



# The Influences Affecting and the Influential Effects of Multiracials: Multiracialism and Stratification

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## Abstract

Early research on multiracials documents the existence of a newly emergent population, those who identify with more than one race or what is commonly now known as multiracials. Contemporary research on multiracialism has a new focus on the stratification that multiracials experience and how multiracials may be influencing a new racial hierarchy. This paper discusses some of the primary issues of multiracialism and stratification including colorism, the racial hierarchy, social class, gender and sexual orientation, and multiracial as a celebrity-like status. As the multiracial population grows, so must the field of multiracialism grows to include critical issues and questions regarding stratification.

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Multiracials, or people deemed to be of multiple races, have always existed in the United States; as early as the 1890 U.S. Census, this country formally recognized those of mixed-race descent. The categories of Octoroon (1/8 Black), Quadroon (1/4 Black), and Mulatto (1/2 Black) were used because more-White/less-Black meant more status and opportunity in society (Davis 1991; Lee 1993). The United States has also historically recognized people of mixed Native American and White descent or “half-bloods,” those of Mexican and White descent or “half-breeds,” and those of Asian and White descent or “Eurasians” (Nakashima 2004). The articulation of a “multiracial” identity, however, did not begin until the late 1970s. By the late 1980s, three notable organizations instigated the movement to make “multiracial” a legitimately recognized and positive racial identity: Association of Multiethnic Americans (AMEA), Project Reclassify All Children Equally (Project RACE), and A Place For Us (APFU). These organizations slightly differed in tactics and goals, but they all agreed on the fundamental right for one to identify as multiracial (Williams 2006). This movement led to a 1997 revision to the U.S. Census questionnaire to allow respondents to “mark one or more” races; this new race option provides the ability to officially document a population that identifies multiple races (Williams 2006).

With the current two or more races population at 2.9 percent and with continued predicted growth, there has been an influx of studies on multiracialism (Jones and Bullock 2012). Early studies documented the rise of mixed-race individuals choosing to identify as biracial and the factors that led them to this identity (Iijima Hall and Cooke Turner 2001; Khanna 2011; Kilson 2001; Korgen 1998; Rockquemore 1999; Rockquemore and Brunsmas 2008; Root 1996, 1999; Wijeyesinghe 2001). As studies on multiracialism have expanded, research questions are now moving beyond the initial question of *if* people are identifying as biracial to what this rise of multiracialism *means* for multiracials as a group, and what multiracialism means for society as a whole. Contemporary multiracial research puts forth questions such as: how do people of different mixed-race backgrounds vary in their multiracial experience; how does gender affect the multiracial experience; how are class status and multiracialism correlated; and how do multiracials fare in society compared to monoracials? In other words, new research is implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, addressing

the stratification of multiracials – both within the multiracial community and in comparison to the rest of society.

In this paper, I bring together recent research on how primary lines of stratification affect the status of multiracials. Specifically, I discuss colorism, the racial hierarchy, social class, gender, and sexual orientation. I also discuss the relationship between multiracialism and its celebrity-like status since the popularity of multiracialism is connected to how society embraces multiracials and thus multiracials' social status. Thus, overall, this paper provides a general understanding of the emerging field of stratification and the multiracial community.

### *A note on the social construction of race and terminology*

Multiracial studies can seductively and implicitly assert race as biological. A racial *mix* can only exist if there are two distinct items to combine; in this way, the concept of 'multiracial' implies that race is a biological fact or a stable and unchanging ontological category. Race when designated as a biological phenomenon centers on the idea that each race has innate, unalterable characteristics that determine individual culture, temperament, and/or biological quality (Goodman et al. 2012; Gould 1981). However, race is *not* "real" in the biological sense; race is a social construction whereby different "races" are denoted by a common set of phenotypical characteristics that are assigned socially significant meanings (Davis 1991; Goodman et al. 2012; Gossett 1997; Gould 1981; Takaki 1993). Thus, when scholars of multiracialism study "multiracials," they are actually studying how people are *choosing* to identify with more than one race, rather than people who are biologically mixed-race. In some instances, multiracial scholars will instead look at how people identify with mixed ancestries or ethnicities (not race), but in both instances it is again how people *choose* to reference their identity rather than a biological reality (Herman 2011). Thus, although not explicitly referenced after this point, (multi) racial/ancestry/ethnic identities are analyzed as social constructions, not biological categories.

