Biracial American Colorism: Passing for White

Keshia L. Harris[1]

Abstract

Biracial Americans constitute a larger portion of the U.S. population than is often acknowledged. According to the U.S. Census, 8.4 million people or 2.6% of the population identified with two or more racial origins in 2016. Arguably, these numbers are misleading considering extensive occurrences of interracial pairings between Whites and minority racial groups throughout U.S. history. Many theorists posit that the hypodescent principle of colorism, colloquially known as "the one drop rule," has influenced American racial socialization in such a way that numerous individuals primarily identify with one racial group despite having parents from two different racial backgrounds. While much of social science literature examines the racial identification processes of biracial Americans who identify with their minority heritage, this article focuses on contextual factors such as family income, neighborhood, religion, and gender that influence the decision for otherwise African/Asian/Latino/Native Americans to identify as White.

Keywords

colorism, light skin, dark skin, biracial

Introduction

Former U.S. President, Barack Obama, is a biracial American and yet via colorism he is indefinitely referred to as the "first Black President of the United States." While Obama identifies as a Black man by choice, many would argue that he does not have the liberty of identifying with his White heritage because of colorism per his physical appearance (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Khanna, 2010; Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013). Determining one's racial identity is a challenging endeavor that precipitates other forms

[1]University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

Corresponding Author:
Keshia L. Harris, University of Chicago, 1126 E. 59th St Chicago, IL 60637, USA.
Email: keshia1@uchicago.edu

of identity for many minority groups (Cokley, 2007; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Worrell & Gardner-Kitt, 2006). It can be an all-consuming venture that includes one's personal beliefs and values, but also their social environment, their upbringing, their professional network, and how others in each of these spaces respond to them. It is a commitment that involves continuous self-examination, honesty about one's insecurities, and awareness of how others may perceive them differently from how they perceive themselves (Helms, 1990; Poston, 1990; Pyke, 2010). The exploration of one's racial identity is particularly demanding for those with parents from more than one racial group like our former President. In a society with historically dichotomous racial categories, are these individuals allowed to identify with more than one racial group or should they be forced to choose one? How do biracial Americans decide which of their parent's ancestries to identify with? Pending colorism: Why do some biracials choose to identify with the dominant European American part of their heritage while others identify more fondly with their minority heritage? This article examines social science literature that provides insights on factors that influence the decision to identify as White such as the influence of colorism on identity development, contextual factors, and perceptions of race in present day U.S. American society.

Many reference their physical appearance as a restriction to how they identify (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Russell-Cole et al., 2013). The idea of crossing the "color line" is the privilege given to biracial individuals who are able to identify with their European American heritage and hide their minority status because of their skin color as a racially ambiguous physical appearance (Bennett, 2001; Cruz-Janzen, 2002). U.S. racial categories segment group memberships into White versus non-White (i.e., minority) or White versus other, that construct an "us" versus "them" mentality between the dominant racial group and minority racial groups. This boundary is what many refer to as the color line; a barrier in which everyone that is born in or migrates to the United States is succumbed to. As illustrated in previous articles, education, socioeconomic status, and marriage status are all divided by this power structure.

Scholars have indicated that self-perceptions as well as judgments about others are often determined by colorism, suggesting that lighter skin is associated with attractiveness, privilege, and higher socioeconomic status, while darker skin is viewed as unintelligent, unattractive, and untrustworthy (Glenn, 2008). Colorism that exist within racial and ethnic groups are a form of bias. Although colorism is not a new phenomenon, it has been given more attention in the United States in the last few decades due to growth in Latino, Asian American, and African American populations, an increase in interracial marriages, and suppositions concerning the racial background of the United States' first Black president (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010). The colorism phenomenon is defined as a process of social stratification that capitalizes skin color by privileging lighter-skinned toned individuals over darker-skinned individuals of a particular racial or ethnic group in education, socioeconomic status, and marriage among other facets associated with life trajectory (Hunter, 2007). The term was originally coined by Alice Walker in 1983 in which it was defined as an internalized preference for European physical features by African Americans such as

light skin and straight hair, which divides the Black community (Wilder, 2010). Walker addressed a few critical components of the phenomenon in her definition. One important aspect is that the preference for lighter skin is something that has been internalized both among social group identification and on an individual interpersonal level. This implies that physical features that have been recognized as societal symbols of power influence the ways in which individuals perceive themselves and others in their environment. These symbols then perpetuate discrimination within already oppressed minority communities by creating a hierarchical structure of privilege based on complexion and other aspects of physical appearance.

