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## **Biracial Identity and Experiences in the US**

### **Introduction**

Being a part of a minority race in the United States already sets one apart from many. It is common for people to embrace their culture while living in the states to keep in touch with one's roots or to be prideful in their cultural background. Whether a citizen is white, black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, it is possible for someone to feel isolated in their own family or even a group of friends. However, what about people mixed with one or more minority races? The US population, having people from numerous parts of the world, had a multiracial section that was 3.2 percent of the population in 2010 and then increased to 10.2 percent of the population in 2020, according to the 2020 United States Census (Jones). This statistic shows the increasing number of multiracial individuals in the United States. However, this investigation focuses explicitly more on biracial individuals - Oxford Language's definition is "containing members of two racial groups." Growing up as a biracial (Filipina and Dutch) US citizen, there have been times when having two racial backgrounds kept my mind from feeling entirely accepted into either my family or friend groups. My research questions will compare the differences between these two groups regarding building relationships, personality traits, acceptance, etc. Being biracial indeed helps

one's appreciation for the cultural diversity of others. I believe that by comparing the two groups, there are character differences in interactions with others, whether it is one's own family or anyone they decide to surround themselves with. Comparing the differences between being part white to being part of two minority groups might also affect a person's relationships with others. So, throughout this essay, the main topic of discussion is whether being biracial changes the way they perceive others, themselves, or the way others perceive them.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does being part of two racial backgrounds affect others' perceptions of a biracial individual?
2. Do these perceptions change whether someone is part of two minority backgrounds rather than one?

### **Literature Review**

With the growing amount of biracial children in the United States, it is crucial to question how having multiple racial identities can affect their personal identities. A case study of biracial development conducted by Raushanah Hud-Aleem and Jacqueline Countryman from Wright State University shows a conversation with a twelve-year-old biracial (mixed black and white) boy named Ryan who struggles with connecting with his peers. The issue may not solely focus on the effects of being biracial. Ryan believed he could only identify as an African American because he had prominent African-American features and because that is what his classmates call him as well. His psychiatrist urged Ryan to learn more about both his African American and European American cultures. This effect led him to call himself biracial after some time which was a self-esteem boost that allowed him to improve peer relationships (Countryman, Hud-Aleem). Ryan's case shows that biracial identity can be deeply rooted in some psychological

problems for those growing up in the United States. It is normal to feel different from others, to feel out of place, to feel disconnected, or to feel judged. However, all these negative emotions influence the inability to accept multiracial identity by letting society's opinions choose themselves. In psychology, the idea is that self-identity development is a lifelong process, meaning that it can quickly evolve as one grows up.

Even multiracial adults deal with troubles regarding relationships “whether it is in the friendships they form, the neighborhood where they live, or contact with family members(Parker, Horowitz, Morin, Lopez).” All of these connections may change based on feelings of acceptance from their backgrounds. The report questions biracial individuals in the States on which cultural group they bond with more, and mixed results depending on the person's race. The report finds that mixed white and black citizens identify more with their black background, while mixed white and Asian citizens identify more with their white background. It is interesting to see that depending on what cultural background one is mixed with, there will be a common closer bond with one side of their family. A little over fifty percent of those observed have something in common with multiracial adults, no matter the backgrounds they are mixed with (Parker, Horowitz, Morin, Lopez). These results show that a familiar feeling among those individuals is wanting acceptance from their groups.

An article from NBC News, a left-leaning National Broadcasting Company, interviewed twelve multiracial individuals to explain how their identities are affected by recent political movements such as Sakshi Venkatraman, a reporter for NBC Asian America, and P.R Lockhart, a journalist who addresses race in America, published “Not Enough or Double the Prejudice: On Being Black and Asian American in 2020.” One of the interviewees, Laya DeLeon Hayes, is a sixteen-year-old biracial, Black, and Filipino girl who voiced Doc McStuffins for Disney. She

explains how as she grew up, it was “kind of confusing trying to navigate where [she] fit.” Further, most multiracial people feel “like they have to identify with one race instead of all the races that make up” their identity (Venkatraman, Lockhart). She talks about how her family encouraged her to read up on Black and Filipino history during the Black Lives Matter movement, only to discover how the beauty standard in Asia idolizes white features. Hayes was upset that half of her culture looked down on the other. She had to open her eyes to look past the idea that “everybody was just as accepting” to learn “that [that is] not always the case” (Venkatraman, Lockhart). Hayes’s story shows how biracial children lose the feeling of acceptance or belonging when it comes to culture, although this also applies to superficial relationships. Biracial identity challenges those feelings and forces these individuals to face stereotypical racism in their everyday lives. This group of black and Asian Americans has to realize that not everyone will embrace them with open arms, which can develop a personality quality that biracial individuals are overall more open-minded than monoracial citizens in the US (Venkatraman, Lockhart).

