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## Status Maximization, Hypodescent Theory, or Social Identity Theory? A Theoretical Approach to Understanding the Racial Identification of Multiracial Adolescents

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RESEARCH IN RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS VOLUME 15

# **BICULTURALISM, SELF IDENTITY AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION**

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# STATUS MAXIMIZATION, HYPODESCENT THEORY, OR SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY? A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE RACIAL IDENTIFICATION OF MULTIRACIAL ADOLESCENTS

Matthew Oware

## ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines whether the racial identification of mixed-race adolescents can be understood through several theories: Status Maximization Theory, the rule of hypodescent, or social identity theory. Status Maximization theory posits that mixed-race adolescents will attempt to identify as the highest racial status group they possibly can. The rule of hypodescent or hypodescent theory, also known as the one-drop rule, is a legacy of the Plantation-era South and prescribes that mixed-race individuals identify as their lowest status racial identity. Social identity theory posits that the higher frequency or quality of contacts with parents or individuals in mixed-race adolescents' peer*

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*networks affect the racial identification of mixed-race adolescents. Also, social identity contends that a mixed-race adolescent's intergroup dynamic (measured here as a child's level of self-esteem, whether there is prejudice at school, and a child's self-concept) dictates how he or she will racially identify. Through analyses of mixed-race adolescents in the National Longitudinal Adolescent Health (Add Health), I find that Asian-white and American-Indian-white adolescents do not status maximize nor abide by hypodescent, while black-white adolescents do not status maximize but do adhere to hypodescent when forced to choose one race. There is no tendency for the frequency or quality of contact with parents, romantic partners, or school composition to affect racial identity, as predicted by social identity theory. Yet, several of the aforementioned social-psychological variables are found to influence the racial identification of mixed-race adolescents. Specifically, whether they felt positively about school, if they experienced prejudice, whether they had higher levels of self-esteem, and if they felt socially accepted by their peers. Another key finding from this research suggests that racial identification for Asian-white and American-Indian-white adolescents are both fluid and optional; this is not the case for black-white adolescents. I conclude by offering the implications of these findings for black-white multiracial individuals.*

Extensive scholarship asserts that "race" is socially constructed; it is not strictly biologically determined. The meaning and classification scheme of race and racial groups is delineated based on the society one lives in (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998; Omi & Winant, 1994). The social construction of race can be seen in census classifications and how these have recently changed. Prior to 2000, people were not allowed to identify themselves as more than one race. If they insisted on so classifying themselves then they were either their mother's race or the race most represented in their neighborhood (Farley, 2001). However, in 2000, when for the first time, individuals were allowed to identify as more than one race, 6.8 million people, or 2.4% of the population so identified themselves (Bureau of Census, 2000). The majority of individuals identifying as more than one race were adolescents 18 and under (Farley, 2001), suggesting that, in the immediate future, increasing numbers of individuals may identify solely as multiracial.

Still remaining to be determined are the social factors that influence the identification of mixed-race individuals. There is growing anecdotal evidence as well as empirical research that suggests that the racial identification of

mixed-race adolescents and adults is influenced by such factors as parental involvement; the racial composition of their neighborhood and school; their peer networks; their romantic partners; their economic backgrounds; how they perceive themselves in relation to marginalized communities; and the quality of contact with individuals in their social networks (Chideya, 1999; Field, 1996; Funderburg, 1994; Harris & Sim, 2002; Harris, 2002; Korgen, 1998; Miller, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunson, 2002; Storrs, 1999; Wallace, 2001; Xie & Goyette, 1997). First, I discuss how the notion of mixed-race identity came into prominence due to influence from multiracial advocacy groups. Next, I briefly detail how families of multiple race individuals, and mixed-race individuals themselves experienced multiraciality. Within this context, I then discuss the theoretical approaches I want to test in relation with this topic. Finally, I provide some implications of these findings for mixed-race people.

## BRIEF HISTORY

In the past, there have always been individuals who identified themselves as more than one race, but this claim was not acknowledged nor legitimated by the United States government until 2000. In part, these actions came about due to multiracial advocacy groups. In the early 1990s groups such as Project Race and American Multiethnic Association argued that there should be a multiracial category on the census and other governmental and state forms. The rationale was that multiple race individuals have the right to be able to identify all aspects of their identity and this was in line with the American idea of individuals having their rights legitimated and protected; that is, the right to self-determination, in this case, the ability to self-identify the way one wants. These groups argued that the census and other government and state agencies failed to acknowledge these rights by not identifying a growing segment of American society. In her groundbreaking book on mixed-race identity, Root (1992) (who is herself multiracial and argues for recognition of multiracial identity) proposes a Bill of Rights for racially mixed people. In it she asserts:

I have the right  
not to keep the races separate within me  
not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical ambiguity  
not to justify my ethnic legitimacy  
to identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify (pg. 7)

I have the right

to identify myself differently than how my parents identify me  
 to identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters  
 to identify myself differently in different situations  
 to change my identity over my lifetime—and more than once (pg. 7).

Robbin (2000) details the massive campaign for a multiracial category by organizations such as Project Race and the American MultiEthnic Association in which they testified in the 1993 congressional hearings held in Boston, Denver, San Francisco, and Honolulu that denying individuals the right to classify themselves as more than one race is prejudicial and discriminatory. In addition, this limitation would only perpetuate the alienation and marginalization that multiple race individuals felt in a monoracial society. Websites have appeared such as Interracial Voice, where writers, mixed-race and single-race, advocate that a multiracial category be placed on the 2000 Census. These groups partially succeeded when on October 29, 1997 the US Office of Management and Budget announced that it would allow Americans to classify themselves as more than one race on the 2000 Census – yet, this was not the multiracial category demanded by these groups (Farley, 2001).