Biracials who can "pass" for White (i.e., those whose skin color and physical appearance most closely represents White European descent phenotype) are able to bypass such structural barriers by acknowledging their White heritage as their most dominant ancestry. In a society built on fragments of the hypodescent principle (i.e., the "one-drop rule"), this identity choice comes with the expense of having to hide or be hidden from one's affiliation with a dark-skinned racial minority group. Passing narratives such as Tony Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *Jazz* illustrate multiracial characters that identified as White up until they discovered their Black heritage as adults, as they were cut off from their Black ancestry during childhood due to a light-skinned parent or grandparent who passed for White (Bennett, 2001). These stories depict the reality of passing before and after slavery as a method of survival; a choice that biracial mothers and fathers made in order to protect their children from subordinate status and mistreatment. Such behavior was prevalent up until 1967 when the U.S. Supreme Court deemed laws against interracial marriage as unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia* (Pratt, 1997). However, is it still necessary for light-skinned, that is, biracials, to solely identify with their White heritage as a method of survival 50 years later in a so-called post-racial America?

Various reasons are attributed to why biracial Americans identify as White in a society in which one can legally marry someone of a different race. As indicated in previous articles, literature on colorism reveals that darker skin holds negative connotations of poverty, ignorance, violent behavior, and unattractiveness even within minority racial groups. Examining identity theories provides a lens through which to understand the foundation of straying away from these unfavorable stereotypes and passing for the light-skinned superior race in the 21st century. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development emphasizes the role that culture and society play in shaping one's identity. During the Identity versus Role Confusion stage, adolescents struggle with deciphering between their individual needs (the psycho) and the needs of society (social). According to this theory, identity solidification commences at the end of adolescence pushing young adults to select one racial group membership based on negotiations between their individual beliefs and their social experiences. W. S. Carlos Poston's *Biracial Identity Development Model* challenges the generalizability of Erikson's theory, along with that of racial identity development theories of single racial or "monoid" racial groups (i.e., Cross's theory of Black identity) by suggesting that multiracials who identify with more than one racial group during adolescence also embrace all of their ancestry during young adulthood (Doyle & Kao, 2007). Poston's

(1990) model is categorized by five stages: (1) *personal identity* describes children who are aware of racial groups but define themselves independently of a particular ethnicity, (2) *choice of group categorization* characterizes individuals who feel forced to choose one racial group because of pressure from their social groups, (3) *enmeshment/denial* illustrates adolescents who experience feelings of guilt and self-hatred because of the decision to accept a racial group that does not fully encompass their ancestry, (4) *appreciation* defines individuals who begin to explore the cultural variations within both of their ethnic groups and learn to accept more than one group membership, and (5) *integration* describes individuals who feel a sense of totality by embracing all of their ethnic identities despite societal pressure to solely select one identity (Poston, 1990).

Doyle and Kao (2007) refer to "Situational Ethnicity" and "Symbolic Ethnicity" as additional themes that suggest a more fluid identity development process for light-skinned multiracials who can pass for White. Situational Ethnicity is the belief that individuals choose a more salient identity depending on their context in a specific moment. Symbolic Ethnicity characterizes individuals who define ethnic identification without actively participating in any ethnic communities or cultural activities (Xie & Goyette, 1997). The idea is that context and environment influence how biracial and multiracial Americans identify in various circumstances over time. Researchers identify other factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, cultural exposure, physical attributes, and family and peer socialization that influence the racial identity development of individuals who have more than one racial background (Chong & Kuo, 2015; Davenport, 2016; Huyser, Sakamoto, & Takei, 2010). Next, we uncover how these factors and theoretical perspectives provide a rationale for biracial colorism by African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans who primarily identify as White.

