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Policing the Boundaries Around Race and Gender

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### **Abstract**

Growing acceptance of transgender identities in the absence of parallel shifts regarding race can be perceived as somewhat paradoxical, especially in light of how differently each construct is imagined to be rooted in biology. Perceptions of race and gender as alterable aspects of identity were explored using four identity transition scenarios. Participants' beliefs about identity transitions were dependent upon both the type of transition and political ideology. Results indicate that identity transitions involving gender (both male to female and female to male) and one race transition (white to black) were perceived similarly whereas the black to white transition was perceived as relatively less plausible. Coded rationales suggest that gender identity is more frequently perceived as driven by choice relative to racial identity. Participants' political ideology was associated with their acceptance of identity transitions.

## Introduction

### *Background*

Amin Maalouf, an award-winning French author, focused on the complexity of human identity in his book *In the Name of Identity*. In the book, Maalouf expresses that “identity isn’t given once and for all: it changes throughout the person’s lifetime” (page number unknown, 2012). He suggests that identities are dynamic, even identities that on the surface seem static (e.g. gender and race). For instance, the meaning of an identity may change for the individual (e.g. an individual may have been brought up Catholic and may identify as such. However, after being confirmed in the church and studying its dogma, the individual may still identify as Catholic but what it means to be Catholic may have changed for them). Alternately, the meaning of an identity might change for the perceiver.

Personal identity, the concept you develop about yourself, interacts with social identity, a person’s sense of who they are based on their group memberships (Tajfel, 1979). Together both forms of identity coexist to form an individual’s identity. The composition of identities is complex due to multiple categories, such as race, gender, religious ideology, sexual orientation, and other categories, interacting with one another. However, expression of these categories, self-expression, is not directly related to identity. Simply performing stereotypical behaviors of the category does not mean that an individual identifies or associated with that category. All aspects of our identities may be more or less salient at a particular time. Which is more salient may be determined by a variety of things, the environment we are in, the role we assume, etc.

While very different, race and gender share an important characteristic; they are both socially constructed. Although both concepts are social constructs, human made categories with no essence, their meanings vary considerably across cultures and time. Until recently, gender, was

almost invariably considered by perceivers to be binary. The narrative regarding gender has changed and with it so has public opinion. For instance, the concept of identifying as transgender, transitioning from the sex given at birth, is now accepted more than it was decades ago. When asked about societal changes in the acceptance of transgender people 39% of Americans responded “that our society has not gone far enough in accepting people who are transgender” (Pew Research Center for people & the Press, 2017).

Parallel shifts in public opinion have not occurred in the area of race (Brubaker, 2015). Race, which is considered polynary, has progressed in a manner in which categories of race are still used today but not as extremely as they were in the past, for instance during the Jim Crow era (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Simple comparison of transgender research and *transracial/transracialism* research, transitioning from the race assigned at birth to a different race, shows the lack of parallel shifts. Moreover, the term transracial is claimed by those have been adopted; transracial research is mainly conducted in respect to interracial adoptions, but not primarily within the term itself. However, research under this term is limited and public acceptance on this idea seems to be negative (Brubaker, 2015). Which raises the question: Why are race and gender viewed differently in America when ultimately both categories of identity are regarded to as social constructs?

### *Race*

History has shown that America, codified in the law, socially constructed identity groups of races to further the gains on certain individual. Could it be that America’s history is an indication of why race has turned so biological when ultimately is has no premises and it is a social construction? Is race perceived as less alterable? Race is a fluid term that varies in different regions of the world, but here in America, the United States, US, it is associated with

physical and biological features (Root, 1998). Historically, race has been a controversial topic in the US. Before the US became a country there was already an establishment of different race classes. However, different historical events cemented these notions in America and established a hierarchy of race, social dominance. When this racial structure was created, it awarded systematic privileges to European, white, individuals over non-European, non-white, individuals. The creation of race and its existence is to benefit members of the dominant race (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, pg. 8-9). This resulted in the creation of social dominance, meaning that in society there are individuals that placed in a place of privileged simply because of the categories they were born into (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, Malle, 1994). For instance, in 1783 an amendment was added to the US constitution that claimed that slaves were to be seen as three fifths of a person. The creation of this amendment is a form of systematic oppression that is embedded on principles of racism. Another form of systematic oppression, the one drop rule, was established in 1910. This meant that if an individual had a single drop of negro blood, the term used in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for a black individual, that they would then be considered black. This new law along with the Jim Crow era, a period of oppression of black Americans and segregation, further established the dominance of white individuals in America pushing the narrative of race (Root, 1998).

It should be noted that due to the strong emphasis on physical features certain individuals may be able to pass as a different identity than their own, (Root, 1998). The notion of passing seems to primarily go in one direction. Passing may benefit an individual by allowing them to be seen as a part of a privileged group and reap the benefits of the group, especially in a privileged group. Yet, passing does not equates being (Root, 1998). However, although some individual are able to pass as a different identity, the idea of passing demonstrates how race is a social

construct. If there were no advantages pertaining to a particular category, one would not desire to pass. Appearance is illustrated as a component of race but in reality, biological features do not construe race.

