancestry), almost always claimed a purely black identity; their Asian/white peers tended to classify themselves as of mixed race.

Herman (2004) surveyed 1,496 men and women who had completed the 2000 U. S. Census. She, too, found: (1) blacks almost always checked “black,” when asked to indicate race, and (2) if people of mixed ancestry (say, Chinese/white) chose just one category, they generally checked a minority identity (i.e., choosing “Chinese,” instead of “white”). Of course, given the option, many people did choose to indicate that they were of “mixed” ancestry. Similar results were secured by Lopez (2003).

When asked about one’s racial background, multiracials’ responses have been found to change, depending on whether they are asked how *others* see them, how they *see themselves*, and on the exact wording of the questions (Lopez, 2003).

b. Biological views of race

Appearance

Society often uses “physical appearance” as a proxy for “race.” Previously, we found that people’s identities (and claims) are shaped, in part, by physical appearance. Surveys, too, confirm that appearance matters. Brunσμα and Rockquemore (2002) interviewed 177 multiracial individuals. People with very light (or very dark) complexions generally identified with *one* racial group; people with medium complexions knew they had more options. A full 41% of them claimed a

“transcendent” identity (identifying themselves as “human” or “without race”); 50% of them claimed a “protean” identity (i.e., possessing a “situational identity”).

Grove (1991) studied the development of identity in 17 Asian, 17 Asian/white, and 17 white adolescents. All completed the *Marcia's Identity Interview* and *Mars Asian Values Scale*. Students who were Asian or white tended to rate the concept of race as important in identity development; Asian/whites were less likely to make that assumption. As one man noted: “I think that being interracial has made a big difference partly from the way I look. Most people can't categorize me and it's give me freedom to float between groups and get around people's expectations more easily” (p. 623). One woman observed: “A lot of times when I talk with Asians, I am not a ‘real Asian’ because I don't look Asian” (p. 624). (Other scholars confirm these findings: see Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004).

c. Social Constructivist Views of Race

Social, Geographical, and Situational Influences

A wide variety of cultural, social, familial, geographical, and situational factors have been found to influence people's racial identity. In one survey, Phinney and Alipuria (1996) found that students identities were influenced by (1) racial heritage, (2) socio-economic status (SES), and (3) the college that students attended. For example, Latino/white students who possessed high SES, tended to present themselves as of mixed ancestry (claiming to be of, say, European and Latino ancestry); Latinos/whites of lower SES, tended to assume a single minority affiliation. (Similar results were secured by Jaret & Reitzes, 1999). (2) Students attending a college that was mostly white tended to identify with a single minority group; those attending a more racially diverse campus were more likely to identify themselves as mixed.

Xie and Goyette (1997), in a survey of children with one Asian and one non-Asian parent, found that children's identifications depended on cultural assimilation, a neighborhood's racial composition, and parent's level of education. First generation children tended to classify themselves as Asian, regardless of neighborhood composition. By the third generation, people's tendency to consider themselves as Asian was very influenced by neighborhood composition. The likelihood of identifying as Asian increased from 33% to 52%, as the concentration of Asians in the

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neighborhood increased from 0% to 20%. Similarly, first generation children were as likely to identify as Asian, regardless of their parents' education. By the third generation, people's tendency to define themselves as Asian rose from 32% to 46%, as parents' level of education increased from "high school" to "advanced degree."

C. Do Mixed Race People Differ From their Peers in Their Views of Race?

From the interviews and the surveys we have reviewed, it appears that: (1) Society is often inconsistent in its classification of multiracials. (In South America, for example, cynics say: "Money whitens.") (2) Multiracials are often forced to negotiate a minefield of conflicting claims as to identity. (3) Multiracials play different roles in different situations. As a consequence of these unique experiences, we might expect that multiracials would be more sympathetic to social-constructivist views of race than are their peers. *Is this so?* Aumer, Li, Hatfield, and John (in review) attempted to find out.

In a series of three studies, the authors interviewed students from various locales in order to determine cultural affects on the conceptualization of race. Student participants were chosen (but not included in all studies) from the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. The studies investigated the appropriateness of conventional and non-conventional survey methodology for capturing people's own racial identities and how one's conceptualization of race may affect interracial attraction. In Study #1, 1371 participants from the University of Texas at Austin were instructed to: "Choose your primary racial group" (from a list of six standard categories). Later, students were asked whether or not they saw themselves as "monoracial" or "multiracial". Of the multiracial participants, 34% originally selected White; 29% Hispanic, 23% Asian, 8%, Black, 5% Other, 1% Asian Indian, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native.

In Study #2, 182 participants from the same University were asked (1) how they identified themselves racially, and (2) how strangers generally identified them in public. A full 26% of participants complained that strangers often misclassified them. Most often misclassified were men and women of Asian and Hispanic ancestry. Students often noted that misclassification occurred most often while with their friends. For example, one 18 year old woman who personally identifies as Hispanic reported: "I'm often mistaken for Asian when I'm with my Asian friends because of [similarities in]

my features.” Another 19 year old male, who self identified as White, noted: “It depends on the context. If I’m speaking Spanish with my family or friends, then I’m Hispanic, but otherwise, if I’m speaking English, then no.”