In addition to there being a political push for the acknowledgement of a multiracial identity, during this time there was also research that examined the experiences of adolescents who possessed mixed-race backgrounds. Cauce et al. (1992) write that the family environment is crucial to a biracial child's understanding of his or her heritage. The mother and father, as well as brother, sisters, or extended family may encourage and support the development of a multiracial identity. Ladner (1986) writes that multiracial families communicate subtle and explicit messages to their children about the racial identity they should adopt. Specifically, those adolescents who openly talked about racial issues with their parents were more likely to identify as multiracial than those who did not (Kerwin et al., 1993).

Other scholar's examination of mixed-race individuals attempted to socially understand their identity. One of Funderburg's (1994) respondents wrote that his father was a black soldier stationed in Iceland and his mother was (white) Icelandic. He writes that he was born in Iceland and since there were no blacks in Iceland where he grew up he considered himself white. When he moved to the United States, in the New York area to live with his father, his friends told him that he had to learn how to "act" black. Finally, when he moved to Miami, blacks did not accept him; his friends were Latinos, and he began to identify himself as mixed. Another of Funderburg's interviewees stated: "... not only personally, but visually

I wanted to emulate... [my mother] in every possible way ... because I was raised by a white person and because most of the people I was surrounded by were white, that became my culture” (p. 43). In their study of black-Japanese biracials, Hall (1992) and Kerwin et al. (1993) found that there was a greater tendency by their respondents to identify as black when they lived in predominately black neighborhoods and had predominately black friends.

Indeed, dating for mixed-race teens becomes more complex than for monoracial ones. Twine (1996) writes that “in an attempt to socially construct a different identity, they [mixed-race adolescents] selected partners who were ‘marked’ racially, that is individuals who were recognized as belonging to the racial category which they now identified” (p. 297). She found that when adolescents who are mixed with a minority status do not want to identify as minority, they do not date minorities. She gives the example of an adolescent who was a biracial black and (white) Jewish person who avoided dating black girls because he wanted to assert a biracial identity, not a black identity. However, Hall (1992) cautions that in the case of peer groups or romantic partners, racial identification may have been antecedent to group or partner acceptance. That is, an individual may have identified as a particular race prior to establishing friendships or acquiring a romantic partner. Consequently, investigating other environmental factors such as school and neighborhood composition over which the adolescent has little influence, along with the race of the romantic partner, is important in determining the relationship between these variables and racial identification.

In this chapter, I examine the effects of the aforementioned social factors, but move beyond this to approach the understanding of the racial identification of multiracial individuals from differing theoretical frameworks. There is emerging research that claims that not all multiracial individuals experience being “mixed-race” in the same manner (Debose & Winters, 2003). For example, Asian-white or American-Indian-white individuals do not face the same levels of antagonism, tensions, or constraints from their respective monoracial populations as do black-white racial combinations due to the history of slavery and legalized institutional discrimination against blacks (Debose & Winters, 2003; Lee & Bean, 2004). Slavery as well as other forms of institutional oppression against minorities created racial hierarchies with blacks being at the very bottom and American-Indians and Asians located between blacks and whites (Spickard, 1989; Eduardo-Bonilla Silva, 2004). There is a general belief that Asians have achieved a “model-minority” status, although scholars from the



Asian-American community refute this claim (Gans, 2004; Wu, 2002). In addition, Asians and Asian-American rates of intermarriage to whites are nearly triple that of blacks, with some Asian groups being more likely to intermarry with whites rather than others (Lee & Bean, 2004; Wu, 2002, p. 273). Native Americans also intermarry with whites at higher rates than do blacks, with approximately half marrying non-American-Indians; that is, marrying whites, blacks, and other minorities (C. Matthew Snipp, 2002).

This research tests whether multiracial adolescents of differing backgrounds react to this implicit (and explicit) racial hierarchy by attempting to identify as the highest status race that they possibly can, status maximization, or whether they employ the hypodescent rule, which stipulates that a mixed-race individual identify as their lowest status racial identity. Alternatively, I will test whether multiracial adolescents utilize social identity theory, which argues that the quality and frequency of contacts with peers and parents, as well as other social-psychological variables affect the racial identification of multiracial adolescents. In all, specific hypotheses are drawn from an extension of status maximization theory (Davis & Robinson, 1998), the one-drop rule, which I will call hypodescent theory in this work (Davis, 1991), and social identity theory (Deaux & Ethier, 1998).

### *Status Maximization Theory*

Status Maximization theory posits a process whereby individuals attempt to adopt the highest status identity that they can reasonably justify. This theory was originally advanced in the area of class identities of married couples, where it has been found that husbands tend to take into account their wives' characteristics in forming their class identity only if their wives' characteristics can be used to justify a higher class identity (Baxter, 1994; Davis & Robinson, 1998). For example, Davis and Robinson (1998) find that husbands whose wives' incomes are higher than theirs or whose wives work longer hours than they do use these characteristics, and not their own to justify a higher class identity. Extending this logic to racial identities, we would expect that mixed-race adolescents with one white parent specifically may understand that there is a hierarchy of racial statuses and attempt to status maximize by identifying themselves as white – the higher status of their parents' races, and if not as white then as multiracial, before identifying as the lower status race.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997) asserts that there is currently a racialized social structure that places blacks, Asians, and American-Indians below

whites. In addition, he speculates that there will be a “tri-racial” stratification system with “assimilated urban Native Americans” represented in the “white” strata and Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, and Chinese Americans grouped in the “honorary white” strata (2004, p. 225). In his hypothetical future racial stratification system, Gans (2004) writes that skin color and class status will be the primary determinants of racial hierarchies, with darker and poorer groups represented at the bottom and lighter and wealthier groups represented towards the top. Clearly, in both of these stratification systems minorities are below whites, setting up a white-non-white dichotomy.