### *Gender*

Gender refers to the psychological sex identity (Tuvel, 2017). Sex is biologically determined. Sex is used a precursor to gender. Due to the association of biological features used to determine sex, the composition of gender is often associated with biological features. Gender was established as a binary category, which was composed of males and females. Within gender a hierarchy was established which placed males at the top, referred to as the patriarchy. This form of social dominance established that males were seen as superior to females. Historically, this can be seen in America with women, females, earning the right to vote several years after males. Men exaggerated sex differences in the interest of justifying the patriarchy, similar to how enslaving people was justified due to “different biology”. However, as America changed so did views on gender. Gender roles, the roles which males and females typically fulfilled, changed as the ideals of a traditional family changed. With the adaption of nuclear families, gender roles began to change as women entered the work force. This took away from the idea that only men could work, and gave women a role economically, socially, and outside of the home. Over time gender began to be seen as more of roles, biological associations began to become less prevalent, and choice associations became more prevalent. With the progression of time gender is perceived as more fluid. Today the government of the State of California recognizes that gender is no longer a binary category but rather more complex (Levin, 2019). Along with the Californian government, other Americans agree with this concept and have become more accepting of transgender individuals (Tuvel, 2017). Yet, this raises the question of why is it that

American can remove the biological associations tied to gender, but not do the same with race? If gender, which has more biological roots than race is alterable by choice, then shouldn't race, which as no real biological association, be regarded to the same degree?

### *Gender and Race*

Researchers Rogers and Meltzoff preformed a studying comparing how school children saw gender and race (2016). The study showed that gender was viewed as more important by white children when compared to minority children's view of race and gender being equally as important to their identity (2016). However, when the children were asked to define race, they focused on features, yet when they were asked to define gender, they focused on emotions. This illustrated that even from a young age child begin to associate physical appearance to race. However, the underlying data did not explicitly explain what promoted the children to think this way. This certainly begs the question, if gender is linked to biology, why are we letting go of that biology but not the (invalid) race biology?

### *Hypotheses*

Due to the strong biological association of race, it is predicted that individuals will use biologically based responses when referring to race. Yet, individuals will use choice-based responses when in reference to gender. Acceptance of identity transitions would depend on type and political ideology. Males will likely feel indifferent about a female to male transition. Social dominance orientation, social conservatism, and the participants racial background will influence their policing.



## Method

### Participants

298 individuals were gathered who were enrolled in introductory psychology classes at Grand Valley State University, participants received course credit. Participants composed of 213 females, 71 male, and 14 individuals that identified as other or declined to answer, 168 identified as European American, 8 as African American, 11 as Hispanic American, 6 as Asian American, 67 as other, 12 as multiracial, and 26 declined to answer.

### Measures

Social conservatism was measured with Everett's (2013) Social and Economic Conservatism Scale. The five items corresponding to social conservatism (i.e., religion, traditional values, abortion, traditional marriage, family unit) were averaged for each participant. Higher scores are associated with more extreme conservatism. Abortion was reverse coded. System Justification was measured with Jost and Kay's (2003) System Justification Scale. Eight items: "In general you find society too be fair," "In general, the American political system operates as it should," "American society needs to be radically restructured," "The United States is the best country in the world to live in", "Most policies serve the greater good," "Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness," "Our society is getting worse every year," "Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve," were averaged for each participant to form a system justification score. "American society needs to be radically restructured," and "Our society is getting worse every year," were reverse coded. Participants then indicated their degree of agreement to the following questions using a seven-point Likert scale (1 being *strongly disagree* and 7 being *strongly agree*). Social dominance was measured with Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle's 16-Item Social Dominance Orientation Scale (1994). The sixteen items

were as follows: “Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups,” “In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups,” “It’s OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others,” “To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups,” “If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems,” “It’s probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom,” “Inferior groups should stay in their place,” “Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place,” “It would be good if groups could be equal,” “Group equality should be our ideal,” “All groups should be given an equal chance in life,” “We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups,” “Increased social equality,” “We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally,” “We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible.” “No one group should dominate in society.” Items: “Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups,” “In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups,” “It’s OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others,” “To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups,” “If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems,” “It’s probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom,” “Inferior groups should stay in their place,” “Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place,” were all reverse coded. Participants then provided their degree of agreement based on a seven-point Likert scale (1- strongly agree, 7- strongly disagree). Furthermore, Jost’s, Glaser’s, Kruglanski’s and Sulloway’s (2002) Resistance to Change scale was used to measure participants resistance to change based on two items: “I would be reluctant to make any large scale change to the social order,” “I have a preference for maintaining stability in society, even if there seems to be problems with the current system.” Once more participants

provided their level of agreement using a seven-point Likert scale (1- strongly agree, 7- strongly disagree).