African American–White Biracials

Traditionally the hypodescent principle, classifying individuals with any amount of African ancestry as Black, has superseded the ability for Black–White biracials to identify with their White heritage. Khanna (2010) argued that the normative image of Black people became a broad range of skin tones, body shapes, and hair textures while the image of White people became quite narrow (i.e., fair skin, straight hair, narrow noses and lips, blue eyes, etc.) as a consequence of this dichotomous racial conceptualization. We see this in entertainment and sports industries today in biracials with African American ancestry such as Halle Berry (European American, African American), Mariah Carey (Irish American, African American–Venezuelan), Barack Obama (European American, Black-African), Alicia Keys (Italian American, African American), Thandie Newton (White English, Black African), Shemar Moore (Irish American, African American), Smokey Robinson (European American, African American), and others who are referred to as Black. Each of these individuals has one parent who is not Black and are of varying skin tones of light brown. However, members of American society reference them as Black because they fail to fit into

the narrow conception of physical whiteness. What about the light-skinned biracial celebrities who have Africa American ancestry but are perceived as White such as Maya Rudolph (European American, African American) and Jennifer Beale (Irish American, African American)? While they are far and few between, these individuals can more readily pass for White because their physical appearance via colorism closely resembles that of monoracial European Americans.

Researchers address the unique identity colorism challenge for Black–White biracial Americans by distinguishing between how others perceive these individuals and how these individuals identify internally. In a study examining racial identity among Black–White biracial adults in the South, Khanna (2010) defines racial categories in two segments: public and internalized identity. Out of 40 participants, only one participant publicly and internally identified as White. The other eight participants who internally identified as White reported biracial or mixed public identities. Only one of the nine participants who reported White internalized identities was male. The majority of the respondents who claimed they could pass as White expressed that most Blacks perceive them as biracial whereas most Whites perceive them as White until they reveal their African American heritage; at which point Whites by colorism consider them solely Black. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) found similar findings in their study investigating racial identity of Black–White biracial college students in the Midwest. Of 177 participants, only 6% identified as White. These individuals reported physically passing as White and having predominantly White social networks as opposed to the predominantly Black residences of those who identified as Black. Nonetheless, researchers found skin color—colorism—to be a more salient factor for how others perceived the respondents than how they identified themselves.

Although most Black–White biracial Americans are pressured to identify solely as Black because of the transcendence of colorism in the hypodescent principle, it is critical to acknowledge the experiences of those who more publicly embrace their White heritage. They aspire to shatter the narrow one-drop narrative and highlight the diverse experiences of those with both African American and European American heritage. While constituting a small proportion of society that is often difficult to locate, these individuals exist today and have chosen to identify as White because of their social environments, peer group memberships, family upbringing, and social class. As referenced above, public affirmation by colorism of any non-White lineage diminishes one's privilege and automatically pushes them into the "other" or "them" category (Cruz-Janzen, 2002). Fear by colorism has led many of these individuals to ignore or dissociate from their African heritage to avoid being ostracized and mistreated (Scales-Trent, 1995). Economically well-off Whites often impose a whiteness standard on peer groups that emphasizes White racial purity in exchange for peer group acceptance among biracials (Schwartzman, 2007). Additionally, Black–White biracials who identify as White tend to live in affluent neighborhoods, have family earnings of at least six-figures, and relative to light skin physically resemble European Americans, again drawing on the influence of colorism (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Williams, 2009).

Biracials who reside in more affluent neighborhoods may experience more social commonalities with their White peers and thus embrace a stronger affiliation with that part of their heritage. Further research illustrates that Black–White biracials with a White mother and Black father are more likely to identify as White than those with a Black mother and White father (Davenport, 2016). Overall, Black–White biracials are more likely to identify with the race of their mother. Khanna's (2010) study indicated that 65% of participants of Black–White unions had a Black father and White mother, replicating Census data. Religion also influences White identity choice indicating that Black–White biracials with a Jewish heritage are more likely to identify as White than Black. Last, female biracials are more likely to identify as multiracial or White than biracial men of African descent. This may be in response to Black–White biracial men being more accepted into self-identified Black peer groups than Black–White biracial women who are often perceived by colorism as conceited or arrogant by their Black female peers (Khanna, 2010).

