Asian enough: monoracial Asian American perceptions of biracial Asian Americans

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Introduction

Solidarity amongst racial groups is often assumed, whether it be identity politics or the people we surround ourselves with. But what happens when an individual is a part of more than one racial group? The number of multiracial individuals is rising rapidly. According to the 2024 US Census, America is home to 10.71 million multiracial Americans. In 2000, only 3.96 million Americans were multiracial (Statista, 2025). The growing number of multiracial individuals, specifically biracial individuals, means there is also an increased importance for scholarship surrounding biracial Americans.

A key category in the current study of biracial individuals is factors in multiracial self identification. In other words, why do biracial individuals choose to identify with one race over the other or as mixed race. Many of the articles I reference in this paper cite a 2004 research paper written by Melissa Herman. Herman's paper examines why young multiracial people choose to identify as one race over another when presented with a survey that allows them to choose only one race.

Herman conducted her research across nine high schools in Wisconsin and California in 1987. All students from the schools participated, excluding students who were not present on the day the surveys were conducted, whose parents prohibited participation, or who refused to participate. Herman received 10,275 responses, of which 1,989 were classified as one of ten biracial categories. Because my paper focuses on mixed race individuals who are part White and part Asian, I chose to analyze only categories in which the individual was part White, part non-White, in order to draw conclusions about Asian-White biracial individuals and compare them to other biracial individuals with a part White, part non-White racial identity. In Herman's data, more multiracial individuals chose to identify as their non-white race than their white race.

Herman looked at factors such as relationship with parents, discrimination, and ethnic makeup of family and friends.

She also hypothesizes that an multiracial individual's perception of ethnic discrimination will more closely match the monoracial group they more closely identify with (Herman, 2004). Other reports have also pointed to similar determinants in self-identification. A 2025 article analyzed factors such as peer discrimination, institutional discrimination, family ethnic-racial socialization, skin color, and proportion of friends by race. Vezaldanos found that biracial individuals who grew up in families that made an active effort to teach them about their heritage were more likely to refuse to answer when presented with a question that allowed them to choose only on racial identity. Regarding Asian biracials specifically, Vezaldenos found that Asian biracials "with a greater proportion of Asian friends were more likely to select Asian as their racial category" (Vezaldenos et al., 2025).

A 2012 report on discrimination perception and ingroup standing added a new variable to consider: self-stereotyping. The authors hypothesized that if an individual doesn't consider themselves to be the stereotypical ingroup member, they will be more likely to identify as multiracial. Their identity will be more anchored in their multiracial identity as a whole than either of their racial identities (Giamo et al., 2012).

The other category of scholarship I reviewed focused on the behaviors and experiences of multiracial individuals. Within this category, much of the current study focuses on multiracial individuals as a whole, but this disregards the vast differences between different multiracial groups. As Norman put it, "Despite the knowledge that different racial groups have had, and continue to have, distinct experiences in the United States, research with Multiracial samples has predominately grouped Multiracial individuals into one inclusive demographic group" (2023).

Because this paper aims to study one specific multiracial group, I have chosen to analyze only reports that differentiate between multiracial groups. Thankfully, more recent reports have differentiated, however the literature has focused mostly on Black-White biracial individuals. Not enough scholarship has focused on the behaviors and experiences of Asian-White biracial individuals.

Still, scholarship on Black-White biracial individuals illustrated where more scholarship should be done for Asian-White biracial individuals. One of the most interesting conclusions I found in my research came from a 2023 report by Analia Albuja. This report focused only on Black-White biracial individuals. It examined what factors influenced Black people's empathy for and acceptance of Black-White individuals. The paper came to the conclusion that self identification played a major role: Black-White biracial individuals who identified themselves as Black were much more likely than those who identified themselves as White to receive empathy from monoracial Black individuals (Albuja et al., 2023). Further studies should be done to see if the same phenomenon is true with Asian-White biracial individuals.

Marisa Franco, one of the authors from the 2023 Albuja paper and the 2023 Norman paper, has authored multiple other papers on biracial individuals, specifically focusing on Black-White biracial individuals. Franco co-authored a report in 2018 focusing on Black-White biracial individuals and Asian-White biracial individuals. She analyzed the contributors to invalidation, or in other words, why monoracial people exclude biracial people. She found two main contributors: appearance and behaviors. Does the multiracial individual look like their non-white racial identity? Do they act stereotypically like their non-white racial identity? She also found that invalidation differed between Asian and Black biracial people. Black biracial

individuals had less “latitude in how they are perceived racially” by monoracial Black people and monoracial White people (Franco and O’Brian, 2018).