### **Procedure**

In order to test how individuals, perceive identity, we have created four different scenarios for participants to read (see the Appendix A). Our participants are drawn from a convenience sample here are GVSU. In order to make our study more generalizable we are trying to get more participants for a bigger demographic. The participants were asked to read a scenario in which J, our subject, is transitioning from either a racial ethnicity or a gender identity opposite from the one they were assigned at birth. However, J's gender and transition both never change in a single scenario, it is either one or the other. In each essay J's transition is never stated until the end of each passage. In all of the passages, J ends their essay by stating what they identify as. J finishes the essays by stating how proud they are of finally being able to identify as \_\_\_\_\_ and finally being able to the box that reads their current identity.

Each scenario is written in a manner where stereotypical characteristics of each identity are pointed out. For example, when J transitions from male to female, the passage talks about how J never really fit in with other boys and preferred to do things, which may be considered girly, such as ballet. But when J transitions from female to male, the passage talks about J not fitting in with other girls and preferring weightlifting. In the race passages we focused more on racial stereotypes. For example, in the white transitioning to black scenario J has dreadlocks and prefers playing basketball. In the black to white transitioning scenario J straightens their hair and prefers to play tennis. Within the essay not only are physical features being used as targets to demonstrate change but also J's emotional wellbeing. Physical changes and emotional wellbeing as both used as primers to show a change. Both are written throughout the essay to continuously

prime the participant without showing bias to either variable. The essays all mention J's newfound comfort in their new identity and how uncomfortable they were in their previous one. This is to demonstrate how their lived experience has always shown discomfort with the identity which they were assigned at birth. The changing of features such as hair, is to demonstrate stereotypical features being changed in order to fit the identity.

Each essay hints at J's assigned gender or race. In order to elude to J's assigned gender or race, stereotypical activities and features were used in the essays. For example, when J transitions from black to white, the essay refers to J's mom fighting with them about straightening their hair and appearing too white. This is done in order to elude to J's assigned race without specifically stating it. The purpose of this is to allow the readers to make an inference in order for their true perception to be shown. However, the key part in each essay is when J discovers their birth certificate. In each of the birth certificates, J discovers something that they previously were not aware of. For example, in the gender scenarios J discovers that they were born with an ambiguous gender, thus the doctors had to decide what gender J fit more. But in the race scenarios J discovers that their father's name is missing on the birth certificate. After bringing up this information to their mother, J's mother informs them that she was dating two men at the time, a black man and a white man, and does not know who the father is. This is also done to allow readers to infer on the father's race.

In our study we ask participants several questions after they have been presented with one of the essays. After the participant has finished reading the essay, they are asked to answer different questions. The main questions we are looking at are how the participants identify based on social conservatism and how that influences their perceptions of J's identity. In order to test this, we have asked participants to what degree do they believe J is what they identify as. After

participants have answered this, they are asked to explain why they believe this. Their open response questions are then content coded. In our content coding we are looking at the mention of choice versus biology. To do this we have limited our coding to four different categories which we have labeled from one through four. One being that biology is only used to defend that J is \_\_\_\_\_. Two being that choice is only used to defend what J is. Three being that both biology and choice are presented but biology is used more than choice. And four being that both biology and choice are presented but choice is used more than biology. For example, if a participant said “If one of J's biological parents were African American, I would say that yes, J is black. If both of his biological parents were white than he is also white,” we would categorize that as a one, strictly biological. But if a participant said, “J is a black person because that is how J identifies. How J identifies himself is far more important than how other people see him,” we would categorize that as a two, strictly choice. Any time that there is a discrepancy, we discuss why we think an explanation should be coded as X and not Y. If there is still a discrepancy and we cannot come to an agreement, we asked a third coder.

## Results

The results of our hypothesis, which predicted that participants would be more accepting of the gender scenarios over the race scenarios, was not supported by our data. *Figure 2* illustrated participants responds when asked given a Likert scale question asking their extent agreement or disagreement with J's newfound identity. An ANOVA test was preformed to determine significance,  $F(3, 290)=5.08$ .  $p=.002$ . Furthermore, when looking at the policing of each category we found that male, female, and black were all a homogenous set for identity transitions, but white was not apart of that set. Table 1 illustrates the multiple comparisons of the identity transition. The results of our first hypothesis, which predicted that race would be policed using biological and physical attributes as the rationale for J's identity transition, was supported by the data. *Figure 1* demonstrates participants responds favoring biology for race and choice for gender. A chi-squared test was preformed to confirm these results,  $\chi^2(3)=46.08$ ,  $p= .001$ . These results illustrate a significant correlation between race and biology-based rationale. A multiple line regression will be used to further examine our results based on other hypothesizes.

