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REFLECTIONS ON WHITE-PASSING BLACK IDENTITY

by

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B.A. The University of Connecticut, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Now, there are more options than ever for racial identity. Identities such as Black, White, Native, Asian, and Latino have put into contention how past racial boundaries and definitions interact with newer racial color lines. Racial passing is one concept that captures both older and newer forms of identity maintenance. Racial passing refers to when a person classified as a member of a racial group is accepted or perceived as a member of another. In this thesis, I review the literature on racial passing to understand its history and theoretical explanations. Based on the review, I examine a convenience sample of research participants to examine their views on racial passing, if they believe claims of white-passing black people claiming blackness, and their opinions on the consequences or benefits of white-passing black people choosing to claim blackness or whiteness. I utilize qualitative methods to understand the participant's perceptions of racial passing. The analyses yielded several themes, including results of white passers' claims of blackness being believed if people believed they were claiming blackness for the right reasons and that people generally understood material reasons for white passers claiming whiteness. The themes support previous racial passing literature findings and provide insights into how racial identity continues to be fluid and ever-changing.

Keywords: Race, Identity, Racial Passing, Racism

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INTRODUCTION

Racial formation in the United States is unique because it is one of the only countries where black people are seen as one group regardless of how they look phenotypically (Omi & Winant 2015). In the United States, racialization was mainly based on blood quantum, which states that someone can be as light or look like any other white person; however, if they had a single drop of black blood in their body, that person was considered black (Cooper 2008). This leads to the concept of "passing," that someone could look white but be black because they would have black ancestry. They started to look white because, over time, their families intermarried with white people and ended up having offspring that looked white phenotypically; hence, they "passed" as white people for phenotypical and social reasons (Cooper 2008). When someone successfully "passed," their black ancestry is unknown.

The United States has a long history of unequal racialization, and with this comes the inability of some people to fit into traditional racial categories and racial hierarchy. The racial hierarchy has put on top the group that reflects the values and interests of the dominant class at the expense of other groups that have no access to resources or have socially favored characteristics. Historically, newcomers to the United States have fought to resemble the dominant ruling class. For example, in the early 20th century, immigrants from India fought in the supreme court to be viewed and recognized as white to be granted citizenship in the case of *Thind v. United States* (Lopez 2006). Although *Thind* ultimately lost, that case highlights how different groups aspire to attain whiteness to receive better treatment and more access to the opportunities that whiteness granted them (Lopez 2006). Although colorism is a problem that should not be ignored (Hunter 2007), anyone in the United States displaying blackness,

regardless of shade or mixed ancestry, would not have access to specific economic and social opportunities (Lopez 2006). Even though new racial identities have emerged, there are still instances where people can racially identify differently from their historical racial identity to receive the benefits and favorable perceptions of the dominant racial group. In this thesis, I examine a convenience sample of research participants to examine their views on racial passing, specifically for white-passing black people (hereafter “white-passers”), and their opinions on the consequences or benefits of white-passing black people choosing to claim blackness or whiteness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Social Construction of Race

Unlike the biological conception of race, social scientists argue that race is socially constructed (Omi & Winant, 2015). Biologically all humans are the same, but race has been used to elicit differences that only exist in the social world; It does not exist in the natural world because no genes in DNA code for whiteness or blackness (Fields and Fields 2014). Humans produced the concept of race to serve a social and institutional function. In the United States context, it is a way of deciding who gets what in a material sense (Omi & Winant 2015). The central organizing principle of race relations in the United States has revolved around the black-white color line (Du Bois 1929; Lee 2003). However, the concept of "black" has become increasingly multidimensional, varied, and contextually specific to the point where there might need to be a reevaluation of the validity of black as a social construct (Brunsma 2002).

In the United States, early 20th century lawmakers decided that everyone with a black ancestry would be classified and viewed as black, even if a white passer had phenotypically white skin, if that person had a black great-grandparent, they would be classified as black (Cooper 2008). That rule was enacted to make everyone in that group part of the same cohesive whole (Cooper 2008). This was done because if every individual member is viewed under the same categorization, then excluding that entire group from having material and social resources would be easier than excluding many smaller groups (Godfrey 2018). However, past racial theories have argued that many people do not comfortably fit within a specific racial category (Fields and Fields 2014). One of the best ways to illustrate this is that the difference between race and nationality confuses many people, particularly new immigrants (Perez 2009). Many new

immigrants view their race as being their nationality; for example, many Chinese immigrants will say they are Chinese and not that they are Asian because they do not know that in the United States, China is considered the county they are from and that Chinese is considered their nationality but that Asian is their racial classification (Iwamoto 2010). This is also because race as a concept is fluid (Iwamoto 2010). You can be viewed as a different race or a member of a different group depending on many factors, such as phenotype, social meaning, the ascription of race, or geographic variations in racial categorization (Campbell 2004). In addition, a person's geographic location can influence their race.

For example, someone viewed as African American in the United States could go to Brazil and be viewed as something else. This is because Brazil has had a different racialization than the United States (Mitchell-Walthour 2014). The Brazilian process was made to build a lineage of hypodescent depending on who someone's parents were, while the U.S. system was made to create a slave class regardless of differing descent (Mitchell-Walthour 2014). Mitchell-Walthour claims, “Although Brazil and other Latin American countries frequently continue to be viewed as exemplars where race is fluid and ambiguous, scholars studying racial dynamics in the United States also recognize that racial identity is not as straightforward as originally thought” (Mitchell-Walthour 2014:322). This further highlights blackness’s multidimensional meanings in the United States today.

Furthermore, racialization happens differently depending on where you are in the United States (Perez 2009). In some places in the United States, a person could be seen as more or less black than others (Bratter 2015). Many black people have reported that depending on where they live or travel, they are viewed as more or less black or a bigger or smaller threat to white people

(Saperstein 2012). Regional history and population distributions have impacted how race is understood and experienced in different places (Khanna 2010). For example, in the south, where the one-drop rule was more prevalent, biracial people mixed with black and white are more likely to identify as biracial in public but privately view themselves as monoracial, viewing themselves as either white or black (Bratter 2015). Also, in the southern United States, compared to the north, there were more enslaved people, and because of that, there were more biracial people (Perez 2009).

Additionally, racial fluidity has allowed an individual's race to change over time depending on space and place. Race has also been proven to be fluid in how certain people's self-identities differ from their external identities. For example, many people are black by ancestry but look white, and when they tell others in social conversations that they are black, they are sometimes not believed (Sims 2016). This also ties into the concept of the changing nature of race over time. For instance, racial categorization, such as that used on the U.S. census, has changed since categories were first developed (Perez 2009). An example that helps highlight this fluidity is that, at one point, people from Armenia were not considered white because of their geographic origin; however, in later iterations of the census, their geographic location became known as a location that was designated as white (Perez 2009).

Passing

The concept of passing can trace its history back to the United States' unique racial formation (Lopez 2006). One example that highlights its unique formation is that there were no multiple distinctions within the group that was labeled as black, unlike in other places. For instance, in Brazil, there were many different racial categories and distinctions within a black

group based on who someone's parents were and what someone's social class was; in the United States, lawmakers decided that no matter how "light" or "dark" someone was that they would all be classified under the same category; as black (Lopez 2006).

