The Influence of Ambiguous Identity on Person Evaluations: The Importance of Context

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract
Biracial people are often stereotyped as cold and socially awkward. Two experiments assessed whether the racial context in which they are perceived influences the application of these stereotypes. Participants read about a Black/White student who chose or was assigned a White, Black or Black/White roommate. Roommate race was manipulated via photographs (Experiment 1), or written description (Experiment 2). When photos were provided, roommate race, not the relationship, influenced target evaluations. The biracial target with a White roommate was viewed the least positively and as least similar to participants, implying his minority status was highlighted by his roommate’s race. The written description produced only relationship effects. When the target chose his roommate he was evaluated as warmer, more competent and with more positive regard than when he was assigned a roommate. The results suggest that visual vs. narrative racial contexts produce divergent evaluations of biracial people.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1
Introduction

“What are you?” This question is often posed to biracial people when they first encounter an interaction partner (Gaskins, 1999). The fact that this question is so often posed to biracial people is indicative of the importance we place on being able to fit people into existing categories. The manner in which we categorize a person informs our attitudes, affect and behaviour towards that person (Bargh, 1999; Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). When we encounter an obstacle to this categorization process, such as when a person has an ambiguous racial identity, overcoming the obstacle creates a challenging and energy consuming cognitive experience. Research suggests that we prefer to expend as little cognitive energy as possible (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000) and thus it follows that we would form less positive evaluations of people whose categorization requires a great deal of cognitive effort. These negative evaluations can be viewed in the stereotypes about biracial people, whereby biracial people are stereotyped as cold and socially awkward (Sanchez & Bonam, 2009), both negative qualities that encourage social distance.

Despite the fact that biracial people compose a substantial portion of the Canadian population, relatively little research has been dedicated to understanding the prejudice and discrimination they face compared with the amount of research that has been devoted to these same issues among monoracial minority groups. In the 2001 census more than 300,000 people identified themselves as belonging to more than one racial group. This number is expected to double by 2027 (Khoo, 2007). There are approximately half as many people who identify as bi-multiracial as there are people who identify as Black in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2004). The number of people claiming bi- or multiracial heritage is even higher in the United States: 9 percent of the population is bi/multiracial and it is expected that 21 percent of the population will be bi/multiracial in 2050 (Tutwiler, 2005). The disparity between the size of this population and the amount of attention paid to this group is slowly being rectified by an increasing interest in the experience of biracial people (e.g., Chelsey & Wagner, 2003; Jackman, Wagner, & Johnson, 2001; Remedios & Chasteen, under review; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009).
1.1 Stereotypes of Bi/Multiracial People

Despite a growing interest in the lives of bi and multiracial people, much remains unknown about the stereotypes and prejudice they face. The limited research that exists suggests there are several common stereotypes. Chelsey and Wagner (2003) designed a study to test adults’ attitudes towards multiracial children. They presented monoracial participants with a vignette about a child’s first day at school and manipulated the race of the child to be Black, White or biracial. Biracial children were viewed as having more trouble with social acceptance than Black or White children. Similarly, Jackman and colleagues (2001) found that participants held unfavourable attitudes towards biracial children regarding social interactions. Participants believed biracial children were awkward in social interactions and were socially ostracized. Interestingly, Jackman and colleagues (2001) found that these beliefs are held more strongly about biracial people than they are of monoracial Black people. This suggests that although both groups experience prejudice, the content of the stereotypes is different and that biracial people are not subjected to half the prejudice as Black people but are subject to different prejudice.

Sanchez and Bonam (2009) tested the extent to which biracial people are perceived as less warm and less competent than monoracial majorities (i.e., White people) and minorities (Black and Asian people). In Experiment 1, participants read an application for undergraduate studies at a top university that was ostensibly completed by an actual student. The applicant indicated that they were Black, White or Black/White biracial. Participants read the application and then evaluated the target on measures of warmth (e.g., warm, sincere) and competency (e.g., capable, efficient). Measures of competency were included because of suspicions that biracial people are also stereotyped as less competent than their monoracial counterparts. Participants also indicated their agreement with the statement that the applicant had overcome many obstacles in their life. In Experiment 2, the same procedure was followed except that targets were Asian, White or Asian/White biracial. In Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 the biracial targets (Black/White and Asian/White, respectively) were rated as less warm than the monoracial targets. Within each experiment, the monoracial targets were not significantly different on warmth ratings. In Experiment 1, no effect of race was found on competency ratings. However, in Experiment 2, biracial (Asian/White) targets were rated as significantly less competent than Asian and White targets.
Stereotypes of biracial people appear to portray biracial people as cold, socially awkward and at times, less competent than monoracial people (Chelsey & Wagner, 2003; Jackman et al., 2001; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). Biracial people suffer serious consequences because of these stereotypes. In Experiments 1 and 2, Sanchez and Bonam (2009) measured participants’ perceptions of how deserving the university applicant was of a minority scholarship (designed to assist minority students in overcoming obstacles associated with obtaining an education). Biracial applicants (both Black/White and Asian/White) were rated as less deserving of the scholarship than their minority counterparts (i.e., Black and Asian targets, respectively). This effect was partially mediated by scores on the warmth and competency measures.

Biracial people are doubly disadvantaged. They are disadvantaged compared to monoracial minorities (i.e., Black people) at an educational level because they are seen as less deserving of minority scholarships (Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). They are disadvantaged compared to monoracial majorities (i.e., White people) at an economic level (Fairlie, 2009). Black/White biracial men in the United States make a comparable wage as Black men, significantly less than White men, despite having obtained higher education on average than Black men. In an attempt to explain the wage discrepancy, Remedios, Chasteen, and Oey (2012) tested the theory that biracial people are penalized in job interview situations because of the stereotype that they are socially awkward. Participants viewed a job application from an applicant who described themselves as Black, White or Black/White biracial. In all cases the applicant had been denied a job, but the rationale provided by the interviewer differed in such a manner that it was either a high or low prejudice justification. Even in high discrimination conditions, participants were more likely to believe that a biracial candidate versus a Black applicant was not hired because of poor interview skills. This displays the robustness of the stereotype that biracial people are socially awkward and provides further evidence for the real-world implications of this stereotype.