Latino–White Biracial Americans

Latinos are currently the largest ethnic group in the United States and constitute the nation's fastest growing population. As of 2016, this minority group made up 17.8% of the total population, compared with 13.3% of African Americans, 5.7% of Asian Americans, and 1.3% of American Indians (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Only 2.6% of the population identified with two or more races. Many organizations and groups have contested the U.S. Census categorization of Latinos suggesting that it conceals the heterogeneity of native Spanish-speaking people (Cruz-Janzen, 2000). The 1980 census was the first to include the Hispanic category with subcategories of Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, or other, while the 2000 census was the first to include an option for more than one race (Rodríguez, 2009). While many individuals of Spanish/Latin American descent are multiracial and contest the census categorization of Latino, it is evident that the majority of these individuals are selecting either the Latino, White, or Black categories. Commensurate with colorism, Davenport (2016) found that Latinos are more likely than any other minority group to choose a White-only identity. For reasons of family socialization, social networks, and socioeconomic status, many biracial Latinos identify with the dominant racial category of whiteness.

Attributed to colorism the manifestations of negative connotations of dark skin among Latinos and the desire for U.S. immigrants to identify as White is done in order to be associated with the privilege that affords upward social mobility. Such psychological internalizations are particularly salient to biracial Latinos who have the option of solely identifying with the parent of European descent. Researchers have conceptualized many underlying factors that contribute to biracial Latino's racial identification such as residence, family income, native tongue, and religious group affiliation. Similar to Black–White biracials, Latino–White biracial Americans who have a family income of $100,000 or more and reside in affluent neighborhoods are more likely to choose a White-only identity (Davenport, 2016). Again, this is likely a socialization effect in which individuals identify more closely with their predominant social

network. Similarly, Latino Whites who identify as White are more often native English speakers than those biracials who solely choose a Latino classification (Cruz-Janzen, 2000). Regional differences also become an environmental factor as biracial Latinos residing in the Northeast have higher rates of identifying as White than biracial Latinos residing in the Midwest or the Mountains/Plains. Davenport (2016) also found that Latinos are more likely than any other biracial minority group to identify with the race of their father.

As places of worship remain segregated by colorism in the United States, religious group membership has been examined as a predictor of racial group identification for biracial Americans. Catholicism is a prominent cultural identifier for many Latinos. Of the 77% of Latinos who identify with Christian faiths in the United States, 48% are Catholic (Pew Research Center, 2017). Taking a closer look, 66% of Catholics who identify as Latino are immigrants compared with 19% of second-generation immigrants, and 16% of third-generation or higher. Davenport's (2016) study revealed that biracial Latinos who practice Catholicism are less likely to identify solely as White than those who identify solely as Christian or nonreligious. Thus, Latino Whites who are more assimilated into mainstream U.S. American culture via socioeconomic status, dominant language use, and religion or lack thereof emphasize their White heritage as their predominant cultural marker.

Distinct from the African American experience, the ways in which Latinos perceive other racial groups is just as important as how others perceive them in developing their racial group affiliation. Social experience, economic standing, and political influence all influence how biracial Latinos situate themselves within the confines of racial group membership in the United States. Some theorists posit that Latinos witness more commonalities with African Americans because of their similar socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences with colorism discrimination and police profiling (Kaufmann, 2003; Sanchez, 2008). Others believe that Latinos and African Americans perceive one another as rivals rather than allies because of a desire to rise above one another in economic standing and to be viewed more favorably among the dominant White racial group (Gonzalez, Barreto, & Sanchez, 2011; McClain et al., 2006).

