

Biracial and passing -- as black

December 14 2010

In a country with Jim Crow segregation laws and the "one-drop rule" determining who was black and therefore where and what a person was permitted to be, it's easy to see why those who plausibly could, might pass as white. But new research published in the December issue of *Social Psychology Quarterly* shows that black-white biracial adults now exercise considerable control over how they identify and the authors find "a striking reverse pattern of passing today," with a majority of survey respondents reporting that they pass as black.

Today's passing, according to the study's lead author, University of Vermont [sociologist](#) Nikki Khanna, is about adopting an identity that contradicts your self-perception of race — and it tends to be contextual.

"Most people in my sample identified themselves as [biracial](#) or multiracial but talked about certain situations, with a group of friends, say, where they might downplay their white ancestry, which can carry its own negative biases," Khanna says. Other reasons cited for passing as black included a desire to take advantage of post-Civil Rights era educational and employment opportunities sometimes available to those who are black.

The phenomenon of passing as black, according to the study, suggests a changing culture around race relations and politics in the United States. Blackness, the authors argue, is less stigmatized today. In fact, as suggested by the study's title, "Passing as Black: Racial Identity Work among Biracial Americans," biracial and multiracial individuals feel more free to experiment with their identity and many express pride in

their blackness and take steps to accent attributes that they consider black.

In addition to providing historical context along with research methodology and analysis, the article presents quotes that offer personal accounts of both those who once passed as white to overcome racial barriers and accounts of those who are now traversing black and white worlds.

Provided by American Sociological Association

Citation: Biracial and passing -- as black (2010, December 14) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-12-biracial-black.html>

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