"IT'S LIKE WE HAVE AN 'IN' ALREADY"

The Racial Capital of Black/White Biracial Americans

Chandra D. L. Waring

University of Wisconsin, Whitewater

Abstract

The increasing bi/multiracial[1] community in the United States has generated much literature about racial identity and social psychological well-being. Drawing on sixty in-depth interviews with Black/White biracial Americans, this paper shifts the theoretical focus from identity and well-being to the conceptual development of how race shapes bi/multiracial Americans' social interactions with both Whites and Blacks. The majority of participants reported interacting differently when in predominately White settings versus predominately Black settings. I offer the concept of "racial capital" to highlight the repertoire of racial resources (knowledge, experiences, meaning, and language) that biracial Americans use to negotiate racial boundaries in a highly racialized society. These findings reveal the continuing significance of racial boundaries in a population that is often celebrated as evidence of racial harmony in the United States.

Keywords: Bi/Multiracial Americans, Social Capital, Cultural Capital, Racial Worldview

> *As it was, I learned to slip back and forth between my black and white worlds, understanding that each possessed its own language and customs and structures of meaning, convinced that with a bit of translation on my part the two worlds would eventually cohere.*
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> —Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (2004, p. 82)

Scholars have predicted that by the year 2050, one in five Americans will identify with two or more racial ancestries (Cheng and Powell, 2007). In fact, 5.6% of children under the age of eighteen claimed two or more races in the 2010 Census and 2.1% of adults marked two or more racial backgrounds (El Nasser and Overberg, 2011). This is a significant change from the time when the "one drop" rule locked most bi/multiracial Americans into the Black racial category unless they were phenotypically White (Johnson 2003). Given the opportunity to claim more than one race, this category has been growing: nine million Americans reported more than one racial category in

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2010 (U.S. Census 2010), up from almost seven million in 2000 (U. S. Census 2000). Furthermore, it should be noted that the number of bi/multiracial Americans is most likely higher considering that some bi/multiracial Americans, such as President Barack Obama, check one racial background on their Census form. While these numbers offer an interesting story given the racial history of the United States, they only tell part of the narrative; they do not provide any information about the everyday experiences, encounters, and complexities that accompany being bi/multiracial in twenty-first-century America. In this article, I explore how Black/White biracials interact with their monoracial White and Black counterparts. I analyze the racialized patterns that emerge in these interactions as well as respondents' understandings of these racialized interactional patterns. I focus on the experiences of Black/White biracials for two unique reasons: (1) they comprise the largest bi/multiracial cohort at 1.8 million (U. S. Census 2010); and (2) they embody both ends of the racial hierarchy. I offer the question: how does race, and all that it entails, shape the everyday interactions of bi/multiracial Americans? Correspondingly, how do bi/multiracial Americans use agency via racial resources to shape these interactions and to generate benefits for themselves?

Black/White bi/multiracial Americans have occupied an unparalleled racial and social location in American history. Through their sheer existence, they probe the main artery of America by embodying both ends of the racial hierarchy. Through activism, research, and memoirs, they push the envelope of racial boundaries, politics, and vocabularies. Through their escalating numbers, they have penetrated mainstream popular culture with musical artists, athletes, and politicians like Alicia Keys, Tiger Woods, and President Barack Obama. While past research on bi/multiracials has created conceptual frameworks for racial identity patterns (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2008) as well as social psychological development trends (Cheng and Lively, 2009), these studies have not systematically considered how everyday interactions unfold, and how bi/multiracials draw upon a unique "tool kit" (Swidler 1986) to work within and around racial boundaries. In addition, while racism scholars have discussed the negotiation of racial boundaries for other populations that do not neatly fit into racial categories, such as South Asian Americans (Purkayastha 2005), these processes have not been empirically addressed in the bi/multiracial population. Moreover, DuBois's pioneering concept of the "double consciousness" examined the "double thoughts, double duties…double words and double ideals…" of African Americans (DuBois 2005 [1903], p. 195). I build on his work by exploring the impact of having *intimate* access to the White world and the Black world as an insider in both, rather than an as an insider in one (Black) and outsider in the other, dominant group (White), which was the dynamic that DuBois documented one century ago. In my study, I elucidate how being biracial in the twenty-first century can operate as an advantage when interacting with both Whites and Blacks. Given that Whites comprise 72.4% and Blacks comprise 12.6% of American society (U. S. Census 2010), which equals 85% jointly, I will analyze why this advantage is valuable or perhaps even necessary in an allegedly "postracial" era. My goal is twofold: to introduce "racial capital" as a concept, and also to explain the conditions under which respondents tend to deploy it.

Racial Boundaries and Worldviews

Bonilla-Silva asserts that "…blacks and whites navigate two totally different ideological worlds…" (2010, p. 152). These separate worlds are a result of inequitable structural arrangements that have generated different life opportunities, trajectories and realities due to racial segregation that created and later exacerbated racial boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). I will briefly document the timeline of how these racial

realms became distinct entities with respective worldviews (Smedley 2007) or cultural frames (Wilson 2009) over several generations, and how historical racist practices have influenced contemporary institutional arrangements. This timeline also foregrounds the significance of developing "racial capital," or four key racial resources: knowledge, experiences, meanings, and language.

The institution of slavery (Feagin 2001), 'separate but equal' education (Johnson 2003), anti-miscegenation laws (Lopez 2006), sexual segregation reinforced by mass lynching (Collins 2005), emotional and symbolic segregation in the media (Beeman 2007; Chito-Childs 2009), residential segregation (Massey and Denton, 1993), and White political dominance (Feagin 2001) have concurrently been used to secure distinct racial boundaries in the United States. Consequently, the fundamental difference in life experiences among Blacks and Whites is evident in the contemporary disparities in wealth (Wilson 1996), income (Hogan and Perrucci, 1998), education (Kozol 1991), medical care (Feagin 2001), life expectancy (Baum 2006), civil liberties (Lopez 2006), media portrayals (Collins 2005), incarceration rates (Alexander 2010), and, in extreme cases, even linguistic expression (Massey and Denton, 1993). Collectively, these disparities structurally position most Blacks and Whites at unequal starting points due to differential access to the resources that are necessary to succeed in the United States.

