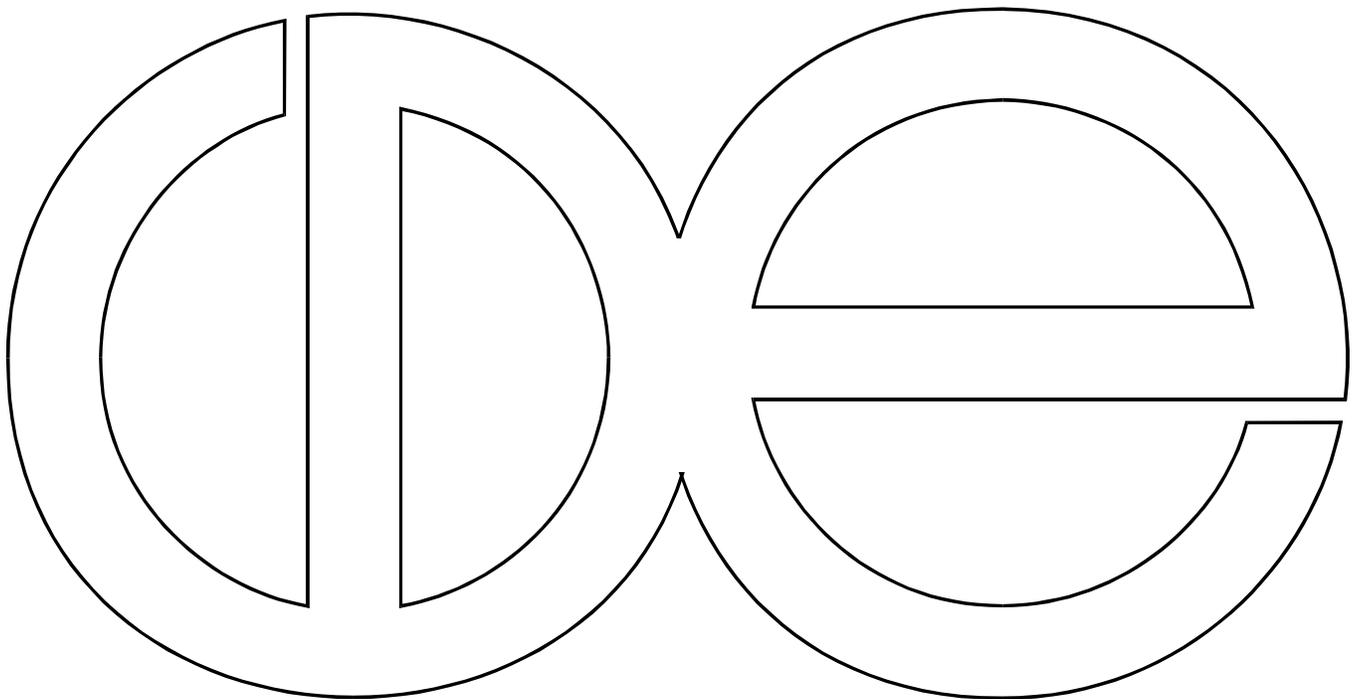


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**The “One-Drop Rule”: How Salient is Hypodescent
for Multiracial Americans with African American Ancestry?**

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ABSTRACT

The “one-drop rule” has historically been used to classify individuals with any African American ancestry as black. There is reason to think, however, that this “rule” might be weakening. Using the May 1995 Current Population Survey’s Race and Ethnicity Supplement, I investigate the salience of the “one-drop rule” for multiracial Americans with some African American ancestry who are forced to choose a single race on a survey. I find that the power of the “one-drop rule” varies significantly by the reason the respondent identified as multiracial, the racial context of the region, and the home context. Its salience varies most, however, across different ancestry groups, with those who choose a “black-American Indian” identity most likely to select a black monoracial identity, while other groups are significantly less likely to choose a black identity.

The “black” category has historically been the most rigidly defined racial category in the United States, with strictly maintained boundaries. The “one-drop rule,” or hypodescent, made this rigidity possible. Everyone with “one drop of black blood” (in other words, one African American ancestor) was considered black. Because this rule was strictly enforced in both legal and popular settings by those outside and inside the black community, researchers and the public alike have often assumed that multiracial Americans with some African American ancestry have unproblematic, unambiguous black identities.

New developments in research on multiracial identity have made it clear that it may be unwise to assume that the “one-drop rule” is still rigidly enforced, or that identity choices are unproblematic for multiracial Americans with African American ancestry. The fluidity of racial identity, especially for individuals who identify as multiracial at least some of the time, is becoming clear (see for example Harris and Sim 2002). As Brunnsma and Rockquemore (2002) point out, this fluidity is changing our idea of what the category “black” means. Research into the construction of “black” identity is also meaningful for those who wish to understand racial identity more generally, since this category has been the most inflexibly defined of any American racial category. Changes in the boundaries of the black racial category might well herald changes in the overall structure of racial categories and their boundaries.

Much of the research that has been done in the past on similar topics has focused on the children of mixed-race couples, examining the race asserted by or assigned to the child. This study takes a different approach; instead, it begins with a sample of individuals who have chosen to self-identify as multiracial. Using the Current Population Survey’s Race and Ethnicity Supplement from May 1995, this paper will test the salience of the “one-drop rule” by considering the racial identification of individuals on both a survey question that allows

multiracial identification, and a forced-choice question that limits each respondent to a single race selection. For those 1,165 respondents who self-identify as multiracial and part-African American, I will compare their multiracial identity to their single race identity, to explore whether most multiracial Americans with African American ancestry feel obliged to choose a singular black identity on the forced-choice race question. I will then consider individual and social factors that might be related to the selection of a racial identity.

