Social Psychology Quarterly
2004, Vol. 67, No. 2, 115–131

The Role of Reflected Appraisals in Racial Identity: The Case of Multiracial Asians*

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Asian Americans are one of the fastest-growing minorities in the United States and show the highest outmarriage rate; yet little research has investigated the racial identity of multiracial Asians. This study explores the racial identity of multiracial Asians in the United States, using survey data on 110 Asian-white adults, and examines the factors that shape this identity. The literature suggests a number of factors; drawing on the theoretical framework of reflected appraisals, I hypothesize that certain factors will be more important than others in this process. When respondents were asked with which race they identified more strongly, Asian or white, two factors were shown to exert the strongest influence on racial identity, namely phenotype and cultural exposure. Logistic regression and qualitative responses reveal that the racial identities of this sample of Asian-white adults are shaped largely by the reflected appraisals of others regarding their appearance and cultural knowledge.

Since the 1970s, Asian Americans have been one of the fastest-growing racial minorities in the United States (Fong 1998; Xie and Goyette 1997). As a result of the 1965 Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act, which lifted restrictions on Asian immigration, the Asian American population has grown approximately 141 percent, while the overall population has increased by 11 percent (Lee and Yamanaka 1990). Asians in the United States also register one of the highest outmarriage rates of any racial minority, producing a visibly growing group of multiracial Asian children (Kitano et al. 1984; Lee and Yamanaka 1990).

Despite a recent increase in research on multiracial individuals and identity, few studies have examined racial identity in multiracial Asians. In this paper I investigate several key factors that shape racial identity in these individuals, particularly those who claim Asian and white descent. Racial identity may be particularly important because it gives people a sense of identity with one group or another, a feeling of community and belonging, and a sense of self. This sense of self may be more complex for individuals with multiple racial backgrounds.

This study builds on gaps in previous multiracial research in several ways. First, past research focuses heavily on the identities and social adjustments of black-white multiracial children. An exploration of Asian-white identity will complement existing studies of black-white identities by providing a more general picture of racial identity among those of white-minority racial mixes, as well as addressing the influence of nationality and ethnicity on racial identity.

Second, previous research on multiracial children and adults primarily uses the case-study method or a small number of interviews. The small sample sizes stem from difficulties in locating respondents in the population. The few studies using larger samples rely on census data, which provide only limited measures of identity. Census studies on multiracial individuals are often limited by their focus on multiracial children rather than adults: the parents, not the children

* The author thanks William Finlay, Stephanie Bohon, Karyn Lacy, and Ashby Walker for reading early drafts of this paper, with special gratitude to Woody Beck and Joya Misra. The author also would like especially to thank Karen Hegtvedt and Cathy Johnson for their invaluable comments and suggestions. An earlier version of this article was presented at the meetings of the fifteenth World Congress of Sociology, held in Brisbane, Australia on July 7–13, 2002, and was supported by American Sociological Association Travel Award Grant 0209367 through the National Science Foundation. Address communications to Nikki Khanna, Department of Sociology, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322; nkhanna@emory.edu.

themselves, fill out the forms. As a consequence, census-based studies may create an inaccurate picture of racial identity.

Finally, no previous study on multiracial individuals has simultaneously taken into account the factors examined here that may influence identity. Thus, past research hardly offers an integrated explanation regarding the various elements shaping racial identity.

To address the gaps in previous research, I use survey data from 110 multiracial Asian-white adults to explore the following question: What factors shape racial identity? Previous studies on mixed-race individuals suggest a number of possible factors; several of these pertain to social interaction and to the influence of others' reactions, whether real or perceived, on identity. Thus, to create a more fully integrated theoretical understanding of mixed-race identities, I draw on the theoretical framework of reflected appraisals: that is, individuals' perceptions of how others view them (Cooley 1902). No known published research has applied the "reflected appraisal" approach to analyze mixed-race identity quantitatively. This perspective allows me to assess the relative importance of various elements that influence racial identity.

Below I identify factors suggested in the literature, which may shape racial identity. Then, employing the theoretical framework of reflected appraisals, I propose that two of these factors, phenotype and cultural exposure, will be the strongest determinants. I examine previous findings with regard to the effects of phenotype and cultural exposure, and predict how each will influence identity. Finally, using logistic regression and written responses from two open-ended questions, I examine how these factors shape identity, and explore the extent to which the reflected appraisal process can be used to explain the racial identity of multiracial individuals in this sample.

RACIAL IDENTITY: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Factors Affecting Racial Identity

Factors that may affect multiracial individuals' racial identity have been explored through major quantitative studies using U.S. Census data, and in a few additional quantitative and qualitative studies (Cauce et al. 1992; Hall 1980, 1992; Mass 1992; Saenz, Hwang, and Anderson 1995; Standen 1996; Stephan 1991; Stephan and Stephan 1989; Williams 1992; Xie and Goyette 1997). Collectively, these studies have identified a number of factors that may shape racial identity, including phenotype, cultural exposure, respondent's gender, gender of the respondent's Asian parent, generation, and socioeconomic background.

Phenotype, or physical appearance, may influence the race with which one most strongly identifies, although the literature is mixed with regard to its effect: some find no correlation between looks and identity (Hall 1980, 1992; Williams 1992), while others claim an association (Kinloch 1983; Stephan 1991, 1992; Stephan and Stephan 1989). Cultural exposure to one's non-white cultural heritage also may influence the racial identity of those with white-minority mixed ancestry: studies show that increased cultural exposure may influence ethnic/racial identification (Stephan 1991, 1992).

Previous studies examining both multiracial and non-white children claim that gender may influence racial and ethnic identity. Women may be more likely to identify with their non-white parent and/or retain more cultural behaviors (Portes and Schauffler 1994; Salgado de Snyder and Padilla 1982). Census studies on multiracial Asians, however, find no gender difference in identification (Saenz et al. 1995; Xie and Goyette 1997).

