POLITICS BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE

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Abstract

The 2000 Census was the first in which Americans had the option of self-identifying with more than one race. Today, 9 million Americans identify with multiple races, and the election of President Obama—a son of biracial parentage—has increased public interest in multiracialism. Using a combination of national surveys and qualitative interviews, this dissertation breaks down the political ramifications of race-mixing and multiracial identity, with a focus on biracial Americans of White-Black parentage. Analyses begin with an assessment of public opinion towards interracial marriage. Findings show that expressed support for intermarriage has increased over the past decade—both through changes in attitudes and through a cohort replacement effect—driven mostly by increasingly progressive views from Whites. Expressed support is inflated by political correctness, as respondents are less likely to claim support when speaking with someone believed to be of their same racial group. Opposition to interracial marriage is not merely evidence of respondents’ racial in-group preferences, but also a disfavoring towards specific racial outgroups, as some out-groups (e.g., Blacks) are considered less desirable marriage partners than others (e.g., Whites). Turning to the identities and attitudes of biracials, findings show that the majority of White-Black biracials now opt to identify as both White and Black—but that nearly 40 percent of biracials continue to subscribe to the one-drop rule, labeling themselves as singularly Black. Biracials’ outlook is significantly shaped by family, sociocultural environment, religion, region, and gender. Results also indicate that “money whitens” biracials’ self-identification; all else equal, biracials from the most affluent families are more likely
to identify as singularly White or White-Black than as singularly Black. Confirming a racial assimilationist effect, biracials adopt the identity of the racial group with which they have the most contact. Regarding policy attitudes, findings show that while identification as partly Black is important in believing that racial discrimination is a major problem in society, simply being of Black heritage leads to significantly more liberal attitudes towards explicitly and implicitly racial policies. Furthermore, on issues involving women and gay rights, biracial individuals who identify as White-Black or singularly Black express more progressive views than monoracial Whites and monoracial Blacks. Interviews further break down biracials’ identities, and suggest that skin color is mostly uncorrelated with racial and political loyalties. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of what the rise in intermarriage and growth of the American multiracial population means, symbolically and substantively, for the future of American race relations.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

America’s racial landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population rose by 15.2 million such that now 1 in 6 people in the United States is of Hispanic ethnicity. The Asian population grew by 43 percent—making it the fastest-growing racial group. The proportion of Americans identifying as Black or as Some Other Race also increased. In contrast, non-Hispanic Whites were the only major racial group that experienced a relative decline, decreasing from 69 percent to 64 percent of the total population (Humes, Jones and Ramirez, 2011). Such racial and ethnic diversity is unprecedented, reflective of rises in immigration and high minority birthrates.

Changing cultural attitudes also explain America’s growing racial heterogeneity. In the wake of civil rights legislation of the 1950s and 1960s, public approval of interracial marriage increased. The stigma once associated with crossing racial boundaries has dissipated, and intimate interracial relationships are seen as more acceptable now than ever before. One-in-seven new marriages are interracial or interethnic, a record high (Passel, Wang and Taylor, 2010). These behavioral trends are reflected in one of the fastest growing racial demographic groups: the mixed-race population.

While race-mixing is not a recent phenomenon, only since the 2000 Census have Amer-
icans been allowed to self-identify with more than one racial group. A simple change in the race question’s wording from prior Censuses—“mark one or more” boxes—has changed how Americans conceive of race. Today more than 9 million Americans identify with multiple races, and it is estimated that 20 percent of the population will identify this way by 2050 (Humes, Jones and Ramirez 2011; Lee and Bean 2004). This rise in the multiracial population has coincided with the election of President Barack Obama—a son of White-Black parentage—and has catalyzed public discourse on the topic.

In changing the way the government records race, the Census has also influenced how Americans perceive race and its significance. Current Census race statistics are used to monitor the enforcement of civil and voting rights and the dispensing of funding to minority communities. But the race question also poses considerable symbolic social consequences. The recognition of certain racial/ethnic groups and not others, as well as the limits imposed on identification, has made the institution one fraught with controversy.

The History of Racial Classification in the United States

The federal categorization of race and ethnicity has undergone significant changes since the first U.S. Census was conducted more than two centuries ago. From enumerator-classification based on “free” or “slave” status in 1790, to permitting respondent self-identification and a total of 63 possible race combinations in 2010, the Census has adapted to changing cultural definitions, public sentiment, and the nation’s increasing melange of racial and ethnic groups.[1]

Although the federal Census option to self-identify with more than one race is novel, the differential classification of mixed-race people is not. The significance of skin tone in determining social treatment and opportunities originated in the antebellum South, when

1The current 63 combinations include all of the possible racial choices involving the six standard race categories (White, Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and Some Other Race). When the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity question is also considered, the number of possible racial/ethnic identity options doubles, to 126 (Snipp 2003).
the principle of white supremacy was adopted as a rationale for slavery. Sexual relationships between White men and enslaved Black women were frequent, despite the negative associations surrounding Blackness. Often non-consensual, these interracial relationships resulted in many biracial births, and prevalent mixing sparked confusion regarding how these children should be identified.

The official categorization of multiracials as belonging to an intermediate racial group began with the 1850 Census, when enumerators were instructed to classify respondents as White, Black, or “Mulatto” for people who were part-White/part-Black. Due to their kinship and modest physical resemblance to Whites, White slaveowners created a color hierarchy that distinguished between Black slaves based on differences in skin tone. Mulattoes were usually given preferential treatment over unmixed Blacks. Mulattoes ranged from preferred slaves who were granted special privileges, to free elites, to those who were so light-skinned, they appeared White. Leading up to the Civil War, however, sentiment towards interracial relationships and mixed White-Black children became hostile. As their desire to defend slavery rose, Southern Whites grew increasingly bitter that mulattoes were deemed an “in-between” race and that many were free. Generations of race-mixing fueled apprehension that many mulattoes were “passing” as White.

Racial Attitudes After the Civil War

Bitterness and apprehension were exacerbated by defeat in the war, and its aftermath. While the Civil War resulted in an end to slavery, race relations during Reconstruction were nothing short of dismal. Fears of competition with Blacks in skilled trade and industrial professions were

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2 Arguably the most famous example was the affair between former President Thomas Jefferson and his slave-maid, Sally Hemings. Incidentally, Hemings was mixed-race herself, and had only one Black grandparent.

3 Although sexual assaults on Black women by White men were tolerated, relationships between White women and Black men were strictly forbidden. The prospect of a White woman contaminating her Whiteness by giving birth to a part-Black child was considered unconscionable.

4 Lighter-skinned mulatto slaves were given less strenuous work than darker-skinned slaves, who were frequently subjected to arduous field labor. (Davis, 2001; Williamson, 1980; Reuter, 1918).
sions led some poor Whites to form racist vigilante organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (Davis, 2001). Southern White elites who had previously expressed benevolence towards Blacks and mulattoes also felt intimidated by their newfound freedom. Shared perceptions of economic threats from Blacks led to a pro-segregation alliance between wealthy and poor White southerners.

Whites in Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and the Carolinas informally adopted a “one-drop rule” to clearly delineate that anyone with any known Black ancestry was assigned the status “Black” (Davis, 2001). Intended to strengthen and advance White supremacy, White former slaveowners ensured that mulattoes would be disqualified from reaping the social and economic benefits of Whiteness. The rule grew in acceptance as mulattoes became increasingly alienated from the White community. Even light-skinned individuals of part-Black heritage began identifying as Black, and found strong allies in unmixed Blacks.

The rule was not officially instituted at the federal level, however, and the 1890 Census added two additional multiracial subcategories, “Quadroon” and “Octoroon” (Bureau of the Census, 1890). These racial labels signified being of one-quarter and one-eighth Black ancestry, but lasted only a single decade. Indian was also included as a potential race, and in response to increased immigration, the Census added two East Asian nationalities, Japanese and Chinese. Over the next two decades, enumerators were allowed to mark respondents as “Other Races,” Hindu, Korean, and Filipino.

The category of “Mulatto” was permanently dropped from the Census in 1930, when the federal government decided that people with any fraction of Black lineage were to be recorded as “Negro” (Snipp, 2003). Thus the one-drop rule was officially institutionalized for the entire country, after 80 years of mixed White-Black classification. While the one-drop rule was stringently administered to Blacks, its application to other minority multiracial subgroups was haphazard. For example, enumerators were instructed to label people with White-American Indian heritage as Indian, “except where the percentage of

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5The one-drop rule is also known as hypodescent, the “traceable amount rule” and the “one Black ancestry rule.”
Indian blood is small, or where he is regarded as a white person by those in the community where he lives” (Bureau of the Census [1930]). In addition, the 1930 Census was the only one in which “Mexican” was considered a race; in all prior censuses and in 1940, Mexican Americans were recorded as White.

Mulattoes and Blacks eventually accepted and committed themselves to the one-drop rule, having acknowledged that such a strict definition of group belonging was non-negotiable in a culture dominated by Whites. In spite of the fixed legal conception of Blackness within both Black and White society, skin color and other physical features were strongly correlated with socioeconomic status in the Black community (Davis 2001). Although they were categorized as singularly Black and committed themselves to Black political causes, people of mixed heritage and light skin gained access to education, high-status occupations and property that darker-skinned Blacks were denied. This link between phenotype and prestige was strong and the Black community internalized these principles. More Afrocentric facial features—dark skin, a wide nose, full lips, and coarse hair—were deemed highly undesirable, and colorism bias in favor of light-skinned Blacks manifested itself in many ways.

The Shift to Self-Identification and “Mark One or More”

After the Second World War, the Census Bureau moved away from enumerator observation and adopted a policy of self-identified reports. This change was an important one. Granting people the ability to assert their own identity redefined race from a label imposed upon individuals to a choice that they could opt into. No longer assigned and biologically predetermined, race became a subjective declaration of an individual’s cultural attachments.

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6Organizations such as blue-vein societies—groups for which membership was contingent upon having sufficiently pale skin that blue arm veins were visible—rose to prominence and separated the lower-class, darker-skinned Blacks from their more affluent, lighter mulatto counterparts (Davis 2001). Black sororities and fraternities infamously employed brown paper bag tests as criteria for acceptance; candidates whose skin was darker than a brown paper bag were deemed “too Black” to join the group. Similar discriminatory behavior included the comb test, which gauged the texture of one’s hair (Hill 2002).
In transferring the act of identifying from enumerator to respondent, the Census amended race from being concrete in nature to a self-defined creation that could be fluid and manufactured (Snipp, 2003).

Such shifts intersected with changing racial demographics and ultimately led to debates concerning longstanding assumptions and beliefs about race and racial meanings. The 1970 Census added a new ethnicity question which asked whether or not respondents were Hispanic or Latino, thus declaring race and ethnicity to be divergent identities. In the 1980s and 1990s, the multiracial community—and often the parents of mixed-race children—lobbied for a multiracial Census category that would more accurately reflect their racial heritage. Their efforts resulted in a 1997 Office of Management and Budget directive requiring that federal data collection allow individuals to identify with multiple racial groups (Williams, 2006). This led to the highly publicized change to the race question in the 2000 Census, which made salient the idea that a person can belong to more than one racial group.

The ability of Americans to now publicly and officially identify with multiple racial groups may stand as “the greatest change in the measurement of race in the history of the United States” (Farley, 2002, 33). This recent restructuring of racial categories has modified the way multiracials are viewed—and how they view themselves. This is especially true for those of part-Black heritage, who today are no longer conditioned or expected to identify as singularly Black. They live in a society where segregated buses and lunch counters are memories of an antiquated era, and singular Black identities are no longer hardened by the fear of lynching or threat of race riots. The social and political repercussions associated with Blackness are less severe now than in the past. Black ancestry is likely less salient to biracials coming of age in the twenty-first century. While they may experience the lingering legacy of de jure segregation and racism, biracials today have also witnessed the election of a biracial/Black President, an event that would have been unfathomable during the Civil Rights Movement.
Black Identity and Political Opinion

Historically, Blacks of mixed-race have been active in furthering the political agenda of the Black community and have always been overrepresented in politics (Hochschild and Weaver, 2007). W.E.B. DuBois referenced the advantages afforded to lighter-skinned Blacks in his classic essay “The Talented Tenth,” arguing that mulattoes were “exceptional” and that their proximity to Whiteness translated to a higher socioeconomic position that could be used to elevate the race (Du Bois, 1903). Prominent mixed-race leaders of the Black community included DuBois, Booker T. Washington and civil rights activist Walter White, who strongly identified as Black despite being blond-haired, blue-eyed, and of predominantly White ancestry (White, 1948). It is also believed that the father of abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass was White (Douglass, 1995). Despite the greater opportunities afforded to them, multiracial Blacks did not distinguish themselves as non-Black because they did not have the option to identify any other way. Defined and treated as Black by society, they internalized the label and identified emotionally and politically with other Black people. While the one-drop rule was originally created to facilitate economic gains to White slaveholders, it became a unifying trait within the African American community. Blacks took possession of the rule, making it a marker of solidarity for all individuals of Black heritage.

The relationship between racial group identification and political cohesion has been well-established. Racial attachments are strong predictors of political beliefs and behavior, helping people organize, interpret, and simplify a complex political world. Group interests can operate as a substitute for self-interests; individuals prioritize the goals and values of the group because they believe that achieving them are beneficial to the individual (Dawson, 1994; Sears et al., 1980). Today, Americans of mixed-Black heritage are a group for whom identity is thoroughly constructed. Studying the political identity development and attitudes

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7The overrepresentation of biracials in government continues today. Contemporary political figures of White-Black parentage include President Obama, NAACP President Benjamin Jealous, and former Washington mayor Adrien Fenty.
of this population sheds light on the evolving nature of race relations. While the topic has led to considerable speculation (Hochschild and Weaver 2010), not much is known about the political views associated with being mixed-race. Research dating back to the 1920s has posited the social implications of mixed heritage, but there has been little data to test these presumptions (Park 1928; Park 1931; Stonequist 1935). My research fills this gap, using new data and theory to examine the relationship between multiracial heritage, identity, and political attitudes.

Not all multiracial subgroups experience race in the same manner (Funderburg 1994; Root 1996). Whereas racial norms have generally afforded people of mixed-race the ability to choose how to identify, group membership has been exceptionally stringent, inflexible, and legally demarcated for those of Black ancestry (Davis 2001). In light of the unique rigidity of the one-drop rule, multiracial White-Black Americans have been the most vocal opponents of mutually-exclusive racial categories (Williams 2006; Goldstein and Morning 2000; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008).

This dissertation thus focuses on biracials who are White-Black for theoretical, practical, and substantive political reasons. First, Whites and Blacks are the two racial groups with the greatest social distance. Their children symbolize the intimate crossing of a strict racial periphery, and have long fascinated, puzzled, and riled both politicians and the American public. White-Black biracials’ existence, and the potential for their existence, has provoked considerable debate and instigated laws that have revolutionized American race relations. From Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), to Loving v. Virginia (1967), to OMB Directive 15 (1997), landmark legislation has centered on the racial boundaries between Whites and Blacks and the classification of their mixed-race children. The identity choices and political loyalties of White-Black biracials have concerned activists and lawmakers, who fear that identification as White-Black will result in a decreased commitment to civil rights and a decline in funding for minority communities (Williams 2006).

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8In one of the few nationally representative studies of multiracials, Fryer et al. (2008) use national survey data to compare the behavior of White-Black adolescents to their White and Black peers.
Furthermore, the rate of marriages between Whites and Blacks remains lower than intermarriages among other groups, indicating that the divide between these two races is wider than those between Whites, Asians, and Latinos (Lee and Bean, 2004). Yet even with these taboos, the number of marriages between Blacks and Whites is growing rapidly, and in 2010, 1.6 million Americans identified as both White and Black (Passel, Wang and Taylor, 2010; Humes, Jones and Ramirez, 2011).  

Aside from issues directly connected to biracials, large social and political disparities exist between Blacks and Whites, disparities that have been a deep, enduring element of American society. The two groups sharply disagree on explicitly racial issues, including affirmative action and government enforcement of school desegregation, and are divided over implicitly racial policies such as federal spending on the poor and government provision of health insurance (Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Kinder and Winter, 2001; Gilens, 1999). Moreover, relative to Blacks, Whites have greater wealth (Kochhar, Fry and Taylor, 2011; Oliver and Shapiro, 2006), live in better neighborhoods (Massey and Denton, 1993), attend better schools (Lee, 2002), and experience significantly lower rates of incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010). Thus the sociopolitical positions of White-Black biracials are substantively interesting and add nuance to our understanding of this enduring and entrenched racial divide.

Who is “Multiracial?” The Challenges of Measuring Race

The meaning of race is socially constructed, changing, and subjective, and scholars of racial and ethnic identity have long debated the definition of “mixed-race” (Omi and Winant, 1994; Waters, 2000). The very word “multiracial” erroneously suggests that there are such things as pure, biological races in the United States (Spencer, 2004). For Blacks, what constitutes multiracial heritage is particularly problematic; as a result of past and more

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9This figure constitutes those who marked only White and Black in the Census; an additional 245,850 respondents marked White, Black, and identified as Hispanic/Latino.
contemporary race mixing, an estimated 75 to 90 percent of all African-Americans have some non-Black ancestry (Davis 2001).

Moreover, racial identity is mutable. When prompted with the option, some people will identify as multiracial even if they normally identify with only one race. Others who have parents of different races will nevertheless classify themselves with an entirely different racial group. And some people will even say they are of mixed-race although their parents are of the same race!

Concise and meaningful classification of multiracial individuals would seem an impossible task, for racial classification is too contested an issue for consensus. Yet even if a collectively agreed-upon definition of mixed-race were to exist, it is unclear what the ramifications of such a system would be. Although the ability to accurately categorize oneself may carry great symbolic weight, mixed-race categorization can prove difficult when it comes to analyzing what the numbers and proportions actually signify.

The inherent subjectivity of racial identification raises the issues of how multiracialism should be measured, and how far back in one’s racial lineage we can go in considering someone as multiracial. Given that most Black Americans are ostensibly multiracial, some researchers have attempted to overcome the hurdle of defining mixed-race by distinguishing individuals who are “immediately mixed,” with parents of different races, from those who are more “remotely mixed,” at the level of grandparents or earlier generations (Spencer 2004). This method would therefore limit one’s analysis to individuals whose biological parents are socially defined as being of different races. However, this classification method is also imperfect because it presumes that both the White parent and the Black parent of a biracial child are each racially pure and unmixed. Since the likelihood that any Black American is truly “unmixed” is quite small, this overlooks the reality that a biracial individual’s self-identified “Black” parent may also be the child of a White parent and a Black parent. Mixed-race parents cannot be socially defined as “monoracial” while their children are then classified as “first-generation biracial”; to call “biracial” the child of a White par-
ent and a socially-defined Black parent is to discerningly assign the race of the parent using the one-drop rule, but not assign the race of the child in this manner (Spencer, 2004).

To some extent, this problem of selectively applying the one-drop rule cannot be overcome, as the fluidity of race is highly convoluted. I limit my population of interest to self-identified, non-Hispanic biracials of White-Black parentage. Respondents considered to be biracial are those who, unprompted, identify one parent as singularly White and their other parent as singularly Black. Allowing individuals to classify their parents with multiple races helps locate those individuals who have less-recently mixed racial heritage.

**Racial Terminology and Population of Interest**

Throughout this dissertation, the term “biracial” is used to denote those who identify one parent as singularly Black and their other parent as singularly White. The word thus refers to parentage, and is not necessarily reflective of one’s self-identification; individuals who are biracial may self-identify in any number of ways, such as White and Black (or, “White-Black,” the phrasing I employ here), singularly Black, or singularly White. The words “mixed-race” and “multiracial” are used interchangeably to denote anyone who has parents of (at least) two different races or ethnic groups (e.g., White-Black or White-Asian), while “multiethnic” refers to people of mixed racial/Hispanic ethnic parentage (e.g., White-Hispanic or Black-Hispanic).

White-Black biracials constitute the largest multiracial subgroup in the United States (Humes, Jones and Ramirez, 2011). They merit special attention because their identities are no longer seen as inflexible and constrained to the one-drop rule. Narrowing my scope to a single multiracial population kept the project manageable and facilitated a clean assessment of complex findings. Any possible drawbacks of concentrating on White-Black biracials were likely counterbalanced by the clearer inferences afforded by this method.

Yet, in concentrating on the political attitudes of people of White-Black parentage, my intention is not to reify a misconception that “multiracial” in the U.S. alludes primarily
to people who are White and Black, as opposed to many other potential racial combinations. The study of race in contemporary America must not be limited to the Black-White paradigm, particularly since Hispanics are the largest ethnic minority and Asians are the fastest-growing racial group. Later stages of the project will expand the analyses of White-Black biracial identity and political attitudes to other multiracial and multiethnic subgroups.

Finally, this dissertation focuses entirely on the political attitude development of biracial young adults. I study this age cohort because the multiracial-identifying population is very young on average, and because there are myriad challenges associated with surveying representative samples of older mixed-race Americans (Meyer, 2001). The findings discussed here are therefore not applicable to biracials born earlier than the 1980s. Despite this limitation, this project remains one of the most generalizable studies of the multiracial population.

Organization

In the chapters that follow, I examine how racial identity develops among biracials, and evaluate the political attitudes that correspond with these identities. Drawing on a nationally representative survey of adults, national surveys of college freshman, and in-depth interviews, I assess the political consequences of our increasingly mixed-race society. This dissertation proceeds with an examination of contemporary attitudes towards interracial marriage, transitioning to the process of racial and political identity construction among biracial young adults.

Interrace marriage has long been considered the benchmark of social distance in a society (Song 2009; Fryer 2007). In order to understand the political identity development of mixed-race Americans, we must first comprehend the cultural significance associated with race-mixing in the United States. While both interracial marriage and mixed-race identifi-

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10 Other large-scale quantitative studies of multiracialism face similar data limitations, and are also forced to limit their analyses to adolescents (Fryer et al. 2008; Harris and Sim 2002).
cation are on the rise, the extent to which Americans genuinely support interracial marriage has heretofore been unknown. I show that while approval of interracial marriage is high, sharp divisions persist regarding the acceptability of particular interracial unions.

Building off of the disparities in intermarriage attitudes, I examine the process of biracial identity development. A chief contribution of this dissertation is its use of representative surveys in analyzing multiracial Americans. The quantitative data that are employed include more than 3500 biracial respondents, a sample size unparalleled in other surveys of political attitudes. The richness of these data provide a first glimpse into the identities and political behavior of biracials. I explain how the racial labels biracials select for themselves are shaped by other social identities, such as gender and religion, as well as their home life, neighborhoods, and socioeconomic status. Findings will show that the majority of biracials now choose to label themselves as White and Black, illustrating that the one-drop rule is no longer the definitive marker of Black identity in the United States.

These racial identity decisions, in turn, meaningfully correspond to biracials’ political attitudes and behavior. The decision to racially identify in a particular manner is conscious and deliberate, as will be evidenced in opinions on racial and social policy. The attention paid here to racial measurement is important. Instead of relying solely on self-reported White-Black identification as a predictor of opinion, I also assess the role that ancestry plays in shaping political consciousness. Asking respondents about the race of their parents enables us to make distinctions based on heritage, thus separating racial background from identity. I show that while biracials can identify in a number of ways, their mixed parentage is often reflected in their political attitudes—sometimes in an unexpected manner.

Although survey data disclose much regarding the development of biracials’ attitudes, I use in-depth interviews to assess how lived experiences influence political identity. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of what the rise in intermarriage and growth of the American multiracial population means, symbolically and substantively, for the broader racial environment and the Black community in particular.
Chapter 2

Race Relations and Opposition to Interracial Marriage

Interrace marriage is the classic determinant of social proximity and distance between groups. A high interracial marriage rate is indicative of weakened racial boundaries and the truest measure of racial integration and assimilation in a society (Song, 2009; Alba and Nee, 2003; Gordon, 1964). In light of the connection between intermarriage and social distance, examining public attitudes towards interracial unions helps us understand the extent to which people accept members of other groups as social equals. A society’s comprehensive support for interracial marriage symbolizes an abatement of discrimination towards racial and ethnic outgroups.

American public opinion regarding intermarriage no longer has potential policy ramifications, since the U.S. Supreme Court declared anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional in 1967 after decades of race-based legal constraints on marriage. The outcome of that case, *Loving v. Virginia*, effectively asserted that non-Whites were henceforth to be considered equal with Whites on the most socially contentious level. Yet discerning public opinion regarding interracial marriage is integral to an accurate assessment of race relations in the United States. Unlike racial issues such as affirmative action, disapproval of
interracial marriage cannot be justified on the principled, nonracial grounds of individualism or egalitarianism. Expressed opposition to interracial marriage is indisputably an issue of intolerance towards racial outgroups and indicative of racial prejudice. Interracial marriage opinion is also likely to have implications for the way mixed-race children develop their sociopolitical identities.

Using two nationally-representative surveys, I assess the role of political correctness in influencing intermarriage opinion and examine how demographic variables predict expressed opposition. My examination reveals that antagonism towards interracial marriage persists, even in our purportedly “post-racial” society. Opposition is not merely evidence of respondents’ racial in-group preferences, but also a disfavoring towards specific racial outgroups, as some out-groups (e.g., Blacks) are considered less desirable marriage partners than others (e.g., Whites). Results show that older Americans, those living in the South, and the less educated are most resistant to interracial marriage. Findings also indicate that while support has increased measurably over the past decade—both through changes in attitudes and through cohort replacement—perceived race of interviewer also plays a strong role in expressed attitudes, with 5 percent of Americans lying about their support for interracial marriage.

This research deepens our comprehension of race relations in America, with a thorough examination of interracial marriage attitudes. Unlike most prior studies on intermarriage opinion, which focus on Whites’ attitudes towards White/Black marriages (e.g., Golebiowska 2007, Heer 1966, Fang, Sidanius and Pratto 1998) or demographic trends in White/Black marriages (Kalmijn 1993, Heer 1974), I investigate Americans’ opinions of interracial marriages broadly, to include Whites, Blacks, Asians and Hispanics.
Explaining Interracial Marriage Opinion

Antagonism toward interracial marriages has dissipated over the past half-century, but support is hardly universal, with an estimated 37 percent of Americans expressing resistance to a family member marrying outside the race (Passel, Wang and Taylor, 2010). Among Whites, those who are younger, more educated, wealthier, and less religious are consistently more likely than those who are older, less educated, poorer, and highly religious to approve of marriages between Whites and Blacks. Greater interracial contact also tempers disapproval of interracial unions (Welch et al., 2001). In addition, Whites have “preferred racial outgroups” in that they express greater support for a hypothetical family member marrying an Asian or Latino person than a Black person (Golebiowska, 2007). Much less is known about intermarriage opinions of other racial and ethnic groups. Examining the views of these other groups—in addition to Whites—clarifies how full racial integration is perceived by all Americans.

Political Correctness and the Race-of-Interviewer Effect

Given the sensitive nature of race and the public’s usual compliance with racial norms, accurately measuring racial attitudes can be challenging. In particular, phone and in-person surveys can be affected by the respondent’s desire to appear racially tolerant, and thus fail to capture true public opinion. Contrasting the public’s expressed support of intermarriage with the actual rate of intermarriage unmasks a large disparity. Even after taking into consideration the racial composition, age, education, and residential patterns of the U.S., interracial marriages are still lower than statistical models predict (Fryer, 2007).

High levels of expressed approval raises the concern that responses reflect political correctness and not genuine public opinion. The discrepancy between strong endorsement of interracial marriage and an incommensurately low interracial marriage rate stems from Americans who claim to accept interracial relationships when they are simply uncomfort-
able admitting their opposition. Many who articulate their endorsement of intermarriages in opinion polls likely feel socially compelled to do so, privately maintaining views that are less agreeable. Due to this potential political correctness, the degree to which Americans continue to harbor prejudicial attitudes is not well understood.

