

Biracial Students on Campus: The Question of Identity

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Although the growing emphasis on celebrating diversity and multiculturalism has brought forth positive recognition to many varying identities, all have not benefitted equally. Lacking a solitary racial anchor, bi- and multi-racial individuals may have difficulty ‘choosing’ a preferred racial identity or ‘conforming’ to others’ preferences. Accordingly, this project examines how and why biracial IUPUI students come to embrace, reject, or alternate among the generally prescribed racial identities. By conducting penetrating interviews of biracial students while immersed in their immediate environment, I will explore their choices, the factors influencing such choices, their satisfaction with their choices, and the choices’ stability. I am especially concerned with whether students feel pressured to embrace one or another identity, and whether the prescribed goes against the students’ instincts or preferences, and to what extent they may alternate among various identities in varying contexts. The ongoing work has begun to provide hints to the ultimate findings ahead. Preliminary results show that 1) subjects feel pressured by the rigidity of historically established racial categories, especially since such pressures are often reinforced by peers, and 2) the context provided by IUPUI’s diverse student body engenders increased confidence in their embracing a “multiracial” identity, despite an abundance of contrary prescriptions. Anticipated conclusions include disconfirmation of the original hypothesis that most biracial IUPUI students maintain a fluid racial identity. Uncertainty and frustration, rather than the confidence to switch identities across varying contexts, appears to characterize student reactions to varying pressures to identify as either black or white. In addition, the more likely identity response, embracing the biracial persona, does seem to work for some, but others may require still more inclusive milieus for truly engaging in more thorough explorations of their identity.

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