Another possible influencing factor is the Asian parent's gender: in this case, whether the respondent has an Asian mother or an Asian father. Again, the literature is divided. Some studies claim that mothers play a larger role in their child's ethnic socialization (Karakasidou 1996; Wilson 1981): having an Asian mother will exert a stronger effect on Asian identity than having an Asian father. Other studies, however, point to the father as the primary cultural transmitter of the family, in which children tend to identify with the father's ancestry and surname (Saenz et al. 1995; Smith and Katzkoff 1986; Waters 1989; Xie and Goyette 1997).

Generation, referring to the length of time the Asian parent and the respondent have been in the United States, also may

affect racial and ethnic identification. Studies of multiracial Asians and other multiracial/multiethnic people show that the effect of identity weakens as the generations pass (Aguirre, Saenz, and Hwang 1990; Lieberson 1985). Other studies of multiracial Asians claim a curvilinear effect, in which first-generation individuals are the most likely to identify as Asian, while the second generation is the least likely to do so. Those of the third generation and beyond, however, are more likely than second-generation multiracials to identify as Asian (Saenz et al. 1995). This trend refers to what Gans (1979) describes as the ethnic revival of later generations, in which ethnicity is largely symbolic. He terms this phenomenon "symbolic ethnicity": these individuals may have only weak ties to their ethnic ancestry, but they show stronger ethnic identification than the previous generation by engaging in acts that express ethnic identity through symbols such as holidays and food.

Finally, socioeconomic background may affect ethnic/racial identity. Proponents of the "ethnic-competition" perspective speculate that as socioeconomic status increases, people are more likely to identify with their minority group because conflict with the white majority increases as they move up the socioeconomic ladder (Hwang and Murdock 1991; Portes 1984). In contrast, the "assimilationist" perspective predicts that as the parents' socioeconomic status increases, people will be more likely to identify with the majority group (white) because they will be more fully integrated into mainstream society (Gordon 1964). Empirical census-based studies on multiracial Asians are mixed, however, and other known empirical research is lacking (Saenz et al. 1995; Xie and Goyette 1997).

Explaining Patterns: The Role of Reflected Appraisals

Although the literature suggests a number of potential influencing factors, no study has taken them simultaneously into account, nor has demonstrated the relative importance of each. Drawing on the literature on reflected appraisals, I propose that two factors, *phenotype* and *cultural exposure,* will be more important than any other factor presented here in influencing racial identity.

According to Cooley (1902), self-concepts are formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in the environment. According to his concept of the "looking-glass" self, individuals first imagine how they appear to others. Second, they imagine others' judgment of that appearance. Finally, they develop some sort of self-feeling or self-concept from this process. In short, individuals come to see themselves as they *perceive* significant others to see them. The "looking-glass" is a metaphor for the way people's self-concepts are shaped by their perceptions of how others view them.

Later theorists and researchers reconfirmed Cooley's notion that the self develops out of the reflected appraisals of others (Goffman 1959; Mead 1934; Schlenker 1980; Sullivan 1947, 1953). According to Felson (1981), "self-perception does not occur in a social vacuum" (p. 79); other people exert a strong influence on individuals' conceptions of themselves. Kinch (1963) proposed that actual responses affect not only our perceptions of others' attitudes towards us, but also the development of our own self-concept. People do not form their self-concepts in complete isolation, but allow them to be shaped in part by the actual and reflected appraisals of others. Further, according to Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982), people feel that their identity claims require validation by others to give them social reality. This point may be particularly important for mixed-race individuals attempting to assert one racial identity over another.

Cooley (1902), however, acknowledges that reflected appraisals are only one process leading to development of one's self-concept. Sole reliance on reflected appraisals to understand the self-concept creates an oversocialized, overpassive view of human beings, as humans often are creative and active in forming self-concepts (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983). Research suggests, however, that reflected appraisals are likely to be important in instances when there are no clear criteria or objective feedback as a basis for self-attributions, such as grades or test scores to determine intelligence (Felson 1981). In the absence of clear-cut and objective criteria for judging who belongs where, mixed-race indi-

viduals often may rely on reflected appraisals in the development of their self-concept with regard to race. More important, Israel (1956) and Backman, Secord, and Pierce (1963) claim that others' appraisals exert more influence on one's self-appraisal when the subject is in a state of uncertainty. This may pertain to mixed-race individuals, who encounter ambiguity about where they belong racially. The more ambiguous one's information, the more likely one is to rely on the opinions of others (Asch 1951; Festinger 1954).

Moreover, some factors affecting racial identity may be shaped more strongly than others by reflected appraisals, and thus may exert a stronger impact on racial identity. Felson (1985) suggests that attributes which are *defined in terms of the perceptions of others,* such as physical attractiveness, are likely to be influenced strongly by reflected appraisals. Racial phenotype, also may be defined in terms of others' perceptions. I argue that racial identity is formed in social interaction, and that the influence of others' reactions towards individuals' phenotype and cultural exposure will predict racial identity most strongly.

> *Hypothesis 1:* An Asian-white individual's phenotype and cultural exposure will be the most important factors influencing racial identity.

Phenotype. Others' reactions to an individual's physical characteristics are likely to exert a strong influence on that person's self-concept with regard to race. Previous research, however, is mixed with regard to the significance of phenotype. Hall (1980, 1992) found no correlation between self-perceived racial appearance and identity. Her studies and others claim that among multiracial Japanese-Americans, physical appearance does not always play a role in racial identification (Hall 1980; Williams 1992). Surprisingly, looks and self-identification showed little correlation: "Whether or not an Amerasian looked relatively more Japanese, more Afro-American, more Euro-American, or possessed various degrees of physical in-betweenness . . . [it] did not always explain why he or she selected a particular identity" (Williams 1992:291–92). This finding, however, may have more relation to the current political climate than to one's internalized racial identity. Labeling oneself as a member of a minority may stem from guilt by association with the white majority or from some perceived advantage in identifying as a person of color. In addition, physical appearance may be somewhat subjective, depending on who is making the judgment, and thus may complicate this kind of research.

