

Daughters of interracial parents more likely than sons to identify as multiracial

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Daughters of interracial parents are more likely than sons to identify as multiracial, and this is especially true for children of black-white couples, according to a new study in the February issue of the *American Sociological Review*.

Among black-white biracials (the offspring of interracial couples in which one parent is black and the other is white) in the study, 76 percent of women and 64 percent of men identified as multiracial. In terms of Latino-white biracials, 40 percent of women and 32 percent of men self-labeled as multiracial. Regarding Asian-white biracials, 56 percent of women and 50 percent of men identified as multiracial.

"It would seem that, for biracial women, looking racially ambiguous is tied to racial stereotypes surrounding femininity and beauty," said study author Lauren Davenport, an assistant professor of political science at Stanford University. "So, biracial women are often seen as not fully white and not entirely minority, and they are cast as kind of a mysterious, intriguing 'racial other.' As a consequence, it may be easier for women to reside in multiple racial groups simultaneously. However, biracial men may be more likely to be perceived as 'people of color.' I argue that the different ways that biracial people are viewed by others influences how they see themselves."

Titled, "The Role of Gender, Class, and Religion in Biracial Americans' Racial Labeling Decisions," the study relies on data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey.

Every year, thousands of incoming freshmen at hundreds of community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities across the United States complete the survey, which the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California-Los Angeles conducts. For her study, Davenport pooled data from the 2001, 2002, and 2003 CIRP Freshman Surveys, giving her a sample of more than 37,000 Asian-white, black-white, and Latino-white biracials, who collectively were the focus of her study.

In addition to gender, religion and socioeconomic status also strongly influenced how biracials self-identified. "Relative to biracials who were religiously unaffiliated, those who identified with ethnically homogeneous religions were more likely to label themselves with a single racial category, than as multiracial," Davenport said.

For example, in contrast to religiously unaffiliated black-white biracials, the likelihood of identifying as multiracial declined by 44 percent for black-white biracial Baptists.

"I also found that money 'whitens' racial identification for biracials," Davenport said. She noted that compared to less affluent biracials, those from the most affluent homes and neighborhoods were more inclined to identify themselves as "white" or as multiracial than as singular minorities.

"These findings show that for the growing mixed-race population, racial labeling choices are intimately linked to social group attachments, identities, and income," Davenport said.

Overall, Davenport found that 71 percent of black-white biracials, 54 percent of Asian-white biracials, and 37 percent of Latino-white biracials identified as multiracial.

"For decades, hypodescent—commonly known as the 'one-drop rule'—structured how individuals of part-black backgrounds were legally and socially identified in the United States," said Davenport. "As a result, I found it particularly interesting that the vast majority of young people of black-white parentage in my study opted to self-identify with a multiracial label. The fact that of the three biracial groups I focused on, black-white biracials were the most likely to call themselves multiracial is striking. But, it is also in line with the Census statistics showing that 'black and white' has become the largest multiple-race population in the United States, tripling in size since 2000. For black-white biracials, a multiracial identification is the new normal."

So, why were black-white biracials the most likely to identify as multiracial?

"I think it relates to the fact that the 'one-drop rule' has been so strong for this population that they feel like historically they have been given less of an ability to choose their race," Davenport said. "I believe this movement towards multiracialism is partially a response to that frustration. Because people in this group have so strongly been expected to identify as black, they are choosing to assert a new identity, one that incorporates both their black and white heritages. It is also likely that, for some, a multiracial label reflects a desire to socially distance and distinguish oneself from blacks."

While black-white biracials were the most likely to identify as [multiracial](#), they were also the least likely to self-label as white. Davenport found that 5 percent of black-white biracials identified as white only, compared to 11 percent of Asian-white biracials and 18 percent of Latino-white biracials.

"It's not completely unexpected that Latino-whites were the most likely of these three groups to identify as white only," Davenport said. "I think

a lot of Latino-Americans think of themselves as having a race that is separate from their ethnicity. On the other hand, that black-white biracials are the least likely to adopt a singular white identification is to be expected, given the legacy of hypodescent, historical norms against 'passing' as white, and the greater tendency for black-white biracials to be categorized as non-white by other groups."

As for why her study is important, Davenport said the multiple-race population is currently one of the fastest-growing racial groups in the country.

"Rates of interracial marriage continue to rise, and social scientists have estimated that one in five Americans will be of mixed-race by 2050," Davenport said. "This population is a young one, and how members of this group choose to label themselves will have implications for the American racial landscape and race relations. Racial identification is also important for the allocation of political resources, the implementation of affirmative action, and the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in employment, education, and housing. How biracial individuals choose to identify is more than an assertion of their racial group attachments—it also has real political consequences."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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