Beyond the Looking Glass: Exploring Variation Between Racial Self-Identification and Interviewer Classification

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Recent research has demonstrated the existence of fluidity in both racial self-identification and interviewer classification. Racial self-identification has been shown to vary for the same individuals across contexts (Harris and Sim 2002), over time (Doyle and Kao 2007; Hitlin et al. 2006) and depending on their social position (Penner and Saperstein 2008). Similarly, interviewer classifications of the same individuals have been shown to vary over time (Brown et al. 2007), as well as change in response to biographical events such as incarceration, unemployment and experiencing a spell of poverty (Penner and Saperstein 2008). However, the specific pattern of variation between racial self-identification and interviewer classification -- i.e., how they might influence each other over time -- has yet to be empirically explored.

The prevailing assumption in the literature on racial identity is that people calibrate or edit their self-identification based on how they are perceived by others (e.g., Nagel 1994). We propose to test this hypothesis directly by examining what happens when there is discordance between an individual's perceived and self-identified race, using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This is a crucial, and up to now missing, piece of the puzzle of whether and how different measures of race relate to one another. Additional analyses will also provide insight into how differences in life chances, such as educational attainment and contact with the criminal justice system, affect how respondents racially identify, are perceived by others and how both change over time.

Biography, Performativity and Reflected Appraisals

Most researchers assume that empirically observing discordance between racial self-identification and external perception is unlikely (e.g., Root 1990, Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002), in large part because individuals will adjust their racial self-identification to conform to the norms or expectations of others (Nagel 1994, Harris and Sim 2002). This perspective draws from the more general theories of the "looking glass self" (Cooley 1902) and "reflected appraisals" (Mead 1934), which posit that an individual's self-concept is developed not in a

vacuum but at least partly in response to how they are perceived and judged by others (or, rather, how the individual believes they are perceived by others). Khanna (2004) illustrates this process at work in the context of racial self-identification in her cross-sectional study of the identity choices of multiracial Asians.

However, overall support for the theory has been mixed -- perhaps in part due to a dearth of longitudinal data and an over-reliance on experimental settings (Yeung and Martin 2003) -- and little empirical attention has been paid to the theory's implicit dynamics; for example, that the perceptions of others will cause changes in self-concept, not simply that the latter will be a reflection of the former. In a more dynamic framework, convergence toward the perceptions or expectations of others is only one possible outcome given discordant (or inconsistent) measures of an individual's race (cf. Yeung and Martin 2003). We outline the various outcomes below, and briefly note the hypotheses related to each result.

Hypothesis 1: No change. External racial classification and racial self-identification might not be congruent simply because each captures a different aspect of how race comes to matter in people's lives (Saperstein 2008). If this is the case, then discordance between the two does not necessarily require a resolution. Research on individuals with one Black and one White parent provides some support for this perspective; for example, multiracial people may self-identify and describe their appearance differently depending on whether they were raised in predominantly White, predominantly Black or more mixed neighborhoods -- a pattern found in adulthood, even after their racial contexts changed (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001).

Hypothesis 2: Random change. Change between and among measures of race largely reflects classical measurement error -- in which idiosyncratic individual factors or general imprecision in the survey instrument adds "noise" that does not vary systematically across populations or sub-groups. Qualitative interviews of individuals who changed their racial identification over time finds evidence of these kinds of processes; for example, one respondent said his race responses varied depending on whether or not he was mad at his mother (Poss and Liebler 2009).

Hypothesis 3: Non-random change. Discordance is inherently unstable and future changes will lead to a resolution. This type of change could occur in either direction:

Toward self-identification (Hypothesis 3a). Theories of symbolic interaction and ethnomethodology suggest that individuals both learn and "perform" the roles or the selves they seek to inhabit (Goffman 1959, Garfinkel 1967). These ideas have long been incorporated into theories of how people "do" gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) but are less often applied to research on race. However, Jackson (2001) argues that blackness, for example, is achieved in part through behavior; that is, performing one's race is a necessary (though perhaps not sufficient) antecedent of being seen in a particular way by others. In this context, we might expect that if the respondent's racial identification is not validated by the interviewer in the first wave of the survey, the respondent will learn better how to play their desired role and will give a more convincing performance by the third wave (see also the discussion of "externalization" in Yeung and Martin 2003). Thus, self-identification will be more stable than interviewer classification and, when there is discordance, self-identified race will remain unchanged but will influence interviewer classification to create concordance .