Other researchers, nonetheless, claim a correlation between physical appearance and ethnic/racial identity. Stephan (1992) found that racial resemblance was associated significantly with ethnic identity for those of Hispanic origin. Other researchers similarly have found a correlation between physical appearance and ethnic identity for multiracial Asians (Kinloch 1983; Stephan and Stephan 1989). Thus I predict:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Asian-white individuals who perceive that others think they appear more Asian than non-Asian (white or any other race/ethnicity) will be more likely to identify as Asian than those who feel that others think they appear non-Asian.

Cultural exposure. The perceived reactions of others (Asian and non-Asian) to one's cultural exposure are likely to influence racial identity. Previous research has shown a relationship between exposure and ethnic identification (Stephan 1991; Stephan and Stephan 1989); exposure may encompass a number of factors.

Researchers have shown a positive correlation between language use and ethnic identity, and have interpreted it as an aspect of Asian cultural exposure (Saenz et al. 1995; Uyeki 1960; Williams 1992). Research also has found that as the local ethnic population or the percentage of ethnic neighbors increases, identification with the ethnic group is more likely (Hall 1980; Saenz et al. 1995), possibly because of increased contact and communication with other ethnics. Stephan (1992) also discusses additional aspects of cultural exposure that influence identity: holidays, music, art objects, dance, household furnishings, festivals, crafts, and cultural values. Participation and exposure to these material and nonmaterial aspects of culture may give multiracials a sense of belonging, which may influence their ethnic identification. Finally, contact with the

home country (e.g., visiting Japan for a summer, living in China for a year) may influence identity, although little research has examined this possibility. Existing studies focus on multiracial Asians living on integrated U.S. military bases, but no research explores multiracial identity in the context of travel and residence in the ethnic parent's country of origin outside that context.

In short, as a respondent's exposure to the Asian culture of her or his ethnicity increases, so does the likelihood that the individual will identify as Asian. Cultural exposure is likely to give the person a sense of group belonging and acceptance within the minority racial group, as well as increased opportunities for contact and interaction; these are likely to influence identity. Therefore I propose:

> *Hypothesis 3:* As the exposure to Asian culture increases, so does the likelihood that Asian-white individuals will identify as Asian.

DATA AND METHODS

Overview

In this study, to examine factors that influence the racial identity of multiracial Asian-white adults, I quantitatively analyze survey responses from 110 Asian-white multiracial individuals. To understand more clearly *why* certain factors are more important than others, I explore qualitative responses to open-ended survey questions. Because of the difficulty in identifying multiracial individuals within the American population and thus the lack of a sampling frame from which to draw, I used snowball sampling.

To obtain respondents, I employed several methods. I placed classified advertisements about the study in local university papers, as well as in magazines that served multiracial readers. In addition, the Internet proved to be valuable in locating respondents: I posted a call for respondents primarily on multiracial websites and mailing lists.[1] The remaining subjects were brought into the study by word of mouth, through coworkers or friends. Respondents filled out a survey that I mailed to them either electronically or by post. Because the sample is nonrandom, findings cannot be generalized beyond the sample itself.

Participants in this study were selected if they had one biological white parent and one biological Asian parent,[2] were at least 18 years old, and were currently living in the United States. I recruited adults for two reasons: they are old enough to identify their racial preference without parental influence, and they are likely to have passed the identity crisis that often attends puberty and adolescence (Erikson 1968; Lipsitz 1977). Finally, I restricted the study to persons currently living in the United States to provide a picture of multiracial identity in this country where many racial/ethnic groups reside.

Measuring Racial Identity

Identity may be conceptualized and operationalized in a number of different ways: for example, by the racial label checked on census or other government forms, by the simple question "What are you?," or by asking how strongly they identify with a racial group or groups. As in recent work on racial identity (Harris and Sim 2002), I tapped "identity" in different ways.

Early findings in this sample showed a significant discrepancy between responses to different survey questions. Respondents were asked two questions created to measure racial identity: (1) "With which race do you most identify (feel a part)"—Asian or white? (2) "If filling out the 1990 U.S. Census, in which you had to choose one racial category, which would you choose?"—Asian, white, or other? Approximately 34 percent of respondents who claimed that they identified most as white chose to label themselves as Asian in the census question, showing a discrepancy between how people label themselves on official forms and which group they identify with most strongly. Less than 2 percent of those who

[1] Calls for respondents were posted on a number of multiracial websites including The Half Korean Page, Hapa Issues Forum, Interracial Voice, MAVIN Magazine Online, Metisse.com, and INTERracial.

[2] Respondents self-identified as biracial by answering an open-ended question about their racial background.

identified most as Asian, however, chose to label themselves as white in the census question, a significantly smaller discrepancy. Overall, despite an almost even division between respondents identifying most strongly as white (50.9%) and as Asian (49.1%), respondents were much more likely to declare themselves Asian (34%) than white (16%) in census categories.[3] This finding indicates some predilection towards *labeling* as Asian.