Wilkinson (2014) found that U.S.-born Latinos who feel economically threatened are less likely to presume commonalities with African Americans, whereas those who gain some form of political influence and/or upward social mobility are less likely to identify commonalities with Whites. Those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds often desire to dissociate themselves from the negative colorism stereotypes of those with darker skin tones in order to advance economically. This concept runs contrary to previous findings indicating that primarily Latino Whites from affluent backgrounds experience a closer connection with Whites because of their predominantly White social networks. Presumably, Latino Whites desire a stronger affiliation with the dominant racial group regardless of economic standing. However, Latinos who have achieved prominent positions of political power likely experience alienation and discrimination in predominantly White professional environments and thus feel a stronger affiliation with their minority counterparts. The Situational Ethnicity theme is

pertinent in the lives of Latino–White biracials who primarily base their racial identification on their impeding social contexts.

Asian–White Biracial Americans

Asian Americans, relative to colorism often referred to as the "model minority," are viewed more favorably by the dominant European American population than any other racial minority group in the United States (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). Researchers attribute the positive perception of Asian descent groups to findings that they have achieved the educational and career success comparable with their White counterparts. In 2015, 21% of Asian Americans obtained advanced degrees compared with 13.5% of Whites, 8.2% of Blacks, and 4.7% of Latinos (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Thus, the sociopolitical and cultural factors that influence the identity development and psychological adjustment of Asian–White biracials is likely very distinct from the experiences of other dark-skinned biracial groups. One can argue that the ability for this minority group as a whole to cross the color line naturally provokes an inclination for Asian Whites to identify as White as opposed to associating with their minority group membership. However, Davenport (2016) found White identification to be more preferable among Latinos than for Asian–White and Black–White biracials. Researchers believe that many Asian Americans express disdain for the model minority label, believing that it limits the heterogeneity of their ethnic groups (i.e., Japanese, Korean, Chinese, etc.), diminishes the complexity of their individual attributes, and melts their culture into that of the dominant White race (Zhou, 2004).

Over the 10-year period between 2000 and 2010, it has been reported that the population of Asian Whites increased via eurogamy by 87%, resulting in the highest it has ever been at 1.6 million people (Chong & Kuo, 2015; Hall, 2001; Jones & Bullock, 2012). Despite such population growth, empirical studies on the experiences of Asian–White biracials are quite scarce. The limited research that exists illustrates various complexities that affect their unique identity processes such as the social spaces in which they occupy, income level, and religious affiliation in comparison with other racial minority groups. Asian–White biracials are more likely than Black–White biracials to express a fluid identity that varies depending on their social setting (Lou, Lalonde, & Wilson, 2011). Chong and Kuo (2015) attribute this identity fluctuation to the value of interdependence and harmony among Asian immigrants. Comparable identity affiliations between Asian Whites and other biracial groups lie within the realm of socioeconomic status. Similar to Black–White biracials and Latino–White biracials, higher income and residence in affluent neighborhoods are predictive of White identification for Asian Whites. An additional similarity between Black–White and Asian–White biracials is that Asian Whites are more likely to identify with their mother's race than their father's (Chong & Kuo, 2015). Those with a college-educated White parent are more likely to identify as multiracial than Asian (Zhou, 2004). Similar to Latino Whites, native English-speaking Asian Whites are more inclined to solely identify as White than nonnative English speakers (Davenport, 2016). Religion also plays a comparable role in the lives of Asian Whites in that Jewish heritage is

predictive of White identity, while Buddhism and Hinduism are predictive of Asian or multiracial identity (Davenport, 2016). Contrary to Black–White biracials, Asian White women are more inclined to select non-White identification than their male counterparts (Basu, 2010).

