

# Not Quite Monoracial: Biracial Stereotypes Explored

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## Abstract

Stereotypes often guide our perceptions of members of social groups. However, research has yet to document what stereotypes may exist for the fastest growing youth demographic in the United States—biracial individuals. Across seven studies ( $N = 1,104$ ), we investigate what stereotypes are attributed to various biracial groups, whether biracial individuals are stereotyped as more similar to their lower status monoracial parent group (trait hypodescent), and whether contact moderates these stereotypes. Results provide evidence of some universal biracial stereotypes that are applied to all biracial groups: attractive and not fitting in or belonging. We also find that all biracial groups are attributed a number of unique stereotypes (i.e., which are not associated with their monoracial parent groups). However, across all studies, we find little evidence of trait hypodescent and no evidence that the tendency to engage in trait hypodescent varies as a function of contact.

## Keywords

biracial, stereotypes, prejudice, intergroup attitudes

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There have been dramatic demographic shifts within the United States over the last 50 years, including a significant increase in the number of individuals who identify as biracial (e.g., a person who has parents from two different racial backgrounds). Indeed, biracial people are currently recognized as one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. From 2000 to 2010, the number of self-identified biracial individuals in the United States increased by over one third, and biracial individuals are projected to account for approximately 21% of the U.S. population by the year 2050 (Smith & Edmonston, 1997; U.S. Census, 2012). Yet, research to date has largely ignored assessing the stereotypes of the biracial demographic. Past work shows that racial stereotypes often guide social expectations within interracial interactions (e.g., Amodio & Devine, 2006; Donders, Correll, & Wittenbrink, 2008), but are there established stereotypes about biracial individuals? And if so, do those stereotypes align with or deviate from people's perceptions of monoracial individuals?

Given the aforementioned demographic shift, it is both timely and theoretically important to consider how biracial individuals are stereotyped by others, and how those stereotypes may form. Without empirical research documenting the existence of biracial stereotypes, we cannot fully understand the role that stereotypes may play in people's perceptions of biracial individuals. Moreover, given that the biracial population in the United States is rapidly growing, we believe that these studies provide an opportunity to examine how

factors, such as intergroup contact, shape the development of stereotypes. Thus, the current paper seeks to explore laypeople's perceptions about how society stereotypes biracial individuals, the extent to which biracial individuals are seen to overlap with their monoracial "parent" groups, and how contact with biracial individuals may influence the development of these perceptions.

Research shows that stereotypes are informed by a number of different social cues, including the groups' social standing within society (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007) and individuals' familiarity or contact with the group (Smith et al., 2006). However, because racial stereotype models have exclusively focused on societal stereotypes associated with monoracial groups (e.g., Gaskins, 1999; Herman, 2010; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007), it is currently unclear whether stereotypes about biracial individuals are consistent with or diverge from these preexisting models (Dunham & Olson, 2016; Gaither, 2015; Richeson & Sommers, 2016). Previous work has primarily focused on how biracial individuals are visually perceived or categorized. For example, relative to their

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monoracial counterparts, biracial faces take more time to be racially categorized and are more difficult to remember (e.g., Blascovich, Wyer, Swart, & Kibler, 1997; Chesley & Wagner, 2003; Chen & Hamilton, 2012; Jackman, Wagner, & Johnson, 2001; Pauker et al., 2009; Remedios & Chasteen, 2013; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). In addition, the majority of these past findings primarily focus on biracial Black/White individuals, leaving out other biracial groups (e.g., biracial Asian/White individuals).

The limited evidence that exists with regard to the perceptions and stereotypes of biracial individuals suggests that they may be perceived to be less socially skilled, less competent, and socially colder than monoracial individuals (Remedios, Chasteen, & Oey, 2012; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). The only other study, to our knowledge, that has looked at biracial stereotypes reported that the one-word stereotypes most frequently and spontaneously applied to biracial individuals broadly are “mixed,” “beautiful,” and “confused” (Nicolas, Skinner, & Dickter, 2019). Thus, there is very limited evidence of the societal stereotypes applied to biracial individuals, in general, and virtually no evidence of how stereotypes may vary across different biracial groups. For instance, how do the stereotypes attributed to biracial Black/White individuals compare with those attributed to other biracial groups such as biracial Asian/White individuals? Moreover, how do the stereotypes attributed to biracial Black/White individuals compare with those attributed to monoracial White and monoracial Black individuals? Are any stereotypes universal to the biracial demographic overall? Knowing that both perceptions of social hierarchy and contact with outgroups generally guide the application and development of stereotypes (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007; Smith et al., 2006; Tajfel, 1982), we explore those issues as they relate to biracial stereotypes in the sections that follow.

### Trait Hypodescent and Intergroup Contact

Research on social hierarchy suggests that some racial groups are perceived to have more wealth and power and be at the top of the social hierarchy (e.g., White Americans), whereas others are perceived to have less wealth and power, such that they are perceived to be lower on the social hierarchy (Fang, Sidanius, & Pratto, 1998; Kahn, Ho, Sidanius, & Pratto, 2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). These social hierarchy perceptions are also directly associated with stereotypes about and expectations for racial minorities' behavior. For example, higher status groups are generally stereotyped as more competent than lower status groups (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007). This is relevant, given both current and historical evidence of racial hypodescent in the United States—the tendency for biracial individuals to be categorized as members of the lower status parent's racial group (e.g., Davis, 1991; Harris, 1964; Nicolas & Skinner, 2017). That is, some evidence shows that biracial Asian/White and biracial Black/

White individuals are more likely to be categorized as Asian or Black (respectively), than White (e.g., Gaither, Pauker, Slepian, & Sommers, 2016; Halberstadt, Sherman, & Sherman, 2011; Ho, Sidanius, Levin, & Banaji, 2011; Krosch & Amodio, 2014; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008). But there are limitations of this research, including the fact that hypodescent findings have primarily been observed among higher status participants (e.g., White people in the United States), such that hypodescent cannot be separated from ingroup over-exclusion (Young, Sanchez, Pauker, & Gaither, 2018). In fact, the opposite pattern of results has been observed in Asian American participants' perceptions of biracial Asian/White individuals (Chen, Kteily, & Ho, 2019). Other work has shown that social and contextual cues significantly affect the extent to which participants engage in hypodescent when making racial categorizations (Gaither et al., 2016; Krosch & Amodio, 2014; Rodeheffer, Hill, & Lord, 2012). Moreover, research has yet to examine whether biracial individuals tend to be stereotyped and thought of as more similar to their lower status monoracial parent group.

Consistent with the notion of hypodescent, one might expect that people will perceive biracial groups as more similar to (and sharing more stereotypes with) their lower status monoracial parent group. Yet, all prior work on hypodescent has focused on racial labeling and categorization (primarily when facial stimuli are present). Thus, it is unclear whether the general principle of hypodescent is also applied to stereotyping or what we term here “trait hypodescent.” Moreover, prior hypodescent research has primarily focused on the categorization of biracial Black/White and Asian/White individuals. As a result, we know far less about how dual minority biracial individuals (e.g., Black/Hispanic or Black/Asian biracial individuals) may be perceived.

Given that contact with outgroup members can shape social attitudes and expectations (e.g., Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), contact with biracial individuals may therefore also be an important predictor of how people perceive different biracial groups. Indeed, previous work has speculated that increased contact with biracial individuals may reduce hypodescent (Nicolas & Skinner, 2017). However, it has yet to be tested how contact with biracial individuals relates to how they are perceived, and whether it is associated with reduced trait hypodescent. By measuring biracial contact, we can explore whether trait hypodescent (if it exists) is moderated by contact.