Based on this racial hierarchy there may be a greater ability for Asian-white individuals and American-Indian-white individuals to identify themselves solely as white (the highest racial status category). Because of their supposed “model-minority” status, mixed-race Asian-white individuals can potentially legitimately choose to “identify up” as white. Indeed, Gans (2004) writes that the Asians’ increasing rates of intermarriage with whites may be eliminating the social boundary that constructs them as a separate race. Joanne Nagel (1995) observes that there are increasing numbers of individuals with Caucasian backgrounds who also identify themselves as American-Indians. Indeed, a substantial portion of American-Indians are in fact mixed-raced (Snipp, 2002). In their summary of the research on multiracial identification, Lee and Bean (2004, p.230) report that 50% of American-Indian-white and Asian-white intermarried couples report an exclusively white racial identity for their offspring. Moreover, Eschbach, Supple, and Snipp (1998) argue that the fact that some whites on the 1990 Census reported American-Indian ancestry signifies the flexibility of racial boundaries for this group. Thus, the same logic may hold for multiracial American-Indian-white individuals – they can freely identify as white without being rebuffed by others. Therefore, I hypothesize that mixed-race white-non-white racial combinations will attempt to status maximize and racially identify as white.

### *Hypodescent Theory*

Hypodescent theory, more commonly referred to as the one-drop rule, prescribes that mixed-race individuals identify as the subordinate status of their racial identities (Davis, 1991; Christian, 2000). This idea emerged from the plantation-era South and focused on the subordination of blacks and the preservation of white supremacy. Specifically, individuals who were

black-white were forced to identify as solely black. Indeed, a legacy of hypodescent is blacks continued adherence to the "one-drop rule." There is still the expectation for mixed-race black-white children to choose a black identity (Wright, 1994). Furthermore, there is still the social assignment of a black identity by peers, parents, and community to mixed-race black-white individuals. (Poussaint, 1984; Thornton, 1992, 1996). Thus, any individual who is black-white may feel forced to identify himself or herself as black (Davis, 1991; Spickard, 1989). However, I apply this theory more broadly, meaning that if there are white-non-white combinations, the adolescent will identify as their minority status instead of their white identity because of the societal pressure to identify as the subordinate status.<sup>1</sup> In effect this hypothesis is the converse of the previous one: I hypothesize that mixed-race white-non-white adolescents will identify overwhelmingly as their minority statuses when required to choose one race.

### *Social Identity Theory*

Unlike status maximization and hypodescent theory, social identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker, 1980) is not focused on a racial hierarchy or the specific race of an individual, but rather on intergroup relationships, or "how people come to see themselves as members of one group/category (the in-group) in comparison with another (the out-group)" (p. 226). Members of the in-group view themselves as similar to one another, holding the same beliefs and attitudes in contrast to members of the out-group. Social identity theory is context- and situation-driven in that an individual's own identity can be influenced by another person's attributes, for example, a person's sex, ethnicity, race, and nationality at a particular moment in time can affect how a multiracial individual will identify herself or himself. Thus, if an individual sees himself or herself as sharing certain beliefs or commonalities with other people, then he or she may identify himself as part of that group, subsequently fully subscribing to the tenets of said group.

I will interpret the social identity theory argument in terms of frequency, or the number of contacts, and quality, or importance of contacts, in adolescents' social networks. The social networks examined will include adolescents' parents, romantic partners, neighbors, and schoolmates. Several researchers have found that the racial identities of mixed-race adolescents are influenced by these factors (Chideya, 1999; Field, 1996; Funderburg, 1994; Storrs, 1999; Xie & Goyette, 1997).

Field (1996) finds that the mixed-race adolescents she interviewed indicated that they take on the racial identity of the group that they establish ties with. Many of the respondents in Funderburg's (1994) and Chideya's (1999) interviewees consistently said that they take on the racial identity of their peers in their neighborhood or their school. Finally, the family environment influences a biracial child's understanding of his or her heritage (Cauce et al., 1992). These examples illustrate the importance of social networks, such as parents, peer groups, schools, and neighborhoods. From previous research, it is clear that these factors influence multiracial identification, but what needs to be discerned is whether the frequency of contacts, alone, affects racial self-classification, or whether the quality or importance of these contacts, alone, affects racial identification, or if it is some combination of the two. Given this logic, social identity theory posits that the more frequent contact that mixed-race adolescents have with their parent of a given race, the more likely they are to identify as that race than as multiracial, and the more likely they are to identify as multiracial than as the other parent's race (this same logic holds for peer groups, schoolmates, and romantic partners).

Cooke (1997) reports that one of her biracial Asian-white respondents identified more as white because he lived and went to school in Southern white towns. In her interview with 53 college age white-Japanese respondents, Mass (1992) found that parental support of a multiracial identity and the geographic location or the proportion of whites and Japanese that lived in a specific community affected the psychological well-being of mixed-race Japanese-whites. These studies suggest that the frequency of contact is important for adolescents when they are establishing a racial identity, leading to the hypothesis that mixed-race adolescents who have higher frequencies of contact with neighbors, schoolmates, friends, and romantic partners of each of their parents' races will be more likely to identify as multiracial than those who have little contact.