Finally, in Study #3, Aumer, Li, Hatfield, and John (in review) asked college students how appealing they found various views of race to be. Students were recruited from three different geographical regions: the University of Texas, the University of Hawai’i at Manoa, and the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. Various measures concerning race and relationships were asked, but of importance to this review, students were asked: “Do you believe race is a social construct?” and “Do you believe race is a biological construct?” Possible answers ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). For more detailed information of this study please refer to Aumer, Li, Hatfield, and John (in review).

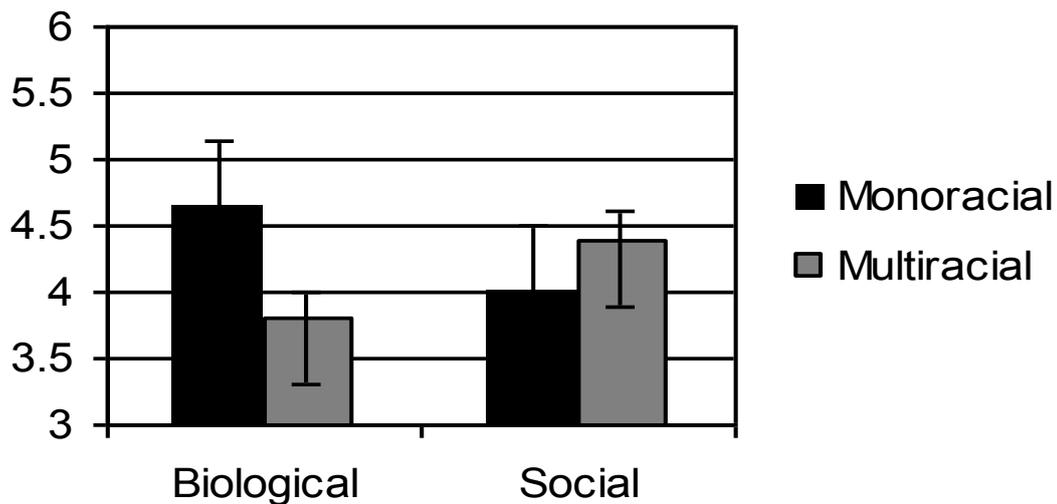


Figure 1. Average scores on the questions: “Is race a social/biological construct?” (for both monoracial and multiracial individuals.)

As can be seen in Figure 1, a significant within-subjects interaction ($F(1,363) = 5.60, p=.01$) demonstrates that multiracial individuals were more likely to see race as a social concept than were their monoracial peers. Interestingly, not only were multiracials more likely to endorse the belief that race was a social construct than their monoracial peers, but they were also more likely to see race as a social rather than a biological concept.

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Participants were also asked to rate their view of race along a continuum, with a “biological view of race” on the far left side and a “social view of race” on the far right side and to mark where between these two end points they viewed the concept of race. In addition, they were asked about their dating preferences and habits. It was found that people who viewed race as a more social construct, were more willing to date people from outside their own racial group than those who insisted race was primarily a biological construct, ($R^2 = .10$, $F(2, 135) = 7.114$, $p < .01$) (See Figure 2). People’s beliefs as to the nature of race may have some impact on their selection of mates, friends, and associates.

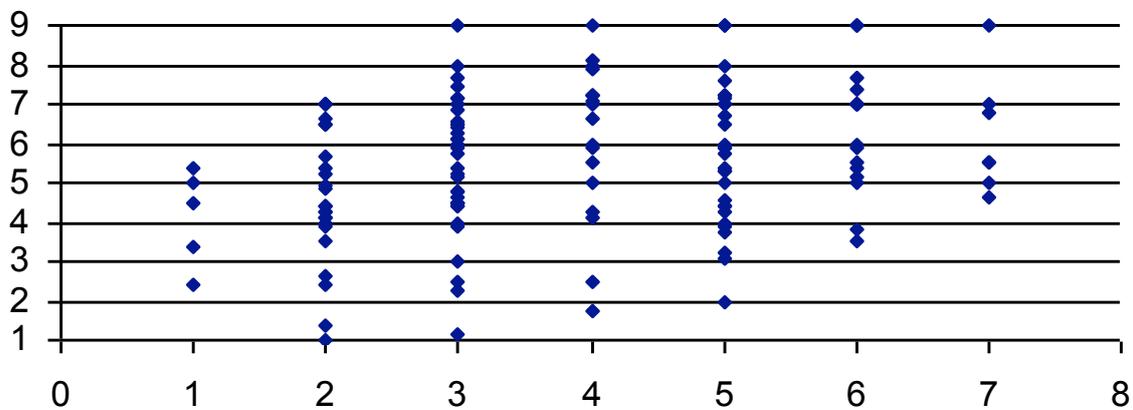


Figure 2. Likelihood of dating someone outside of one’s own racial group depending on their view of race as either a more biological or social construct.