The political and social context in which racial attitudinal questions are asked can affect respondents’ psychological dispositions, causing them to provide answers that do not reflect their true opinions but rather what they assume are the expectations of their interviewer (e.g., Cotter, Cohen and Coulter 1982; Hatchett and Schuman 1975). Conscious of the opinions they convey, respondents can feel obligated to comply with social norms and are apprehensive of offending their interviewer or coming across as racist. Yet, research on the political effects of social norms has shown that when given the opportunity to clandestinely express their racial prejudices, people will freely do so (Kuklinski, Cobb and Gilens 1997; Sniderman and Carmines 1997).

In particular, the race of one’s interviewer can increase the saliency of racial issues, resulting in response bias. Race-of-interviewer bias may increase respondents’ racial consciousness and affect the answers they provide such that the racial tolerance that is observed is overstated, disguising underlying prejudice.

Although bias occurs because respondents feel pressure to respond in a particular manner, it is unclear if they are more honest with an interviewer of their same race, or of a different race. A respondent who thinks she is being questioned by an interviewer of her same race may be more inclined to respond truthfully because she feels more comfortable confiding prejudicial views to a member of her same group—in which case, same-race interviewers provoke a more frank response. Alternatively, respondents may feel undue influence from interviewers of their same race to assert in-group solidarity, causing them to express a greater level of opposition because they believe this is what their interviewer

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1 People are also unwilling to admit to themselves that they possess discriminatory beliefs. Mendelberg (2001) shows that White voters are persuaded by implicit political messages that activate their negative racial stereotypes, but once such messages are exposed as racist, they are rejected and effects on opinion disappear, because Whites do not want to think of themselves as racially prejudiced.
wants to hear. This, too, would not be reflective of their true opinions; in this case, support for interracial marriage would be understated.  

While both scenarios are plausible, prior studies have found support only for the former explanation. Racial equality is a standard of behavior shared by the majority of Americans, a norm to which people are expected to conform. It is therefore doubtful that many respondents anticipate that their same-race interviewer would desire a prejudiced answer. We can infer, then, that to the extent that responses differ based on the race of one’s interviewer, most people interviewed by someone of their same race are confessing their true opinions. If they state that they would be bothered by a member of their family interracially marrying, it is not because they feel pressure to respond this way but because these are their genuine views.

We should therefore expect that people will express lower levels of interracial marriage support when speaking to someone believed to be of their same race or ethnic group. Similarly, respondents who are interviewed by someone believed to be of a different race ought to be less comfortable being candid, and more inclined to accommodate to what they perceive are their interviewer’s expectations, expressing higher levels of racial tolerance and acceptance than they truly feel in an attempt to avoid offending the interviewer. Thus, respondents may feel coerced into proclaiming excessive support.

Race-of-interviewer effects may operate differently for Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics than for Whites. A lack of support for interracial marriage may be interpreted among racial and ethnic minorities not as prejudice towards out-groups, but as loyalty to the in-group and a commitment to preserving group solidarity and culture. Minority respondents may fear that expressions of approval will be interpreted by their same-race interviewer as indicative of assimilation or “selling out” and minority respondents might feel particularly constrained to not betray group principles or in-group solidarity (Shelby, 2005). Respondents seeking the approval or respect of their same-race interviewer may, in an expression of racial unity, claim lower levels of support than they truly feel. Thus being interviewed by someone of her same race would underestimate interracial marriage support by pushing the respondent towards greater opposition.

Davis (1997a) finds that Blacks tend to be more sensitive to White interviewers and as a result generally feel apprehensive of expressing their true political attitudes, which may not be favorable to Whites. Black respondents who have White interviewers are more likely to acquiesce to their interviewers’ interests, and are more inclined to express the opinion that Blacks are politically ineffective. Hatchett and Schuman (1975) have also attested that both Whites and Blacks tend to be more honest with interviewers of their same race.
Social Context and Individual-Level Influences

While many predictors have been linked to Whites’ intermarriage opinion, I focus on the four that have consistently been the most influential: age, region, education, and gender. Unlike other work, I limit my independent variables to sociodemographic predictors—not political or racial attitudinal ones—which enables a cleaner breakdown of opinion.

Age

Age is a strong predictor of racial attitudes (Schuman et al., 1997). Age differences in interracial marriage opinion should primarily stem from cohort effects, generational differences that occur when groups are born and socialized during different time periods. Cohort replacement should lead to aggregate opinion change as older generations—who hold more traditional, racially intolerant opinions—die and are replaced by younger ones, which tend to be more racially progressive. Americans who experienced Jim Crow segregation, the race riots of the 1960s, or anti-miscegenation laws tend to have more racially prejudiced beliefs than those who grew up in a time where Blacks and other racial minorities were fully integrated into mainstream society. Older Americans are thus expected to subscribe to old-fashioned views on race and marriage.

Region

When the U.S. Supreme Court declared anti-interracial marriage laws unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), all sixteen states with such legislation still in place were in the

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4For example, it has been shown that Whites who negatively stereotype Blacks are more opposed to intermarriage than Whites who do not negatively stereotype Blacks (Golebiowska, 2007). This finding is an intuitive one; we would expect that the types of people who hold prejudice towards Blacks would also be disinclined to welcoming a Black person into their family.

5A second age-related source of population opinion change are age effects, those associated with the varying developmental stages in the lifespan. Psychological, biological, and physical changes stemming from aging likely have little impact on racial opinions. Although it is possible that people become more socially and politically conservative as they grow older, research suggests that the aging process has minimal effect on racial attitude change (Steeh and Schuman, 1992; Dangelis and Cutler, 1991; Krosnick and Alwin, 1989).
South. White Southerners feared that proximity between Black men and White women would inevitably lead to intimate relationships, and mixed-race children would effectively equalize the races (Myrdal, 1944). Today, explicitly prejudicial attitudes and behaviors are considered objectionable; even so, racial divisions persist, most notably in the South. Although anti-miscegenation laws were unenforceable after 1967, Alabama did not remove its law until 2001; even then, 40 percent of Alabama voters objected to the change (Crary, 2007). In rural parts of Mississippi and Georgia, racially segregated proms persist on account of “tradition” and the fear that integration will promote interracial dating (Corbett, 2009). In light of the South’s entrenched history of racial animosity and the discrimination that lingers there against White-Black relationships particularly, it is expected that those living in this region are more likely than those living elsewhere in the country to declare hostility to marrying outside the race. In contrast, the diverse racial and ethnic region of the Pacific West states may generate a social setting in which interracial marriage is especially accepted; thus, we should expect that people living in this region will be most supportive of a family member marrying outside the race.

**Education**

The relationship between Whites’ higher educational attainment and progressive racial attitudes is strong, positive, and monotonic. Those with no high school diploma are the least racially liberal, while those who have a college degree are the most liberal. College promotes both greater sensitivity to difference and also fosters greater contact among people who might not otherwise interact (Schuman et al., 1997). Higher education may also provide increased opportunity for people to engage in interracial relationships.

Education should have a racially liberalizing effect on Whites’ intermarriage views. While Blacks who are more educated are more inclined to marry outside their race (Kalmijn, 1993), educated members of minority groups may nevertheless be less supportive of marry-

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6One exception is affirmative action. On this topic, the least-educated respondents express the most liberal views, while those with at least a high school degree evince much less support (Schuman et al., 1997).
ing outside their race. Although they experience greater interracial contact, better-educated members of underrepresented minorities (i.e., Blacks and Latinos) also have a greater awareness of racial disparities and may be more cognizant of social marginalization their groups face. It is thus possible that members of these groups would value maintaining in-group racial political solidarity, and would be more averse to intermarriage than their less-educated counterparts.

**Gender**

While White women are typically more racially liberal than White men, the two groups share equally high levels of opposition towards anti-miscegenation laws ([Schuman et al., 1997](#)). Still, the sanctioning of race-mixing in principle is not the same as support for a family member marrying someone of a different race. Moreover, there are stark racial/gender differences in the tendency to inter racially marry. Black women and Asian men marry outside their racial groups at much lower rates than Black men and Asian women, respectively. For some racial groups, there seem to be social and cultural gender norms that discourage interracial relationships. To measure the influence of gender on intermarriage opinion, regression estimates break down attitude differences between men and women.

**Data**

To assess interracial marriage opinion, I rely on two national telephone surveys of racial attitudes, one conducted in 2001 by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University and Washington Post, and a second conducted in 2009 by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Both surveys oversample Blacks and Hispanics, reducing the margin of sampling error and increasing the reliability of the estimates that can be made for these

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7In 2008, 22 percent of Black men who married wed a non-Black woman, compared to only 9 percent of Black women who wed a non-Black man. Among Asians who married, 40 percent of women married outside the race, in contrast to only 20 percent of Asian men ([Passel, Wang and Taylor, 2010](#)).
minority groups.

The data are used to evaluate how respondents would feel if someone in their family were to marry a person of a different race. The questions read,

“How do you think you would react if a member of your family told you they were going to marry (An African American/Hispanic American/Asian American/White American)?

Would it be fine with you, would it bother you but you would come to accept it, or would you not be able to accept it?”

Respondents were asked about each group to which they do not belong. (The ordering of racial groups was randomized.) Since the wording of these questions is identical across the two surveys, I compare the responses from each year to judge how opinion has shifted from 2001 to 2009.

The word “race” typically evokes among Americans conceptions about skin color and membership in at least one of five primary racial and ethnic categories—White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or American Indian. For some people though, disapproval of interracial marriage may not necessarily connote discrimination against races different from one's own, but rather a preference for marrying within one’s same group. For instance, resistance to interracial or interethnic relationships could stem from a desire to preserve ethnic or religious cultural traditions, rather than a racial aversion per se. Although the issue of interracial marriage deals explicitly with racial preferences—not ethnic or religious ones—it is possible that some people may interpret questions on interracial marriage along ethnic or religious lines.

However, since the surveys that are assessed here explicitly ask opinions regarding certain racial pairings, comparisons of attitudes can be made across target outgroups. This would determine whether expressed opposition to interracial marriage is really in-group preference and not outgroup bias. If members of one racial group support certain types of interracial marriages more than others, then this difference in opinion can be attributed solely to racially prejudicial attitudes against that group.

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8One stereotypical example is the desire of Jewish mothers to have their Jewish sons marry Jewish girls.
Because these surveys record the interviewer’s perceived race, it is possible to gauge whether or not interracial marriage opinion is swayed due to social desirability, by contrasting answers based on the perceived race of interviewer. Given that both surveys were conducted over the phone, there is a modicum of uncertainty among respondents regarding their interviewer’s race. The analyses of social desirability that follow therefore focus on the perceived race of the survey interviewer, since it is the race respondents believe their interviewer to be that would influence a change in expressed opinion. Race-of-interviewer bias persists across different survey methodologies; while effects are most pronounced in face-to-face conversations, they also occur in telephone surveys because people can successfully use verbal cues to distinguish their interviewer’s race (Cotter, Cohen and Coulter, 1982). In contrast to other work that measures effects of social desirability on White opinion (Kuklinski, Cobb and Gilens 1997; Hatchett and Schuman 1975) or Black opinion (Davis 1997a; Davis 1997b; Schuman and Converse 1971), the influence of social desirability among Hispanics and Asians is also assessed.

The wording of the question assessing intermarriage opinion is direct and its purpose unambiguous: to gauge racial prejudice. The perspicuity of this measure is both a strength and a limitation. It is ideal for the researcher because it estimates opinions explicitly about interracial intimacy and limits the potential for respondents to disguise unfavorable answers as anything other than prejudice. However, this transparency may also provoke socially desirable responses and lead to an overestimation of intermarriage support and an embellished perception of racial tolerance.

Accounting for perceived interviewer race exposes lurking racial biases and affords us a better understanding of the effects of political correctness on opinion. Unfortunately, it

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9 The 2009 survey records the actual race of interviewer, but unfortunately does not ask respondents about perceived interviewer race. I thus impute perceived interviewer race for 2009 using actual race of interviewer, race of respondent, and respondent demographics, as well as the conditional correlations from 2001. I incorporate the uncertainty of these imputations into the analyses.

10 An alternative method of estimating a race-of-interviewer effect is to compare responses by actual interviewer race, as opposed to perceived race, an approach consistent with much of the literature on the race-of-interviewer effect (e.g., Davis 1997a, Davis 1997b).
tells us nothing about those individuals who will always hold back their racial prejudices when answering surveys, only admitting their true racial hostility among the comfort of close friends and family. This is a regrettable fact of racial attitude polls. Some people are simply cautious of confessing their biases to a stranger interviewing them over the phone, even if that stranger is perceived to be of their same racial group and assumed to be more understanding of their point of view. Future work using survey experiments or online focus groups should examine in greater detail the circumstances under which people are most inclined to express racially antagonistic views.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Table 2.1 presents respondents’ opinions when they are asked how they would feel if a member of their immediate family were to marry someone of a particular racial group. Disparate findings are reported across groups. Among White respondents, overall support for a family member marrying someone who is Black (62 percent) is markedly lower than support for marrying a Hispanic or Asian (71-72 percent). By comparison, both Hispanic and Asian respondents also least favor marriages with Blacks, and most favor marriages with Whites. Although Blacks are the group least accepted by all other races, they are paradoxically the most tolerant of interracial marriages—expressing 83 percent approval and exhibiting no distinguishable pattern of preference for one out-group over another. Broadly, these findings confirm that respondents prefer interracial marriages between certain groups over others, a difference that cannot be justified by racial ingroup preference but rather the relative preference towards particular outgroups.

Since these results are simple averages pooled across two years, findings do not account for the potential bias of political correctness, sociodemographic differences between racial groups, or year effects. Regression results will determine whether these effects persist when accounting for systematic covariate differences among groups.
Table 2.1: Expressed Support for Interracial Marriage (2001 and 2009 Pooled). Respondents were asked how they felt about a family member marrying someone of a particular racial outgroup. Percentages reflect those who say they “would accept” an immediate family member marrying someone of the named, target racial group. Values across rows show support level by race of respondent, and values down columns show support towards each target racial group. Respondents of all races express the most support for a family member marrying a White person, and the least support for a family member marrying someone who is Black.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Race</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>62.0</th>
<th>70.8</th>
<th>71.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Race</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>71.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regression Model and Results

The predictors of intermarriage support are disentangled using a logistic regression model, where the dependent variable of interest is interracial marriage opinion. The original variable had three possible response options—“would be fine with” a family member marrying out; “would be bothered, but would eventually accept”; and “would never accept.” Given the small proportion of respondents who provide “would never accept” answers, I dichotomize the response set between those who “would be fine with” and those who would not. The independent variables are target race, perceived race of interviewer, age, region, education, gender, income, religion and year. Estimated effects for each variable are allowed to vary by race of respondent within a multi-level framework where race-specific effects are drawn from pooled estimates.\[1\] The effects of each variable are discussed in turn.

\[1\] This multi-level model serves as a necessary compromise, given that the small sample sizes for the non-White racial groups (even with oversampling) does not provide enough respondents to allow for separate regressions by race of respondent and race of target group.
Race of Interviewer Effects

Figure 2.1 shows the estimated effect of perceived interviewer race on expressed support for interracial marriage. Respondents of all races evinced greater support if they believed they were being interviewed by someone of the named target racial group than someone of their same group. For example, White respondents were more likely to claim they supported a family member marrying a Black person if they believed their interviewer were Black than if their interviewer were perceived to be White.

Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics are similarly influenced by social desirability considerations. All else equal and averaging across target outgroups, Whites are 3 points more supportive of intermarriage when they perceive their interviewer to be of the target outgroup than when they perceive their interviewer to be White. Blacks and Hispanics are also 3-5 points more supportive when their interviewer is believed to be of the targeted racial group than Black or Hispanic (respectively), though these differences are not statistically significant. The most pronounced effects of political correctness exist among Asian Americans. Support was 12 points higher among Asians who perceived an interviewer to be of the named racial group than when they perceive an Asian interviewer. This finding suggests that Asians particularly valued being viewed as highly egalitarian by people outside of their racial group.

Education

Figure 2.2 presents the estimated effects of education, region, and age on support for interracial marriage. The first panel of Figure 2.2 shows that the effects of education differ based on the race of the respondent but not the race of the named outgroup. For White respondents, all else equal, having at least some college is predictive of more liberal intermarriage attitudes. Greater education similarly pushes Hispanics to endorse interracial marriage.

For Black and Asian respondents, however, education does not engender greater inter-
Figure 2.1: Influence of Perceived Interviewer Race on Expressed Interracial Marriage Opinion. Values shown are point estimates with 90 percent confidence intervals, for believing that it “would be fine” if a family member were to marry someone of the named racial group. Respondents who perceive their interviewer to be of a named racial outgroup express greater support than respondents who perceive their interviewer to be of their same race. (White respondents are 3 points more likely to express support for a family member marrying a Hispanic person when they perceive their interviewer to be Hispanic.) Values are averaged across all target outgroups. Asians evince the greatest difference in opinion, given perceived interviewer race.

marriage support. Among Blacks, having some college begets a 4-point increase in support for marrying Whites, Asians, and Hispanics, but this effect disappears among those who earned a college degree. For Asians, having attended college has no independent effect on attitudes, and earning a college degree generates an 8-point decrease in approval (though
the numbers are not statistically significant at the .10 level).

Figure 2.2: **Influence of Education, Region, and Age on Expressed Interracial Marriage Opinion.** Values are point estimates with 90 percent confidence intervals, for believing it “would be fine” if a family member were to marry outside the race. Education: S=some college, C=college degree (baseline=high school or less). Region: P=Pacific, S=South (baseline=all other states). Age: 40 yrs, 65 yrs (baseline=18 yrs). Age is the strongest moderator of opinion; across respondent racial groups, the oldest age cohorts are least supportive of interracial marriage.
Region

The second panel of Figure 2.2 demonstrates that the effects of region on intermarriage views also depend on respondent race. Relative to Whites living in the non-Pacific and non-South, those in the Pacific are, all else equal, 10 points more supportive of a family member marrying outside the race, while those in the South are 8 points less likely to express support. Regional effects for other respondent groups are less pronounced. Compared to comparable Hispanics in other parts of the country, Hispanics living in the Pacific West are 5 points less likely to express support for intermarrying. However, for Asians, living in these areas yields increased acceptance of marrying Blacks and Latinos, though not Whites. Region has no discernible influence on Black opinion.

These differential effects of region appears counterintuitive. Given that the Pacific states boast the highest rates of interracial marriage and multiracial identification (Passel, Wang and Taylor 2010; Humes, Jones and Ramirez 2011), it would seem that people living in this region would be distinctly the most supportive of race-mixing.

Age

The largest and most consistently influential predictor of interracial marriage opinion is age, the effects of which are presented in the third panel of Figure 2.2. Across all respondent racial groups, support for a family member marrying someone of a different race declines precipitously with age.

Importantly, the magnitude of the age effect is dependent on both the race of the respondent being asked as well as the outgroup in question. The influence of age on White opinion is largest when Blacks are the named outgroup. Relative to Whites who are 18-years-old, Whites who are 65-years-old are, all else equal, 40 points less accepting of a family member marrying someone who is Black and 28 points less supportive when asked about a Hispanic or an Asian person. For Hispanic and Asian respondents, as well, the effect of age is greatest when asked about a family member marrying a Black person. Find-
ings for Black respondents reveal smaller age effects, with 65-year-olds 10-15 points less accepting of intermarriage than are Blacks who are 18-years-old, all else equal.

**Income and Religion**

The influence of income, religion, and gender are presented in Figure 2.3. The first panel of Figure 2.3 shows that income has no independent effect on intermarriage opinion—except among Hispanic respondents. The poorest Hispanics are, all else equal, 5 to 10 points less supportive of interracial marriage than those who are moderate-to-wealthy. The reasons for this are unclear, and worth examining down the road.

Across the board, religious affiliation within racial groups shapes intermarriage support in a consistent manner, and does not depend on target outgroup. For example, all else equal, Black Catholics are 10 points more supportive than similar nonreligious Blacks of a family member marrying a White, Hispanic, or Asian person. However, the impact of a particular religion on intermarriage opinion is dependent on respondent racial group. All else equal, nonreligious Whites are 10 to 15 points more supportive of intermarriage than are Catholics, Protestants, and Whites belonging to some other religion. Religion has a weaker effect on Hispanic opinion, though the impact of religious denomination generally operates in a similar manner as it does with Whites; all else equal, nonreligious Hispanics are several points more supportive of intermarriage than are those who are Catholic, Protestant, or some other religion. Among Black respondents, however, Catholics comprise the most supportive religious denomination; being nonreligious or Protestant leads to greater resistance to a family member marrying interracially. For Asians, being nonreligious and Protestant leads to greater approval.

**Gender**

Respondent gender plays an integral role in shaping intermarriage views. The effects of gender differ dramatically by race and target group, however. White women express greater
intermarriage support than White men—particularly with regard to a family member marrying a Black person, where women are 5 points more supportive than men, all else equal. Among Blacks respondents, in contrast, women voice decidedly less support than men. Black women are particularly bothered by a family member marrying a White person (10 points less supportive than comparable Black men), but are also less accepting of marrying Hispanics or Asians. In contrast to the significant gender effects among White and Black respondents, effects of gender among Hispanics are considerably smaller, and there is no noticeable impact among Asians.

**Shifting Opinions**

Figure 2.4 displays the change in interracial marriage opinion from 2001 to 2009. These findings reflect “true” intermarriage opinion, as estimates are purged of interviewer influence. For White and Hispanic respondents, acceptance of marriage towards all outgroups increased over the course of the decade. White approval of a family member marrying a Black person rose by 10 points, from 55 percent to 65 percent; support for marrying Hispanic and Asian increased to 72 percent. Blacks were the only racial group whose support appears to have decreased over time. Even so, Blacks continued to express the most favorable views, with support at 80 percent for marrying Whites, Hispanics, and Asians.

Importantly, approval of a family member marrying a Black person increased among all outgroups between 2001 and 2009. However, support for a family member marrying a Black person remained noticeably lower than support for marrying Whites, Asians, and Hispanics. This result demonstrates that while Blacks are deemed more acceptable marriage partners now than in the past, they are still subjected to greater discrimination than are all other racial groups. Hypothetical Black in-laws are more likely to receive opposition—simply because they are Black.

12 Estimates reflect how people did/would answer if they believed they were speaking with someone of their same race.
Figure 2.3: Influence of Income, Religion and Gender on Expressed Interracial Marriage Opinion. Difference in marriage support by respondent income, religion, and gender. Values are point estimates with 90 percent confidence intervals, for believing that it “would be fine” if a family member were to marry outside the race. Income: 2=$30-50k, 3=$50-75k, 4=above $75k, (baseline=less than $30k). Religion: C=Catholic, O=Other Religion, P=Protestant (baseline=no religion). While income has little effect on opinion (except among Hispanics), the influence of religion and gender is large. Black women in particular are less supportive of intermarriage than are Black men.
Figure 2.4: Change in Interracial Marriage Opinion, 2001-2009. Values shown are point estimates with 90 percent confidence intervals, for believing that it “would be fine” if a family member were to marry someone of a specific racial outgroup. This reflects true opinion, as estimates represent how respondents answered/would answer if they perceived their interviewer to be of their same race. Values across rows show support level by race of respondent, and values down columns show support towards each target racial group. Whites and Hispanics have become somewhat more tolerant over the course of the decade, Asians had no appreciable change, and acceptance among Blacks appears to have decreased.
Discussion

Researchers contend that public opinion in support of racial equality reflects compliance with contemporary norms, not necessarily a sincere commitment to equal treatment (Feagin 1991; Mendelberg 2001; Schuman et al. 1997). One way to substantiate the veracity of expressed support for interracial marriage is to study intermarriage behavioral trends (Kalmijn 1993). Another way to gauge true opinion is to contrast responses across interviewer races, as I have done here.

Decades ago, Schuman and Converse (1971) argued that studying the influence of interviewer’s race on respondent opinion provides meaningful insight into the interpersonal tensions between Blacks and Whites. Evidence of dishonesty or reluctance to respond in a truthful manner says much about present-day racial dynamics. Not just an artifact of the survey discussion, race-of-interviewer effects are indicative of the persisting constraints Americans feel when it comes to race.

The data assessed here demonstrate that the disparity in opinion over interracial marriage continues, both across and within races. Many Americans do not consider members of outgroups as social equals—particularly when that outgroup is Black. They are also more likely to provide answers less favorable to interracial marriage when they feel they can be candid about their true feelings, as is the case when inquired by someone of their same racial group.

Prior to this research, work on interracial marriage opinion focused almost entirely on the views of White Americans. This work has determined that older age cohorts, Southerners, and the less-educated are the most resistant to interracial marriage (Golebiowska, 2007). Yet the results presented here demonstrate that much of what is known about interracial marriage attitudes is limited primarily to Whites, and not applicable to other racial/ethnic groups.

In particular, the effects of region and education operate differently for minority groups than for Whites. Whereas Southern Whites are disproportionately likely to express re-
sistance to intermarriage, a similar “Southern cultural aversion” to race-mixing does not exist among Blacks, Asians or Hispanics. Moreover, while a college education has a distinctly liberalizing impact on White opinion, earning a college degree has no such effect on Blacks’ views and actually seems to encourage greater opposition among Asians (relative to a high school education). For these racial minorities, higher education appears to impart a greater racial awareness, understanding of disparities, and group solidarity—which helps instill the belief that it is important for members of the minority group to marry within the race. In contrast, higher education exposes Whites to people different from themselves, teaching them that discrimination on the basis of race is unjustified, destructive, and illustrative of ignorance.

In addition, the impact of age on racial prejudice is noticeably weaker among Blacks than among Whites. We might expect that Blacks socialized during Jim Crow segregation and the Civil Rights Movement would, like Whites, also express markedly less approval of intermarriage than their younger counterparts. Yet Blacks’ support for intermarriage remains high even among the oldest respondents; whereas the oldest Whites exhibit a 28 to 40 point decrease in approval (depending on the target racial group), the comparable decrease for the oldest Black respondents is only 10 to 15 points.

All told, these differential results—along with Census projections indicating that racial minorities will become a majority of the U.S. population by 2050—reinforce the importance of broadening the study of racial attitudes beyond those of White Americans (Bernstein and Edwards, 2008). As the American population continues to diversify, scholars of public opinion must turn their attention to the racial attitudes of non-White groups. Examining the intermarriage opinions of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians alongside those of Whites helps us more fully understand the future direction of American race relations—and, less directly, the extent to which people of mixed-race are accepted into American society.
Explaining Racial Tolerance and Prejudice

In light of Black political solidarity (Dawson, 1994) and the purportedly strong opposition of Blacks to intermarriage (Shelby, 2005), it is ironic that Blacks are the racial group most accepting of marrying outside their race. The vast majority of Black Americans are not bothered by interracial marriage, as 8 in 10 Blacks would openly welcome a close family member marrying someone of a different race. Black opinion does vary by gender—Black women are less approving of intermarriage than Black men. Nevertheless, Blacks routinely evince support for interracial marriage at levels that are markedly higher than all other racial and ethnic groups. This begs the question, what accounts for Blacks’ stronger intermarriage support? Put a different way, what accounts for other groups’ greater prejudice?

Racial boundaries between Whites, Asians, and Hispanics are more malleable than those between these groups and Blacks. Asking respondents how they would react in the abstract towards a family member marrying a Black person likely invokes various negative stereotypes people have against African Americans (Dovidio, Evans and Tyler, 1986; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997).

One interpretation of Blacks’ steady interracial marriage support may lie in the adherence of many Black Americans to a “radical egalitarian” belief system, advocating for government enforced equal opportunity and racial justice (Dawson, 2001). In a society where racial divisions persist in many realms, Blacks and non-Blacks marrying signals the declining relevance of race. It could be that proportionately few Blacks are bothered by interracial marriages because such unions exemplify a more racially equitable culture. Blacks may interpret interracial marriage not as a form of “traitorous” behavior on the part of Blacks, but instead as evidence of an increasingly racially progressive society.

Implications of Findings

Interracial marriage opinion is a decisive test of the full acceptance into society. To that end, the results found here offer at once a sobering and optimistic commentary on the current
status of American race relations.