Researchers have found that when mixed-race adolescents talk to their parents beyond a superficial level about their racial background then they are more likely to identify as multiracial (Johnson, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) found that if a mixed-race adolescent feels close or is highly involved with their peers of different races or families where both the mother and father are present, then they are more likely to identify as multiracial. Johnson (1992) specifically states that the quality and frequency of contact that a child has with their family will influence their racial identification. These studies suggest that beyond frequency of contact, the *quality* of the contact that mixed-race adolescents

have with their social networks are important to their racial identification. Thus, the greater the quality of contact that mixed-race adolescents have with their parent of a given race, the more likely they are to identify as that race than as multiracial, and the more likely they are to identify as multiracial than as the other parent's race. This logic also applies to schoolmates, friends, and romantic partners.

Not only are the quality and frequency and quality of contact with family members and peers important for self-identification purposes, but they also help establish and fortify a child's self-concept and self-esteem (Johnson, 1992). Therefore, in addition to examining the quality and frequency of contact with schoolmates, friends, parents, and romantic partners, I will include social-psychological variables that have been found to affect an adolescent's racial identification: self-esteem, how adolescents feel about school, perceptions of prejudice by other students, and whether the adolescent feels socially accepted by their peers. Earlier research purported to find that individuals who identified as multiracial had feelings of low self-esteem, were confused over their racial identity, and experienced psychological and behavioral problems (Gibbs, 1987; Piskacek & Golub, 1973; Tiecher, 1968). Yet, Cauce et al. (1992) found that the sample of adolescents that they studied did not differ from the monoracial minority control group in terms of life stress, behavioral problems, psychological distress, competence, or self-worth. Being allowed to select multiple racial categories is a new phenomena and given the pressure to "take sides" in matters of race may require adolescents have a relatively high self-esteem, good support from others, and live in a relatively non-prejudiced environment. Thus, I hypothesize that the greater the self-esteem, the more they feel accepted by others, and the less prejudiced and fair they perceive individuals in their social environment, the more mixed-race adolescents will identify as multiracial rather than as only one parent's races.

## METHODS

Data for this research are drawn from the National Longitudinal Adolescent Health dataset (Add Health). The longitudinal study was designed to examine the individual, environmental, and contextual factors that influence the health of adolescents from grades 7 through 12 as of 1994. The survey consisted of two waves. The first wave was an in-school survey of adolescents from grades 7 through 12 and was administered in 132 schools during the spring of 1994. Of those schools that qualified, 80 were selected

with a total 90,000 students from grades 7 through 12. The second wave was a follow-up to this in 1995, which consisted of an in-home interview of the adolescent and the principle caregiver.

The sample in this work is limited to adolescents who completed the Add Health survey at home, who live with both of their biological parents, and whose biological parents identify as different races. The sample pool of adolescents is based on the race of the parents to determine whether one race takes precedence over another or if both races are given equal weight by the adolescent when they racially identify themselves. Therefore, it is important that the parents be of different races. In addition, it is essential that the child have, theoretically, equal access to both parents. Thus, it is imperative that both biological parents live at home with the child. Employing these constraints produces a sample of 142 non-Hispanic, mixed-race adolescents who live at home with both of their biological parents. The sample does not include the children of parents who identify as Hispanic or children who identify as Hispanic since this is not considered a "racial" category.

A key strength of the Add Health survey for the purposes of this research is its construction of the race question. The in-school and at-home surveys ask, "What is your race? If you are of more than one race, you may choose more than one." The categories available to choose from are white, black or African-American, Asian or Pacific Islander, American-Indian or Native-American, and other. Adolescents are allowed the opportunity to check more than one racial category. However, on the at-home survey adolescents who select more than one race are asked a follow-up question that forces them to choose one race from the aforementioned categories. Thus, the opportunity to examine whether adolescents status maximize or adhere to the one-drop rule can be determined using the open-ended and forced choice questions. The dependent variable measures whether the adolescent identifies as their mother's race, father's race, or as multiracial (both races). This is a three-category dependent variable coded: (1) if the adolescent chooses the father's race, (2) for multiracial identification, and (3) if the adolescent identifies as the mother's race. For purposes of the analyses, whites are classified as the highest status race, with blacks, Asians, and American-Indians being treated equally, but lower than white. Therefore, if there is a black-white combination, then white would be the highest racial status and black would be the lowest. If there is an Asian-black or Asian-Native-American combination then these statuses would be treated the same.<sup>2</sup> The coding of the independent variables is given in the Appendix.

## RESULTS

I begin by testing the status maximization hypothesis that mixed-race adolescents will be more likely to identify as the race of the parent with the higher status race (that is, white) than as multiracial, and more likely to identify as multiracial than as the race of the parent with the lower status race. Table 1 shows which racial identity is chosen by adolescents when their mother's racial status is higher than their father's (that is, white), when both of their parents' races are equal (or when it is minority-minority), and when their father's racial status is higher than their mother's (that is, white) ( $\chi^2 = 1.290$ ,  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .863$ ). These crosstabulations reveal that there is no relationship between parents racial status and the racial identification of the child, providing no support for the hypothesis. In additional analyses not shown here, I used multinomial logistical regression to test whether the parents' racial status variables predict the racial identification of adolescents. Confirming the crosstabulations, mixed-race adolescents are no more likely to identify as the race of the parent with the higher race than as multiracial, nor are they more likely to identify as multiracial than as the race of the parent with the lower status.<sup>3</sup>

Next, I test whether the presence of a black parent overrides any tendency for multiracial adolescents to status maximize. While this is a test of hypodescent, it is also implicitly, a test of status maximization because this theory predicts that a person with one black parent would attempt to identify as the higher status race; that is, as white.