The idea that someone in the United States can be considered black despite how phenotypically white they might appear is an old concept; it started in the 20th century as a practice that said that someone with even one black ancestor on either side of their family would be considered black, regardless of how far back that ancestor was in the family tree (Cooper 2008). Specifically, terms such as "white," "black," and the "one-drop rule" were used by lawyers and court justices in disputes involving racial identity and legal rights beginning in 1896 (Cooper 2008). In both cases, the one-drop ideograph dominated discussions regarding who was "black" or "white" Based on its ideographic relationship with the one-drop rule, "black" was defined to include mixed and unmixed blacks as well as whites (Cooper 2008). invisible blackness was rhetorically constructed from the language used by the court; the one-drop rule continues to influence legislation and social attitudes (Cooper 2008). So, this meant that even the way a person presents in terms of skin color was irrelevant if they had a black ancestry; they are black regardless of how phenotypically white or black they are; that is why passing has been seen as a form of "invisible blackness" by those who possess it (Cooper 2008). This means that the person who is passing is, in fact, black but appears to be white or another race. The dominant class created the concept of hypodescent through the one-drop rule as a rejection of the concept of passing. It was meant to racialize every member of a specific lineage as part of a lower-class group (Hobbs 2014). So, everyone with "black" blood was considered black; this is also why

descendants of enslaved black people were seen as black, even if mixed with another race (Hobbs 2014).

It is important to note that passing can be seen to cross racial identity borders (Alexander 2004). Therefore, passing is a construction of how members of different groups view the person passing (Alexander 2004). Passing can be viewed as a performance in the ways that it is the suppression of an invisible stigmatized social identity (DeJordy 2008). However, many people with an invisible stigmatized identity do not reveal these identities in organizational settings (DeJordy 2008). Studying people from multiple backgrounds shows that ancestry is not the only thing multiracial people claim for their identity (Khanna 2015). In a 2011 study, it was found that biracial people of a black and white mixed identity largely embraced a biracial identity in public but were privately identified as either black or white (Khanna 2015). When someone observes someone else and assesses their race, observers tend to place the individuals they observe in monoracial categories (Feliciano 2015). A 2010 study discussed how participants perceived almost half of the multiracial targets as monoracial (Herman 2010).

Furthermore, this same study said a black-white dichotomy still exists where part of black remains in the collective black category (Herman 2010). Children of multiracial parents are often labeled as monoracial (Lichter 2018). The appearance of mixed-race people has been seen as ambiguous and changing depending on environmental and social factors, which has led to mixed-race people being ascribed to other races and ethnicities (Sims 2016). Biracial people are often forced to be members of the black community (Franco 2015). Although colorism is a societal problem (Hunter 2007), white people do not perceive a meaningful difference between light-skinned and dark-skinned black people (Hannon 2020). In terms of identifying that person

as black, white people do not view that person as more or less black depending on skin color. As Hannon (2020:95) writes, "The results are consistent with theories of social cognition that emphasize that beyond formal racial classification schemes, skin tone is used to categorize others along a continuum of 'blackness.'" Since this present study aims to research the opinions and perceptions of racial passing and its themes, it is essential to note that although white people have differing opinions of light-skinned and dark-skinned black people, those people are still viewed as members of the same group. This study adds to the existing research on passing by investigating how people feel about white passers claiming blackness and how they feel about passing in general.

Authenticity and Material Consequences of Passing as White

In accordance with a general sociological definition of authenticity, black authenticity is slippery because the ideas of what is and is not considered authentically black are often not explicit (Cox 2020; Nguyen 2014). This is important to the purposes of this paper because, in many ways, white passers are not seen as authentically black, and speaking of identity "The development of black racial identity more broadly involves constructions of black authenticity—that is, what constitutes "real" blackness." (Sims 2016, Cox 2020: 92). Who is allowed access to blackness is whoever can fit into what is usually considered black. Still, the boundaries of blackness and black authenticity are policed by outsiders and insiders alike through boundary maintenance. One of the ways that blackness is policed is that interracial black people might feel pressure and not feel "black enough" by their black peers, meaning that if someone does not subscribe to the dominant cultural idea of what it means to be black then they might not feel black (Cox 2020). Policing of blackness differs between black and non-Black people in the ways

that white people might limit black expressions in specific institutional spaces, for example white people might limit certain black hairstyles and traditional clothing (Cox 2020). White people also operate in boundary maintenance by making claims or accusations that a black person is "too black" or "inauthentically black," such as if a black person subscribes to the dominant black cultural image they might be deemed "too black", but if a black person does not subscribe to that image they might be seen as a black person who is "inauthentically black" (Cox 2020). Because of that boundary maintenance by non-black people, black people might feel behavioral constraints and not be seen as authentically black by their black peers (Cox 2020).

What is seen as being authentically black is constructed as a cultural idea legitimized through specific ideas and ideologies (Khana 2010). Blackness and black authenticity can both be seen as being a performance of what is authentically black (Cox 2020). However, blackness is not a static concept; it constantly evolves as racial discourse changes and is modified in cultural production (Nguyen 2014). An example of blackness changing is how black stereotypes evolve and change over time; for example, the "mammy" archetype of a black woman caretaker has come in and out of fashion in media depending on the political and social era (Collins 2005). That archetype is of a black woman who is usually older and usually overweight who is seen as a pseudo parental figure in a white household (Collins 2005). These "controlling images," or common motifs that reflect the dominant group's interest in keeping a specific demographic in a subordinate position, impact the ways in which black identity and authenticity are defined externally (Collins 2005). Black authenticity can sometimes be viewed against whatever has been considered the common idea of blackness in popular media (Nguyen 2014). For example, one stereotypical representation of black people in the media today revolves around the images

and iconography of rap music (Nguyen 2014). Therefore, what would be considered authentic blackness would be that of the controlling images of rap music (Nguyen 2014). For example, if those current controlling images are gold chains, dreadlocks, and flashy designer clothes, then to be authentically black one must conform to these controlling images (Nguyen 2014).

According to the "looking glass self" theory, racial authenticity claims of black people who look white say people self-identify with how they believe others see them (Saperstein 2014). If white passers self-identify as black, they will likely believe other people will see them as black. Moreover, if they self-identify as black, they will most likely subscribe to the central popular cultural ideas of what it means to be black. Appearance can influence identity, but people can have varying experiences depending on the situation; therefore, the experience can differ depending on where you are (Sims 2016). That is why certain people have unsuccessfully passed as white because social factors such as style of dress, educational and career attainment, and the community networks people belong to have influenced who can pass (Khanna 2010). In recent years, there has also been an emphasis on people lying that they are black (Khanna 2010). There have been several notable examples of white people culturally appropriating black culture and living as black. One of those people was Mezz Mezzrow, a Jewish-born musician who immersed himself in black culture to attempt to become more flamboyant and advance his music career (Hubbard 2003). Another relevant example is Rachel Dolezal, a white woman who claimed to be black and became president of her NAACP chapter (Osuji 2019). This is suspected of white passers claiming blackness: lying about their identities like Mezzrow and Dolezal did.

Passing and the concept of white passers claiming blackness is a complex problem in that racial identity is supposed to be static and cannot be changed. However, the concept of passing

proves that identity is fluid (Hubbard 2003). Passing and people who could potentially pass claiming blackness, therefore, is a way to contradict the notion of stable racial order and defined boundaries (Hubbard 2003). The state can be seen as an actor in how it can create and reinforce racial boundaries. The creation of multiracial identity as a racial category was seen as a threat to the ways that the dominant white hegemonic masculinity was dominant in the late 19th century into the early 20th century (Thompson 2009).