These findings reaffirm what others scholars have established: that while Whites generally support intermarriage, they are most likely to be bothered by the prospect of a Black person marrying into their family. Results also show, however, that other racial groups are disproportionately agitated by intermarriages with Blacks—who paradoxically are the most tolerant of intermarriages, in all of its forms. The incongruously resistant reaction of Whites, Hispanics, and Asians to a loved one marrying a Black person reflects persisting racial biases, divisions, and imbalances. This one-sidedness of opinion—that Blacks are the most accepting but least desired partners—is disconcerting because it highlights the unparalleled discrimination to which Blacks continue to be subjected. It also reifies the rigidness of the Black/non-Black color line.

In *Assimilation in American Life*, Gordon (1964) argued that structural assimilation, or extensive integration of a minority group into a society’s social organizations, inevitably leads to intermarriage. A cost of structural assimilation, Gordon asserted, is that the values and distinguishing features of an ethnic group fade away as group members become increasingly absorbed into the broader society.

The greater acceptance of Whites, Asians, and Hispanics over Blacks as intermarriage partners may mean that non-Blacks are becoming more assimilated than Blacks into mainstream American culture. This is compounded by the fact that the types of Blacks who do intermarry tend to be better educated and wealthier than Blacks who do not (Heer 1974; Kalmijn 1993). This suggests that not only are the children of Black/non-Black unions lighter in skin tone than their “monoracially Black” peers, they are also afforded greater socioeconomic resources to facilitate their own success in life. If these comparably more privileged “multiracial-Blacks” do not see their identities as tied to the Black community, higher rates of intermarriage may indirectly cultivate a more entrenched hierarchy, one that

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1 Kalmijn (1993) shows, however, that the relationship between race, education, and intermarriage is non-linear, as Black college graduates are more likely than are Black high school graduates to marry Whites, but less likely than are Blacks who have some college experience, but not a four-year degree. (This finding is consistent with the results presented here on the effect of education on Black interracial marriage opinion.)
further segregates African Americans. If this is the case, interracial marriage would serve as a signal of partial integration and an erosion of racial barriers for some groups, but not a behavior that translates to sweeping acceptance (Song 2009). Perhaps, then, we should not be so quick to triumph increased race-mixing as evidence necessarily of a steep decline in racial social distance.

I have also shown that respondents feel pressure to respond in a socially appropriate way when talking about intermarriage, a topic that speaks to the nature of race relations in its purest form. This finding seems to gloomily imply that racial prejudice is not disappearing, and may only become more covert.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that there has been a real change in public opinion regarding interracial unions. The high rate of interracial dating, cohabitation, and marriage indicate that voiced acceptance of interracial intimacy is not mere lip service but an act regularly being carried out. Despite some unrelenting aversion, the rate of these types of unions continues to rise and the multiracial population is growing rapidly (Humes, Jones and Ramirez 2011). To the extent that interracial marriage support is illustrative of greater tolerance of outgroups, these analyses do reveal some encouraging findings.

As these results have shown, age is the strongest predictor of intermarriage opposition. The oldest respondents are distinctly the most hostile towards interracial marriage, much more so than those who have at best a high school diploma or are socialized in the racially contentious South. Across racial groups, young adults proclaim the greatest enthusiasm for intermarriage. Supplementary regressions indicate an estimated 79 percent of the increase in White approval in 2009 stems from a cohort replacement effect—elderly racial conservatives being replaced by young racial progressives. The remaining 21 percent of the change among Whites comes from individuals becoming more racially liberal over the 8-year time period. This encouragingly suggests an emerging culture that is increasingly tolerant. It appears that, as the American landscape continues to diversify and older, less racially tolerant generations are replaced by more open-minded ones, the U.S. may shift
further towards becoming a race-neutral society.

**Conclusion**

In his classic 1940s study of White-Black interaction, Gunnar Myrdal expressed doubt that the American public would ever condone interracial marriage, because such unions would effectively demonstrate that the two races were social equals. Myrdal proclaimed,

> No other way of crossing the color line is so attended by the emotion commonly associated with violating a social taboo as intermarriage and extra-marital relations between a Negro man and a White woman. [...] No excuse for other forms of social segregation and discrimination is so potent as the one that sociable relations on an equal basis between members of the two races may possibly lead to intermarriage (Myrdal 1944, 606).

Present-day race relations, however, bear little resemblance to those of the Jim Crow era during which Myrdal wrote. While racial prejudice and discrimination have by no means disappeared, public support for interracial marriage has risen steadily since the Supreme Court struck down all race-based legal constraints on marriage. A majority of all Americans now feel people should marry regardless of race; a majority also claim that they personally would not be bothered by a close family member marrying outside their racial group. While they remain less common than marriages within races, those between races have become increasingly prevalent: in 2008, 1 in 7 new marriages were interracial or inter-ethnic, an all-time high. Intermarriage serves as a barometer of social distance and minorities’ acceptance into a society. To the extent that full racial integration and equality are socially beneficial and a normative goal to which our nation should aspire, we ought champion the record high intermarriage rate as a symbol of true racial progress.

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14 This is in contrast to 1958, when only 2 percent of White Americans said they would support a family member marrying someone who was Black (Passel, Wang and Taylor 2010).

15 For some groups, the interracial marriage rate is even higher; among those who married in 2008, 1 in 4 Hispanics married a non-Hispanic, and nearly 1 in 3 Asians married a non-Asian.
But while widespread interracial marriage signifies that once-strict racial barriers are breaking down, intermarriage itself does not automatically or straightforwardly equate extensive racial tolerance. Nor does it amount to full racial integration. Although only 4 percent of White Americans are in an interracial marriage, 92 percent of interracial marriages involve a White partner (Qian 2004). This “lightening” of racial and ethnic minorities, particularly when it involves those from politically underrepresented groups, raises the concern that heightened interracialism may mitigate mixed-race individuals’ minority racial identity and weaken minority ethnic group ties. This also introduces important questions regarding how the children of interracial unions racially identify and align themselves politically.

Thus, what the rising frequency of intermarriage means for future generations is not yet clear. Our increasingly multiracial society has led some to insist that it is only a matter of time until “everyone is mixed-race” (Ropp 1997). In light of the results discussed here, however, such sentiments seem naively optimistic. It is improbable that entrenched racial inequality and discrimination will simply evaporate, even as more people intermarry and the multiracial population continues to grow in size.

So what does this mean for the biracial children of Black/non-Black unions? What does this mean for identity development and racial solidarity? The link between interracial marriage attitudes and the politics of multiracialism is a direct one. For more than two centuries, American racial tensions have revolved around relations between Whites and Blacks, and efforts to restrict racial intermarriage sought to specifically prohibit romantic unions between these two groups. The sustained prevalence of interracial marriage signals an ethnic boundary shift, resulting in significant social demographic changes, the most notable of which is a higher multiracial birthrate. Today, White and Black is the most

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16 A rise in the ratio of Americans who claim a multiracial identity is not contingent upon a similar rise in the interracial marriage rate. Marriage is clearly not a requisite for having children, and a disproportionately high percentage of mixed-race children are born to single mothers (Fryer et al. 2008). Still, the growth of the multiracial population is inextricably tied to an increase in the prevalence of interracial marriage; the purpose of antimiscegenation laws was precisely to uphold a strict racial hierarchy and limit the conception of mixed-race offspring (Myrdal 1944).
common multiple-race combination reported in the Census, with 1.8 million people identifying with these two groups (Humes, Jones and Ramirez 2011). I address these issues in my next chapter, where I examine the racial identity construction processes of White-Black biracial young adults.
Chapter 3

The Racial Labeling Decisions of Biracial Americans

“It is official: Barack Obama is the nation’s first black president.”

So declared The New York Times, in response to President Obama’s checking of “Black” as his race on the 2010 Census (Roberts and Baker 2 April 2010). The race that Obama marked was befitting of The Times’ dramatic announcement, because it was one that no president had ever marked before. But the act was more than just the filling of a box; it was a conscious decision to racially identify with a particular group. Given Obama’s White-Black parentage, he had several groups with which he could feasibly identify: as White, Black, White and Black, or “Some Other Race.” In light of these choices, Obama’s decision to officially classify himself as singularly Black was viewed as definitive, settling the public debate over the significance of his biracial ancestry and where he fit within the racial divide.

For most Americans, racial identification is simple, based on monoracial parentage and thus devoid of choice. Yet for the growing mixed-race population, the racial identification process is not so straightforward. Like President Obama, millions of Americans have multiple options when asked to racially identify themselves on government forms, surveys,
and college applications. While their identity decisions typically do not make headlines, these individuals also engage in a complex identity construction process, one that in the aggregate has important implications for the future of race relations in the United States.

Race-mixing is hardly a new concept in American society (Myrdal, 1944; Stonequist, 1935; Park, 1931), but the idea of a mixed-race identity is relatively novel. This is particularly true for individuals born to White-Black interracial couples. Historically, Americans of mixed-Black heritage adhered to the one-drop rule, which defined anyone with Black ancestry as singularly Black (Spencer, 2004; Davis, 2001).

In 1997, however, after much lobbying by the multiracial community, the Office of Management and Budget ordered that federal forms allow respondents to identify with multiple racial groups (Williams, 2006). This change in data collection led to the “mark one or more” addition to the Census race question and helped make salient the idea that one can “legitimately” belong to more than one race. In 2000—the first year in which Census respondents were allowed to identify with multiple races—785,000 were identified as White and Black. By 2010, this number had more than doubled (Bureau of the Census, 2000; Humes, Jones and Ramirez, 2011).

For American White-Black biracials, identity is no longer deemed a mutually-exclusive construction. It is therefore important that we reevaluate our treatment of race. In order to best explain the relationship between racial identity and sociopolitical outcomes, we must thoroughly unpack the predictors accounting for racial identity in the first place.

This chapter seeks to understand how young biracial Americans choose their racial identities. As findings will show, the identity construction process for individuals of White-Black parentage is quite complex. Yet these racial identity outcomes are well-explained by an overarching assimilation effect, as biracials incorporate the racial identity that is most numerically dominant in their environment. Racial outlook is profoundly shaped by the

1 Even though they were socially defined as Black, individuals of partial Black ancestry were sometimes classified based on the fraction of their background that was Black; for example, “mulattoes” were one-half Black, “quadroons” were one-quarter Black, and “octoroons” were one-eighth Black (Davis, 2001).
interactions biracials have with family and sociocultural setting. Unlike most research on mixed-race identity, which assesses the racial labels given by parents to children (Schwartzman 2007; Roth 2005; Xie and Goyette 1997; though see also Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008), the goal of this chapter is to understand how biracials self-identify. Using previously unassessed national survey data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, I examine the association between sociodemographic variables and racial identity outcomes for several thousand young adults of White-Black parentage. Employing a multinomial logistic regression model, I find that characteristics including parents’ races, gender, income, religion and community characteristics all significantly explain racial identity choice. I conclude with a discussion of the substantive social and political implications of these findings.

Approaches to Studying Multiracialism in America

Scholars have long hypothesized the social and psychological effect of mixed White-Black heritage. Academic approaches to understanding multiracial identity have largely reflected the social and political context of the time (Shih and Sanchez 2005; Root 1996). As a result, theories regarding mixed-race people and their identities have evolved considerably.

The earliest theory of mixed-race identity was the problematic approach, first developed in the late 1920s by Robert Park. This approach painted a pessimistic picture of the mixed-race person as a tragic figure caught between two cultures and yet not a member of either (Stonequist 1935; Park 1928). By the 1970s, mixed-race people were no longer assumed to be a confused, in-between group, and a new paradigm—the equivalent approach—gained popularity. This approach viewed mixed-race people as comparable to monoracial minorities in terms of their racial identity development process (Thornton 1996). In the decades that followed, race scholarship became increasingly nuanced, and it is now widely accepted that race and racial identity are impermanent and socially con-
While multiracial identity construction has long been theorized, only recently have these presumptions and hypotheses been tested empirically. Unfortunately, due to continuing data limitations, measurement concerns abound. Almost all empirical studies on multiracial identity formation have relied solely on case studies or semistructured interviews (Shih and Sanchez 2005). Much of the research emphasizes the struggles respondents face in dealing with their mixed background, but this work often suffers from strong selection bias. While pioneering work has given us a starting point to build upon, the generalizability of these findings is questionable, due to the unrepresentative samples from which they draw (e.g., Bowles 1993; Kerwin et al. 1993).

The few existing quantitative studies also tend to suffer from small sample sizes, and researchers often compensate for this limitation by clustering all mixed-race respondents into one “multiracial” category, regardless of individuals’ specific racial backgrounds (e.g., Jaret and Reitzes 1999). This procedure masks differences in racial-ethnic experiences and outlooks. Importantly, most of these surveys lack data on the race of respondents’ parents, such that it is impossible to analyze people who have parents of different races but self-identify with a single race. In studies that do employ data on parents’ race, racial identification is usually not self-ascribed, but rather the label given to the biracial individual by his or her parents as conveyed on a Census form (e.g., Roth 2005; Qian 2004). While there is likely a positive correlation between how parents racially identify their children and how children racially identify themselves, this approach overlooks the racial perspectives of mixed-race people.

Hence the true nature of identity construction remains uncertain. However, with new datasets constructed for this project, each of these limitations is overcome and I produce a more reliable assessment of the determinants of racial self-identity.

Shih and Sanchez (2005) show that qualitative studies that sample from clinical populations are more likely to find depression and problem behaviors among multiracial respondents. Studies wherein multiracial respondents report feeling positively about their identities tend to come from nonclinical populations.
Racial Identity Development

Although racial options are typically constrained to the race of one’s parents, identification with a specific racial group (or groups) is socially, psychologically, and politically constructed. Biracial people often undergo tension and anxiety about their racial identity, and there can be strong pressure to choose a particular racial label (Shih and Sanchez, 2005).

Racial socialization and context may shape biracials’ identities in two potential, opposing ways. Greater contact with a particular group may have an assimilationist effect, moving a biracial individual towards identification with that race. For example, biracials may develop a strong emotional attachment to the Black community if they have frequent and sustained interactions with African Americans. Their more intimate connection with Blacks may encourage them to incorporate a Black identity.

Alternatively, more contact with a single race may accentuate perceptions of racial difference, thus producing a contrast effect that pushes biracials away from that racial identity. Greater interaction with Blacks, for instance, would make any cultural differences between biracials and African Americans more salient. Greater proximity to Blacks may make biracials more aware of cultural dissimilarities, resulting in an inability to relate to the Black experience. This theory predicts that being surrounded predominantly by Blacks makes biracials less likely to identify as Black because they view the groups to be incomparable, perhaps even in opposition to one another.

These two effects are examined here. The sociopsychological effects of family structure, the racial contact and outlook shaped by cultural environment, and the nuances of gender identity are all known to influence race consciousness (Schuman et al., 1997). The influence of each of these variables on biracials’ self-identification are evaluated in turn.
The Sociopsychological Influences of Family

One of the earliest and most important places mixed-race children learn to view themselves racially is in the home, and among the first people from whom they learn are members of their immediate family (Brown 2001; Funderburg 1994). In particular, the ways in which parents socialize their children into racial identities are central to the emotional and psychological development of the child’s racial self-concept. Interactions between monoracial parent(s) and biracial child are continuous and acute, and provide a frame of reference as to where the child fits both within the family and the broader society (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008).

Race of Father and Race of Mother

Prior work suggests that paternal race/ethnicity strongly influences how multiethnic individuals view themselves. When Americans have parents of differing ethnicities, they tend to identify with their father; this is true for White ethnics (Waters 1990) as well as biracial Asian children (Xie and Goyette 1997). Identification with the patrilineal line of descent is common because surname—a symbolic indicator of ethnic heritage—is typically passed down by the father.\footnote{However, Waters (1990) argues that preference for selecting the father’s ethnicity is not guaranteed. She finds that while interethnic White Americans generally identify with their father’s ethnicity, some ethnicities are disproportionately chosen based on their social esteem; for example, Italian (a “popular” label) is much more common than Scottish (an “unpopular” one).}

For mixed children of Asian or Latino heritage, a distinctly ethnic surname may indeed serve as a cue to one’s background. However, for Black Americans, surname is less likely to disclose race. Without this signal, we should not assume that biracial children with a Black father will be more likely to identify as singularly Black than biracial children with a Black mother. Even so, racial identity may still be transmitted in a patrilineal manner, as children may be more likely to identify with (or be identified as) their father’s race if he is the authority figure in the household (Roth 2005).
On the other hand, women tend to be more attuned than men to the nuances of identities (Crenshaw 1989), so it is possible that in the process of identity construction, mother’s race is of greater significance than father’s race. The mother’s strong emotional attachment to her child may induce a preference that the child’s racial identity be reflective of her own. Indeed, some of the most vocal opponents of mutually-exclusive racial categories during the Multiracial Movement were White mothers who were frustrated that their mixed children had to “deny” their mother’s race (Williams 2006). Mothers may be especially sensitive to their children’s racial identity decisions, and therefore more disposed to encourage the child to develop a self-identity inclusive of her race.

Parents’ Relationship Status

In addition to parents’ gender-racial combination, racial identity is affected by the parents’ relationship status. Children with separated parents may understand race differently than those who live with both parents. Since children with separated parents tend to be raised primarily by their mother, they may singularly identify with their mother’s race at greater rates than biracials whose parents are still together. Biracial children who are raised by their single Black mother, for instance, may have weaker or nonexistent ties to their White father and his extended family; this lack of White familial ties, coupled with perhaps especially strong ties to Black maternal relatives, may strengthen the child’s identity as singularly Black. (Likewise, a biracial child raised by a single White mother may be significantly more likely to identify as singularly White or White-Black, than as singularly Black.)

Conversely, biracials whose biological parents are still together should be more prone to incorporating both parents’ races into their self-concept, thus identifying as White-Black. Having parents who are married shapes identity by strengthening the saliency of both races. Living with both parents may also increase the chances that the child will have sustained, close relationships with extended Black and White relatives alike. Furthermore, seeing their parents’ intact relationship may contribute to a positive outlook on race relations more
generally. Biracials whose parents are still together should therefore feel less pressure to identify with a single race, and more inspired to challenge restrictive racial norms, rejecting the one-drop rule.

**Parents’ Education**

Parents’ education is an important element in the strength of one’s racial and ethnic identity, as educational attainment influences racial outlook and transmits increased knowledge of racial and ethnic inequality. The social networks associated with education may shape the environment in which parents socialize their biracial children and the racial labels they pass on to them (Xie and Goyette 1997; Lieberson 1985). In shaping racial identity development, parents’ education may operate in two opposing ways.

First, education can strengthen minority identity by increasing awareness of racial inequality and sensitivity to minority causes (Roth, 2005). Better-educated Black parents may be more likely to convey to their biracial children an understanding of Black history and the marginalization that Blacks continue to face. These parents may transmit racial norms to their children, telling them that despite their part-White parentage, American society identifies them as Black, and that they should appreciate and embrace their Black culture. Given their understanding of race relations as imparted by their well-educated parents, these biracials may ultimately decide to identify as singularly Black.

Alternatively, high levels of education may encourage outside-the-box racial thinking. This would entail well-educated parents having more racially progressive views on race than less-educated parents. As a result, well-educated parents—regardless of whether they are White or Black—may encourage their biracial children to be open to racial identities not constrained by the one-drop rule. Indeed, analyses of Census data have found results

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4Although Roth (2005) argues that this “awareness” hypothesis only applies to the educational attainment of the minority parent, the effect of education on sensitivity to racial minorities is not necessarily limited to members of minority groups (Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000). One need not be Black in order to value racial equality, espouse racially liberal principles, or reject social injustice (Shelby, 2005). Higher education may therefore similarly impart greater consciousness of minority disparities on White parents, leading them to also foster in their biracial children a singular Black identity.
consistent with this “norm rejection” hypothesis, as education is positively correlated with parents’ rejection of a singular Black identity in labeling their children (Roth [2005]). Still, it remains to be seen whether parents’ education is consequential not just in the racial labels given to biracial children, but also on children’s self-identification.

**Sociocultural Environment and Attitudes About Race**

While family structure plays an integral role in biracials’ identity development, interactions outside the home can be even more influential. Instructive in our understanding of the impact of sociocultural environment on identity is Cooley’s classic “looking-glass self” hypothesis. Cooley ([1902](#)) theorized that one’s sense of self originates from interactions in society and from the perception of others. Arguably, the racial attitudes shared within one’s social environment and the racial composition of one’s peer network shape awareness of group belonging and rejection. Accordingly, the most relevant environmental influences on racial identity are region, religion, and family income.

**Region**

At a 1994 high school assembly in Wedowee, Alabama, Principal Hulond Humphries warned students that interracial couples were forbidden from attending the school prom. When a student named ReVonda Bowen asked how this rule affected her—since her dad was White and her mother Black—the principal announced that the rule’s purpose was precisely to prevent “mistakes” like her from happening (Williams [2006](#)).

This incident effectively conveys the South’s notorious history of White-Black racial tension, particularly the anxieties surrounding interracial romantic relationships. Yet antagonism toward such relationships is still present; in October 2009, a Louisiana justice of the peace made headlines when he refused to issue a marriage license to a White-Black

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5The case of Emmett Till, the Black teenager who was kidnapped and murdered in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly flirting with a White woman, illustrated the severity of Southern animosity towards Black male/White female relations.
couple, on the grounds that such marriages do not last long and that “there is a problem with both groups accepting a child from such a marriage [because] those children suffer” (Foster, 2009). In addition to continued resistance to interracial marriage, the South has had the greatest adherence to the one-drop rule.

This aversion to challenging antiquated racial norms, and the sharp division between Whites and Blacks regarding the acceptability of interracial marriages noted earlier, is arguably illustrative of the broader social environment in which biracial Southerners develop their sense of identity. Strong Southern resistance to interracial relationships and defense of the one-drop rule suggests that a White-Black identity may be a less socially accepted option in this region. More constrained in their identity options, biracial Southerners should be under greater pressure to identify as singularly Black.

In contrast to the South and other regions of the country, the racial heterogeneity and high rates of interracial marriage in the Pacific West states reflects an environment that places a positive emphasis on multiracialism. In the 2000 Census, 40 percent of the “two or more races” population lived in the Pacific West. Whereas 2.4 percent of the overall American population identified with at least two races, the states with the highest percentages of multiple-race identifiers—Hawaii (21 percent), Alaska (5.4 percent), and California (4.7 percent)—were all in the Pacific West; the two other states in this region, Oregon and Washington, also had percentages of multiple-race identifiers that exceeded the national rate (Jones and Smith, 2001). The diverse racial and ethnic region of the Pacific West states should generate a social setting in which a mixed-race identity is accepted and encouraged; biracials living in this area likely feel more comfortable identifying as White-Black.

Infamously, in 1983, a blonde, blue-eyed Louisiana woman named Susie Phipps was denied a passport because the race marked on her application (“White”) differed from that listed on her birth certificate (“Colored”). Phipps—who had no idea she had any Black heritage and always considered herself exclusively White—sued the Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records in order to change her racial classification; she was found to be three-thirty-seconds Black and therefore singularly Black under Louisiana law. Appeals to higher courts upheld the decision (Davis, 2001).

These patterns persisted in the 2010 Census.
Contextual Determinants

In addition to region of residence, other environmental factors including a community’s urbanicity, racial composition, and wealth should be significantly associated with strength of racial identity and views on racial issues.

Population density. Individuals who reside in metropolitan areas are, relative to those in rural towns, more likely to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds who possess a range of social and political ideologies. Living in a more urban neighborhood may thus influence biracials’ identity decisions via increased exposure to broader racial outlooks and worldviews. Biracials who live in more populous areas should therefore tend to identify as White-Black, as opposed to a single race.

Percent Black in neighborhood. Residential segregation, racial discrimination, and racial unity are strongly correlated (Gay 2004; Tate 1993; Massey and Denton 1993). Blacks’ neighborhood quality affects their race salience and perceptions of linked fate and racial discrimination (Gay 2004). Biracials who live in whiter communities may be vulnerable to more incidences of prejudice, and such experiences may in turn have a contrast effect, increasing the salience of their minority identity. Similarly, residence in a majority Black community may heighten biracials’ solidarity with their Black peers. On the other hand, living in a moderately diverse area with few Blacks may produce an assimilationist effect, engendering feelings of psychological distance from the Black community and an inability to integrate a distinctly Black identity.

Median income. Neighborhood socioeconomic status strongly impacts how Blacks judge the status of their own lives. Blacks who live in safe, well-kept areas are less likely than those living in impoverished neighborhoods to have a communal experience of hardship or deprivation (Dawson 1994). As their neighborhood status increases, perceptions of linked fate and perceived discrimination decrease (Gay 2004). Biracials who live in well-to-do areas may similarly be disinclined to believe that race is an integral part of their lives. Residing in an upscale locale with little crime, good schools, low unemployment, plentiful
social services and economic growth may not instigate the belief that one’s life chances are inextricably tied to their being a member of a socially and economically disadvantaged minority group. As a result, biracials who live in areas with higher median incomes may be less prone to believing that their racial minority status will restrict their life chances, less likely to perceive their fates as linked to that of African Americans, and therefore less apt to identify as singularly Black.

Family Income

Independent of community effects, the social networks and status associated with one’s own family income may impart a distinctly racial frame of reference on biracials. The racialized nature of income inequality is such that wealth is often affiliated with light skin color, and poverty with darker skin color, both in the United States and abroad (Gilens 1999; Silva 1994). The conjecture that “money whitens” is a prominent sociological theory that has been studied extensively in Brazil, where 44 percent of the population is multiracial and skin color and socioeconomic status are highly intertwined (IGBE, 2008). Researchers have argued that high income in Brazil impels a move away from a “darker” identity (e.g., black or brown) in favor of a “lighter” identity (e.g., brown or white).

Although much has been made of the idea that “money whitens,” empirical findings are mixed. Some evidence supports the presumption that, for people of mixed-race backgrounds, affluence is associated with a “whiter” identification (Schwartzman 2007; De Carvalho, Wood and Andrade 2004; Silva 1994). Other research cautions that a whitening effect is overstated (Telles, 2004). In all of these studies, however, education is used as a proxy for income level; thus, the theory that “money whitens” remains untested, and “education whitens” is a more appropriate claim. Furthermore, within the U.S. context, research on African American identity has found that higher income actually bolsters Black group consciousness and solidarity (Gay 2004; Dawson 1994).

Still, income may operate differently for biracial Americans than it does for Black
Americans, since biracials are less constrained in their racial identity decisions. Although research has largely failed to examine a causal relationship between income and the racial identities of biracial Americans, biracials with higher family incomes may be less likely to identify as singularly Black and more likely to identify as singularly White. Money may whiten via heightened social mobility, facilitating a transition into higher status social circles wherein biracials are inclined to be seen as White (Telles 2002, Telles 2004). Moreover, as Schwartzman (2007) suggests, financially well-off Whites may impose a “whiteness standard” upon their biracial peers; the desire for group acceptance may compel affluent biracials to self-label as a lighter race.

Religion

Religion and religious participation are socializing agents that are instrumental in forging beliefs about racial group position and racial consciousness (Dawson 1994). The social and political significance of religion differs between Whites and Blacks, and some religions are more strongly linked to racial/ethnic identity than others (Calhoun-Brown, 1999). Accordingly, there is good reason to suspect that a biracial individual’s religious affiliation (or lack thereof) helps forge his or her racial identity.

Religion has always been an integral component of African-American culture and politics (Harris-Lacewell 2006). Black religion developed in part as a reaction to racial oppression, and religious principles were central to effecting social change during the Civil Rights Movement. The Black church ultimately evolved into not just a place of religious worship, but one that helps establish and strengthen Black identity, solidarity, social networks, and leadership (Calhoun-Brown 1996, Ellison 1991). For these reasons, biracials who attend predominantly Black churches should be more likely to identify as singularly Black than biracials affiliated with other religions. Since Baptist is the largest Black religious denomination—with about 45 percent of Blacks identifying as Baptist, compared with only 15 percent of Whites—we might expect that biracial Baptists are more inclined
to embrace a singular Black identity (Kosmin and Keysar, 2009).