Literature Review

Although African Americans are the least likely of any American minority group to intermarry, rates of intermarriage for all racial and ethnic groups have been increasing steadily since 1960. In 1994, 3.2 percent of all African American wives and 6.6 percent of all African American husbands were married to a spouse of another race (Sandefur et al 2001), and the numbers are even higher for young couples (Qian 1997) and those with high levels of education (Farley 1999). The growing population of intermarried couples has led to a “biracial baby boom,” with the numbers of biracial births increasing at a faster rate than the number of monoracial births (Root 1996). The 2000 Census has focused a great deal of attention on this growing population, since it is the first recent Census allowing self-identification with multiple races. The Census data shows that the multiracial population is indeed a sizable one, with 6.8 million people listing 2 or more races (Jones and Smith 2001).² Of this multiracial population, 25.8 percent name African American as one of their races (approximately 1.75 million people). Davis (1991) argues that the number of individuals who *could* claim a mixed racial heritage is really much higher. He reasons that, of people who generally identify as African American, at

² The most common racial combinations found were “white and some other race,” “white and American Indian,” “white and Asian,” and “white and black.”

least three-fourths have some white ancestry, and as many as one-fourth have some American Indian ancestry. Most of these people do not identify as multiracial, he argues, because they are following the “one-drop rule.”

There is a long history in the United States of the “one-drop rule,” or hypodescent, which asserts that anyone with any African American ancestry is African American. Davis (1991) demonstrates that the “one-drop rule” has been used as the popular standard, as well as the legal one, for many years, and was initially used to define all mixed-race children as black in order to maintain the color line of slavery. Children of slaves, therefore, were always considered black, even if the majority of the child’s ancestors were white (see also Perlmann and Waters 2002).

Hypodescent has historically been used both by outsiders to assign individuals to the African American racial group and by insiders to assert an African American identity. Davis explains that the African American community fully adopted the “one-drop rule” after Reconstruction, embracing the idea that all individuals with some “black blood” were part of the African American community, and rejecting the earlier divisions between “mulattoes” and “pure blacks” (see also Rockquemore and Brunson 2002 and Williamson 1980). Although light-skinned blacks often had an intermediate status between blacks and whites before Reconstruction, the widespread racism and discrimination faced by all nonwhites after Reconstruction led to a strengthening group identity and an emphasis on black solidarity.

There is substantial evidence that Davis was right about the power of the “one-drop rule” inside and outside the black community. By 1945, for example, when Drake and Cayton wrote their famous piece on Chicago, *Black Metropolis*, the authors considered it an accepted fact that multiracial children with one black parent were “of course” considered black. Davis’ argument is also supported by the fact that the change from interviewer-assigned race to self-identification

in the 1960 Census had little effect on the size of the black population. Blacks were apparently using the same “one-drop rule” for self-identification that interviewers had been instructed to use in earlier Censuses.

More recent history has, in some ways, reinforced the strength of the “one-drop rule.” The Black Power movement, for example, emphasized the positive aspects of black identity, and placed a great deal of pressure on multiracial individuals to fully embrace a black identity (and consequently distance themselves from other possible identities) (Brown 2001; Williamson 1980). DeBose and Winters (2003) note that today, some members of the African American community consider it a betrayal for a biracial person with African American descent to claim a biracial identity, since they believe it “amounts ... to removing themselves from a perceived inferior race to reap societal benefits” (p. 129).

On the other hand, there is good reason to think that the “one-drop rule” might be less powerful today than it was in the past. Several studies have found that biracial respondents, especially young people, prefer a biracial identity to the single-race identity that the “one-drop rule” enforces. Korgen (1998), for example, found in her interviews with 64 black-white biracial individuals that those born before the civil rights movement generally asserted a monoracial African American identity, in keeping with Davis’ argument. She also found, however, that the members of the younger generation of biracial individuals she interviewed were more likely to assert a biracial identity, or both a black and biracial identity. The majority of the younger respondents valued their biracial identity and believed that the benefits of a biracial identity outweighed the costs. Although they did admit to having trouble “fitting in,” consistent with the marginal man description of multiracial identity crisis outlined by Park (1928), Korgen’s respondents also felt that their biracial identity gave them a broader perspective (as Park also

suggested). They were unwilling to give up their biracial identity in order to gain the advantage of “fitting in” with one group.

Rockquemore and Brunnsma’s (2002) study supports the idea that many young people value their biracial identity. They interviewed college students with one black and one white parent, and more than half of them identified as “biracial.” Rockquemore and Brunnsma described their identity as a “border identity,” one which “highlights an individual’s existence between two socially distinct races” (42). Almost 20 percent of their sample did, however, choose just one race (a “singular” identity), with most of those individuals choosing to identify as African American, and a few identifying as white.³ Others in their sample either had a “protean” identity, one which shifts according to situational factors, or a “transcendent” identity, in which respondents refused to categorize themselves racially, rejecting racial distinctions as false categories. The authors found that the racial identity of biracial white/black college students is related to the composition of their social networks and the interactions that students had with others (for example, whether or not their chosen identity was validated). Based on their surveys and interviews, the authors concluded that the “one-drop rule” is “headed for a slow and painful death” (117) as more young people choose identities freely rather than feeling constrained by a singular identity.

Other authors, such as Spickard (1992), have agreed that there is growing acceptance for multiracial identities, and this should make it easier for all multiracial Americans to maintain a “border” identity and reject the “one-drop rule.” Less research has been done, however, on these trends for multiracial Americans with one black parent and another non-white, non-black parent. One of the few studies that compared biracial individuals with one black parent and one parent of

³ We would expect few people from this sample to identify as white, however, since the sample was drawn only from individuals who had marked “black,” “other race,” or no race on another survey.

other races is DeBose and Winters (2003). They found that there are some interesting differences between biracial black-white and biracial black-nonwhite respondents. In their Southern California sample of 15 biracial individuals with one African American parent, they found that black-white respondents were more likely to emphasize their black identity and its value than black-nonwhite respondents (although both groups generally expressed an identity that included both parents' heritage).