### The Current Studies

Although much of social psychology has focused on stereotype applications toward minority groups, the field has yet to extend these applications to the biracial demographic—a demographic that directly contradicts the common either/or thinking about race. Thus, the current work fills a void in the literature by investigating (a) the specific stereotypes attributed to various biracial groups and the extent to which these

stereotypes overlap with those attributed to their monoracial parents' groups; (b) how similar biracial individuals are perceived to be to their monoracial parents' groups and whether this varies as a function of the societal status of those racial groups; and (c) how contact with biracial individuals is related to perceived similarity between biracial people and their monoracial parent groups. Across seven studies, we examine the perceptions and stereotypes of six different biracial groups to test the generalizability of the effects while also examining the similarities and differences in stereotypes applied to each group. Therefore, this research extends monoracial stereotype frameworks to a biracial population for the first time while also highlighting the potential variation that may exist across and within the biracial demographic.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 1,104 participants from seven unique samples were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk to participate for US\$0.50 (147 in Study 1a, 159 in Study 1b, 154 in Study 1c, 168 in Study 1d, 162 in Study 1e, 157 in Study 1f, and 157 in Study 1g). These studies were conducted in 2013 to 2014, when it was more normative to base sample sizes on convention, which is what we did in the current studies—targeting approximately 50 participants per condition. However, in light of current recommendations of 100 participants per cell for adequately powered behavioral studies (e.g., Fraley & Vazire, 2014; Vazire, 2014), we focus our inferential tests on within-subjects analyses ( $Ns \geq 147$  per cell). Reported participant demographics are as follows: 71% White, 53% female, mean age 33.44 years ( $SD = 11.84$ ), and 49 different U.S. states represented.

### Materials and Procedure

Participants in each study were randomly assigned to report on the stereotypes of one of three groups. In all studies (except Study 1g), participants were assigned to report the stereotypes associated with a specific biracial group (e.g., biracial Black/White individuals) or one of the monoracial parent groups (e.g., White or Black individuals). Study focuses were as follows: Study 1a biracial Black/White individuals, Study 1b biracial Asian/White individuals, Study 1c biracial Black/Hispanic individuals, Study 1d biracial Black/Asian individuals, Study 1e biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals, and Study 1f biracial Hispanic/White individuals. In Study 1g, participants were randomly assigned to report on the stereotypes associated with biracial Black/White individuals, biracial Asian/White individuals, or biracial individuals, generally (racial background not specified) to compare (a) stereotypes directly for the two most commonly reported biracial groups on the U.S. Census and (b) how stereotypes about these groups may compare

with those assigned to a biracial label that does not specify racial background.

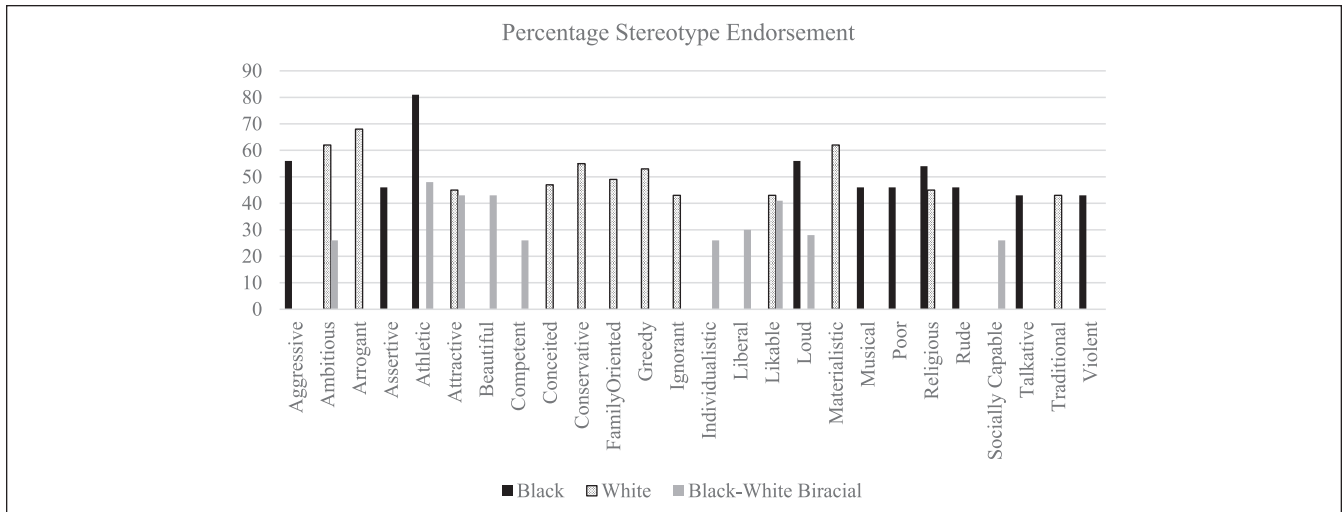
The primary goal of all seven studies was to explore whether there are societal stereotypes about biracial individuals among adults in the United States. Using methods adapted from Devine and Elliott (1995), when participants signed into the study via Qualtrics, they read that we were interested in people's perceptions about society's stereotypes about various groups. These instructions were employed to ensure that participants understood that we were interested in societal stereotypes about the respective groups in general, as opposed to the participants' personal beliefs about the groups. Because there is evidence that stereotypes change over time (e.g., Madon et al., 2001; Zou & Cheryan, 2017), and we were investigating stereotypes toward new target groups, participants were first asked to list as many stereotypes as they could come up with about the group to which they were randomly assigned. This approach also allowed us to capture stereotypes that go beyond the personality/behavioral traits in the stereotype checklist (e.g., free responses such as "comes from a broken home"). After providing their own free-response descriptions, participants were presented with a list of 85 stereotypes (e.g., athletic, happy, sensual, see methods file for full list) that were drawn from previous stereotyping studies (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969; Katz & Braly, 1933) and asked to check off all that they felt applied to the group in question. This and other similar approaches (e.g., Maddox & Gray, 2002) have previously been used to assess stereotypes toward a wide range of groups.<sup>1</sup> The free responses were later coded for their content by two female coders (one Asian and one biracial Asian/White). The coders made a list of the stereotypes that participants freely generated to compare with the stereotype checklist. The first author went over this list and resolved any disagreements or difficulties in categorizing a given stereotype. Across studies, an average of 72% of the stereotypes coded from participants' open-ended responses was not included in the checklist. Table 1 provides the most frequently reported stereotypes of each group (excluding those that appear on the checklist) and the percentage of participants who indicated that stereotype. See Supplemental Materials for more detailed descriptions of these stereotypes; participants' free-response stereotypes from all studies can be found on Open Science Framework ([https://osf.io/twc5v/?view\\_only=c2a402801666432b96f1c0b54bd1a499](https://osf.io/twc5v/?view_only=c2a402801666432b96f1c0b54bd1a499)).

For our primary measure of trait hypodescent, participants were asked to indicate how similar they thought the biracial group examined in that study and the relevant monoracial parent groups were to one another, using a scale from 1 (*not at all similar*) to 7 (*very similar*). Thus, in Study 1a, participants rated the similarity between Black and White individuals, White and biracial Black/White individuals, and Black and biracial Black/White individuals. Trait hypodescent was assessed by statistically comparing similarity ratings for the two monoracial parent groups. In addition, we descriptively