Just as the racial homogeneity of the Baptist church helps establish and strengthen Black identity, the racial homogeneity of the Jewish American community may help promote the adoption of a singular White identity among biracial Jews. Ninety-two percent of American Jews identify as White, and being Jewish is often considered not only a religious identity, but an ethnic one as well (Kosmin and Keysar, 2001). Given their (typically) non-White phenotype, biracial Jews may feel disconnected from their predominantly White Jewish peers; sharing the racial identity of their peers may generate for biracial Jews a greater sense of inclusiveness, helping them better assimilate with their religious culture.

Cohort Effects

The one-drop rule has defined who is Black in the U.S. for over a century, and societal attitudes about race can be slow to change (Davis, 2001). Yet as interracial marriage rates rise, the multiracial population grows in size, and opinions regarding racial labeling become more flexible, a White-Black identity should become increasingly socially acceptable. It is probable then that over time, biracial individuals will feel less constrained to assume a singular Black identity, and freer to identify with both of their races.

Gender Identity and Race Consciousness

It has been argued that we cannot fully comprehend the meaning of race without weighing the role that gender plays in generating and sustaining race as a social construction (White 2001; Higginbotham 1992). Although some have argued that the framework in which biracial women negotiate their identities differs from that of biracial men, evidence in support of this theory is inconsistent (e.g., Rockquemore 2002). While there is currently little empirical support for the idea that biracial women are more likely than men to identify as White-Black, there is good theory to support this expectation.

Being a woman may impart a more complex and insightful approach to racial iden-
tity (Crenshaw 1989; hooks 1981). As such, biracial females’ doubly-marginalized backgrounds as women of color may place them in a social position distinct from that of biracial men. Biracial women are more exposed to and engaged with different forms of identity, and so may be more inclined to question the rationale in identifying with a single race, and more prone to challenging racial norms such as the one-drop rule.

Furthermore, the social value placed on physical appearance and phenotype is greater for women than for men. Among Blacks, light-skinned women tend to be seen as more attractive than dark-skinned women, but skin color has no relationship with attractiveness for men (Hunter 2004; Hill 2002). The differential impact of skin tone may influence biracial women to internalize their mixed-race appearance and endorse a White-Black identity at a greater rate than men. Rockquemore’s (2002) interviews with biracial women provide some support for this conjecture. She finds that, due to their whiter features, biracial women are sometimes told by Black women that they “aren’t really Black.” Biracial women internalize this exclusion, rejecting a singular Black identity in favor of a distinctly biracial one. Biracial men, Rockquemore argues, do not undergo such interpersonal tension with Black men and are consequently not as inclined to see themselves as biracial.

In sum, while there has been little evidence regarding the influence of gender on biracial identity, race-gender intersectionality theory suggests that biracial women should be more likely than biracial men to identify as White-Black.

**Data and Measurement**

In order to understand the identity construction of biracial Americans, I analyze Freshman Survey data collected by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute. Every year, CIRP surveys college freshman from across the country in order to understand the backgrounds of entering college students. The survey is nationally-representative of college freshman and includes questions
on students’ families, educational backgrounds, and interests. The analyses here employ Freshman Surveys collected each year in which respondents were asked to identify their parents’ races—2001, 2002, and 2003.

The strengths of these surveys distinguish them from competing studies currently used by researchers of multiracialism. Unlike other quantitative data, the Freshman Surveys include questions on mother’s race and father’s race, making it possible to ascertain individuals who identify with a single race but have parents of different races. Especially notable is the Freshman Survey’s large sample size; pooling data from the three available years yields a sample of 3,529 respondents of White-Black parentage.

College freshman are not representative of all 17 to 19 year-olds; they are academically driven and come from wealthier, better-educated households. Still, this survey includes a diverse set of higher institutions, including two-year colleges, four-year universities, religiously affiliated institutions, and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Moreover, since roughly two-thirds of high school graduates enroll in college immediately after their senior year of high school, a focus on college freshmen captures a large proportion of people within this age group (American Council on Education). These surveys are also conducted at the beginning of the freshman year (before attenuation in enrollment), further strengthening the generalizability of findings. While the restriction to college freshmen prevents examination of older biracial Americans—who were socialized in an era in which the one-drop rule defined group membership—assessing a survey that focuses on people in their late teens targets my group of interest, since the mixed-race population skews young.8 Thus, employing these Freshman Surveys requires some compromise, providing valuable of information on a remarkably large number of biracial Americans, at the cost of limiting the ability to infer to the broader White-Black population.

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8Current Population Survey data from 2004 indicate that over 75 percent of people identified as White-Black were under the age of 18, compared to less than 30 percent of singular-identified Whites and Blacks.
Table 3.1: Racial Parentage as a Predictor of Biracial Identity. Biracial respondents are three times as likely to have a Black father and White mother than a White father and Black mother, a finding consistent with broader interracial marriage trends (Pas- sel, Wang and Taylor, 2010). Biracials with a White father and Black mother are more inclined to identify themselves as singularly Black than their peers who have a Black father and White mother. A majority of the overall sample identifies as White-Black.

### Descriptive Statistics

People with mixed parentage are divided in their identity decisions, and as shown in Table 3.1, the identities chosen are correlated with the racial combination of the respondents’ parents. Those with a White father and Black mother are more likely than their Black father and White mother counterparts to identify as singularly Black. Biracials who have a White father and Black mother are almost equally split between identifying as White-Black (48 percent) and singularly Black (44 percent); roughly 8 percent identify as singularly White. In contrast, most respondents with a Black father and White mother identify as White-Black, while only 37 percent identify as singularly Black and about 7 percent who choose singularly White.

These findings suggest that mother’s race and father’s race are meaningful in the construction of biracial identity. More broadly, they indicate that the majority of biracial young people are now rejecting the one-drop rule, identifying as White-Black. Of particular note is the 7 percent of biracials choosing to label themselves as singularly White, an identity that has in the past been referred to as “passing” and contrary to racial social norms.

Figure 3.1 shows how demographic characteristics predict identity outcomes. Relative to biracial men, biracial women are as likely to identify as singularly White, but 8 percent less likely to identify as singularly Black and 8 percent more likely to identify as White-
Black. Having separated parents is predictive of a decreased likelihood of identifying as singularly White. The region where one lives is also consequential; relative to biracials who live in other parts of the country, Southerners are noticeably less likely to identify as White-Black (and more likely to identify as singularly Black), whereas those living in the Pacific West are more likely to incorporate a White-Black identity (and less likely to identify as singularly Black). Religious identity is also associated with racial identity. Although only 7 percent of all biracials identify as White, roughly 24 percent of those who are Jewish do so; similarly, whereas 38 percent of all biracials identify as Black, about 49 percent of biracial Baptists identify this way. Biracials who are nonreligious are somewhat more likely to identify as White-Black and less likely to identify as singularly Black.

Figure 3.2 shows how socioeconomic variables—parents’ educational attainment and family income—predict racial identity. Parents’ education has little effect, though having a White parent with a graduate degree is predictive of a dual White-Black identity. Income is mostly inconsequential, though biracials from six-figure income households are notably less likely than those in lower income brackets to identify as singularly Black.

Figure 3.3 shows how environmental contextual factors predict identity decisions. Breaking down zip code population density, median household income, and percent Black (non-Hispanic) into quartiles, findings imply that neighborhood context has distinct consequences on identity development. The likelihood of adopting a multiracial identity increases monotonically as population density rises; biracials who live in the most urban settings are the least likely to identify with a single race, and most likely to identify as White-Black. Living in a wealthier neighborhood seems to whiten biracials’ identities, a finding akin to the abovementioned effect of family income. Whereas those living in the poorest neighborhoods are disproportionately inclined to identify as singularly Black (and specifically less likely to identify as White-Black), those in the most affluent areas are excessively likely to label themselves as White or White-Black. Finally, as expected, living in areas with the greatest proportion of Black residents is associated with a decrease in singular White
Figure 3.1: Predictive, Cross-Tabular Relationship of Gender, Parents’ Relationship Status, Region, and Religion on Racial Identity. Legend: w=biracials who identify as singularly White, b=biracials who identify as singularly Black, m=biracials who identify as White-Black (i.e., “mixed”). Dashed vertical lines indicate the baseline proportion of all biracial respondents who identify with a particular race; thus, without any predictors, 7 percent identify as singularly White, 38 percent identify as singularly Black, and 55 percent identify as mixed. Italicized symbols represent statistically significant (p-value $\leq 0.05$) deviations from the baseline proportion. Being male, Southern, Baptist, Jewish, and of some other religion are all significantly predictive of a singular racial identity; being female, living in the Pacific West states, and being nonreligious are predictive of a White-Black identity.

These cursory findings shed some light on the biracial population, suggesting that certain background characteristics—particularly gender, region, religion, and income—are correlated with racial identity. Multinomial regression results will determine whether these effects persist when accounting for systematic differences across covariates among respondents.
Model and Results

Because these respondents are identifying with one of three racial categories (as singularly White, singularly Black, and mixed-race White-Black) their identification decisions are estimated using a multinomial logistic regression model. The regression evaluates the differences between respondents who identify as singularly White or singularly Black, relative to a reference group of those who identify as White-Black.

All of the respondents evaluated here are considered biracial because they report having
Figure 3.3: Predictive, Cross-Tabular Relationship of Local Contextual Factors—Population Density, Percent Black (Non-Hispanic), and Median Household Income on Racial Identity. Legend: w=biracials who identify as singularly White, b=biracials who identify as singularly Black, m=biracials who identify as White-Black (i.e., “mixed”). Dashed vertical lines indicate the baseline proportion of respondents who identify with a particular race; thus, without any predictors, 7 percent of biracials identify as singularly White, 38 percent identify as singularly Black, and 55 percent identify as mixed. Italicized symbols represent statistically significant (p-value <= 0.05) deviations from the baseline proportion. Areas with the highest population densities and higher median household incomes are predictive of White-Black labels, while areas with the highest proportion Black populations are associated with singular Black or White-Black labels.

one singularly White parent and one singularly Black parent. Excluded from the analysis those who have at least one multiracial parent.

Racial identity. The dependent variable is racial identity, as defined by the race(s) the respondent checks off to designate his or her race/ethnicity. Three identity outcomes are
examined here: White, Black, and White-Black.

**Parents’ races.** An indicator is included for whether a respondent has a White father and Black mother, as opposed to the more common combination of Black father and White mother.

**Parents’ status.** An indicator for respondents with parents who are not currently together (divorced, living apart, or where at least one parent is deceased) is included.

**Parents’ races*Parents’ status.** This interaction assesses whether respondents with separated parents are more likely to identify with the race of their mother.

**Gender.** An indicator for female is included.

**Home region.** Respondents are classified as living in the Pacific West states (CA, OR, WA, HI, AK), Southern states (the Confederate states as well as KY, MO, OK, and WV), or All Other states. All Other states are the baseline reference group.

**Area Contextual Factors.** Census 2000 measures of respondent zip code population density, median household income, and percent Black non-Hispanic are included.

**Parents’ Education.** Parental education is assessed by race of parent (i.e., Black parent’s education and White parent’s education), and divided into four levels: high school diploma or less, some college (including receiving associate’s degree), college degree, and at least some graduate work. High school diploma or less is the reference group.

9."Other race" is a fourth plausible identity outcome, but few respondents with one White parent and one Black parent chose this identity. Some 67 biracials (2 percent of the biracial sample) also chose to identify as White, Black, and some additional race, but I do not include them in this analysis. Because the additional race(s) with which these respondents identify vary so greatly (additional races include American Indian, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Other Latino, and Other), there is limited theoretical basis for grouping these “White-Black+” identifiers together for the purposes of predicting racial identity decisions.

10. The survey’s question wording does not specify whether the “mother” and “father” mentioned are the respondent’s biological parents. It is possible that when answering the parents’ races questions, some identify the race of a step-parent or adoptive parent. However, the potential ambiguity of this question is of minimal concern; it is unlikely that a significant proportion of respondents would interpret “mother’s race” and “father’s race” as references to anything other than the races of one’s biological parents.

11. The states defined here as “South” were those that had antimiscegenation laws in place until *Loving v. Virginia* overturned them in 1967. Although a distinction may be made between the “Deep South” states—which were those most dependent on slave labor and among the first to secede from the Union—and the “Outer South” states, a relatively small sample of residents from the Deep South necessitates that these subregions be collapsed into one “South” regional variable.
**Family Income.** Family income is split into four tiers: less than $30,000 (the reference); $30,000-$59,999; $60,000-$99,999; and $100,000 or more.

**Religion.** The six religious categories include Baptist, Catholic, Other Christian, Jewish, Other Religion, and non-religious (the reference group).

**Year Surveyed.** To assess whether certain racial identities are becoming more or less common over time, the year surveyed is also included, with 2001 being the baseline.

Specific question wording and variable coding can be found in Appendix A at the end of this chapter.

I use as predictors the variables described in the previous section. Given their non-intuitive interpretation, I report the multinomial coefficient estimates in Appendix B (Figure 3.5), and instead focus here on the more conceptually interpretable odds ratios, displayed in Figure 3.4.

As expected, parents’ race and relationship status are important predictors of racial identity choice. Among biracials with married parents, those with a White father and Black mother are significantly more likely to identify with a single race than are those with a Black father and White mother—17 percent more likely to identify as singularly Black and 46 percent more likely to identify as singularly White. That they refrain from adopting an identity that reflects both racial backgrounds suggests that some biracials whose White father and Black mother are married are influenced by their White patrilineal heritage, while others are influenced by their Black matrilineal parentage, but not both. It is not clear what accounts for this finding.

Having separated parents is also a determinant of racial identity, but only for biracials with a separated White father and Black mother. In comparison to similar biracials with a married Black father and White mother, those whose White father and Black mother are no longer together (and who most likely live with their single Black mother) are 34 percent more likely to identify as singularly Black and 20 percent less likely to identify as White-Black. In other words, being raised by a single parent does significantly shape identity
Figure 3.4: Odds Ratios of Racial Self-Identification for Biracials. Odds ratios below 1.00 indicate a lower likelihood, and values above 1.00 indicate a greater likelihood, of choosing a respective racial identity. For example, for the variable Female, the 1.35 odds ratio under “White-Black” indicates that, relative to comparable men, women are 35 percent more likely to identify as White-Black; similarly, the 0.66 under “Black” means that biracial women are 34 percent less likely to identify as Black, relative to comparable biracial men. Dots represent point estimates, lines represent 95% confidence intervals, and tick marks represent 90% confidence intervals. (Note that while the value printed above each confidence interval is the true odds ratio, the scale and confidence intervals presented are the log odds ratios, which ensures the symmetry of the intervals.)
choice, but only for those biracials with a single Black mother.

Gender, a principal social identity in its own right, is also an important predictor of racial identity. All else equal, women are 35 percent more likely than men to identify as White-Black. Biracial women thus reject singular racial identities (especially a singular Black identity) at higher rates than men. This strong divergence in identification between men and women is particularly notable, given that prior work has failed to find any aggregate gender differences in biracial identification (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2008). I elaborate on this finding at greater length in the discussion section.

In terms of regional effects, living in a Pacific state may be associated with a preference for incorporating a mixed-race identity over a singular Black one, though findings do not meet conventional levels of statistical significance. Conversely, a mixed-race identity is less popular among biracials from the South, a finding consistent with expectations given the racial culture of the region. Relative to similar respondents living outside the South and Pacific, Southerners are more likely to label themselves with only one race—12 percent more likely to identify as singularly Black and 26 percent more likely to identify as singularly White.

The racial and economic context wherein one lives are also determinants of identity outcomes. Biracials living in denser neighborhoods are significantly more likely to identify as multiracial than biracials who live in more rural areas; for each standard deviation increase in population density, biracials are 7 percent more likely to identify as White-Black and 28 percent less likely to identify as singularly White. Living in richer areas is associated with a push away from a singular Black identity and towards a “whiter” one—but living around more Black people diminishes the likelihood that a biracial will identify as singularly White.

Furthermore, parents’ educational attainment is predictive of identification, but is conditional on the race of the parent. Surprisingly, having a well-educated Black parent translates to neither a singularly Black identity nor a more multiracial outlook. However, rela-
tive to biracials whose White parent has at most a high school diploma, those whose White parent has a graduate degree are 14 percent more likely to identify as White-Black and 58 percent less likely to identify as singularly White. So while greater education among White parents facilitates the adoption of a White-Black identity, no such effect exists for better-educated Black parents.

Family income has an important impact on identity, but only among the most well-off. Relative to a baseline of less than $30,000, higher incomes are not predictive of racial identity decisions until income reaches at least $100,000. Biracial respondents with family incomes above $100,000 are, all else equal, 62 percent more likely to adopt a singular White identity. Affluence is thus predictive of a lighter racial label. That this finding persists after accounting for parents’ education and community racial and economic context provides strong evidence in support of a specific money whitening effect, and not a broader socioeconomic effect.

Religious affiliation is generally associated with the adoption of a singular racial identity. Baptists, Other Christians and those belonging to Some Other Religion are—relative to similar non-religious biracials—more likely to identify as singularly Black than as White-Black. In contrast, Jewish biracials are 247 percent more likely than comparable non-religious biracials to identify as singularly White and 34 percent less likely to identify as White-Black. Similarly, biracials affiliated with other religions are 89 percent more likely to identify as singularly White.

Finally, there may be a general trend towards multiracial identification among young biracial adults. Compared to 2001, biracial individuals were 15 percent more likely to identify as White-Black in 2002, though there was no change in identification from 2002 to 2003. The increase in White-Black identification comes from respondents who would have otherwise chosen a singular Black identity for themselves, as White identification rates did not significantly decline from 2001 to 2003.
Discussion

These analyses shed light on the nuances of identity development among Americans with dual White-Black parentage. The construction of identity is predicated on multiple factors. At first glance, these results speak to the intricacies of biracial identity formation. Yet sociopsychological influences operate in a straightforward manner. Taken together, findings indicate that social context produces an identity assimilation effect, as opposed to an identity contrast effect. Elements of a biracial’s identity become more pronounced if there are more people with that element in their social circle. Rather than contrasting their mixed background to a race that is numerically dominant in their environment and finding difference, biracials see parallels. They are better able to relate to that group and gravitate toward that identity.

This assimilationist effect is especially evident when we consider the impact of religion. Biracials who live or worship with a particular racial group incorporate that group’s identity into their self-concept. Biracial Jews are more likely to identify as White, and biracial Baptists as Black, because the racial homogeneity of these denominations and the social cohesion of religion nurtures the feeling of belonging. If racial interactions promoted a contrast effect, we instead would have observed greater Black identification among biracial Jews and whiter identification among biracial Baptists.

Evidence of an assimilation effect is similarly visible in household income, urbanicity, community affluence, region, and parental relationship status. Biracials who are raised by a single Black parent identify as Black because they have forged a stronger attachment to the Black community. Sustained homogeneous racial contact does not magnify perceptions of distance from that race, instead aiding in the development and strengthening of ties to that group. On the other hand, urban areas tend to be culturally diverse, which may explain why biracials in these settings choose to label themselves as White-Black.
Intersecting Identities

As these analyses demonstrate, fundamental to the construction of racial identity among White-Black biracials are prominent nonracial social identities such as class, religion, and gender. Preliminary in-depth conversations with biracial young people (to be discussed in greater depth in a later chapter) help elucidate these dynamics of identity intersectionality.

First, it appears that the impact of income and religion on racial identity can largely be explained by the types of racial group networks associated with class and religious worship. In interviews, wealthier biracials who identified as singularly White implied that they did so primarily because they lived in upscale neighborhoods and attended private schools that were almost entirely White and Asian. Even some biracials who lived in urban areas with high levels of racial, ethnic, and class diversity indicated that because their immediate networks were affluent and predominantly non-Black, they had almost no sustained contact with Black people (aside from occasional visits with members of their Black extended family). Some admitted that their infrequent interactions with Blacks mostly reinforced standard anti-Black stereotypes, which had the effect of distancing these biracials further from a Black identity and toward a White one. The extent to which one socializes or has contact with people of different racial/ethnic groups influences his or her broader racial outlook, and income and religion serve as proxies for network racial diversity or segregation. Biracials take cues from those in their classrooms, neighborhoods, and places of worship, racially evaluating themselves in relation to the race of their peers.

The racial identity development process with respect to gender is more complex. I find that identity construction for biracial women and men centers on phenotype, but that phenotype operates in different ways for each gender. For biracial women, comments made by others about their looks increase the salience of their mixed racial background. According to many biracial women, antagonistic remarks made by Black women—in which Black women call biracial women conceited on account of their comparably lighter skin
and longer hair—dissuade biracial women from identifying as singularly Black. Hair texture is another issue that biracial women cite as critical in their decision to identify as White-Black. In fact, every single biracial woman with whom I have spoken has brought up their coarse, curly, “distinctly mixed-race” hair, which they say sets themselves apart from both White women and Black women, and also from their biracial male counterparts. Biracial men, on the other hand, are relatively more inclined to label themselves as singularly Black, an identity decision that can be explained by the gendered nature of anti-Black racism. Some biracial males say that they feel stereotyped as “young men of color”; some report being pulled over for “driving while Black” or sensing that people are scared of them because their age and skin color fit the “suspicious Black male” cliche. Because people in society tend to not view them as “biracial” but rather as simply Black, these biracial men self-identify accordingly.

This purported differential impact of racism on biracial men is unanticipated, yet it should not be surprising. Research shows that Black men are much more likely than Black women to report experiencing racial discrimination, feeling that people are afraid of them, and being unfairly stopped by the police because of their racial/ethnic background (Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University/Washington Post Poll: Race and Ethnicity in 2001). Waters (1999) finds that these disproportionate rates of perceived racism are integral in shaping the racial identities of Black Caribbean-American males. The identification process for biracial men is similarly tied to social norms surrounding Black masculinity; for some biracial males, identification as White-Black suggests to their Black peers that they are racially “inauthentic.” Consequently, these biracial men are more likely to feel deterred from expressing a White-Black identity, and believe that claiming a singular racial iden-

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12 Rockquemore (2002) also finds this in her interviews with biracial women.

13 Waters attributes the decisions of second-generation Caribbean-American males to identify as Black American (in lieu of, for example, Caribbean-American) to the heightened racism that Black men face in the United States. Her work also finds that boys are more likely than girls to be ostracized if they talk or act “White”; in addition to having their racial loyalties questioned, boys often find their masculinity questioned. Thus, for young Caribbean-American men, the only socially acceptable outcome is to embrace a singular Black American identity.
tity is a way of asserting masculinity. In short, racial boundaries are sharper for men than for women, and may work to push biracial men towards a singular Black identity. Because biracial men perceive greater levels of anti-Black discrimination and stereotyping, their Black solidarity and propensity to view themselves as singularly Black is heightened. Conversely, although biracial women also face racial stigmatization, it is considered more socially acceptable for them to exist in two racial cultures simultaneously.

**Future Work**

This chapter has broken down the racial identity development process in detail, describing how many important social, psychological, and economic variables predict biracial identity. These findings confirm that the racial labels adopted by biracial young adults are reflective of the racial contact they have. Biracials assimilate to the racial groups that surround them.

Still, one important component of identity formation has gone unexamined here. Skin color and other physical features—such as hair texture, eye color, and nose shape—should be strong predictors of racial identity because they are connected both to the way biracial people racially views themselves, as well as how people in society label and treat them. Phenotype is likely to influence identity construction via its link to racial discrimination and group inclusion. To the extent that possessing a more “ambiguous” or less Afrocentric phenotype is associated with being viewed and treated as “not quite Black,” lighter-skinned biracials should be less susceptible to anti-Black racism and stereotyping. In turn they may experience greater psychological distance from the Black community and a lowered inclination to identify as singularly Black. Darker-skinned biracials, on the other hand, should be more often viewed as Black and may be more able to relate to Black struggles. Yet, the link between phenotype and identity usually goes unaddressed in quantitative research, primarily due to the difficulty in measuring phenotype. Although the data assessed in this

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14 Research on phenotype often ranks skin color on a five-point, light-dark scale, with possible responses ranging from “very light” to “very dark.” This measurement approach is problematic because the outcomes are vague and because phenotype encompasses not only skin color but other facial features that may influence
chapter does not permit an analysis of phenotype’s role in racial identification decisions, I begin to tackle these and other issues in a later chapter, wherein I interview several biracial young adults.

**Conclusion**

When asked by Barbara Walters on *The View* why he does not identify as biracial, Obama replied that he ultimately realized that others viewed him as Black, and that “if the world saw me as African American, then that was something I needn’t run away from, that’s something that I could go ahead and embrace” (Obama, 29 July 2010). By choosing to label himself as singularly Black, Obama expresses solidarity with Blacks, emphasizing an allegiance with the Black community that he does not feel towards other racial groups.

The racial identity decisions of biracial Americans pose numerous social and political consequences. Census race statistics influence how billions of dollars in federal funding are distributed to communities for neighborhood improvement projects, public health, education and in the provision of community services. Identity decisions can also affect the allocation of resources to minority students in higher education. Disentangling the substantive meaning behind identity choice provides a stronger theoretical framework for understanding the political significance of mixed-race identity.

Affording people of mixed-race the ability to mark multiple boxes reflecting their diverse heritage has distinct psychological benefits (Townsend, Markus and Bergsieker, 2009). Yet, it is unclear whether the decision to mark off a particular race carries any substantive political significance, or if multiracial identification is instead of greater symbolic importance related more to one’s mental and emotional well-being. Whether this identity is indeed politically consequential is currently unknown; it is possible that the unique experience of being biracial influences political attitudes, regardless of how one identifies. I take one’s identity with a particular racial group (e.g., Hochschild and Weaver, 2007).
up this issue in the next chapter, where I explore the relationship between biracial heritage and identity on racial group consciousness and political outlook.
Appendix A: Question Wording and Response Coding

CIRP Freshman Surveys

Race: “Please indicate the ethnic background of yourself, your father, and your mother. (Mark all that apply in each column.)”

Mother’s race: Only mothers who are marked as only White or only Black and have a child with a singular-identifying man of the opposite race are examined. Thus, mother’s race is coded as “Black” if Black and no other race is marked, or as “White” if White and no other race is marked.

Father’s race: Only fathers who are marked as only White or only Black and have a child with a singular-identifying woman of the opposite race are examined. Thus, father’s race is coded as “Black” if Black and no other race is marked, or as “White” if White and no other race is marked.

Respondent’s race: Only students with a “Black mother and White father” or “White mother/Black father” are examined. Students’ race is coded as singularly “Black” if Black and no other race is marked; singularly “White” if White and no other race is marked; and “White-Black” if White and Black and no other race is marked.

Gender: 0=male, 1=female.

Home region: Indicators created for 3 areas: South (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MO, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV); Pacific West (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA); Other (all other states).


Median Household Income: Median income of respondent’s zip code (“median income” as defined by 2000 Census data); all incomes coded continuously.

Percent Black non-Hispanic: Percent of respondent’s zip code that identified as Black, non-Hispanic (as defined by 2000 Census data).

Father’s education: “What is the highest level of formal education obtained by [your fa-
Mother's education: “What is the highest level of formal education obtained by [your mother]?” Dummies created for High school diploma or less, Some college, College degree, and Some graduate school or graduate degree.

Income: “What is your best estimate of your parents’ total income last year? Consider income from all sources before taxes.” Indicators created for: $29,999 or less; $30,000-$59,999; $60,000-$99,999; $100,000 or more.

Parents’ status: “Are your parents both alive and living with each other; both alive, divorced or living apart; [or] one or both deceased?” Two indicators: Parents living together; parent(s) deceased or living apart.

