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Previous research suggests that biracial people have a wide array of choices when it comes to their racial identity (Rockquemore, 2002). According to Kerry Ann Rockquemore, some biracial people choose to have a “border identity” that intertwines both of their racial backgrounds to create a “unique category of self-understanding” (Rockquemore, 2002). While this is not the case for every biracial person, Rockquemore also states that some biracial people may choose to only identify with one of their racial backgrounds and in most cases, black/white biracial individuals tend to identify as exclusively black (Rockquemore, 2002). There are quite a few significant factors that influence an individual’s choice of identity. These factors include an individual’s social network, family influence, and physical appearance (Rockquemore, 2002). As Rockquemore points out, gender as an influence on a biracial individual’s choice in identity is fairly underdeveloped despite the fact that race and gender do in fact interact with one another at a complex level (Rockquemore, 2002).

Gender

In Lauren Davenport’s article examining the role of gender and its effect on biracial Americans’ racial labeling, there was a trend in research that suggested biracial women were less likely to be perceived as a minority than biracial men due to the gendered nature of racism (Davenport, 2016). Being seen as a minority for biracial men led to them being much more likely to experience negative interactions such as discrimination, police brutality, and overall fear from white people.
Davenport’s article also suggested that physical attractability was a more important social factor for biracial women than biracial men which stems from skin tone discrimination and European standards of beauty (Davenport, 2016).

It is also suggested that biracial women face more social pressure as well as hostility from black women than biracial men do with men (Davenport, 2016). Due to previous research, women and men in the U.S. “are racialized in systematically distinct way” (Davenport, 2016). Even though women and men are distinctly racialized, the research also suggests that biracial women appear to have an easier time crossing the racial boundaries presented. Whereas biracial men are just more likely to be grouped with other black men to be characterized as criminals and other discrimination, thus resulting in the placement of a minority group that rejects or denies white heritage (Davenport, 2016). This all leads to Davenport’s conclusion of “biracial women are more likely to identify as multiracial than comparable biracial men, who will tend to adopt a singular minority identification” (Davenport, 2016).

According to Rockquemore’s article, the gendered social phenomenon known as skin stratification adds to the notion of attractiveness for women just as Davenport pointed out (Rockquemore, 2002). Rockquemore states that the standards of beauty are applied more often to women than men and leads to the gender-specific emphasis on body image (Rockquemore, 2002). Women are socially and psychologically held up to European standards of beauty which ultimately leads the concept of skin stratification (Rockquemore, 2002). Findings from Rockquemore’s study show that biracial women are judged more harshly and rejected from social settings with other black women than men (Rockquemore, 2002). Ultimately what Rockquemore points out is that “appearances were symbolically and linguistically linked to black identity” (Rockquemore, 2002, p. 492). Overall, biracial men do not find themselves in situations where they are competing or being rejected by black men as biracial women do with black women (Rockquemore, 2002).

Feminist Theory

Basu’s article examining the gender differences among biracial college students states the significant aspect of intersectionality in relation to the general claims of feminist theorists. Basu states that it “does not make sense to examine race and gender as independent constructs, as the two continually influence each other” (Basu, 2010, p. 98). In the article it is suggested that biracial women have a greater need to be accepted which is linked to their overall feelings of self-worth more than biracial men (Basu, 2010). Significant in the case of biracial women and men, their choices on identity are what Basu calls a process rather than a fixed category (Basu, 2010). This stems from the social pressure that these individuals receive in regards to choosing only one particular social group or racial group for them to associate with (Basu, 2010). Basu’s study suggests that there is more opportunity for biracial women and men especially of college age to feel accepted and less pressure to choose just one group or feel excluded (Basu, 2010). This opportunity consisted of being part of sports groups which many of the males in the study did as opposed to the females (Basu, 2010).

The results of Basu’s study also show that females discussed issues that related to gender more than the male students even though both were referred to as “exotic” (Basu, 2010). The term “exotic” was seen as more offensive to the female participants of the study as opposed to the male participants (Basu, 2010). The males related the term “exotic” with the concept of “different” (Basu, 2010). Basu states that this may be a result of the biracial female participants to feel more societal expectations from the term “exotic” which includes being overly sexualized (Basu, 2010). The oversexualization that biracial women are subjected to is exactly what feminist theorists state about women of color in general. The biracial females appeared to view the term as placing them in the same category as an object or “trophy” (Basu, 2010). Overall,
Basu’s study further confirms what feminist theorists state in that “women are more likely to be stereotyped as being more ‘sexual’ and ‘exotic’ (Basu, 2010). Basu also points out that there is the possibility that the biracial males were not offended by the term due to the fact that they did not associate or feel any of the societal expectations from the term as the females did (Basu, 2010).