Politics may influence the race that a mixed-race person selects in response to racial questions on the census, job applications, college applications, and similar questionnaires. Carla Bradshaw (1992), a clinical psychologist who studies multiracial identity, explains why some individuals of a white-minority mix may choose to label themselves as members of a minority:

> The polarized racial climate may be particularly difficult for White-minority biracial individuals. . . . Racial consciousness and experiences of oppression compel some degree of identification with people of color. Though the biracial person may not be individually responsible for perpetuating racial oppression, access to social privileges and power implies identification with the oppressor and may evoke feelings of guilt and betrayal by association. (p. 87)

Therefore respondents in this sample may select the minority label (the Asian category) on the basis of active choices shaped by the political environment. In addition, individuals of a white-minority mix may select the race that may benefit them most at the time, such as by qualifying them for admissions programs or government benefits (Johnson et al. 1997; Ramirez 1996). Stephan and Stephan (2000) further propose the importance of examining the underlying functions of ethnic identity: they claim that choices of identity may serve particular purposes such as increasing prestige, obtaining a job, or avoiding identification with a disliked group. I argue that ethnic labeling may be guided by perceived advantages of identifying with one racial group over another. In short, self-selected labels may not necessarily represent the race with which the respondent identifies most, and thus may not be an adequate indicator of identity.

To avoid political or racial climate as intervening variables, I chose to measure racial identity as the racial group of which one most feels a part and with which one identifies most. I used surveys to collect information on the race with which the respondent *most identified*.[4] To measure this as a relatively stable characteristic, I asked:

> With which race/ethnicity do you MOST identify (the group that you really feel a part of)?
>
> (0) White
> (1) Asian

Other Survey Measures

To identify factors that might influence racial identity, I constructed and used additional questions that I developed, as well as questions from similar survey instruments used in previous multiracial studies (Hall 1992; Stephan 1992). I measured the respondent's phenotype by asking how they felt *others* would categorize them racially according to their looks. Looking white, appearing to be of another race altogether, or looking racially ambiguous was dummy-coded 0; looking Asian was coded 1.

With regard to cultural exposure, I included in the survey a general exposure variable in addition to eight more specific exposure variables. The general variable measured, on a four-point Likert scale ranging from not at all (1) to a lot (4), how exposed respondents felt they were to their Asian culture.[5]

The more specific exposure variables included proficiency in an Asian language,

[3] Fifty percent of all respondents labeled themselves "other."

[4] Racial identity for mixed-race people may not be static, but may change and evolve over time and with age, and may vary with the situation (Waters 1990). However, I was seeking a measure of a stable self-concept with regard to race, at least at this point in the respondent's life.

[5] These analyses are inherently asymmetric: the measures tap Asian cultural exposure, while white American culture is presumed. This was the case because I believed that white cultural exposure variables would not show enough variation to merit inclusion in the models.

which was measured on a five-point scale: higher numbers represented greater perceived proficiency. Parents' participation in the Asian community of their own ethnicity while respondents were growing up was measured on a five-point scale from there was little or no community in the area (1) to parents participated often (5). The size of the Asian community where respondents primarily grew up was measured on a five-point scale ranging from nonexistent (1) to 100 more families (5).

I used a four-point Likert scale to measure both the respondents' family participation in Asian ethnic and national holidays and the frequency of hearing music from the Asian parent's country of origin played in their household as they were growing up (not at all = 1; a lot = 4). The frequency of eating food from the Asian parent's country of origin while growing up was measured on an eight-point scale from never or less than once a year (1) to every day (8). The frequency of having Asian neighbors of their Asian ethnicity when growing up was coded rarely/never (1), occasionally (2), and frequently/very frequently (3). The final cultural exposure variable, whether the respondents had ever lived for any period in the Asian parent's country of origin (excluding birth), was dummy-coded no (0) and yes (1).[6]

Additional factors identified in the literature are used as controls. The respondent's gender was dummy-coded female (0) and male (1). Socioeconomic background was measured by three variables: the mother's and father's completed education (measured on a seven-point scale with 7 denoting the most education), and the parents' approximate yearly income when respondents were 16 years old. I took midpoints of income ranges, and represented income by nine categories ranging from lowest to highest. Respondents were asked which parent was of Asian descent; responses were dummy-coded 0 if the Asian parent was the mother and 1 if the Asian parent was the father. Each respondent's generation was coded into two dummy variables representing generations 2 and 3 (with generation 1 as a referent variable).

Finally, the survey included two additional open-ended questions, which allowed respondents to comment on the fluidity of their ethnic/racial identities as well as on the positive and negative experiences of being multiracial. First they were asked to explain how their choice in racial/ethnic identification might have changed over time, in different situations, or with different people. Later they were asked to comment, in general, about their experience of being Asian-white in the United States, as well as about any positive or negative experiences that stood out in their minds.

FINDINGS

Respondents' Characteristics

Of the 110 respondents, almost 37 percent are Korean-white, 25 percent are Chinese-white, 25 percent are Japanese-white, nearly 6 percent are Indian-white, 2.5 percent are Filipino-white, 2.5 percent are Thai-white, and the remaining are of mixed Asian heritage and white. Fifty-three percent of the sample are female; 47 percent are male. The ages range from 18 to 52 years, with a mean of 22. Further, the mother is the Asian parent for 71 percent of the respondents, and the father for 29 percent. This is not surprising because Asian American women are far more likely than Asian American men to intermarry (Kitano et al. 1984; Lee and Yamaka 1990).

Most of the respondents (nearly 60%) are second-generation Americans with respect to the Asian parent: that parent was foreign-born, but they were born in the United States. Almost 23 percent of the sample are first-generation Americans (both they and their parents were born outside the United States), and 18 percent are third-generation Americans or beyond (both they and the Asian parent are U.S.-born).