Most often, multiracial refers to people whose parents each identify with one race (monoracially). There are also people who are second- or multi-generationally mixed: people with one biracial parent and one monoracial parent; however, there is relatively little research on this population, or at least the distinction between biracials and multiracials is not often emphasized. Both in scholarly studies and in popular culture, the term *multiracial* is used as a sort of catchall term to refer to all people who identify with more than one race. In this paper, in order to be comprehensive and avoid confusion, I choose to use biracial and multiracial interchangeably.

### **Colorism**

Skin tone stratification, otherwise known as colorism, in the United States is discrimination based on society's preference for light skin over dark skin. Colorism can also sometimes take into account hair texture, thickness of lips, eye color, nose shape and other phenotypic features that society associates with race. It can be intraracial discrimination, when members of a racial group make judgments based on skin tone about other members of the racial group. It can also be interracial discrimination where a member of one racial group makes judgments about members of another racial group based on skin tone (Herring 2004, 3).

Multiracials, both in the past and today, are often assumed to have a light skin tone (however "light" is generally determined by society) (Davis 1991; Herring 2004). However, this identification is based on several assumptions: (i) that all multiracials have light skin tones and people with dark skin tones are monoracial; (ii) that light and intermediate complexions

are a sign of mixed-race; and (iii) in conjunction with number one and number two, that biracials are usually a mix of a White and non-White person (which is why people assume light skin means biracial). These three assumptions are obviously highly interrelated, and they are all problematic as they equate lighter complexions with multiracial. There are people with dark skin tones who identify as biracial and people with very light skin tones who identify monoracially. There are also, of course, biracials who do not have a White parent. However, even given these facts, both because of the real relationship between skin tone and multiracialism as well as the popular belief that light skin tone equals multiracial, scholars must address skin tone stratification in the discussion on multiracial stratification.

### *A brief historical look at skin tone stratification*

In the United States, people with light complexions were historically given special treatment and presumed to be smarter, more ethical people. Individuals of Black and White descent were termed “mulattos” and held an intermediary status between White and Black; they received better treatment than Blacks including greater access to jobs and the political system (Davis 1991; Herring 2004). Many of the nation’s early Black leaders, including Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Booker T. Washington all non-coincidentally had lighter complexions (Ciment 2001; Davis 1991; Herring 2004). In the 1950s, overt examples of society favoring light skin tones persisted including the “brown paper bag tests,” where some clubs required that one’s skin be lighter than a brown paper bag in order to be admitted (Thompson and Keith 2004). Such favoritism was not observed only among Black communities. For example, the Spanish had relationships with indigenous Mexicans whose descendants came to be known as “Mestizos.” Mestizos, in their society, were considered to be more inherently successful and socially adept (Hunter 2004).

In today’s society, people considered to have a light skin tone still receive social preferences such as being deemed more attractive, earning higher wages, and experiencing less discrimination in the penal system (Hersch 2008; Hunter 2004; Viglione et al. 2011). One indication that such preferences are still in effect is the sale of skin lightening creams and related products, which are expected to increase by almost 18 percent to reach 76 million dollars annually by 2015 (Gabler and Roe 2010). In U.S. society, just as much as there is a White privilege, there is also a light skin privilege (Herring 2004; Hunter 2007; Thompson and Keith 2004). In the next two sections, I review some common experiences particular to people with light skin and dark skin, and the relationship between skin tone and experiences of multiracials.

### *Light skin tone*

As the cultural popularity of multiracialism grows, society is increasingly aware of a population of people who identify as biracial. Particularly people with light skin or a mixture of phenotypic features such as light eye color and curly hair can sometimes be more easily recognized and have a validated biracial identity (Doyle and Kao 2007; Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2008). Another benefit for light-skinned multiracials is that their racially ambiguous complexion can help them move more easily between groups; for example, if one is Black-White then s/he can more easily navigate networks of both Blacks and Whites (Strmic-Pawl 2012; Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2008). At the same time, however, having light skin can present certain struggles.