Religion: “Current religious preference.” Six indicators created: Baptist; Roman Catholic; Jewish; Other Christian (including Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, LDS, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Seventh Day Adventist, Unitarian, United Church of Christ); Other Religion (including Buddhist, Islamic, and Hindu); None.
Appendix B: Additional Graphs and Regression Estimates

Figure 3.5: Coefficient Estimates from Multinomial Model of Racial Self-Identification for White-Black Biracials. Baseline category (omitted) is identifying as White-Black. Dots represent point estimates, lines represent 95% confidence intervals, and tick marks represent 90% confidence intervals.
Chapter 4

The Political Attitudes of Biracial Americans

The 2000 U.S. Census was the first in which respondents were allowed to identify with multiple races. This historic change challenged longstanding assumptions about the meaning and definition of race in the United States. As our racial landscape evolves, we must reexamine how race shapes political views in the 21st century. Studying the emerging multiracial population adds nuance to our understanding of the political ramifications of racial identity.

Despite the changing demographics, race is often treated as a mutually exclusive category of analysis within American politics. Some work has examined the political organizing of the Multiracial Movement, the flexibility of racial identity, and the functioning of government institutions in shaping identity choice (e.g., Hochschild and Weaver 2010; Williams 2006; Perlmann and Waters 2002; Nobles 2000). But few studies focus on the political attitudes of mixed-race Americans, and even those studies reach divergent conclusions.

While Masuoka (2008) finds that multiracials tend to share the political views of their minority racial background, scholars have generally argued that mixed-race people are in
the center of the racial divide. For example, Hochschild and Weaver (2010) assert that the level of racial awareness and support for race-based policies held by self-identified multiracials falls between support expressed by monoracial Blacks and Whites. This finding supports traditional theories that people of mixed backgrounds are “caught in the middle” of two opposing worlds (Park 1928; Park 1931; Stonequist 1935). Unfortunately, these conclusions are often based on small mixed-race sample sizes and improper racial coding techniques. Hence the generalizability of current results is rather limited, and sometimes misleading.

For this research, “monoracial” is defined as having two parents of the same race, and “biracial” as having parents of different races. This work focuses on two monoracial groups, Whites and Blacks, and three biracial groups: White identifiers, Black identifiers, and White-Black identifiers. Whites and Blacks are the two racial groups with the greatest levels of social distance. As has been shown, the White-Black interracial marriage rate remains significantly lower than the rate of marriages between White-Asian and White-Latino couples, and public support for White-Black unions is also lower (Passel, Wang and Taylor, 2010). Americans who are White-Black arguably merit special attention because they illustrate a new shifting of the margins of racial classification, which had previously been defined by the one-drop rule as inflexible and permanent. Finally, as will be discussed in greater depth, there exists a sharp, enduring White-Black divide in public opinion (Kinder and Winter 2001; Schuman et al. 1997). Individuals of White-Black parentage thus straddle a longstanding and unique racial divide; their very existence represents the crossing of strict racial boundaries.

This work examines how people of biracial, White-Black parentage are distinct from their monoracial counterparts. My argument, broadly, is two-fold. First, both racial identity and racial parentage—in tandem—are important predictors of political opinion. Since race

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1This opinion has also been expressed by politicians. In response to the creation of a new “multiracial” category on official state race forms, a Michigan state legislator said, “[Mixed-Black identifiers] wouldn’t be supporting Black people and the issues that Black people have fought for” (Spickard and Burroughs 2000:247).
and ethnicity are increasingly fluid social constructs, scholars of modern race politics would do well to depart from the standard classifications of race by disentangling racial identity from racial background. Second, the attitudes of multiracials follow no strict pattern and depend on the political issues at hand.

Using nationally representative surveys of college freshman, I more accurately measure racial identity, clarifying the connection between race and public opinion. Findings run contrary to the present literature. White-Black biracials do not generally have views that are “in between” those of Whites and Blacks; the story is more complex than that. I show that on racial issues, biracials generally hold views akin to the racial group with which they identify. That is, biracials who choose to identify as singularly White are most similar to monoracial Whites, and biracials who identify as singularly Black are similar to monoracial Blacks. However, biracials who identify as White-Black also tend to share the racial attitudes of Blacks. Moreover, on social and civil rights issues, biracials who identify as White-Black are paradoxically more liberal than both Whites and Blacks. These results imply that the choice to identify as mixed-race may be indicative of a more progressive, tolerant outlook on issues that affect socially marginalized groups. I conclude with a discussion of how these results challenge the literature on ethnic identity theory, especially primordialism and constructivism.

Social Group Identity and Political Behavior

Political solidarity develops from the construction of powerful and stable subjective group identities (Huddy, 2003). Social identity is the feature of one’s self-image that stems from the social groups with which he feels he belongs (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Integral to group identification are two elements: awareness and attachment; in order to identify with a group, one must be cognizant of her membership in the group and also feel psychologically tied to it (Campbell et al., 1960; Conover, 1984; Tajfel, 1981). Social group membership is
hence a necessary but insufficient component of group identification, as simply belonging to a group does not inevitably prompt a psychological connection. It is generally difficult to establish distinct membership in areas lacking clearly delineated perimeters, such as social class. In contrast, it is much easier to establish an individual’s objective membership in groups that have unmistakable boundaries.

Accepting the priorities and interests of a social group helps individuals determine what is important to them personally, which subsequently influences their interpretation of policies and political issues (Conover, 1984). Those with the deepest group attachments are most inclined to share the group’s values. Membership in organizations such as unions help bring together people of similar social positions and political interests. Conover (1984) has also shown that group identifiers make relatively more political comments on issues that distinctly affect their group. In order for political differences across groups to occur, individuals must first self-identify with the group—that is, internalize their group membership such that they feel a connection (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Conover argues that these effects are due to both objective membership and psychological attachment to the group, not simply feelings of warmth towards people belonging to the group.

We know that people approach the world from diverse positions and mindsets, and subsequently have different stances on issues. Still, most sociodemographic group memberships—such as age and marital status—have little influence on individuals’ political actions (Huddy, 2003). One area that consistently yields meaningful political repercussions is racial and ethnic group membership.

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Gender is often cited as an area with easily defined categories. Objective belonging is typically straightforward and static; nearly everyone fits neatly into one of two mutually exclusive categories, identifying exclusively with their gender and being recognized by others as a member of that gender (Huddy, 2003).

Early voting studies also found that White, native-born Protestants and higher socioeconomic status groups are more likely than minority ethnic and religious groups to vote Republican (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954; Campbell et al., 1960).

For example, individuals identifying with the business community and the middle-class are significantly more likely to reference economic policy than those identifying with other groups, such as African Americans.
Significance of Racial and Ethnic Identities

Ethnic group loyalties have been responsible for traditional forms of activism such as voting (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Wantchekon 2003), and more contentious social movements including riots, insurgency, ethnic conflict, civil war, and genocide (McAdam 1999; Varshney 2003; Beissinger 2002; Klarman 2004; Posner 2005; Weinstein 2007). Comparative theories of ethnic identity have alternatively argued that ethnicity is primordial (Connor 1994; Van Evera 2001), thoroughly constructed and surviving only under certain circumstances (Anderson 2006; Chandra 2001), and an instrumental calculation wherein identities are mere expressions of self-interest, emerging when certain competitive ethnic groups are brought into contact with one another (Hardin 1997; Brass 1991; Posner 2004). Scholars have also deliberated how to properly measure ethnic fractionalization (Alesina et al. 2003; Laitin and Posner 2001), and the definition of ethnicity itself has been the subject of lengthy academic debate (Chandra 2006; Brass 1991; Horowitz 1985). In the U.S. context, racial identity has been shown to influence how people learn and understand politics (Harris-Lacewell 2006), and racial group membership is linked to opinions on college racial quotas, government assistance to Blacks, and preferential hiring of minorities (Bobo 1998; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Race, ethnicity, and immigration intersect to profoundly shape political experiences, electoral behavior, and partisanship (Rogers 2006; Waters 1999; Jones-Correa 1998). The responses of voters to political campaign messages are also influenced by race (Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002; Mendelberg 2001).

While the political significance of ethnicity has been rigorously theorized, American politics tends to treat racial and ethnic identity as concrete, with membership easily defined and instantly recognized (Conover 1984). Regression models of public opinion usually include an indicator variable for a respondent’s racial or ethnic group under the assumption (often correct) that it will yield a statistically significant coefficient. Such parsimonious racial classification is reasonable in most analyses of public opinion, as a more complex
format can prove challenging when evaluating the substantive impact of race on policy views. But researchers often add these basic racial indicators without considering their substantive political meanings. Such simplistic demarcations of race neglect the variation present within racial groups and overlook the differences that may exist between “processes of externally ascribing an objective race or ethnicity to an individual” and “processes of internally choosing a subjective race or ethnicity” (Lee, 2008, 463, emphasis added).

Racial categories are no longer clearly delineated. In order to fully understand the political psychology of race, simply using one’s stated race to infer how racial identity shapes political views is not the ideal approach. For mixed-race Americans, the marking of a single race instead of multiple races may not be indicative of group and political allegiances. This is particularly true for African Americans, an estimated 80 percent of whom have at least some White ancestry (Davis, 2001). Though the one-drop rule has traditionally defined Americans of White-Black backgrounds as exclusively Black, social distinctions have always been made between lighter-skinned, mixed-race Blacks and darker-skinned Blacks (Hochschild and Weaver, 2007; Davis, 2001). Research on Black political participation that is unable to distinguish between Blacks of immediate multiracial heritage from singular Blacks implicitly presumes that all respondents identifying as “Black” view politics solely through this racial lens. Such a treatment of identity ultimately masks potential ways in which non-Black ancestry among Black identifiers alters individual perceptions of group solidarity and linked fate.

**Racial Identity and Political Meanings**

For more than two centuries, racial meanings have been fundamental to the structuring of American society, shaping individual identities and explaining macro-level economic, cultural, and political behavior (Omi and Winant, 1994). For Blacks and Whites alike, the link between identity and political behavior is strong. However, the two groups do
not emphasize racial identity equally. The sections that follow describe the implications of Black and White racial identity in the United States, and how racial group ties shape political consciousness.

**The Political Meaning of Black Identity**

The legacy of slavery and persisting racial discrimination, segregation, and inequality help explain the construction of African American political identity. For Black Americans, the “shared experience of deprivation” is a fundamental facet of group consciousness (Gay, 2004). Blacks take a collective approach to politics, believing that what happens to the group has implications for what happens to the individual (Dawson, 2001; Dawson, 1994). This macro-level sense of racial linked fate results from micro-level contact with Black sociopolitical networks. Residential segregation stimulates and strengthens ties to Black history, culture, and identity (Tate, 1993). Higher rates of poverty among Blacks produce a social environment that lends itself to heightened informational isolation from the conventional political sphere (Dawson, 1994).

Political dialogue within the Black community is multifaceted and varied, often running contrary to information disseminated from mainstream media. In addition to receiving official information and cues from political elites, Blacks are uniquely influenced by the range of unofficial opinions that originate within the Black community. Formal political participation, including membership in civil rights organizations, as well as informal cultural ties, such as watching Black television, engaging in conversations at Black barber shops and beauty salons, and worshipping at Black churches, are integral in shaping understanding of racial group interests (Harris-Lacewell, 2006; Taylor, 2002; Calhoun-Brown, 1996).

In short, Black political discourse is frequently distinct from that of other racial groups, and the linked fate perceived by Blacks is stronger than that by Whites, Latinos, and Asians (Bobo and Johnson, 2000). Black political solidarity centers around collective mobilization in the pursuit of racial justice, and as a result, Blacks comprise the most liberal group on
The Political Meaning of White Identity

“White” is viewed as the default racial group in the United States and the reference against which all other races are evaluated (Harris-Lacewell, 2003). Race is less salient for Whites because they are less likely than Blacks to experience intolerance or injustice (Jaret and Reitzes, 1999). Whites are rarely cognizant of their racial identity. Their lack of racial self-awareness is embodied by the “transparency phenomenon”: by virtue of their majority status and dominant social position, Whites are afforded the ability to not consciously think of themselves in terms of race (Flagg, 1993).

While their racial identity is often unconscious, Whites recognize race when a non-White’s race affects their own life (Haney-Lopez, 2006). Whites’ policy attitudes differ markedly from those of Blacks. These opinion differences are most visible on racial issues including affirmative action and school integration, but also persist for nonracial issues, such as the expansion of government services (Kinder and Sanders, 1996). Scholars have proposed and tested a range of theories to explain Whites’ opinions, and while they disagree on the true reasons behind Whites’ racial attitudes, they concur that a distinct racial divide exists between Whites and Blacks (e.g., Kinder and Mendelberg, 2000; Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Bobo, 1988; Sidanius et al., 2000; Sniderman and Piazza, 1995; Sniderman, Crosby and Howell, 2000).

Although we understand the identity and attitude formation of Blacks and Whites, very little is known about how mixed-race people develop their political consciousness. In the sections that follow, I review the literature on multiracial politics and propose hypotheses regarding the relationship between racial identity and political beliefs.
Political Implications of Multiple Racial Identities

In his seminal work on the psychology of the “marginal man,” Park (1931, 538) argued that White-Black biracial people represent “a distinct racial category and a separate social class.” Not wholly embraced by either race, biracials were considered “too Black” for Whites and “too White” for Blacks. Stonequist (1935) later theorized that mixed-race people are greatly impacted by both of their parents’ racial cultures. Biracials are often identifiable to others as such and experience the racial prejudice that exists towards mixed-race people in society. Ultimately, these scholars argued, the impact of being mixed—irrespective of one’s chosen racial identity—will shape biracials’ social outlook.

Even though valid criticisms have been levied against the marginal man hypothesis over the years (e.g., Harris and Sim 2002), the basic tenets of the theory—that biracials are always mindful of their dual racial heritage, and never fully incorporated into a single racial group—are worth considering. The knowledge that they have parents of different racial groups with a contentious history and continuing inequities should shape biracials’ political outlook broadly and their racial attitudes in particular. At the same time, my interviews with biracial individuals suggest that while their racial identity decisions are somewhat fluid, they are nonrandom and persist across social contexts.

There are many reasons for biracials to be politically distinct from their monoracial White and monoracial Black counterparts. Unlike Whites, biracials will be susceptible to racial prejudice and cognizant of their minority racial status. However, White parents may socialize their biracial children to think about race in a less guarded manner than Black parents socialize their monoracial Black children. Biracials’ relatively lighter skin and more Eurocentric features may also make them less vulnerable to discrimination than monoracial Blacks, and subsequently less mindful of racial inequality.

Yet identity construction is complex and purposeful. Group identifiers pay greater attention to those issues most involving the group’s interests (Conover, 1984). Biracials’ subjective group identities should be a meaningful barometer of their racial group accep-
tance and attachment. We should therefore expect that biracials will express especially distinctive opinions on those political issues most salient to the interest of the racial group with which they identify—issues of an explicitly racial nature. Biracials should express less distinctive attitudes on issues indirectly linked to their racial group’s interests, such as symbolically racial policies like social welfare and nonracial policies like abortion.

Focusing on the three most common identities adopted by White-Black biracials—Black, White, and White-Black—I analyze the political meanings associated with each and theorize how subjective identity impacts policy beliefs.

**Biracial, Singular Black Identity**

W.E.B. Du Bois argued that an integral element of Black solidarity is a collective Black identity, rooted in a common historical and cultural experience, though not necessarily a shared biological lineage (Du Bois, 1903). Biracials who identify as singularly Black exemplify this conception of collective Black identity, signifying a distinct allegiance, sense of personal awareness, purpose, and shared interest with fellow Blacks. Among biracial, singular Black identifiers we should expect to find strong feelings of a Black linked fate, an increased recognition of racial disparities, and an avid commitment to the promotion of policies intended to assist racial minorities and other disadvantaged groups.

Yet, given their immediate White heritage, these biracial Blacks should be politically distinct from their monoracial Black counterparts. White parentage, coupled with the social privileges that Whiteness provides, may exert substantial influence on biracial Black identifiers. Therefore, even though they label themselves as Black, biracial Blacks should have political outlooks slightly more akin to that of Whites than do monoracial Blacks. The policy areas which should produce the strongest divergence in attitudes from monoracial Blacks are those in which race is most salient, including affirmative action and perceptions of racial discrimination.
Biracial, Singular White Identity

In traditional American culture, Whiteness is tautologically defined as “that which is not non-White” (Haney-Lopez, 2006), while Blackness is characterized as “having any traceable Black ancestry” (Davis, 2001). Biracials who identify as singularly White defy these social conventions. While almost nothing is known about White-identified biracials, the decision to not identify as Black suggests that race is largely inconsequential in their day-to-day lives. Low in race salience, biracial Whites give no serious contemplation to racial issues and at times have a naive understanding of Black history, culture, and politics. The previous chapter has shown that singular White-identifying biracials are less likely to live in neighborhoods with large Black populations; this greater detachment from the Black community and failure to integrate a Black identity may subsequently promote a longing for full social acceptance among Whites.

At the same time, by disclosing that they have a Black parent, biracials who choose to identify as singularly White fully recognize that they are “biologically” biracial. They are not, as a matter of course, denying their Blackness, but rather failing to integrate a Black identity into their self-concept. In light of their racial awareness—minimal as it may be—biracial Whites should be more understanding than monoracial Whites of the problems facing Blacks, and possess at least a moderate interest in pursuing policies to alleviate them. Along these lines, biracial White identifiers should possess outlooks that are significantly more racially liberal than those held by monoracial Whites. Relative to biracials who identify as at least part Black, however, singular White identifying biracials should be markedly more conservative in their racial and nonracial views.

5Multiracialism research rarely attempts or is able to locate these biracial Whites, and the few studies that do find them have been limited by small sample sizes. See Cross (2003) for a critique of Rockquemore and Brunsma’s failure to assess this population in their book, Beyond Black.
Biracial, White-Black Identity

In their decision to identify with multiple races, Biracial White-Blacks separate themselves from Biracial Blacks and Biracial Whites. They relate to members of a racial minority group yet they do not seem to possess a sweeping sense of Black group consciousness. Relative to biracials who identify as Black, those who identify as White-Black should be less likely to perceive grave inequality between the two races and be less supportive of policies that address such inequities.

My analyses of biracial identity construction established that White-Blacks’ dual racial identity is shaped by greater diversity of racial contact, including more racially heterogeneous peer networks, which may help them develop a broader understanding of race or group membership. The decision to identify as both White and Black—two seemingly contradictory identities in the U.S. racial context—may be illustrative of and also a contributing factor towards a uniquely broad-minded social and political outlook.

Data and Methods

Many large surveys do not allow respondents to identify with multiple racial groups, so it is often impossible to identify mixed-race individuals in the most commonly used datasets. Although the General Social Survey and the National Election Study allow respondents to identify with multiple races, their sample sizes are too small to garner a sufficient number of mixed-race respondents. Moreover, because these surveys do not ask the race of respondents’ parents, researchers are unable to pinpoint individuals who identify with a single race but have mixed-race parentage.

The data employed here successfully overcome these limitations. In order to evaluate the relationship between racial background, identity, and political attitudes, I analyze Freshman Survey data collected by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute. Every year, CIRP surveys a nationally-
representative sample of college freshman to understand the demographic profiles of entering college students. The survey includes questions on students’ families, educational backgrounds, interests and an extensive battery of political questions.

The strengths of the Freshman Surveys distinguish them from other large sample survey datasets currently used to study people of mixed-race, such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) and the Census Public Use Microdata Sample. Unlike these data, the Freshman Surveys include questions on mother’s race and father’s race. Especially notable is the Freshman Survey’s large sample size; pooling data from the three years in which respondents were asked their parents’ races (2001, 2002, and 2003) yields a sample of about 3500 respondents of White-Black parentage (and nearly 1 million monoracial Whites and monoracial Blacks).

Defining “Biracial”

Respondents were asked the race of their parents, and were permitted to mark multiple races for each. Five different racial groups are examined: Monoracial Whites (who identify as White and have two White parents), Biracial Whites (who identify as White and have one White parent and one Black parent), Biracial White-Blacks (who identify as White and Black and have one White parent and one Black parent), Biracial Blacks (who identify as Black and have one White parent and one Black parent), and Monoracial Blacks (who identify as Black and have two Black parents).

Table 4.1 shows that individuals with parents of the same race almost always self-
Race of Parents

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Identity</th>
<th>Both White</th>
<th>Both Black</th>
<th>One White, One Black</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>99.97%</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
<td>99.87%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Black</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>858,573</td>
<td>80,558</td>
<td>3,462</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Racial Parentage as a Predictor of Respondent Identity. Whereas almost all respondents with two White parents identify as White, and respondents with two Black parents identify as Black, individuals with one White parent and one Black parent are divided in their identity decisions; 55 percent identify as White-Black, 38 percent identify as singularly Black, and 7 percent identify as singularly White. These findings suggest that the one-drop rule no longer defines group belonging for biracials.

identify solely with that race—99.97 percent for monoracial Whites, and 99.87 for monoracial Blacks. People of mixed racial parentage, however, are much less constrained in their identity decisions. A majority of biracials—55 percent—identify as White-Black, while a large proportion choose to identify as singularly Black.

The Racial Divide in Political Attitudes and Behavior

In assessing differences in opinion across racial groups, the dependent variables of interest are political attitudes on explicitly racial issues, implicitly racial issues, and nonracial issues. Responses are coded from 0 to 1 such that higher values are indicative of more politically liberal views. (Specific question wording and variable coding can be found in Appendix A.)

The primary independent variable is racial identity, as defined by the race(s) the respondent marks to designate himself or herself. Racial identity is then broken down, such that biracial Whites are compared to monoracial Whites, and biracial Blacks are compared to monoracial Blacks. Biracial Whites and biracial Blacks are then compared to their biracial White-Black identifying counterparts.

In designating race as a predictor of political attitudes, these analyses treat racial identity decisions as causally prior to policy evaluations. This operationalization is in line with
sociological literature indicating that biracials spend years grappling with their racial identities \cite{Rockquemore2008, DaCosta2007, Funderburg1994}. Many ethnic politics studies also suggest that group identity develops first and political consciousness follows \cite{Conover1984, Horowitz1985, Beissinger2002}. For some biracials, historic political events—such as the changing of the Census or the election of a mixed-race president—may play a role in influencing identity choice. It is also possible that biracials’ feelings about race-based issues can shape their perceptions of certain racial groups\footnote{For example, negative affect towards policies like welfare may engender feelings of resentment towards Blacks as a group, and push biracials away from a Black identity of any kind.} While these circumstances are plausible, it is unlikely that racial policy attitudes directly impact racial identity choice\footnote{Even less conceivable is the possibility that one’s nonracial policy attitudes, such as feelings towards gay marriage or abortion, would shape her racial identity formation.} The political outcomes found here are thus explained by racial identity, and not vice versa.

Descriptive statistics are shown in Appendix B and demonstrate that there are considerable differences in demographic profiles by racial group that are also likely predictors of political attitudes. As such, regression analyses include covariates for gender, mother’s education, father’s education, family income, parents’ relationship status, religion, region, community context (median income, proportion Black non-Hispanic, and population density), and year surveyed. Separate regressions are computed for White identifiers, Black identifiers, and biracials. For White identifiers and Black identifiers, matching was used before each regression to better ensure comparability along demographic characteristics. For ease of interpretation, I use the ordered logistic regression estimates to generate responses on the 0 to 1 scale and present the predicted differences in responses between the racial groups. Reported results are outcomes for racial background/identity; all other regression variable impacts are not shown here\footnote{To verify that results are robust to alternative methodological approaches, I also ran ordered logistic models without matching and ordinary least squares models (with and without matching). Results persist across these other model specifications and are omitted here.}
Race and Monoracial Biracial Biracial Biracial Monoracial Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monoracial White</th>
<th>Biracial White</th>
<th>Biracial White-Black</th>
<th>Biracial Black</th>
<th>Monoracial Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racism is a Problem</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Understanding</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative Action</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: OPINION ESTIMATES FOR ATTITUDES TOWARDS EXPLICITLY RACIAL ISSUES. Percentages indicate agreement that racism is a problem, it is important to promote racial understanding, and that affirmative action in college should be permitted. Higher percentages represent more racially liberal responses. Monoracial Whites express the most conservative racial attitudes and monoracial Blacks express the most liberal racial attitudes.

Explicitly Racial Attitudes

In assessing the relationship between racial background, identity choice, and explicitly racial attitudes, three measures of racial opinion are evaluated: the degree to which one believes that racial discrimination continues to be a problem, the level of importance placed on promoting racial understanding, and respondents’ support for affirmative action in college admissions.

Table 4.2 displays the opinion estimates on these issues for each racial group. Unsurprisingly, the largest divide appears between monoracial Whites and monoracial Blacks, with monoracial Whites expressing the least support for racial issues. Among biracial respondents, the race(s) with which one chooses to identify has strong implications for her perceptions of issues that are explicitly racial in nature.

Figure 4.1 presents the regression estimates of racial attitude differences, by racial group. As shown in Panel (a), biracial Whites are substantively as likely as monoracial Whites to believe that racism is a major problem in the United States. However, on the other two racial measures, just being of immediate Black heritage is enough to shape opinion. Relative to monoracial Whites, biracial Whites are 6 percent more likely to believe that it is important to help promote racial understanding and 7 percent more likely to support affirmative action in college admissions.

Panel (b) illustrates that biracial Blacks express racial attitudes that are mostly indis-
tistinguishable from those held by monoracial Blacks. Biracial Blacks are about as likely as monoracial Blacks to think it is important to help promote racial understanding and support affirmative action. Biracial Blacks express somewhat weaker support for the view that racism is a major problem, though this difference, while statistically significant, is still only by a few percentage points.

Panel (c) compares the three biracial identity groups with each other. Despite their identification as partly White, biracial White-Blacks possess racial attitudes that are mostly comparable to those of biracial Blacks. Identifying as at least partly Black significantly increases the likelihood that one views racial discrimination as a major problem. At roughly similar rates, biracial White-Blacks and biracial Blacks agree that racial discrimination is a problem and believe it is important to promote racial understanding. However, biracials who identify as White are markedly less likely to subscribe to these views.

In sum, on matters explicitly racial in nature, identifying as Black is a key predictor of racially liberal views and a commitment to racial progress. Biracial White-Blacks—like their singular-Black identifying counterparts—do see racial discrimination as a continued problem, express a strong commitment to helping improve race relations and tend to support affirmative action, a policy intended to help lessen racial disparities. Hence a real racial awareness and fidelity to racial causes exists within the White-Black identifying population. Similarly high levels of racial liberalism are not apparent for biracial Whites. While they are more supportive of affirmative action than monoracial Whites, biracial Whites are as disinclined to recognize or admit to continued racial discrimination.
Figure 4.1: REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS EXPLICITLY RACIAL ISSUES. LEGEND: w=biracial White; b=biracial Black. Panel (a) shows differences in attitudes between White identifiers, Panel (b) shows differences between Black identifiers, and Panel (c) compares the three biracial groups, by identity choice. Higher values indicate more racially liberal views. Values shown are point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals. All else equal, biracial Whites are slightly more racially liberal than monoracial Whites, while no such difference exists among Black identifiers. Despite being slightly more racially liberal than monoracial Whites, biracial Whites are still considerably more conservative than their biracial peers.

Table 4.3: OPINION ESTIMATES FOR ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMPLICITLY RACIAL ISSUES. Percentages indicate support for criminals’ rights, agreement that the death penalty should be prohibited, and support for stronger federal gun control laws. Higher percentages represent more liberal responses. Monoracial Whites express the most conservative attitudes, while monoracial Blacks express the most liberal attitudes.

**Implicitly Racial Attitudes**

Table 4.3 shows opinions regarding the implicitly racial issues of crime policy—criminals’ rights, the death penalty, and gun control. Across these issues, monoracial Blacks are again the most liberal and monoracial Whites the most conservative. However, the range in attitudes is not as wide, and the difference between these two groups is generally ten or fewer percentage points.

Corresponding ordered logistic regression results are displayed in Figure 4.2. As shown in Panel (a), biracial Whites have attitudes that are analogous to or more liberal than those
held by monoracial Whites. Similarly, Panel (b) demonstrates that biracial Blacks tend to be more conservative than monoracial Blacks. So on the death penalty and gun control in particular, singular-identifying biracials possess views that are more moderate than their monoracial White and Black counterparts.