Still, there are many gaps in the current literature. There are several papers that investigate how monoracial Black people view biracial Black people, and even more papers about how biracial individuals view themselves, but not enough scholarship has been done on how monoracial Asian people view biracial Asian people. Franco has analyzed what it takes for biracial Black individuals to be classified as Black. Herman, Vezaldenos, and Giamo have analyzed how biracial individuals classify themselves. However, I have not found significant scholarship on how monoracial Asian people classify biracial Asian people and why. What does it take for biracial Asians to be considered Asian enough in the eyes of monoracial Asians?

In this paper, I seek to answer that question. While Franco’s analysis cannot be expanded to Asian biracials, it is a good starting point of what indicators should be studied. For this paper, I chose to study three indicators: self identification, behavior, and appearance. The goal is to find out how these indicators impact how monoracial Asian people classify biracial Asian people.

Methods

To see if these three indicators actually had a relationship with monoracial Asian perception of biracial Asians at George Washington University, I conducted a pilot survey of monoracial Asian individuals. Participants were presented with a survey asking them whether they thought a biracial individual, all of whom are celebrities, had a stronger Asian identity or White identity. Participants were recruited using the snowball method. It is unknown the exact demographics of the participants, due to the method used, but all participants were monoracial Asian students at the George Washington University, and at least two participants are international students.

Participants randomly receive one of three survey versions providing either the self identification of the celebrity, a picture of the celebrity, or short biography of the celebrity, meant to mimic the "behaviors" category. The same ten celebrities were used for each survey version; versions differed only by which indicator was given. Celebrities were chosen for a few reasons: one, celebrities had to have a half-White, half-Asian identity; two, the celebrity had to have spoken publicly about their biracial identity so that their self identification was known; lastly, the celebrity had to have public information on their upbringing and personal lives so that behaviors could be known. No names were provided, and respondents in the appearance cohort and the behaviors cohort, were asked to disregard any background information they had about the public figure when making their decision. The order of the celebrities was randomly shuffled for each respondent. Survey respondents were all monoracial Asians.

The three survey versions were to accurately assess the statistical significance of each variable. To determine statistical significance, a hypothesis test was conducted.

H_0: Self identification, appearance, and behaviors of biracial Asians have no impact on monoracial Asian perception of the extent of biracial Asians' Asian identity.

H_A: Self identification, appearance, and behaviors of biracial Asians have an impact on monoracial Asian perception of the extent of biracial Asians' Asian identity.

Hypothesis tests determine whether it is plausible that differences in answers were random. Essentially, is it plausible that there is actually a relationship between the indicators provided and the monoracial Asian's answer? Without the indicators to influence responses, the assumption under H_0 is that respondents essentially selected at random, which over many responses, would result in the mean perceived Asian Identity for each version being close to 0.5.

All tests were conducted using R Studio, a coding platform designed for data science. R Studio has built in functions for bootstrapping, which is the process of randomly sampling with replacement from a sample to estimate a statistic (Bootstrapping (statistics), n.d.). I used bootstrapping to account for my small sample size. R Studio also has a built-in function for finding the p-value, which calculates how unlikely it is to get a result as or more extreme than ours by random chance. A low p-value indicates that it is unlikely our result is due to random chance, and that there is likely another factor at play, which in this case is the indicators. For this study, I ran two types of tests. A null hypothesis test of each indicator against an assumed null of 0.5. Next, I ran a chi-squared test for homogeneity for each celebrity across variables. This type of test determines whether it is plausible that the difference in observations for the same individual is due to random chance.

Results

Participant Perception of Example Celebrities Perceived Asian Racial Identity as a Proportion			
Celebrity	Self Identification Indicator	Behaviors Indicator	Appearance Indicators
Celebrity 1	0.71	0.33	0.50
Celebrity 2	1.00	0.50	0.83
Celebrity 3	1.00	0.83	0.83
Celebrity 4	0.57	0.17	0.00
Celebrity 5	0.86	1.00	0.33
Celebrity 6	0.14	0.83	0.66
Celebrity 7	0.29	0.50	1.00
Celebrity 8	0.71	0.17	0.00
Celebrity 9	1.00	0.83	0.17
Celebrity 10	0.86	0.50	0.00

Although n = 19 is not enough results to conduct a proper hypothesis test, the data is still worth analyzing. I ran a pilot hypothesis test using the data I collected. Using R Studio, I created a bootstrap sample of each of my three categories, each with 2000 repetitions. From there, I ran the bootstrap tests against an expected value of 0.5. I chose 0.5 because this is what the value would be close to if the indicators truly had no impact and the survey had many samples. From the self-identification cohort, my test yielded a p-value of 0.003, which is statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. From the behaviors cohort, my test yielded a p-value of 0.069, which is not statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. From the appearance cohort my test yielded a p-value of 0.965, due to the appearance indicator mean being 0.5.