Conclusions and Discussion

In this paper, we have attempted a comprehensive review of theory and research as to the factors which influence Americans’ views of race. We began by surveying popular theories of race and racial identity. We found that currently scholars are engaged in a fierce debate. Some contend that race is primarily a social construct, serving political, religious, and personal goals; others that it is a primitive biological entity, writ in one’s ancestry, appearance, and genes.

Our first step was to assemble a collection of appropriate studies, conducted from 1986-2006, by scholars in a variety of disciplines—including social psychology, sociology, clinical psychology, and nursing. These included interviews and surveys.

This comprehensive review was designed to find out more about how modern-day Americans (particularly Americans of mixed ancestry) view race. Specifically, we hoped to gain an understanding of the multiracial experience and its impact on multiracials' conceptions of race and racial identities.

Summary of Findings - The preceding research led us to several conclusions:

- An examination of the U. S. Census data makes it clear that America is becoming an increasingly diverse society.

- Americans often find it difficult to classify people of mixed ancestry.

- Most American are aware that assigning race is a complex task—involving social and biological factors. Nonetheless, in practice, most people seem to assume that individuals can be classified into distinct types on the basis of their ancestry, appearance, and genetic heritage. Thus, when trying to classify people as to race, Americans' attributions are generally based on ancestry and appearance.

- Multiracials are more likely than their peers to accept the notion that race *is*, at least in part, a social construct than are their peers. Nonetheless, they are well aware of the role that ancestry, appearance, biology, and genetic factors play in American's racial classifications.

- *Social-Constructivist Views of Race* Often, children aren't aware of the concept of "race" until schoolmates apprise them of its importance. A variety of social factors—cultural, familial, and situational—have been found to shape people's racial identities. People of mixed ethnicity often adopt different *personas* in different situations: they may claim a "protean identity," a "situational ethnic identity," and/or report "chameleon experiences." Of course, people's ability to "role play" and cross racial lines depends on the willingness of the audience to accept the legitimacy of the performance.

- *Biological Views of Race* People of mixed ancestry are naturally influenced by such biological factors as ancestry, skin pigmentation, hair texture, and facial configuration in "choosing" an identity, too. Blacks prefer to classify themselves as (monoracially) "black," denying any mixed heritage. If forced to select *one* identity, men and women (of mixed race), tend to claim a minority status (identifying themselves as, say, "Asian" instead of "white."). *Why is this?* Perhaps they are simply accepting society's definitions (i.e. adhering to the archaic "one drop rule.") Perhaps they possess a political agenda, wishing to celebrate, say, their Asian or African heritage. Perhaps

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they wish to identify with the oppressed. Perhaps they are protesting white oppression. Perhaps they come from traditional families who insist on traditional identities.

In any case, people do rely on ancestry, appearance, and an almost alchemic vision as to the importance of “blood” and genes in coding for personality and potential.

Future Directions

As always, our survey leads to more questions than it answers.

Firstly, some have speculated that scholars’ political agendas sometimes influence their scientific perceptions. Social constructionists are sometimes accused of a political agenda, desiring to insist race doesn’t and shouldn’t matter (see Brace, 2005; Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). In the distant past, German scholars attempted to classify Jews, Negroes, gays as inferior on the basis of innate racial differences. (see Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Rushton, 1995.) Today, critics often accuse scientists of similar biases. Are they right? Do scholars political attitudes shape their advocacy of (and receptivity to) various theoretical arguments as to the nature of race?

Cultural and cognitive psychologists argue that people from different cultural and racial backgrounds differ markedly in the way they view the world (Nisbett, 2003.) Some, for example, have speculated that while most Americans prefer Aristotelian logic, multiracials possess a naïve dialecticism and the ability to think more dialectically (Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, Wang, & Hou, 2004). Others argue that the cognitive frameworks of monoracials and multiracials may differ in susceptibility to “the fundamental attribution error” and in whether they are likely to be “levelers versus sharpeners” (Ehrman & Leaver, 2001).

Cognitive and cross-cultural psychologists argue that only by studying such differences can scholars can gain a true understanding of general cognitive processes.

Finally, we confront the impossible question: “What do we mean by ‘race’ and ‘ethnic’ heritage?” What do we mean when we say a person is of “mixed” ancestry? (see Helms, 1994; Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Anthropologists point out that, almost all peoples are of mixed ancestry. African-Americans, for example, almost always classify themselves as “purely” black (Herman, 2004; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996). Yet, if you quiz them about their *grandparents*, they readily acknowledge their multiracial heritage (Davis, 1991; Williamson, 1980, p. 111). What are they “really”—black or mixed race? What are we? How far back in the

historical record should one go in classifying oneself. Should we rely on ancestry? Social claims? Clusters of genetic traits?

Hopefully, in the future, scientists will be able to tell us more about these perplexing yet fascinating questions. This matters all the more as the number of children in the globalizing world which are born of mixed race coupling continues its dramatic growth. Such information should prove vital for politicians, legislators, and social planners in the making of policy decisions.

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