A primary challenge for White/non-White biracials with light complexions can be developing an affiliation and closeness with their non-White side. They encounter an “ethnic authenticity” issue, wherein multiracials’ loyalty to their minority racial status is questioned (Espiritu 2001; Hunter 2007; Yancey and Lewis 2009). Black multiracials can be criticized for not being “Black enough” or Latino multiracials for not being “Chicano enough.” Moreover, sometimes not being “Black enough” is also extended to “wanting to be White” or “acting White” (Strmic-Pawl 2012; Hunter 2004, 2007). Such multiracials who are deemed as being too distant from “the Black experience” are not fully accepted by Black communities; indeed, President Obama, as a Black-White man, received similar condemnation (Coates 2007). Moreover, Blacks and biracial Blacks with light skin tones are still assaulted with historically derisive terms such as “yellow” and “redbone” (Hunter 2004). Due to such criticisms, Storrs (2006) found that many mixed-race women who could “pass” for White, including those of Mexican American, Native American, and Puerto Rican American descent, would use cultural cues and organizational memberships to underscore their tie to their non-White racial group and to dispute that they were just a “wannabe.”

### *Dark skin tone*

In contrast to those with light skin, multiracials with dark complexions may face problems having their multiracial identity validated by society. As noted earlier, due to culturally popular images of multiracials with light skin, curly hair, or as ethnically ambiguous, dark-skinned biracials can have a more difficult time identifying as multiracial; specifically, Black-Whites with darker skin encounter judgments that they are “just Black.” On the positive side, darker-skinned multiracials do not commonly face the ethnic authenticity problem as they are readily seen as belonging to the non-White racial group (Hunter 2007; Khanna 2011; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2008).

Having a darker skin tone in U.S. society is also, overall, less valued. Racist ideas of beauty continue; for example, a recent study by Dr. Satoshi Kanazawa of The London School of Economics and Political Science made its way into several articles and blogs. Though later the study was found to be completely scientifically unfounded, Dr. Kanazawa claimed Black women were less attractive than Asian women and White women (Loveys and Fernandez 2011). This study does *not* point to the fact that Black women are less attractive; rather, it mistakenly equates a socialized preference for light skin tone as an objective measurement of beauty. Skin discrimination also has serious social consequences as one study found that light-skinned Black women received a 12 percent shorter prison sentence than their darker-skinned counterparts, and evidence suggests that among Blacks, lighter-skinned individuals are more likely to have higher earnings and have more schooling (Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Viglione et al. 2011)

Skin tone stratification is a significant issue that has and continues to plague the United States. Indeed, as will be discussed in the following section, some scholars suggest that skin tone will become more, not less, important in the future (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006). The colorism issue is not particular to multiracials but can be a significant part of the multiracial experience and therefore must be considered in stratification research.

### **The racial hierarchy**

Although many believe that the U.S. has become post-racial, most scholars of race relations recognize that a racial hierarchy remains in the United States. Winant (2000: 183) argues that

we have not transcended race and that a hierarchy persists, which he defines as “the taken-for-granted injustice and inhumanity that so often accompanies the race concept.” Bonilla-Silva (1997: 469) contends that “in all racialized social systems the placement of people in racial categories involves some form of hierarchy that produces definite social relations between the races.” For Winant, Bonilla-Silva, and similar scholars of race including Bell (1992), Feagin (2006), and Gallagher (2003), there is an inherent tie between the existence of race, the racial hierarchy, and racism. Thus, if multiracial is a new race in the United States, then the question must be posed: Where do they fit on the racial hierarchy?