When forced to choose a single race, black-Asian individuals often choose "black" as their single-race identity (Hall 1992). However, this pattern depends on age, level of exposure to black culture, and other contextual factors (Hall 1992, Xie and Goyette 1997). Williams and Thornton (1998) found that, although their black-Asian respondents felt that the "one-drop rule" created pressure to be especially aware of their black heritage, at the same time, their respondents asserted multiracial identities, resisting the assignment of a single racial identity. Williams-León (2003) found several authors who advocated the use of the "one-drop rule" by black-Asian individuals, since they are perceived as less "accepted" than their Asian-white counterparts, and could therefore benefit from unity with the black community.

The identity choices of black-American Indian individuals have also received less attention than black-white individuals. Although there is good historical evidence that black-American Indian intermarriage was fairly common at some times and places (see, for example, Perdue 1979 and Mandell 1998), less is known about how the children of those unions self-identified. Interviews such as those found in Brooks (1998) make it clear that the history of black and American Indian relations has not been smooth, but has instead been a contradictory mix of competition, racism, and acceptance. Although he finds evidence that blacks (especially in the Jim Crow era) might have emphasized their American Indian heritage in order to refute

common stereotypes and associate themselves with another, less persecuted group, he also finds respondents who emphasize the great distance between the two groups and the unwillingness of some American Indian communities to accept those with visible black heritage. As Baird-Olson (2003) points out, these identity issues are further complicated by the many different ways that American Indian identity can be defined (including, for example, tribal membership, “blood quantum” or number of American Indian ancestors, and residence in an urban or reservation setting). Eschbach (1995) used the 1990 Census to show that children with one American Indian parent were racially identified as American Indian in less than half the cases, although he found higher rates of American Indian identification in a few places where intermarriage rates were low. This suggests that racial context might have an effect on the identification of black-American Indian individuals, although that group is not separated out by Eschbach.

Black-Hispanic individuals have been the subject of very little research on racial identity choices, due to the nature of the race and ethnicity questions on most surveys. Since Hispanic identity and racial identity are usually included in different questions, those who choose a Hispanic identity and a black identity are generally not considered “multiracial.” Those studies that have been done have shown that those who identify as black and Hispanic often have lower socioeconomic status and high levels of segregation compared to those who identify as white and Hispanic (Murguia and Telles 1996; Denton and Massey 1989), but issues of identity are less clear. Rodriguez (2000) points out that Hispanic identity and racial identity overlap for many Hispanic Americans, and that many Hispanics choose “other race” on surveys because their identities are not well represented by the current racial and ethnic identity questions. Recent research, such as Harris and Sim (2002) has pointed out the need for a single ethnicity/race question to consider this identity issue. I will address this question in more detail below.

These studies suggest that the “one-drop rule” might be losing its position as the standard for the racial identity of those with some African American heritage, and that the effects of contextual factors might be growing (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2002). As Davis (1991) points out, there are many other ways that the United States could view the identity of mixed-race individuals.⁴ In fact, he points out that the “one-drop rule” is used only in the United States; other countries present alternatives for classifying mixed race individuals. Racially mixed individuals in different parts of the world have often been treated as a group separate from either parent group, with a different social status than either group. Clearly, in many other settings, mixed-race identities are validated, and individuals are not asked to select one “singular” racial identity (see, for example, Nobles 2002 and Daniel 2003).

Recent research on the “one-drop rule” in the United States has been limited by the difficulty of locating a large sample of the multiracial population. Most studies of biracial or multiracial individuals are based on small, local samples, or samples that include only those who have strong feelings about their biracial identity (and are therefore willing to answer an advertisement for biracial interview respondents, for example). It is therefore difficult to tell if the conclusions of the research would be robust in large, nationally representative samples. It is possible to test this question with the 1995 Current Population Survey Race and Ethnicity Supplement. With this data, we are able to see how individuals identify when they are forced to choose one racial identity, and how they identify when allowed to select more than one race. Since we can compare the responses of each individual, we can test the “one-drop rule”

⁴ Indeed, Davis notes that the United States was not always united behind the idea of hypodescent. Parts of the U.S., especially Louisiana, were very reluctant to adopt a “one-drop rule,” since they had a long history of considering mixed-race individuals as an intermediate category between whites and African Americans.

hypothesis: do multiracial Americans with some African American ancestry consistently choose “black” as their single race identity?⁵

Data

The Current Population Survey’s May 1995 Race and Ethnicity Supplement is a large, nationally representative sample of households (N=124,534). Before the Supplement was administered (in some cases, months before) each respondent was asked in their initial CPS survey to indicate whether or not he or she was Hispanic and identify with a single race. The May 1995 CPS Supplement was designed to test several questions. The first was whether Hispanic identity should be determined in a separate ethnicity question, as it was on the 1990 and 2000 Censuses, or whether “Hispanic” should be included in the list of possible races in the race question. Half the households were therefore given a racial identity question that included Hispanic in the list of races, while the other half were given a separate Hispanic identity question. The second issue being tested was whether people should be allowed to identify as multiracial. Thus for half of the households in the May 1995 CPS, the list of races included an option called “Multiracial.” If this was selected, the respondents were asked in a follow-up question to select the specific races with which they identified, and to explain why they identified as multiracial. These two questions were tested in all combinations, resulting in 4 panels of about 15,000 households each for the May 1995 CPS Supplement:

⁵ Of course, there is an equally important portion of the “one-drop rule” hypothesis that cannot be tested with this data (or, indeed, most survey data). I cannot answer the question: “do outside observers assign multiracial Americans with some African American ancestry to a monoracial “black” identity?” See Harris’ (2002) study on the relationships between observer characteristics and the races that they assign to others for one of the few available studies of observed race.

Panel 1: separate Hispanic question, no Multiracial category,
Panel 2: separate Hispanic question, Multiracial category,
Panel 3: no separate Hispanic question, no Multiracial category,
Panel 4: no separate Hispanic question, Multiracial category.