Contextual factors play a key role in considering the psychological health and social experiences of biracial individuals. In one of the only empirical studies focusing solely on Asian White individuals, Chong and Kuo (2015) examined the relationship between biracial identity and psychological adjustment among a young adult population. Findings indicated that those who identified as Asian White felt a stronger sense of belonging and attachment to the heritages of both of their parents than those who identified as White. Those who classified themselves as White by colorism more strongly identified with their White parent's heritage; however, they felt more alienated from both racial groups than those who identified as Asian White and Asian. This is likely attributed to cultural socialization such as specific practices, beliefs, and lessons distinct from the traditional American culture that is experienced by Asian White and Asian dominant identification groups but left void in White dominant identification groups. Likewise, individuals in the Asian White group reported less psychological distress than those in the White dominant group. Researchers propose that individuals who feel a stronger sense of belonging within their cultural communities as well as with both of their heritage groups express healthier psychological adjustment than those who lack such affiliation (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Last, perhaps via colorism those who identified as White were less likely to report a strong sense of Asian socialization and were more likely to uphold their majority heritage while disparaging their minority heritage than those who identified as Asian White or Asian. It is likely that biracial individuals who were raised in households that included teachings of their respective Asian culture were able to develop more positive associations with their minority heritage. Overall, most Asian Whites identify as biracial rather than White (Davenport, 2016).

Native American–White Biracials

Throughout the history of the United States, all racial minority groups have been discriminated against in order to advance capitalism and maintain the power structure of financially well off European Americans. Contrary to colorism aimed at African Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans have historically been classified by ancestry rather than physical appearance. For example, multiracial Japanese Americans with one parent of Japanese ancestry were mandated to relocate to internment camps during World War II (Doyle & Kao, 2007). More recently, single race and multirace Native Americans have been required to provide proof of ancestry in order to gain access to tribal lands and entitlements granted by U.S. federal and state governments (Ferguson, 1996; Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Thornton, 1997). Now that Native Americans are no longer seen as a threat to American imperialism, making up only 2% of the U.S. population, this minority group is unique in that they receive territorial benefits by claiming American Indian ancestry.

Native Americans have maintained a strong sense of racial/ethnic pride despite being overpowered and influenced by growing populations of Whites over time (Huyser et al., 2010). However, the racial identity of Native Americans is a complicated venture due to extensive intermarriage patterns and tribal enrollment data that influence this group's demographic profile (Thornton, 1997). Native American Whites have the least stable racial identification over time compared with the other biracial groups discussed (Doyle & Kao, 2007).

Native American Whites are a niche group as they make up a very small portion of the U.S. population and often deny their Native American heritage altogether. Factors that influence these biracials to solely identify as White are family income and socialization, physical appearance, and education levels (Huyser et al., 2010).

Colorism in skin color is one of the most prominent components of White identification among Native Americans biracials. Contrary to the aforementioned biracial groups, single-race Native Americans are virtually homogenous in medium brown skin tones while Native American Whites primarily have fair-light brown skin tones (Doyle & Kao, 2007). Thus, Native American Whites are more physically able to pass as White because of their dominant European features. In their study examining the stability of racial identity among multiracial young adults over a 6-year period, Doyle and Kao (2007) found that nearly 67% of self-identified Native American White adolescents changed their identity to White as adults. Only 19% of this group reported a consistent race during the research period compared to 57% of Black Whites and 53% of Asian Whites. The authors attribute this finding to the historical frequency of interracial relations between Native Americans and Whites along with the small Native American population in the United States, suggesting that these factors lead Native American Whites to be more inclined to identify solely as White as they become adult members of society. Perhaps the extensive pairings of Native Americans and Whites over time in addition to the diminishing population size contributes a stronger sense of validation and acceptance in identifying with the dominant racial group. Continued intermarriage of Native Americans and European Americans often leads to diminished awareness of genealogical lineage and a decline in identification with the minority group (Alba, 1990).

Researchers have also suggested high levels of assimilation among Native American Whites illustrating that cultural ways, native languages, and distinguished ethnic traits of the minority group are perceived as disadvantages in social mobility; thus, these individuals often dissociate from these characteristics in order to obtain higher levels of education and prestigious employment opportunities (Lee & Bean, 2004). Single-race Native Americans have the lowest levels of schooling and earnings followed by Native American Hispanics, Native American Blacks, Native American Whites, and finally those who solely identify as White (Huyser et al., 2010). These statistics indicate an incentive for Native American Whites to prioritize their White heritage in order to be accepted as contributing members of the American society at-large, rather than carrying the burden of being a native of the past.