People of mixed-race descent have historically been looked upon with a mix of disdain and praise and have therefore held an uncertain, middle status in the racial hierarchy. Historically, a mixed-race individual was deemed a “marginal man” as he did not belong fully to any group and so received hostility from members of both of their racial groups (Davis 1991; Stonequist 1937, 66). Nott and Gliddon in 1854 said that “mulattos,” those of mixed Black and White descent, had the shortest life span, were intermediate in intelligence between Blacks and Whites, and were less likely to bear children (p. 42). Such overt racism towards those of mixed-race descent has largely ended, yet at the same time, as a minority racial group, contemporary multiracials still occupy a middle, and sometimes liminal status.

### *The contemporary racial hierarchy*

The United States, historically, has had a dual Black/White racial hierarchy, with Whites at the top, Blacks at the bottom, and all other races/ethnicities placed somewhere between (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Gans 2012; Hochschild et al. 2012; Yancey 2006). However, as the United States becomes more racially diverse and attitudes about and experiences of racial discrimination change, some scholars have suggested that the traditional Black/White racial hierarchy is changing. Two popular theories that pose a new possible U.S. racial hierarchy are The Latin Americanization Thesis and Black/Non-Black Divide. Bonilla-Silva (2004) and Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2006) have posited The Latin Americanization Thesis, the emergence of a tri-racial hierarchy. In this hierarchy, Whites are at the top, followed by Honorary Whites, and Collective Blacks at the bottom. “Whites” include those traditionally identified as White, some new White immigrants such as Russians and Albanians, assimilated White Latinos, and some light-skinned multiracials; “Honorary Whites” include light-skinned Latinos, Asian ethnics who do well economically such as Japanese and Korean Americans, and most multiracials; “Collective Blacks” include those traditionally labeled as Black, Asian ethnics who have a low socioeconomic standing such as Vietnamese and Laotian Americans, dark-skinned Latinos, and dark-skinned new immigrants such as West Indians and Africans. In contrast to the old dual hierarchy, this hierarchy suggests that there will be more emphasis placed upon skin tone and that Honorary Whites, which includes multiracials, will serve as a buffer zone for the conflict experienced between Whites and Collective Blacks. Gans (2012) also suggests a similar tri-racial hierarchy and notes the important ways in which intermarriages and multiracials are a component in the new configuration of the racial hierarchy. The second theory, the Black/Non-Black Divide, posits that the racial hierarchy is moving from White/Black to Non-Black/Black wherein racial mobility is less about being White and more about being *not* Black. (Yancey 2003). This thesis is related to the idea of “Black exceptionalism,” where Blacks are at the center of the racial divide and uniquely continue to experience severe racial discrimination including residential segregation, higher degrees of social alienation, and labor market

discrimination (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Parisi et al. 2011; Yancey 2006). In a Non-Black/Black hierarchy, the change is not the creation of “Honorary White” but is about distance from Blackness.

Theories on the contemporary racial hierarchy are important to the discussion on multiracial stratification for two reasons: (i) as noted, the existence and increase in the multiracial population is an important factor in shaping the current racial hierarchy; and (ii) it is important to understand where multiracials’ place in the new hierarchy.

In all three racial hierarchies (the classic White/Black hierarchy, the tri-racial White/Honorary White/Collective Black hierarchy, and the non-Black/Black hierarchy), most (light-skinned) multiracials are closer to Whiteness than Blackness. In the tri-racial hierarchy, some multiracials fall into the White category (if they have white skin tones and do well socioeconomically), and most multiracials will fall into the Honorary White category (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006). In the other two dual racial hierarchies, multiracials distance themselves and are distanced from Blackness so that, in these situations, multiracials again occupy a middle status between White and “Other.”

Another way of measuring where multiracials place on the racial hierarchy is by comparing the socioeconomic status of multiracials to that of monoracials. In general, socioeconomic rankings of the races place Asians at the top, then Whites, then American Indians and African Americans. Those of Black and White descent tend to place higher than Blacks but lower than Whites. Those of Asian and White descent tend to place lower than Asians and a bit better than Whites (Hochschild et al. 2012). Those of American Indian and White descent are higher than American Indians but lower than Whites (Liebler 2010). Thus, multiracials occupy a middle-ground on the hierarchy as they are often positively ranked in comparison to their monoracial parents yet still rank lower than Whites.