Most respondents reported a middle-class background, as indicated by parental

[6] Cultural exposure variables primarily tap exposure to Asian heritage "while growing up." The heavy emphasis on childhood socialization and Asian exposure is due to the young age of the sample. Socialization, however, is likely to influence the respondents' racial identity throughout their life course, and variables tapping current context will become more important as the respondents age.

income and educational levels.[7] Asian Americans show the highest levels of education, occupational attainment, and income among minority groups (Lee and Yamanaka 1990). In addition, intermarriage occurs most often among the most highly educated and most professional Asian Americans (Lee and Yamanaka 1990). The respondents' prosperous socioeconomic background is most likely due as well to the recruitment methods of university and Internet advertising. Table 1 provides a summary of the means and standard deviations of all variables included in both regression models.

Regression Analyses

Table 2 presents the logistic regression results assessing the impact of various factors on the likelihood that a respondent identifies as Asian.[8] I present two logistic regression models: a basic model and an extended model that includes eight additional cultural exposure variables. Although significance tests are reported in both models, they are presented for descriptive purposes only. Because the sample is nonrandom, inferences cannot be made to a larger population.

In Hypothesis 1 I predicted that a respondent's phenotype and the level of cultural exposure to her or his Asian heritage would be the most important factors influencing racial identity. As predicted by the theoretical framework of reflected appraisals, this hypothesis is supported. Phenotype, measured by how respondents felt that *others* perceived their looks, was the strongest influencing factor, as shown by the highest odds-ratio value in Model 1. The second strongest factor is cultural exposure. In Model 2, phenotype again is the strongest influencing factor, followed by the cultural exposure variables of language proficiency, frequency of eating Asian food while growing up, and Asian residence.

In Hypothesis 2 I predicted a positive relationship between looks and racial identity. Model 1 shows that Asian-whites in this sample are 197 percent more likely (or twice as likely) to identify as Asian than as non-Asian if they feel that others perceive them as looking Asian. The effect of phenotype on racial identity is even stronger in Model 2, where respondents are 481 percent (or five times as likely) to identify as Asian if they feel others perceive their looks as Asian. In

[7] Forty-one percent reported that their parents made $70,000+ per year. More than 80 percent of the fathers had completed some college or more, as had 67 percent of the mothers.

[8] The analyses presented here focus on factors that lead Asian-whites to identify as Asian, not on those which cause them to identify as white. These analyses are asymmetrical in that we are tapping into Asian identity for the sake of clarity and brevity in the discussion.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender	.533	.501
Asian Parent	.292	.456
Phenotype	.303	.461
Father's Education	5.077	1.625
Mother's Education	4.008	1.773
Parental Income	67,916.179	44,232.931
Gener2	.592	.494
Gener3	.183	.389
General Exposure	2.790	.882
Language Proficiency	2.817	1.160
Parent's Participation	3.143	1.284
Community Size	3.314	1.436
Holiday	2.630	1.171
Food	5.740	1.725
Music	2.203	1.209
Asian Neighbors	1.583	.805
Asian Residence	.300	.460

Table 2. Logistic Regression for Likelihood of Most Identifying as Asian

	Model 1 (Basic)	Model 2 (Extended)
Variable	*B*(Exp*B*)/Odds Ratio	*B*(Exp*B*)/Odds Ratio
Gender (Male)	–.2543 (.7755)	.7536 (2.1246)
	–22.5%	112.5%
Asian Parent (Father)	–.2538 (.7758)	–.1238 (.8836)
	–22.4%	–11.7%
Phenotype (Asian)	1.088 (2.9688)*	1.7603 (5.8141)**
	196.9%	481.4%
Father's Education	–.3753 (.6871)†	.4058 (.6664)†
	–31.3%	–33.4%
Mother's Education	.3342 (1.3969)*	.2365 (1.2668)
	39.7%	26.9%
Parental Income	-7.2^{-06} (1.000)	-7.7^{-06} (1.000)
	0.0%	0.0%
Generation 2	–.3661 (.6934)	–.1959 (.8221)
	–30.7%	–17.8%
Generation 3	.4051 (1.4995)	.7739 (2.1683)
	50.0%	116.8%
General Cultural Exposure	.6733 (1.9607)*	—
	96.1%	
Language Proficiency	—	.7760 (2.1728)*
		117.3%
Parent's Participation	—	–.1181 (.8886)
		–11.1%
Community Size	—	.1051 (1.1108)
		11.1%
Holiday	—	–.3198 (.7263)
		–27.4%
Food	—	.6504 (1.9163)**
		91.6%
Music	—	–.2859 (.7513)
		–24.9%
Asian Neighbors	—	.5812 (1.7882)
		78.8%
Asian Residence (Yes)	—	–1.3642 (.2556)†
		–74.4%
Constant	–0.9297	–4.3754*
N	105	101
Significance	0.007**	.000**
Percent Correct Predicted	68.57%	75.25%
Cox and Snell R^2	0.194	0.330
Nagelkerke R^2	0.258	0.439

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed test)

both models, this relationship is statistically significant.

In Hypothesis 3 I predicted that Asian-white individuals would be more likely to identify as Asian as cultural exposure to their Asian heritage increases. Regression Model 1 reveals a positive, highly statistically significant relationship between Asian cultural exposure and a stronger identity as Asian than as white. For every unit increase in the respondent's perceived cultural exposure, the respondent's odds of identifying most strongly as Asian increase by 96 percent.

Regression Model 2, with the additional exposure variables, also supports the hypothesis that increased cultural exposure increases the likelihood of an Asian identity. Racial identity is influenced significantly by three variables: language proficiency in the Asian parent's first language, frequency of eating food from the Asian parent's country of origin while growing up, and ever having lived in

the Asian parent's country of origin. For each unit increase in the respondent's language proficiency, the respondent is 117 percent more likely to identify as Asian. This finding supports previous research, which shows a correlation between language and ethnic identity. For each unit increase in the frequency of eating ethnic food from the Asian parent's country of origin while growing up, the respondent is 91.6 percent more likely to identify as Asian.