1.2 The Difficulty of Racial Categorization

The stereotypes that have been explored about biracial people can be interpreted as distancing stereotypes. They discourage social closeness by portraying biracial people as cold and socially awkward. One potential explanation for the content of these stereotypes is that the initial experience of encountering a biracial person is cognitively unpleasant and people apply
stereotypes that discourage future interactions in an attempt to avoid experiencing similar cognitively unpleasant encounters in the future. Previous research has shown that the initial experience of encountering biracial people is cognitively unpleasant/challenging (Chen & Hamilton, 2012; Remedios & Chasteen, under review; Willadsen-Jensen & Ito, 2006) and this research will test the premise that the degree of difficulty associated with making a racial categorization about a biracial person mediates evaluations of that person.

When we first meet someone, we automatically categorize them according to the most relevant or obvious cues of group membership (Bargh, 1999; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), often race, age, and gender (Bargh, 1999). Categorizations of this sort take place within seconds of first meeting someone (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Rule, Macrae, & Ambady, 2009). This is an unconscious process that functions to maintain reserves of cognitive energy and reduce the time and energy required to synthesize the vast amount of information to which people are exposed (Bargh, 1999; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). Evidence from fMRI and ERP data supports these well-developed social psychological theories about the automaticity of race perception and categorization (Willadsen-Jensen & Ito, 2006).

Obstacles to the initial categorization process make the task of categorizing a new person more challenging. For example, when someone encounters a person who cannot easily be racially classified they are likely to find the task of categorizing this person challenging. One manner in which racial classifications may be unclear is when a person has a bi or multiracial heritage (i.e., parents from different racial backgrounds) (Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009). Having a biracial identity can be viewed as having an ambiguous identity because it is unclear to a perceiver which of two supposedly mutually exclusive categories (e.g., Black or White) is an accurate categorization of the target. Perceptual ambiguity of race and sexual orientation has been shown to influence memory for faces (Pauker, Weisbech, Ambady, Sommers, Adams, Jr., & Ivcevic, 2009; Rule, Ambady, Adams, Jr., & Macrae, 2007) and it seems likely that ambiguity may influence other factors related to person evaluations.

Several recent studies have explored the relative difficulty of categorizing biracial targets into racial categories. Chen and Hamilton (2012) asked participants to make racial classifications of Black, White, and biracial targets. Participants could choose to apply the option of Black, White or multiracial to each target. When categorizing multiracial targets participants were more likely
to misclassify them (compared to classifications of Black and White targets) and took longer to respond. The longer response time implies that more cognitive resources were required for the categorization decision of multiracial compared to monoracial targets. Similar patterns of responding were found for Black/White and Asian/White biracial targets, and for morphed biracial target faces and actual biracial target faces. Other research (Remedios & Chasteen, under review) has shown that participants experience the categorization of biracial targets as a subjectively difficult experience. Participants found categorizing a Black/White biracial target significantly more difficult than categorizing a Black or a White target.

As previous research has shown (Bargh, 1999) people are frugal in expending their cognitive energy. When making a racial categorization of a biracial person people must expend more cognitive energy than when categorizing a monoracial person. This experience is difficult for perceivers and it may be that this difficulty colours perceivers’ reactions to biracial individuals. This possibility is supported by the content of stereotypes held about biracial individuals. Viewing biracial people as cold, socially awkward (and sometimes incompetent) works to discourage social closeness as none of these traits are desirable in friends, colleagues or close others. These stereotypes may function as justification to avoid further contact or interaction with biracial individuals and thus avoid the unpleasant cognitive experience of attempting to classify them racially. I will test this theory by taking a measure of participants’ perceptions of the target’s warmth and competency as well as the difficulty associated with this task. Difficulty will be tested as a potential mediating variable to determine if it is the difficulty of categorizing ambiguous identities that drives the derogation of biracial targets.

1.3 The Importance of Context

Negative attitudes and stereotypes of biracial people appear to be responsible for various negative outcomes in work and school environments (Fairlie, 2009; Remedios et al., 2012; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). Because of the negative outcomes associated with biracial identity it is necessary to understand what factors might reduce the application of stereotypes and negative attitudes towards biracial targets. One variable that may reduce negative attitudes and stereotypes towards biracial targets is the context in which they are perceived.

Context has been explored as one manner in which prejudice towards monoracial minorities, specifically Black people, can be moderated. Several contextual methods to reduce racial biases
have been explored. For example, presenting participants with positive Black examples and negative White examples (e.g., Denzel Washington and Jeffery Dahmer, respectively; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001) reduces bias displayed against Black targets. Other research has shown that the physical context in which a person is viewed influences the activation of racial biases. Viewing a spray-painted wall paired with a White or Black face versus viewing a church paired with a Black or White face had an impact on perceptions of the Black face. When Black faces were viewed in the context of a church the racial bias present when Black faces were viewed against a spray-painted wall was eliminated (Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 2001). Similarly, viewing Black and White faces presented in different roles (e.g., as prisoners vs. lawyers) influences the activation of racial biases (Barden, Maddux, Petty, & Brewer, 2004).