Conclusion

Biracial Americans are a dynamic and distinguished group of individuals that make up a larger part of the American society than is recognized. Because of the hypodescent principle of colorism and a dichotomous system of racial socialization, identifying with more than one racial group is often uncommon, misunderstood, and out of place. This article illustrates why it is often easier for biracials to select a single-race identity either by choice or by societal forces. Colorism, or socialization of skin tone, was identified as a prominent factor that influences individuals to identify solely as White and to be perceived by others as White across biracial groups. Other prominent factors contributing to White identity discussed in this article were gender, religion, language, and socioeconomic status. Overall, Latino Whites are the most likely group to identify as White while Native American Whites are the most likely group to change their identity to White as adults. Black Whites and Asian Whites favor identifying with the race of their mother while Latino Whites more frequently identify with the race of their father. This is likely an effect of typical machismo or miscegenistic beliefs in Spanish-speaking countries in which standard heteronormative gender roles are upheld and men are viewed as the leader of the household (Diekman, Eagly, Mladinic, & Ferreira, 2005; Torres, 1998). In expansion of gender trends, Black–White women and Latinas more often identify as biracial or White than their male counterparts while Asian White women more frequently identify as Asian or biracial than Asian White men.

Skin color plays an important role in that Black and Latino men, who typically have darker skin tones than Asian men, experience higher rates of discrimination and police brutality by colorism compared with any other racial group (Khanna, 2010). Thus, these biracial men are less likely to identify with the dominant race that perceives them to be a threat to society. Furthermore, biracial groups that practice the religion most typical of their minority heritages are most likely to identify with their minority group (i.e., Baptism for Black Whites, Catholicism for Latino Whites, and Hinduism, Buddhism, or Muslim for Asian Whites), whereas those who practice Judaism are more likely to identify as White. Native English-speaking Asian–White and Latino–White biracials express a stronger affiliation with their White heritage than nonnative English speakers (Davenport, 2016). All biracial groups who have six-figure incomes and reside in upper middle class to upper class neighborhoods are more likely to identify as White than those who are working class and/or live in predominantly minority neighborhoods. Latino Whites and Native American Whites are the most likely to identify as White in order to achieve higher levels of education and receive higher paying employment opportunities whereas Black Whites more often identify as White in order to avoid discrimination from peers.

It is clear that each of these groups have very unique experiences that set them apart from their monoracial peers. In a U.S. social context that values single-race identity, biracial individuals often feel alienated, misplaced, or misunderstood. Many researchers attribute this characteristic to internalized oppression in which individuals hold whiteness to a higher standard and feel ashamed about their minority group affiliation

due to colorism (Pyke, 2010). Additionally, others attribute the sense of isolation to the hypodescent colorism principle that has seeped into the perspectives of every racial group in the United States (Khanna, 2010). Imagine if former President Obama would have called himself the first biracial president of the United States rather than the first Black president. White people would have likely frowned upon accepting him as partially one of them while Black people would have likely shunned him for betraying the Black race. Ultimately, his only option to be successful was to identify with a single race. To deny an aspect of one's identity is a challenging decision that can be psychologically detrimental if not thoughtfully and consciously considered. Biracial individuals who feel a sense of connection with both of their heritages tend to have stronger psychological health than biracials who identify with a single racial group (Lusk, Taylor, Nanney, & Austin, 2010). While this article's primary focus was to highlight the often-unacknowledged role of colorism in shaping the identities and perceptions of biracial Americans who identify as White, we equally strive to shatter the falsehoods of White superiority and minority group inferiority in order to create a space in which these individuals are encouraged to embrace the unique complexities of their multiracial heritages.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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Author Biography

Keshia L. Harris, PhD is a social science researcher who has recently obtained a doctorate degree from the Department of Comparative Human Development at the University of Chicago. Former academic history include an EdM and MA in mental health counseling from Columbia University, Teachers College and a BA in psychology from Spelman College. Dr. Harris is a Fulbright-Hays Alum and a member of Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society. Her research advances efforts to expand knowledge of the colorism phenonmenon and minimize educational inequality worldwide.