In Model 2, however, an unexpected significant relationship appears between Asian identity and whether a respondent has spent time living in the Asian parent's country of origins (Asian residence). Although I predicted a positive relationship (as time in the Asian country would increase cultural exposure and thus would strengthen an Asian identity), the relationship is actually negative. It appears that respondents who have spent time living in the Asian parent's country are actually 74 percent *less* likely to identify as Asian than are those who have never lived there. I explore this finding in the qualitative section of this paper.

As for other factors included here as controls, only mother's and father's education show significant effects on racial identity: both are indicators of socioeconomic background. For each unit increase in the father's educational level, we find a 31 percent decrease in the odds of the respondent's identifying as Asian in Model 1, and a 33 percent decrease in Model 2. This finding may partially support previous research claiming that as socioeconomic status increases, the respondent will be less likely to identify as Asian and more likely to identify as white, as predicted by the "assimilationist perspective." The opposite, however, seems to be true for mother's educational attainment, which shows an increase in the odds of identifying as Asian. Yet this relationship disappears in Model 2 when the general cultural exposure variable is removed and is replaced with eight more specific cultural exposure variables. Thus, when controlling for more specific variables, mother's educational level is no longer important.

The third and final indicator of socioeconomic background, parental income, shows no significant relationship with identity. The remaining controls—gender, Asian parent's gender, and generation[9]—also reveal no significant relationship with racial identity.

The Influence of Reflected Appraisals on Racial Identity: Qualitative Responses

I argue that the strong effects of phenotype and cultural exposure on racial identity can be explained by reflected appraisals. Open-ended survey responses provide insight into this process. First, I point out examples in which respondents felt that others' reactions to their *phenotype* influenced their racial identity. I also show instances in which they felt that their looks facilitated some measure of acceptance or rejection by a racial group, and explained how this affected their identity. Second, I demonstrate how others' reactions to the respondents' *cultural knowledge* and exposure have influenced their feelings of belonging, and hence their racial identification. Finally, I draw on comments made by respondents with regard to traveling or living in the Asian parent's country of origin, to clarify how reflected appraisals explain why they actually may be *less* likely to identify as Asian.

Influence of phenotype on racial identity. Respondents commented frequently on how they thought *others* viewed their phenotype, and how this has affected their racial identification. A Korean-white respondent who identifies most strongly as Asian commented on how she perceives the views of other Koreans and of non-Asians regarding her looks:

> Since I *look* full Korean, most non-Asians wouldn't know what to think when they met my parents. . . . However, Koreans are no better. The older Koreans expect me to speak fluently, and question when I don't understand what they're saying . . . the Koreans where I live now try to ignore the fact that there is another side of me. They try not to see the Caucasian side of me. For the most part, they don't have to see it, since I don't look it (respondent's emphasis).

[9] Generations 2 and 3 were run separately in each model because of their correlation (see Appendix Table A1), yet the effects remained insignificant in both models.

The respondent's perception of others (both Korean and non-Korean) in regard to her looks is that of a "full" Korean. Both groups interact with her as if she is Asian; not surprisingly, she identifies most strongly as Asian.

The importance of one's perceptions of others' views of one's phenotype is also evident in the comments of a Chinese-white respondent, who identifies most as white. She commented on how she perceives other Chinese people's reactions to her:

> I now do not relate to Asian culture and have considered myself of almost little Asian background. The reaction I get from most people when I tell them I'm half Chinese is "Oh really? You don't act or look Chinese" . . . when I was younger the older Chinese people in the community used to poke fun at me because of my lighter skin and brownish-black hair.

Unlike the first respondent, who was mistaken for "full" Korean, this Chinese-white respondent is questioned continually about whether she has any Chinese ancestry at all. Constant questioning of her Asian ancestry may prevent her from identifying with other Asians.

Some respondents commented on how their racial identity was influenced by changes in their looks while they were growing up. Their comments directly link their perception of others towards their looks to their own racial identity. More important, these comments connect others' reactions to their looks to how others *interacted* with them, which in turn affected how the respondents identified. One Korean-white respondent, recalling how his identification has changed over time, observed:

> I think as my looks changed, I got treated differently, which made me change the way I identified myself.

Another Korean-white respondent reflected similarly on how his peers influenced his change in identification over time:

> I mainly began to change with my appearances. I began to look more Asian; therefore I began to be classified as such by peers.

Moreover, in regard to phenotype, many of the respondents commented on how their physical characteristics influenced their own *perceptions of acceptance* by one or both racial groups. Acceptance by group members seems to play a large role in group identity: Stephan (1991) found that such acceptance, often based on the respondents' physical characteristics, was a determinant of ethnic identity. She discovered that racial identity was influenced by reactions by both family and nonfamily members to the individual's phenotype. For instance, one Japanese-white respondent remarked on how her looks facilitated a feeling of acceptance by whites; thus it is not surprising that she identifies most strongly as white. She wrote:

> Due to my mixed heritage and appearance I found it tough to identify with either Asians or whites. In the end, the Caucasian population was more accepting . . . I don't have many Asian friends or ties. The Asian population in general sees me as Caucasian and sometimes doesn't ever even believe I am half Asian.

Another respondent, a Korean-white woman, commented on feeling rejected by other Koreans because of her looks. Not surprisingly she also identifies most strongly as white:

> The toughest part is not being accepted by my Korean-speaking, Korean-American peers. I don't have the typical "almond shaped, Asian eyes," and my frame isn't quite what you would call the typical Asian petite.

In contrast, a Chinese-white respondent reflected on how her looks prevented acceptance by whites. Thus, she identifies most as Asian:

> I feel most comfortable with Asians. I don't look white, therefore Caucasians don't accept me as white. I look mostly Asian.