## Discussion

This exploratory study aimed to examine how individuals perceive others identity. Due to the heavy American association of biology being a check marker for race and public opinion of gender shifting, both social constructed where examined within relation to identity transitions and compared. We hypothesized that when looking at the participants rationale, we would find that biology was used to explain the participants choice of agreement or disagreement towards race transition. We found this to be supported by the data and consistent with Rogers and Meltzoff's study. We hypothesized that this would happen due to the strong biological

connection Americans have with race. Yet, we found that ultimately people were generally accepting of almost all identity transitions. Our data illustrated that black, male, and female are a homogenous set but white is not apart of that set. One possibility for this could be that our participants, who are largely white, could be heavily policing their own category. However, this raised the question if it truly is just policing towards one's own group. I hypothesize that if this experiment was performed with an equally distributed amount of participants for each race transition, then we will see a similar format of policing. For instance, if we had 150 self-identifying black participants and 150 white identifying participants and both were randomly assigned a race transition essay, we would expect for the results to also be homogenous set, but with high levels of disagreement on our Likert scale question. Another reason why we expected this is because within race we can see SOD in affect. In this case whites hold the majority in the US and positions of power, but black are apart of the minority and historically have been oppressed. This power dynamic gives leverage to whites in the US over blacks. Whites are more critical of black transition into their own category due to the fear of them losing out on their privileges, typically viewing it as a zero-sum game (Norton & Sommers, 2011). If individuals could transition to white then it would allow them to reap the benefits of being white, but this would seem detrimental to other whites because of the fear of whites no longer having dominance over the minority.

### *Future Research*

This exploratory study examined the perspectives of individuals who where show a binary transition from either race or gender. However, due to its exploratory nature it is only the first step in investigating how identity is being thought of in our society. The study was performed in west Michigan and participants were largely white identifying. In order to further

this research, it would be interesting to exam if a more diverse population would police these categories in similar manners. For example, this study could be repeated in New York were Americas population is more diverse. We predict that this may produce significantly different data from our own, currently.

In this study we found that physical featured played a large role some of the manners in which race was being thought of. To further test the relation of physical attributes and transitions of race and gender, participants can be shown two pictures. Each of these pictures would show the same individual but with their physical attributed altered in a stereotypical physiological manner for that race or gender. Going further with this a series of alterations can be made from the original picture creating a scale of what is considered as passable by participants. Once more the participants rationale would be examined and researchers can gain further knowledge how biology is a variable when discussing transitions of race and gender.



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## Appendix A

### *Scenario One: Female to Male*

J is a senior journalism major at GVSU who was recently invited to be inducted into Kappa Tau Alpha, the national honor society for journalists. Part of the application process asks applicants to write a two-page essay reflecting upon a significant life hardship they have overcome. The following is J's essay.

Ever since I can remember, I have been confused about who I am. As a preteen, I felt like a complete outsider: misunderstood by my parents, my teachers, and even my closest friends. In my early years, I wasn't able to label what it was that made me feel so uncomfortable, I just knew that I seemed unlike anyone else I knew. During my early elementary school years I had quite a few friends and what seemed like ample leeway with respect to how I expressed myself and how I spent my spare time. After school I couldn't wait to change into play clothes and explore the woods with my best friends, Tim and Nathan. We climbed trees, collected interesting rocks, and built shelters out of sticks and leaves. We often stayed out after sunset, inventing forest games and imagining our future lives as great explorers. The time spent with Tim and Nathan are amongst my best childhood memories.

However, as the years passed, my life became more complicated and certainly less enjoyable. My parents started to constrain me, claiming that I was spending far too much time with Tim and Nathan. My parents used schoolwork as the reason they wanted me to stay indoors, but I knew that wasn't the real reason for their new rules. I was one of the best students in my class and I often completed my homework in a matter of minutes once I returned home. At the same time, my parents encouraged me to develop new friendships with the several of the

young girls in my neighborhood. My mom even enrolled me in a ballet class, hoping I would befriend some of the other girls. I felt extremely uncomfortable in that class, I certainly didn't move like a graceful ballerina and I felt ridiculous in a leotard and tights. My parents were disappointed when I refused to continue with the class after just two months. Perhaps the most painful aspect of that time period was that I sensed a growing distance between Nathan, Tim, and me. It was clear that they continued to have their forest adventures, I just wasn't invited to join them any longer.

I felt extremely lonely during my high school years. I continued to succeed academically and won several awards for articles I wrote regarding sexism and social injustice for the school paper, but I was never able to develop close friendships with others. Looking back now, I know that I had already started to recognize the role that I was playing in my inability to forge close friendships. I felt very strongly that I was not living as my authentic self. It seemed impossible to develop a close friendship with another person when I wasn't sharing what I felt was my true self with others. My parents were always very concerned about my lack of friends, wondering aloud why I had not been invited to school dances and other social events. My relationship with my mother became strained during my sophomore year of high school, especially after the huge fight we had about my weight lifting at the gym. My mom was extremely critical of my body building and claimed that I was becoming too masculine looking. Looking back now, I regret the things I said to her on that day, however, I genuinely felt that she was always trying to make me look and behave in ways that I never felt.