Toward interviewer classification (Hypothesis 3b). This is the classic assumption in the literature on racial identification across the social sciences: reflected appraisals. It suggests that individuals privilege the perceptions of others, or social norms more generally, in determining their self-identification -- or at least, as Harris and Sim (2002) note, the expression of it in surveys. Thus, interviewer classification will be more stable (because it is tied to unchanging aspects of an individual's appearance, or so the assumption goes) and, when there is discordance between it and the individual's self-identification, the perceptions of others will affect self-identification to create concordance. Alternatively, discordance could be caused by difficulty understanding or fitting oneself into U.S. racial categories (cf. Hitlin et al. 2006; Rodriguez 2000). This suggests that, rather than being a more general pattern, discordant racial classification will be most common among a particular type of respondent (e.g., Latinos and/or recent immigrants) and may resolve itself over time as a result of assimilation to U.S. norms (Hypothesis 3c).

Data and Methods

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent of Health (Add Health) is a nationally-representative sample of Americans who were enrolled in grades 7-12 in 1994-5. It has been

used extensively to study the fluidity and complexity of racial identity (Harris and Sim 2002, Hitlin et al. 2006, Brown et al. 2006, Vacquera and Kao 2006, Campbell and Troyer 2007, Doyle and Kao 2007, Hitlin et al. 2007), and is one of the few national surveys to collect data on both the respondent's racial self-identification and the interviewer's classification in multiple waves. This makes it ideal for both testing theories about the influence of one perception of race on the other, and for replicating previous results from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (Penner and Saperstein 2008), which demonstrated a relationship between changes in social status and changes in race.

Add Health has recently completed its fourth wave of data collection. We draw on both the Wave 1 and Wave 3 in-home samples in the analyses the follow.[1] Wave 1 consisted of 20,745 interviews conducted between April and December 1995. Wave 3 consisted of 15,197 interviews conducted between July 2001 and April 2002 when the respondents were aged 18-26. Our study sample includes the 14,852 cases where individuals were interviewed in both waves and are not missing data on either their racial self-identification or their interviewer classification in either wave.

There were several changes to the racial response options and the question order between the two waves. First, the option to answer "Other" to the race question was removed in Wave 3. As a result, and because we are interested in tracking changes from discordance to concordance (and vice versa), we drop cases in which either the respondent or the interviewer marked "Other" in Wave 1. Of course, the vast majority of adolescents choosing "Other" also identified as Hispanic in Wave 1 (Brown et al. 2006) so our results cannot be generalized to include all self-identified Hispanics. The second change was that the interviewer's racial classification moved from immediately following the respondent's self-identification to the end of the survey. This likely inflated agreement between the two measures of race in Wave 1 but allows other information gathered during the survey to color the interviewer's response in Wave 3.

Another quirk of the data is that respondents could give multiple race responses, but interviewer classifications were limited to one. As a first cut at comparing the two measures, we rely on a follow-up question asked of respondents who identified multiple races, which asked them to choose their "best" single race from among the same list of categories (i.e., White,

[1] Wave 4 is expected to be released sometime this fall. It reportedly includes only a measure of interviewer classification, but we plan to incorporate the new data in future analyses.

Black, Native American and Asian). Though this hides some of the complexity of the adolescents' self-identification it provides the closest approximation to the response required from the interviewer.[2] In subsequent analyses, we also plan to examine patterns of concordance by using all responses from the respondent and requiring that the interviewer classification match only one of them.

A detailed comparison of the paired race measures from waves 1 and 3 is shown in Table 1. In future analyses, we plan to examine whether the patterns in this array remain similar among different types of respondents (e.g., men and women, dark skinned and light skinned, immigrant and native, Hispanic and non-Hispanic, etc.). We also anticipate using either log linear or Rasch models to adjudicate among the competing hypothesis noted above, as well as to test whether or not biographical events, such as educational attainment (high school completion and college enrollment) or coming into contact with the criminal justice system (measured as being stop by police, arrested, convicted or incarcerated), help to explain whether self-identified and interviewer-classified race changes first and under what circumstances.