Being white provides an economic advantage despite whatever background you come from (Roediger 2007). White people, concerning work and working conditions, exhibit racial stereotypes and prejudices about black workers, creating a system of forging their identity against blackness (Roediger 2007). Therefore, if being white is beneficial in how you are viewed in employment and other settings, white passers claim whiteness to secure social, educational, political, and economic benefits reserved for white people (Broady 2018). Because of the negative associations with blackness, it was and still is seen by some as beneficial to be white. For example, in the past, color-based marriage selection concentrated economic advantages among lighter-skinned black Americans (Reece 2018). Moreover, as marriage is seen as a wealth-building process, it was seen as an advantage to hide your blackness. The same can also be said for finding employment and housing. Although there are clear benefits of whiteness, it is essential to note that there could be disadvantages to white passers attempting to pass as white. First, white passers might be viewed negatively in the black community because they choose to pass (Hobbs 2014). Passing as white and not claiming a black identity was seen as a betrayal of black people who could not pass (Hobbs 2014). The white passers who choose to pass are usually comfortable with those consequences unless they try to play both sides and gain the

advantage of being seen as white. They also maintain membership in black groups to get resources allocated for black and minority people (Hobbs 2014). Based on this review, this current study explores individuals' perceptions of racial passing and its themes.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I employed semi-structured interviews with research participants to answer my research questions, including how participants felt about racial passing, the authenticity of white passers claiming blackness or whiteness, and the social construction of race. In the coming subsections, I will overview my population, outline my sampling strategy, and detail my research design and procedures. After explaining my analytic strategy, I also reflect on my position as a researcher.

Population and Sampling

I used a convenience sampling method (Stratton 2021) to reach people via social media and email. The only inclusion criteria for the convenience sample were that participants must be 18-41. The age limit was capped at 41 because that is the current age of the oldest millennials. This was stated in the IRB procedure because this study aimed to get the younger generation's views on passing. I kept the call for participants posted for 24 hours on my Instagram story; I discuss the limitations of this approach in my discussion section. Participants came from the posted Instagram story and several students from a large public university in the Southeast region of the United States, who contacted me after I posted a flier (see appendix) through that university's sociology department email mailing list. I recruited 12 respondents (see Table 1 for a breakdown of participants' demographic information). They are primarily people aged 20-33. Although most interviewees were found through a university sociology mailing list, their educational level and status were not asked. It was evenly split between males and females, with one person identifying as non-binary. Five of my respondents identify as Black, one as Hispanic,

two as white, two as biracial black-Latinx, one as biracial black and white, and one broadly as
“American.”

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	State Raised*	Age
Jamal	Black or African American	Male	“The Hood”	24
Neva	Black / Hispanic	Non-Binary / “3 rd Gender.”	Florida	22
Lucia	Hispanic / Latino	Female	California	24
Marvin	Black or African American	Male	In the south (North Florida)	33
Khairy	Black / Hispanic	Male	FL	22
Hanisi	Black or African American	Male	New York State	23
Bernadette	White	Female	Italy and Alabama	26
Kaitlyn	White	Female	Missouri	31
Karmen	White / Hispanic	Female	Florida	20
Ariela	Black	Female	Florida	24
Shaneeka	Black	Female	Connecticut	40

*This question asked the respondents in what state they spent most of their lives in.

Study Design

I utilize in-depth interviews for this investigation, following an open-ended, semi-structured question format. Interviews were the best method of investigation for this project because they provided me with much information that I analyzed to measure attitudes and beliefs about white passers (Jamshed 2014). Participants responded to my social media posts or emails

expressing interest in participating in the study. I coordinated with them to schedule interviews, offering multiple interview options in person, over the phone, and via Zoom. Two of the people interviewed were interviewed in person, one of them was interviewed over the phone, and nine of them were interviewed over zoom. All people interviewed over zoom had their webcam turned on for the interview. The in-person interviews yielded rich results because I felt there was a more personal connection with the participants who were being interviewed. The interview with the most information and most detailed responses was the phone interview; I suspect that this was because the participant felt he could talk more freely because he did not see me, but this was also a very opinionated participant leading me to believe he might have reacted the same way regardless of whatever interview format was used. The zoom interviews generally yielded detailed responses compared to the in-person interviews, but there were a few people who got off the call fast and there were some who did not give much information. I assume this typically happened with zoom calls and not in person meetings and telephone calls because of the zoom webcam format, but it also could have been due to the personalities of the participants or because I did not pace the interviews properly myself.

Before the interviews, participants were given a consent form to fill out before the interview started and a Qualtrics survey to collect demographic information on race, gender, U.S. state in which they came of age, and age. The consent form, demographic questionnaire, and interview questionnaire are all available in the appendix. Participants were asked in the interviews to elaborate on their general feelings about passing and white passers claiming blackness and whiteness. The broad categories of questions I asked participants dealt with how they viewed and approached ideas of racial passing. The deeper I got into the interviews, the

more I learned about the social attitudes and beliefs about white passers claiming blackness. I also specifically asked whether the interviewee accepted or rejected claims of blackness by white passers and how they felt about the material and social reasons why white passers would claim either blackness or whiteness. I completed a total of 12 interviews, and they lasted about 30 minutes on average, as some participants gave greater details than others.

Analytic Strategy

After data collection ended, I transcribed the interviews. Then I coded the data through a multistage process (Keuschnigg, 2017; Stratton, 2021). Coding is a specific analytic process by which I review data for emergent or predetermined themes (Keuschnigg, 2017; Stratton, 2021). What I did in my specific coding process was that I separated the data into thematic categories. The first step was to transcribe all data obtained from my audio recording and written notes from the interviews onto a word document and de-identified the data by giving participants pseudonyms based on their backgrounds. Then, I separated all data points into thematic units, identifying four main themes in addition to the semi-structured ones. The first is the social construction and fluidity of race; the second is acceptance of white passers' claims of blackness; the third is a rejection of white passers' claims of blackness; and the fourth is participants' views on the material consequences of passing as either white or black. An example of how this coding process works is that if I had an information point that was a quote of an interviewee saying they disagree that someone can be black but look white, such as "I would not let someone who I just met that looked white, attempt to discuss their blackness with me" I separated that point into the "rejection of white-passers claims at blackness" theme. I then coded the data to assess a more profound meaning to the data within the four main themes. For example, if I had someone tell me

about how race is a social construct, I would put that under the "social construction of race" theme and then attempt to extrapolate more meaning from that if that participant gave more context clues or said something similar or contradictory earlier or later in the interview.

Reflexivity Statement

I am interested in this topic because I am a mixed-race black man who has been told that he does and does not pass as white, depending on the circumstance and situation. I have been curious about how the public perceives white passers who choose to pass as white and white passers who are openly black and proud of it. I have been curious because I have found that the black people I have met who have viewed me as black have tended to be the black people that liked me and that the black people that I had met who did not like me rarely, if ever, viewed me as black, even when I expressed my ancestry and racial background to them. This led me to wonder if being black is considered valuable. I wanted to understand the inner social mechanisms of what does and does not prevent someone from being viewed as black when they have a very light or white complexion. In my interview, participants mostly did not comment on my race or what they did or did not see me as. I did not disclose to my participants that I am a mixed-race Black man who is very light-skinned but still considers himself black because I feared it would sway their answers in a particular direction. I did not want them to give me an answer I wanted to hear or be afraid that I would argue with them. Not disclosing my racial background led me to get more genuine answers.