Three years ago, the confusion I had felt for the majority of my life dissipated when I stumbled across multiple medical records that my parents had been hiding from me. When I was born, the attending physicians and medical staff took several days to assign a gender to me. It

was impossible to tell if I was male or female simply by looking at me, therefore, several additional tests were done including tests of my hormone levels and scans of my internal organs. While the tests were not 100% conclusive, the doctors told my parents that their best guess was that I was a girl. Before I turned 2, I had additional surgeries to ensure that my external genitalia appeared female. My parents told no one about my condition, not even their own parents.

It might come as a surprise that I am not angry with my parents for their deception. The sense of relief that I felt on the day that I found those records far outweighed any anger I could have felt towards them. For the past year and a half I have been living my life as a male. While my parents have mixed feelings regarding my decision, I have never felt more at peace and certain of myself. It is my plan to move forward in life with my newfound optimism. It gave me great joy to check the “male” box when filling out this application. It was the first time I have officially indicated my gender in a manner that I feel is true to who I am.

*Scenario Two: White to Black*

J is a senior journalism major at GVSU who was recently invited to be inducted into Kappa Tau Alpha, the national honor society for journalists. Part of the application process asks applicants to write a two-page essay reflecting upon a significant life hardship they have overcome. The following is J's essay.

Ever since I can remember, I have been confused about who I am. As a preteen, I felt like a complete outsider: misunderstood by my parents, my teachers, and even my closest friends. In my early years, I wasn't able to label what it was that made me feel so uncomfortable, I just knew that I seemed unlike anyone else I knew. During my early elementary school years I had quite a few friends and what seemed like ample leeway with respect to how I expressed myself and how I spent my spare time. After school I couldn't wait to change into play clothes and spend time on the basketball court with my best friends Darius and DeShawn. We worked on our shooting, dribbling, and passing for hours on end. We often stayed out after sunset, perfecting our moves and imagining our future lives as famous NBA basketball players. The time spent with Darius and DeShawn are amongst my best childhood memories.

However, as the years passed, my life became more complicated and certainly less enjoyable. My parents started to constrain me, claiming that I was spending far too much time with Darius and DeShawn. My parents used schoolwork as the reason they wanted me to spend less time on the basketball court, but I knew that wasn't the real reason for their new rules. I was one of the best students in my class and I often completed my homework in a matter of minutes once I returned home. At the same time, my parents encouraged me to develop new friendships with the white kids at my private school. My mom even enrolled me in tennis and golf lessons at the country club, hoping that I would become friends with the young people who were members

there. I felt extremely uncomfortable at the country club, I certainly didn't identify with any of the kids there. My parents were disappointed when I refused to continue with my lessons, just two months after I started. Perhaps the most painful aspect of that time period was that I sensed a growing distance between Darius, DeShawn, and me. It was clear that they continued to hang out together on the basketball court, I just wasn't invited to join them any longer.

I felt extremely lonely during my high school years. I continued to succeed academically and won several awards for articles I wrote regarding racism and social injustice for the school paper, but I was never able to develop close friendships with others. Looking back now, I know that I had already started to recognize the role that I was playing in my inability to forge close friendships. I felt very strongly that I was not living as my authentic self. It seemed impossible to develop a close friendship with another person when I wasn't sharing what I felt was my true self with others. My parents were always very concerned about my lack of friends, wondering aloud why I never passed my free time with classmates from my school. My relationship with my mother became strained during my sophomore year of high school, especially after the huge fight we had about how I was wearing my hair. My mom was extremely critical of my dreadlocks, and claimed that I was becoming too black looking. Looking back now, I regret the things I said to her on that day, however, I genuinely felt that she was always trying to make me look and behave in ways that I never felt.

Three years ago, the confusion I had felt for the majority of my life dissipated when I stumbled across my birth certificate that my parents had been hiding from me for my entire life. I was shocked to see that there was no name in the space where the father's name would normally go. When I confronted my mother, she explained that she couldn't be 100% certain who my biological father was because she had been dating two men at the time I was conceived:



a black man named Ty and a white man, the man I had always believed was my biological father. My parents told no one about my situation, not even their own parents.

It might come as a surprise that I am not angry with my parents for their deception. The sense of relief that I felt on the day that I found my birth certificate far outweighed any anger I could have felt towards them. For the past year and a half I have been living my life as a black man. While my parents have mixed feelings regarding this decision, I have never felt more at peace and certain of myself. It is my plan to move forward in life with my newfound optimism. It gave me great joy to indicate my race as “black” when filling out this application. It was the first time I have officially indicated my race in a manner that I feel is true to who I am.

*Scenario Three: Male to Female*

J is a senior journalism major at GVSU who was recently invited to be inducted into Kappa Tau Alpha, the national honor society for journalists. Part of the application process asks applicants to write a two-page essay reflecting upon a significant life hardship they have overcome. The following is J's essay.