In the context of a changing United States, multiracials can be a new buffer group between Whites and Blacks. They can (un)intentionally emphasize the non-Black line, or they can continue to hold the traditional intermediary status between Whites and Blacks. It is important to note that in nearly every theoretical instance, multiracials hold a middle status on the racial hierarchy.

### *Multiracials and racial fluidity*

As noted above, some multiracials may become “Honorary White” or be seen as merging into Whiteness, that is, some multiracials have the option of becoming White. The movement of some multiracials into Whiteness is what Gallagher (2004) labels “racial redistricting,” a process whereby the “White” racial category is “revitalized as potential challengers to the existing hierarchy are co-opted and rewarded with the perks of membership in the dominant group” (p. 74). Gans (2012) also speaks to the process whereby some groups undergo a Whitening process, which he labels as deracialization. Those of Asian and White descent, Native American and White descent, and Latino and White descent are particularly seen as having this option (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006; Doyle and Kao 2007; Gallagher 2004, 2010; Lee and Bean 2010; King-O’Riain 2004). In Asian-White communities, upward mobility into Whiteness is attainable because of the socioeconomic status of some Asian ethnics, such as Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino, who tend to marry Whites. These Asian ethnics tend to have a high socioeconomic status, are seen as “model minorities” who work hard and do well in school, and they often have lighter skin tones (Gallagher 2010; Wu 2002). The children of these Asian-White unions also then tend to do well, are embraced by White society, and have White social networks. Strmic-Pawl (2012),



in a study of 18–30-year olds, finds three particular ways in which Asian-Whites align themselves with Whites: (i) feeling “normal” and not different, which are signs of White privilege; (ii) agreeing with “post-racial” beliefs such as emphasizing meritocracy, disagreeing with Affirmative Action and other race-based policies, and perceiving little racial discrimination in society; and (iii) having mostly White homogenous friendship groups, which is characteristic of White self-segregation. These three behaviors indicate that Asian-Whites are adopting White cultural logics as they merge into Whiteness. Moreover, at the same time that Asian-Whites move towards Whiteness, they also distance themselves from Blackness, similar to how White immigrants at the turn of the 20th century strategically distanced themselves from Blackness in order to become White and attain a higher social status (Gallagher 2010; Lee and Bean 2010; Yancey 2006).

In the case of Hispanic-Whites, the situation is complex because “Hispanic” according to the U.S. Census is an ethnicity and not a race. For this reason, it is particularly difficult to assess and discuss the literature on multiracial Latinos, and studies have to be careful to draw fair conclusions about mixed Latinos. The majority of Hispanics identify as White on the census; in 2010, 53.7 percent of Hispanics identified as White, and 36.7 percent were classified under “Some Other Race”, while only 2.5 percent were identified as Black. Six percent of Hispanics identified with two or more races compared to 2.3 percent of non-Hispanics (Ennis et al. 2011). In other words, because much of the Hispanic population already identifies as White, Hispanic-Whites may also culturally identify with Whiteness, yet we also know that Hispanic experiences vary, especially when taking skin tone into account (Gallagher 2004). Moreover, the likelihood of Hispanic-Whites identifying as White or becoming fully incorporated into White networks is mediated by the use of the Spanish language and by phenotype (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006; Forman et al. 2002).