Given the strong evidence that context can influence evaluations of monoracial minority members, it is logical that context might influence perceptions and evaluations of biracial minority members. One manner in which the influence of context has been explored as a factor in perceptions of biracial targets is in regards to the race of those with whom a person has a relationship with, is interacting with, or is surrounded by. It may be that these others provide contextual clues as to how to categorize the target and thus reduce the difficulty associated with categorizing ambiguous targets. The context of those with whom you are seen has not been highly recognized as a relevant mechanism by which person evaluations are influenced and yet seems like an important point to consider. Most interactions do not occur in a laboratory but in the complex, changing context of the outside world. Often people are surrounded by others who may influence how they are evaluated. Past research conducted regarding the influence of others in perceptions of biracial targets points to the importance of this context (Ito, Willadsen-Jensen, Kaye, & Park, 2011).

Ito and colleagues (2011) designed several experiments to test whether the race of those with whom a person is viewed influences how that person is perceived. Specifically, they were interested in whether a biracial person was perceived as more Black or more White depending on the race of those around them. To test this theory Ito and colleagues (2011) obtained baseline measures of the time it took participants to classify positive and negative words as good or bad. Participants then viewed the same words presented after a Black, White or biracial face. Facilitation scores were determined by subtracting the response time when the word was viewed after a face from response times when the word was viewed alone. No effect was found for
positive words, and White faces created no facilitation effects. Black and biracial faces facilitated responses to negative words; the most facilitation occurred with Black faces, facilitation with biracial faces fell at a mid-point between White and Black faces. This first experiment provided baseline levels of facilitation to compare to facilitation levels when biracial faces are viewed in different racial contexts.

In a second experiment, Ito and colleagues (2011) manipulated the race of the other faces that were shown with the biracial face. Biracial faces were either shown in the context of all White faces or all Black faces. Ito and colleagues found evidence of racial contrast effects. When the biracial faces were viewed with all White faces, they facilitated responses to negative words more so than when they were viewed with an equal number of White and Black faces. The increased facilitation to negative words can be interpreted as an indication that the biracial faces were viewed as more Black than when they were viewed in a context with White and Black faces. When biracial faces were viewed in the context of all Black faces, they did not facilitate participant responses. This provides evidence that these faces were viewed as more White than when they were shown in a Black and White context because it is consistent with the finding in the first study that White faces do not create facilitation effects.

In a third experiment, Ito et al. (2011) found more support for the theory that context influences perceptions of biracial targets. Participants evaluated how prototypical biracial targets were of Black and White faces. Target faces were viewed either in a mixed Black and White context, an all-Black context or an all-White context. When the target faces were viewed in a mixed context they were rated as being equally prototypical of White and Black faces. However, when viewed in an all-White context targets were perceived as being more prototypical of Black features and less prototypical of White features. Similarly, when viewed in an all-Black context targets were perceived as being less prototypical of Black features and more prototypical of White features. This suggests that perceivers use the race of those with whom they view a biracial target as clues to the target’s race. This may result in easier target categorizations for the perceiver, and thus more positive reactions to the target.

Recent research (Ito et al., 2011) shows that the context in which a biracial person is viewed can influence perceptions in such a manner that a contrast effect occurs between the perceived race of the target and the race of those with whom the target is viewed. However, a second line of
research would posit that assimilation effects would occur, such that a biracial target would be perceived to be of a similar race as those with whom the target is viewed, rather than of a contrasting race (Hebl & Mannix, 2003; Klacyznski, 2008; Sigelman, Howell, Cornell, Cutright, & Dewey, 1991). Stigma-by-association research suggests that a person who associates with a stigmatized individual is evaluated similarly as that individual, regardless of whether they share the stigmatized trait (Sigelman et al., 1991). Stigma-by-association has not been explored in a racial context, but this effect has been found for sexual orientation (King & Black, 1999; Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russel, 1994; Sigelman et al., 1991), weight (Hebl & Mannix, 2003; Klacyznski, 2008), epilepsy (Parfene, Stewart, & King, 2009), and even something as minimal as coupon using (Argo & Main, 2008).

Most stigma-by-association research has focused on how relationships (e.g., as roommates or friends) between gay and straight men impact evaluations of the straight man in the relationship. Neuberg and colleagues (1994) explored the idea that being friends with a homosexual would influence evaluations of a straight target. The key measure was a rating of how comfortable participants would feel spending time socially with the target. Participants were informed that they would be viewing an interaction between two friends after which they would evaluate several facets of the interaction and the people involved in it. They were provided with a brief profile in which information regarding the sexual orientation of the two people in the interaction was manipulated. The target was described as straight and the target’s friend was either straight or gay. Participants found the idea of social interaction with the target less comfortable when the target was friends with a homosexual than when the target was friends with a heterosexual.

A second experiment designed to test the influence of stigma-by-association on person evaluations was conducted by Sigelman and colleagues (1991). Sigelman et al. (1991) tested what conditions must be met for stigma to transfer, specifically, they tested whether the type of relationship between the target and the stigmatized person influenced the degree to which stigma transferred. Participants read a vignette that described a university student who was either assigned a roommate (i.e., not a close relationship) or chose to room with a friend (i.e., a close relationship). The roommate was either gay or straight. After reading a vignette, participants rated the target on ten traits established as being stereotypically homosexual. When the target had a close relationship with a gay roommate they were rated higher on stereotypically gay traits than when they were assigned a gay roommate or had a straight roommate. This study, in
combination with the work done by Neuberg et al. (1994) suggests that when a person is evaluated in the context of a stigmatized close other they are evaluated similarly as that close other.

1.4 The Current Research

The research conducted on stigma-by-association suggests that when biracial people are perceived in a homogenous group of monoracial people evaluations of the biracial target should assimilate towards the monoracial people (e.g., a biracial target viewed with a group of Black people should be evaluated similarly as a Black person). However, the research conducted by Ito et al. (2011) provides evidence for contrast effects. To resolve this discrepancy, it is necessary to examine the manner in which context is manipulated in the different lines of research. Stigma-by-association research largely posits that a close or desired relationship exists between the target and the people with whom they are viewed. The work by Ito et al., in contrast, merely displays images of targets with a series of monoracial people with whom they have no relationship. It may be that when a relationship exists between a target and a contextual person assimilation effects occur and when no relationship exists, contrast effects occur. I will test this possibility in the current research.