### **Methodology**

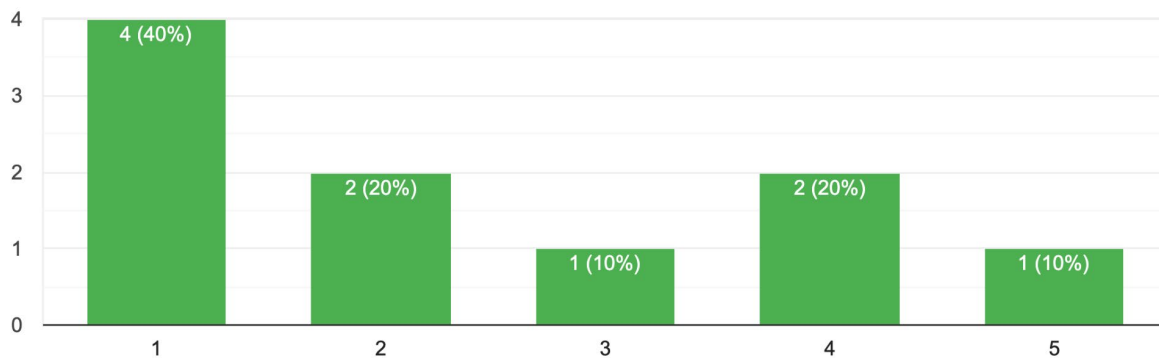
To investigate the research questions above, I created a fifteen-question Google Form Survey to measure how biracial people feel about their relationships with their families, friends, and themselves and how it affects their view of their identity. The goal was to reach ten to fifteen participants, which was difficult because of the lack of biracial individuals in my UWP001 class. To reach a bigger audience, I posted the Google Form Survey on my Instagram story and luckily reached up to ten participants. The survey titled "Biracial Experiences and how it Affects Others' Perceptions of You" encourages participants to answer all questions except the written options because they are more personal. It starts with five demographic questions about their preferred

sexual identity and ethnic groups. The survey goes more in-depth about whether they are part of any minority groups. Next is a list of six Likert scale questions asking participants if they lean toward one ethnic group more than the other and if they feel accepted culturally. Last are the three optional open-ended questions asking participants about personal experiences with being biracial. The first of those written questions are specifically for experiences of biracial people who are half white; the second asks if participants believe biracial identity adds anything to their personality; the last asks if they believe biracial identity affects the ability to build any relationship. Out of the ten participants, I had three responses for the first question, six for the second, and four for the third. This part of the survey is most important for my study because anecdotal evidence is the best way to explore feelings of racial identity. This survey was open to any age group because I discussed how self-identity development is a life-long process in the literature review. However, all participants are in the age range of fifteen to twenty-five years old.

## Findings and Discussion Section

I feel that I fit in with both cultures equally.

10 responses



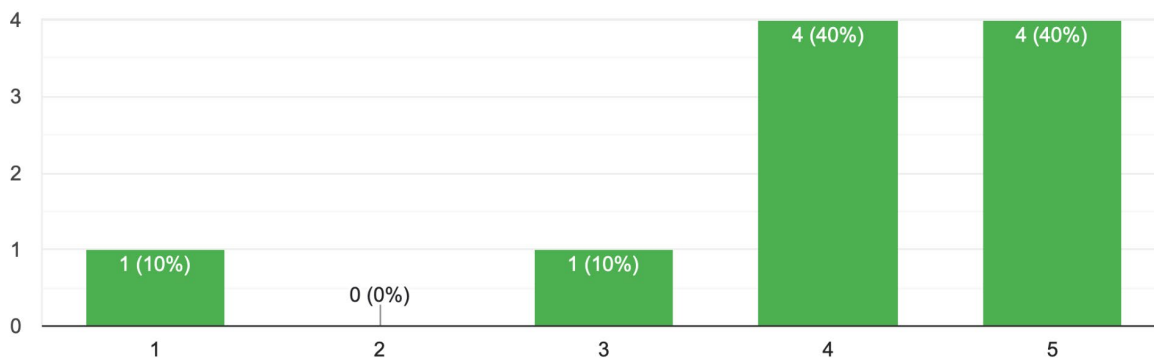
*1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree*

The first of my observations is how for biracial people who are half white, most participants from that group have a more challenging time fitting in with both of their cultural

backgrounds because of family connections. Four of the five participants who disagree that they fit in with both cultures equally are half-white. For the Likert question that asks if participants “identify with one cultural background more than the other,” most of my participants agreed with this statement. The need to lean towards one side of one’s family can result from the confusing process of figuring out one’s self-identity. I believe this reflects why biracial individuals can feel out of place while being on one side of their family (one of my open-ended questions). All participants explain feelings of embarrassment, uncomfortableness, and inferiority. One respondent was told by their family how they [are] “not really Filipino” because their mother immigrated to the states as a child. They were also told they were “diluting the bloodline” because their half-white self is dating an entirely white individual. These negative impressions are confusing for self-identity development. Another respondent explains how they lost connection to their African roots because they have “no idea where [their] African bloodlines lie.” Both answers show how biracial individuals can sometimes be forced into identifying with one of their backgrounds only because feelings of acceptance are lost in family relationships. Similar to Ryan’s case study, his inability to form peer relationships was because he was forced to identify only as African American only because of his appearance. His solution to fixing peer-to-peer friendships was to learn to embrace both of his cultures.