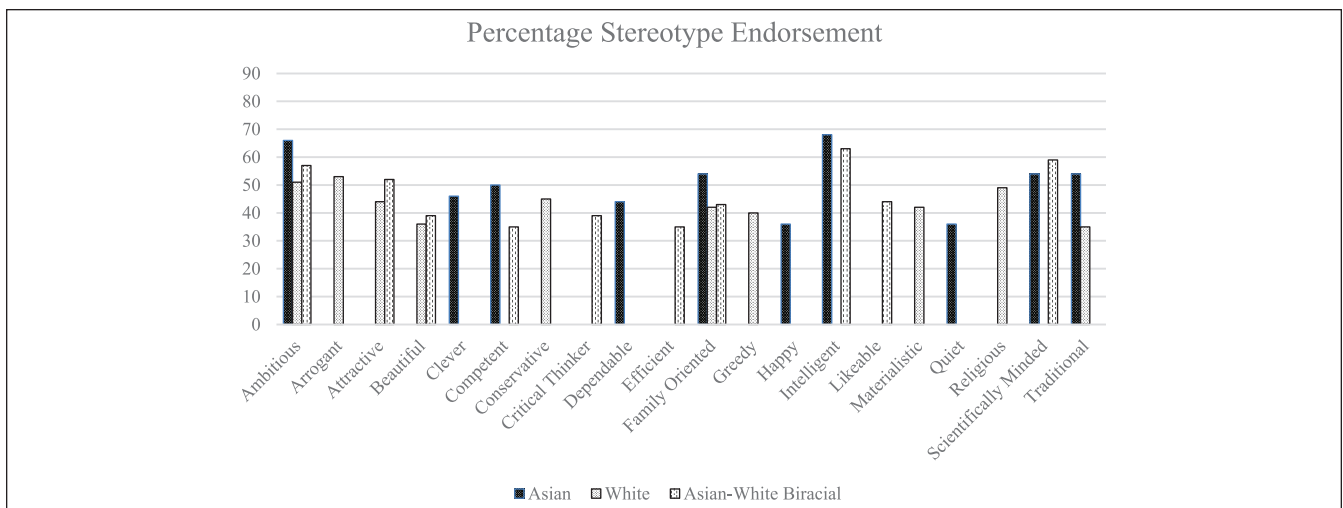
**Table 1.** Stereotypes Coded From Participants' Free Responses and the Percentage of Participants Who Reported Them.

Study Ia	White	Black	Biracial Black/White
	Rich (32%) Racist (21%) Privileged (21%) Bad dancers (19%) Entitled (17%)	Criminal (33%) Uneducated (27%) Welfare-recipients (20%) Unemployed (16%) Angry (15%)	Not belonging (35%) Broken home (16%) Ostracized (16%) Confused (10%) Criminal (8%)
Study Ib	White	Asian	Biracial Asian/White
	Racist (33%) Judgmental (22%) Rich (20%) Bad dancers (18%) High status (18%)	Bad drivers (38%) Appearance (38%) Academic (34%) STEM-oriented (34%) Food preferences (24%)	Appearance (18%) STEM-oriented (14%) Not belonging (10%) Academic (7%) Bad drivers (7%)
Study Ic	Hispanic	Black	Biracial Black/Hispanic
	Illegal immigrant (55%) Professions (34%) Hard working (30%) Large family (29%) Appearance (25%) Food-related (25%)	Criminal (49%) Appearance (30%) Welfare-recipients (21%) Food preferences (21%) Drug-related (17%) Family issues (17%)	Appearance (31%) Criminal (21%) Large family (13%) Not belonging (10%) Drug-related (10%)
Study Id	Asian	Black	Biracial Asian/Black
	Appearance (38%) Bad drivers (33%) STEM-oriented (28%) Hard working (26%) Strict parents (14%)	Criminal (55%) Welfare recipients (23%) Food preferences (23%) Appearance (21%) Uneducated (16%)	Not belonging (26%) Appearance (24%) Criminal (11%) STEM-oriented (9%) Ostracized (9%) Family-related (9%)
Study Ie	Hispanic	Asian	Biracial Asian/Hispanic
	Illegal immigrant (38%) Large family (37%) Hard working (37%) Appearance (25%) Professions (20%)	Bad drivers (32%) STEM-oriented (30%) Hard working (30%) Appearance (28%) Food preferences (9%)	Not belonging (18%) Appearance (16%) Bad English (10%) Bad drivers (10%) Professions (10%)
Study If	White	Hispanic	Biracial White/Hispanic
	Privileged (34%) Racist (32%) Rich (28%) Bad dancers (14%) Entitled (11%)	Illegal immigrant (39%) Hard working (29%) Criminal (23%) Large family (21%) Appearance (18%) Bad English (18%)	Appearance (26%) Food preferences (13%) Illegal immigrant (11%) Hard working (11%) Professions (11%) Not belonging (11%)
Study Ig	Biracial	Biracial Black/White	Biracial Asian/White
	Not belonging (48%) Appearance (33%) Ostracized (7%)	Not belonging (40%) Appearance (17%) Broken home (17%) Ostracized (8%)	STEM-oriented (30%) Appearance (28%) Not belonging (14%) Professions (12%) Bad drivers (10%)

Note. STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.



**Figure 1.** Percentage of participants endorsing the application of each of the top 10 to 13 stereotypes from the checklist applied to each group in Study 1a.



**Figure 2.** Percentage of participants endorsing the application of each of the top 10 to 13 stereotypes from the checklist applied to each group in Study 1b.

compared the specific stereotypes attributed to the biracial group in relation to each monoracial parent group. If biracial groups were observed to have more stereotypes in common with the lower status monoracial parent group, that would be interpreted as evidence supportive of trait hypodescent.

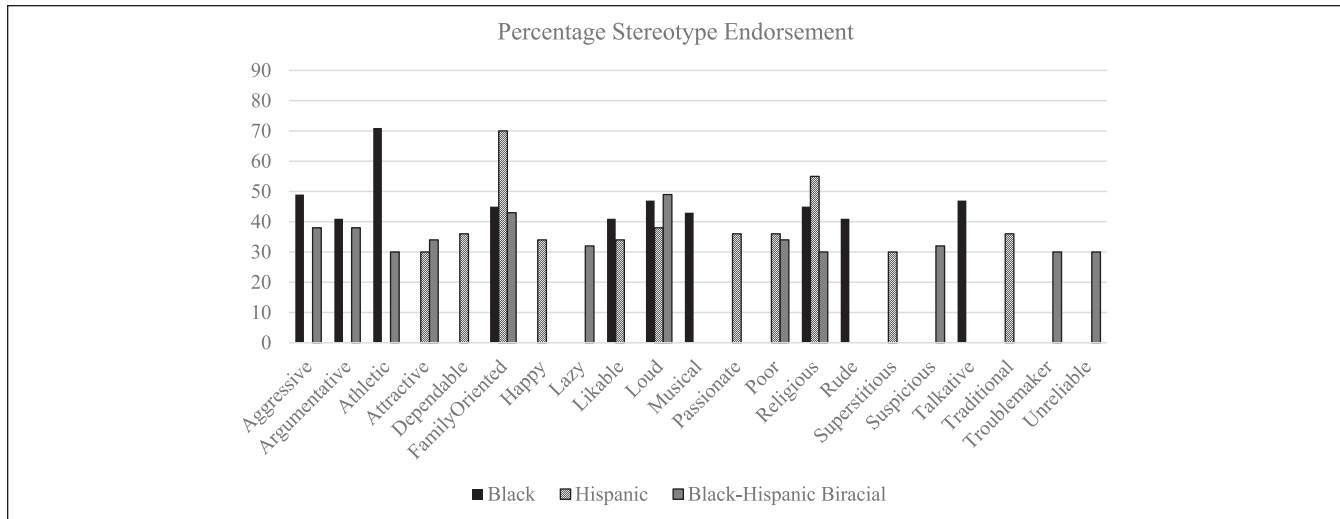
Next, participants were asked to report how much contact they had had with the biracial groups in that study and the relevant monoracial parent groups. For example, in Study 1a, participants rated their contact with Black individuals, White individuals, and biracial Black/White individuals, using a scale from 1 (*not much contact*) to 7 (*a lot of contact*).<sup>2</sup> Finally, participants reported their demographic information.<sup>3</sup> Full materials for all seven versions of the study are available on Open Science Framework ([https://osf.io/dmf9h/?view\\_only=c2a402801666432b96f1c0b54bd1a499](https://osf.io/dmf9h/?view_only=c2a402801666432b96f1c0b54bd1a499)).