Two experiments will determine the importance of context in evaluations of biracial targets. In both experiments, male targets will be presented with a Black, White, or biracial roommate. The roommate will either have been assigned by the school (as a partial replication of the no relationship conditions that show contrast effects) or will be a friend that the target chose to room with (a partial replication of the close relationship conditions shown to produce assimilation effects). I hypothesize that when the roommate is monoracial (either Black or White) evaluations of the target will be more positive on stereotyped biracial measures (i.e., warmth) than when the roommate is biracial. This effect will occur because a monoracial roommate acts as a clue as to how to categorize the biracial target, thus easing the difficulty associated with making a race categorization of the target. When the target chose his roommate the positive effects of having a monoracial roommate will be stronger.

I expect a different pattern of racial categorization when the target was assigned versus chose his roommate. When the target was assigned his roommate, I expect contrast effects to occur: When the target has a White roommate I expect that he will be perceived as more Black and more
Black stereotypes will be applied. When the roommate is Black I expect that the target will be perceived as more White and fewer Black stereotypes will be applied. When the target chose his roommate I expect to find assimilation effects: The target will be evaluated as more White and fewer Black stereotypes will be applied when he has a White roommate; the target will be evaluated as more Black and more Black stereotypes will be applied when he has a Black roommate. In both monoracial conditions, when the target either chose or was assigned their roommate I expect a more positive set of evaluations (i.e., higher warmth, competence, identification and positive attitudes) than when the target has a biracial roommate. I expect this pattern because regardless of the race of the monoracial roommate, they will provide contextual clues as to how the biracial target should be categorized.

In Experiment 1 race will be manipulated via photographs of Black, White and biracial men. In Experiment 2 race will be manipulated via a demographics question included in the profile. Two methods of manipulating racial context are being applied because the manner in which context is manipulated may have an effect on the outcome. Most of the previous research conducted using biracial targets has examined people’s reactions to biracial people when they have been informed that the target is biracial, and are given details of the target’s heritage (Chelsey & Wagner, 2003; Jackman et al., 2001; Remedios et al., 2012; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). However, this does not approximate how a person may evaluate a biracial person upon encountering them in a real-life situation. In actuality, people are unlikely to know the heritage of a biracial person when they first meet the person. For this reason, it is important to study how this experience of uncertainty will influence perceptions of biracial people. The importance of the racial and relationship contexts in which they are viewed may differ depending on whether the perceiver has or does not have knowledge of the person’s heritage. The same experiment is being conducted using different contextual manipulations to determine whether the importance of context changes depending on what initial information the perceiver has when evaluating a biracial person.
2.1 Method

2.1.1 Participants

One-hundred seventy-three psychology students from the University of Toronto took part in Experiment 1. They were compensated with course credit or $10. Fifty (28.9%) of the participants were male, 123 (71.1%) were female. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 37 ($M = 19.73, SD = 3.30$).

2.1.2 Procedure

Participants signed up for the study using the PSY100 pool website. The experiment was described as a study to explore how university students perceive the experience of living with a roommate. Upon arriving at the Adult Development Lab participants completed traditional consent procedures and were seated at a computer in a small testing room. The experiment was presented using MediaLab software. Participants were informed that they would be viewing a randomly generated profile from those collected over several years from first-year Ontario university students. In reality, participants were assigned one of six profiles based on their condition. All six profiles contained the same basic demographic information (i.e., year of study, major, etc.) and a photograph of the target student and their roommate. The manipulation of race occurred via these photographs.

The photographs used in this experiment were selected from a collection of Black, White and morphed biracial photos collected by Ito et al. (2011). A set of 15 (5 White, 5 Black and 5 biracial) photographs were pretested on measures of liking, perceived race, age, and attractiveness. The final 4 photographs selected (1 White, 1 Black and 2 biracial) were selected as being the most similarly rated on attractiveness, liking and age (see Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WH385</th>
<th>BL33 (SD)</th>
<th>BI10 (SD)</th>
<th>BI23 (SD)</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Means and Standard Deviations of Pretesting Data for Photograph Selection*
The target student was the same biracial male in all conditions. The race of the target’s roommate was varied by condition. The roommate was White, Black or biracial. The photograph of the roommate was presented for 1500 milliseconds and then the program automatically progressed to the evaluation questions. The second variable that differed by condition was the relationship between the target and their roommate. In one condition, the target profile indicated that the target was assigned his roommate. This was indicated in two ways. First, the profile asked students to check whether they chose or were assigned their roommate. Second, the profile asked students to write a brief sentence explaining the relationship they had with their roommate prior to living together.

In the assigned condition, participants read: “I did not choose my roommate. The university assigned me to live with someone based on supposed compatibility. We both enjoy videogames and we both play pool”. In the chose condition, participants read: “I chose to live with a friend from high-school. We’ve known each other for a few years and are quite good friends. I thought we would get along well as roommates because we have some common interests, we both like
playing videogames and we both play pool”. After viewing one of the six profiles, participants completed a series of evaluative measures and a set of demographic questions.