Even the individuals who were not given a multiracial option, however, were later asked if they would have liked a multiracial option to better describe their racial background.⁶ Those who said that they would have chosen a multiracial option were then asked to identify the other races with which they identified. Therefore, we can identify multiracial respondents for the whole dataset.⁷ The dataset includes more than 6,500 multiracial respondents, 1,165 of whom identified as multiracial with some African American heritage. For complete descriptive statistics on the variables used in this analysis, see Appendix A.

Using this data, I first show descriptive statistics for how multiracial individuals with some African American heritage identified when forced to select one race. I then use logistic regression to investigate some of the factors that may be related to the selection of a black racial identity versus any other single race. To help elaborate on these findings, I conclude with a multinomial logit model. Multinomial logit models are appropriate for nominal outcomes, such as the selection of a single race from a list. The effects of the independent variables are allowed to differ for each outcome with this model, which makes it ideal for understanding how individual and contextual factors are related to the selection of any given racial category. Predicted probabilities are presented in order to facilitate comparisons across outcomes. For a more detailed description of multinomial logit models, including the calculation of predicted probabilities, see Long (1997).

⁶ The exact question was: “In addition to [the race the respondent named] would you like to have had a “Multiracial” category on the list I read earlier to better describe yourself?”

⁷ For more information on the May 1995 CPS Race and Ethnicity Supplement, see Tucker et al (1996).

Results

Descriptives

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Table 1 shows that people who list African American as part of their multiracial heritage have interesting patterns of self-identification on the standard CPS race question, which forces respondents to choose one race. Almost all respondents who list an “American Indian and black” identity or an “other race and black” identity select black when forced to choose one race. On the other hand, less than 70% of those who identify as “Hispanic and black” identify as black when choosing one race, even though “Hispanic” was not an option on the standard CPS race question.⁸ Less than half of those who list “white and black” or “Asian and black” select black when forced to choose one race. For those who choose “white and black,” white is the next popular identity choice, followed by an “other race” identity. For those who identify as “Asian and black,” only about 25% choose an Asian identity, and almost 20% identify as “other race” (with a small group identifying as white). Only 44% of those who list 3 or more races (including black) choose African American for their monoracial identity, with most others choosing white or “other race.” Clearly, not all respondents who indicate that they are part African American are following the “one-drop rule” when asked to select a single race. This pattern depends heavily, however, on which races the multiracial individual selects. Hypodescent appears to be a very strong influence for those with black and American Indian ancestry, and a much weaker one for those who indicate black and Asian or white heritage.

⁸ Hispanic was listed as an option on the supplemental race question for only half of the respondents who completed the supplement. The other half were asked about their Hispanic background in a separate question, and therefore we cannot determine whether those who chose “Hispanic” and “black” in separate questions were thinking of themselves as multiracial.

This pattern varies by age, as we would expect from previous research, which has suggested that the “one-drop rule” had a more powerful influence before the civil rights movement. First, as we see in Table 1a, there are fewer individuals in the group born before 1965 who assert any multiracial heritage, even though there are more people in the sample born before 1965 (0.77 percent of the individuals born before 1965 in the total sample list more than one race including African American, and 1.14 percent of individuals born after 1965 do). There are two explanations for this higher rate of multiracial identification: either there has been a significant increase in the number of multiracial individuals born in the last 30 years (and there has certainly been some increase), or there are more individuals in the older generation than in the younger generation who could identify as multiracial, but choose not to. It is likely that both of these mechanisms are at work.

[TABLE 1A ABOUT HERE]

Second, for all multiracial categories, individuals born before 1965 are more likely to select black as their monoracial identity than those born after 1965. Although some of these results have to be viewed with caution due to the small sample sizes involved, purely descriptive evidence does support the hypothesis that the “one-drop rule” is less powerful in the determination of racial identity for multiracial individuals in younger generations.

Differences in the power of the “one-drop rule” might be strongly related to the reasons that respondents give for identifying as multiracial. For example, individuals with parents of two different races might be less likely to voluntarily exclude part of their heritage on forced-choice questions, and so might resist giving a standard response to race questions (instead choosing an option like “other race”). Individuals who are identifying as multiracial only for the more generationally distant reason of having multiracial ancestry might be more influenced by the

“one-drop rule” when selecting a single race. Although the CPS did not ask respondents to describe their family racial background, it did ask everyone who identified as multiracial the reasons why they did so. The responses were grouped into four categories: because the respondent’s parents were from different racial groups, because the respondent’s ancestors were from different racial groups, because the group that the respondent belongs to is mixed, or other reasons. Respondents were allowed to select more than one reason for their multiracial identification.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The results, divided by group, can be seen in Table 2. This table shows us that those who identify as “black and white” or “black and Hispanic” are most likely to say that their parents are different races. Those who identified as “black and other race” and “black and American Indian” are least likely to indicate they have parents of multiple races. Mixed ancestry was most likely to be given as the reason for multiracial identification by those who selected three or more races, while those who were “black and Hispanic” were most likely to say that they identified as multiracial because the group they belonged to was mixed. This table shows that the groups that are least likely to say they have parents of different races (black-American Indian and black-other race) are also the most likely to identify as black on forced choice questions.

Logistic Regressions

In order to consider these questions in more detail, we need to better understand why people self-identify in the ways that they do. One of the factors that people might take into consideration when they decide which single race to choose is their reason for identifying as multiracial, as discussed above. Other factors might also be related to the selection of a single

race on a survey, such as age, region of the country, level of education, socioeconomic status and foreign birth. Past research, such as Brown (2001) and Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002), has suggested that the racial context in which an individual is located might also be particularly important for identity. Therefore, I have also included the percent of the state that was black (in 1995) as an indicator of regional context. The race of the respondent's spouse and the use of Spanish in the home are included as indicators of household context.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 3 shows logistic regressions where the dependent variable is a 1 if the multiracial respondent chose black as their single race in the standard CPS question and 0 if the respondent chose any other single race.⁹ This table therefore explores the association between individual characteristics and the use of the “one-drop rule” in selecting a racial category.¹⁰ Model 1 simply shows us that, compared to individuals who list black plus two or more other races, black-American Indians and black-others are significantly more likely to list their race as “black” if forced to choose one race. The other racial combinations do not differ significantly from those selecting three or more races (the reference category, as well as the modal category).