Quantitative analyses for all studies were carried out using linear mixed models. At present there is not a consensus on how to appropriately calculate effect sizes for these types of models (Peugh, 2010); thus, these analyses are accompanied by exact *p* values and 95% confidence intervals only.

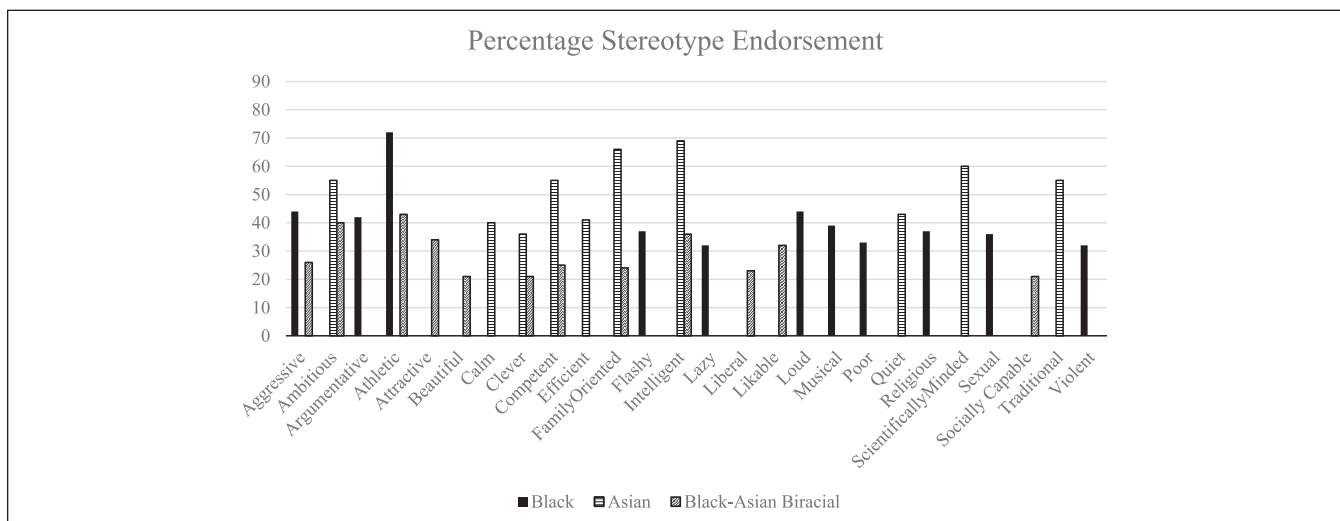
### Results and Brief Discussions

Consistent with previous stereotype checklist studies (e.g., Devine & Elliot, 1995), we present the 10 most frequently selected stereotypes for each group for Studies 1a–1g. Up to 13 stereotypes are presented for cases in which there was a tie between stereotypes (see Figures 1–7 for a visual representation). Following descriptive information about the attribution of stereotypes from the checklist and participant-generated





**Figure 3.** Percentage of participants endorsing the application of each of the top 10 to 13 stereotypes from the checklist applied to each group in Study 1c.



**Figure 4.** Percentage of participants endorsing the application of each of the top 10 to 13 stereotypes from the checklist applied to each group in Study 1d.

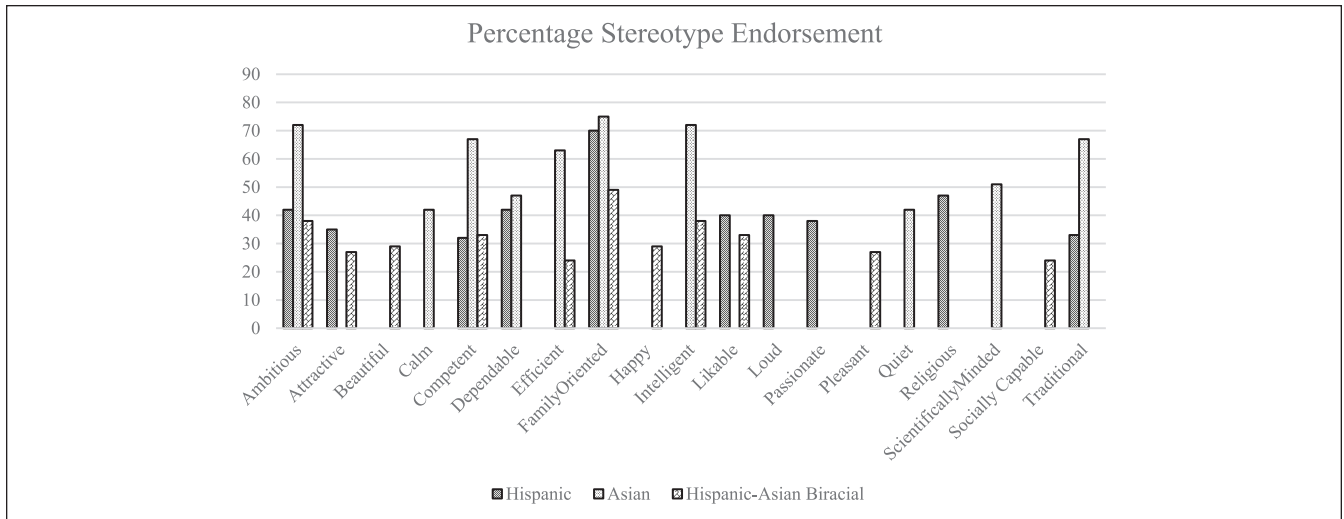
stereotypes, we report inferential analyses of (a) trait hypodescent and (b) the role of contact with biracial groups in predicting perceived overlap with monoracial parent groups.

**Study 1a: Comparing Stereotypes of Biracial Black/White, Monoracial Black, and Monoracial White Individuals**

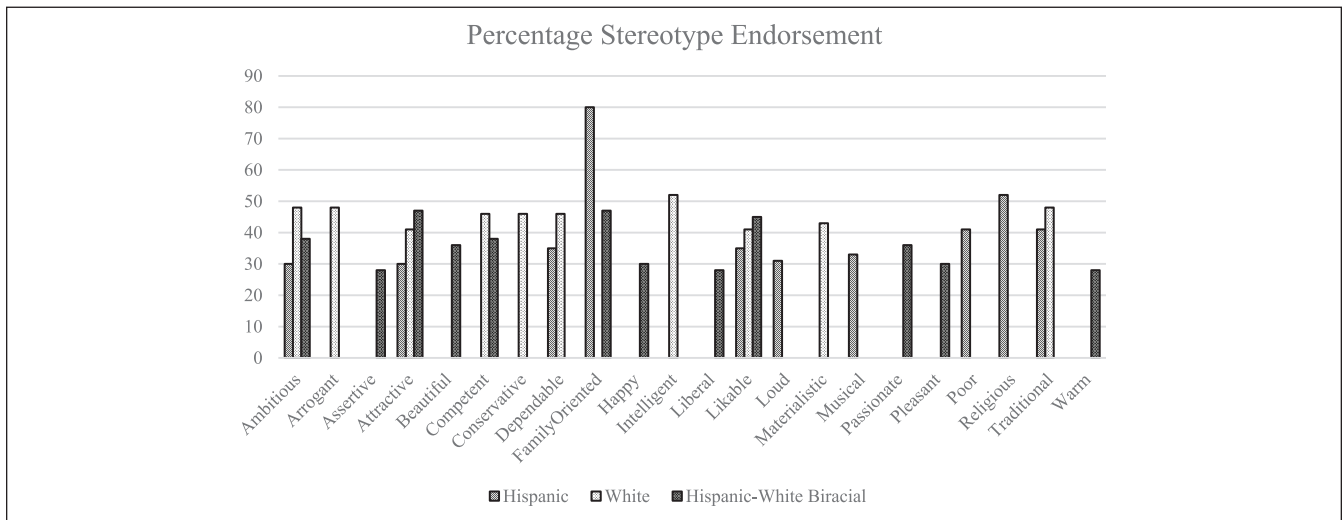
**Stereotypes.** See Figure 1 for stereotype checklist results. A substantial proportion of the free-response stereotypes attributed to each group were not included on the stereotype checklist: 77% for White individuals, 63% for Black individuals, and 82% for biracial Black/White individuals. Excluding the stereotypes included on the checklist, Table 1

provides the most frequently reported free-response stereotypes of each group.