Participants first completed a three-item affective evaluation of the target ($M = 5.11$, $SD = .65$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75$). Participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale how much they like the target (1 = not at all; 7 = very much), how positively they feel about the target (1 = not at all positively; 7 = very positively) and how negatively they feel about the target (1 = not at all negatively; 7 = very negatively), reverse coded. This three item scale was designed to capture immediate affective responses towards the target. Participants then completed the Warmth ($M = 4.84$, $SD = .67$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$) and Competence Scale ($M = 5.09$, $SD = .55$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$) (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) composed of 20 items. For each item participants indicated on a 7-point Likert scale how descriptive the trait (e.g., friendly, competent) is of the target (1 = not at all descriptive; 7 = highly descriptive). Following this, participants completed a measure of stereotypicality ($M = 2.12$, $SD = .29$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$) in which they rated how representative nine stereotypically Black traits (e.g., uneducated, criminal) are of the target on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all representative; 7 = very representative). Participants were also presented with ten non-stereotypical traits (e.g., “Sad”, “Energetic”) intermingled with the stereotypical traits. The non-stereotypical traits were included to mask the true purpose of the scale.

Participants then completed a seven item liking measure to determine how much the participant thought they would like the person whose profile they viewed (1 = “not at all”, 7 = “very much”) ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .50$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$). This scale included items such as “would you like to get to know this student” and “can you see yourself being friends with this student” and was designed to capture the cognitive evaluation of the student by the participant. Participants completed a four-item measure of similarity including items such as “How similar are you to this student?” ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .29$, Chronbach’s $\alpha = .93$), and a modified inclusion of other in self task as a measure of closeness between the target and themselves (1 = the most distance between student and participant, 7 = most overlap between student and participant; $M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.31$; Wright, Aron, & Tropp, 2002). They then completed a filler task which included questions regarding their perception of various demographic traits of the target student, including “how old do you think the student was whose profile you viewed”. Participants also answered a series of questions regarding their perception of the target’s race. Participants first completed a fill-in-the-
blank measure in which they were asked to type the race or ethnic group that they believed the student belonged to. They then answered whether they believed the student belonged to a single racial group (1 = “yes”, 2 = “no”, 3 = “don’t know”), and then indicated how Black or White they believed the target was (1 = “100% Black”, 5 = “100% White”).

Finally, participants completed a brief demographics questionnaire and a suspiciousness check. Participants were then debriefed and thanked for their participation.

### 2.2 Results

I conducted analyses of variance (ANOVA) on measures assessing race perceptions of the biracial target (difficulty of categorizing, race perception, assignment of Black stereotypical traits) as well as on evaluations of the biracial target (perceptions of warmth and competence, identification with the target, positive attitudes toward the target).

#### 2.2.1 Categorizing difficulty

I first examined whether participants had difficulty assigning a racial label to the student whose profile they viewed. An ANOVA indicated that there was no difference in difficulty when the student chose ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.51$) vs. when they were assigned a roommate ($M = 3.89, SD = 1.71$), $F(1, 167) = .02, p = .878$. There was also no main effect for roommate race, $F(2, 167) = .22, p = .802$. Students with a Black ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.52$), White ($M = 3.89, SD = 1.67$), or biracial ($M = 4.00, SD = 1.67$) roommate were evaluated as similarly difficult to categorize. There was also no interaction of roommate race and relationship, $F(2, 167) = 2.56, p = .080$. I also conducted correlations to determine if, as theorized, the degree of difficulty in categorizing a target racially was associated with how the target was evaluated. Difficulty was not significantly correlated with warmth, competence, positive regard or identification with the target (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Warmth</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Positive Affect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How difficult to</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.021</td>
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</table>
categorize the target

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.787</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 173.

2.2.2 Perceptions of Race

The second variable I examined was perceptions of the target’s race on a five-point scale ranging from 100% Black to 100% White. An ANOVA illustrated that there were no main effects and no interaction effect, all Fs < 1.23, all ps > .29. Participants viewed the biracial target’s race similarly whether he chose his roommate ($M = 3.90, SD = .84$) or was assigned his roommate ($M = 3.82, SD = .94$). The roommate’s race also had no effect on perceptions of biracial target, with participants viewing his race similarly whether the roommate was Black ($M = 3.98, SD = .80$), White ($M = 3.74, SE = 1.00$), or biracial ($M = 3.86, SD = .84$).

2.2.3 Stereotypical Traits

I next tested whether there were differences in the degree to which participants stereotyped the target using a set of stereotypically Black traits. An ANOVA illustrated that there were no main effects and no interaction effect, all Fs < 2.16, all ps > .12. Whether the target chose ($M = 2.07, SD = .88$) or was assigned ($M = 2.14, SD = .89$) their roommate did not change how stereotypically they were perceived. Targets with a Black ($M = 2.14, SD = .93$), White ($M = 2.25, SD = .91$), or biracial ($M = 1.92, SD = .81$) roommate were perceived as similarly warm.

2.2.4 Perceptions of Warmth

In addition to examining participants’ perceptions of the biracial target’s race, I also examined the degree to which he was viewed as warm. There were no main effects and no interaction, all Fs < 1.73, all ps > .19. Targets who chose their roommate ($M = 4.89, SD = .72$) were evaluated as similarly warm as those who were assigned a roommate ($M = 4.75, SD = .66$). Targets with a Black ($M = 4.78, SD = .66$), White ($M = 4.79, SD = .69$), or biracial ($M = 4.87, SD = .69$) roommate were perceived as similarly warm.
2.2.5 Perceptions of Competence

As well as examining perceptions of the target’s warmth, I examined the degree to which he was viewed as competent. There were no main effects and no interaction, all $Fs < .89$, all $ps > .35$. The target was viewed as equally competent when he chose his roommate ($M = 5.10$, $SD = .68$) as when he was assigned a roommate ($M = 5.00$, $SD = .69$). Competency evaluations were no different when the target had a Black ($M = 5.01$, $SD = .64$), White ($M = 4.98$, $SD = .75$), or biracial ($M = 5.14$, $SD = .66$) roommate.

