

Often misidentified, multiracial people value accurate perceptions

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Multiracial people may be misidentified more often as being white than black and may value being accurately identified more so than single-race individuals, according to research presented at APA's 121st Annual Convention.

"Today, the distinctions among white, black, Latino and Asian people are becoming blurred by the increasing frequency and prominence of multiracial people," said Jacqueline M. Chen, PhD, of the University of California, Davis. "Still, average Americans have difficulty identifying multiracial people who don't conform to the traditional single-race categories that society has used all their lives."

Chen discussed six experiments in which participants were consistently less likely to identify people as multiracial than single-race and took longer to identify someone as multiracial compared to how easily they identified black, white and Asian people. When they made incorrect identifications, they were consistently more likely to categorize a multiracial person as white than black, the study found. Time pressure, [distractions](#) and thinking of race in either-or terms made observers significantly less likely to identify someone as multiracial. The study was conducted at the University of California, Santa Barbara and involved 435 ethnically diverse undergraduate students.

Participants identified the race of black, white, Asian or multiracial individuals in photos and researchers recorded each participant's accuracy and time to respond. Researchers used a [memorization](#) task and

a time limit in two experiments to determine if either would affect a participant's accuracy. In another experiment, participants were told the study was about [reading comprehension](#) and attention. They then read news articles about scientists claiming to find a [genetic basis](#) for race and were asked to view several photographs of faces and identify them by race.

Scientists agree that the [racial categories](#) we use today are not based on [biological differences](#) but are social constructions that can change over time, Chen said, noting that until the mid-20th century, the Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States viewed Irish and Italian immigrants as different races. Previous research has found that people who identify as multiracial have as many as or more positive experiences than those who identify with a single race, regardless of that group's status in society, she said.

In another presentation during the same convention session, Jessica D. Remedios, PhD, of Tufts University, looked at how multiracial people value the accuracy of another person's perception of their race. "Our research found that multiracial people expect positive interactions with people who accurately perceive their racial backgrounds because that affirms their self-perceptions," Remedios said.

She described an experiment in which researchers took photos of participants and told them they would trade the photo with a participant located in another room. The person in the other room was actually fictional, and each participant received a photo of a white male and was asked to identify his race on a form with a list of several races and a place to add comments. The participants then read comments the researchers had developed for the fictional participant who they thought had viewed their photo and they completed a questionnaire to assess their interest in meeting that person. Another experiment did the same, but showed participants photos of a white man or woman and added

questions to determine whether the participants were surprised by accurate or inaccurate identifications and how they felt about themselves after reading the other participant's comments.

Multiracial participants were more interested in meeting partners who had accurately identified them. Single-race people were surprised but multiracial people were not when their race was not accurately identified. Multiracial and single-race people had similar negative reactions to being misidentified, but only multiracial participants indicated an accurate identification would support their self-image, whereas there was no effect on self-image among the single-race participants.

This study involved 169 undergraduates in two groups. One group consisted of students with parents of different races and single-race students, but no whites. The other combined multiracial and single-race students including whites. Whites were not included in the first group because past research suggests they are not usually concerned with their race, but they were included in the second study to test whether whites and minorities react differently to others' accuracy about their [race](#), Remedios said.

More information: "She's Multiracial: The Emergence of a Multiracial Category in Person Perception," Jacqueline M. Chen, PhD, and David L. Hamilton, PhD; and "Multiracial and Monoracial Individuals' Responses to Others' Accuracy and Confusion About Their Race," Jessica D. Remedios, PhD, and Alison L. Chasteen, PhD, symposium session 3004, Friday, Aug. 2, 8 - 8:50 a.m. HST, Hawai'i Convention Center, room 321A.

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