For this chi-squared test, none of the celebrities returned statistically significant p-values, with the lowest one being 0.15. In the discussion section, I elaborate on why I think none of these tests returned a significant p-value, and what better tests could be conducted.

Discussion

My pilot results partially support my hypothesis that my chosen indicators have an effect on monoracial Asian perception of biracial Asians. These pilot results suggest that the celebrities' self-identification has an impact on monoracial Asian perception of biracial Asians. This finding is in line with Albuja's study noting the relationship between biracial Black-White Americans' self identification and the empathy they received from monoracial Black Americans (Albuja et al., 2023). Behaviors were not shown to be statistically significant. However, the low p-value showed promise that a proper survey and hypothesis test may yield statistically significant results. My results suggest that there may be some sort of relationship between a

biracial Asian individual's self-identification and behaviors and monoracial Asian perception of that individual's Asian racial identity. My results suggested no relationship between biracial Asian appearance and monoracial Asian perception of strength of Asian racial identity. Because of the small n, I would still be interested in further research on the appearance indicator with more survey respondents and more individuals in the survey.

The non-statistically significant appearance cohort was due to the mean proportion being 0.5, which was the expected value. I believe the 0.5 mean proportion was due to my attempt to choose a variety of "White-passing" and "Asian-passing" celebrities, resulting in roughly half of the celebrities being deemed White and the other half being deemed Asian. In future research, I would separate the "White-passing" and "Asian passing" celebrities into two separate surveys and conduct a chi-squared test for homogeneity to determine the differences. I believe this would be far more effective than the chi squared tests I did by celebrity. Preliminary results suggest that some of these factors are used when monoracial Asian individuals decide whether a biracial Asian individual is "Asian enough." Further proof lies in the fact that only one celebrity in my statistically significant indicator, which was self-identification, identified in a way that would likely be construed as white. This celebrity self identified as "Icelandic." All other celebrities self-identified as some form of Asian-American, Asian, or mixed.

With the chi-squared test, no factor returned to be statistically significant. This result was puzzling, as I had assumed that variations amongst celebrities would be the strongest evidence of indicators. However, now I believe that it would be more helpful to conduct chi-squared tests against two groups, "White-passing" and "Asian-passing." I would also do this for self-identification, dividing between Asian self-identification, white self-identification, and

mixed self-identification, and behaviors, dividing between stereotypically Asian behaviors and stereotypically White behaviors.

While I believe the full execution of this study would be extremely insightful into monoracial perception of biracial Asian Americans, it is worth noting potential biases and design flaws, as well as pointing out additional possible areas of study. First, the individuals in the surveys used were celebrities, which means that respondents may already have a preconceived notion of the celebrity, or even any characters they may play. In the self-identification cohort, it is nearly impossible to guess a celebrity solely from how they identify themselves, so this bias should not play a major factor in this survey version. In the behaviors cohort, it is possible that respondents could guess the celebrity from the short biography written, but it is less likely. Still, this bias should be considered. In the appearance cohort, the individual is apparent from the photo provided, so bias is likely. While survey respondents were asked not to consider any background information they may have on the individual, human bias is inherent. A better way to conduct this study would be to use pictures of non-famous White-Asian biracials that the individuals do not know; however, this resource was not available to me.

Second, it is worth noting that respondents may feel pressured to answer one way or another, especially those who may have known what this research paper was about. Although respondents were asked to answer honestly and reminded that no one would ever see their individual answer, pressure to answer in an acceptable or non-offensive manner may have affected responses.

Lastly, I'd like to address further topics of study. While I chose to test only whether the indicators have an effect on perception, I believe it would be insightful to understand why. If able to conduct another study, I would test the hypothesis that these indicators allow monoracial

Asians to evaluate perceived discrimination, and that if a monoracial Asian perceived that a biracial Asian also experienced anti-Asian discrimination, they would be much more likely to view that biracial Asian as having a strong Asian identity.

While several of my tests were not statistically significant, I believe my research was insightful in suggesting the impact of the self-identification indicator and showing promise in the impact of the behaviors indicator. This pilot research shows strong potential for continuing this research on a larger scale with more resources and different tests.

Citations

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