This systematic, generational disadvantage for Black Americans has created spatial isolation and disproportionately high rates of concentrated poverty (Rhoden 2006). Consequently, a distinct African American culture has developed in part as a corollary of oppression (Rhoden 2006) that includes "shared group constructions of reality" (Wilson 2009, p. 43) and social interactional patterns. Scholars argue that a corresponding "generic meaning system" or "White racial framing" exists among White Americans that "encompasses many pieces of racialized knowledge and understanding that in concert shape human action and behavior in a myriad of ways that are often automatic or unconscious" (Picca and Feagin 2007, p. 9). Loïc Wacquant (2004) reaffirms the existence of a White cultural frame in contending that his French—as opposed to White American—background was an asset while he conducted his ethnography in a poor, Black community in Chicago. In his words, he benefitted "…from the simple fact of not having the *hexis* of the average white American, which continually marks, if against his or her own best intentions, the impenetrable border between the [White and Black] communities" (2004, p. 10). Thus, in the case of Whites and Blacks, two different racial worlds exist, each complete with ways of interpreting the world through a respective White or Black lens (Smedley 2007). I maintain that having access to both White and Black communities as an insider, accompanied by both cultural frames or worldviews, is noteworthy considering the legacy of racial segregation that has too often rendered these communities "impenetrable."

Social and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu introduced the term social capital, referring to the resources that can be acquired through social networks (Dika and Singh, 2002). Social capital facilitates the exchange of valuable information that otherwise would not be accessible, and in addition it has the potential to influence critical decisions, such as who is hired in a company (Lin 1999). People with access to multiple, diverse networks are exposed to more information and can "consciously adapt to different situations and manage conflicting obligations" (Erikson 2003, p. 15). Bourdieu argued that the "profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity of which makes them possible" (quoted in Portes 1998, p. 118). Hence, the benefits that derive from a group are a critical component of what establishes the group *as* a group. This is particularly

meaningful when considering racial group membership, and thus, is useful in conceptualizing racial capital.

Embodied capital, part of cultural capital, requires a *habitus* in which an individual acquires and becomes conditioned to a form of knowledge that is expressed through the body, such as speaking (Erel 2010). Language, interactional competence, and how to effectively and appropriately communicate are characteristics of cultural capital (Crossley 2001). These characteristics have racial implications as various manifestations of institutional and cultural factors have produced pronounced distinctions in what has been referred to as Standard American English (SAE) (i.e., White, middle-class English), and African American English Vernacular (AAEV) or African American Language (AAL)[2] (Paris 2009). The linguistic elements of cultural capital provide a complementary framework within which racial capital can be examined.

Derivatives of cultural capital include sexual and bodily capital. Sexual capital has been described as "accumulated sexual knowledge and skills" (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005, p. 97). Similarly, bodily capital is "a symbolic currency often acquired by members of the dominated fractions of society, who deprived of other forms of social power, cultivate their bodies as value-producing investments" (Bernstein 2007, p. 42). Wacquant articulates the process of acquiring bodily capital in boxing as "a sense of corporeal thrift acquired gradually through *long-term contact* with other athletes and coaches, workout after workout and fight after fight" (2004, p. 127, author's emphasis). These iterations of cultural capital highlight the many manifestations of advantage attainment in a series of domains from sex to sports. They lay a foundation that invites further intellectual insight on how society creates and organizes information and opportunities, especially when considering long-term exposure to different groups in society.

METHODS

This study consists of data collected for my dissertation research of sixty in-depth, semi-structured interviews with men and women who have one White parent and one Black parent. These interviews followed a life-story model (Auyero 2002) where questions were asked chronologically, which allowed respondents to tell a story about their life (Weiss 1994), starting with their first memory about race. Because qualitative research examines nuances and interpretations through a systematic analysis of processes and/or meaning-making (Sprague 2005), I was able to outline the processes of how social interactions about race unfolded. Furthermore, in-depth interviews enable a level of description and reflection about experiences that "seldom occur in everyday life" (Charmaz 2006, p. 25) and are, consequently, instrumental in understanding how participants make sense of their racialized realities.

Sample

I interviewed thirty-five women and twenty-five men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-two years old. I used convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants due to three factors: bi/multiracial Americans are not easily identifiable, there is no public place where they tend to congregate and I had limited access to financial means. Additionally, I sent out a call for participants at a local university. Most respondents were born and raised in the northeastern United States between Pennsylvania and Maine; however, some respondents grew up on the West Coast, in the Midwest, the Southwest, and the South. Five interviewees grew up in multiple states or countries. Initially, I used personal contacts to recruit participants and as the study progressed,

participants and friends/acquaintances referred others. According to the 2010 Census, the greatest proportions of bi/multiracial population are in the West (38%) and the South (31%). The Northeast and Midwest each hold 16% of the bi/multiracial population (Census 2010). However, the 2010 Census shows reasonably high concentrations of bi/multiracials along the New England and Middle-Atlantic coasts.

Although this creates a limitation in terms of generalizability, I attempted to minimize this limitation by interviewing as many respondents as possible, which in some cases required alternative interviewing arrangements (i.e., via Skype and email). Notably, convenience and snowball sampling can also present an advantage during data collection because the fact that I knew some participants established a level of rapport that facilitated ease during the interview. Moreover, the respondents who were referred to me were often referred through a person with whom they had a strong intimate connection, such as a close friend, sibling, or romantic partner. In this sense, the mutual contact "vouched" for me and consequently, generated a sense of trust. These advantages are evident in interviews where respondents expressed strong emotions such as crying or sharing traumatic memories about their childhood.