RESULTS

There were several pre established themes that I wanted to investigate, and these were evident in the questionnaire. There were themes related to passing that I wanted to come out of the data, these did not, instead there were many emerging themes that came out that provided insights into my research questions. It was helpful for this research that all participants had a general understanding of passing, as evidenced by a representative sentiment expressed by Khairy, a 22-year-old black man, who said, "When someone of one race has characteristics of people associated with another race, they tend to pass as that other race." Most people in my sample understand passing as when a person of one race looks like a member of another. The answers diverged, however, when the participants told me their differing views and opinions on passing. The variations in answers and beliefs occurred when I asked people questions similar to "What if someone who looks white says they are black instead." The responses to questions like that lead me to identify the major themes of this work, which are: 1) the social construction and fluidity of race; 2) acceptance of white passers' claims of blackness; 3) rejection of white passers' claims at blackness; 4) participants' views on the material consequences of passing as either white or black.

Social Construction and Fluidity of Race

Although in line with the representative sentiment of passing expressed earlier, a few participants had an idea of passing that was more knowledgeable of history; for example, Marvin, a 33-year-old black man, spoke of the concept of passing as having "originated from the reconstruction era when white people were looking to classify more people as black, so they

created the one drop rule." This quote is significant because it exemplifies the breadth of knowledge of passing within my small pool of interviewees. Also speaking of the United States' unique racial formation, Bernadette, an immigrant, spoke to me of how the United States is different from the rest of the world in saying, "I am from Italy; I am Italian, and Americans do not view themselves as Americans." Bernadette was referring to the concept of how immigrants come to the United States and need clarification about what their racial classification would be. They would view their race as their nationality rather than that, despite their nationality, multiple nationalities would be encompassed under one racial category.

Also, speaking of United States racial formation, Carmen, a 20-year-old Hispanic college student, told me, "Usually, we are talking about race in the sense of color; then it depends on the color. However, I feel there is a thin line between their ethnicities. However, you can be white and still be part of different ethnic groups". Here Carmen expresses how race is usually assigned by the skin color someone has but that there are variations in how race is viewed and associated: although you could have white skin, you could still be viewed as a different ethnicity despite the white skin. Speaking of how race is a social construct and something made to serve a purpose, Lucia, a 24-year-old Hispanic woman, told me, "some people are black but can "pass" as white because of their dress style." This speaks to stereotypical black-and-white ways of acting and dressing, such as Lucia saying, "if you wear certain clothes like preppy clothes or sweater vests and are black or another non-white race, white people will like you more. You can be accepted as white if you act white." She claimed that white people would be calmer around you if you spoke in a specific voice. This is essentially a commentary on if you are the opposite of being

whatever is considered authentically black that you could become more accepted by white people.

Several participants talked about how race is a fluid concept and can change depending on time and place. For instance, Khairy stated the following:

Many people subscribe to the idea that if you do not look like this, you are not this; I am afraid I must disagree because race theories are not objective. It is something we made up. The phenotype was at the forefront, but at the same time, heritage, lineage, and where you are from geographically also matter—differences between both Sub-Saharan Africans, the difference between Africans and Polynesians. If you go and see Polynesians, you will see people with big noses and dark skin. That sounds like a nigga to me, but they are not. Black people are the most diverse on the planet.

This goes along with the idea that racial categories are imperfect. That quote speaks to the subjectivity of race and how many people do not fit into specific categories concretely. It also speaks to the importance of external classification because if you describe a Polynesian to someone, you are essentially describing a black person. Still, that person may not be considered black by many others. So essentially, if someone can look black and not be black, another person could be black but not look black. They also speak of how that skin color affects who can identify as what. Carmen went on to tell me:

I am Mexican, so I know a lot of Hispanics look white. So other Hispanics might not view them as Hispanic or Hispanic enough. It has to do with skin color or, in the Mexican sense, if they speak the language and indulge in the culture. They get accepted if

they speak the language or know the culture. I know many Mexican people born in the states, so they are called white Americans.

Carmen discusses how some people have white skin but are not classified as white; they are classified as Hispanic. Carmen claims that the classification and the social reality are in contention. For example, some Hispanics have white skin, but they might not be viewed as "Hispanic enough," as Carmen said, so other Hispanics might consider them Hispanic if that person immerses themselves in the language and culture. However, at the same time, due to their white skin, they might be considered white and not Hispanic by certain people. This sentiment rang true with Kaitlyn, a 31-year-old social services worker, who told me.

I've seen biracial siblings where one is darker than the other. So, where one was followed around in a store while the other was not, I have met people who strongly identify with their culture where people would think they are black. I have met people who claim to be Hispanic, but most people would think they are white. I have met people in Florida who identify as Puerto Rican when nobody would assume that.

Kaitlyn speaks to the fluidity of race because two different siblings could be treated differently just because of the color of their skin at any given time. So, for example, if the lighter-skinned sibling were to get a tan, they would be treated like the darker-skinned sibling, or if the darker-skinned sibling were to get pale, they would get treated like the lighter-skinned sibling. How they are treated could depend on the time of year and the weather. She also gave examples of how people who might be treated as Hispanic or a Hispanic ethnicity in one place would be treated as white or another ethnicity or even black if they went somewhere else. Further highlighting how in many ways, race is essential "when you are in time, where you are in

location.” Talking about race depends on time and place and that you could be considered something different depending on where you live and at what period you lived in that place. Also, speaking of how race is fluid depending on where you go and how different people might see you as a different race or ethnicity depending on their perception, Marvin, a 33-year-old black man, told me.

I look at their complexion to see if they are white. Just because they look white does not mean that they are white. Egyptians, Samoans, and Arabian ethnicities. People view ethnicity and race as separate things, depending on the people they talk to. The way of seeing color is by seeing their complexion.

This reveals the significance of racial fluidity that ethnicities such as Egyptians and other middle eastern groups would technically be classified as white under the census. However, those people would not be considered white in the real world. People would judge them based on their skin color and complexion regardless of whether they are technically classified as white. Another participant Jamal, a 24-year-old black man, also spoke of the situation involving the white classification on the census, going on and saying, "In the census, north Africans are classified as a white group. That makes zero sense to me; if you go to north African countries, you will see natives who look like Morris Chestnut. You mean to tell me that is a white man?". This also speaks to the disconnection between classification and reality. Because on the census, the theoretical North African who looks very African American would technically be classified as white on formal paperwork, but in a social setting, he would not be classified and treated as that. Jamal also said that "under the census, middle eastern people would also be classified as white.

So you mean to tell me that those were white men who hijacked the planes and crashed them into the twin towers?". This also highlights the contention between designations and social reality.

Acceptance of White Passers Claims of Blackness

Whether or not people accept the passing presentations of others is grounded in authenticity. Many of the respondents' comments suggest that white passers claiming blackness must demonstrate that they are culturally competent in blackness. Therefore the respondents are drawing boundaries around acceptable claims of blackness based on "authentic" presentations based on individual and more significant societal-level ideas of what is and is not considered "authentic" blackness.