**Table 1.** Crosstabulation of Parental Racial Status with Adolescent Racial Identity ( $N = 142$ ).

	Adolescent Selects			Total
	Father's race	Both mother's and father's races	Mother's race	
Mother is white (%)	14.1	62.0	23.9	100 ( $N = 71$ )
Racial statuses equal (%)	18.5	51.9	29.6	100 ( $N = 27$ )
Father is white (%)	11.4	63.6	25.0	100 ( $N = 44$ )
Total (%)	14.0	60.6	25.4	100 ( $N = 142$ )
$\chi^2$		1.290		
Degrees of freedom		4		

Table 2 presents the crosstabulation of whether adolescents with one black parent choose their father's race, mother's race, or a multiracial classification when asked to select more than one race ( $\chi^2 = 16.80, df = 2; p < .001$ ). There is a relationship between having a black parent and racial identification. Where the mother is black, 71% choose to identify as their mother's race (i.e., black), 29% select multiracial, and none pick their father's race (although there are only seven cases where the mother is black). Thus, hypodescent theory seems to apply. When the father is black, 22% identify only as black, 69% of the adolescents choose a multiracial identification, and 9% choose only their mother's race. When the mother is black there is a tendency for the adolescent to identify as black. This is not the case with the father; when the father is black, there is a tendency to identify predominately as multiracial. But, among such adolescents who choose a single racial identity, they are twice as likely to identify as black (22%) than white (9%). Overall, though, when the father is black, there is a tendency towards status maximization (choosing a multiracial identification or white) than to adhere to the hypodescent theory and identify as black. Consequently, in the cases where the mother is black, hypodescent theory seems to apply. However, when the father is black adolescents predominately identify as multiracial.

When limiting the analyses to only Asian-white, American-Indian-white, and black-white racial combinations and examining the forced race question where adolescents are asked to specify one race ( $N = 105$ ), I find that: (1) for Asian-white adolescents, there is a slight tendency to identify as white, although the percentages are fairly close (45% Asian and 52% white); (2) American-Indian-white adolescents choose American-Indian and white at equal rates, 50% for both; and (3) black-white adolescents adhere to the

**Table 2.** Crosstabulation of Racial Status with Adolescent Racial Identity for Adolescents with One Black Parent ( $N = 52$ ).

	Adolescent Selects			Total
	Father's race	Multiracial	Mother's race	
Mother black (%)	0	28.6	71.4	100 ( $N = 7$ )
Father black (%)	22.2	68.9	8.9	100 ( $N = 45$ )
Total (%)	19.2	63.5	17.3	100 ( $N = 52$ )
$\chi^2$		16.796***		
Degrees of freedom		2		

\*\*\*  $p < .001$  (one-tailed test).



one-drop rule, choosing a black identity by a three to one margin. Thus, these findings disconfirm the hypotheses that adolescents status maximize. Specifically, for Asian-white and American-Indian-white combinations, adolescents do not status maximize and choose a predominately white racial identity, while mixed-race black-white adolescents overwhelmingly choose a black racial identification (Table 3).

I next test the hypotheses put forth by social identity theory, specifically, that the high frequency of contact and the quality of contact between mixed-race adolescents and their parents and peer networks will influence their racial identification. Overall, in Tables 4–7, using multinomial logistical regression, I found no significance between the frequent contact with either parent and mixed-race adolescents’ social networks (friends, schoolmates, and romantic partners) on how they racially identified. The same finding holds for quality of contact between mixed-race adolescents and their parents or their peer networks (although, as found in Table 5 for every instance that a child is satisfied with their father he or she is 20% less likely to identify as their mother’s race vs. a multiracial identification<sup>4</sup>). Due to high multicollinearity between the aforementioned variables, I had to include each one in a separate model. Also, small sample sizes did not allow for individual analyses for each racial combination (i.e., Asian-white, American-Indian-white, and black-white combinations).

Albeit none of the quality and quality of contact variables were significant, there were significant findings among the social-psychological

**Table 3.** Adolescent’s Responses to a Question Forcing Them to Identify as Their Mother’s or Their Father’s Race (*N* = 105).

	Asian-White <sup>a</sup> ( <i>N</i> = 60)	American-Indian-White ( <i>N</i> = 14)	Black-White <sup>b</sup> ( <i>N</i> = 31)
American Indian	2% (1)	50% (7)	–
Asian	45% (27)	–	–
Black	–	–	71% (22)
White	52% (31)	50% (7)	23% (7)

*Note:* Percentages under each column represent the percentage of adolescents who choose each racial category (e.g., for Asian-white, 1 person chose American-Indian, 27 chose Asian, etc.).

<sup>a</sup>Continued to identify as white and Asian.

<sup>b</sup>Continued to identify as white and black.

**Table 4.** Multinomial Regression of Child's Racial Identification on Frequency of Contact with Fathers vs. Mothers ( $N = 129$ ).

	Model 1	Model 2
	Father's race vs. multiracial	Mother's race vs. multiracial
More activities with father	.241 (1.273)	-.057 (.944)
Constant	1.669	1.324
Pseudo $R^2$		.189

Notes: Odds ratios are in parentheses; reference category on dependent variable is multiracial.

**Table 5.** Multinomial Regression of Satisfaction with Parents for Fathers and Mothers ( $N = 134$ ).

	Model 1	Model 2
	Father's race vs. multiracial	Mother's race vs. multiracial
More satisfied with father	.059 (1.061)	-.202* (.817)
Constant	.882	1.492
Pseudo $R^2$		.190

Notes: Odds ratios are in parentheses; reference category on dependent variable is multiracial. \* $p < .05$  (one-tailed test).