Model 2 incorporates the information given by the respondent for why he or she chose to list multiple races, as well as an interaction between Hispanic identity on the initial CPS survey

⁹ It is important to note, however, although I am considering the single-race response of the individual (as black or another single race) as the dependent variable, this survey item *preceded* the item that allowed multiracial response (sometimes by months). Similarly, although we can think of the individual's reasons for identifying as multiracial as potentially causally prior to actually identifying as multiracial, in this survey, the respondents were asked for their reasons only *after* they chose to identify as multiracial. It is therefore possible that the individual's single race response had an influence on their multiple race response, and that their multiple race response influenced the reasons they gave for identifying as multiracial. It is important to remember that the models shown are only evidence of association, not evidence of causation.

¹⁰ These models also include dummy variables indicating which panel of questions the respondent received and a dummy variable indicating whether or not the supplement was answered by another member of the household (coefficients not shown).

and the selection of a biracial “black-other” identity.¹¹ Although only 13 of the 309 people who identified as “black-other race” self-identified as Hispanic on the initial survey, those who did were significantly less likely to select a black single-race identity. Those who self-identified as “black-other” and non-Hispanic were very likely to choose black as their single race, suggesting that the attachment to the “other race” identity is fairly weak for those identify as non-Hispanic, but stronger for those who identify as Hispanic.

When respondents were asked why they identified as multiracial,¹² those who identified as multiracial because of a racially mixed ancestry (compared to those who did not select this reason for identifying as multiracial) were more likely to choose black as their single race, possibly because this answer is identifying those people discussed by Davis (1991) who *can* identify as multiracial, but *usually* select an African American identity. The more generationally recent reason for choosing a multiracial identity (having parents of different races) does not have a significant effect on single race identification, nor does the most generationally distant reason (belonging to a group that is mixed).¹³

Model 3 adds in controls for generation and regional context. The generation difference suggested by table 1a is supported by the finding that those who were born before 1965 (those

¹¹ I also considered an interaction between Hispanic identification on the initial survey and identification as black-Hispanic on the supplement. The variable was not useful, however, since everyone who identified as black-Hispanic on the supplement but non-Hispanic on the initial interview chose black as their single race in the initial interview.

¹² It is important to remember that respondents could choose more than one reason for identifying as multiracial.

¹³ Some have suggested that those with multiracial parents might differ significantly from the other two groups. Most past research has been done exclusively on this group, since most studies of identity selected respondents based on their parents’ races. Models (not shown, available on request) that limited the sample to those who identified themselves as having parents of different races demonstrated that most of the independent variables have a virtually identical relationship to self-identification when compared to Table 3. The exceptions were that no regional differences were significant for this group, and that respondents with more education or with low income had a higher likelihood of identifying as black. While SES effects are not significant for the whole sample, therefore, education and income have opposing effects when the sample is limited to individuals with parents of different races.

over age 30) are significantly more likely to select a black identity.¹⁴ This relationship becomes insignificant, however, once control variables are included in the model (more specifically, it becomes insignificant once education is included in the model). As we see in model 4, which includes all the control variables, the effects of the individual level variables are minimal. Gender and education level have no significant relationships with identifying as black on the initial survey. Foreign birth and family income also have no significant effects.

In the final model, the relationship between racial identity and racial context is clear; those who live in a state with a large black population are significantly more likely to self-identify as black when forced to choose a single race. Even controlling for this effect, individuals from the West are less likely to choose black as their single racial identification, compared to those living in the Midwest. This suggests that there are some racial climate factors that are not captured by mere numbers.

Those who speak Spanish at home are less likely to identify as solely black, suggesting that the home ethnic and linguistic context is also very important in the self-identification of multiracial individuals.¹⁵ The effect of language on identity remains even after foreign birth is included in the model. Another measure of home context is the race of the spouse (with those who have no spouse included in the reference category). As we would expect, those respondents whose spouse self-identifies as black are more likely to self-identify as black, while those with a non-black spouse are less likely to self-identify as black. Of course, the race of the spouse could also be simply another indicator of the respondent's chosen racial identity, since research on

¹⁴ Models that included age and age squared instead of generation did not find any significant linear or quadratic effect of age. Similarly, models that were limited to only adult respondents were calculated (since children did not answer the survey for themselves, and did not have valid educational attainment data), and these models (not shown) were virtually identical to the models shown.

¹⁵ An interaction between language use and Hispanic identity did not, however, yield any significant results.

adolescent multiracial Americans has found that youth feel pressure to develop peer and dating networks that reflect their own racial identification (Twine 1996; Korgen 1998).