Preliminary Results

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics illustrating the influence and stability of racial self-identification and classification across the two waves of Add Health. We define *influence* as when one measure of race changes between waves to "match" the other, and *stability* as when a given measure of race does not change between waves.

The first thing to note is that there is variation along all four of the hypothesized pathways -- no change, random change and resolution toward either self-identification or interviewer classification -- and none explains a majority of the racially discordant cases.[3] Of the 139 cases in which the two measures of race did not match in Wave 1, 14 percent stay discordant

[2] We also acknowledge that there is a difference, conceptually and often empirically, between racial "identity" -- in the sense of how people think of themselves privately (Harris and Sim 2002) or how they identify most strongly (Khanna 2004) -- and how they report their race on surveys. The distinction is similar to Mead's (1934) "I" and "me." However, we argue that a survey measure of self-identification is the more likely of the two to be affected by the reflected appraisal process and social pressure to conform, largely because of its public disclosure. Further, we are sympathetic to recent critiques of the literature on identity more generally (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) and claim only to be studying the process of identification.

[3] Of course, consistency is the norm overall with 95.7 percent of the sample described in exactly the same way on both measures in both waves.

in the exact same way and 11 percent remain discordant due to a different pairing of responses. While nearly 76 percent become concordant in Wave 3, not all of those cases resolve in the direction of the interviewer's classification as the theory of reflected appraisals would predict.

The results do provide some support for the reflected appraisal hypothesis insofar as the interviewer's classification is both the more influential and the more stable of the two measures. Among the discordant cases, an individual's self-identification in Wave 3 was more likely to change toward (i.e., to match) the interviewer's classification from Wave 1. So, for example, someone who self-identified as Native American but was seen as White in Wave 1 was more likely to change to consistently White than consistently Native American in Wave 3. Data from the full sample also suggest that interviewer classification is slightly more stable over time; respondents are more likely to change their self-identification and have their interviewer classification remain constant (1.6 percent of cases), than to maintain a constant self-identification and have their interviewer classification change (1.3 percent of cases).

However, this reflected appraisal pattern does not hold for all sub-groups (see also Wiley et al. 2008). For example, among teens who self-identified as Asian in Wave 1, their interviewer classification in Wave 3 was more likely to change to match their self-identification in Wave 1 (55.2 percent). The self-reports of Wave 1 self-identified Asians also stay more stable over time in the full sample (5.5 vs. 3 percent). In contrast, for Wave 1 self-identified Whites, the majority of discordant cases (51.5 percent) are drawn in the direction of the interviewer's classification in Wave 3 and their interviewer classifications are also more stable overall (1.3 vs. 0.5 percent).

The "random" changes, or those that are unexplained by existing theories of race and racial identification, also are a striking component of these results. Adolescents who identified or are classified by others as Native American are especially likely to change in these unexpected ways. Examples include: switching from Black and Native American in Wave 1 to Native American and White in Wave 3, or from Asian and Native American in Wave 1 to White and Asian in Wave 3 (self and interviewer responses, respectively).

Taken together, these results reveal a need for additional exploration of the processes that generate changes in racial self-identification and external classification. While recent research has clearly demonstrated the existence and extent of racial fluidity in the United States, the findings above underscore that our understanding of how and why such changes occur is far from complete. One promising possibility that we aim to explore further is that biographical

events that affect one's social position, such as educational attainment and contact with the criminal justice system, also shape how people come to see themselves and others.