**Examining contact and trait hypodescent.** We used a linear mixed model to predict perceived similarity between biracial Black/White individuals and monoracial parents' groups from parent racial group (Black vs. White), contact with biracial Black/White individuals, and their interaction. Results provided no evidence for trait hypodescent; participants rated biracial Black/White individuals as equally similar to Black individuals ( $M = 4.66, SE = 0.11$ ) and White individuals ( $M = 4.51, SE = 0.11, t(138) = -0.29, p = .772, 95\%$  confidence interval [CI] = [-0.60, 0.45]). Results remained the same controlling for perceived similarity between parent



**Figure 5.** Percentage of participants endorsing the application of each of the top 10 to 13 stereotypes from the checklist applied to each group in Study 1e.



**Figure 6.** Percentage of participants endorsing the application of each of the top 10 to 13 stereotypes from the checklist applied to each group in Study 1f.

groups. Moreover, greater perceived similarity between parent groups was associated with more perceived similarity between biracial individuals and parent racial groups,  $t(137) = 13.47, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.48, 0.65]$ .

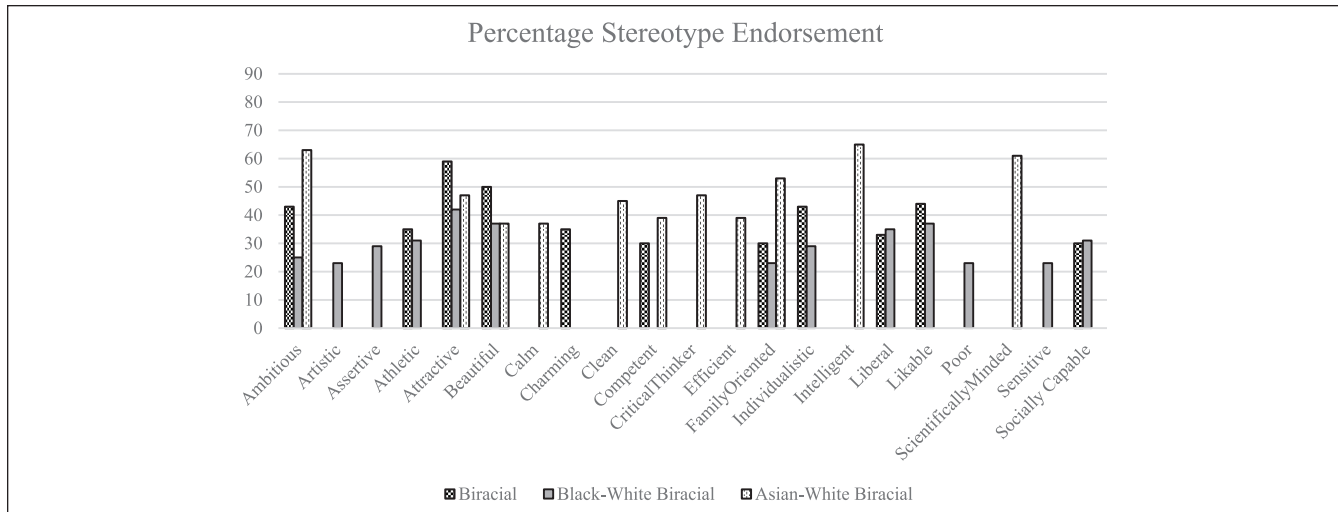
Increased contact with biracial Black/White individuals was associated with greater perceived similarity between biracial Black/White individuals and parents' racial groups (White individuals and Black individuals),  $t(138) = 4.36, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.16, 0.43]$ . Yet, the interaction between monoracial parent group and contact was nonsignificant,  $t(138) = 0.95, p = .345, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.06, 0.18]$ .

In sum, biracial Black/White individuals were perceived to be no more similar to Black than White individuals. Moreover, biracial Black/White individuals had an equivalent number of stereotypes in common with White individuals (ambitious,

attractive, likable) than Black individuals (athletic, loud, criminal). However, some stereotypes, for example, being criminals—were much more frequently applied to monoracial individuals than biracial Black/White individuals. Taken together, Study 1a provides no evidence of trait hypodescent and indicates that this does not seem to vary as a function of contact with biracial Black/White individuals.

**Study 1b: Comparing Stereotypes of Biracial Asian/White, Monoracial Asian, and Monoracial White Individuals**

**Stereotypes.** See Figure 2 for stereotype checklist results. A substantial proportion of the free-response stereotypes attributed to each group were not included on the stereotype



**Figure 7.** Percentage of participants endorsing the application of each of the top 10 to 13 stereotypes from the checklist applied to each group in Study 1g.

checklist: 81% for White individuals, 75% for Asian individuals, and 52% for biracial Asian/White individuals. Excluding the stereotypes included on the checklist, Table 1 provides the most frequently reported free-response stereotypes of each group.

**Examining contact and trait hypodescent.** We used a linear mixed model to predict perceived similarity between biracial Asian/White individuals and parents' racial groups from parent racial group (Asian vs. White), contact with biracial Asian/White individuals, and their interaction. Results provided no evidence for trait hypodescent; participants rated biracial Asian/White individuals as equally similar to Asian individuals ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ) and White individuals ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ),  $t(149) = 0.83$ ,  $p = .409$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.24, 0.58]$ . Results remained the same controlling for perceived similarity between the parent groups. Moreover, greater perceived similarity between parent groups predicted more perceived similarity between biracial individuals and parents' racial groups,  $t(148) = 8.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI =  $[0.41, 0.65]$ .

Increased contact with biracial Asian/White individuals was associated with greater perceived similarity between biracial Asian/White individuals and parents' racial groups (White individuals and Asian individuals),  $t(149) = 3.00$ ,  $p = .003$ , 95% CI =  $[0.07, 0.32]$ . However, the interaction between monoracial parent group and contact was nonsignificant,  $t(149) = -1.63$ ,  $p = .105$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.19, 0.02]$ .

In sum, Study 1b replicated the lack of trait hypodescent observed in Study 1a—biracial Asian/White individuals were perceived to be equally similar to Asian individuals and White individuals. However, biracial Asian/White individuals had more stereotypes in common with Asian individuals (nine stereotypes) than White individuals (four stereotypes). For instance, both biracial Asian/White individuals and

Asian individuals were stereotyped in terms of physical appearance, academic abilities, being good at math and science, and being bad drivers. Thus, the stereotype findings provide some suggestive evidence of trait hypodescent, such that biracial Asian/White individuals may be seen as more similar to and stereotyped in similar ways as Asian individuals, yet results failed to support a link between contact and trait hypodescent.

### **Study 1c: Comparing Stereotypes of Biracial Black/Hispanic, Monoracial Black, and Monoethnic Hispanic Individuals**

**Stereotypes.** See Figure 3 for stereotype checklist results. A substantial proportion of the free-response stereotypes attributed to each group were not included on the stereotype checklist: 79% for Hispanic individuals, 67% for Black individuals, and 61% for biracial Black/Hispanic individuals. Excluding the stereotypes included on the checklist, Table 1 provides the most frequently reported free-response stereotypes of each group.