**Table 6.** Multinomial Regression of Closeness with Parents For Fathers and Mothers ( $N = 129$ ).

	Model 1	Model 2
	Father's race vs. multiracial	Mother's race vs. multiracial
Closeness with parent	.515 (1.674)	-.260 (.771)
Constant	1.278	1.435
Pseudo $R^2$		.187

Notes: Odds ratios are in parentheses; reference category on dependent variable is multiracial.

**Table 7.** Multinomial Regression of Child's Racial Identity on Quality of Contact with Romantic Partner Variables ( $N = 141$ ).

	Model 1	Model 2
	Father's race vs. multiracial	Mother's race vs. multiracial
Multiracial vs. non-multiracial romantic partner	.997 (2.710)	-2.906 (3.131)
Involvement	.231 (1.297)	.182 (.194)
Involvement $\times$ multiracial vs. non-multiracial romantic partner	-.137 (.872)	.626 (.607)
Constant	0.059	.145
Pseudo $R^2$		.018

*Notes:* Odds ratios are in parentheses; reference category on dependent variable is multiracial.

variables. Examining Model 1 of Table 8, I found that if children feel positive about their school then they are 38% higher to identify as their father's race as opposed to multiracial. The more adolescents perceive students in their school as prejudiced then the odds of them identifying as their father's race as compared to multiracial increase by 115%.<sup>5</sup> If children like themselves the way they are then the odds are 341% higher that they will identify as their father's race than as multiracial. At the same time, however, the more children feel socially accepted the less likely they are to identify as their father's race in comparison to multiracial by 78%.

In Model 2 of Table 8, the more children perceive prejudice at their school then the more likely they are to identify as their mother's race in comparison to multiracial by 115%. The odds increase by 183% that they will identify as their mother's race as opposed to multiracial the more they like themselves the way they are. However, the odds decrease by 64% that an adolescent will identify with their mother's race in comparison to multiracial when he or she feels more socially accepted by their peers.

Both Models 1 and 2 partially support my hypotheses regarding social identity theory in relation to the social-psychological variables. First, possibly due to the emotional attachment that parents have with their mixed-race children (as argued by Radina & Cooney, 2000), attempting to buffer them from negative experiences, these children may associate positive experiences in school with their parents, subsequently identifying racially as that parent (in this case the father). Also, if students perceive prejudice at

**Table 8.** Multinomial Regression of Child’s Race on Quality of Relationship Variables in School (*N* = 105).

	Model 1	Model 2
	Father’s race vs. multiracial	Mother’s race vs. multiracial
Feel positive about school	.322* (1.380)	.119 (1.130)
Teacher is fair towards students	.179 (1.196)	.135 (1.145)
Students in school are prejudiced	.763* (2.145)	.485* (1.624)
Like myself the way I am	1.483* (4.406)	1.039* (2.826)
Feel socially accepted	-1.720* (.180)	-1.010* (.364)
Feel safe in neighborhood	.394 (1.483)	.071 (1.074)
Proportion white in school	.137 (1.147)	-.249 (.780)
Constant	1.168	12.354
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.130

*Notes:* Odds ratios are in parentheses; reference category on dependent variable is multiracial. \**p* < .05 (one-tailed test).

their school then they are more likely to identify either as their mother’s or father’s race rather than as multiracial. Perhaps adolescents’ who perceive their school as prejudiced may feel forced to choose a single race, rather than seek to compromise (which would entail having a multiracial identification).

Next, the way adolescents feel about themselves and whether they feel accepted by others influence how they racially identify. It is possible that children with high self-esteem have the confidence to choose one of their parent’s races over the compromise between them, which is to identify as multiracial. At the same time, adolescents who feel socially accepted by their peers (presumably at school since this is where the question is asked) are more likely than those who feel less accepted to identify as multiracial. They may be attempting to “fit in” with their multiracial environment. These findings corroborate the literature that suggests that social-psychological factors such as self-esteem and external factors such as peer networks influence racial identification (Chideya, 1999; Field, 1996; Funderburg,

1994; Gibbs, 1987; Piskacek & Golub, 1973; Radina & Cooney, 2000; Root, 1992, 1996; Storrs, 1999; Xie & Goyette, 1997).

## CONCLUSION

Through analyses of data on mixed-race adolescents drawn from the Add health survey data, I find that mixed-race adolescents, generally do not status maximize, specifically, adolescents who are Asian-white and American-Indian-white are as likely to select their minority statuses as they are to choose a white status when they are forced to select one racial identity. Adolescents who are mixed-race black-white are more likely to choose a black racial identification when they are limited to selecting one race. Hence, these adolescents are constrained by the one-drop rule. Although these findings do not support the status maximization theory, they are interesting nonetheless. In her seminal piece on the ethnic identification of whites in the United States, *Ethnic Options*, Waters (1990) argues that whites have "optional ethnicities," they can freely choose to identify themselves as ethnic or not. My findings suggest that this applies as well to Asian-white and American-Indian-white individuals. These results reveal that these individuals are able to select either a solely white or strictly minority status without negative repercussions suggesting that racial and ethnic boundaries are dissipating for this population. However, because of the legacy of the one-drop rule, black-white individuals may view themselves as limited to selecting an exclusively black identity when asked to choose one race, suggesting that racial boundaries continue to be maintained for these individuals and that racial identification for this group is impermeable (Lee & Bean, 2004). Furthermore, black-white mixtures may not be immune to the forms of discrimination and prejudice that are visited upon blacks. This finding suggests that Gans' (2004) and Bonilla-Silva's (2004) future racial stratification systems will come into existence. That is, racial hierarchies will transform from a white-non-white dichotomy to a black-non-black dualism.