Fifty-four respondents have a White mother and a Black father, which reflects the social pattern of Black/White heterosexual couples in the United States (DaCosta 2004). Although respondents were recruited on the basis of having one White and one Black parent, during eight interviews, it became evident that the self-identified Black parent possessed racially mixed heritage. I included these participants to further illuminate how "Black," as a racial category has historically obscured other heritages. The majority of interviewees (fifty out of sixty) had spent at least one semester in college, which is associated with a middle-class socioeconomic status, although twelve of the fifty expressed financial obstacles that echoed those of working-class and poor Americans (i.e., growing up in low-income housing, parents working multiple, low wage jobs, etc.). Also, one woman and three men identified as a lesbian or gay, respectively.

Reflexivity

The integrity of qualitative research is dependent upon reflexivity, acknowledging the role of the researcher in the process of conducting research and ultimately, the researcher's responsibility in the process of knowledge production (Merriam 2009). As a result, I disclosed my biracial ancestry to each interviewee. Having this heritage in common foregrounded an "insider understanding" (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). Scholars have argued that sharing similar stigmatized backgrounds has the ability to stimulate a level of trust between the researcher and participant (Johnson-Bailey 2004), which is of heightened importance when studying racial minorities and other oppressed groups (Conwill 2007). This level of trust is essential when interviewing biracials and discussing their contentious experiences, interactions, and relationships with Whites and Blacks (Waring 2013). In addition, scholars have documented how previous research on bi/multiracials has been saturated in misunderstandings, assumptions, and narrow definitions of race that do not accurately reflect the lived experiences of bi/multiracials (Funderburg 1994; Root 1992). Additionally, I used Marjorie DeVault's (1990) feminist approach of using my own experiences—constituting a shared reality with respondents to some degree—to "serve as resources for…listening" (p. 104). At the same time, there were other social identities that I did not share with respondents, such as education level or socioeconomic status. Consequently, I am aware of the limitations that are associated with "insider'" status, such as ignoring intra-group diversity (Mannay 2010). I understand that ultimately, I occupy a simultaneous insider/outsider position because we all embody and occupy a constellation of social categories.

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Data Collection

I conducted the interviews, which lasted between one and three hours, between January 2009 and January 2011. Two inquiries in particular inform this article: 1) "Tell about your experiences within the white and black communities;" and 2) "Do you feel comfortable around white people and black people?" These questions invited participants to report if they were accepted as racial in-group members/racial insiders, as well as the process of facilitating this status. I would then probe accordingly with follow-up questions about family, friends, and romantic partners. Upon probing, respondents were asked pointedly how they interact with Whites and Blacks, and if there was any distinction between the two racial groups by focusing on concrete memories of racialized encounters. I operationalize the term "interact" to mean four different mechanisms that participants deploy: (1) What racialized information they choose to reference in a given interaction (knowledge); (2) What racialized encounters they choose to reflect upon in a given interaction (experiences); (3) What connotation they associate particular words with (meaning); and (4) What words they choose to use while communicating (language). I operationalize the term "access" to mean being treated as a racial insider or racial in-group member, and therefore being able to reap the benefits of this group membership due to long-standing racial homophily preferences in the United States. To protect the privacy of my participants, names and other identifying information were replaced with pseudonyms.

Coding and Analysis

I enlisted a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to allow central themes to emerge without the guidance of preconceived theories or concepts. This technique allowed for perpetual reflection and recoding as I transcribed and reread transcriptions (Weiss 1994). As I identified patterns or themes, I organized these themes into categories (Saldana 2009). In addition, I engaged in "member checking" (Merriam 2009) to ensure validity by sharing my preliminary findings with a handful of my respondents and requesting their estimation of how I interpreted their experiences. As more themes developed, I revisited previous transcriptions to identify new themes. Reading and rereading each transcription allowed me to distinguish between the different types of interactional strategies, such as knowledge and experiences, by creating subthemes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). In the analysis process, I created memos (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) about each code and thematically linked similar data, which allowed me to identify which encounters triggered racial capital, how interviewees deployed racial capital, the outcomes of racial capital, and the implications of such resources in a purported "colorblind" society.

CONCEPTUALIZING RACIAL CAPITAL AS A FORM OF CAPITAL

I offer the concept "racial capital" to refer to the repertoire of racial resources (knowledge, experiences, meaning, and language) that biracial Americans draw upon to negotiate or cope with racial boundaries in a highly racialized society. Racial capital is explicitly race-based, and advantages are gained after racial in-group membership is communicated through racial resources. This distinguishes it from other forms of capital, which are influenced by socioeconomic background, education level, etc., and are each shaped by structural conditions that have direct and indirect racial implications; but they are not directly connected to communicating racial insider status in *two* racial communities.

Knowledge is a staple of cultural capital (Waquant 2004). Audrey Smedley asserts that "'race' is a shorthand term for, as well as a symbol of, a 'knowledge system,' a way of knowing, of perceiving and of interpreting the world" (2007, p. 15). Consequently, racial knowledge can operate as a racial resource that shapes how we interpret the world and how we interact as a result of our interpretations. Experience, a tenet of human capital (Michael 2004), is also central to racial capital because personal experiences heavily influence an individual's concept of experiencing reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In a racialized society like the United States, there are different realities that are contingent upon racialized experiences. Meanings also influence interactions; thus, having access to two racialized meaning systems is historically significant. In fact, President Obama affirms in his memoir, "As it was, I learned to slip back and forth between my black and white worlds, understanding that each possessed its own language and customs and *structures of meaning*, convinced that with a bit of translation on my part the two worlds would eventually cohere" (2004, p. 82, author's emphasis). Lastly, I argue that language, a cornerstone of cultural capital (Crossley 2001), can also signify linguistic cues of racial membership since "[i]n African American culture, personal expression orients to a sense of self that is grounded within one's community" (Ray 2009, p. 68).