Physical characteristics often dictate acceptance into ethnic/racial groups. For those who attempt to assert an identity that differs from their physical appearance, reactions by others may constrain their choices and influence their identity formation. If multiracial individuals attempt to assert an identity that differs from how others see them, their self is likely to be challenged with comments such as "Really? You don't look it!" (Bradshaw 1992).

This situation is evident in the following statement. This respondent identifies most as white because of perceived group reactions, both white and Japanese, to her looks:

> I have been more accepted by the Caucasian community because of my appearance. Most racism I have experienced has been primarily from the Asian community. My appearance and parentage have led people of all ethnicities to think I am not an "authentic Asian." When I've said I'm Japanese, people have often told me I'm not, as if I wouldn't know my racial background.

Further, ethnic and racial identities that differ from outside perceptions may even lead to confusion, as in the case of this Asian Indian-white respondent:

> [T]he Indian-American groups made me prove my heritage in a way that was humiliating and insulting. To spend my whole life defending my Indian heritage against taunts and ignorance, to feel very proud of this ethnicity, and then to have ignorant Indian-American youth accusingly ask, "What are you?" when I attended Indian functions, look at me with shock when I ate Indian food, be told that I was so "fair" or light, implying that it was unthinkable that I was Indian . . . infuriated me and added to my confusion.

Influence of cultural exposure on racial identity.

Respondents also commented frequently on how *others' reactions* to their cultural knowledge influenced their feelings of belonging. Individuals may enjoy a sense of legitimacy if they think others perceive them as a member of the ethnic/racial group. Those who felt exposure to the culture were also more likely to identify as Asian; in written comments, these respondents mentioned how understanding the culture somehow enhanced their "Asianness" in the eyes of other Asians.

For example, Asians may be more inclined to accept multiracial Asians who can speak their language, and this acceptance may strengthen the respondent's identity as an Asian. Inability to speak or understand the ethnic language is likely to distance the mixed-race individual from other Asian ethnics, as in the example of a Chinese-white respondent who identifies most strongly as white. He commented on others' challenges to his Asian identity:

> I've often questioned my own racial identity, or had it questioned by others. I feel sort of distanced from being Asian, mainly because of my appearance, but also because I realize how vastly different my life growing up is from my father's. When visiting relatives, the conversation is usually Tagalog and Chinese, neither of which I speak, so I'm often left on the sidelines.

Individuals who are only "half" Asian might already feel lack of acceptance by monoracial Asians. This may be intensified if they do not possess the cultural knowledge that otherwise might give them access to the group. A Korean-white respondent described how his lack of cultural knowledge has influenced other Koreans' reactions towards him. He perceives that the Korean community does not accept him as Korean because of this lack of knowledge; therefore his sense of belonging lies with whites.

> The Korean community is a bit more reluctant to consider me Korean for two basic reasons: my appearance and, more importantly, I have no real connection to Korean culture. . . . Even if at first Koreans are apprehensive to me being Korean, if I could prove culturally I was, then I believe I would have a more welcome response. Unfortunately, again I have no Asian upbringing.

An Indian-white male, who identifies most strongly as white, commented similarly on other Asian ethnics' reactions to him and his lack of cultural knowledge:

> One thing I've noticed about myself is that on college applications and other forms where it would be to my advantage to declare myself a minority, I feel like I'm lying if I do so. Largely because I'm treated by most strangers like I am Caucasian because I was raised by parents who chose not to make a big effort to expose me to Indian culture, it seemed like the only fair option would be to put down "Caucasian."

Influence of residence in Asia on racial identity. In regard to cultural exposure, I found an unexpected relationship between

Asian identity and residence in Asian parent's country of origin. Those who had spent time living in the Asian parent's country of origin, such as Japan, China, or India, actually were *less* likely to identify as Asian. The process of reflected appraisals may be useful in accounting for this surprising relationship. One possible explanation is that living in an Asian parent's country of origin may make differences between multiracial and monoracial Asians *more* evident. Differences in physical appearance and cultural knowledge may be more noticeable in environments more homogenous with regard to physical characteristics than in the United States, where many ethnic and racial groups live and where intermarriage and mixed-race individuals are increasing. For multiracial Asians raised in Asia, phenotype may visibly identify them as separate from the dominant monoracial Asian groups (Williams 1992).

A 20-year-old female Japanese-white respondent wrote:

> I've never had any bad experiences by being half Japanese/half white in the United States. I've always been pretty [well] accepted, because I have always been aware of my ethnicity . . . [however], I didn't like being looked at in Japan because when I was a young girl, there were hardly any foreigners in Japan, so I felt like an outcast.

Slight variations in physical appearance may draw attention: in one study of Japanese-white individuals (Williams 1992), respondents commented that others who were curious about their looks often stopped them on the street. This became a constant reminder of their physical differences. This situation is made more evident in the comments by many of my respondents. One man of Korean-white parentage described how others' reactions to him, while he was living in Asia, led him to identify as white:

> I was born in Korea, living there until I was eight. Then my family moved to the Philippines, where I lived till I came to the U.S. for college. So I basically grew up in Asia. At that time, I thought of myself as culturally American, and physically as a Caucasian, because that's how people treated me.

Although this individual was raised and lived most of his life in Asia, he identified most strongly as white and as American (rather than as Asian and Korean) because of the reactions he encountered and his interactions with other Asians.

Similar reactions were expressed by a 46-year-old Japanese-white male respondent:

> Not too long ago, I visited my relatives in Tokyo, Japan to see my cousin get married. I felt like I did not fit in when I was there. Japan is truly a monoculture and it made me realize that I am only half Japanese. . . . Other than that genetic linkage, I am an American.