Discussing the participants' acceptance of white passers claiming blackness is essential. Participants said things like if a person who looks white told them that they are black, they would believe them if the white passer claimed blackness was culturally competent in blackness. One participant Hanisi, a 21-year-old college student, told me, "it cannot come off as corny. I have seen white people try to use African American Vernacular English, and it sounded like nails on a chalkboard." Here, Hanisi describes that a white passer claiming blackness has to come off as natural and not them trying too hard in order for their claim to be believable. A few respondents also talked about how they believe there are varying ways that white passers claiming blackness could "win them over." When asked that same question, Lucia, a 24-year-old Hispanic woman, said,

People create race as a social construct, so if someone tells me they are black but look white, I will believe them. However, it would depend on the context. It would have to come off as authentic to believe it. For example, driving through Florida, I saw a white

person with dreads. The first instinct to see a white-looking person with dreads is the assumption of appropriation. A conversation would change how you perceive them. In that conversation, they need to know the culture to convince you. It is not easier to lie about blackness than about something else.

This connects to ideas of authenticity. For example, although Lucia perceives someone who looks white as having a black hairstyle, she would start to see that person as black if they expressed that information to her and if that person was culturally competent in blackness. The person Lucia saw would need to be black by heritage and at the same time subscribe to the dominant cultural view of blackness and have an advanced understanding of that culture for Lucia to identify that person as black. There were similar views by people on accepting white passers claiming blackness. For example, one of the participants, Carmen, a 20-year-old Hispanic woman, told me.

If they say they are black, they are black because of these lighter-skinned and albino black people. If they provide evidence, then I can believe them. I would see them as black and white because they are privileged to appear white. I would have to see their parents believe it.

This respondent did not talk about cultural knowledge but rather that they would have to see family photos or proof of ancestry of the white passers claiming blackness. For this person, it was all about what the family tree resembles, and that being the most significant determination of that person's claims of being black; it was all ancestry driven. However, simultaneously, she claimed that she would first believe their claim of blackness because she claims many black people look white and albino. For Carmen, portraying an authentic black image and cultural

knowledge was unnecessary. Speaking of what would convince him of a white passer claiming blackness Marvin told me, "Some people are not genuine; they use being black for their egotistical benefit. If they were working a blue-collar job, where claiming blackness would be a detriment and not a benefit, I would respect it; at that point, it is about having black pride." Here he talks about how he believes many people out there claim to be black to feed their ego when they are in a position where being black could potentially benefit them; going deeper into that, he said, "some people only claim to be black because being black makes them feel good because of the things associated with blackness, such as masculinity and coolness." He elaborated on people claiming blackness to progress in their careers by saying that "some people want to be the only black person in the room, and that can be beneficial to their career." Later in the interview he echoed other participants who expressed that they would respect the claims of blackness from white passers more when the white passers claiming blackness only stood to lose in a situation where they were claiming blackness. He said that at that point, that person must only be doing it because they are proud of being black.

Also, speaking of respecting white passers' claims of blackness, Khairy told me, "I would treat them like they are black. You do not need to be black to claim black culture. Since the world is so anti-black, there is some validity to anyone claiming to be black since the world hates black people so much." Khairy claims that since the world hates black people so much, if somebody wants to claim blackness, he will let them because they only stand to lose by making that claim. Khairy is drawing a much looser boundary around blackness than other participants did. Also, speaking of believing that claim, Bernadette told me, "I do not believe it would impact how I see them. It will be excellent if someone is comfortable discussing that with me. I do not

think my interaction would change, but I would view them however they want. I would believe them; it would be disrespectful to say, "prove that you are black" I do not think that is a lovely thing to tell people." Bernadette says that if someone chooses to identify with that, she would be forced to accept it because she finds it disrespectful and intrusive to tell someone else their identities and for that person to prove their identity to you. Bernadette refused even to draw a boundary around blackness at all.

Rejection of White Passers Claims of Blackness

Respondents also engage in boundary maintenance for black authenticity when rejecting claims of blackness from white passers because they drew tighter boundaries around what it means to be black based on skin complexion, ancestry, and various political and social beliefs.

Some people rejected the idea of white passers claiming blackness. The general idea that many expressed was, "if someone does not look black, they are not black," One of the participants discussed how he saw race, Hanisi; a 23-year-old black man told me, "When it comes to race, it is your skin color, and in the society, you are in, how does society react to that skin color?" There were also similar sentiments brought out as well. When asked how she would react if a person who looks white told her that she is black and if she would view that person as black or continue to view them as white, Kaitlyn, a 31-year-old white woman, said,

I do not know if it would necessarily impact me; my first thought would be that I would not have guessed that. I would want to respect their identity, but a big part of me would think you will not experience the same things as people with darker skin. It sucks that the world is like that, but it is. I would not stop being their friend. Internally I would still view them as white, but if somebody asked me, I would tell them they have biracial

parents and correct them as black. Externally I would respect it, but internally I would say, I see you as white, and people see you as white.

She would refuse to see that person as black because how she self-identifies that person would force her to still see them as white. Although she would attempt to respect her wishes in public, she would completely disagree in private. This is tied to boundary maintenance in terms of authenticity. Although Kaitlyn is a racial outsider because she is not black, she still practices racial authenticity creation from an outsider's perspective. She is creating and drawing these boundaries based on what she believes is black authenticity because she said she would completely disregard what that person is claiming and view them as what she claims they will get treated as. This is a similar argument I heard from other participants, where they told me that you could not be black if you cannot be treated as black, they are giving their external racial identification of somebody, but this could potentially be stressed as a reason why there needs to be an external racial identification classifier that is not at the individual level. Also, speaking of that sentiment of not being black because they cannot get treated as black, Marvin told me,

If I look at them and view them, I will want to see what they dealt with in life. A white person would be more comfortable around them if they look European. They would not deal with those little things. So when they make that claim of blackness, you would think they are lying to you, joking, or trying to be funny.

Marvin claims that since they look European, they might not suffer from racial microaggressions and that white people would be more likely to include them. Moreover, he would not accept them as black because they are not treated as black. Moreover, if a white passer told him they were black, he would be suspicious of that person because he would probably think

that person was lying or trying to be funny, making it much harder for him to take them seriously.

Speaking of rejecting white passers' claims of blackness, Carmen told me, "In a way, I think they are selfish. There is no real reason besides their sense of belonging to a group." She claims that white passers claiming blackness have an ulterior motive and want to belong to a group. This is important because certain people attempt to claim blackness to benefit themselves and get resources and positions in communities; a prominent example is Rachel Dolezal, who lied that she was black and used that to get elected as president of a NAACP chapter (Osuji 2019). Also, speaking of that uneasy feeling he gets around white passers claiming blackness, Khairy told me,

A challenge I see right off the bat is instant distrust. Non-ambiguous black and African American people would instantly distrust someone who may present as white-passing since black people and black communities distrust white people because of historical reasons such as slavery and current-day reasons such as the police. If a white-looking person came into our space and started saying he was black. That would be seen as weird, and people would probably feel uncomfortable around that person.

Khairy claims that due to generational trauma, black people would not accept someone who looks white claiming to be black. However, speaking of how their mind could be changed, a common sentiment expressed that of Hanisi claiming, "An ancestor test would change my mind, their parent's, and grandparents' races. So what is the basis of your claim?". This also echoed the sentiments of people in the acceptance section of this paper, where they said that they would believe it if that person had a solid basis for making that claim. The biggest point that

respondents were trying to make is that they discussed a protective mechanism of blackness. By essentially claiming that if someone had not suffered because they have white skin, they are creating a protective border on who can and cannot claim blackness.

The Consequences of Passing as White or Claiming Black Identity

The participants discussed multiple ways in which there are benefits and advantages for claiming blackness or whiteness when you are a white passer. These also include material consequences and other things, such as social consequences. Participants spoke to me about things such as marriage and job opportunities coming to you easier if you identify with a white identity. On the other hand, participants talked about how if you claim blackness there could also be advantages to how people view you in a physical and social sense as well.