Ever since I can remember, I have been confused about who I am. As a preteen, I felt like a complete outsider: misunderstood by my parents, my teachers, and even my closest friends. In my early years, I wasn't able to label what it was that made me feel so uncomfortable, I just knew that I seemed unlike anyone else I knew. During my early elementary school years I had quite a few friends and what seemed like ample leeway with respect to how I expressed myself and how I spent my spare time. After school I couldn't wait to hang out with my best friends, Vanessa and Claire. Together, we engaged in a variety of activities but my favorite was "hospital" where we would diagnose our dolls and stuffed animals with ailments and then pretend to care for and ultimately cure them. We often stayed out after sunset, caring for our "patients" and imagining our future lives as successful nurses. The time spent with Vanessa and Claire are amongst my best childhood memories.

However, as the years passed, my life became more complicated and certainly less enjoyable. My parents started to constrain me, claiming that I was spending far too much time with Vanessa and Claire. My parents used schoolwork as the reason they wanted me to stay indoors, but I knew that wasn't the real reason for their new rules. I was one of the best students in my class and I often completed my homework in a matter of minutes once I returned home. At the same time, my parents encouraged me to develop new friendships with the several of the young boys in my neighborhood. My mom even enrolled me in a baseball camp, hoping I would

befriend some of the other boys. I felt extremely uncomfortable during that camp, I certainly didn't play ball well and I felt ridiculous wearing the team uniform, especially the baseball pants. My parents were disappointed when I refused to continue with the camp after just two months. Perhaps the most painful aspect of that time period was that I sensed a growing distance between Vanessa, Claire, and me. It was clear that they continued to play hospital, I just wasn't invited to join them any longer.

I felt extremely lonely during my high school years. I continued to succeed academically and won several awards for articles I wrote regarding sexism and social injustice for the school paper, but I was never able to develop close friendships with others. Looking back now, I know that I had already started to recognize the role that I was playing in my inability to forge close friendships. I felt very strongly that I was not living as my authentic self. It seemed impossible to develop a close friendship with another person when I wasn't sharing what I felt was my true self with others. My parents were always very concerned about my lack of friends, wondering aloud why I wasn't asking girls to school dances or attending other social events. My relationship with my mother became strained during my sophomore year of high school, especially after the huge fight we had about all of the cardio work I was doing at the gym. My mom was extremely critical of my body, claiming that I was becoming too feminine looking. Looking back now, I regret the things I said to her on that day, however, I genuinely felt that she was always trying to make me look and behave in ways that I never felt.

Three years ago, the confusion I had felt for the majority of my life dissipated when I stumbled across multiple medical records that my parents had been hiding from me. When I was born, the attending physicians and medical staff took several days to assign a gender to me. It was impossible to tell if I was male or female simply by looking at me, therefore, several

additional tests were done including tests of my hormone levels and scans of my internal organs. While the tests were not 100% conclusive, the doctors told my parents that their best guess was that I was a boy. Before I turned 2, I had additional surgeries to ensure that my external genitalia appeared male. My parents told no one about my condition, not even their own parents.

It might come as a surprise that I am not angry with my parents for their deception. The sense of relief that I felt on the day that I found those records far outweighed any anger I could have felt towards them. For the past year and a half I have been living my life as a female. While my parents have mixed feelings regarding my decision, I have never felt more at peace and certain of myself. It is my plan to move forward in life with my newfound optimism. It gave me great joy to check the “female” box when filling out this application. It was the first time I have officially indicated my gender in a manner that I feel is true to who I am.

*Scenario Four: Black to White*

J is a senior journalism major at GVSU who was recently invited to be inducted into Kappa Tau Alpha, the national honor society for journalists. Part of the application process asks applicants to write a two-page essay reflecting upon a significant life hardship they have overcome. The following is J's essay.

Ever since I can remember, I have been confused about who I am. As a preteen, I felt like a complete outsider: misunderstood by my parents, my teachers, and even my closest friends. In my early years, I wasn't able to label what it was that made me feel so uncomfortable, I just knew that I seemed unlike anyone else I knew. During my early elementary school years I had quite a few friends and what seemed like ample leeway with respect to how I expressed myself and how I spent my spare time. After school I couldn't wait to change into my tennis clothes and spend time on the school courts with my best friends Jake and Chip. We worked on our serves and tennis strokes for hours on end. We often stayed out after sunset, perfecting our moves and imagining our future lives as famous tennis players making it to the final round of Wimbledon. The time spent with Jake and Chip are amongst my best childhood memories.

However, as the years passed, my life became more complicated and certainly less enjoyable. My parents started to constrain me, claiming that I was spending far too much time at school with Jake and Chip. My parents used schoolwork as the reason they wanted me to spend less time playing tennis, but I knew that wasn't the real reason for their new rules. I was one of the best students in my class and I often completed my homework in a matter of minutes once I returned home. At the same time, my parents encouraged me to develop new friendships with the black kids in my own neighborhood. My mom even enrolled me in an after-school