### **Social class**

One of the key components of stratification is class status. Some scholars argue that class status is more important than race in assessing opportunities for upward mobility (Wilson 1978); this statement is rife with debate, but what can probably be universally agreed upon is that a higher education and greater wealth signify a better status in society. On this measurement then, multiracials tend to do better than those on the low end of the racial hierarchy. For example, utilizing American Community Survey [ACS] data, the approximate median annual household income of monoracial Asians is \$70,000, Asian-Whites \$65,000, monoracial Whites \$55,000, Asian-Blacks \$50,000, White-American Indians \$45,000, Black-Whites \$40,000, and monoracial Blacks \$35,000 (Hochschild et al. 2012, 74). The most advantaged multiracials are White-Asians or White-Some Other Race as they are likely to own a home and have an advanced degree; however, these multiracial Asians are a specific set of Asian ethnics whose parents are usually of Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, or Asian Indian descent (Le 2010). The most disadvantaged multiracials, using ACS data, are those who identify as part Black; multiracials who are part Latino and part Black are the most disadvantaged (Campbell 2010). Hispanics and multiracial American Indians tend to have a higher socioeconomic status than those who identify as solely Hispanic or American Indian (Herman and Castilla 2010; Liebler 2010). In comparison to their monoracial counterparts, multiracials tend to occupy a middle class status between their racial memberships (Campbell 2010; Herman and Castilla 2010; Hochschild et al. 2012).

That multiracials tend to occupy a better class status begs the question of whether this correlation exists because multiracials do better in society or because middle and upper class people are more likely to identify as multiracial. The latter explanation implies that there

could be a large number of multiracials who are of a lower class status but prefer to identify monoracially. Some evidence of such lies in the initial emergence of the multiracial movement. The movement to recognize multiracial classification was largely driven by White, upper class women (Williams 2006). This middle–upper class status of the multiracial movement and related organizations suggest that lower class mixed–race individuals may not feel included, thereby lowering the likelihood of multiracial identification. Furthermore, one could presume that having more education (a class signifier), which fosters questioning and independence, would correlate with the adoption of a multiracial identity (Fhagen-Smith 2010). Likewise, middle class mixed–race individuals might be more likely to identify as multiracial as they have larger, more diverse social networks (Edison and Yancey 2010; Fhagen-Smith 2010).

It is also important to note how multiracials see themselves on the class hierarchy. For example, some studies show that (often younger) part–Black biracials will distance themselves from lower class notions of Blackness. These Black–White multiracials conflate race and class by associating Black with low class signifiers such as hip–hop and informal English and then distance themselves from such images (Strmic-Pawl 2012; Khanna 2010). Likewise, Asian–Whites who see themselves as occupying a middle class status will strategically distance themselves from Blacks, whom they see as occupying a low class status (Strmic-Pawl 2012).

Campbell finds that there is no correlation between high socioeconomic status and the likelihood of choosing a multiracial identity, while other studies suggest that there may be a correlation between class status and identifying as multiracial (Khanna 2010; Morning 2000 cited in Yancey and Lewis 2009). More studies need to be done on the connections between class and possible correlations to the likelihood of identifying as multiracial (Note, scholars should consult the pioneering volume edited by K. Korgen entitled *Multiracial Americans and Social Class*).

### **Gender and sexual orientation**

Approximately, the same number of men and women identify with more than one race; as of 2009, 2,633,000 men and 2,691,000 women identified with two or more races. Based on U. S. Census counts then, it seems that men and women are equally open to identifying as multiracial; however, we know that race is gendered or in other words, gender can vary the ways in which race is experienced (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996; Davis 1983; Hill 2005; Hill Collins 2000). Just as White women and Black women do not have the same experiences as “women,” so do multiracial men and women have different experiences.

Multiracial scholarship suggests that depending on the racial mix, men and women vary in the embracing of a multiracial identity with several scholars specifically examining the ways in which gender shapes the experiences of multiracial women (Strmic-Pawl 2012; Liebler 2010; Rockquemore 2002; Root 1999; Storrs 2006; Tashiro 2013). Based on census data, Liebler (2010) finds that American Indian men report being multiracial more often than American Indian women; she suggests this variance in identity choice might derive from the preference for the masculine label of “warrior” compared to the feminine label of “Indian princess.” Rockquemore (2002) shows how Black–White women, ages 18–46, feel tensions with other Black women because of how light skin and “good hair” are valued in Black communities. Similarly, Strmic-Pawl (2012) finds that Black–White and Asian–White women, ages 18–30, overall understand and emphasize their multiracial identity through a gendered lens because of issues such as beauty and hair. Notions of masculinity also vary across race; for example, Asian men encounter stereotypes about being effeminate and passive, while Black men are stereotyped as virile, sometimes violent, and hyper-masculine (Hill Collins 2002;



Wingfield 2008; Wu 2002). Future research needs to further explore how notions of masculinity and femininity affect how men and women experience being mixed-race and how they choose to identify.