Overall, the frequency or quality of contacts that mixed-race adolescents had with their parents or members of their social networks had no effect on racial identification. Yet, some social-psychological variables were significant, confirming these set of hypotheses for social identity theory. Self-esteem, self-concept, and perceived prejudice do affect how a child identifies

himself or herself, corroborating previous findings. Future research on mixed-race adolescents should continue to examine how these individuals relate to more “qualitative” indicators such as how an adolescent feels about himself or herself and how they may connect to or feel alienated from students or teachers at their schools.

## BROADER IMPLICATIONS

Early literature on multiracial individuals tended to depict them as psychologically and emotionally dysfunctional; these individuals were viewed as being unable to freely move and successfully negotiate a monoracial world. They were perceived as being alienated and marginalized due to their mixed-race status. Primarily, this literature focused on black-white interactions (Spickard, 1992). Indeed, according to my findings it is harder for black-white mixtures to assertively select a white identity, as compared to other minority-white combinations. This is because, historically, blacks who chose a white identification – who passed – were viewed as traitors to the black community, essentially thought of as abandoning blacks and blackness. This perspective manifested itself in the 2000 elections when some black radio station disc jockeys implored mixed-race blacks to select a singular black identification because of the perceived loss of political power that could occur in the black community.

Maria Root’s multiracial proclamation detailed at the beginning of this chapter speaks to the narrowly defined views of racial identification from some monoracial blacks as well as other groups. Although Root and other multiracials attempt to carve out an emotional, physical, and psychological space for themselves, they are still ultimately responding to a deeply entrenched taxonomy that articulates singular racial identities, not multiple ones. Thus, the proverbial question towards multiracial individuals: “What (single) race are you?” Hence, although there is current literature that theoretically discusses the fluidity of racial identification, based on context, place and so forth, the reality on the ground is that “how” these individuals actually live continues to be determined by others. The sorts of choices that mixed-race individuals can make about themselves are, partially, dictated by outside groups and people. Unfortunately, according to my findings, the push for mixed-race individuals to select a single race could affect their self-esteem and their self-concept, which would ultimately only reinforce the belief that these individuals are “tragically mulatto.”

## NOTES

1. Although hypodescent has mainly been discussed in relation to black mixtures, Davis (1991) writes about other societies where there is variability in terms of whether an individual with different ancestries chooses a subordinate or superior status than their parents.

2. This research focuses on American-Indian-white, Asian-white, and black-white combinations since these constitute the largest combinations in my sample and are the most frequently discussed combinations in the research on multiracial identity.

3. In this analysis and the ones that follow there were no significant differences found between the racial identification of males and females. There were also not significant differences based on income, findings there were present in other research (Xie & Goyette, 1997; Harris, 2002).

4. I convert the logit odds produced by multinomial logistical analyses to odds ratios. The numbers in parentheses are the odds ratios. Odds ratios are easier to interpret than the logit odds, which are the beta coefficients. A ratio above or below 1.0 is the percentage increase or decrease in the odds of selecting a racial identity with a one unit increase in the independent variable.

5. Numbers are rounded off, so the odds ratio for the students in school are prejudiced variable is 2.145, this translates to 115% increase for identifying as the father's race as opposed to multiracial.

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## APPENDIX. DESCRIPTION OF VARIABLES

Variable	Description	Metric
<i>Dependent variable</i>		
Adolescent's race	Three-category variable: mother's race, multiracial, father's race	1 = father's race 2 = multiracial 3 = mother's race
<i>Independent variables</i>		
Adolescent's age	"What year were you born?" Year of birth subtracted from 1995	Years 12–21
Adolescent's grade	"What grade are you in?"	Grades 7–12
Adolescent's forced race	"Which ONE category best describes your racial background?" Dummy variables	1 = white, 0 = non-white 1 = black, 0 = non-black 1 = American-Indian, 0 = non-American-Indian 1 = Asian, 0 = non-Asian 1 = other, 0 = non-other
Mother's race	"What is your race? You may give more than one answer." Dummy variable	1 = white, 0 = non-white 1 = black, 0 = non-black 1 = American-Indian, 0 = non-American-Indian 1 = Asian, 0 = non-Asian 1 = other, 0 = non-other 1 = multiracial, 0 = non-multiracial
Father's race	"What is your race? You may give more than one answer." Dummy variables	1 = white, 0 = non-white 1 = black, 0 = non-black 1 = American-Indian, 0 = non-American 1 = Asian, 0 = non-Asian 1 = other, 0 = non-other 1 = multiracial, 0 = non-multiracial

APPENDIX. (Continued)

Variable	Description	Metric
Mother's forced race	"Which ONE category best describes your racial background?" Dummy variables	1 = white, 0 = non-white 1 = black, 0 = non-black 1 = American-Indian, 0 = non-American 1 = Asian, 0 = non-Asian 1 = other, 0 = non-other
Father's forced race	"Which ONE category best describes your racial background?" Dummy variables	1 = white, 0 = nonwhite 1 = black, 0 = non-black 1 = American-Indian, 0 = non-American-Indian 1 = Asian, 0 = non-Asian 1 = other, 0 = non-other
Romantic Partner's race	"What is {initials} race?"	1 = white, 0 = non-white 1 = black, 0 = non-black 1 = American-Indian, 0 = non-American-Indian 1 = Asian, 0 = non-Asian 1 = other, 0 = non-other
Mother's education	"How far did you go in school?"	1 = multiracial, 0 = non-multiracial Continuous variable 1 = first grade- 9 = professional training beyond a 4-year college or university
Father's education	"How far did you go in school?"	Continuous variable 1 = first grade- 9 = professional training beyond a 4-year college or university

Mother's occupation

“What description comes closest to describing her job?”