Some participants said they were okay with white passers claiming whiteness because it comes with benefits. For example, Khairy told me

that being white, you have easier access to employment and housing opportunities. I perfectly see and understand the reason and justifications for it.

Whiteness comes with certain rights and privileges; an entire history backs you up. That is why we joke around that white people have a 400-year lead. They came to this country and were the slave owners; we were the enslaved.

This sentiment also rang true from other participants. For example, when asked if they believe that people who choose to pass as white do it to benefit themselves, Kaitlyn, a 31-year-old white woman, said:

I think there are probably people who take advantage of their circumstances. However, I feel like people get tired of repeatedly explaining their identities. However, I am white,

so I do not have to care about my identity, so I would not have to explain myself and still get along in the world. Also, being white helps you get better jobs and houses because society has institutionalized them.

Kaitlyn again talks about how white people are afforded the right not to explain their identity constantly in the way that a white passer would have to explain their blackness constantly. She also states the material consequences and wages of whiteness. She also claims that whiteness does help people in the social and material sense, whether they realize it or not. Also channeling that same sentiment was Lucia, a 24-year-old mixed-race Hispanic woman. She said,

People who pass do it to benefit themselves and get more resources in a racialized society. Again, white at the top; if you can access that, why not do it? I know many darker-skinned people of color who attempt to attain whiteness because they also understand the benefit.

Highlighting how the United States is a racialized country and how every aspect of American life such as employment and education has been racialized. Kaitlyn emphasized that if you can access those things you would have no reason not to do that. Further speaking on the material consequences of whiteness, a big theme expressed to me by the participants was that if you are white that people will tend to get along with you better and that they will also won't mind having you around in a work setting. Hanisi specifically told me

Being white in a work setting helps because more people will want to have you as a coworker and you'll deal with less interactions of people making accusations and microaggressions to you. You'll also not deal with people threatening to quit if you had

gotten hired. I know black people who when they got hired at a certain job the white people at the job threatened to quit or refused to work with that person.

Speaking of a material consequence of blackness, a few other respondents told me about celebrities they found annoying who attempted to flip-flop between white and black to benefit themselves. For example, Neva, a 22-year-old mixed-race black and Hispanic woman, told me how annoying Zoe Kravitz was to her. Speaking of Kravitz, she told me,

She is only black when it benefits her; she will flip flop depending on her role; she will go from being black to almost being white depending on what movie she is in. I find that disingenuous.

Neva found it inauthentic for Kravitz to claim blackness to her benefit. Although Kravitz plays imaginary roles as white or black or whatever other race on screen, this does not necessarily have anything to do with how she identifies or carries herself in real life. Therefore the implications of Neva's comments and how she seems to understand passing is that she views someone who could pass, such as Kravitz, as having the power to turn her ambiguity or lighter skin into a mechanism to make money and play a role as well as her black heritage as being something that benefits her if she chooses to go that route as well.

Further bringing up the ways that at times it can be seen as disheartening to constantly have to explain yourself and your place in the world in terms of talking about identity, Kaitlyn says,

I guess they have to "come out," in a sense, similar to the LGBTQ community. If someone identifies as black but looks white, they must come out. Moreover, they must constantly explain and justify it to people. There is much mental fatigue because of this.

They would have to argue with people about it. So, you might think it is not worth bringing up at some point.

She talks about how explaining your identity to people would become so annoying that you would not do it anymore after a certain point. Even though there might potentially be a benefit to claiming blackness, the process of constantly having to explain it and potentially be interrogated about it could cause some to not bring it up. Another participant Marvin offered something similar in expressing his thoughts on white passers claiming blackness

if it was beneficial school-wise, business-wise, and relationship-wise. I believe that people would want to do that. They do it to benefit themselves. For example, Rachel Dolezal lied that she was black; she tried to benefit from what black people were getting. That is cultural appropriation; she wanted to gain resources. People lying about they are black is not as rare as people think it is.

Although this work is about white passers who are black by ancestry and do not lie that they are black, that quote on Dolezal is worth noting because some people do think that white passers are lying, and some do view a material consequence of blackness.

Further elaborating on the social situations that would influence someone who passes to lean into their blackness, Ariela, a 24-year-old black woman, told me, "People like exotic people, so I guess that is another advantage. Some groups will like someone for having a black lineage because they will be viewed as exotic." Ariela comments on the fetishization of blackness and black heritage.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, I sought to answer the research question, "how do participants feel about racial passing, specifically looking at the authenticity of white passers claiming blackness or whiteness and the social construction of race?" The participants told me that they view passing as when someone who is black might not look black because of marriage patterns in their family, which was in line with the definitions of passing that were provided by the literature reviewed (Cooper 2008, Hobbs 2014). Compared to my research question, the results yielded four main themes and are organized in this paper accordingly where respondents talked to me about 1) the social construction and fluidity of race; 2) acceptance of white passers' claims of blackness; 3) rejection of white passers' claims of blackness; and 4) views on the material and social consequences of passing as either white or black. Although I received data points on all four themes, a slightly higher amount of data points leaned towards the acceptance theme than the rejection theme. Although similar numbers of participants accepted and rejected white passers claiming blackness and similar numbers told me about the material consequences of passing as white or black, and all talked about the social construction and fluidity of race, more people ended up talking about acceptance at a greater length. Still, again, I cannot accurately make this claim based on only 12 interviews; it would appear that if you are a white passer claiming either blackness or whiteness if you meet someone, you cannot accurately assume their opinion of you without asking them; this includes people from almost every racial category assessing a white

passer's race. These interviews got interesting when participants told me things that were in line with or in contrast to the literature I reviewed in preparing this thesis.

One of the major themes participants talked to me about was the social construction and fluidity of race; All of the participants told me that race is a socially created category, they also discussed how race is fluid in how it changes over place and time, seemingly agreeing with the literature reviewed (Omi and Winant 2015, Lopez 2006). What participants highlighted is that the significant sociological paradigms of race, such as the ideas of hypodescent and the idea that black people are considered black despite their skin shade, are still at play. These are significant to my findings because they confirm that participants view black people on a continuum of blackness, possibly leading to the idea that white passers who express their blackness would be viewed on that continuum. However in contradiction to that, many of the participants expressed that they think concepts such as the "one-drop" rule are obsolete and that in current American society, it is not about ancestry but rather skin shade in line with what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva consider the Latin Americanization of American society, which states that racial hierarchy is now decided by skin tone and someone's skin color, not ancestry, and that is what places them at specific positions on the racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2015). However, all participants seemingly suggested that when they viewed someone, they classified that person under a monoracial category (Herman 2010, Khanna 2020). Some participants rejected the ways in which white passers tried to claim blackness, but none of them viewed light-skinned and dark-skinned black people as members of different races, they did not view one as multiracial and the other as black; they were viewed as black despite skin color. This also mirrors existing research that children of biracial parents are viewed as monoracial (Lichter 2018). This makes me wonder

if they might still see white passers as black even though they claim to see them as white and reject their claims of blackness. This then leads to the concept of how some people might be known to be Black, but have their claims of Blackness rejected for whatever reason. Virtually all respondents told me how race is constructed differently or seen differently based on place and physical location in the social context (Perez 2009). Participants from mixed-race backgrounds especially suggest that mixed-race people are confused with other ethnicities depending on where they go and how they dress (Sims 2016). Further highlights of this was how respondents told me race is a fluid concept heavily influenced by space and place (Iwamoto 2010). One participant highlighted how race and nationality confuse new immigrants; Bernadette told me she is Italian and coming to America; it confused her how white was considered her race and not Italian. This is because the United States has a different racial construction than Italy, as a further example of how regional history impacts how race is viewed and understood (Khanna 2010). Also adding weight to this concept, all of the Hispanic participants would talk about if they went to a particular place, they would be viewed as Mexican, but if they went to another geographic location, they would be viewed as white or as another Hispanic ethnicity.