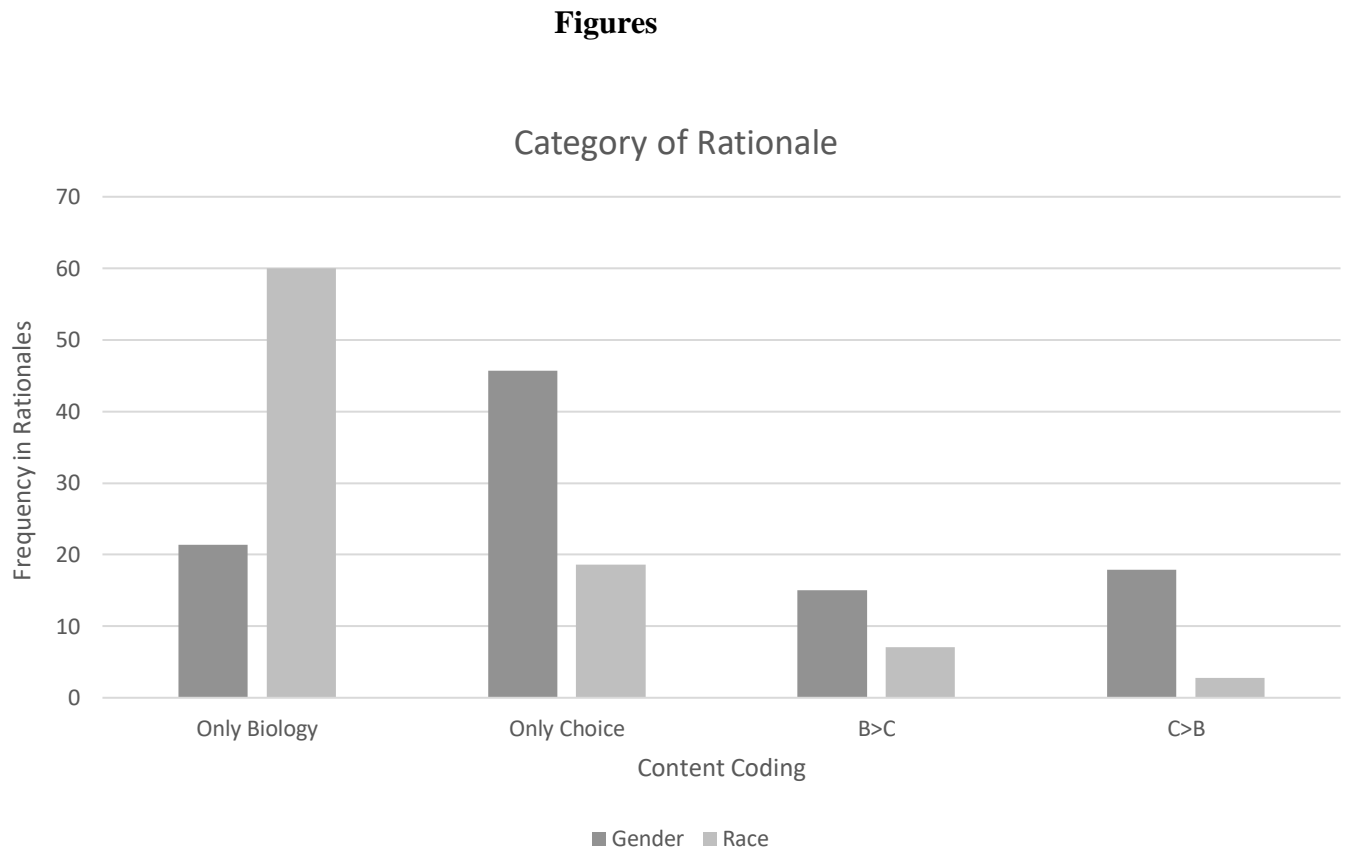
community basketball league, hoping that I would become friends with some of the neighborhood boys. I felt extremely uncomfortable playing basketball, I certainly didn't identify with any of the kids there. My parents were disappointed when I refused to continue playing, just two months after I started. Perhaps the most painful aspect of that time period was that I sensed a growing distance between Jake, Chip, and me. It was clear that they continued to play tennis together after school, I just wasn't invited to join them any longer.

I felt extremely lonely during my high school years. I continued to succeed academically and won several awards for articles I wrote regarding racism and social injustice for the school paper, but I was never able to develop close friendships with others. Looking back now, I know that I had already started to recognize the role that I was playing in my inability to forge close friendships. I felt very strongly that I was not living as my authentic self. It seemed impossible to develop a close friendship with another person when I wasn't sharing what I felt was my true self with others. My parents were always very concerned about my lack of friends, wondering aloud why I never passed my free time with friends from my neighborhood. My relationship with my mother became strained during my sophomore year of high school, especially after the huge fight we had about how I was wearing my hair. My mom was extremely critical of my newly straightened hair and claimed that I was becoming too white looking. Looking back now, I regret the things I said to her on that day, however, I genuinely felt that she was always trying to make me look and behave in ways that I never felt.

Three years ago, the confusion I had felt for the majority of my life dissipated when I stumbled across my birth certificate, which my parents had been hiding from me my entire life. I was shocked to see that there was no name in the space where the father's name would normally go. When I confronted my mother, she explained that she couldn't be 100% certain who my

biological father was because she had been dating two men at the time I was conceived: a white guy named Stan and a black man, the man I had always believed was my biological father. My parents told no one about my situation, not even their own parents.