- 0 = not homemaker
- 1 = homemaker
- 0 = not worker (retail, office)
- 1 = worker (retail, office)
- 0 = not construction, mechanic, craftsperson
- 1 = construction, mechanic, craftsperson
- 0 = not factory, transportation, military
- 1 = factory, transportation, military
- 0 = not professional, manager, technician

Father's occupation

“Which description comes closest to describing his job?”

- 1 = professional, manager, technician
- 0 = not homemaker
- 1 = homemaker
- 0 = not worker (retail, office)
- 1 = worker (retail, office)
- 0 = not construction, mechanic, craftsperson
- 1 = construction, mechanic, craftsperson
- 0 = not factory, transportation, military
- 1 = factory, transportation, military
- 0 = not professional, manager, technician
- 1 = professional, manager, technician

*Neighborhood-level variable*

Proportion of white in neighborhood

Proportions of white and minorities in census tract areas

Range: 0—100%

APPENDIX. (Continued)

Variable	Description	Metric
<i>School-level variable</i>		
Racial composition of teachers	“Approximately what percentage of your full-time classroom teachers is of each of the following races?” Dummy variable	Dummy variable 1 = white, 0 = non-white 1 = black, 0 = non-black 1 = American-Indian, 0 = non-American-Indian 1 = Asian, 0 = non-Asian 1 = other, 0 = non-other
Type of school	“Which of these characterize your school? Mark all that apply.” Public, Catholic, Alternative, Private. Dummy Variable	1 = public, 0 = non-public 1 = Catholic, 0 = non-Catholic 1 = alternative, 0 = non-alternative 1 = private, 0 = non-private
<i>Attachment variables</i>		
Satisfaction with mother	Arithmetic mean of responses to three items: (A) “Most of the time, your mother is warm and loving toward you?”; (B) “You are satisfied with the way your mother and you communicate with each other?”; (C) “Overall, you are satisfied with your relationship with your mother?” 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach’s Alpha = .8959	Scale 1–5
Satisfaction with father	Arithmetic mean of responses to three items: (A) “Most of the time, your father is warm and loving toward you?”; (B) “You are satisfied with the way your mother and you communicate with each	Scale 1–5

	other?"; (C) "Overall, you are satisfied with your father?" 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's Alpha = .9482	
Closeness to mother	"How close do you feel to your mother?" 1 = not at all, 2 = very little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = very much	Scale 1-5
Closeness to father	"How close do you feel to your father?" 1 = not at all, 2 = very little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = very much	Scale 1-5
Involvement with romantic partner	Sum of responses to seven variables: (A) "I told my partner that I loved him or her."; (B) "My partner told me that he or she loved me."; (C) "We thought of ourselves as a couple."; (D) "I met my partner's parents."; (E) "We went out together alone."; (F) "We had sexual intercourse."; (G) "We went out together in a group." 1 = yes, 0 = no Cronbach's Alpha = .6500	Count 0-7
Attachment to male friends	Sum of responses to five variables: (A) "You went to his house in the last seven days."; (B) "You met him after school to hang out or go somewhere in the last seven days."; (C) "You talked with him about a problem in the last seven days."; (D) "You talked with him on the telephone in the last seven days."; (E) "You spent time with him last weekend." 1 = yes, 0 = no. Cronbach's Alpha = .8253	Count 0-5
Attachment to female friends	Sum of responses to five variables: (A) "You went to her house in the last seven days"; (B) "You met her after school to hang out or go somewhere in the last seven days"; (C) "You talked with her about a problem in the last seven days"; (D) "You	Count 0-5

APPENDIX. (Continued)

Variable	Description	Metric
<i>Frequency variables</i>	talked with him on the telephone in the last seven days.”; (E) “You spent time with her last weekend.” 1 = yes, 0 = no. Cronbach’s Alpha = .8642	
Contact with parents	On how many of the past seven days was at least one of your parents in the room with you while you ate?	Scale 0–7
Activities with mother in past 4 weeks	Sum of responses to ten variables: “Which of the things listed on this card have you done with your mother in the past four weeks?” (A) gone fishing; (B) played a sport; (C) gone to religious service or church-related event; (D) gone to a movie, play, museum, concert, or sports event; (E) talked about someone you are dating, or a party you went to; (F) had a talk about a personal problem you were having; (G) had a serious argument about your behavior; (H) talked about your school work or grades; (I) worked on a project for school; (J) talked about other things you are doing in school. 1 = yes, 0 = no. Cronbach’s Alpha = .4333	Count 0–10
Activities with father in past 4 weeks	“Which of the things listed on this card have you done with your father in the past four weeks?” (A) gone fishing; (B) played a sport; (C) gone to religious service or church-related event; (D) gone to a movie, play, museum, concert, or sports	Count 0–10

event; (E) talked about someone you are dating, or a party you went to; (F) had a talk about a personal problem you were having; (G) had a serious argument about your behavior; (H) talked about your school work or grades; (I) worked on a project for school; (J) talked about other things you're doing in school. 1 = yes, 0 = no.  
Cronbach's Alpha = .5553

Feel positive about school	Arithmetic mean to three variables: (A) "I am happy to be at this school."; (B) "I feel like I am part of this school."; (C) "I feel close to people at this school." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's Alpha = .7725	Scale 3-15
Teacher is fair towards students	"Teachers at this school treat students fairly." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree	Scale 1-5
Students in school are prejudiced	"The students at this school are prejudiced." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree	Scale 1-5
Like myself the way I am	"I like myself the way I am." 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree	Scale 1-5
Feel socially accepted	"I feel socially accepted." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree	Scale 1-5
Feel safe in neighborhood	"I feel safe in my school." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree	Scale 1-5

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