I maintain that these resources are acquired through long-term, meaningful interactions with both racial communities *as an insider*, and are used to navigate largely segregated settings that still exist in schools, at work, and in peer groups. Racial capital is different from White privilege in three ways: (1) racial capital is not based on skin color; (2) it operates as an asset in both communities; and (3) it requires the deployment of racial resources through social interactions. Insider status facilitates an emotional and historical connection to Whites and Blacks that conveys a level of intimacy that is difficult to establish across racial lines in the United States, particularly among Whites and Blacks, due to the aforementioned violent, unequal history. Each resource, used singularly or collectively, shapes daily interactions with Whites and Blacks. Racial resources were deployed in similar ways in the sense that respondents reported using them on a regular basis with both Whites and Blacks. In addition, racial capital was deployed for similar incentives—to circumvent stereotypes and boundaries—although the types of stereotypes that were evaded differed. These are discussed more in depth below. Race and resources create a mutual dialectic in which having access to two racial domains facilitated the development of racial capital *and* deploying racial capital continued to foster racial insider status in these two racial domains.

Findings

Michael Eric Dyson argues that race is "about how you use language, understand your heritage, interpret your history, identify with your kin, and figure out your meaning and worth to a society that places values on you beyond your control" (2009, p. 183). It became clear early in the interview process that respondents detected cues that compelled them to interact in racially coded ways in predominately White or Black settings or while interacting with a White or Black person in a one-on-one social interaction. This interactional practice was deployed as a means to be accepted as a racial insider and to have access to the benefits of insider status. One respondent, Rudy, explicitly characterized being biracial as "you kinda have that 'in' already" with both racial communities "because you can understand and relate to Black people better [than non-Blacks] and you can understand and relate to White people better [than non-Whites]." Rudy's statement would have no meaning if racial communities were not rigidly defined and maintained; nor would his assertion carry significance if each

racial world did not have community-based cultural frames or information that engenders, in Rudy's words, an "in." As the literature review illustrates, divergent cultural systems emerged out of racial segregation, and these systems have produced worldviews that have largely been preserved within each respective community with little probability of intersection. I contend that my respondents' narratives underscore the distinct social and racial position of having access to both racial worlds.

Research supports distinct differences in the racial socialization of Whites (Picca and Feagin, 2007) and Blacks (Nunnally 2010), regardless of class. Black/White biracials have the potential to access both forms of socialization, which is unique and can yield racial dividends. The majority (61%) of my respondents were raised by both parents, although not all of them lived with both parents for their entire childhood and young adulthood. Most of the remaining participants developed relationships with the racial community that corresponds with their absent parent. This happened either as a result of living in a multiracial community and/or their own expectations that obliged them to forge a connection. Essentially, participants felt that precisely because they are Black and White, they should have relationships with both White and Black people. For example, Jasmine, who has two (adopted) White parents, attended a historically Black college to feel more connected to Blacks. Henry, who was raised by his Jamaican mother and never met his Italian father, majored in Italian in college because he reported, "missing that part of me." Notably, fifty-two of sixty participants (86.6%) reported feeling connected to both Whites and Blacks equally or being able to relate to Whites better than most Blacks can, and being able to relate to Blacks better than most Whites can. As a result of establishing strong ties to both communities, these participants are able to use racial resources to traverse racial boundaries by capitalizing on homophily preferences (McPherson et al., 2001) that manifest through race. In the following sections, I outline how racial capital is drawn upon through knowledge, experiences, and meanings in White and Black communities. I deliberately select interactions with respondents who are phenotypically incompatible with the person or group they interact with to assert that racial capital has the potential to trump phenotype. Then I explain how racial capital is deployed through language by juxtaposing how respondents report linguistically expressing themselves in each community. Lastly, I analyze the disadvantages of racial capital as well as futile attempts of racial capital deployment. The fact that participants chose to draw upon racial resources, regardless of their outcome, attests to the rigidity of racial boundaries, and the incentive of biracial Americans' to master how to navigate them.

Deployment in the White Community

Lawrence is the only person of color in his doctoral program. He navigates encounters with Whites by initiating topics of conversation that are "not typically ethnic," to negotiate racial boundaries. As a result, Lawrence reports being accepted and being treated as more of an intellectual equal.

> It's all about assumptions in White communities and Black communities. So what I try to do in White communities, if I feel as if they are going to focus *completely* on the color of my skin, then I bring up, um, things that are not *typically ethnic* to talk about. Um, [for instance], "Let's talk about literature from Europe, let's talk about European history." Then they start to realize, "Wait a minute, he knows about a lot more than just the color of his skin or race or racism." That's how I kind of gauge it, on both [racial] sides.

The social process of temporarily suspending his White colleague's judgment about Lawrence as a person of color is motivated by his accumulated knowledge and experiences with Whites. While knowledge of racism has been documented in other studies (Essed 1991), racial knowledge in the form of racial capital is different in two ways. First, it is not limited to knowledge of rac*ism*, and secondly, it also includes, by definition, knowledge of *two* racial worlds as an insider. Lawrence reports deploying racial capital "on both sides;" he explained, "I'm disruptive [in both communities], but I also belong here because I fit into both…kind of." Another respondent echoed Lawrence's ability to contend with racial boundaries with Whites by deploying racial capital to gain acceptance from his girlfriend's father.

Rudy's quote was such a succinct articulation of being biracial that I chose his words for the title for this article. Implicit in his statement about having an "in" in both communities is an assertion about racial knowledge and experience to which biracials exclusively have access. Rudy is typically perceived as "full Black" by strangers. His reflection on the experience of meeting his White girlfriend's family members who were displeased that he was Black, illustrates how Rudy generated an "in" for himself.