Multinomial logit model

The logistic models described above help us to understand when the “one-drop rule” is most likely to be applied, but they do not allow us to explore which other races are being considered during the choice of a single racial identity. The multinomial logit model, shown in Appendix B, takes advantage of the full range of the data by evaluating all five racial identity categories presented to respondents (with black as the excluded category). Appendix B can be read as a set of logistic comparisons, with black as the reference category for each model.¹⁶ Since multinomial logit models contain so many comparisons, however, they can be difficult to interpret. Therefore, Table 4 presents predicted probabilities calculated from the multinomial logit models.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Table 4 shows the predicted probability of selecting a given single race identity. The first section of table 4 shows how these predicted probabilities vary according to the multiracial identity expressed in the supplemental survey. Those who self-identified as black-American Indian and black-other race (non-Hispanic) were extremely likely to identify as black, holding all other factors constant. Black-Asian respondents were also fairly likely to select a black identity (an 88% probability). Those who identified as black-white have a 78% predicted probability of identifying as black, but also a 15% predicted probability of identifying as white and a 7% predicted probability of choosing “other race.” The group with the lowest probability of

¹⁶ The extremely large standard errors for some coefficients result from the lack of cases in those cells, since no one who identified as black-other, for example, chose American Indian as their single racial identity.

selecting a black identity, black-other race (Hispanic) respondents, were quite likely to choose a white (10%) or “other race” (14%) identity. A similar pattern emerges for respondents who chose more than two races. Surprisingly, those who identified as black-Hispanic have a greater probability of identifying as white (10%) than “other race” (2%).

The first panel shows, therefore, that while predicted probabilities of choosing a black single race identity remain high for all categories, several categories also show significant probabilities for white and “other race” identification, especially for those who identify as black-white, black-other (Hispanic), and more than two races.

The second panel of Table 4 shows how the reasons for identifying as multiracial are associated with the single race chosen in the initial survey. Those who identified as multiracial solely because their parents were different races were quite likely (38% predicted probability) to identify as “other race,” rejecting the standard U.S. racial categories. Those who identified as multiracial solely because their ancestors were different races had a sizable probability of identifying as white or “other race” (more than 10% for each), but also had a higher probability of identifying as black than those who identified as multiracial because of parents of different races. The final reason, identifying as multiracial because the group is mixed, was associated with a fairly high probability of identifying as white (21%), and an intermediate level of identification with black (60%) and “other race” (18%).

Discussion

These results show mixed support for the hypothesis that the “one-drop rule” is no longer the dominant self-identification paradigm used by multiracial people with some African American heritage. When respondents are forced to choose a single race, black remains the

modal choice for all the multiracial groups. Tables 1, 3 and 4 show that some groups, such as black-American Indians, do tend to overwhelmingly identify as black in monoracial questions, suggesting that the “one-drop rule” still has the power to affect racial identities. Other groups do not follow the same pattern, however, and regional and home contextual factors have significant effects, so it is possible that hypodescent is influential only in certain situations. Table 2 suggests these patterns might be related to reasons for claiming a multiracial identity; the two groups most likely to identify as black (black-American Indians and black-Others) are also the two groups least likely to say they have parents of different races. The groups least likely to identify as black (black-Asians and black-whites) are much more likely to indicate they have parents of different races.

Table 3 tests the question of what individual factors are related to a multiracial individual’s choice of black as a monoracial identity, and they demonstrate that indeed the pattern varies significantly by multiracial groups. These findings suggest that hypodescent is no longer the nationwide standard, but instead has more power for some groups than others. Of course, with cross-sectional data it is impossible to tell whether these individual factors are causing racial identification, or whether the racial identification is causing these individual factors (for example, it is possible that multiracial people who do not want to be identified solely as black move to the West, and it is possible that living in the West has an effect on people’s ideas about racial identification).

The multinomial logit model in Appendix B and the predicted probabilities shown in table 4 make it clear that these patterns also vary across the possible racial identities. An unexpected finding in table 3, the lack of a significant relationship between having parents of different races and the choice of a black identity, is clarified in table 4, which shows that those

who have parents of different races are relatively unlikely to choose a white, American Indian, or Asian identity, but are quite likely to choose an “other race” identity, rejecting the standard racial options on surveys.

The controls I introduced to help understand the use of the “one-drop rule” did not, however, “explain away” the multiracial group differences in African American identity choices. Respondents who identify as “black and American Indian” continue to be the most likely to select black as their single racial identification even after controls for education, regional context, home context, age, and reason for multiracial identification. It seems most likely, therefore, that these group differences are created not by differences in average individual characteristics, but instead by the very different histories of these groups. Blacks and American Indians have a long history of intermarriage in the United States, so we may be seeing patterns of identification that have had a very long history in families (or we may be seeing more identification with ancestors who are quite far in the past, possibly due to more positive feelings about American Indian ancestors). Black and white intermarriage, on the other hand, has had a very different and more contentious history, so we would expect different forces to be at work for identity choices. The link between the history of intermarriage and racial identity is not direct, but it is meaningful, as is frequently reflected in the responses of interviewees. Williams and Thornton (1998) noted that their respondents were very aware of the histories of racial groups, and discussed the history of oppression for different groups when they explained their racial identity.

This research confirms, therefore, that there are some groups who seem to feel little obligation to follow the “one-drop rule” when identifying with a single race. While the “rule” appears to be weakening, however, there may be other factors at work that help to maintain its

power, such as the emphasis on solidarity within the black community, and historical differences in patterns of oppression and intermarriage. It is also important to remember that this is a conservative test of the strength of the “one-drop rule,” because if it is truly dominating our society today, many people who *could* claim a multiracial identity will instead simply identify as black, and will therefore not be included in survey data on multiracial Americans.

Conclusion

Black identity is more nuanced and complex than researchers have generally acknowledged. The assumption that black identity is a straightforward, unambiguous construct is clearly out of date; the “rule” that was once seen as a rigid boundary defining black identities has become increasingly flexible and fluid over time. Multiracial respondents with some African American ancestry help to illustrate this point; their identity choices range across all of the possibilities, and cannot easily be described by an identity “rule” such as the “one-drop rule.”

Future work, then, needs to continue to consider how multiracial Americans fit into the current racial identity constructs. Future surveys should learn from the May 1995 CPS Supplement and construct their questions regarding race with care. The CPS experiment teaches us that questions about racial identification must be carefully written and that, if researchers need multiple kinds of race data (such as multiracial information *and* a single racial identity for each respondent) it is far better to ask multiple race questions than to recode people into the necessary racial categories by some arbitrary algorithm.