**Transnational**

According to Jennifer Michaels’ chapter in the book German Memory Contests, she analyzes the literature of Afro-German women in post-unification Germany and their struggle with biracial identity (Michaels, 1990). There was complete isolation from the black community for Afro-German women (Michaels, 1990). It was not until the 1980s that Afro-German women were able to begin claiming cultural space and then define themselves as a cultural group (Michaels, 1990). The unification of white Germans increased the exclusion felt by biracial and black Germans (Michaels, 1990). Michaels points out that many Germans of color or immigrants were not included in the unification amongst other Germans (Michaels, 1990). The unification occurring in Germany also brought an increased state of hostility and racism toward Afro-Germans. As Afro-German women started to claim cultural space, an important factor in finding those spaces was the aspect of creating a community of Afro-Germans (Michaels, 1990).

Community is an important factor since there was a lack of role models and continuation of historical roots for Afro-Germans which also happens to be an important factor in shaping identity (Michaels, 1990). With the black German movement aiding in the sense of community and belonging, a black German women’s group was formed. This group is known as ADERFA which played a significant role in shaping self-esteem and cultural identity (Michaels, 1990). Another important factor within the struggle of obtaining cultural space for Afro-German women was creating new memories while contesting old ones (Michaels, 1990). This involved reclaiming history since history itself is a significant factor in shaping cultural identity (Michaels, 1990). Michaels points out the fact that there is a perception from white Germans that individuals who are black Germans are an “exotic” combination (Michaels, 1990). In reclaiming history, the black German authors that Michaels examines are the foundation in bringing awareness to black German history and making visible the overall black presence within German history and its racist thinking that is embedded in the German language (Michaels, 1990). The experiences of Afro-German women being “different” compared to the white majority of society were negative (Michaels, 1990). This negative association led biracial women to have internalized stereotypes that were blatantly racist to the point that the women hated being black and attempted everything “to be as white as possible” (Michaels, 1990).

**Labels**

As Mahtani discusses in the article *What’s in the name? Exploring the Employment of ‘mixed race’ as an Identification*, the label of “mixed race” allows women to “convey a sense of their identities outside of the binary racialized vocabulary” (Mahtani, 2002, p. 476). The ability to identify as “mixed race” provides them with a unique opportunity to articulate and further the depiction of their social experiences (Mahtani, 2002). In the study of Mahtani’s article, some women found the label of “mixed race” as “limitless” in the sense that it offered them an alternative rather than having to identify with a particular stereotype associated with a certain group (Mahtani, 2002). Other participants found the term “mixed race” extremely problematic in the sense that it not only validates the social construction and concept of race but it privileges race over other important factors of social identity such as gender in this case (Mahtani, 2002). There was also a trend following the label “mixed race” as detrimental to the social experiences of the participants in the study due to them feeling as if the term leads to the generalization and enhancement of social stereotypes about a given racial group.
However, as pointed out by a participant from Mahtani’s study, how people understand the term and experience being “mixed race” varies exponentially due to geographic location (Mahtani, 2002). Despite this variation in experiences, it ultimately assumes that all “mixed race” persons experience the same racialized struggles in society (Mahtani, 2002). Another participant in Mahtani’s study also pointed out the intersectionality of racial identity. The participant stressed the importance of identifying as a woman rather than “mixed race” at times due to all of the political struggles that come along with gender and being a woman (Mahtani, 2002).

**Discussion**

The goal of the present research was to determine whether or not there are significant findings of gender influence on biracial identity. After various literature review from previous research, it is fair to say that gender plays a significant role in how biracial women and men make choices about their identity. However, as previously stated from Rockquemore’s article, the influence of gender on biracial identity is underdeveloped (Rockquemore, 2002). This limitation is due to the overall examination of female clinical sample patterns of behavior exclusively and generalized to non-clinical cases which is methodologically problematic (Rockquemore, 2002).

In order to better develop the overall research of a biracial individual’s choice on identity and its gender influence incorporating the developmental psychology perspective of the Human Development Across the Lifespan Model is a possibility. It would also be beneficial for future research to incorporate the experiences and patterns of behavior exhibited by biracial individuals as parents. Another area of interest could be the experiences that biracial individuals have when dating and in their relationships.

As Rockquemore precisely sums up, racial identities of biracial people are “framed by institutional inequality and ideological racism that restricts the capacity of those with African ancestry to construct any identity other than that assigned to them by out-group members” (Rockquemore, 2002, p. 487). This is all due to the fact that “social actors cannot maintain an identity without external validation from others” and “biracial people may construct a black identity only because society, in accordance with the one-drop rule, defines them as black” (Rockquemore, 2002, p. 487).

**References**