In contrasting the three biracial groups, Panel (c) illustrates that biracials have implicitly racial opinions that are largely akin to one another. In spite of the fact that, relative to White-Black identifiers, biracial Whites demonstrate somewhat more punitive attitudes towards criminals, all three groups have generally similar views on the death penalty and gun control.

Figure 4.2: REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMPLICITLY RACIAL ISSUES. LEGEND: w=biracial White; b=biracial Black. Panel (a) shows differences in attitudes between White identifiers, Panel (b) shows differences between Black identifiers, and Panel (c) compares the three biracial groups, by identity choice. Higher values are indicative of more racially liberal views. Values shown are point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals.
Race and Monoracial Biracial Biracial Biracial Monoracial Identification

White White White-Black Black Black

Abortion Rights 51.0% 57.8% 59.7% 56.4% 48.3%
Married Women 77.8% 72.6% 83.5% 76.7% 71.4%
Gay Marriage 55.9% 59.3% 66.3% 59.3% 47.5%

Table 4.4: Opinion Estimates for Attitudes Towards Nonracial Issues. Percentages indicate agreement that abortion should be legal, disagreement that married women are “best confined to the home and family,” and agreement that gay couples should be allowed to legally marry. Higher values indicate more liberal responses. Biracial White-Blacks express the most liberal opinions regarding women and laws supporting gay marriage.

Attitudes Towards Women and Gay Rights

To gain a more general sense of how racial background and identity shape political outlook, I turn to issues that are distinctly nonracial in nature, but affect groups that often face discrimination: women’s and gay rights. I measure the types of social freedoms respondents feel should be afforded to these groups, examining views on abortion, the role of married women in society, and gay marriage. Raw opinion differences shown in Table 4.4 demonstrate that biracial White-Blacks are the most liberal group on all of these issues, while monoracial Blacks have the most conservative views.

The magnitude of these effects persists in the presence of statistical controls, as Figure 4.3 reveals. Biracial Whites have views that are generally similar to those of monoracial Whites, though biracials are significantly less supportive of the rights of working women, agreeing more with the statement that “the activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.

Compared with their monoracial Black counterparts, biracial Blacks are much more liberal on all issues of women’s and gay rights. Biracial Blacks are about 7 percent more supportive of a woman’s right to an abortion, 5 percent more likely to support women working outside the home, and 10 percent more in favor of gays’ right to legal marital status. Thus despite their congruous racial identities, Blacks of biracial parentage possess markedly more liberal social attitudes than Blacks of monoracial parentage.
Even more liberal than biracials who identify as Black are biracials who identify as White-Black. Panel (c) of Figure 4.3 indicates that biracial White-Blacks express the most socially progressive opinions of all three biracial groups. While they are statistically indistinguishable from the other biracial groups on abortion, White-Blacks are as supportive of gay marriage as biracial Blacks, and have more egalitarian views on the rights of married women.

Figure 4.3: Regression Estimates of Differences in Attitudes Towards Abortion, Women’s Role in Society, and Gay Rights. LEGEND: w=biracial White; b=biracial Black. Panel (a) shows differences in attitudes between White identifiers, Panel (b) shows differences between Black identifiers, and Panel (c) compares the three biracial groups, by identity choice. Higher values are indicative of more liberal views. Values shown are point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals.
Discussion

At the outset of this chapter, it was argued that measuring race as a mutually exclusive construct implicitly discounts variation present within racial groups—particularly, among the rising mixed-race population—and may ultimately obscure the influence of race on political attitudes. The results described here demonstrate that such a one-dimensional treatment of race does mask the influence of racial background on political attitudes. When parents’ race is disentangled from racial identity, important political differences within groups are revealed.

Biracials who identify as White have more ideologically liberal views on racial and nonracial issues than typical White identifiers (i.e., those with two White parents). Biracial Whites are significantly more likely to value racial tolerance and support affirmative action. They are also more opposed to the death penalty and more likely to endorse stronger gun laws, a notable finding given that these issues disproportionately affect the Black community. Although biracial Whites define themselves as being part of the racial majority, their political outlook is reflective of their experiences as racial minorities. While they share the same racial label as monoracial Whites, these biracials have different worldviews that are captured in their political attitudes. Biracial Blacks’ political views are similarly reflective of their mixed-race background. While biracial Blacks are largely indistinguishable from monoracial Blacks on explicitly racial matters, they express somewhat more conservative policy opinions on those indirectly racial in nature.

Findings on the subjects of women’s and gay rights are especially telling. On policies involving these groups, being biracial and also identifying oneself as White-Black is predictive of more liberal attitudes. For example, in contrast to the 48 percent of monoracial Blacks and 56 percent of monoracial Whites who believe that gays should be allowed to marry, 66 percent of biracial White-Blacks respond this way. In their strong endorsement of women’s and gay rights, biracials who choose to identify as White-Black or singularly Black adopt attitudes that are distinctly more progressive than those shared...
by other racial groups. The particular decision to incorporate a multiracial identity is sug-
gestive of a heightened awareness of inequality regarding marginalized minorities. Biracial
White-Blacks are more sensitive to upholding or pushing for the freedoms of groups facing
discrimination; the decision to identify with multiple races may also be indicative of a more
open-minded political outlook.

Explaining Biracial Liberalism: Impact of Parents’ Ideology

Parental influence is central to the development of individuals’ political ideologies and
partisan attachments (Campbell et al., 1960). One probable explanation for biracial White-
Blacks’ generally more liberal attitudes is the unusually progressive outlook of their par-
ents.

While marriages between Whites and Blacks are on the rise, they remain relatively
uncommon, and are less frequent than economic models of racial contact predict (Fryer,
2007). For Whites and Blacks, the decision to interracially marry is no small act. Those
who choose to marry outside their race likely possess unorthodox, more tolerant political
views than those who do not. As a result, we should expect that on average, the types of
people who have biracial children are more racially and socially liberal than the types of
people who have monoracial children. Interracial parents may encourage their children to
endorse a particularly liberal belief system. The manner in which a biracial individual is
raised should subsequently shape the ideas, values, and principles that she adopts.

One way to test whether biracials are simply inheriting liberal political views is to
compare the attitudes of their parents to the parents of monoracial Whites and Blacks. Un-
fortunately, the Freshman Surveys do not include questions about parents’ political views.
However, a different public opinion survey—the Kaiser, Harvard, Washington Post “Race
and Ethnicity in 2001” poll—inquires about experiences with interracial relationships. Al-
though this survey does not ask whether respondents are inter racially married, it does ask
whether they have dated someone of a different race and asks specifically the race of the
person they dated. The Race and Ethnicity survey consequently facilitates a comparison of the policy attitudes of the types of people who have biracial children, along with those likely to have monoracial children.

To gauge opinion, I use the 2001 Race and Ethnicity survey to contrast the opinions of three hypothetical parent groups, parents of: monoracial Blacks (i.e., Blacks who have not dated a White person); monoracial Whites (i.e., Whites who have not dated a Black person), and biracial White-Blacks (i.e., the average political views of Blacks who have dated a White person, with those of Whites who have dated a Black person). I then compare these opinions with those expressed by the three hypothetical children groups in the Freshman Surveys: monoracial Blacks, monoracial Whites, and biracial White-Blacks (of any identity). I analyze political issues that are asked in both surveys: affirmative action, gay marriage, abortion, criminals’ rights, and ideology.

Given their use of different question wordings, only ordinal comparisons can be made across these two surveys. Analyses are therefore meant to serve as a rough measure of whether biracials are possibly inheriting their parents’ views. Even so, the pattern of “children’s” attitudes mirrors that which is predicted by “parents” views, as seen in Figure 4.4.

The students’ opinions, presented in the right panel, clearly mimic those held by their “parents” which are shown on the left panel. On nearly every issue, the pattern in the Freshman Survey findings match those of the Kaiser Survey. The distinctly liberal outlook of biracials on abortion, gay marriage, and ideology are akin to those held by White and Black adults who date outside their race. These findings thus suggest that the “unique worldviews” of biracial White-Blacks stem, at least in part, from the fact that they tend to have White and Black parents who hold more liberal political outlooks than White and Black parents of monoracial White and monoracial Black children.

Whether biracials are merely a product of their liberal interracial parents is not entirely clear from these data. Biracials’ unique personal experiences may also play a role in shaping their socially progressive political beliefs, independent of their parents’ ideology and
Figure 4.4: Comparing Parents’ and Children’s Attitudes. The left graph presents attitudes of White adults and Black adults, differentiating whether or not they have dated someone of the opposite race. LEGEND: W=Whites who have not dated Blacks; B=Blacks who have not dated Whites; M=Average of Whites who have dated Blacks and Blacks who have dated Whites. The right graph presents attitudes of Monoracial Whites (W), Monoracial Blacks (B), and Biracial White-Blacks of any identity (M). Attitude responses are ordered from 0 (most conservative) to 1 (most liberal), such that higher values represent more liberal views. These findings indicate that the attitudes of biracials (right panel) mirror those that would be predicted by their hypothetical parents (left panel).

socialization. While the data analyzed here do not permit a more thorough examination of this possibility, this is an issue that future research should examine in greater depth.

Multiracialism and Implications for Ethnic Identity Theory

Although this research has focused on a seemingly small racial subset, the findings discussed here contribute to our broader understanding of the political ramifications of identity formation. Results speak widely to the fluidity of ethnic identity, informing our understanding of how American racial identities develop and translate into political group connections. In particular, these findings contribute to the longstanding scholarly debate on the relative merits of constructivism and primordialism.

Research on group attachments has consistently found that subjective group allegiances are more politically influential than objective group membership (Huddy 2003, Waters 1990). Indeed, this work has shown that not all biracials of White-Black parentage feel a
strong sense of attachment to each of their racial heritages. There are distinct differences among biracials based on their chosen racial identities, an outcome that runs contrary to primordialist claims that racial identity is predetermined and unchanging.

At the same time, constructed identity—as evinced by the racial labels individuals choose to adopt—does not independently predict political attitudes. That is, a failure to break down racial identification conceals the significant influence of racial ancestry on policy opinion. Biracials are politically affected by their racial background, even if they do not self-identify with this background. Along these lines, the primordialist argument that ethnic identities are fixed and difficult to re-form once established is supported by these findings.

All told, these results give pause to the traditional theories of racial and ethnic identity, supporting the argument that race can be both constructed and primordial. While racial boundaries are clearly permeable, the effects of politicized minority ancestry endure even when individuals fail to identify with this ancestry. Although neither ethnicity theory deserves unequivocal support, attempts to discredit either one appear to be unfruitful.
Appendix A: Question Wording and Response Coding

CIRP Freshman Surveys

Demographic Controls

Race: “Please indicate the ethnic background of yourself, your father, and your mother. (Mark all that apply in each column.)”

Mother’s race: Mothers who are marked as only White or only Black and have a child with a singular-identifying man of the opposite race are examined. Thus, mother’s race is coded as “Black” if Black and no other race is marked, or as “White” if White and no other race is marked.

Father’s race: Fathers who are marked as only White or only Black and have a child with a singular-identifying woman of the opposite race are examined. Thus, father’s race is coded as “Black” if Black and no other race is marked, or as “White” if White and no other race is marked.

Respondent’s race: Only students who have two White parents, two Black parents, or one White parent and one Black parent are examined. Students’ race is coded as singularly “Black” if Black and no other race is marked; singularly “White” if White and no other race is marked; and “White-Black” if White and Black and no other race is marked.

Gender: 0=male, 1=female.

Home region: Indicators created for 3 areas: South (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MO, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV); Pacific West (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA); Other (all other states).


Median Household Income: Median income of respondent’s zip code (“median income” as defined by 2000 Census data); all incomes coded continuously.

Percent Black non-Hispanic: Percent of respondent’s zip code that identified as Black,
non-Hispanic (as defined by 2000 Census data).

**Father's education:** “What is the highest level of formal education obtained by [your father]?” Indicators created for High school diploma or less, Some college, College degree, and Some graduate school or graduate degree.

**Mother's education:** “What is the highest level of formal education obtained by [your mother]?” Indicators created for High school diploma or less, Some college, College degree, and Some graduate school or graduate degree.

**Income:** “What is your best estimate of your parents’ total income last year? Consider income from all sources before taxes.” Indicators created for: $29,999 or less; $30,000-$59,999; $60,000-$99,999; $100,000 or more.

**Parents’ status:** “Are your parents both alive and living with each other; both alive, divorced or living apart; [or] one or both deceased?” Two indicators: Parents living together; parent(s) deceased or living apart.

**Religion:** “Current religious preference.” Indicators created for Baptist, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Other Christian (including Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, LDS, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Seventh Day Adventist, Unitarian, United Church of Christ), Other Religion (including Buddhist, Islamic, and Hindu), and No religion.

**Explicitly Racial Issues**

**Racial discrimination:** “Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in the U.S.”: 0=Agree Strongly, 0.33=Agree Somewhat, 0.67=Disagree Somewhat, 1=Disagree Strongly.

**Racial understanding:** “Importance of helping to promote racial understanding.”: 0=Not Important, 0.33=Somewhat Important, 0.67=Very Important, 1=Essential.

**Affirmative action:** “Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished.”: 0=Agree Strongly, 0.33=Agree Somewhat, 0.67=Disagree Somewhat, 1=Disagree Strongly.
Implicitly Racial Issues

**Criminals’ Rights:** “There is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals.” 0=Agree Strongly, 0.33=Agree Somewhat, 0.67=Disagree Somewhat, 1=Disagree Strongly.

**Death Penalty:** “The death penalty should be abolished.” 0=Disagree Strongly, 0.33=Disagree Somewhat, 0.67=Agree Somewhat, 1=Agree Strongly.

**Gun Prevention:** “The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns.” 0=Disagree Strongly, 0.33=Disagree Somewhat, 0.67=Agree Somewhat, 1=Agree Strongly.

Attitudes Towards Abortion, Women, and Gays

**Abortion:** “Abortion should be legal.”: 0=Disagree Strongly, 0.33=Disagree Somewhat, 0.67=Agree Somewhat, 1=Agree Strongly.

**Married women:** “The activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.” 0=Agree Strongly, 0.33=Agree Somewhat, 0.67=Disagree Somewhat, 1=Disagree Strongly.

**Gay marriage:** “Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.”: 0=Disagree Strongly, 0.33=Disagree Somewhat, 0.67=Agree Somewhat, 1=Agree Strongly.


Variables Gauging Parents’ Ideology

**Asked of unmixed, non-Hispanic Whites:** “Have you EVER dated someone who was Black or African American?” 0=no, don’t know, refused; 1=yes.

**Asked of unmixed, non-Hispanic Blacks:** “Have you EVER dated someone who was White?” 0=no, don’t know, refused; 1=yes.
**Affirmative Action:** “Do you favor or oppose employers and colleges making an extra effort to find and recruit qualified minorities?” 0=oppose, don’t know, refused; 1=favor.

**Felon enfranchisement:** “As you may know, in some states convicted felons permanently lose their right to vote. Do you favor or oppose returning the right to vote to ex-felons whose crimes were not violent ones?” 0=oppose, don’t know, refused; 1=favor.

**Gay Marriage:** “Thinking about your own values and morals, I’d like you to tell me whether you think [marriages between people of the same sex are] generally acceptable or generally unacceptable.” 0=generally unacceptable, don’t know, refused; 1=generally acceptable.

**Abortion:** “Thinking about your own values and morals, I’d like you to tell me whether you think it is generally acceptable or generally unacceptable [for someone to have an abortion].” 0=generally unacceptable, don’t know, refused; 1=generally acceptable.

**Ideology:** “Would you say your views in most political matters are liberal, moderate, conservative, something else, or haven’t you given this much thought?”: 0=Conservative; 0.5=moderate, something else, haven’t given this much thought; 1=liberal.
Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.5 displays demographic differences for gender, region of residence, and religion. White-Black identifiers are the racial group least likely to live in the South, an unsurprising finding given the South’s history of strict adherence to the one-drop rule. Also notable are group differences in religious affiliation. Monoracial Whites are most likely to be Catholic or non-Baptist Christian, while a plurality of monoracial Blacks are Baptist. Among the three biracial groups, Black identifiers are most likely to be Baptist—a predominantly Black religion—while White identifiers are the group most likely to be Jewish—a predominantly White religion. Approximately 25 percent of all biracials are nonreligious, compared to only 17 percent of monoracial Whites and 9 percent of monoracial Blacks surveyed.

Figure 4.5 provides an overview of the socioeconomic demographic characteristics of the five racial categories. As illustrated in the first graph, the greatest disparity for family income exists between monoracial Whites and monoracial Blacks. Only 10 percent of monoracial Whites have a household income below $30,000, compared with 40 percent of monoracial Blacks; moreover, one-third of monoracial Whites have incomes of $60,000 or more, relative to only one-tenth of monoracial Blacks. Biracials fall in between these two groups, and identity choice is correlated with income. Biracial Whites have family incomes most similar to monoracial Whites, and biracial Blacks have incomes more like monoracial Blacks. In contrast, White-Blacks’ family incomes fall between the biracial Whites and biracial Blacks. Each parent’s level of education follows similar patterns, though there is comparably less range among biracial groups in these areas. These significant group differences reinforce the importance of accounting for demographic characteristics in the

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11 One potential explanation for this lower rate of religious affiliation is that the interracial parents of biracial children are, on average, less religious than parents of monoracial children. Given that the status quo in the United States is to be religiously affiliated (76 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christians, while only 15 percent say they are nonreligious (Kosmin and Keysar 2009), it is possible that the types of people who are nonreligious also take an unorthodox approach to other social issues, and are more comfortable engaging in interracial relationships.
Parents’ Races and Self-Identification

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Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics of Gender, Region, and Religion, by Racial Parentage and Respondent Racial Identity. Racial group differences are most notable for religion, as 45 percent of Blacks are Baptist, compared to only 9 percent of Whites. Biracials—irrespective of racial identity—are the group most likely to be nonreligious, and most likely to live in the Pacific West states.

regressions of political attitudes.
Figure 4.5: HOUSEHOLD SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND, BY RACIAL PARENTAGE AND IDENTITY. For both family income and parents’ education, the largest group disparities are between monoracial Whites and monoracial Blacks. Biracial respondents tend to fall somewhere in the middle, with income but not parents’ education correlated with their choice of racial identity.

Figure 4.6, Figure 4.7, and Figure 4.8 present raw attitudes towards explicitly racial, implicitly racial, and nonracial policies.

Figure 4.6: ATTITUDES TOWARDS EXPLICITLY RACIAL ISSUES, BY RACIAL PARENTAGE AND IDENTITY. LEGEND: W=monoracial White; w=biracial White; m=biracial White-Black; b=biracial Black; B=monoracial Black. Responses are ordered from 0 (most conservative) to 1 (most liberal), such that higher values indicate more racially liberal views. (Across all issues, monoracial Whites express the most conservative racial attitudes and monoracial Blacks express the most liberal racial attitudes.)
Figure 4.7: Attitudes Towards Implicitly Racial Issues, by Racial Parentage and Identity. Legend: W=monoracial White; w=biracial White; m=biracial White-Black; b=biracial Black; B=monoracial Black. Responses are ordered from 0 (most conservative) to 1 (most liberal), such that higher values indicate more racially liberal views. (On criminals’ rights, the death penalty, and gun control, monoracial Whites express the most conservative attitudes, while monoracial Blacks express the most liberal attitudes.)

Figure 4.8: Attitudes Towards Abortion, Women’s Role in Society, and Gay Rights, by Racial Parentage and Identity. Legend: W=monoracial White; w=biracial White; m=biracial White-Black; b=biracial Black; B=monoracial Black. Responses are ordered from 0 (most conservative) to 1 (most liberal), such that higher values indicate more liberal views. (Biracial White-Blacks and biracial Blacks express the most liberal opinions regarding working women and laws supporting gay marriage.)
Chapter 5

Letting People Speak for Themselves: Interviews with Biracial Young Adults

The data presented thus far has been entirely quantitative, coming from nationally representative surveys. The corresponding results have allowed for a detailed examination of biracial identity and political attitude development, one of the first of its kind. Although these data tell a rich story of the political consequences of biracial identity, such surveys leave many questions unaddressed. For example, they say nothing of whether a seemingly consequential feature like skin color influences racial group attachments and political ideologies. Furthermore, quantitative surveys discount the ways in which interpersonal social interactions—both the positive and not-so-positive—create indelible memories that impact racial awareness.

Only by hearing the voices of biracial people directly can the nuances of racial and political identity formation fully emerge. By listening to biracials’ experiences first-hand—how they look, the way they are identified by their family members and peers, the discrimination they face, and when and why they internalize others’ perceptions of them into their own self-concept—we are able to understand more completely the multidimensional nature of identity.
This chapter aims to fill in some of the gaps of our understanding of biracial identity. To learn more about how identity progresses and becomes established, I conduct in-depth interviews with biracial young people. I begin by discussing ways in which factors such as phenotype, familial relationships, social environment, and peer dynamics—variables which are not included in standard surveys—shape racial and political identity. I then explain my data collection process and describe my findings, concluding with a discussion of the implications of the results.

Potential Determinants of Identity and Political Belonging

Phenotype and Racial Consciousness

For Black Americans, the link between skin color and social status is acute and long-standing. Relative to Blacks with dark skin, those with lighter skin are often better educated, associated with prestigious family backgrounds and hold elite professions (Hill 2002; Hughes and Hertel 1990; Keith and Herring 1991). Given the strong correlation between lighter skin color and higher status, and the relationship between White ancestry and light skin color, it would seem that among the Black population, those with the most proximate White ancestry—that is, a White parent—would have the greatest access to the privileges accompanying Whiteness. Accordingly, people with White-Black parentage should be particularly affected by phenotype’s impact on life experiences, and the consequences of phenotype should be apparent in biracials’ racial identity construction.

Multiracial identity scholars have argued that physical appearance—particularly skin color, but also hair texture, hair color and eye color—is fundamental in shaping racial identity (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008). People of mixed-race often identify with the racial group with which they most resemble. Skin color is likely a strong predictor of

1Though, as discussed here and elsewhere (e.g., Brown 2001; Hunter 2004; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008), given the one-drop rule’s legacy, singular-White identification remains uncommon among White-Black Americans.
racial identity because it is connected both to the way mixed-race people see themselves, as well as how people in society label and treat them.

Societal attitudes and treatment on the basis of phenotype may, in turn, influence biracials’ identification and political outlook for a multitude of reasons. First, on account of their more Eurocentric features, lighter-skinned people of Black heritage are sometimes seen as an exotic “Other,” stereotyped as more privileged, favorable, and attractive than their darker-skinned counterparts (Hill 2002; Drake and Cayton 1945). Lighter skin color is also associated with greater self esteem among Black women and higher levels of self-efficacy among Black men (Thompson and Keith 2004). Phenotype is also likely to influence racial identity construction via its link to racial discrimination. Individuals are susceptible to stereotypes if and only if they are classified as being a member of the relevant social group (Bodenhausen and Macrae 1998; Fiske and Neuberg 1990), and studies find that people with more Afrocentric facial features are judged as more likely to possess stereotypically Black traits, such as laziness, musicality, athleticism, and hostility (Blair et al. 2002). Moreover, male prison inmates with more Afrocentric features receive harsher sentences, even when accounting for variables such as crime seriousness and prior offenses (Blair, Judd and Chapleau, 2004).

To the extent that biracial White-Blacks with a less Afrocentric phenotype are more inclined to be viewed and treated as “not quite Black,” they may also be less susceptible to anti-Black racism and stereotyping. On account of their fairer skin and more racially ambiguous appearance, these biracials may come across as more trustworthy or less threatening than their counterparts who have more Afrocentric features. In turn, these lighter-skinned biracials’ diminished likelihood of personally experiencing racial prejudice may result in their being less aware of or able to empathize with the discrimination more commonly experienced by “more Afrocentric” biracials (Hughes and Hertel 1990). This deceased awareness may engender a lessened ability to relate to Black struggles, greater psychological distance from the Black community, and thus a decreased likelihood of iden-
tifying as singularly Black.

Furthermore, although having a “more Eurocentric” phenotype advantages people of Black heritage on many levels socially, it can paradoxically serve as a disadvantage when it comes to Black group acceptance. An ideology exists within the Black community that people of mixed-race are not legitimately Black and are more likely to assimilate to White culture. Lighter skin, straighter hair, and lighter-colored eyes can invoke negative assumptions about racial loyalties and attachments (Shelby 2005; Davis 2001). Light-skinned Blacks—particularly those who are of mixed racial backgrounds—often report that they do not feel “Black enough” (Hunter 1998). These feelings of outsider status appear to be directly related to lighter skin color, as biracials who have darker pigmentation and coarser hair often report feeling more akin to Blacks than other mixed-race people with fairer phenotypes (DaCosta 2007).

Skin color may constrain the racial labels a biracial can “acceptably” adopt. If a person of White-Black parentage looks like he has no Black ancestry at all identifies as singularly Black and attempts to affiliate himself with the Black community, he may experience resistance, not acceptance, from Blacks. Feelings of alienation among lighter-skinned multiracials may subsequently influence their racial identification. The recognition that they are different both in skin tone and social treatment from those with more Afrocentric features further suggests that light-skinned White-Blacks will be less prone to identifying as singularly Black.

In sum, we should anticipate that phenotype is an important predictor of racial identity decisions. Specifically, the possession of less Afrocentric features should be highly correlated with a mixed-race, White-Black identification. Biracials who have Whiter features should be less susceptible to racial prejudice and discrimination, but also more likely to be considered by the Black community as “less than fully Black,” and should therefore be significantly less likely to identify as singularly-Black.
Family Dynamics

We have seen that mother’s race and father’s race and relationship status are important factors in the development of identity. The influence of other family dynamics is less clear. The degree of acceptance one is extended by her extended family should also be important for identity development. Someone whose biracial background is accepted openly by both his extended White and Black family members may identify very differently than someone who has dealt with rejection from a particular side of the family. Similarly, whether one has full-, half-, and/or step-siblings may affect their racial reference point and outlook. A biracial with married parents and full siblings may perceive race differently—and be more inclined to identify as White-Black—than an only child whose biological parents are separated and has monoracial White or Black half-siblings. These dynamics are likely to play a central role in both formation of racial and political identity.

Aside from family, racial environment may also contribute to the formation of biracial identity. A diverse racial environment may be consequential in two ways. It could either make him more cognizant of his mixed-race background, leading him to identify as biracial, or it could cause him to be more aware of racial disparities, consequently self-classifying as either singularly White or singularly Black. Likewise, he might relate more to a certain racial group if the majority of his friends are members of that group. Racial homogeneity could potentially lead him to assimilate to a singular identity while rejecting or minimizing a mixed-race one.

Better understanding the complexities of identity formation helps us refine the relationship between race and political group attachments. While the previous chapters have established a connection between racial self-identification and policy opinion, a more precise breakdown of the correlates of identity is necessary in order to fully gauge the political consequences associated with multiracial backgrounds.
Data and Results

To more closely evaluate the formation of biracial sociopolitical identity, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten biracial young adults. These interviews were completed in-person, over the phone, and via email. Interviews generally lasted between 1 and 2 hours.²

Since the mixed-race population is disproportionately young in age, respondents were adults between 18 and 30 years old, and most were in their early 20s. Respondents were primarily recruited on college campuses through multiracial or minority student organizations, though snowball sampling methods were also used to enlist interview participants.³ Respondents were fairly geographically diverse, coming from the East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast, and one respondent was born and raised overseas. Most respondents had married biological parents, though a few had parents who were divorced (and also had monoracial stepparents and half-siblings). There was also a reasonable sociodemographic mix; most were in college or college educated, but two respondents had a high school degree or less.