The second major theme of this work was the acceptance of white passers' claims of blackness. Several of the participants spoke to me about how a white passer could "win them over" and how that person could prove they had suffered for being black or by exhibiting the dominant cultural idea of blackness (Nguyen 2014, Cox 2020). This further exemplifies how the cultural idea of what is considered authentically black through hip-hop culture is the dominant black authenticity paradigm today. This leads me to wonder if there is a component of pain and suffering that has become a theme to embody the black identity and if black people or people

generally believe that you have to suffer to a certain degree to claim blackness. This also leads me to wonder if white passers claiming whiteness is an attempt to avoid suffering, similar to what specific literature discussed white passers claiming whiteness as a betrayal because white passers would not suffer on the plantation (Hobbs 2014). Several participants provided insight into why some people identify as how people see them in public but privately identify as something else (Sims 2016). They provided insight by saying that some white passers having to explain their identity everywhere they go would get tiring, so instead of constantly explaining their identity, they would let people talk to them like they are white or whatever other identities in public, but privately they would view themselves as black; similar to the concept of multiracial people embracing a multiracial identity but only embracing one solo identity in private.

The third major theme of this work was rejection of white passers' claims of blackness; Many people also expressed that they believe white passers claiming they are black are lying (Khanna 2010). Examples such as Dolezal and living in the age of situations like that make me wonder if those stories have made it harder for actual black people who pass as white to claim a black identity without being accused of malicious intent. The various ideas my participants expressed about black identity appear contradictory. Many of them said they would not view white passers (and, in some cases, light-skinned black people) as black, but other comments and actions suggested they view all black people under a "continuum of blackness" (Hannon 2020). Further leading me to question that they might possibly view white passers as black and on that "continuum of blackness", but for whatever reasons that needs further study, they are publicly or privately rejecting white passers claims at blackness. This contradictory line of thinking implies

that people could be expressing an ideology of not accepting white passers in public. However, in private or subconsciously, they could still view those people as black or on a continuum of blackness. It could also show that black identity to the participants is still constructed and negotiated through the realm of black ancestry. They might negotiate boundaries and authenticity through skin color while simultaneously operating on black ancestry and a continuum of blackness; thus, the contradiction exists. Also, most of the black respondents created a mechanism of protecting blackness, in particular because they claimed that other people were abusing a black racial identification. They claimed that due to the historical suffering of black people at the hands of white people, they would not trust someone who is white coming into a black space and claiming to be black because they would try to protect that space from a possible outsider or intruder. This was a common sentiment expressed to me, that white passers attempting to embody blackness were doing it for malicious reasons.

The fourth theme of this work was the views on the material and social consequences of passing as either white or black. Many participants inferred work on the wages of whiteness and why white passers claim whiteness. Participants talked about how they understood the social reasons for people hiding their stigmatized social identity (DeJordy 2008). This further supports the literature on whiteness and hiding stigmatized social identities. Specifically, respondents highlighted that they believed white passers claim whiteness to secure jobs, education, and social opportunities (Broady 2018, Reece 2018). The implications for white passers claiming whiteness are that they have an easier life where opportunities are more easily accessed. The implication for people who perceive or assume that white passers are passing for these very reasons of having a more leisurely life is that the people perceiving that might feel betrayed if they believe

that white passers should claim blackness. On the other hand, those same people might also not care; they might accept white passers claiming whiteness because they would behave the same way if they could pass as white. Virtually all the participants said they would accept why a white passer would claim whiteness. Only one participant told me they would not accept a white passer claiming whiteness and that he would demand they claim to be black. This is significant because it shows my participants do not care if a white passer claims to be white, only when they claim to be black.

Something that strikes me about this research is that in many ways, when Black people both accept and reject white passers claims of blackness they do it in ways that they personally think is a protection of blackness, this was determined by participants telling me that they accept or reject claims in ways that they believe would be right to black people as a whole. When participants accepted white passers claims at blackness, they told me they did it in part because they strongly thought that was the right thing. They claimed it was the right thing to do because they thought it meant there would be more black people as part of the population. So if there were more black people advocating for black causes then more could get done. They also claimed that white passers only stand to lose by making a claim at blackness so they might as well let them. But on the contrary, people who rejected white passers claims at blackness did it because they claimed they were protecting blackness. For them they drew tighter boundaries on blackness because of personal and group history. They also did it because they view blackness as being something inherently or socially valuable, and that if more people had access to it they would abuse it. They almost treated blackness like it was a natural resource.

This work adds to the literature on blackness because it might help answer how blackness is viewed today, a topic that scholars say might need a reevaluation (Bonilla-Silva 2015, Guerrero 2016, Brunnsma 2002). Because this is a work that talks about passing, talking about passing can be a gateway for people to talk or express information about race related topics that they would not express if they were otherwise not talking about the concept of passing. That is probably the greatest contribution of this research. This research adds to the existing literature by asking participants how they feel about people claiming blackness who might not necessarily look black. Surprisingly, only one person, Jamal, a 24-year-old black man, told me that they suspected someone they met in real life was attempting to pass as white; Jamal was the sole participant who based their beliefs on actual experiences with someone who was a white passer. He told a story of someone he met who was a higher-up in their college, which he believed was a black man attempting to pass as white. He said he believed he was black because he had a "very African American name that no white person would have." He also talked about how he believed this same person was shaving his head bald by choice because he was "trying to hide his naps" and did not want his "black hair" to grow. This was significant to my research because even the participants familiar with passing said that the idea of thinking they were interacting with someone attempting to pass as white had rarely crossed their minds. This impacts my findings and the participants' thoughts on passing more broadly because nearly every participant in the sample did not have an actual person or persons to ground their ideas. What it says about my findings that only one person actually encountered someone who passes is that many of the participants might have been talking to me under the assumption of what they would do if they encountered someone who passes, and not basing it in experiences of what they did do when

they met someone who passes. It feels like a topic or concept that only some people have been asked about or actively considered.

There were limitations regarding the project scope. One of the significant limitations was that I only included a small number of participants from limited social backgrounds. Future studies should include a larger population and assess other possible avenues of difference across social identities, more research could also be done on whether someone from a particular political, economic, or social background would be more hostile or accepting of white passers' claims of blackness or whiteness. There were also limitations due to my data collection strategy. Namely, the flier only being posted on my Instagram story for 24 hours limited the total number of participants; posting the recruitment flier for a more extended period or across different social media platforms would likely yield greater participation. The small sample size of this project also means the findings are not generalizable to a larger context; however, this study is critical because it gives insight into how a few specific people view a research topic that needs further study.