2.2.6 Identification with the Target Student

I measured the degree to which participants identified with the target student with a composite measure of similarity and perceived overlap between the student and the participant (Pearson’s $r(171) = .68$, $p < .001$). There was no main effect for relationship, students who chose their roommate ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.14$) and students who were assigned their roommate ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.11$) were not perceived differently, $F(1, 167) = 2.33$, $p = .128$. There was a significant effect of race, $F(2, 167) = 4.31$, $p = .015$. Participants identified differently with the target student if the roommate was Black ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.27$), White, ($M = 2.99$, $SD = .92$), or biracial ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.13$). Tukey’s HSD showed that participants identified more strongly with the biracial student when his roommate was Black vs. White ($p = .020$). They did not differently identify when the roommate was Black vs. biracial ($p = .827$), or White vs. biracial ($p = .090$). There was no interaction between race and relationship, $F(2, 167) = .30$, $p = .741$.

2.2.7 Positive Attitudes towards the Target Student

I measured the degree to which participants felt positively towards the biracial target with a composite of two variables, affect and liking (Pearson’s $r(171) = .596$, $p < .001$). There were no effects for roommate relationship, $F(1, 167) = .004$, $p = .952$. The target who chose his roommate ($M = 4.80$, $SD = .79$) was evaluated as positively as when he was assigned his roommate ($M = 4.78$, $SD = .90$), There was a main effect for roommate race, $F(2, 167) = 4.28$, $p = .015$, such that the biracial target was evaluated less positively when he had a White ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .80$) than Black ($M = 4.92$, $SD = .94$, $p = .038$), or biracial roommate ($M = 4.94$, $SD = .75$, $p = .023$). There was no difference in evaluations of the biracial target when he had a Black or
biracial roommate ($p = .984$). There was not a significant interaction between roommate relationship and race, $F(2, 167) = .18, p = .836$.

### 2.3 Discussion

Contrary to the predicted results, there were no effects found for the measures thought to be most related to stereotypes of biracial people. Warmth and competence were not affected by the race or the relationship between the roommate and the student. Perceptions of race and applications of Black stereotypes also did not differ by condition. The lack of effect for perceptions of race is surprising following the work of Ito et al. (2011) who found consistent race perception effects when they manipulated the racial context. The lack of results in this experiment may be due to the relatively small context provided to assist in evaluation. Participants in the studies by Ito and colleagues viewed a single image of a biracial target surrounded by images of either White or Black faces. It may be that the impact of context is more apparent when the biracial student is in the minority and their race is thus more salient. There were no race effects for several of the evaluative measures, and there were no relationship effects on any of the dependent measures. The main effect of race for identification and positive regard suggests that roommate race was the more salient cue in deciding participants’ attitudes towards the biracial target.

Participants’ identification with, and positive regard for the target were related to the race of the roommate. It is interesting to note that the most positive evaluations of the biracial target occurred when they had a Black roommate and the least positive evaluations occurred when the target had a White or biracial roommate. A similar pattern was found for identification with the target. This pattern is similar to that found by Ito and colleagues (2011) who showed that biracial targets facilitated responses to negative words the most when viewed in the context of White faces (suggesting they are perceived as being more Black than when viewed with biracial or Black faces). Although no explicit effects were found for perceptions of race, it may be that the same affective responses captured in Ito et al.’s (2011) studies were captured in this experiment. People who viewed the profile of a biracial student with a White roommate experienced a contrast effect where the non-Whiteness of the target was highlighted and detrimentally influenced positive regard for and identification with the target.

This experiment provided support for the theory that a person’s associates can influence how they are perceived. Although no effects were found for race perception, the race of a biracial
student’s roommate influenced how positively they were viewed and to what extent other students felt they identified with that student.
Chapter 3
Experiment 2

In Experiment 1, I tested the influence of racial context using photographs of biracial, Black, and White men. Participants were provided no details about their racial heritage, similar to real life interactions between strangers. In Experiment 2, participants will be informed of the racial heritage of the target student and their roommate. This is a process often used in research with biracial targets, and may create a different pattern of effects than was found in Experiment 1. Eliminating the uncertainty regarding the race of the target and associate may reduce the impact of racial context in person evaluations and increase the importance of relationship cues. As in Experiment 1, the biracial target either chose or was assigned a Black, White, or biracial roommate.

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

Participants were recruited online using Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). They were compensated $0.30 for their participation. Three-hundred fourteen people submitted this task for compensation on MTurk. Thirty participants had skipped more than half of the questions in the survey and were eliminated. Two-hundred eighty-four participants completed the experiment. One-hundred twenty-two participants were eliminated for failing one or more of the manipulation checks (accurate recall of the race of the student, their roommate, or the relationship between the target student and their roommate). Of the remaining 162 participants, 81 were male (50%), 80 were female (49.4%), and 1 person (0.6%) chose not to disclose their gender. Age ranged from 18 to 74 (\(M = 26.45, SD = 8.76\)).

3.1.2 Procedure

After selecting to complete this task on MTurk, participants followed a link to the experiment which was posted online using Survey Monkey. Participants were presented with a consent form, at the end of which they had the option to consent or choose not to participate. If they selected consent, they progressed in the survey. If they did not consent they were automatically directed to the debriefing page.
After consenting, participants viewed a profile of a university student. The profile contained demographic information, including a race item. As in Experiment 1, the student was biracial in all conditions and their roommate was Black, White or biracial (Black/White). To manipulate the race of the roommate, the roommate had checked the White or Black option, or in the biracial condition, they selected “other” and had written in “biracial Black/White”. The relationship between the roommates was manipulated in the same manner as in Experiment 1. The target student selected either the option that their roommate was assigned or that they chose to live together. The profile also contained a statement about the relationship between the target and his roommate and was similar to those used in Experiment 1.