**Examining contact and trait hypodescent.** We used a linear mixed model to predict perceived similarity between biracial Black/Hispanic individuals and parents' racial groups from parent racial group (Black vs. Hispanic), contact with biracial Black/Hispanic individuals, and their interaction. Results provided no evidence for trait hypodescent; participants rated biracial Black/Hispanic individuals as equally similar to Black individuals ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ) and Hispanic individuals ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ),  $t(142) = -0.55$ ,  $p = .580$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.39, 0.22]$ . Results remained the same controlling for perceived similarity between the parent groups. Moreover, greater perceived similarity between



parent groups predicted greater perceived similarity between biracial individuals and parents' racial groups,  $t(142) = 12.15, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.54, 0.74]$ .

Increased contact with biracial Black/Hispanic individuals was associated with greater perceived similarity between biracial Black/Hispanic individuals and parents' racial groups (Hispanic individuals and Black individuals),  $t(142) = 2.45, p = .016, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.03, 0.26]$ . The interaction between monoracial parent group and contact, however, was nonsignificant,  $t(142) = 0.37, p = .708, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.07, 0.10]$ .

In summary, biracial Black/Hispanic individuals were perceived to be equally similar to Black individuals and Hispanic individuals. Biracial Black/Hispanic individuals had several stereotypes in common with Black (nine stereotypes) and Hispanic individuals (seven stereotypes). Taken together, Study 1c also failed to provide much evidence of trait hypodescent, or an effect of contact on trait hypodescent.

### **Study 1d: Comparing Stereotypes of Biracial Black/Asian, Monoracial Black, and Monoracial Asian Individuals**

**Stereotypes.** See Figure 4 for stereotype checklist results. A substantial proportion of the free-response stereotypes attributed to each group were not included on the stereotype checklist: 70% for Black individuals, 67% for Asian individuals, and 69% for biracial Asian/Black individuals. Excluding the stereotypes included on the checklist, Table 1 provides the most frequently reported free-response stereotypes of each group.

**Examining contact and trait hypodescent.** We used a linear mixed model to predict perceived similarity between biracial Black/Asian individuals and parents' racial groups from parent racial group (Black vs. Asian), contact with biracial Black/Asian individuals, and their interaction. Results provided evidence for trait hypodescent; participants rated biracial Black/Asian individuals as more similar to Black individuals ( $M = 3.89, SE = 0.11$ ) than Asian individuals ( $M = 3.71, SE = 0.11$ ),  $t(151) = -2.39, p = .018, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.73, -0.07]$ . Results remained statistically significant controlling for perceived similarity between the parent groups. Moreover, greater perceived similarity between parent groups predicted greater perceived similarity between biracial individuals and parents' racial groups,  $t(150) = 8.72, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.39, 0.62]$ .

Increased contact with biracial Black/Asian individuals was associated with greater perceived similarity between biracial Black/Asian individuals and parents' racial groups (Black individuals and Asian individuals),  $t(151) = 2.25, p = .026, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.02, 0.29]$ . Yet, the interaction between monoracial parent group and contact was nonsignificant,  $t(151) = 1.56, p = .121, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.02, 0.19]$ .

Overall, Study 1d provided some evidence of trait hypodescent; biracial Black/Asian individuals were perceived to

be more similar to the lower status monoracial parent group (Black individuals) than the higher status monoracial parent group (Asian individuals). However, biracial Black/Asian individuals had more stereotypes in common with Asian (seven stereotypes) than Black individuals (four stereotypes). Taken together, Study 1d provides conflicting evidence of trait hypodescent, given that participants rated biracial Black/Asian individuals as more similar to Black individuals but tended to stereotype them like Asian individuals. Moreover, we failed to find any evidence that trait hypodescent varied as a function of contact.

### **Study 1e: Comparing Stereotypes of Biracial Asian/Hispanic, Monoracial Asian, and Monoethnic Hispanic Individuals**

**Stereotypes.** See Figure 5 for stereotype checklist results. A substantial proportion of the free-response stereotypes attributed to each group were not included on the stereotype checklist: 72% for Hispanic individuals, 71% for Asian individuals, and 71% for biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals. Excluding the stereotypes included on the checklist, Table 1 provides the most frequently reported free-response stereotypes of each group.

**Examining contact and trait hypodescent.** We used a linear mixed model to predict perceived similarity between biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals and parents' racial groups from parent racial group (Asian vs. Hispanic), contact with biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals, and their interaction. Results provided no evidence for trait hypodescent; participants rated biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals as equally similar to Asian individuals ( $M = 3.96, SE = 0.11$ ) and Hispanic individuals ( $M = 4.04, SE = 0.11$ ),  $t(159) = 0.18, p = .857, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.23, 0.28]$ . Results remained the same controlling for perceived similarity between the parent groups. Greater perceived similarity between parent groups predicted greater perceived similarity between biracial individuals and parents' racial groups,  $t(159) = 9.39, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.45, 0.69]$ .

Increased contact with biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals was associated with greater perceived similarity between biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals and parents' racial groups (Hispanic individuals and Asian individuals),  $t(159) = 3.62, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.11, 0.38]$ . However, the interaction between monoracial parent group and contact was nonsignificant,  $t(159) = -0.97, p = .336, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.13, 0.04]$ .

In sum, biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals were perceived to be equally similar to Asian individuals and Hispanic individuals. Biracial Asian/Hispanic individuals had several stereotypes in common with Asian (seven stereotypes) and Hispanic individuals (seven stereotypes). Thus, findings provide no evidence of trait hypodescent, or variation in trait hypodescent as a function of contact.

### Study 1f: Comparing Stereotypes of Biracial White/Hispanic, Monoracial White, and Monoethnic Hispanic Individuals

**Stereotypes.** See Figure 6 for stereotype checklist results. A substantial proportion of the free-response stereotypes attributed to each group were not included on the stereotype checklist: 72% for Hispanic individuals, 84% for White individuals, and 73% for biracial White/Hispanic individuals. Excluding the stereotypes on the checklist, Table 1 provides the most frequently reported free-response stereotypes of each group.

**Examining contact and trait hypodescent.** We used a linear mixed model to predict perceived similarity between biracial White/Hispanic individuals and parents' racial groups from parent racial group (White vs. Hispanic), contact with biracial White/Hispanic individuals, and their interaction. Results provided no evidence for trait hypodescent; participants rated biracial White/Hispanic individuals as equally similar to White individuals ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ) and Hispanic individuals ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ),  $t(149) = -0.46$ ,  $p = .648$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.51, 0.32]$ . Results remained the same controlling for perceived similarity between the parent groups. Moreover, greater perceived similarity between parent groups predicted more perceived similarity between biracial individuals and parents' racial groups,  $t(149) = 13.25$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI =  $[0.51, 0.69]$ .

Increased contact with biracial White/Hispanic individuals was associated with greater perceived similarity between biracial White/Hispanic individuals and parents' racial groups (White individuals and Hispanic individuals),  $t(149) = 4.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI =  $[0.14, 0.38]$ . Yet, the interaction between monoracial parent group and contact was nonsignificant,  $t(149) = -0.11$ ,  $p = .912$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.10, 0.09]$ .

In sum, biracial White/Hispanic individuals were perceived to be equally similar to White individuals and Hispanic individuals (and this did not vary as a function of contact), consistent with the bulk of the evidence from our previous studies. However, biracial White/Hispanic individuals had fewer stereotypes in common with White (four stereotypes) than Hispanic individuals (seven stereotypes). Thus, Study 1f provided some evidence of trait hypodescent, at least in terms of stereotyping.

### Study 1g: Comparing Stereotypes of Biracial Black/White, Biracial Asian/White, and Biracial Individuals

The goal of our final study was twofold: (a) to compare the stereotypes attributed to the two most common biracial groups in the United States—Black/White and Asian/White biracial individuals and (b) to examine what stereotypes may come to mind when someone thinks of the word “biracial,”

generally (i.e., without specifying racial background). This comparison therefore allows us to document who people generally think of when they hear the word “biracial.” It also allows us to test whether—in line with stereotype development and intergroup contact research—those general stereotypes overlap with the two biracial groups with which Americans should have the most contact or exposure.