The nature of my research question meant that this study was unidirectional: investigating people's perceptions of white passers. Future research could look at the other side of this phenomenon—those who are white passing. For instance, future work should explore the reasoning of people who choose to pass as white. This could yield insights into individual and group-level justifications and reasonings for choosing to pass as white. Further research could also be done on the experiences of people who look white but choose to live life openly as black and their reasons for this choice. This could yield further insights into the outcomes and experiences associated with claiming a black identity at the individual or group level, I believe

that line of inquiry is significant because certain groups are stereotyped as being more or less accepting of black people as a whole, so it would be interesting to see how they view the phenomenon of white passers claiming blackness or whiteness. More research could also be done to identify how differing racialization across the United States could affect if people from a specific geographical location were susceptible to accepting white passers' claims of blackness. This research would be necessary because much public information on views of passing still needs to be gathered. This current project fits into the greater literature on race and racism because it explores the modern relevance of a theory and practice that many claims are obsolete.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board

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Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

August 17, 2022

Dear Edi Mucka:

On 8/17/2022, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Initial Study
Title:	SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS "WHITE-PASSING" RACIAL IDENTITY
Investigator:	Edi Mucka
IRB ID:	STUDY00004474
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRP 251, Category: Faculty Research Approval; • HRP 254, Category: Consent Form; • HRP 255, Category: IRB Protocol; • Interview Protocol, Category: Interview / Focus Questions; • Recruitment Flyer, Category: Recruitment Materials; • White Passing Demographic Questionnaire , Category: Survey / Questionnaire;

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Karilla C. Birkbeck

Kamille Birkbeck
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER

FLYER:

Study Participants Wanted!

Participants wanted to research social beliefs on "White-Passing" racial identity.

Participation includes completing an online survey and an interview (either in person, via Phone, or via Zoom) that is about 45 minutes long.

Eligibility requirements for the study:

- Must be between the age of 18-41 years

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact Edi Mucka at edi.mucka@Knights.ucf.edu. You may also contact the Faculty Supervisor Jonathan Cox at jonathan.cox@ucf.edu

EMAIL:

SUBJECT LINE: White-Passing Racial Identity Interview

Thank you for contacting me regarding our research about social beliefs on "White-Passing" racial identity.

Participation includes completing an online survey and an interview (either in person, via Phone, or via Zoom) that is about 45 minutes long.

Please respond to this email with times/days you are available to set up a zoom, phone, or in-person interview. I will then respond with an invite depending on the option that you select.

Thank you

Eligibility requirements for the study:

- Must be between the age of 18-41 years

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact Edi Mucka at edi.mucka@Knights.ucf.edu. You may also contact the Faculty Supervisor Jonathan Cox at jonathan.cox@ucf.edu

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL FLORIDA

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: Social Attitudes Towards "White-Passing" Racial Identity

Principal Investigator: Edi Mucka

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jonathan Cox

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

The purpose of this research is to examine the concept of white passing in the modern American racial context.

This research will be conducted through interviews in two parts: a brief demographic questionnaire completed at the beginning of the interview and open-ended questions. If interested, participants will be asked at the end of the interview if they change their mind about an answer to a question they can be recontacted by the PI.

The time needed to complete the demographic questions and interview should be about 45 minutes.

You will be audio recorded during this study. If you do not want to be recorded, you will not be able to be in the study. Discuss this with the researcher or a research team member. If you are recorded, the recording will be kept in a locked, safe place. The recording will be kept a period of 5 years post-study closure.

For UCF students or employees: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will in no way affect your relationship with UCF, including continued enrollment, grades, employment or your relationship with the individuals who may have an interest in this study.

The only identifiable private information that will be collected is the contact information, the answers to the demographic questions, and the answers to the interview questions. Only members of the research team (Principal Investigator and Faculty Supervisor) will have access to the information. The information will be kept on a password-protected laptop for a period of 5 years post-study closure.

The data will be retained after the study for future research. The data will be stored on a password-protected laptop. The only person who will have access to the data will be the Principle Investigator and the data will be stored for a period of 5 years post-study closure.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Edi Mucka, Graduate Student, Sociology MA Program, College of Sciences, (860) 772-5002 or Dr. Jonathan Cox, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Sociology at (407) 823-2233 or by email at Jonathan.cox@ucf.edu

IRB contact about your rights in this study or to report a complaint: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or have concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901, or email irb@ucf.edu.

APPENDIX D: QUALTRICS SURVEY

White Passing

https://ucf.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6n7nTGYNEMgGabA

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 What race do you self-identify as?

- White (1)
 - Black or African American (2)
 - American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
 - Asian (4)
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
 - Hispanic/Latino (6)
 - Other (7) _____
-

Q2 What gender do you identify as?

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Non-binary / third gender (3)
 - Prefer not to say (4)
 - Other (5) _____
-

Q3 In what state did you grow up (or spend most of your life)

Q4 Where on the political spectrum do you place yourself?

- Very Liberal (1)
 - Liberal (2)
 - Moderate (3)
 - Conservative (4)
 - Very Conservative (5)
-

Q5 Click to write the question text

- Click to write Choice 1 (1)
 - Click to write Choice 2 (2)
 - Click to write Choice 3 (3)
-

Q6 What is your age?

End of Block: Default Question Block

https://ucf.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6n7nTGYNEMgGabA

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Date: _____

Time: _____

Interview Protocol (UCF)

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to meet me and participate in this study. As previously mentioned, this study is about the various attitudes toward "white-passing" racial identity. Just to confirm, you are at least 18 years of age?

Again, this interview is completely voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable or don't want to answer any questions at any point, you are free to decline to answer them. The interview and this study are completely confidential – I will not ask you for your name, and I will use pseudonyms (fake names) for any papers I write about this study.

Here is the consent form. Please take a moment to look it over, ask any questions, and keep this hard copy for your records. [Hand HRP-254 Explanation of Research form to the participant and wait.]

Do you still give your consent to participate? If so, can you please verbalize this consent – a simple "Yes, I give my consent to participate" will work.

Do you mind if I record this interview? [Turn on the recorder if consent is given.] If so, before we begin, can you again verbalize your consent for the audio recording of the interview? Thank you.

Introductory Questions:

1. Have you heard of the concept of racial passing before? Please define it in your own words. *
 - a. Follow-up: After they reply, define passing: "Passing is when someone who is black is perceived by others as a white person, for whatever reason. People who choose to pass do it for social and economic reasons because there is an incentive to hide their black identity and to be perceived as white."

Interactions:

2. When you see other people, in what ways do you interpret their racial identity or "see color?" In other words, how do you classify other people racially?
3. What challenges do you believe are present to someone being a member of a particular racial group while at the same time not necessarily looking like they belong to that racial group?
 - a. Follow-up: Are there any people you think are black but are passing as white?

Perceptions:

4. If someone who you perceive to be white told you that they are black, in what ways would that impact how you view them racially? Please briefly explain your answer.
 - a. Follow-up: Would you view that person as black, or would you continue to view them as white?
 - b. Follow-up: What might change the way you perceive them racially?
 - c. In what ways does this differ from non-Black students?
5. What are the potential impacts, whether positive, negative, or neutral, for someone racially self-identifying in a way that other people do not see them?
 - a. Follow-up: What might some of their experiences be?
6. Do you think people who choose to pass as white do it to benefit themselves? If yes, in what ways does it benefit them? If not, why do you think they choose to pass as white?
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about passing?

Closing:

8. Do you have any final thoughts you would like to offer or questions about anything?
9. If I need to follow up with you at any point regarding this study, is it OK that I do so? If yes, I will only contact you via your preferred method.

Thank you again, and have a great rest of your day.

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