While this set of respondents is moderately varied in terms of demographics, these ten interviews are certainly not meant to be representative of young people. Rather, the purpose of these interviews is to supplement the 3500 quantitative surveys previously analyzed, providing greater detail directly from the voices of White-Black biracials. These interviews thus serve as a window into the multiracial experience, shedding some insight into the complex ways in which racial and political identity generate and develop.

The questions asked were intended to stimulate thoughtful conversation and were mostly open-ended. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions, enabling respondents to clarify or elaborate on their answers if necessary. The

²All names and personally identifiable information, such as details regarding specific people, places, or events, have been changed.
³At the end of each interview, respondents were asked if they knew of any other mixed-race people who might be willing to speak with me; if they did, contact information was then requested.
intent of the interviews—to better understand the racial identity and political opinions of the White-Black biracial population—was always stated up-front. Respondents were asked about the development of their racial and other social identities, their childhood, racial interactions, family life, and how (if at all) their racial heritage shapes their political positions and engagement.

As these interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, I followed a prearranged question list. This set of questions was designed to organize and provide direction to the discussion. However, the questions and topics were flexible, and if the respondent wished to spend more time discussing particular issues related to the general topic at hand or change the subject entirely, I accommodated their interests as much as possible.

In order to bring forth the most full and honest responses, I aimed to interview in a manner that would generate widespread participation, while still being sympathetic to the fact that race can be a sensitive subject for multiracial people. Respondents were told that they could skip questions they preferred to not answer and could end the interview at any time, though none chose to do so.

**Findings**

Socialization within the immediate and extended family is a critical component in the development of racial identities, and interviews demonstrate that the attitudes imparted on biracials by their parents are particularly vital to identity formation.

Many respondents said that their parents had spoken openly with them about their racial lineage while growing up. Rather than trying to directly shape their identity, parents typically encouraged their children to respect and value both sides of their heritage. When discussing race with their children, parents sometimes relayed stories of discrimination they had faced years before, when they first met their future in-laws. Most often, biracial respondents described prejudice inflicted upon their Black parent by their White relatives.

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4These questions are available at the end of this chapter.
One young woman spoke of the opposition her Black mother encountered with her White grandfather before her parents were married, saying:

“I think there were jokes when she wasn’t there... My dad had a conversation with his father, they went on a walk one day. It was obvious that they were crying. [My dad asserted], ‘You’re either going to accept Elizabeth, or I’m not going to be around anymore, because I’m going to marry her.’ After that, [my grandpa] was very open around her.” (Twenty-year-old, White-Black identifying female)

Despite some respondents’ admissions that their parents had a difficult time initially being welcomed into the family, ultimately everyone came to support their relationship, likely because they recognized how serious it was.

In addition to their parents’ encounters with prejudice, respondents also spoke of their own less-than-positive exchanges with their family. These interactions, which were never overtly racist, did affect biracials’ feelings of acceptance into their extended families. For example, one male had to contend with hostility from his Black father’s family, who he believed “think I’m better than them because I act and speak a certain way.” Although he did not explicitly say that their criticism guided the way he identified, he did acknowledge that he often felt unwelcome by them due to character traits they affiliated with his Whiteness.

Family structure and relationships were integral in shaping positions on race in other ways. One woman described her extended family as extraordinarily diverse; in addition to her two siblings, she had several mixed-race (White-Asian and White-Black) cousins on both her maternal and paternal side. In our discussion, it occurred to her that she actually had more biracial first cousins than monoracial ones, as well as other extended relatives who had been adopted transracially. While she acknowledged that her family was exceptionally racially diverse, she also said that this diversity was almost never remarked upon. And yet, having spent much time with her family growing up, she believed that being surrounded by so many racial backgrounds and having it be a non-issue impacted her opinion of race as a topic that was too often overblown in the media.

A few respondents had half-siblings of a single race. For some, having a monoracial
sibling served as a racial reference point, a person to whom they compared themselves and recognized disparity. One woman remarked that she—with her brown skin and coarse dark hair—looked nothing like the single White mother and White, blue-eyed half-sister with whom she grew up; her mom and sister were clearly White and she was not, and thus never considered herself White at all, choosing to identify exclusively as Black.

For other biracials, however, having a singularly White or Black sibling had an assimilationist effect on identity construction. One biracial male, who had a blond, blue-eyed White half-brother from his mother’s previous marriage, chose to identify as singularly White, this in spite of his dark coloring. Thus even though familial characteristics usually operate in palpable ways, the relationship between family and identity construction does not always function in a clear-cut causal manner.

Racial Environment and Peer Networks

The racial composition of biracials’ peers, and the way they are received by these peers, deeply influences their identity development. The degree to which they are embraced by either Blacks or Whites is central in determining the race with which they feel most solidarity, or whether they feel equal solidarity with both groups.

Here again, one’s racial reference point strongly guides identity. Growing up in a racially homogeneous setting directs how biracials interpret and internalize their backgrounds. One biracial woman who had mostly White friends prior to attending college grew up in an area with few racial minorities claimed she identified “pretty consistently” as White-Black growing up. She also observed, however, “I was one of 5 or 6 Black people in my high school class,” a comment that seems particularly telling; though she classifies herself as White-Black, when she compares her racial origins to that of her peers, she becomes hyper-aware of her racial minority status in a predominantly White school, identifying (seemingly unconsciously) with those students who also share her minority position.

Other respondents described biases they had endured from classmates. One woman
said that most of her friends were White, and that she did not feel welcomed by Blacks hanging out in large groups, elaborating:

“If I’m with a bunch of African Americans, I feel excluded, for the most part. I [hear] a lot of stereotypically Black language I don’t use, I don’t listen to the same music. I’ve never been accepted at Black tables [in school]. People didn’t see me as Black in high school. I wonder if that’s because I was so academically driven.” (Twenty-year-old, White-Black identifying female)

In addition to peer racial environment shaping biracials’ identities, nearly every person interviewed recounted having been corrected by someone else regarding what their race “truly” was. These opinions were often unprovoked and stated matter-of-factly, as if the biracial individual’s race was simple and clear-cut. According to every person interviewed, Blacks evinced the strongest and most vocal opinions on the topic, often telling them they were “really Black” instead of biracial. To this effect, one woman stated, “I’ve been told that no matter what I call myself, I am Black no matter what. I find that offensive, as that [implies] that my White part of the family had no part in raising me.”

A common annoyance respondents expressed was the expectation that they would label themselves a particular way on a form that inquired about their race. Specifically, several respondents described being pressured to check their race as “Black” when filling out official surveys, applications, or tests. One biracial male, who grew up in Europe, revealed:

“My annoyance with racial identification in the U.S. started when I had to register for high school. On the form I had to mark my race and at that time they didn’t have “other” to mark on the form so I marked both Black and White. When I went to turn in the form, a Black woman was sitting at the desk and said that I can’t do that. She called my [Black] father over and told him what I did and she gave him a ‘how dare he do that’ look. My Dad just looked at her and said, ‘what should I do?’ She got upset and I refused to change it. I said I’m as much White as I am Black and I left it at that. She was furious.” (Twenty-nine-year-old, German identifying male)

And yet, this young man disclosed that he paradoxically also faced criticism for being “not Black enough,” continuing:
“Once I started school and started socializing with other students, I did make an effort to befriend other Black students. For me it was new and I really wanted to get to know them, learn more about my Black culture, etc. But all I encountered was animosity and resentment. Eventually they started calling me names like ‘Oreo’ and accused me of thinking I’m better than them because I ‘talked like I was White.’ It eventually escalated to bullying where some teachers had to step in and stop it.”

His sentiment was echoed by other respondents, who mentioned that their Black peers often distinguished them from “real Blacks” by referring to them as “light-skinned” or remarking that they have “good hair.” One young biracial woman recalled an interaction with a Black female friend in college, in which she expressed interest in the friend’s African American sorority:

“I was asking her questions about it. She was like, ‘I don’t know if you’ll be able to do such-and-such activities, because you’re not really Black.’ I almost didn’t know what to say. I thought, well, who are you to tell me who I am? It was definitely offensive.” (Twenty-one-year old, White-Black identifying biracial female)

Such exchanges with Blacks were commonly documented. Blacks tended to be the most outspoken in their judgments of where biracials “truly” belonged racially. But whereas Blacks would often accuse biracials of “talking White,” the reverse—Whites charging them with “talking Black”—was never reported. In fact, few people brought up outright discrimination from Whites at all. When asked about incidences of White prejudice, most replied they had “never” faced any whatsoever (though one woman did say she once had a White boyfriend whose extended family would joke about his “Black girlfriend”). Although most noted that they had not suffered blatant racism from Whites, they did wonder whether negative sentiments lurked beneath the surface; a number of respondents admitted sometimes feeling uncomfortable in all-White settings, particularly with adults.

This is not to say, however, that Whites did not occasionally voice their racial attitudes. They did, but always in an even-keeled, nonthreatening manner. For example, one biracial female respondent mentioned attending a predominantly Black event with a White friend
and commenting, “We’re the only two White people here!” to which her amused friend rectified, “Uh, you’re Black.”

Regardless of the challenges they sometimes faced when connecting with people belonging to other racial groups, those interviewed generally indicated that they felt comfortable being around all types of people. Interestingly, even those who revealed they had faced strong discrimination by Blacks suggested that this discrimination did not make them any less likely to identify with their Black side.

**Nationality**

Aside from the United States, no other nation in the world subscribes to the belief that one drop of Black blood makes someone singularly Black. This fact that did not go unnoticed by the biracial German male I spoke with, the only non-American interviewed. Unlike all of the other respondents, he said that he felt little solidarity to either Whites or Blacks. He rarely spoke of race with his White friends or work colleagues, and his interactions with Blacks had been fairly negative because his lack of connection to Black culture was usually interpreted as disinterest, shame, and elitism. But he insisted that his lack of any sort of racial solidarity was simply due to his being half-German and growing up in Western Europe. He did not place importance on racial extraction because he was not raised in a setting where race was particularly salient or meaningful.\(^5\) When asked how he racially identified himself, he responded that he was “half German, half Black,” but also declared, “I exclusively identify myself as German and it does not change depending on who I’m with.” He elaborated,

> “Growing up in Germany I didn’t even think about race. My father was Black but in Germany you were considered German if you spoke the language fluently. It wasn’t until I came to the U.S. that it became an issue for me. It is

\(^5\)Ethnicity, immigration, and religion are in fact extremely politically contentious social issues throughout Western Europe. Germany, as we know, has had the most infamous preoccupation with racial purity and White supremacism. However, I think this young man was trying to convey that, when he was growing up in West Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, there was no ideology akin to the one-drop rule, and therefore his Black heritage was not underscored as something with which he should concern himself.
not important to me but in the U.S. people tend to make it a point to figure out ‘what I am.’” (Twenty-nine-year-old, German identifying male)

He continued,

“It just doesn’t factor into my thought process. I see myself with a unique background that goes beyond race which is a cultural difference. I will admit that I do feel a solidarity with Germans in this country (meaning Germans who grew up in Germany and came here for work or school). I identify with them culturally, whether they are White, Black, Asian, etc.”

That his ethnic identity was a national and not racial one further illustrates the centrality of social context in the construction of ethnic ideologies. Because this man had not been raised in a hierarchical, racialized culture, no strong emphasis had been placed on his non-White ancestry. He was not taught to view himself as singularly Black, and he thus felt little connection to other Black people. Although he recognized the uncommonness of his half-Black status, his identity as a biracial or Black man was not made salient to him until he moved to the U.S., a more race-conscious country. In this new atmosphere, wherein singular White identification is widely considered to be an “illegitimate” identity for White-Black biracials, this young man’s self-conception as a White German was widely treated as illicit, and outside the scope of reason. His solidarity with Germans and not African Americans was met with outright contempt from the Black community (and, though he does not mention it, is also likely met with quiet confusion and disagreement by Whites).

**Influence of Phenotype on Identity**

Interviews indicate that phenotype, particularly skin tone, is central to the way biracials interpret others’ perceptions of them. Every respondent stated that they were accustomed to being asked about their racial background, and most said that strangers’ assumptions regarding their ethnicity was often dependent on the context in which they were interacting, sometimes related to the parent the biracial was with at the time. One woman with curly
brown hair and light brown skin said that whereas she felt she looked biracial or African-American, people who saw her with her White father often assumed she was White, but if they saw her with her Black mother, they thought she was Black (or they were confused and did not know what to think). The ability to be accepted as monoracially White or Black was another point of emphasis. Says one young woman, “There were times when I’ve been in all White settings in which I can pass as being a White person.”

It was also common for strangers to arbitrarily assume that biracials belonged to a different ethnic group entirely. Most often, biracials recounted being mistaken as Hispanic, an unsurprising finding given that the ethnic groups of Latin America tend to be extremely racially mixed (Telles 2004, Davis 2001). Biracials’ brown skin and often Eurocentric features often lead to their being informally classified variously as Mexican, Brazilian, Dominican, or Puerto Rican:

“Like if I’m with my [White] father, I get Puerto Rican a lot. If I go to Spanish-speaking countries, they think I’m Spanish. I guess this is a way of being embraced in a different culture.” (Twenty-year-old, White-Black identifying female)

Other ethnic groups were also mentioned:

“I’ve gotten everything from Israeli to Algerian to Latino. People normally can’t figure out what I am except for other Black people. They immediately know I’m half Black. It’s strange how easily they pick up on it. Other races generally do not...Just the other day I went out with someone and he thought I was Hispanic. He was shocked when I told him I was half Black but he said it didn’t matter; I had an ‘exotic look.’” (Twenty-nine-year-old, German identifying male)

Biracials were accustomed to being seen as an intriguing ethnic “other,” which was a point of pride: they were paradoxically all races, and yet also seemingly nothing in particular.

All told, the impact of phenotype on identity is a complicated one. Biracials’ self-identities are not based on the race others think they are. However, the ethnic group with
which a biracial appears to belong certainly influences the assumptions that are made re-
garding his or her ethnic background. These assumptions—if held by enough people—can
restrict the labels that biracials feel comfortable adopting. While skin color shapes the way
biracials are seen by others, it has surprisingly little effect on how they view themselves.
Clarified one respondent,

“As a multiracial person, I could never put down White. I look more Black. It's just about appearance. I associate more with Whites. But I would only put down Black, mixed, or other...If you have darker skin, people will look at you and think you’re Black.” (Twenty-year-old, White-Black identifying female)

As this statement alludes, race is constructed and meaningful only to the extent that it is granted significance by people in society. Yet, the misperceptions of others by no means dictate biracials’ self-identities. Despite being regularly mistaken as belonging to ethnic groups as varied as Palestinian, Portuguese, or Hawaiian, no White-Black biracial with whom I spoke ever considered identifying with these groups because they were understood to be outside the scope of their racial choice-set. Thus while biracials’ skin color and appearance influenced outsiders’ perceptions and was a major factor in how they felt connected to other groups, phenotype is a decidedly less powerful independent factor than other social and psychological variables such as social networks, socioeconomic status, and area context.

Malleability of Racial Identity

The changing of the Census race question in 2000—and how it enabled people to iden-
tify fully with all of the groups with which they belonged—was referenced by several respondents. They felt that the new racial wording—“mark one or more” boxes (empha-
sis added)— symbolically validated the concept of multiracialism for those who had felt constrained for years to either neglect part of their identity or mark the meaningless racial category “Other.”
For many, racial awareness became activated in college, when they were able to join multiracial clubs and take courses on issues pertaining to minority communities. While one woman appreciated that her parents had opened her up to both races, she also wished she had learned more about Black culture prior to coming to college, stating, “I think it’s important to know your background.”

Biracials were divided on whether they exclusively identified their race a certain way, or whether it changed in different settings or depending on who they were with. Most of the time, respondents explained they considered themselves biracial, but would occasionally identify monoracially if they were with a racially homogeneous group of people or had self-interested strategic reasons for doing so. The fluidness of identity was not entirely straightforward. For example, being in a predominantly White environment would often trigger a singular White or White-Black assimilationist type of identity, though it would at times prompt a singular Black contrast or “distinguishing” identity.

Most respondents said they identified as White-Black, and most said they always identified this way. Rarely did a respondent say they exclusively identified with a single race; even those who generally thought of themselves as singularly Black would, when given the opportunity, sometimes self-classify as White-Black. Expressed racial classification was most likely to shift when respondents felt like they had something to gain from the adoption of a particular identity. Many who had attended college admitted that, when the opportunity had presented itself, they identified as singularly Black on their admissions application. Some confessed this sheepishly, as if ashamed they were using their Blackness to “game the system,” whereas others saw nothing wrong with using their biracial lineage for instrumental purposes.

**Political Attitudes, Group Belonging, and Solidarity**

Given that respondents frequently noted how much they were judged on their racial background, the degree to which they were forthcoming with their own racially prejudicial
beliefs was somewhat striking. Several openly stated their acceptance of certain racial stereotypes, particularly those against Blacks. One young woman who participated in a dance company along with several other White-Black biracial students remarked,

“[I]t’s an ongoing joke. I think a lot of us identify with White culture more, but at times being African American comes out, like having to do with eating chicken or watermelon [or] taking things from the dining hall. ‘Oh, you’re so Black’ or ‘Oh, you’re such a Negro.” (Twenty-year-old, White-Black identifying female)

In other words, although she generally viewed herself as closer to Whites, her Black identity became salient when she engaged in cliched Black behaviors, including eating certain types of foods and engaging in trivial theft. (It’s worth pointing out that this woman did not mention feeling “more Black” when she participated in other activities commonly associated with the Black community—such as music or dance—that were less trite than eating chicken and hoarding cafeteria food.)

Politically, most biracials interviewed identified as Democrat. For some, partisanship was socially learned from their parents. One Republican woman who had a Black Democrat mother and a White Republican father affirmed that her father’s political views had influenced her:

“I don’t have two Democrat parents. [My dad] taught me the importance of healthy skepticism, and I see both sides of the issue. Had I not had a Republican parent, I would have thought maybe Democrat was the only way to be.” (Twenty-year-old, White-Black identifying female)

In general, though, biracials’ partisanship appeared largely independent of their parental political socialization. One man, who had an Independent mother and a Republican father, defined himself as a “strong Democrat” and “strong liberal.” Whereas his mother had fierce socialist ideals and his father was a conservative “Republican who likes Sarah Palin,” he was progressive, pro-choice, and supportive of affirmative action. This man, who was gay, also fervently supported gay marriage, saying, “I think as tax payers and citizens

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6I attribute this candidness to the comfort biracials felt being interviewed by someone of their same background, as well as my concerted effort to not exhibit any negative reaction to their comments.
we should have the right to marry.” While his attitudes on the topic may be interpreted as self-interested, he went on to compare opposition to gay marriage to antiquated anti-miscegenation statutes, arguing, “The laws [against gays marrying] are as ridiculous as the laws that existed into the ‘70s...prohibiting Whites and Blacks from marrying in certain states.”

His was a sentiment echoed by others for whom the legality of gay marriage did not hit as close to home. Many people with whom I spoke took issue with government interference in private matters such as marriage and abortion. While no respondents had parents who had personally been affected by anti-miscegenation laws, the similarities between opposition to interracial marriage, gay marriage, and reproductive rights seemed readily apparent to them. One person stated that she believed her multiracial heritage had pushed her to be especially critical of policies that infringed upon the rights of marginalized groups. She believed that the unique types of racial discrimination she had experienced as a mixed-race person effectively propelled her to be more accepting towards other groups outside mainstream society.

Aside from opinions on specific policies, regarding where their racial allegiances lay—with Whites, Blacks, both, or neither—the answer was unequivocal: biracials’ solidarity was with the Black community. Although most respondents racially identified as White-Black, respondents almost unanimously acknowledged that biracials as a group had a lot more in common with Blacks than with Whites. Respondents felt that, despite the growth of the multiracial population and weakening of the one-drop rule, their Black heritage tended to trump their White, and most people in society still also tended to ignore their White heritage. One young man believed that biracials’ doing well in society was somewhat dependent on Blacks’ also doing well because “most Americans see White-Black Americans as simply being Black”; in contrast, he said that biracials’ success was “not at all” tied to the success of Whites. Another woman noted that while she felt close with Whites (albeit “not overtly so”), that she felt more strongly tied to Blacks.
In addition, everyone interviewed expressed a strong desire to know more about Black history and culture; curiously, no one proclaimed yearning to learn about that of Whites. This may be because they felt they already knew a lot about mainstream American culture, which is predominantly White, while Black culture receives comparably less attention. Perhaps this is because what constitutes White political solidarity is not entirely clear. If anything, “White solidarity” may negatively connote White supremacism. In contrast, the political interests of Blacks as an underrepresented, disadvantaged minority group are more coherent and recognizable. Still, many respondents indicated an interest in learning about Black culture not because they simply knew comparably less about their Black history, but because they had a desire to feel more connected to the group with which they shared such distinctive and profound historical experiences.

Although they tended to feel much closer to Blacks than to Whites, important differences between the two groups were not lost on respondents. Not a single person equated the experiences of biracial White-Blacks as a group with that of Blacks, and when asked the degree to which the success of White-Blacks is inherently tied to the success of the Black community, answers were mixed. Some respondents believed they were linked as racial minorities, a trait that clearly distinguished biracials from Whites. Opined one individual, “though I don’t see White-Black Americans as Black obviously, I do still see them as people of color,” whereas there are “not a ton of similarities between [biracials and Whites].” But another respondent felt that White-Black biracials were fundamentally different from both Blacks and Whites, stating,

“I don’t think [biracial’s success] depends on [African Americans’ success]. Multiracial people are their own separate category. Given that they’re so young, it’s difficult to predict where that will go. There’s a link to the Black community, [but] mixed race people are separate.” (Twenty-one-year old White-Black identifying female)

When asked how much she thought biracials had in common with White Americans, another young woman responded,
“I don’t have a lot of the stereotypes of African Americans. People look at me and think I’m not Black enough for it to affect me....Almost all of the interracial children I can think of are moving upward in society, they have families [that have] improved from where previous generations were. In general, biracial people are moving upward, because they have that White link.” (Twenty-year-old, White-Black identifying female)

A number of people similarly cited skin color as a central determinant of linked fate between biracials and Blacks. “How dark you are matters,” affirmed one woman. Concurred one male, “Depending on how dark their skin is, [I] would say [biracials and Blacks] have some in common.” He also felt, though, that skin color connected biracials to other ethnic groups with which they were not a part, such as Latinos; all marginalized ethnic minorities were linked because they faced discrimination due to their backgrounds. Because biracials often appeared distinctly non-White but otherwise racially ambiguous, they theoretically could be subjected to the types of prejudice and discrimination endured by other groups of color.

Although most biracials did not see their group’s accomplishments as fundamentally linked with those of African Americans, Black political identity could become activated under certain conditions. This was particularly true when it came to major political events, and for the biracials with whom I spoke, there was no bigger such moment than the presidential election of Barack Obama in 2008. Obama’s election as the “first Black president” brought their Black political identity to the forefront. When asked the extent to which she felt group solidarity with Blacks, one young woman said that though she normally didn’t identify herself politically with African Americans, she certainly did for the 2008 election: “And my [Black] mother did, too. Because [Obama] was a Black candidate. I think Blacks need to move up in society, that’s why I voted for him.”

At the same time, however, other respondents took care to not equate the existence of a biracial/Black man in the White House with an end to the major problems that have disproportionately affected racial minorities in the United States. Biracials were not naive to issues that continue to plague the Black community, variously citing unemployment,
the racial achievement gap in education, higher crime and incarceration rates, and health
disparities such as higher infant mortality rates. In their discussions of these disparities,
they demonstrated not only mindfulness of racial inequalities, but also an empathy and
unity with Blacks that showed they saw their fates as linked.

Still, most respondents felt that despite the persistence of significant racial disparities
and feeling that more work needs to be done, most racial problems have been conquered.
Says one woman:

“[It] depends on what part of the country you live in. In the major metropolitan
areas, many problems facing racial minorities have been overcome, and if you
work hard enough and apply yourself, no matter what your race is, you can
succeed. I think that is less true in more rural and less metropolitan areas of
the country.” (Twenty-one-year old, White-Black identifying female)

Regarding race relations specifically, most respondents expressed optimism regarding
what their group symbolized in terms of the future of American race relations. As one male
respondent put it,

“I think there is too much attention paid to race these days but I think that is
definitely changing. My father’s generation still views the limitations set by
race because of their upbringing. To my generation and the ones after me, I
think race is less of an issue, especially as the number of interracial children
increases.” (Twenty-nine-year-old, German identifying male)

Discussion and Conclusion

The quantitative assessments presented in the prior three chapters tell a complicated story
of identity development, showing that home life, racial context, and individual demograph-
ics significantly predict the categories biracial young people choose to mark on surveys.
These identities, in turn, shape their interpretation of racial and nonracial policies and the
degree of support or opposition they are afforded. By establishing the correlates of biracial
political identity, these analyses sharpen our understanding of race’s influence on public
opinion. Still, surveys such as these cannot on their own describe the full story.
Interviews with biracials enable a more comprehensive evaluation of identity development, allowing us to hear first-hand how experiences impact the way they view themselves and their place in the world. Importantly, these discussions reinforce that White-Black biracials grapple quite seriously with their identities. The racial choices they eventually adopt are deliberate, conscious decisions largely reflective of the options they are afforded and pushed to choose by society. At the same time, biracial’s identities are not driven entirely by the assumptions placed on them by others. Identities are thoughtfully contemplated and constructed, and sometimes discount societal expectations, involving a thorough consideration of the individual’s own beliefs, feelings, and attachments.

**Context and Identity**

At this chapter’s outset, it was posited that phenotype, familial relationships, and racial interactions would each have a significant impact on biracials’ identity decisions and, therefore, their political attachments. The findings for these features are addressed in turn.

**Phenotype**

While phenotype is an important component of biracial identity, it does not operate in a straightforward manner. Skin color is noteworthy in that it affects the degree and severity of discrimination biracials experience. It also constrains the racial labels they feel comfortable adopting, effectively strengthening or weakening the options available in one’s identity choice set.\(^7\)

However, skin color is but one feature that is contemplated during racial identity formation. It does not appear to drive identity decisions, as darker-skinned biracials are no more likely than those who are lighter skinned to identify as singularly Black. Skin color also does not seem to be predictive of political attitudes; darker-skinned biracials, for example, are no more likely to identify as liberal or Democrat than their lighter-skinned

\(^7\)Recall, for instance, the female respondent who believed that a singularly White identity was not a realistic option for her, since no one would ever look at her and think she were White.
counterparts.

The interviews described here are largely consistent with the results found by Hochschild and Weaver (2007), who show that although skin color has been linked to prejudice, socioeconomic status, and life chances, it has surprisingly no bearing on African Americans’ political attitudes or perceptions of linked fate with the Black community. Given the preliminary evidence discussed here, I would extend Hochschild and Weaver’s theory to biracial White-Black Americans. Skin color is essentially irrelevant when it comes to explaining biracials’ political beliefs.

Skin color is predictive of the type and severity of racial discrimination one endures. The lighter-skinned biracials with whom I spoke indicated that the racial discrimination they endured almost always came from Blacks. On its face, we might think that this would push lighter-skinned biracials away from both a Black identity and Black political affiliation. After all, since lighter-skinned biracials are more likely than those who are darker-skinned to be told by Blacks that they “aren’t really Black,” it would seem plausible that they would also be less inclined to see themselves this way. However, the discrimination biracials experience is not related to the strength of their racial identification or to their political views.

The meaning associated with Black identification, as it was socially constructed for decades, was centered around not skin color but a “biological” definition of race, in the one-drop rule. Thus, the construction of African American racial identity is not based on racial appearance but rather an emotional attachment, the belief that individuals of Black heritage are united—culturally, emotionally, and politically—as a marginalized people with a common history. As Hochschild and Weaver point out, despite the association of phenotype with myriad social consequences, in some ways it is unsurprising that there is little connection between skin color and strength of Black racial identity. At the same time, that there also appears to be no significant association for biracial White-Blacks indicates that Black ancestry continues to politically trump other identities.
Family and Racial Interactions

According to respondents, Blacks are much more vocal than Whites in expressing their opinions about biracials’ identity. Whites seem to be “trained” to be politically correct when it comes to race and fear offending someone whom they know is not within their same racial group. However, Blacks generally subscribe to the one-drop rule, and (despite criticisms) embrace biracials as their own; thus, they feel comfortable telling them where they belong.