Thus, reflected appraisals may explain why those who have visited or lived in an Asian country are actually less likely to identify as Asian. Other Asians' reactions whether real or perceived, are likely to draw attention to the differences between multiracial and monoracial Asians. Multiracial Asian-white individuals visiting or living in these environments may feel a greater distance between themselves and their Asian ethnic group, which may strengthen their identity as white rather than Asian.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This diverse sample of multiracial Asian-white Americans shows that racial identity is quite complex. What the majority of the population often takes for granted may be less simple for mixed-race Americans in search of identity and a sense of belonging. In this paper I have sought to identify factors that shape racial identity, and have found a number of variables that play a significant role. The most important are phenotype and cultural exposure, with some evidence as well for socioeconomic status.

Many of the variables detected in previous studies as important influences were not significant here. I found no relationship, for example, between gender and racial identity. The gender of the respondent's Asian parent also exerted no influence on identity. This may be the case because I included the cultural exposure variables in both models: the literature suggests that parents influence identity through cultural transmission to their children.

In addition, although past research revealed a generational effect on racial/eth-

nic identity, generation showed no effect here. I found no weakening in Asian identity, nor a third-generation ethnic revival. This result may be due to differences in the ways in which identity was operationalized here and in previous studies. Support for a curvilinear relationship came primarily from census studies, which operationalized identity simply as the racial label checked on census forms by *parents* of multiracial children. Moreover, generational findings may not have been detectable here because of the small sample size and the resulting decrease in power in detecting significant relationships.

As for the socioeconomic variables, only father's education showed a significant effect on racial identity. Fathers' higher educational attainment increased the likelihood that respondents would identify as white; this finding partially supports the assimilation perspective. I found no relationship, however, between racial identity and mother's education or parental income.

As predicted by reflected appraisals, phenotype and cultural exposure were the strongest and most significant factors influencing racial identity. Some mixed-race individuals have no clear-cut criteria or receive no objective feedback for making self-attributions with regard to race; in the development of their racial identity, these persons may rely on reflected appraisals (their perception of how others view them) of their looks and their cultural exposure. Previous research shows that others' appraisals influence one's self-appraisal more strongly when one is in a state of uncertainty. Thus, reflected appraisals may be particularly important for mixed-race people, for whom ambiguity about racial identity is an issue.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study of multiracial individuals is often complicated by difficulties in locating respondents, and also by their smaller numbers within the American population. Because of the complications inherent in examining this population, I must discuss some limitations.

First, because I used snowball sampling to locate respondents, the results cannot be generalized. In addition, the small sample size may have contributed to a decrease in statistical power, which reduced the possibility of detecting significant factors that influence racial identity. Significant factors also may have gone undetected because of the risk of correlated error terms, which sometimes are symptomatic of nonrandom sampling methods. Thus factors that do not achieve statistical significance in this sample should not be dismissed immediately as evidence of no relationship. Future quantitative research should strive to increase the number of respondents in order to increase power in detecting relationships.

In addition, although the use of the Internet helped to increase the size and geographic diversity of the sample, it also may have biased the sample. This sample was quite young and middle-class; it is not surprising that most of the participants in the study either owned a computer or at least knew how to use the Internet.[10] Respondents found through multiracial websites and magazines also may differ from respondents found by other means: they may be more aware or more conscious of their racial background, more aware of multiracial issues and challenges, more likely to identify with their minority ethnicity, and the like, which may influence their survey responses. The problem of sample selectivity for respondents with at least some multiracial awareness, however, is common to most multiracial studies because of problems inherent in locating participants. Thus, the results reported here should not differ considerably from those of previous studies.

A second limitation in this research is the use of surveys to examine racial identity. Although useful for gathering information on a number of respondents and valuable in delineating trends, surveys limit the depth of information that researchers can obtain from this unique population. Although this paper incorporates open-ended comments made by respondents about identity issues, future research might include in-depth interviews to

[10] Approximately one-fourth of the Asian American population under age 17 is of mixed ancestry(Xie and Goyette 1997); their youthfulness is reflected in this sample.

explain more clearly and explore more fully many aspects of the multiracial experience. In addition, although this survey inquired in open-ended questions about changes in racial identity over time and across situations, the dependent variable measured racial identity as a stable self-concept, not as a changing and evolving aspect of the self. Future work should examine fluctuations in identity, through either in-depth interviews or longitudinal surveys.

Despite these limitations, this study pioneers the simultaneous inclusion of factors identified in the literature and development of an integrated explanation regarding elements that influence racial identity. It is also one of few studies, outside potentially problematic census research, to empirically examine identity and the factors that shape it. Exploration of Asian-white identity is a useful addition to the multiracial literature because of the added dimensions of nationality and ethnicity in identity. As intermarriage between Americans and immigrants increases, it will become more important to take into account the role of cultural variables, like those included here, in shaping identity.

Finally, this study points to discrepancies in measures tapping racial identity. Future researchers should be clear about how they define and measure identity, and should be aware of the effects of the racial and political climate on responses. Indeed, different measures of identity may account for the inconsistency of findings in previous studies of multiracial identity.

Appendix Table A1. Correlation Matrix of Variables

	Gender	Asian Parent	Phenotype	Father's Education	Mother's Education	Income	Generation 2	Generation 3	Exposure
Most ID	–0.035	–.171†	.212*	–.188†	0.030	–.174†	–0.145	0.103	–.249**
Gender		–0.024	–0.050	–0.147	–0.015	–0.033	0.072	–0.118	–0.027
Asian Parent			0.017	.396**	.321**	.378**	0.123	0.764	.167†
Phenotype				–0.025	–0.014	0.093	–0.007	–.172†	–0.081
Father's Education					.570**	.446**	0.083	0.004	–0.122
Mother's Education						.336**	0.004	0.145	–0.030
Income							0.115	–0.127	0.059
Generation 2								–.570**	0.061
Generation 3									0.047
Exposure									

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed test)

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