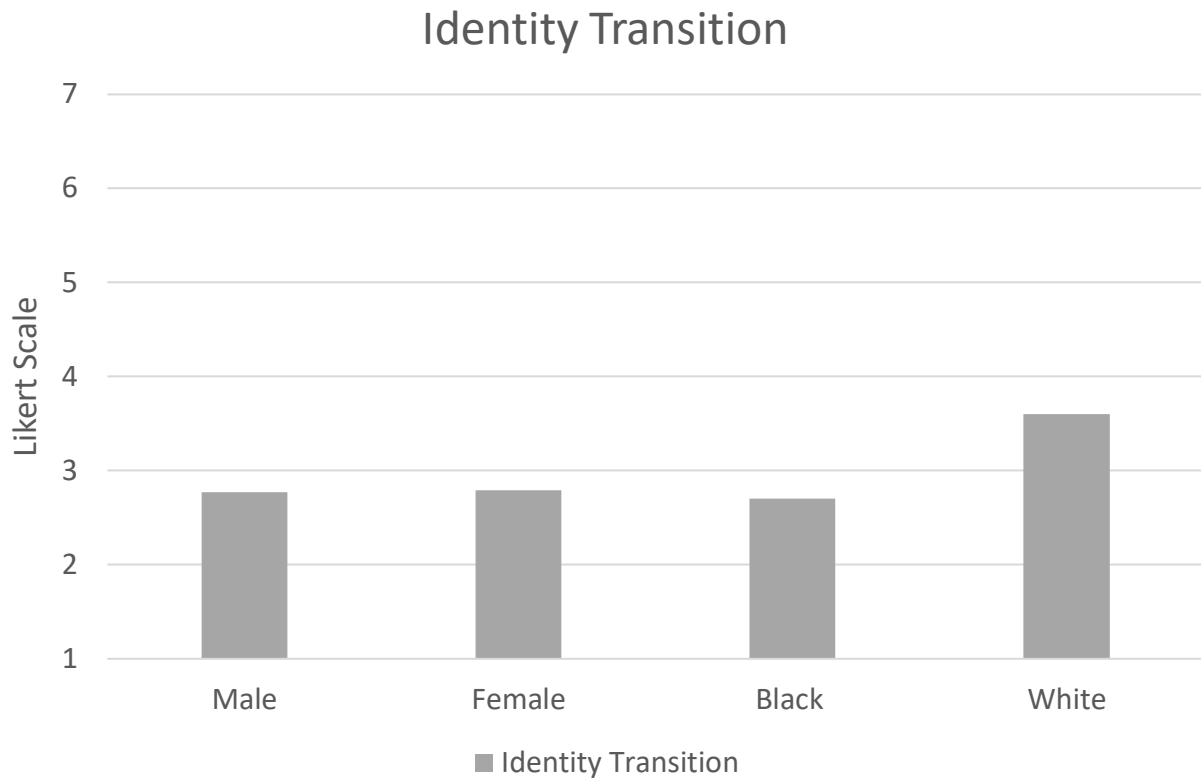
It might come as a surprise that I am not angry with my parents for their deception. The sense of relief that I felt on the day that I found my birth certificate far outweighed any anger I could have felt towards them. For the past year and a half I have been living my life as a white man. While my parents have mixed feelings regarding this decision, I have never felt more at peace and certain of myself. It is my plan to move forward in life with my newfound optimism. It gave me great joy to indicate my race as “white” when filling out this application. It was the first time I have officially indicated my race in a manner that I feel is true to who I am.



*Figure 1.* Frequency of Content Coded Items Regarding Rationale.

Note: Only biology refers to participants only mentioning biology as their rationale for J's identity transition. Only choice refers to participants only mentioning choice as their rationale for J's identity transition. B>C refers to participants mentioning both choice and biology but emphasizing biology. C>B refers to participants mentioning both biology and choice but emphasizing choice.





*Figure 2.* Likert Scale Responses for Identity Transitions.

Note: The mean of response to Likert scale question asking their extent of agreement or disagreement with J's newfound identity, was taken for each of the scenarios. Identity transition on the X axis refers to identity J identifies themselves as at the end of each scenario. (1-Strongly agree, 7- Strongly disagree.)

### Tables

Table 1

#### Multiple Comparisons of Policing Around Identity Transitions

Transition	Transition to	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Male	Female	-.0195	.256	1.000
	Black	.0751	.256	.993
	White	-.7898*	.256	.025
Female	Male	.0195	.256	1.000
	Black	.0946	.255	.987
	White	-.7703*	.255	.029
Black	Male	-.0751	.256	.993
	Female	-.0946	.255	.987
	White	-.8649*	.255	.010
White	Male	.7896*	.256	.025
	Female	.7703*	.255	.029
	Black	.8649*	.255	.010

Note: \* denotes significance because *p* is smaller than .05.