> It was a pain in the ass at first because her parents were like "Oh you're Black, blah, blah, blah." But then I brought up "I'm half White, too." Then, like, you can just get into a day-long conversation. [Her father said] "Oh, I didn't expect that from you…who is White?" Then I can talk about my mom's side, like, where she's from. It just brings up a whole different range of topics that they'll feel more *comfortable* talking to me about than if I was full Black.

Rudy strategically mentions his White lineage to initiate a conversation with his girlfriend's father, who immediately became more receptive to Rudy, and Rudy's relationship with his daughter. Rudy's interactional behavior supports Bonilla-Silva and colleague's (2004) concept of the *White habitus*, the racially segregated racial socialization that Whites experience which fosters skewed views about themselves in comparison to other racial groups, and shapes their attitudes and emotions. Rudy capitalizes on his knowledge of and experience with the *White habitus* by talking at length about his White ancestry. As a result of reorienting the focus of the conversation to his Whiteness, even though he appears to be "full Black," Rudy prompts his girlfriend's father to be more comfortable with him. It is important to note that there might not have been a similar outcome if Rudy simply knew about White ancestry in general rather than knowing about his own specific White ancestry due to racial homophily preferences. Essentially, both being White *and* sharing this information, generated an "in" for him. This was particularly noteworthy in Rudy's case because his girlfriend's father initially threatened to stop paying his daughter's college tuition. He withdrew this threat upon spending time getting to know Rudy, and perhaps more importantly, after Rudy deployed racial capital.

Saul shared a similar experience while explaining that when his White friends introduce him to new White peers, "They'll be talking about something they probably wouldn't expect me to know about, like Country music. I'll pop in and say 'Yeah, I just saw Kenny Chesney [in concert].' They'll be like 'Really? *You*?' And then we start talking more…and then we'll end up being friends.'" Saul elucidates that he understands the assumptions White peers have as well as how to manage them. He adds, "I do it on purpose to let them know, things don't have to be awkward because I look Black. You don't have to be nervous." As Saul, Lawrence, and Rudy explain, the intimate familiarity with the *White habitus* (Bonilla Silva et al., 2004) or White racial frame (Picca and Feagin, 2007), due to being an insider, assists in their ability to negotiate racial

boundaries through racial capital despite their non-White appearance. Respondents typically used racial capital in interactions with Whites to circumvent racial stereotypes of Blacks being unintelligent, dangerous and inferior to Whites.

Deployment in the Black Community

Vanessa explains how she reaped political racial advantages in high school by obtaining the "Black vote" and how her White boyfriend recruited her assistance in college while courting Black voters.

> [My boyfriend] even made a joke: "Oh, you're really good with Black people." But it's true. He won't approach them. He's scared, he's intimidated. But, like, people are people to me and growing up in a city, I can act tough if I need to. I think that's, like, the mentality that goes along with interacting with the Black community versus the White community. I have always, *always* been able to float from group to group. I won vice president during my sophomore year because I got the Black vote [laughs].

Vanessa is often misunderstood as "all White;" hence, she is often not initially viewed as a racial insider to Blacks. However, because she grew up in a predominately Black community, she can relate to Blacks and deploys racial capital to make that apparent. She draws upon her racial worldview (Smedley 2007) to bond with Black peers because she is aware that they will assume she is White. Vanessa maintains that being able to interact in racially specific ways (i.e., "tough") in encounters with Blacks establishes a connection. Although Vanessa's understanding of Black culture reflects racial stereotypes of Blacks as more aggressive (Collins 2005), she demonstrates a similar level of internalized oppression as other African Americans that associate Blackness with violence (Bryant 2011). Vanessa uses her accumulation of knowledge, experiences, and meanings of Blackness to counteract her White appearance and establish in-group status with fellow Blacks, and in this case, to also gain political benefits for her and her White boyfriend.

William is also phenotypically White. He recalled how his ability to "connect with different types of kids" enhanced his job prospects as a coach at an inner city high school with a large racial minority population. William was able to comfortably interact and bond with his players—despite looking White—which is a key distinction that he believes has provided him with professional opportunities.

> Sometimes I do feel out of my element if they're not Black people who I know. They kind of look at me like "You're not Black" at first but I feel like I can relate to a lot of different things, culturally—well, racially speaking—which in life has helped me. Especially in social situations or with coaching. The group of kids who I coach now is completely different than the kids I coached back at home. For some people, that would be a [racial] barrier. They might be like "Well, I'm not really used to this." But not me. When you're in a position of power as the coach, you can't seem like you're uncomfortable.

William argues that his ability to "relate to a lot of different things, culturally—well, racially" has helped him socially and professionally since he was referred to his current coaching position through informal networks. When he encountered moments with Black student athletes who assumed that he is White, he was able to suggest that he can relate to them by drawing upon racial resources. These racial resources are

effective, despite William's White appearance, because "race is a unifying fiction that still resonates in Black communities and gives unity to the experiences [rather than the phenotype] of many individuals" (Dyson 2009, p. 246). Other White-looking Black/White biracials have documented similar reactions when interacting with the Black community (Rockquemore 2005), although it was not referred to as racial capital.