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Table 1. Cross tabulation of self-identified and interviewer-classified race combinations, Add Health Waves 1 and 3

Wave 1	*Wave 3 Race*																	
Race	AA	AB	AN	AW	BA	BB	BN	BW	NA	NB	NN	NW	WA	WB	WN	WW	Total (%)	Total (N)
AA	90.74	0.1	0.67	3.15	0.1				1.72		0.76	0.1	0.76		0.1	1.81	100	1,048
AB		*				*											100	4
AN	60	10		10	10								10				100	10
AW	66.67			20												13.33	100	15
BA	*				*	*											100	3
BB	0.03	0.03	0.03		0.09	98.08	0.06	0.55		0.18	0.06	0.03		0.52		0.34	100	3,282
BN						*					*	*				*	100	4
BW						54.55						9.09				36.36	100	11
NA	*																100	2
NB						83.33				16.67							100	6
NN	2.48		0.62	0.62		2.48	0.62		1.86	0.62	47.83	14.91			1.24	26.71	100	161
NW								1.96			7.84	17.65			5.88	66.67	100	51
WA	44.44		11.11	11.11									22.22			11.11	100	9
WB						52.38		4.76						14.29		28.57	100	21
WN											*		*				100	3
WW	0.33		0.03	0.08		0.17		0.09	0.02	0.02	0.39	0.93	0.18	0.06	0.22	97.48	100	9,022
AO	82.76			3.45		3.45						3.45	3.45			3.45	100	29
BO						69.23		7.69								23.08	100	13
NO											14.29	28.57			14.29	42.86	100	14
WO				3.45		10.34					3.45				6.9	75.86	100	29
OA	66.67			4.76		4.76			4.76							19.05	100	21
OB		3.03			3.03	54.55		6.06	3.03	3.03	3.03	3.03		3.03		18.18	100	33
ON											14.29	21.43				64.29	100	14
OW	2.06			0.69		0.34		1.72			6.53	8.93			1.72	78.01	100	291
OO	6.75	0.13	0.13	0.53	0.13	4.89	0.13	1.32	0.53	0.93	5.29	11.38	0.93	0.66	0.93	65.34	100	756
Total (%)	7.43	0.04	0.09	0.37	0.05	22.45	0.03	0.31	0.2	0.12	1.31	1.63	0.24	0.21	0.28	65.23	100	
Total (N)	1,104	6	14	55	8	3,335	4	46	29	18	194	242	36	31	42	9,688		14,852

Notes: The first letter represents the self-reported race, and the second the interviewer observed race. W=white, B=black, N=Native American, A=Asian, and O=other. Cells with no observations are empty. Valid cells in rows that contain fewer than 5 cases are marked with *.

Table 2. Tracking Influence and Stability in Measures of Racial Self-Identification and Interviewer Classification

	% consistent	% toward self	% toward interviewer	% random change	N
Discordant cases	14.4%	25.2%	49.6%	10.8%	139
Wave 1 Responses:					
Self id White	15.2%	21.2%	51.5%	12.1%	33
Self id Black	5.6%	44.4%	33.3%	16.7%	18
Self id Native American	16.9%	6.8%	69.5%	6.8%	59
Self id Asian	13.8%	55.2%	17.2%	13.8%	29
Interviewer id White	15.6%	26.0%	51.9%	6.5%	77
Interviewer id Black	16.1%	19.4%	61.3%	3.2%	31
Interviewer id Native Am.	0.0%	41.2%	17.6%	41.2%	17
Interviewer id Asian	21.4%	14.3%	50.0%	14.3%	14
	% consistent	% self stable	% interviewer stable	% random change	N
Full sample	95.7%	1.3%	1.6%	1.4%	14852
Wave 1 Responses:					
Self id White	97.2%	0.5%	1.3%	1.0%	9055
Self id Black	97.6%	0.9%	0.9%	0.6%	3300
Self id Native American	39.5%	14.5%	20.9%	25.1%	220
Self id Asian	88.7%	5.5%	3.0%	2.8%	1077
Interviewer id White	96.8%	0.7%	1.5%	1.0%	9099
Interviewer id Black	97.3%	0.9%	1.3%	0.5%	3313
Interviewer id Native Am.	43.3%	21.3%	3.9%	31.5%	178
Interviewer id Asian	89.8%	4.0%	3.2%	3.0%	1062

Source: National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves 1 (Home) and 3. Ns are unweighted. Note: Sample excludes cases of “other” identification or classification from Wave 1. Discordant cases occur when the self identification and interviewer classification did not match in Wave 1. Consistent cases fall on the diagonal of Table 1. Random change cases represent the residual of the other three columns.