After reading the student and roommate profile, participants completed the same dependent measures as in Experiment 1 (affect, warmth and competence, Black stereotypical traits, liking, similarity, and inclusion of other-in-self, and demographics). Participants also answered three questions that served as manipulation checks. They were required to indicate the race of the target, the race of his roommate and the relationship between the two students. They completed each of these tasks in two ways, first by completing a fill-in-the-blank task for each manipulation check, followed by a second check in which they were asked to select the appropriate race or relationship from a drop-down menu. After completing these measures, participants were presented with a debriefing form, and a second consent option. At this point, they had the option to withdraw their consent without penalty.

3.2 Results

I conducted Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) on racial perceptions of the biracial target as well as on evaluations of the biracial target (perceptions of warmth and competence, identification with the target, positive attitudes towards the target). I did not include an analysis of the difficulty participants had identifying the race of the target because all participants were informed of the target’s and roommate’s race.

3.2.1 Black Stereotypical Traits

First, I tested the importance of roommate relationship and race on Black stereotypical ratings of the target student. There was no effect of roommate relationship, $F(1, 156) = 1.57, p = .212$. Targets who chose their roommate ($M = 1.89, SD = .64$) were stereotyped similarly as targets
who were assigned their roommate, \((M = 2.04, SD = .79)\). There was a significant effect of roommate race, \(F(2, 156) = 3.30, p = .039\). The target student was stereotyped more when he had a biracial roommate \((M = 2.16, SD = .80)\) than when he had Black roommate \((M = 1.82, SD = .67, p = .033)\) (i.e., they saw the biracial target as more stereotypically Black when he had a biracial vs. a Black roommate). There were no stereotyping differences between targets who had a Black vs. White \((M = 1.96, SD = .66)\) roommate \((p = .584)\) or targets who had a White vs. biracial roommate \((p = .382)\). There was no interaction between roommate relationship and roommate race, \(F(2, 156) = .67, p = .512\).

### 3.2.2 Perceptions of Warmth

I next analyzed perceptions of target warmth to determine the importance of roommate race and. There was a significant main effect of roommate relationship, \(F(1, 156) = 31.71, p < .001\) such that students who chose their roommate \((M = 5.52, SD = .90)\) were viewed as significantly warmer than students who were assigned their roommate, \((M = 4.78, SD = .95)\). There was no effect of race, \(F(2, 156) = 1.30, p = .275\). Students were perceived as similarly warm if they had a Black \((M = 5.23, SD = .96)\), White \((M = 4.97, SD = .88)\), or biracial \((M = 5.10, SD = .85)\) roommate. There was no significant interaction, \(F(2,156) = 1.06, p = .347\).

### 3.2.3 Perceptions of Competence

I then tested the influence of roommate relationship and race on perceptions of student competence. There was a significant main effect of relationship, \(F(1, 156) = 12.83, p < .001\). Students who chose their roommate \((M = 4.49, SD = .66)\) were perceived as significantly more competent than students who were assigned their roommate \((M = 5.02, SD = .086)\). There were no effects of roommate race on perceptions of competence, \(F(2, 156) = .38, p = .683\). Students who had a Black \((M = 5.28, SD = .89)\), White \((M = 5.23, SD = .72)\), or biracial \((M = 5.19, SD = .77)\) roommate were perceived as equally competent. There was no interaction effect of roommate relationship and race, \(F(2, 156) = 1.75, p = .177\).

### 3.2.4 Identification with the Target Student

The measures of self-and-other overlap and similarity were highly correlated (Pearson’s \(r\) \((160) = .742, p < .001)\). I combined these variables to create one measure of the degree to which the participant identified with the target student. I conducted an ANOVA to determine the
importance of roommate relationship and race on the degree to which the participant identified with the target student. There was no significant main effect of relationship, although there was a trend for participants to identify more with those who chose their roommate ($M = 3.86, SD = 1.19$) than those who were assigned their roommate ($M = 3.55, SD = 1.12$), $F(1, 156) = 3.02, p = .084$. There was no effect of roommate race on identification, $F(2, 156) = .063, p = .939$. Students with Black ($M = 3.73, SD = 1.23$), White ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.03$), and biracial ($M = 3.66, SD = 1.18$) roommates were identified equally with the target student. There was no interaction of race and relationship, $F(2, 156) = .113, p = .893$.

### 3.2.5 Positive Attitudes towards the Target Student

Liking and positive affect were highly correlated (Pearson’s $r(160) = .665, p < .001$). I combined these two variables to create a composite variable of positive attitudes towards the target student. I tested the influence of roommate relationship and race on positive attitudes. There was a significant main effect of roommate relationship, $F(1, 156) = 10.60, p = .001$. Students who chose their roommates ($M = 5.57, SD = .81$) were evaluated more positively than students who were assigned a roommate ($M = 5.10, SD = .99$). There was no effect of roommate race on positive attitudes towards the student, $F(2, 156) = .368, p = .693$. Students with a Black ($M = 5.38, SD = .96$), White ($M = 5.31, SD = .94$), or biracial ($M = 5.25, SD = .89$) roommate were viewed equally positively. There was no interaction between roommate relationship and roommate race, $F(2, 156) = .038, p = .962$.

### 3.3 Discussion

I was interested in testing the influence of mono vs. biracial roommates on perceptions of biracial target students. In Experiment 1 I tested this using a photographic manipulation of race; in Experiment 2 I tested this using a demographic questionnaire. Despite there being no effect for stereotyping in Experiment 1, Experiment 2 showed that roommate race influenced the degree to which participants applied Black stereotypes to the biracial students. Interestingly, this effect did not display the expected pattern. Biracial students with a Black or White roommate were not stereotyped differently, but students with a biracial roommate were stereotyped as more Black than those with a Black roommate. One possible explanation for this effect can be found within an aversive racism framework.
Aversive racism attempts to resolve two conflicting phenomena: the prevalent goal of equality in Western societies, and the unconscious negative beliefs held by advantaged group members towards historically disadvantaged groups (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Although people know they should not be prejudiced, most people have prejudiced beliefs, at least to some extent. People are then torn between the societal pressure not to act prejudiced and the prejudice they carry. This leads to the phenomenon of aversive racism wherein people will act in a prejudiced manner when they can justify the decision in some other manner (e.g., it’s not because he’s Black, it’s because he’s not qualified), but will suppress their prejudice when it would be an overtly prejudiced action (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002; Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2009). In terms of the stereotyping that occurred in this experiment, it is possible that participants were conscious of the stereotypicality of the traits they were rating. In that case, they may have felt that rating the target more highly on these traits when they had a Black roommate would be an overt expression of prejudice. However, when the target had a biracial roommate the prejudice would not be as overt and was thus perceived as more acceptable to participants.

