

Introduction. For the first time in history, the 2000 U.S. Census allowed respondents to indicate more than one race. Remarkably, there is considerable geographic variation in the proportion of the black population that identifies as both black and white, ranging from 31.7% in Medford/Ashland, Oregon to 0.3% in Florence, South Carolina. Greater black-white biracial populations skew toward northern and northwestern areas where total blacks represent an exceptionally small proportion of the population. In contrast, areas with smaller black-white biracial populations are typically in the South where total blacks represent a large proportion of the population. Distinctions across metropolitan areas suggest that underlying structural differences may affect the likelihood of biracial identification. Borrowing from prior theoretical and empirical scholarship on mixed-race marriage, this study illuminates the impact urban structural features have on the likelihood of blacks reporting black-white biracial identification.

Background. Intergroup relations have often been investigated through the lens of exchange, assimilationist, or opportunity-structure theories. Blau's macrostructural theory (Blau 1977; Blau and Schwartz 1984) develops the opportunity-structure perspective, and has most often been applied to interracial marriage (Blau, Blum, Schwarz 1982; Rytina et al 1988; Skvoretz 1990). Prior literature on structural determinants of mixed-race marriage reveals fruitful findings that may also prove useful in explaining mixed-race identification. This study borrows from postulates developed by Blau and associates (1977, 1980, 1984a, 1984b, 1995), to investigate the influence of various urban conditions on the choice to report biracial identification to assess whether the same macrostructural parameters that influence interracial marriage should also influence interracial identification on the U.S. Census.

Data & Methods. Blau's macro-social work suggests several structural characteristics that shape opportunities for interracial marriage, including group size, exposure, heterogeneity,

inequality, and the degree to which race is correlated with other characteristics. To investigate the influence of various conditions on the choice to report black-white biracial identification, OLS regression is used to analyze structural differences across 330 MSAs. It is hypothesized that when (1) blacks account for a small proportion of a population, (2) there is higher black residential exposure to whites, (3) racial heterogeneity is maximized, (4) equality in higher education is minimized, and (5) racial parity across educational categories is maximized, there will be greater likelihood for blacks to report black-white biracial identification.

Results. All hypotheses are supported. Over 93% of the variation in black-white biracial identification among blacks can be accounted for by group size, exposure, racial diversity, equality in higher education, educational parity across all levels, foreign-born population, and geographical region. The smaller the proportion the black population represents, the greater the likelihood blacks will identify as biracial with whites. Furthermore, when frequency of black exposure to whites is maximized, blacks are more likely to report biracial identification. Racially diverse MSAs have higher percentages of blacks who report black-white biracial identification, when socioeconomic inequality is controlled. Whereas greater equality in higher education dampens the likelihood of biracial identities when group size is controlled, proportionate representation between blacks and whites within each educational category engenders biracial identification. Areas with more foreign-born blacks have higher rates of black-white identification. Finally, blacks who live in the South are considerably less likely than blacks who live in other regions to report a shared identity with whites. Overall, the R^2 for the multivariate model, coupled with statistically significant results of all major postulates in the hypothesized directions, demonstrates significant improvements over prior direct tests of Blau's opportunity structure theory.

Discussion. With all hypotheses fully supported, it is demonstrated that structural parameters theoretically and empirically known to affect biracial marriage similarly affect biracial identification. For example, as the size of a black community increases, the racial diversity of a given MSA decreases, segregation increases, and black exposure to whites decreases. Such conditions minimize the likelihood of blacks marrying whites, and similarly minimize the likelihood of blacks identifying as both black and white on the U.S. Census.

Speculation as to why blacks might identify mono-rationally, despite known advantages of identifying with whites (Hochschild and Weaver, 2007), are explored from a structural perspective. Additionally, now that official data are available, implications of replacing biracial marriage prevalence (Lichter and Qian, 2005) with biracial identification prevalence (Kalmijn, 1993; Brunnsma, 2005), as an indicator of social distance, are discussed.

Conclusion. Past studies have tested various aspects of Blau's theory within the purview of interracial interactions. However, no study has simultaneously tested the effect of several theoretical propositions on actual contact between blacks and whites, nor has any study attempted to apply work on biracial marriage to biracial identification. Additionally, previous studies of multi-racial identification have been chiefly qualitative in nature, inherently relying upon small, often biased samples. With a paucity of large-scale attempts to quantify the many *external* factors influencing how one chooses to self-report racial identification, cumulative learnings have been fundamentally incomplete. By extending Blau's understanding of intergroup relations to also include interracial identification, this study demonstrates the methodological advantage of studying biracial identification over biracial marriage as an indicator of social distance between blacks and whites and contributes to the collective understanding of the racial identification process.