**Stereotypes.** See Figure 7 for stereotype checklist results. A substantial proportion of the free-response stereotypes attributed to each group were not included on the stereotype checklist: 74% for biracial Black/White individuals, 68% for biracial Asian/White individuals, and 78% for biracial individuals (race not specified). Excluding the stereotypes on the checklist, Table 1 provides the most frequently reported free-response stereotypes of each group.

**Examining contact and trait hypodescent.** We used a linear mixed model to predict perceived similarity between biracial individuals and parents' racial groups from parent racial group, contact with those biracial individuals, and their interaction. Similarity between parent groups was not assessed in this study; thus, we did not test whether results differed after controlling for similarity between parent groups.

**Biracial Black/White individuals.** Replicating the findings of Study 1a, results provided no evidence of trait hypodescent, participants rated biracial Black/White individuals as equally similar to Black individuals ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ) and White individuals ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ),  $t(146) = -1.29$ ,  $p = .197$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.92, 0.19]$ .

As with all previous studies, increased contact with biracial Black/White individuals was associated with greater perceived similarity between biracial Black/White individuals and parents' racial groups (White individuals and Black individuals),  $t(146) = 3.18$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI =  $[0.08, 0.34]$ . However, the interaction between monoracial parent group and contact was nonsignificant,  $t(146) = -0.50$ ,  $p = .620$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.16, 0.10]$ .

**Biracial Asian/White individuals.** Replicating the findings of Study 1b, results provided no evidence for trait hypodescent. Participants rated biracial Asian/White individuals as equally similar to Asian individuals ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ) and White individuals ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ),  $t(146) = -0.20$ ,  $p = .838$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.37, 0.30]$ .

Again, increased contact with biracial Asian/White individuals was associated with greater perceived similarity between biracial Asian/White individuals and parents' racial groups (Asian individuals and White individuals),  $t(146) = 3.13$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI =  $[0.07, 0.32]$ . Yet, the interaction between monoracial parent group and contact was nonsignificant,  $t(146) = -0.01$ ,  $p = .994$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.09, 0.09]$ .

Overall, the results of Study 1g indicated that the category “biracial” may be somewhat more representative of biracial

Black/White individuals than biracial Asian/White individuals, as indicated by greater overlap between the stereotypes attributed to biracial and biracial Black/White individuals (nine stereotypes) than biracial Asian/White individuals (five stereotypes). The findings of this study also provided insight into the stereotypes that are applied to biracial individuals in general—ambitious, attractive, beautiful, and family-oriented. The two tests of trait hypodescent supported our previous findings, showing no evidence of trait hypodescent or variation as a function of contact.

## General Discussion

Across seven studies, we investigated whether biracial stereotypes align with or diverge from more commonly known monoracial stereotypes, whether these stereotypes differed by biracial group, and whether contact with biracial individuals was associated with perceived similarity to their monoracial parent groups. Results revealed considerable variability in the stereotypes applied to various biracial groups. In addition, biracial individuals were not just attributed the same stereotypes as their monoracial parents' groups. Across studies, 26% to 60% of the stereotypes that were applied to biracial individuals were unique (i.e., not overlapping with either monoracial parent group). This suggests that the biracial demographic is, indeed, perceived to be distinct from their monoracial parent groups.

### *What Are Unique Biracial Stereotypes?*

Our findings provided evidence of a universal biracial stereotype, that is, a set of stereotypes that characterized all biracial groups, regardless of racial background. All biracial groups were stereotyped as attractive, and nearly all were stereotyped as beautiful (see Nicolas et al., 2019). This is consistent with prior studies indicating that across multiple societal contexts (the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Japan), mixed-race faces (both real and morphed) are rated as more attractive than monoracial faces (Lewis, 2010; Rhodes et al., 2005; Sims, 2012). Although it is unclear precisely why this is the case, some have argued that this could be evidence of an evolved attraction to people with greater genetic diversity (Lewis, 2010). The stereotype of not fitting in/belonging also emerged for all biracial groups. This finding aligns with work indicating that concerns about not fitting in are common among biracial people in the United States (e.g., Kelcholiver & Leslie, 2007), and that one's sense of belonging is one of the most frequently studied constructs among multiracial populations (Charmaraman, Woo, Quach, & Erkut, 2014; Gaither, 2015). Given that biracial individuals tend to be perceived as more attractive than monoracial individuals, and that biracial individuals tend to express greater concerns about belongingness than monoracial individuals, it is not surprising that these emerged as universal stereotypes of biracial people. Thus,

the findings of these studies suggest that these universal biracial stereotypes may merely be a reflection of the most common perceptions people have of biracial individuals and biracial individuals' personal experiences.

It is also worth emphasizing the low percentage of participants' open-ended responses which were captured by the stereotype checklist (50% or fewer across all samples). In fact, many of the most common stereotypes reported in participants' open-ended responses are not included in common stereotype checklists (e.g., Devine & Elliot, 1995; Madon et al., 2001; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). For instance, although the stereotype that Asian individuals are bad drivers was reported in the open-ended responses of more than 30% of the sample in all three studies that measured stereotypes of Asian individuals, to our knowledge this stereotype has largely been undocumented in the literature (though Duchschere & Dovidio, 2016 provide some evidence). This may have to do with the fact that much of the prior stereotyping work has focused on one-word traits and descriptors. The current work demonstrates that many of the most common stereotypes people hold about racial groups are more nuanced than that, as evidenced by the fact that some of the most frequently reported stereotypes across groups had to do with physical appearance and dress, food preferences, professions, and family structure/dynamics. We next summarize how biracial stereotypes relate to monoracial stereotypes, evidence of trait hypodescent, and the relation between contact with biracial individuals and the perceived similarity between biracial individuals and their monoracial parents' groups.

### *Evidence of Trait Hypodescent*

Overall, we found very little evidence for trait hypodescent—biracial individuals were not perceived to be more similar to (nor did they consistently share more stereotypes with) their lower status monoracial parent's group. Unlike our studies, many of the previous studies examining hypodescent through racial labeling or racial categorization used facial stimuli (e.g., Cooley, Brown-Iannuzzi, Brown, & Polikoff, 2018; Gaither et al., 2016; Ho et al., 2011). Although some studies have found evidence of hypodescent based on written descriptions of ancestral background (Ho et al., 2011), other work has showed that when ancestral background and facial stimuli were independently manipulated, only facial stimuli produced evidence of hypodescent (Skinner & Nicolas, 2015). Taken together, previous findings suggest that hypodescent may be largely based on visual appearance. Thus, the current studies are the first (to our knowledge) to examine stereotyping and perceived similarity of biracial individuals to their monoracial parent groups—as opposed to similarities in racial labeling. It remains to be seen whether trait hypodescent might emerge if participants were making judgments based on facial stimuli. Future work should examine this possibility.

We also examined whether, as Nicolas and Skinner (2017) suggest, increased contact with biracial individuals

**Table 2.** Mean Level of Biracial Contact, Number of Unique Stereotypes, and Number of Overlapping Stereotypes With the Lower and Higher Status Monoracial Parent Group, Across Studies.

	Biracial contact	Unique stereotypes	Lower status overlap	Higher status overlap
Study 1a: B/W	4.03	9	3	3
Study 1b: A/W	3.59	4	9	4
Study 1c: B/H	3.38	5	9	7
Study 1d: B/A	2.62	7	4	7
Study 1e: A/H	2.48	6	7	7
Study 1f: W/H	4.01	10	7	4

Note. Contact was measured on a scale from 1 (*not much contact*) to 7 (*a lot of contact*). B/W = Black/White; A/W = Asian/White; B/H = Black/Hispanic; B/A = Black/Asian; A/H = Asian/Hispanic; W/H = White/Hispanic.

moderates hypodescent. However, we found no evidence that this was the case, at least when it comes to trait hypodescent. See Figure 2 for a side-by-side comparison of mean level of contact as it relates to attribution of overlapping stereotypes with higher and lower status monoracial parent groups. Biracial individuals were not reliably attributed more stereotypes in common with their lower status monoracial parent group. Thus, participants generally did not show evidence of trait hypodescent, and this did not vary as a function of how much contact participants had with that particular biracial group. Instead, across all studies, we observed that increased contact with biracial individuals was associated with increased perceptions of biracial people as an amalgamation of the traits of each of their monoracial parents' groups—such that they were perceived to be more similar to both their higher and their lower status monoracial parent groups. The fact that we failed to find much of any evidence of trait hypodescent, overall, may help explain why contact did not moderate trait hypodescent. Yet, other work has found that contact did not moderate visual hypodescent, in terms of racial categorization (Chen, Moons, Gaither, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2014).