Biracials are often able to unwittingly “pass” for members of other ethnic groups. As a result, they occasionally hear bigoted remarks about Blacks and experience discrimination that is not intended for them. This can engender a greater awareness of the racial prejudice Blacks covertly face, and may explain why biracials tend to feel closer to African Americans than to Whites.

All told, interviews reinforce the assimilation effect discussed earlier. Biracials’ identities and political beliefs often reflect those of the people surrounding them. The racial cultures in which they are socialized, and the racial composition of their peer networks, profoundly shape their perceptions of group acceptance. Environment and racial contact helps biracials figure out where they belong.

Causality

One limitation of observational survey data is their inability to establish causal mechanisms: does racial identity explain political attitudes, or is it the other way around? While these interviews are non-experimental and do not answer this question definitively, findings strongly imply that the development of racial identity precedes that of political attitudes. For biracials, attentiveness to race begins early. During childhood, they become cognizant of skin color difference, racial stereotypes, and the importance that others place on race. This is because, in the United States, race is institutional and systemic. Racial meanings are authoritative in the organization of social order, and race’s influence is discernible in
and embedded throughout a range of public realms (Omi and Winant, 1994).

There have long been assumptions and connotations associated with race-mixing and mixed-race people. As the interviews discussed here illustrate, race and all that it implies becomes ingrained in biracials’ consciousness beginning when they are young. Ours is a culture that associates race with so much—hard-work, intelligence, crime, class, politics. A person’s race is one of the first things we notice about them, and it becomes more difficult to make snap judgments when there is sufficient ambiguity as to what their race is. Because they do not fit neatly into a single group, biracials spend much time figuring out where they belong. In contrast, their political opinions do not form until later, after racial group attachments develop. While racial identity continues to evolve during adolescence, it generally does not change to accommodate newly formed political ideologies.

Political views can strengthen or weaken racial identities, biracials do not develop policy opinions and then cultivate a racial identity that corroborates those opinions. Feelings about issues that are racial in nature may occasionally color the strength of one’s own racial self-concept. However, political considerations are, at best, a minor factor in the development of racial identity, playing a role that pales in comparison to more fundamental elements such as local racial composition, family, gender, religion, income, interactions with peers.

**Future Work**

To be sure, the respondents interviewed here comprise only a small subset of biracials. These respondents tend to have educated parents and rarely mentioned experiencing discrimination. Furthermore, none of the biracials interviewed here were socialized in the South, which has been shown to significantly shape identity formation. Future in-depth interviews and focus groups, should disentangle the nuances of sociopolitical identity. This work should also more carefully assess how mixed-race background overlaps with gender, nationality, sexuality, and socioeconomic status in the construction of political ideology.
Appendix: Interview Questions

Racial Identity and Malleability

How do you racially identify yourself? With which race do you most identify?
   What is your biological mother’s race?
   What is your biological father’s race?
   Would you say you exclusively identify yourself as (race marked in prior question) or does it change in different settings or depending on who you’re with?

Feelings About Racial Identity

Would you say that being of a mixed-racial background is important to you?
How important would you say your racial-ethnic identity is, to you personally?
Can you think of times in your life that it has been more or less important?
Have there been any specific times you feel you have benefitted from being mixed-race?
Can you recall the last time?

Family Life

Are your biological parents currently married to each other? (If no: Were they ever married? If were married but separated/divorced: About how old were you when they separated/divorced? After the separation, with whom did you primarily live?)
   Do you have siblings (full, half, step)? (If full: Do you know how they racially identify? If half or step: What races are they?)
   Aside from your siblings, are there any other mixed-race people in your family?
   Did you talk openly in your family about your mixed racial background?
   Do you think your parents tried to directly shape your racial identity? (If yes: which racial identity did they encourage you to adopt?)
   Do your parents talk about their racial/ethnic backgrounds often?
   Growing up, how often did you spend time with your mother’s family?
   And how about your father’s family? How often did you spend time with them?
   Did either of your parents belong to any racial/ethnic organizations or clubs?
   Did your parents ever discuss personal experiences of discrimination based upon their race/ethnicity?

Phenotype

How would you describe your skin color?
How would you describe your hair color?
How would you describe your hair texture?
What race do you think people in society see you as?
Is it common for people to ask or comment on your racial background? Can you recall the last time someone asked or commented on it?
Early Life and Contact With Other Races

Where were you born?
Where did you grow up? (Did you live anywhere else growing up?)
Growing up, did you live in a racially integrated neighborhood, or were almost all of the families in your neighborhood of the same race? (If almost all of same race: What race is that?)
Did you attend a racially/ethnically diverse grammar or elementary school, or were almost all of the kids in your grammar/elementary school of the same race? (If almost all of same race: What race is that?)
What about your high school? Was it pretty diverse, or were almost all of the kids in your grammar/elementary school of the same race? (If almost all of same race: What race is that?)
What was the racial composition of your closest friends like growing up?
Do you generally feel most comfortable being around a particular racial group? Why do you think that is?

Relationships

What is the race/ethnicity of the people you have dated?
Was it important to you or to your parents for you to date someone of a particular race? (If so: which race was that? Why?)
How do you feel about interracial relationships in general?
Do certain types of interracial relationships bother you more than others?
How much discrimination do you think there is against interracial couples in our society today? Would you say there is a lot of discrimination, some, only a little, or none at all?
In your opinion, how should the children of White-Black interracial unions racially identify?

Racial Discrimination

How much racial discrimination or hostility would you say you experienced from Blacks?
Have you ever experienced negative treatment from Blacks because of your skin color or physical features (e.g., skin color, hair color/texture, eye color)? (If yes: Could you please tell me a little bit about these experiences?)
How much racial discrimination or hostility would you say you experienced from Whites?
Have you ever experienced negative treatment from Whites because of your skin color or physical features (e.g., skin color, hair color/texture, eye color)? (If yes: Could you please tell me a little bit about these experiences?)

Inter-Ethnic Group Relations

Thinking about issues like job opportunities, educational attainment or income, how much do (people who are mixed White-Black) have in common with other racial groups in the
United States today? A lot in common, some in common, little in common, or nothing at all in common with: African Americans/White Americans/Asian Americans/Hispanic Americans?

Thinking about things like government services and employment, political power and representation, how much do people who are mixed White-Black have in common with other racial groups in the U.S.? Would you say people who are mixed White-Black have a lot in common, some in common, little in common, or nothing at all in common with African Americans/White Americans/Asian Americans/Hispanic Americans?

Do you feel that mixed, White-Black Americans have more, less, or about the same opportunities in life as African Americans?

Do you feel that mixed, White-Black Americans have more, less, or about the same opportunities in life as White Americans?

How much does mixed, White-Black Americans “doing well” depend on African Americans also doing well? A lot, some, a little, or not at all? Why would you say this is?

How much does mixed, White-Black Americans “doing well” depend on White Americans also doing well? A lot, some, a little, or not at all? Why would you say this is?

Is there too much, too little, or about the right amount of attention paid to race and racial issues these days?

What about problems facing racial minorities. Which of the following comes closer to your opinion? Do you think we have overcome the major problems facing racial minorities in this country, or are there still major problems facing racial minorities?

**Party Identification**

Generally speaking, do you usually consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, some other party, or what? (If Democrat or Republican: Would you consider yourself a strong Democrat or Republican or a not very strong Democrat or Republican? If Independent/Other: Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?)

What about your mother and father? Do you know their party identification?

**Ideology**

Generally speaking, in politics do you consider yourself to be conservative, liberal, middle-of-the-road, or don’t you think of yourself in these terms? (If conservative: Do you consider yourself a strong or not very strong conservative? If liberal: Do you consider yourself a strong or not very strong liberal? If middle-of-the-road: Do you consider yourself more like a liberal, or more like a conservative, or truly middle-of-the-road?)

What about your mother and father? Do you know their political ideology?

**Religion**

Would you say you are religious?

What is your religion?

About how often do you attend religious services?
How religious would you say you are?

**Group Consciousness and Linked Fate**

Thinking about issues like job opportunities, educational attainment or income, how much do you have in common with other mixed White-Black people? Would you say you have a lot in common, some in common, little in common, or nothing at all in common?

How much does your "doing well" depend on other mixed-race, White-Black people also doing well? A lot, some, a little, or not at all?

To what degree do you think that what happens to Black people in general in this country will affect your own life? Would you say it affects you a lot, some, or not very much?

To what degree do you think that what happens to White people in general in this country will affect your own life? Would you say it affects you a lot, some, or not very much?

To what degree do you think that what happens to mixed, White-Black people in general in this country will affect your own life? Would you say it affects you a lot, some, or not very much?

Do you belong to any ethnic organizations or clubs?

**Group Solidarity**

Now I’m going to ask you some questions about racial group solidarity. Some elements of solidarity include identification with the group, special concern, shared values or goals, loyalty and mutual trust.

To what extent would you say you feel group solidarity with Whites?

To what extent would you say you feel group solidarity with Blacks?

**Policy Attitudes**

I’m going to ask you about some policy issues. Please tell me how strongly you support or oppose the following policies. Your response can be: strongly support, support, oppose or strongly oppose. If you are not sure how you feel or don’t know, feel free to say so.

What is your opinion on affirmative action in college admissions, and why?

What is your view about same-sex couples? (For example, should they be permitted to: legally marry, enter into civil unions, receive no legal recognition?)

Generally speaking, what are your feelings on abortion? Do you think abortion should be: legal in all circumstances, legal in most circumstances, legal only when necessary to save the life of the woman or in cases of rape or incest, illegal in all circumstances?

Do you think that your racial heritage influences your political outlook in any way? If so, how?

How do you racially see President Obama? Why?

What does it mean to be black, in your opinion?

What does it mean to be white?

What does it mean to be biracial?
Demographics

What is the highest level of education attained by your mother?
What is the highest level of education attained by your father?
What is your household income?
What is your date of birth?
Chapter 6

Conclusion

“Census 2000 will go down in history as the event that began to redefine race in American society.” —Kenneth Prewitt, former head of the U.S. Census Bureau

Today, millions of Americans identify with multiple races, and President Obama has helped bring the topic of multiracialism to the forefront of American politics. The transformation of the American population in recent years necessitates that we reconsider our framework of how racial/ethnic identities are formed, what constitutes group membership, and how political outlook is shaped by these considerations. In light of the changing racial and ethnic demographics of the United States, analyses of public opinion that focus on racial attitudes must take into account the perspectives of individuals on the racial margins.

This dissertation contributes to American politics research that has begun to complicate the claim that race and ethnicity are unchanging and separate categories. Studying an emerging racial identity group—the multiple-race population— informs our understanding of the nature and meaning of race in our increasingly diverse society. This work on mixed-race Americans provides a window onto the fluid, as opposed to fixed, relationship between racial background and identity, and offers insight into the ways in which identity functions.

1 Qtd. in Williams (2006).
The central goal of this dissertation has been to assess the sociopolitical ramifications of multiracialism, with a focus on Americans of White-Black parentage. No longer confined to the one-drop rule, people of White-Black parentage now have multiple racial identity options from which to choose. How is racial identity constructed within this population, and how does identity influence political outlook? In what ways do biracial White-Blacks differ politically from “monoracial” Whites and Blacks? Does non-Black identification among biracials connote weaker links to the Black community and less support for race-based policies? These questions motivated my study. In explaining racial identity formation and subsequent policy attitudes, surveys of several thousand respondents of White-Black parentage were supplemented with in-depth interviews to further elucidate the impact of race on political outlook.

Since social attitudes towards interracial relations are inextricably tied to multiracialism, analyses began with an assessment of public opinion towards intermarriage. I examined who currently opposes interracial marriage and how opposition has shifted over the past decade. I also measured whether respondents lie to interviewers out of political correctness—that is, whether people claim to support interracial marriage when they are secretly bothered by it. Using data from two nationally-representative surveys, I showed that while the elderly, the less educated, and those living in the South are most resistant to interracial marriage, sociodemographic variables function differently among Whites, Blacks, Asians and Hispanics. Expressed support for interracial marriage has increased considerably over the past decade, driven primarily through White cohort replacement, as older, racially prejudiced Whites were replaced by young racial progressives. Even so, political
correctness remains a contributing factor to expressed intermarriage support; Americans are less likely to claim they approve of race-mixing when they believe their interviewer is of their same racial group.

Opposition to interracial marriage is an indisputable sign of racial prejudice, and poses implications for how people of mixed-race are perceived in society. Findings showed that, all else equal, White, Hispanic, and Asian respondents are most bothered by a family member marrying a Black person—while Black respondents are, incongruously, the most approving of all forms of interracial marriage. Non-Blacks’ lower levels of support for part-Black intermarriages implies that the children of such marriages may also be less accepted in society. If part-Black multiracials experience greater marginalization and prejudice, they may be more inclined than other part-White mixed-race subgroups to identify socially and politically with their racial minority background.

I then turned to the identity choices of the largest multiracial subgroup—those of White-Black backgrounds. In disentangling self-identification, I assessed the factors that shape identity for college students of White-Black parentage. Results indicated that the majority of White-Black biracials opt to identify as both White and Black—but that nearly 2 in 5 biracials continue to subscribe to the one-drop rule, labeling themselves as singularly Black.

Findings also showed that gender, religion, family income, and area racial composition structure racial identity decisions. Being female, wealthy, living in an urban setting and having a well-educated White parent are predictive of a mixed-race, White-Black identity. Residing in more affluent communities and being Jewish encourage a singular White identity, while having a single Black mother, living in the South, and being Baptist are sig-
significantly predictive of a singular Black identity. Interestingly, “money whitens” biracials’ self-identification; all else equal, biracials from the most affluent families are more likely to identify as singularly White or White-Black than as singularly Black.

The political attitudes that correspond with these identity choices were then explored. Racial identity results from an intentional, deliberate process and serves as a lens through which politics is interpreted. Self-identity and racial group attachments are mutually reinforcing, and together shape political views. It was also shown that imposing simplistic measures of racial identity on respondents does not accurately capture the influence of race on opinion. A one-dimensional treatment of race masks the influence of multiracial background, and can sometimes generate improper inferences about the role identity plays in explaining political attitudes.

Although prior research presumed that biracials were “torn between two social worlds” and were consequently in-between Whites and Blacks politically, the data examined here did not support this hypothesis. Identity choice, not merely having a biracial background, explains political group attachments. Contrary to popular belief, having a White parent does not necessarily lead to a decrease in solidarity with minorities. Identifying as White-Black (as opposed to Black) is not associated with a restrained commitment to race-based policies, but rather an attentiveness to racial disparities and dedication to racial liberalism. With the exception of the seven percent of biracials who chose to identify as singularly White, biracials’ closer proximity to White culture does not weaken their minority identity.

The survey data used cannot disentangle whether biracials’ political liberalism stems from being the product of two open-minded parents, or from the unique life experiences biracials face due to their unconventional racial background. Evidence suggests that at
least some of biracials’ greater tolerance can be attributed to the distinctly liberal views of their interracial parents (who are, on average, more progressive than the parents of monoracial Whites and Blacks). Future research should further explore the influence of parents’ ideology.

Still, preliminary interviews with biracials suggest that the double racial consciousness that is conveyed through a mixed-race identity stimulates a more sensitive and introspective approach to politics, particularly with regard to contentious social issues on which the general public is divided. Interviews also implied that while skin color impacts assumptions made by others regarding biracials’ backgrounds, skin color is mostly uncorrelated with racial and political loyalties. This is because, for biracials, identification develops out of an emotional connection to a particular racial group, not simply the race to which one appears to belong.

**Implications for American Race Relations**

Cultural attitudes regarding the meaning of race have changed dramatically over the past two decades. The changing of the Census reflects a move from a primordialist approach to race, to a constructivist perspective (Snipp, 2003). The boundaries of racial group belonging and mixed-race classification—once sharply drawn—are now blurred. Examining multiracials helps us understand the political consequences of affording people new racial identity options. It also sheds light on the future direction of American race relations.

In 1980, 3.2 percent of all U.S. marriages were interracial or interethnic; by 2008, this figure had risen to a record-high 8 percent (Passel, Wang and Taylor, 2010). Interracial
marriage is more prevalent among young adults and people who have attended college. High rates of intermarriage among Asians and Hispanics (and greater societal support for these marriages) demonstrate that, for these groups, certain racial and ethnic boundaries are particularly weak. While White-Black marriages are more rare and receive comparably lower levels of support than those between Whites, Asians, and Hispanics, marriages between Whites and Blacks are nevertheless becoming increasingly frequent, and are particularly common and accepted among Black males. In 2010, two-third of all multiple-race identifiers were under the age of 30 (Bureau of the Census, 2010).

All of these findings optimistically suggest that increases in the interracial marriage rate and multiple-race identification will encourage people to see beyond color, and will ultimately bring an end to our nation’s deeply-rooted racial hierarchy. Yet precisely these same figures can be cited in making the opposing argument—that rises in race-mixing will produce a societal outcome that is much more bleak. *The types of people who intermarry are different from the types of people who do not.* Those who intermarry are better-educated, more affluent—and more likely to be Asian or Hispanic than Black. If such differential intermarriage propensities continue, interracial unions may very well have the auspicious effect of reducing social distance between Whites, Hispanics and Asians—while simultaneously reinforcing obstacles for Blacks, who are less likely to intermarry with Whites. This dissertation has also shown that those Blacks who do marry Whites tend to be of greater socioeconomic status than Blacks who marry Blacks. As such, the children of White-Black unions are also more affluent on average than are monoracial Black children.

In light of current and projected demographic trends, it appears that a new American color line is materializing (Song, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Lee and Bean, 2004). The in-
grained Black/White racial divide may be giving way to a more nuanced racial hierarchy wherein race, skin color and socioeconomic status are strongly linked. Multiracialism may sustain this hierarchy by allowing people of mixed-race to distance themselves from disadvantaged, scorned minority groups. This would mean that certain minority groups (Asians, Hispanics, and Blacks who intermarry with Whites) are becoming more assimilated into mainstream culture, while others (most pointedly, Blacks who do not intermarry) remain excluded. Thus continued multiracialism would bolster negative stereotypes about disadvantaged minority groups, producing a novel form of racial stratification.

Unsurprisingly, the significance of intermarriage and the malleability of identity among mixed-race people has sparked controversy among some civil rights organizations. Black leaders in particular have expressed unease that a multiracial category would lead to a decline in the proportion of Americans identifying as Black, and would subsequently decrease tax dollars and affirmative action programs intended for African Americans. Another concern was that multiple race-identifiers would be opting out of their Black heritage and possess weaker links to the Black community and less loyalty to Black causes (Williams, 2006).

Findings presented here suggest that such apprehensions are unwarranted, at least for the time being. It has been argued that the inclusion of a Black cultural identity is not an essential element of Black solidarity, but that Black solidarity does require the possession of a belief system that lauds racial equality and tolerance (Shelby, 2005). Indeed, despite the multiple identity choices now afforded to biracials, emotional attachments to Blacks remain powerful. A substantial percentage of White-Black biracials still identify as singularly Black, which suggests that the one-drop rule remains an enduring hallmark
of racial solidarity. Furthermore, biracials who reject the one-drop rule and identify as White-Black are not substantively differentiating themselves from Blacks. Their choice to mark “White” in addition to Black reflects a desire to embrace both of their racial heritages; it is a recognition of their Whiteness, not a rejection of Blackness, as some might presuppose. Importantly, this part-White identification should not be interpreted as a decline in Black awareness, as White-Black identifiers remain largely as racially conscious as singular Blacks.

In *Behind the Mule*, Dawson showed that most Black Americans, regardless of class, viewed their fate as individuals linked to that of the racial group. Dawson argued that if Blacks continue to perceive their lives to be shaped by what happens to the group more generally, Blacks’ estimation of group interests would drive how individual Blacks assess politics. While it would seem, then, that individuals of part-Black heritage who identify with a race other than Black do not possess as strong a Black group consciousness, this seemingly weaker Black identity does not translate into weaker ideological views.

Still, discrimination in the U.S. on the basis of race continues to be a problem. As mixed-race births continue to rise and multiracial identification gains social acceptance, it seems likely that biracials’ perceptions of racial inequality will also change—even if inequalities remain an objective reality. Whether increased mixed-race identification will create a new, complex racial hierarchy down the road remains an open question.
Avenues for Additional Research

This dissertation has centered on the political consequences of racial identity for Americans of White-Black parentage, primarily due to the exceptional levels of social distance between Whites and Blacks and the traditionally strict definition of what constitutes “Black” in American culture. Yet dramatic racial and ethnic differences in intermarriage rates reinforces the importance of expanding this study beyond those of White-Black biracials. The Census projects that minorities will comprise a majority of the U.S. population by 2050 (Bureau of the Census, 2008), and in order to more fully understand the sociopolitical consequences of American multiracialism, we must not confine ourselves to the Black/White paradigm. The immediate next step in this project is to conduct analogous studies of multiracial Hispanics and multiracial Asians. This research will also be aimed at better disentangling the relationship between phenotype, racial/ethnic identity choice, and group consciousness among all mixed-race groups.

Although there is certainly no single multiracial experience in the United States, many of the findings discussed here have implications for these other racial subgroups. While the strength of support for racial policies probably differs across groups, it seems likely that in light of their experiences as racial minorities, the belief that racism is a major social problem would be widely-held among mixed-race people in general. Moreover, the more tolerant, progressive political outlook that White-Black identifiers express on women’s rights and gay rights may also be shared by people identifying as multiracial more broadly.

Still, White-Asians, White-Blacks, and White-Latinos have dissimilar lived racial realities. The construction of identity among biracial Hispanics and biracial Asians differs in
many notable ways from that of biracial Blacks. Scholars have suggested that the multiracial children of White/non-White couples will naturally have a weaker connection with the ethnic culture of their minority parent. Intermarriage is believed to dilute the racial distinctiveness of mixed-race children, and sociologists have hypothesized that these children are subsequently less inclined to adopt a singular racial identity (Harris and Sim, 2002). Variation among mixed-race Hispanics and Asians in terms of national origin, foreign language fluency, and proximity to the immigrant experience should affect both identity development and ideology. Biracials from dual ethnic minority backgrounds, such as Asian-Blacks or Latino-Blacks would seem to have an even more unique set of social, psychological, and cultural influences on their identity development, as would multiracials who belong to three or more racial/ethnic groups. Expanding the definition of biracial to encompass other types of mixed-race groups would refine our understanding of identity’s influence on political attitudes.

In light of the finding that biracials assert greater support for the rights of racial minorities, women, gays, and criminals, it would be interesting to test whether this broad support for socially marginalized groups extends to social welfare and economic issues, such as antipoverty policy. Moreover, it is the strength of one’s group identity, not simply seeing oneself as a member, that is most important in fostering political cohesion (Huddy 2003; Tate 1993). Future research should examine how the strength of biracials’ identity corresponds to their ideology.
Alternative Social Identities

This dissertation established that class, gender, region, and religion are particularly important predictors of biracial identity development. Studying the role of additional social identities and how they intersect with race would add context and clarity to our comprehension of identity politics.

For instance, we might ask how biracials from socially marginalized groups view themselves racially, and what impact this has on their view of the political world. Notably, gay and lesbian biracials likely negotiate their racial identities in very different ways from straight men and women. Results presented here showed significant gender differences in identity, as biracial men are more likely than biracial women to identify as singularly Black. However, if gay men are more likely to deemphasize traditional gender traits, they should be less concerned, for instance, with “proving” their masculinity by identifying as Black. They may be more comfortable with disregarding social convention, and may have unique attitudes towards identity in general.

Also, how does being a child of immigrants shape a biracial’s approach to racial classification? This was briefly addressed in the qualitative chapter, but deserves closer attention. In light of the legacy of American slavery and persisting racial disparities, individuals born in the U.S. are socialized to view race very differently than those who immigrate to the United States. In particular, Americans’ definition of what constitutes Black contrasts sharply with the racial attitudes held by people in other countries, and Roth (2005) shows that immigrant parents pass on different racial labels to their children than native American parents.² Being a first-generation American likely has important consequences for

²Roth (2005) finds that when only the Black parent is an immigrant, or both the Black parent and the
a biracial person’s outlook and identity development, and the political attitudes of these individuals should be evaluated.

**Expanding Beyond College Students**

The findings on mixed-race identity are derived primarily from surveys and interviews of college students. While college students represent a large proportion of biracial youth, they do not represent all biracial youth. These data are unable to tell us about those individuals who do not enroll in college, or those who drop out of high school. While findings are a step forward in our understanding of biracial identity formation, the full extent to which results are generalizable to the broader White-Black biracial population is unknown. The types of biracials who do not make it to college may have different sociopsychological considerations when developing their racial identities. In light of the importance of class in explaining racial labeling, biracials from less privileged or more impoverished backgrounds may be particularly likely to identify as singularly Black. The types of biracials who choose to not go to college—irrespective of their socioeconomic background—may have social outlooks that are less conventional and perhaps more inclined to de-emphasize racial identity. The results discussed in this dissertation cannot speak to these individuals, but I do hope to evaluate their identity development in research to come.

White parent are immigrants, the likelihood that the biracial child will be given a non-Black label on Census forms increases considerably. When only the White parent is an immigrant, however, biracial children are more likely to be classified as Black.
Identity Fluidity

Developmental psychology research has shown that mixed-race identity can change over the lifespan. Harris and Sim (2002) find that, once they reach sixteen years of age, adolescents of mixed White-Black backgrounds are more likely to select Black as the single best race that describes them. Roth (2005) similarly shows that, as they age, mixed-race children are increasingly likely to adopt a singular Black identity, usually because biracial identities are less recognized among adolescents’ peer groups than singular racial identities. The degree to which multiracials’ racial labels change in different settings is not well-understood. Particularly interesting is the potential for multiracials to purposefully identify as a singular racial minority for instrumental purposes. Policies that provide an “edge” to an individual—simply for identifying as an underrepresented racial minority—may motivate multiracials to strategically label themselves as Black or Hispanic, when they normally identify as mixed-race. The extent to which racial identity can be manipulated for personal political gain is an issue that will certainly rise in significance as university admissions committees and policymakers grapple with how multiracials should be counted when it comes to the allocation of race-based resources.

Conclusion

“[M]ixed-race persons are reshaping America’s racial imagination, especially among the young.” —Ian Haney-Lopez

\[\text{3This is because African American culture and style are often seen as attractive to teenagers, and mixed-race individuals may therefore identify as singularly Black in order to fit in with their Black peers.}\]

\[\text{Haney-Lopez (2006: xvii)}\]
Americans’ racial attitudes have changed dramatically in recent decades. An end to race-based constraints on marriage, a widespread norm of racial equality and tolerance, and rises in the rate of interracial relationships have transformed U.S. society. The “biracial baby boom” of the 1970s and 1980s helped spark debates regarding longstanding mutually-exclusive racial labels—which seemed antiquated in light of the thousands of children who no longer fit neatly into such categories. The political influence of this demographic was made clear, when the Office of Management and Budget decided that government agencies would be required to permit multiple-race identification, beginning with the 2000 Census.

Today, mixed-race identifiers number in the millions. Most of them are not yet of voting age. Their numbers are growing swiftly, and raises questions surrounding what this will mean substantively in terms of racial policies and resource distribution. It also raises more symbolic considerations, as the American racial landscape diversifies and some deeply-rooted racial barriers break down.

The changing of the Census was a noteworthy event, for it reflected the federal government’s recognition that mutually-exclusive race categories were unable to capture the nation’s increasing diversity. But the Census change truly became significant because so many respondents chose to assert their mixed-race identities. Increasing recognition of racial mixture signals an about-face in the way Americans understand race and ethnicity. The emerging multiracial population proves that the meaning of race has changed in this country. Assessing their identities and opinions helps us understand the new identity politics in America.
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