

Whites distrust biracial people when their racial presentation varies, study finds

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In a multiracial society, people of biracial background sometimes find it necessary or advantageous to present themselves as members of one ethnic group or the other. A Rutgers study says white people react negatively to such "contextual racial presentation." . Credit: Rutgers University

Whites consider biracial people to be less trustworthy if they change their racial presentation depending on circumstances, Rutgers University-New Brunswick researchers find.

The study appears in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

Rutgers social psychologists Analia Albuja and Diana Sanchez studied how [white people](#) perceive biracial people who identify as biracial but who sometimes "present" themselves as one race or the other in different situations.

In the 2010 U.S. Census, nine million people identified themselves as "multiracial" (chose more than one race), and 30 percent said they had, at some point, presented themselves as members of one race or another.

In a series of five studies, the researchers asked hundreds of white people to review blog posts purportedly written by people who identified as black and white or Asian and white. Some of the "bloggers" indicated that when applying for jobs or college admission or when filling out government forms, they sometimes presented themselves as biracial and sometimes as one race or the other.

The researchers coined a term for presenting oneself as a member of one race in some contexts and of another [race](#) in another context: contextual racial presentation, or CRP.

Sanchez and Albuja, the lead author and a psychology graduate student in the School of Graduate Studies, recruited several hundred white subjects to take part in the studies online. The researchers asked their subjects to fill out online questionnaires designed to elicit their impressions of the bloggers. How trustworthy were they? How likeable were they? Was their behavior—whether or not they presented themselves contextually—right or wrong?

The results showed that across the board—regardless of whether the "bloggers" presented themselves as white or members of a minority or whether they could benefit from their choice—white people perceived

them as less trustworthy and likeable than biracial people who didn't present contextually. The white people were more likely than not to object to such presentation on moral grounds. However, when the bloggers didn't have a choice in the matter (some forms didn't have a category for bi-racial people), white people were more lenient.

Sanchez said she and Albuja chose white participants exclusively for the studies because they have a position of privilege in U.S. society and have more ability to set rules and norms for how people of different races are perceived.

More information: Analia F. Albuja et al. Fluid racial presentation: Perceptions of contextual "passing" among biracial people, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jesp.2018.04.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2018.04.010)

Provided by Rutgers University

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