Do you think by being biracial, you have the quality of being more open-minded?

10 responses



*1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree*

A majority of biracial participants agree that their biracial identity pushes them to be more open-minded because some of their cultures are judgemental and unaccepting. Eight out of the ten participants chose that they agreed with this statement. In the open-ended question about "biracial identity [adding] anything to your personality," most respondents went in depth about this Likert scale question. One participant says how growing up multicultural "[helps] develop [their] open-mindedness" because they understand different backgrounds and "how it affects one's perspectives." Another says being biracial helps "admire the differences each individual [possesses]." Although this is positive, being open-minded again results from feeling isolated from family and friends. For example, one respondent explains how they "feel out of place with [their] friends" because they easily embrace "Chinese culture while [they] do not." Relating to the Literature Review, Hayes's biracial story talks about how she learns that Asian culture traditionally looks down upon those with darker skin tones. Because she works in the film industry, she was inspired to create a space on television for black and Filipino cultures. Hayes's anecdote and the participants' responses show that that lonely feeling pushes biracial people to be more accepting so others do not feel the same way they do with their own multicultural identity.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this investigation, it can be said that isolation is a familiar feeling shared between biracial individuals. The negative comments that biracial people receive in their daily lives result in how they form relationships with friends and family and how they see themselves. Forcing self-identity is a common problem these groups face, forming a confusing path to self-identity acceptance. The Google Forms Survey shows how biracial citizens want to feel like they belong with their families and friends because they majorly affect how they perceive themselves,

regardless of their age or sexual identity. My investigation also presents evidence that biracial individuals tend to be more open-minded because of the treatment they get from society and abrupt family members. Furthermore, as a final point, my research proves how being part of multiple backgrounds changes how others perceive a biracial citizen in the United States. When it comes to being part of two minority backgrounds or one, most participants agree that the feeling of belonging is a significant factor for self-identity acceptance, especially in connecting with both one's cultures.



## Annotated Bibliography

Hud-Aleem, Raushanah, and Jacqueline Countryman. "Biracial Identity Development and Recommendations in Therapy." *Psychiatry (Edgmont (Pa. : Township))*, Matrix Medical Communications, Nov. 2008, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2695719/>. This published article talks about a research on biracial children, specifically black and white individuals, in the United States and how they deal with their racial identity. The authors talk about racial identity development in the States and how children run into obstacles as a biracial kid. Going through the investigation shows how children have to deal with racism and how society can lead them to have a bias towards white culture. Because this source is from PubMed Central, this article studies the difficulties of these children to see how it can relate to any treatment in therapy. As one of my potential research questions, I wanted to address how biracial people with two minority backgrounds compared to one, are treated differently. I believe this research will help me study one of my demographics for my essay.

Parker, Kim, et al. "Chapter 5: Race and Social Connections-Friends, Family and Neighborhoods." *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, Pew Research Center, 10 May 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/06/11/chapter-5-race-and-social-connections-friends-family-and-neighborhoods/>. This report focuses on multiracial adults. The article talks about the different combinations of races that biracial individuals identify with, and strangely, the way these people form relationships with either side of their families are different. Not only talking

about their family relationships, but the research goes on and talks about how being biracial is also different when it comes to finding romantic partners. The article goes on showing stats from surveys given to multiracial people to see if there are any commonalities. My research questions focus on if being biracial affects the way others perceive a biracial person. This report is useful because it includes many biracial examples and I will be able to compare all of their experiences. I would probably use this article the most to look back on my own survey questions to see if the results are similar to their study.

Venkatraman, Sakshi, and P.R. Lockhart. "On Being Black and Asian American in 2020."

*NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 18 Oct. 2020,

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/not-enough-or-double-prejudice-being->

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ck-asian-american-2020-n1243353.

This news article from 2020 talks about the height of the Black Lives Matter movement heightened by police brutality and the Stop Asian Hate movement started by the increased racism towards Asians because of the Covid 19 pandemic. We hear the stories of six mixed individuals in the United States that talk about how their black culture is pressed on more when there's an issue at hand. The article explains how being multicultural also affects them in a socially political world. This story is helpful because it adds another view to my research question that I want to further explore. Identity for biracial citizens is not just a personal problem, but having to deal with the casual racism on a daily basis has one questioning it even more. I want to talk about these experiences

in my research because I believe my research question is better and through anecdotal evidence.

#### Works Cited

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