Some of the questions this work raises can, of course, only be investigated using more in-depth interview studies. In order to better understand the meaning of the patterns seen here, we need more studies that compare the single and multiple race responses of individuals, and ask

respondents why they chose to identify as they did in each question. We also need to discover how the expressed race of survey respondents intersects with other meaningful aspects of race, such as the ways they are identified by others, in order to more fully understand what surveys are (and are not) capable of teaching us about racial identities.

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Table 1: The racial identification of multiracial individuals with African American heritage in the CPS

Racial Identification on the Supplement	Racial Identification on the Standard CPS question					TOTAL
	White	Black	American Indian	Asian	Other	
Black and one race						
White	32%	47%	1%	1%	20%	194
American Indian	2%	96%	1%	0%	1%	249
Asian	6%	47%	3%	25%	19%	32
Other	3%	92%	--	2%	4%	309
Hispanic*	27%	67%	--	--	7%	30
Black and two+ races	27%	44%	2%	3%	25%	351

*Hispanic was listed as a race only in supplement panels 3 & 4, given to half the sample

Table 1a: The racial identification of multiracial individuals with African American heritage, by age

Respondents born in 1965 or after (age 30 and younger)

Racial Identification on the Supplement	Racial Identification on the Standard CPS question					TOTAL
	White	Black	American Indian	Asian	Other	
Black and one race						
White	28%	45%	--	--	27%	139
American Indian	--	95%	2%	1%	2%	104
Asian	8%	44%	--	24%	24%	25
Other	3%	88%	--	4%	5%	123
Hispanic*	33%	62%	--	--	5%	21
Black and two+ races	22%	39%	3%	4%	32%	223

Respondents born before 1965 (over age 30)

Racial Identification on the Supplement	Racial Identification on the Standard CPS question					TOTAL
	White	Black	American Indian	Asian	Other	
Black and one race						
White	42%	51%	2%	2%	4%	55
American Indian	3%	96%	1%	--	1%	145
Asian	--	57%	14%	29%	--	7
Other	3%	94%	--	--	3%	186
Hispanic*	11%	78%	--	--	11%	9
Black and two+ races	35%	52%	2%	1%	11%	128

*Hispanic was listed as a race only in supplement panels 3 & 4, given to half the sample

Source: Calculations of the author using the May 1995 CPS Supplement

Table 2: Reasons for multiracial identification for individuals with African American heritage in the CPS

Racial Identification on the Supplement	Reason for Multiracial Identification			N
	Parents mixed	Ancestors mixed	Mixed group	
Black and one race				
White	69%	53%	46%	194
American Indian	31%	47%	31%	249
Asian	56%	56%	38%	32
Other	26%	34%	29%	309
Hispanic*	70%	43%	53%	30
Black and two+ races	63%	62%	49%	351

*Hispanic was listed as a race only in supplement panels 3 & 4, given to half the sample

Source: Calculations of the author using the May 1995 CPS Supplement

Table 3: Logistic regressions of the selection of Black as the single-race identification in the CPS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Multiracial groups				
Black-white	0.134 (0.185)	0.188 (0.188)	0.171 (0.191)	0.196 (0.202)
Black-American Indian	3.426*** (0.334)	3.453*** (0.339)	3.323*** (0.345)	3.158*** (0.357)
Black-Asian	0.116 (0.387)	0.124 (0.389)	0.032 (0.403)	0.057 (0.419)
Black-Other race	2.521*** (0.237)	2.949*** (0.281)	2.928*** (0.284)	2.774*** (0.294)
Black-Hispanic	0.626 (0.414)	0.780* (0.420)	0.817* (0.428)	0.924** (0.446)
Black-Other Race*Hispanic		-3.310*** (0.641)	-3.222*** (0.655)	-2.624*** (0.715)
Reasons for multiracial ID				
Multiracial because parents different races		-0.159 (0.200)	-0.072 (0.210)	-0.066 (0.220)
Multiracial because ancestors diff. races		0.524*** (0.197)	0.518** (0.202)	0.561*** (0.209)
Multiracial because group is mixed		-0.168 (0.195)	-0.140 (0.199)	-0.094 (0.207)
Controls				
Male			0.114 (0.158)	0.162 (0.165)
Born before 1965 (over age 30)			0.528*** (0.198)	0.475 (0.293)
Percent state black, 1995			1.456 (0.992)	1.828* (1.038)
South			-0.305 (0.248)	-0.377 (0.259)
Northeast			-0.544** (0.236)	-0.347 (0.252)
West			-0.602** (0.254)	-0.503* (0.261)
High school graduate				0.441 (0.357)
Some college				0.456 (0.355)
Bachelor's degree				0.421 (0.439)
Graduate school				-0.093 (0.558)
Spanish spoken at home				-1.450*** (0.427)
Non-black spouse				-0.653** (0.273)
Black spouse				1.763*** (0.637)
Foreign born				-0.436 (0.305)
Family income (14 cat.)				-0.026 (0.022)
Observations	1165	1165	1165	1165

Standard errors in parentheses * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

All models include dummy variables for panel of the CPS supplement and proxy response.

Final model includes dummy variables for missing education and family income data.

Table 4: Predicted probabilities for selecting a single race in the CPS

	Predicted Probability				
	White	Black	American Indian	Asian	Other race
Multiracial groups ¹					
Black-white	0.146	0.783	0.000	0.000	0.071
Black-American Indian	0.003	0.990	0.000	0.000	0.006
Black-Asian	0.034	0.883	0.004	0.000	0.079
Black-Hispanic	0.099	0.879	0.000	0.000	0.022
Black-other, Non-Hispanic	0.003	0.979	0.000	0.000	0.017
Black-other, Hispanic	0.099	0.761	0.000	0.000	0.140
More than two races	0.105	0.773	0.002	0.000	0.120
Reasons for identifying as multiracial ²					
Multiracial because parents different races	0.086	0.536	0.002	0.000	0.377
Multiracial because ancestors diff. races	0.105	0.773	0.002	0.000	0.120
Multiracial because group is mixed	0.209	0.604	0.010	0.000	0.178

All predicted probabilities are based on the multinomial logit model shown in Appendix B.