Olivia, also phenotypically White, never met her Black father and was raised by her White mother and White stepfather. She discussed how she deploys racial capital to make her White half-sister's Black boyfriend feel comfortable when he accompanies her home from college because her parents are unhappy with his racial background. Her sister Aubrey was present during the interview and also offered her opinion. "When Aubrey brings her boyfriend home, I say 'I'll come over, I'll be the [Black] presence, you know.' I'm like the middle, go-between person." Aubrey added, "He *loves* to go to her house because he feels that comfort, he always says there is someone there for him to relate to…He's so self-conscious…but being with Olivia and my [Black] uncle makes him a little more comfortable." Dyson argues that "[t]he relations of race have mostly to do with the conditions that foster or frustrate interactions between racial groups" (2009, p. 190). These sisters discuss how Olivia is able to foster positive interactions through a bond with Blacks, despite racially looking White, which has the potential to frustrate interracial relations. Olivia further explained that she also relates to her Black uncle, who married into her family. "We just have that immediate bond. I'm very comfortable with him because the whole family is White, and I know how some of them can be. Case in point, my [White] grandmother would come over to the house for Thanksgiving, but she wouldn't talk to me." In these scenarios, Olivia is detailing how her shared knowledge and experience has shaped how she connects with her sister's boyfriend and her uncle. The role of racial knowledge in negotiating boundaries during racialized social interactions has been analyzed in other studies, although the focus was on ethnicity, not race (Purkayastha 2005). As a result of these racial resources, Olivia has established a bond with her Black uncle, and her home serves as a sanctuary for her sister's Black boyfriend. As with other respondents, how she deploys racial resources trumps her phenotype and fosters a racial connection or bond. Participants often used racial capital with Blacks to elude racial stereotypes of Whites being mistrustful, privileged, and uncomfortable around African Americans.

Dual Deployment: Racial Bonding through Language

In addition to knowledge, experiences, and meanings, respondents used language, or code-switching, as a racial resource. Code-switching, the enactment of diverse interactional methods that vary according to social setting (Hua 2008), has been examined in the African American community (Ray 2009), and in other ethnic communities (Paris 2009), yet not in the bi/multiracial community. The participants in this study employed linguistic expression as a mechanism to establish a connection with Whites and Blacks. Language was the most commonly used component of racial capital. Although respondents did not explain why, it stands to reason that verbal communication is highly likely if not necessary in a social interaction, yet referencing knowledge, experiences, and meanings are less likely. Respondents report speaking "a little more properly around White people" and "probably more slang with Black people," in the words of Alvin, who was raised by his White family. However, Alvin, along with several other respondents, refined this assertion by declaring "It's not like I talk that way *just* because they are Black or White. It's more of a vibe thing." This "vibe" is a comfort level that participants were able to establish and/or detect due to having access to two racial worldviews, which includes linguistic resources.

In Madeline's words, "I kind of pick up how my friends talk. I do get a lil' *soul* in my voice around Black people…I feel like if you can work the subtleties, you can bond with whomever." Similarly, Chase describes his experiences meeting new players on his track team in college:

> I can usually tell the kids on the team who are from mostly Black neighborhoods. Like, they speak slang so it's *abrasive* when they talk to White people because the kids who grow up in White towns are not necessarily used to it. But I knew how to talk to White kids. I can just come up to them and talk normally…I think it's more of a comfort thing.

Dennis is a musician who just returned from a two-year residency in London and was raised by his Black mother's relatives. He explained why he adamantly refuses to bring some of his Black friends to predominately White functions. In recalling a conversation with a Black friend who wanted to accompany Dennis to a wine tasting, Dennis replied, "Nah, man, you can't come. You act weird and uncomfortable around White people. You be talkin' like 'nigga this' and 'nigga that.' White people don't like that, man. Makes 'em nervous. You can't talk like that around White people." In this statement, Dennis' contention is twofold. First, he emphasizes his Black friend's *lack of* racial capital by asserting that he does not interact appropriately, according to Dennis, with Whites through his actions and word choice. Secondly, he also acknowledges the different meaning that is attached to the word "nigga" among Whites; and he privileges this meaning in a predominately White setting.

> Gabriella explicitly articulates how she expresses one idea in two ways:
> I'm not bipolar, I see it as the most effective way to get my point across. To some people, I'll say 'He was handsome!' versus 'He fine as hell, girl!' It's, 'cause I know how to say it to them for them to understand it the way that I mean. And I think I'm the baddest [skilled, clever] because I can talk to this group and that group *in the same way* that they talk.

Notably, Gabriella begins with a disclaimer that she is "not bipolar," which indicates that she understands how she may be perceived when using racial capital in the form of language. This disclaimer highlights the unique social and racial position that she holds by suggesting that her linguistic options are an uncommon practice. Also, Gabriella's explanation underscores a different grammar system as well as a different parlance to express the same meaning. Django Paris notes how African American Language (AAL) omits the verb in addition to other sentence structure distinctions that represent "an act in linguistic identity" (2009, p. 434). Moreover, George Ray (2009) contends that Standard American English (SAE) is largely considered "proper" English; and it is overwhelmingly associated with the "mainstream," (i.e., middle-class Whites) professionalism, and success (Delpit 2009). The differences in linguistic expression show how language operates as a component of racial capital, and can be used to interact and bond with both Whites and Blacks. In these ways, biracials are managing or essentially working in and around racial boundaries by exposing how porous racial boundaries can be in a way that is directly connected to their Black/White biracial ancestry. If they did not have long-term contact as an insider to both racial communities, and the experiences that accompany this long-term exposure, it would be difficult for them to "pick up" how each communicates. In addition, they might be less comfortable and confident when engaging in code-switching, unlike Gabriella, who boasts that she is "the baddest."

Deployment Disadvantages and Debacles

Although there is a shared racial experience among Blacks (Essed 1991) and a White racial frame (Picca and Feagin, 2007), the worldviews of Whites and Blacks are large in scope. Furthermore, the ingredients that inform these cultural frames are, to some extent, debatable. For example, political philosophy (West 1993), sexual orientation (Battle and Barnes, 2010), gender (Lorde 1984), and class (Feagin and Sikes, 1994) are merely a few areas that underline intraracial tensions and create different experiences which in turn, shape worldviews. Therefore, racial capital is not immune to disadvantages and/or debacles because racial resources are not concrete or fixed. While disadvantages and debacles were not a dominant theme, they are worth exploring because they further complicate the concept of race by revealing how racial resources are, to a certain degree, subjective. Consequently, region, gender, generation, and other social markers mediate them.