The effect of roommate race on stereotyping was the only circumstance in which roommate race influenced any of the dependent variables. However, roommate relationship influenced evaluations of warmth, competence, identification and positive regard. When the target chose his roommate he was perceived as warmer, more competent, and with more positive regard; there was a trend for identification in the same direction. These effects suggest that the relationship was more salient (vs. race) to participants as they made their evaluations of the target student.
Chapter 4
General Discussion

These two experiments used a similar design to determine the influence of racial context in evaluations of biracial people. Each experiment tested a different method of manipulating racial context. Experiment 1 used a photographic manipulation and Experiment 2 used a narrative manipulation. The results from Experiment 1 and 2 were drastically different. When a photograph was used, racial context effects occurred, but when a narrative manipulation was used, relationship context effects occurred. As well as differing in the means by which race was manipulated, the two experiments differed in the information that was available to participants. Participants in Experiment 1 were not provided any details of the target or roommate’s race, other than what they observed in the photographs. However, in Experiment 2, participants were informed of both the target and the roommate’s race. The fact that the two experiments produced different patterns of results might be attributable to the different level of information provided in each study.

In Experiment 1 participants were required to racially categorize the target student without information about his race. In this circumstance, the race of the target’s roommate seems to be more important for informing evaluations of the target. In Experiment 2 participants were aware of the race of the target and therefore did not need to reference the race of the target’s roommate to inform their categorization of the target and the subsequent evaluations. There was a strong pattern for students who chose their roommate to be evaluated more positively (warmer, more competent, etc.) which seems to indicate that participants referenced the relationship between the target and his roommate for cues about how to evaluate him.

It may be the case that the different pattern in results can be attributed to the different information available to participants and the subsequently different cues they use to inform their evaluation of the target. However, a second possibility is that the difference in presentation of racial information is directly attributable for the different outcomes. There are differences in how words and pictures are processed. One of the common findings is that pictures are remembered more easily than words, likely because they are processed on two levels: That of the picture and the associated word (Brady, Konkle, Alvarez & Olivia, 2008; Paivio & Csapo, 1973). This phenomenon could explain the difference in what factors were salient in Experiments 1 and
2. When participants viewed an image of the target and his roommate, they processed race in both its visual and narrative form. However, when presented with only the written racial manipulation, race was processed in only one manner. The relationship manipulation was lengthier (a paragraph) than the one item race manipulation and was likely processed more than the race item. The differences in the effects of visual vs. narrative manipulations may be accounted for by this differential processing.

There may also be other factors that influenced the outcomes. The visual stimuli were used with student participants in a laboratory (i.e., controlled) setting. Participants in the second experiment were not necessarily university students and were able to participate on any computer in the location of their choosing. These two factors may have confounded the results, as either one might be responsible for the different responses to the race and relationship manipulations. A replication of both experiments should be conducted using the same population and the same environment.

I was unable to provide evidence for the theory that the difficulty associated with categorizing a biracial target is responsible for the stereotyping of biracial people. In Experiment 1, there was no correlation between participants’ self-reported difficulty in deciding race and their evaluations of the student on measures of warmth, competency, identification and positive regard. It may be that more subtle measures of cognitive capacity could provide evidence for this theory. If the time it took participants to select from a menu of possible racial labels was measured, it would provide a reaction time measure that could be analyzed as an indicator of the cognitive load required to make such a decision. Participants who take longer to make a decision could be assumed to have required more cognitive resources to make their decision, and thus the decision could be classified as being more or less difficult. This possibility could not be explored in Experiment 2 because the experiment necessitated providing participants with the target’s racial composition.

Neither experiment produced the expected pattern of stereotyping. Experiment 1 produced no stereotyping effect and Experiment 2 produced stereotyping in the opposite direction than was expected. The influence of context in the stereotyping of biracial people should be explored in future experiments using different context manipulations. One manipulation that could be applied is the same one used by Wittenbrink and colleagues (2001) for which participants viewed
Black and White people either in the context of a church or a wall covered with spray-paint. It might be that the same contexts that influence how Black people are perceived influence how biracial people are perceived.

It is also worth exploring how the context influences behavioural outcomes. There were no behavioural measures included in the current experiments, and thus we cannot ascertain from these studies whether differences in stereotyping and evaluations of biracial people influence participants’ behavioural intentions towards them. It is worth exploring whether the context in which people view a biracial participant influences their desire to engage in conversation or future contact with that person. It would also be worth exploring whether racial context influences other outcome measures that have been previously related to biraciality, such as job-interview outcomes (Remedios, et al., 2012).

**Conclusion**

Although neither study produced the hypothesized results, they both demonstrated the importance of context in person evaluations. Experiment 1 provided a set of results that are consistent with contrast effects found by Ito and colleagues (2011) and failed to produce evidence for the assimilation effects that were expected based on the stigma-by-association literature (Neuberg et al., 1994; Sigelman et al., 1991). Experiment 2 failed to replicate these results, and instead presented a new series of results that highlight the importance of relationships in how a person with an ambiguous identity is perceived. What these experiments demonstrate most clearly is the importance of continuing to explore the influence of context in perceptions of biracial people.
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