¹The first set of predictions assume a respondent who falls in the following categories:

female, ancestors different races, younger generation, state mean percent black, living in the midwest, some college education, does not speak spanish at home, no spouse, mean income, and a self-response to panel 1 of the supplement.

²The second set of predictions assume the same as above, except the respondent:

identified as more than two races, and the reason for identifying as multiracial varies.

Appendix Table A: Descriptive statistics for all respondents who identified as multiracial and part African-American

Total N:	1165	
Single race identification (on initial CPS survey)		
White	15.5%	
Black	68.8%	
American Indian	1.1%	
Asian	2.1%	
Other race	12.6%	
Multiple race identification (on supplemental survey)		
Black-white	16.7%	
Black-American Indian	21.4%	
Black-Asian	2.7%	
Black-Other race	26.5%	
Black-Hispanic	2.6%	
Black-Other race*Hispanic	1.1%	
More than two races (ref.)	30.1%	
Reason for identifying as multiracial		
Multiracial because parents different races	47.1%	
Multiracial because ancestors diff. races	49.0%	
Multiracial because group is mixed	39.1%	
Controls		
Male	42.2%	
Born before 1965 (over age 30)	45.5%	
Mean percent of state black (1995)	15.7%	
South	39.5%	
Northeast	25.9%	
West	16.0%	
Midwest (ref.)	18.6%	
Less than high school grad (ref.)	12.3%	
High school graduate	16.7%	
Some college	17.4%	
Bachelor's degree	7.6%	
Graduate school	3.3%	
Education missing (respondents younger than 22)	42.3%	
Spanish spoken at home	3.9%	
Non-black spouse	13.0%	
Black spouse	8.9%	
No spouse (or race missing) (ref.)	78.1%	
Foreign born	9.7%	
Mean family income (14 categories)	7.27	(7="20K to 24,999," 8="25K to 29,999")
Family income missing	6.0%	
Controls for panel response		
Panel 1 (ref.)	29.2%	
Panel 2	24.3%	
Panel 3	25.9%	
Panel 4	20.6%	
Supplement answered by self (ref.)	45.8%	
Supplement answered by proxy	54.2%	

Appendix B: Multinomial logistic regression of the selection of the single-race identification in the CPS

	White	Amer. Ind.	Asian	Other race
Multiracial groups				
Black-white	0.320 (0.251)	-1.745 (1.135)	-1.873 (1.322)	-0.546** (0.265)
Black-American Indian	-3.732*** (0.559)	-1.593* (0.894)	0.075 (1.432)	-3.246*** (0.623)
Black-Asian	-1.245 (0.828)	0.728 (1.311)	6.008*** (1.559)	-0.558 (0.557)
Black-Other race	-3.688*** (0.510)	-36.505 (17880626)	0.289 (0.905)	-2.177*** (0.416)
Black-Hispanic	-0.189 (0.515)	-36.416 (53896443)	-34.446 (27569888)	-1.805** (0.788)
Black-Other Race*Hispanic	3.647*** (0.919)	4.228 (93382643)	-35.877 (35631860)	2.348*** (0.899)
Reasons for multiracial ID				
Multiracial because parents different races	-0.673** (0.275)	-0.451 (0.834)	1.203 (0.952)	1.092*** (0.335)
Multiracial because ancestors diff. races	-0.839*** (0.272)	-0.735 (0.855)	0.450 (0.754)	-0.419 (0.275)
Multiracial because group is mixed	0.098 (0.281)	1.237 (0.862)	-2.773*** (0.839)	0.220 (0.263)
Controls				
Male	-0.117 (0.217)	0.316 (0.617)	-1.295* (0.684)	-0.099 (0.215)
Born before 1965 (over age 30)	-0.485 (0.355)	0.450 (1.238)	0.801 (1.555)	-0.789* (0.461)
Percent state black, 1995	-3.375** (1.613)	3.362 (3.139)	2.104 (4.841)	-0.978 (1.360)
South	0.582 (0.362)	0.003 (1.081)	20.339*** (3.863)	0.177 (0.323)
Northeast	0.681** (0.332)	-0.476 (1.340)	21.411*** (3.476)	0.016 (0.325)
West	0.709** (0.347)	1.649* (0.998)	25.004*** (3.100)	-0.319 (0.345)
High school graduate	-0.153 (0.421)	-33.635 (19095582)	-0.766 (2.120)	-0.801 (0.626)
Some college	-0.680 (0.440)	0.709 (1.374)	1.871 (2.055)	-0.207 (0.542)
Bachelor's degree	-0.462 (0.531)	2.354 (1.459)	1.864 (2.335)	-0.943 (0.785)
Graduate school	0.050 (0.654)	2.718 (1.758)	-33.031 (35195469)	-0.066 (0.906)
Spanish spoken at home	1.669*** (0.497)	-33.821 (47707876)	5.196*** (1.753)	1.257** (0.599)
Non-black spouse	0.769** (0.331)	2.338** (1.140)	-0.982 (1.441)	0.495 (0.443)
Black spouse	-1.188* (0.668)	-32.404 (25945229)	-33.806 (15045336)	-34.334 (12870104)
Foreign born	0.280 (0.378)	-33.477 (20825708)	2.701** (1.117)	0.518 (0.431)
Family income (14 cat.)	0.045 (0.030)	-0.208** (0.102)	0.224** (0.101)	0.012 (0.029)
Constant	-0.278	-5.041**	-33.946	-1.169
Observations	1165	1165	1165	1165

Standard errors in parentheses * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Models include dummy variables for panel of the CPS supplement and proxy response, as well as dummy variables for missing education and family income data.

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