Sexual orientation has also been shown to influence the mixed-race experience. There are few studies and relatively little data from which to draw very strong conclusions; however, there are some initial thoughts. Due to society's heavy emphasis on sexual orientation, gay multiracials learn to navigate social contention about their race *and* sexual orientation simultaneously (Strmic-Pawl 2012; Kich 1996; Williams-Leon 2001). Those of mixed-race descent have historically faced stereotypes about being hypersexual, and Lesbian, Bi, Gay, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals often face similar stereotypes now. The experience as gay and multiracial is different from heterosexual multiracials as both multiracials and LGBTQs occupy a middle ground between two opposing forces. In addition, there is some evidence that suggests gay biracials prioritize their LGBTQ identity over their mixed-race identity. With contemporary issues regarding LGBTQ equality, including military incorporation and marriage, gay biracials face a world where their gay status may occupy the front stage more than their mixed-race status (Strmic-Pawl 2012). When studying those who are LGBTQ and multiracial, one must understand how these identities are interconnected and shape one another.

### **Multiracial as celebrity**

Multiracials increasingly occupy an important symbolic placement in society. The media often celebrates multiracials because they are co-opted to signify that the United States is entering a post-racial time period, an era when society has finally moved beyond race and when one's character, rather than the color of one's skin, is what matters more. As individuals who own two racial worlds simultaneously, biracials are seen as literally embodying racial reconciliation (Spencer 2004; Walker 2001). They are also generally depicted as "special," as "occupying the best of both worlds," "as being more cosmopolitan," "as exotic," and other characteristics that uncritically label biracials as inherently having a higher culture and status (Spencer 2004; Yancey and Lewis 2009).

The celebration of multiracials is clear by their prominence in the media. In 2011 alone, *The New York Times* published seven articles on multiracialism; this total does not include opinion pieces or editorials (Saulny 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e; Saulny and Steinberg 2011a, 2011b). Articles such as "Race Remixed" and "The New Face of America" tend to celebrate the triumphant nature of biracials choosing to identify with more than one race. Multiracials are also used in what Williams (2006) terms "marketing multiraciality," the "broad set of practices that include marketing to, by, and of multiracials" (157). Marketing to multiracials and marketing using multiracials has increasingly become more widespread. For example, Levi's, the jeans company, had a brown-skinned woman hold a sign that said "I can't be prejudice [sic], I'm mulatto" (cited in DaCosta 2007, 165), Barbie now has racially ambiguous friends, and increasingly, there are calls for "ethnically ambiguous" actors (DaCosta 2007; La Ferla 2003; Mueller 2007). And, Edison and Yancey (2010) find that biracial characters have a higher socioeconomic status than Black characters. Of course, there are also the celebrities who are held up as icons of the mixed-race movement including Jessica Alba (Mexican-Danish-French Canadian), the Kardashians (Armenian-Scottish-Dutch), and Vin Diesel (Black-White) (MyChoiceToLove 2012). This celebrity-like status is not just imposed on multiracials but is also often actively embraced by multiracials themselves; Black-Whites and Asian-Whites describe themselves as special and as having the unique ability to fight racial discrimination (Strmic-Pawl 2012). Future research

should look into the connections between the cultural popularity and media emphasis on multiracialism with the likelihood of people identifying as multiracial as well as the likelihood of others accepting multiracial as a legitimate identity.