### *How Do Biracial Stereotypes Relate to Monoracial Stereotypes?*

Interestingly, Study 1g showed that stereotypes about biracial people, in general, overlapped with most of the perceived societal stereotypes of biracial Black/White individuals (9 out of 11 stereotypes). In contrast, biracial Asian/White individuals only overlapped on about half of the stereotypes (5 out of 11) of biracial individuals, generally. Participants also reported more contact with biracial Black/White individuals than biracial Asian/White individuals (see Table 2). This is not surprising, given that biracial Black/White individuals are the most commonly reported biracial group in the United States (U.S. Census, 2012). A question that emerges from this research is how unique stereotypes of biracial groups are formed. In other words, what factors led to the development of unique stereotypes about a biracial group, rather than a combination of the stereotypes most often applied to their monoracial parent groups?

One possibility is that biracial groups that are more visible or present in the population have more unique stereotypes. Thus, having more contact with a biracial group may lead to the development of more unique (nonoverlapping with monoracial parent groups) stereotypes about them. However, as illustrated at the aggregate level in Table 2, the number of unique stereotypes applied to a given biracial group seems to be independent of the amount of contact (at the group level) participants had with that biracial group. The groups with whom participants reported having the most (biracial Black/White individuals) and the least contact (biracial Asian/Hispanic and biracial Black/Asian individuals) were attributed a similar number of unique stereotypes.

An associated possibility is that individuals may use causal reasoning to combine groups with stereotypes that are perceived to be at odds with one another (Kunda, Miller, & Claire, 1990). For instance, if participants are trying to form an impression of biracial Black/Asian individuals, they may imagine the types of Asian and Black people who would form a relationship and have children together. This may provide fodder for speculation about the ethnic and cultural background of biracial Black/Asian individuals. Previous research has shown that when combining two disparate pieces of social information about an individual (e.g., Harvard-educated and carpenter), people employ causal reasoning to form impressions (Kunda et al., 1990). This type of causal reasoning is supported by participants' open-ended responses, which often referenced parents' motivations for engaging in an interracial relationship (e.g., greed, desperation), and family structure (e.g., come from a broken home, Asian mom and Black dad, mom has children with many different men). Future work should further investigate the causal thought processes individuals go through to form impressions and stereotypes about biracial individuals and groups.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

A limitation of the current set of studies is that the samples that rated each individual group were somewhat small by current standards. Thus, the specific stereotypes attributed to each group should be viewed with some caution. We do note, however, that the stereotypes most frequently applied to each



group were fairly consistent across studies, although there were some groups (e.g., biracial Black/Hispanic individuals) that were only evaluated by a single participant sample. Future research should therefore replicate this work with a larger sample for generalizability purposes. Our samples were predominately White and none of the other racial or ethnic groups were large enough to statistically examine separately. Thus, the current findings largely represent the stereotypes of White individuals in the United States and future work should examine how perceptions of biracial individuals vary across different racial groups.

Furthermore, the valence (positive or negative) of the stereotypes attributed to monoracial parent groups may also be an important predictor of the number and valence of unique stereotypes attributed to biracial groups. We found that biracial Black/Hispanic individuals were largely attributed negative stereotypes. This may be explained by previous work showing that in the United States, Black individuals and Hispanic individuals tend to be perceived more negatively (lower in competence and warmth), than White and Asian individuals (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). This is also consistent with past work indicating that having dual minority statuses equates to more negative perceptions and experiences (e.g., Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Taken together, these results suggest that there may be an additive effect of monoracial parent group stereotypes, such that participants perceive biracial Black/Hispanic individuals particularly negatively, because there are negative stereotypes associated with both of their monoracial parent groups. Future research should examine whether the stereotypes of biracial Black/Hispanic individuals are as negative as our data suggest and whether other groups of biracial individuals that combine negatively stereotyped monoracial parent groups (e.g., biracial Black/Arab individuals) are also disproportionately attributed negative unique stereotypes. Moreover, given that several countries have Black Hispanic or Afro-Latinx populations (e.g., Cuba, Dominican Republic), future research should examine the extent to which the stereotypes applied to biracial Black/Hispanic individuals differ from the stereotypes applied to ethnically Hispanic Black individuals.

Finally, we also believe that the growing biracial demographic may present an important opportunity to develop the literature on intersectionality. Previous intersectionality work has largely focused on the intersection of identities across two social domains (e.g., race and gender), whereas biracial populations present the opportunity to explore the overlap of two identities within a single social domain (i.e., race). In fact, recent work has demonstrated that race is “gendered” meaning that some racial categories are more directly associated with certain genders over others (e.g., Black with men; Johnson, Freeman, & Pauker, 2012). This suggests that biracial Black/Asian individuals may be stereotyped quite differently, depending on their gender, such that biracial Black/Asian women may be stereotyped in line

with Asian stereotypes and biracial Black/Asian men may be stereotyped in line with Black stereotypes. Future work will be critical for determining whether and how the stereotypes applied to biracial individuals vary as a function of their gender.

## Conclusion

In sum, this research marks the first to date to comprehensively document the developing stereotypes about the growing biracial population in the United States. This work is also among the first to begin the needed discussions surrounding possible within-group differences for perceptions of the biracial demographic. Our data suggest that there are universal stereotypes of biracial individuals, namely that they are attractive and struggle with belonging. However, we also found that the perceived societal stereotypes about biracial groups vary greatly. Although some biracial groups share a lot of stereotypes with their monoracial parent groups (e.g., biracial Asian/White individuals), other groups are stereotyped in ways that are largely distinct from their monoracial parent groups (e.g., biracial Black/White individuals). Furthermore, we show that when researchers use the term “biracial,” it is clearly important to specify which biracial group is of interest, because the default biracial group may be biracial Black/White individuals.

Identifying the stereotypes that are applied to the biracial demographic will help further our limited understanding surrounding biracial social experiences and treatment. Beyond this, examination of the stereotypes that are applied to various biracial groups and the factors that predict them may provide important insight into the development of stereotypes, more broadly. In the current studies, contrary to the literature on racial categorization of biracial individuals, we failed to find consistent evidence of trait hypodescent. Thus, biracial individuals were not consistently considered to be more similar or share more stereotypes with their lower status monoracial parent group, and this did not vary as a function of contact with that particular biracial group. This work provides an initial test of some of the factors (hypodescent, contact) that could theoretically contribute to the development of biracial stereotypes, though many others remain untested (e.g., phenotypicity, exposure). Given the increasing size and visibility of the biracial population in the United States, researchers now have the opportunity to examine the factors that predict the formation, change, and content of stereotypes as they become established within the broader culture.

## Authors' Note

Allison L. Skinner and Sylvia P. Perry share first authorship.

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## Notes

1. Participants were also asked to rate the assigned groups on other factors including how educated the group is and how similar people in this group are to themselves.
2. Participants also completed a series of exploratory individual difference measures (race essentialism, colorblindness, and social dominance orientation) that are not reported because they go beyond the scope of this article.
3. Participants also completed exploratory individual difference measures of their race-related attitudes immediately before demographic information was collected.

## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material is available online with this article.

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