The disadvantage of racial capital was unanimously reported to be "getting caught in the act." Louie recalls an experience when he was working as a bouncer at a bar that was racially segregated by floors: "I walked downstairs [to the mostly Black floor] and some guys were like 'What up, Louie?' And I'll be like 'Yo, what up, yo?' That's when you'll see the switch, but one time Vince [a White friend] was right behind me and…so…I've been *caught* doin' it. Vince goes 'What the hell was that!?'" Louie described these experiences as "really embarrassing… humiliating because they just don't understand." Eva reiterates this predicament when she deploys racial capital, "I'm always really conscious about it, I feel almost bad sometimes when someone sees it because they are like 'What's going on?' [laughs] Especially my boyfriend, he'll be like 'Who *are* you?'" Anita characterizes the feelings of exasperation and bewilderment that she experiences when she is in the company of both Whites and Blacks. "When both races are there, I'm like 'Crap! What now?'" Her thoughts reveal not only the anxiety of "getting caught" but also the aftermath: how should she continue the social interaction?; which racial resources should she draw upon?; and how should she deal with this embarrassing and unexpected encounter? The dilemma of "getting caught" is a considerable disadvantage because it precipitates feelings of embarrassment and questions of authenticity that can jeopardize the bond that is intended to be established through racial capital.

Respondents also disclosed encounters when they did not negotiate racial boundaries, yet should have, or when they made an earnest, yet futile attempt to deploy racial capital. Jason explained how he learns from his peers when he is not effectively negotiating racial boundaries: "They point it out. Like, you may use a word when you're with your Black friends that they don't know so they call you out on it. It's the same with your White friends. They'll be like [condescending tone] 'Why'd you say *that*?' They don't even say 'Can you explain that word?' They make you feel stupid, like, weird." According to my respondents, navigating two racial realms propagates perpetual criticism or shameful encouragement to interact in a specific way. Other respondents recalled abortive attempts at deploying racial capital. Fiona calls attention to the regional nuances of racial resources: "When I moved down South [from the Northeast], it was totally different. All of the sudden, I had to pick a race, it didn't matter what I said or did. Just didn't matter." She went on to say that she did not interact in meaningful ways with Whites in school or at work because it was "so severely segregated." Hence, most of her social circle was comprised of Blacks. Malcolm shared a gendered dimension of racial capital. "I didn't know how to give dap [gestural greeting] at the [Black-frequented] barbershop. I, like, messed it up a couple of times. It gets complicated…and the guys laughed at me." This gestural greeting is worth mentioning because it structured subsequent social interactions; the men at the barbershop would continue to tease him if he "dapped" incorrectly, no matter what racial resources he strategically deployed to counteract his

earlier interactional *faux pas*. However, if he "dapped" correctly, it was "just a regular day at the barbershop." Malcolm felt an acute sense to learn how to "dap" because he is fair-skinned, and most people assume he is White. He went so far as to arrive at the barbershop a few minutes early and sit in his car so he could observe other men "give dap" first and memorize how to gesture accordingly. Therefore, greeting fellow Black males at the barbershop served a symbolic purpose and was used to counteract his phenotype as a means to cultivate racial insider status. These outcomes reveal the inevitable distinctions in racial worldviews that participants learned to contend with, sometimes successfully, and other times, not successfully. My findings show that racial capital was successful more often than not. However, failed attempts at racial capital deployment further differentiate racial capital from other forms of capital because it highlights how racial resources operate differently than cultural, social, or economic resources. This finding also underscores how "insider" status is limited in the sense that it can be rendered null depending on subsequent interactional behaviors, and because it is contingent upon whom the person is interacting with as well as a host of other nuanced factors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Before the year 2000, the U.S. Census did not allow Americans to indicate more than one racial background.[3] The 2000 Census invited the growing demographic of mixed-race Americans to "check all that apply." Notably, the population of Black/White biracial Americans increased by over 134% from 2000 to 2010, according to the Census. In the 2010 Census, 92% of people who reported more than one race selected two races; the most common two-race combination was Black and White. Therefore, this group is worthy of empirical attention, especially considering historical and current race relations. Staggering racial disparities persist between Whites and Blacks in housing (Massey and Denton, 1993), education (Kozol 1991), healthcare and life expectancy (Kirby and Kaneda, 2010), and treatment by the criminal justice system (Alexander 2010). These stark differences in life experiences, opportunities, and chances facilitate different ways of viewing life in American society. Therefore, having intimate access to both of these worldviews and socialization processes is sociologically significant.

Given the potential for a distinct type of dual racial socialization from two communities in the form of parents and other caregivers, I build on DuBois's theory of double consciousness by arguing that biracial Americans have *intimate ties* to the White world and the Black world, or in the words of Maria Root, they have "both feet in both [racial] groups" (Root 1992, p. xxi). Consequently, biracials are socialized by White and Black family members and by subsequent "thoughts," "duties," "words," and "ideals" of both communities, each with distinct worldviews or cultural frames that are racialized due to the history of race relations in the United States. Armed with these worldviews, they are unique in that they have access to a repertoire of racial resources that they deploy to navigate social interactions with Whites and Blacks. In sum, if social capital is colloquially abbreviated as "who you know" and cultural capital is "what you know," then racial capital can be colloquially abbreviated as "who you know, *racially* and what you know, *racially*." The racial element is significant because it includes a culture that has developed in part, due to the racialization process that includes institutionalized privilege and discrimination, depending on race. Access to two racial worldviews is significant due to racially bound information that exists and can be used as a benefit. The fact that such racial resources are needed to traverse racial boundaries in a twenty-first-century America that boasts of a "postracial" era is worthy of scholarly attention. I echo other race scholars who destabilize "postracial"

rhetoric by arguing that my findings suggest that the deployment of racial capital *precludes* the possibility of a postracial society. In other words, in a society that is devoid of racial significance, drawing upon racial resources would be meaningless.