### **The type of “mix” in mixed-race**

This paper reviews the stratification of multiracials and makes some distinctions between types of multiracials, but it is important to understand that not all multiracials have the same or similar experiences of their race. The multiracial experience varies by the “mixture” of the races. For example, due to persistent discrimination against Blacks and a resurgence of anti-immigration attitudes that is associated with all Latinos (regardless of actual citizenship status), Black-Whites and Latino-Whites can encounter racial discrimination that prevents them from upward mobility. Black-Whites, Latino-Whites, and non part-White multiracials are more likely to perceive and experience racial discrimination – from feeling ostracized by Whites to employment discrimination to micro-aggressions such as being followed around in a store (Herman and Castilla 2010; Herring 2004; Iijima Hall and Cooke Turner 2001). Anzaldúa (2004) suggests that those of mixed Latino descent, due to a history of colonization, have long identified with multiple races and embody boundary crossing. From this perspective, mixed Latinos also have a distinct experience of their multiraciality. Thus, such multiracials may not hold multiracial as a primary identity and/or such multiracials may place differently in the social-racial hierarchy than other multiracials.

Since the research on multiracialism is a relatively recent endeavor, much of the discussion on multiracials focuses on race, not ethnicity. However, ethnic identities certainly can vary the story of the biracial experience. For instance, more research is needed to understand how being African-American-White versus Jamaican-White versus African-White varies the biracial experience. The same is true for Asian-Whites; certainly, differences exist for Japanese-Whites versus Indian-Whites versus Laotian-Whites. As these non-White ethnic identities have specific histories and engagement in U.S. racial politics, the biracial experience will vary.

Furthermore, in analyzing multiracials’ location in a changing hierarchy, researchers also need to look at biracials who are not part White. For example, we know that in Vietnam, children of Black-Vietnamese descent were shunned because they were assumed to be children of soldiers and prostitutes (Iijima Hall and Cooke Turner 2001). And in the United States, Latino-Blacks can have different experiences and political alignments from those who identify as Latino-White. The overall cautionary tale here is that not all multiracials can be seen as the same, and stratification of multiracials depends upon the “type of racial mix.”

### **Moving the research on multiracialism forward**

The population that marks one or more races on the U.S. Census has continued to grow with a 32 percent increase between 2000 and 2010; specifically, there was large growth with the Black and White population, which increased by 134 percent, and those marking White and Asian grew by 87 percent. Furthermore, to recognize this growing population, there are organizations dedicated to the multiracial experience including the American MultiEthnic Association (AMEA) and MAVIN – the Mixed Heritage Experience as well as other scholarly endeavors such as the Critical Mixed-Race Studies Conference and the Journal of Critical Mixed-Race Studies. As the multiple race population grows and as White births are now the minority in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2012), research on multiracial stratification is critical to understanding the changing racial landscape.

In this paper, some of the issues that affect multiracial stratification were reviewed, though they were discussed as somewhat distinct issues. However, pulling these studies together reveals how there is a growing body of literature on multiracialism and stratification. This paper points to the need to examine further several areas such as: how skin tone affects one's likelihood to identify as multiracial; how educational attainment affects one's likelihood to identify as multiracial; how Whites, with variance by socioeconomic status, recognize and accept multiracial as a valid identity; and, how media reception of and marketing of products to multiracials shape the growth of multiracialism. In addition, though not expressly addressed in this paper, age is also an important factor to study as the multiracial population grows. There are already noticeable differences in how young, middle aged, and older multiracials fare and how age might correlate to identity options (Binning et al. 2009; Bracey et al. 2004; Choi et al. 2010; Doyle and Kao 2007; Tashiro 2013). Moreover, future theoretical and empirical studies on multiracialism should integrate these topics and analyze how they are intersecting issues; for example, skin tone can be a raced, classed, and gendered issue. With a field of multiracial studies now established, scholars must consider how different multiracial populations will fare socioeconomically, politically, and socially; and how multiracials will be integrated into and change the racial hierarchy.

## Short Biography

Hephzibah V. Strmic-Pawl's research is focused on multiracialism, racial identity, African-American communities, racism, and inequality. She is currently working on a book manuscript that documents the similarities and differences that Asian-White multiracials and Black-White multiracials experience and how racism shapes the multiracial experience. Strmic-Pawl is currently an Assistant Professor in the Psychology and Sociology Department at Coastal Carolina University and heads the campaign to create an Ella Baker Day in Virginia. She has a BS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, an MA from the University of Chicago, and a PhD from the University of Virginia.

## Note

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