The patterns that I have identified in this article are distinctive. At one level, my findings revealed patterns similar to Smedley's (2007) theoretical perspective of race as a worldview that structures one's experiences, cultural conditioning, interpretations, and realities in addition to other racism scholars' arguments about the sociohistorical grounding of the current experiences. At another level, my participants' collective narratives constitute a type of "tool kit" with racial implications, which consists of "symbols, stories, rituals and worldviews" (Swidler 1986, p. 273) that people use to "organiz[e] experience and evaluat[e] reality" as well as create social bonds (p. 284). In my study, biracials use a racialized "tool kit" that is unique precisely because it is twofold. In addition, considering the realities of "everyday racism" (Essed 1991), respondents access and draw from two worldviews (Smedley 2007) or cultural frames (Wilson 2009) *as an insider*, which is markedly different from Whites who live in predominately Black communities or Blacks who live in predominately White communities.

These findings are significant because although society is changing, with a critical lens, we can see that in some ways, it is also remaining the same. Sociopolitical changes, such as the rescinding of anti-miscegenation laws in 1967, have stimulated an increase in interracial unions (DaCosta 2004), a growing bi/multiracial population (Shih and Sanchez, 2009), a multiracial movement (Root 1992), changes in the measurement of racial populations in the United States (see the 1990 and 2000 Censuses), and an explosion in bi/multiracial research. While these changes are milestones and may warrant a significant racial juncture in the United States, this shift has not been seamless for those who represent these changes. In fact, racial identity scholarship identifies the struggles of confidently choosing or rejecting racial identities (Funderburg 1994; Kilson 2001; Leverette 2009; Renn 2004; Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2008), and social psychological well-being research documents the social obstacles of fitting in, particularly in adolescence (Binning et al., 2009; Campbell 2009; Cheng and Lively, 2009; Lusk et al., 2010).

My study reiterates the complicated racial realities evident in existing literature by showing that racial boundaries are not necessarily diminishing in the United States. I identify how racial boundaries are in fact being routinely and deliberately negotiated by a subpopulation that is often assumed to be the embodiment of a racial panacea. In this study, I document how my respondents decenter any figments of a "postracial" or "colorblind" imagination by detailing how race colors their everyday encounters with friends, partners, peers, and supervisors about topics as mundane, and seemingly race-neutral as work, college, dating, and hobbies. This analysis can inform our understanding of how race operates not only in society at large but also in groups that require resources that can accrue benefits. Given the resilience of racial ideologies and the subsequent tenacity of racial boundaries, understanding that that information is embedded in and preserved in specific racial communities that can facilitate opportunities is important. Additionally, understanding the exclusive positionality of Black/White biracials underscores the significance and implications of having access to knowledge, experiences, meanings, and languages in both Black and White worlds.

Implications for Racial Capital

Having intimate, emotional, and familial ties to people of different racial backgrounds and subsequently different worldviews is distinct from other forms of capital.

Chandra D. L. Waring

Although my study examines Black/White biracials, I do not argue that racial capital is limited to a specific group; however, due to lingering racist ideologies, institutional arrangements, and individual practices, racial capital is likely to be accumulated and deployed by people with parents of different racial backgrounds, including other bi/multiracials (i.e., Black/Latino or White/Asian), because of the strong implications and dividends of kinship ties. Scholarship has explored the "strengths" of dual cultural heritage (Edwards and Pedrotti, 2004), the appropriation of White racial symbols to denote biracial ancestry (Khanna 2010), and the "ethnic capital" of White British mothers of biracial children who engage in racially-conscious parenting strategies (Twine 2010). In addition, one scholar has used the term "racial capital" in reference to the ability to buy beauty products, such as skin lightening cream, that manipulate bodies of color into appearing more White or European (Hunter 2011). However, these scholars have yet to employ the term "racial capital" as a way to conceptualize how bi/multiracials negotiate racial boundaries through racial resources in interactions with Whites and Blacks, who collectively comprise 85% of American society. Scholars who do examine daily racialized experiences focus on monoracials, such as Philomena Essed's influential *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* (1991). Essed's (1991) theoretical framework systematically examines everyday encounters as a complex web of social relations that can inform us about how society is structured. I argue that my findings help scholars understand how race continues to function in an increasingly racially diverse and multiracial society, and particularly in the Black/White biracial community. If the very population that is often cited as "evidence" that racial boundaries are disintegrating is in fact deploying racial resources and consequently, preserving race as a social, yet salient, construction, how can we claim a "postracial" or "colorblind" society? Lastly, using a racial capital framework allows us to explore race through worldviews that are racially bound. In doing so, this analysis illuminates the historical implications of accessing more than one racial worldview in a country with an infamous racial past, supposedly "postracial" present, and increasingly bi/multiracial future.

Corresponding author: Assistant Professor Chandra D. L. Waring, Department of Sociology, Criminology and Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, 2122 Laurentide Hall, 800 W. Main Street, Whitewater, WI 53190. E-mail: waringc@uww.edu

NOTES

1. I use the term "bi/multiracial" to refer to individuals of African/Black and European/White ancestry, or to refer to the greater American community of people who possess at least two racial ancestries as a means to be inclusive of individuals who identify with "biracial" and "multiracial." I use the term "biracial" when referring to my respondents because most of them identified with this term. I use the term "mixed-race" also to refer to people of more than one racial background; I use this term as a reflection of a time period when terms like "biracial" and "multiracial" were not yet part of the mainstream racial vocabulary.

2. In using this language, I do not mean to imply that all African Americans speak a particular type of English or that all White Americans speak a particular type of English. I only intend to make the point that racial patterns have emerged in American English; and that these patterns are worth noting because they signify an important, unequal history. They also have the potential to correspond with, and deepen our understanding of, racial capital.

3. A slight exception is the 1890 Census, which allowed Americans to mark the category "Mulatto," which indicates White/European and Black/African ancestry (Johnson 2003). However, this category was removed from the Census in 1900, yet it re-emerged briefly in 1910 and 1920 (Johnson 2003).

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