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Membership Has Its Privileges: When Black People Afford Black–White Biracial People the Benefit of the Doubt

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Objectives: The current research investigates whether Black people afford Biracial people the benefit of the doubt when using a stereotype to describe a Black person, and the role that racial self-identification plays in this process. **Method:** Black participants were asked to form an impression of a target who either applied the “late” stereotype to describe a Black person or did not. The primary dependent variables were participants’ perception of the target as prejudiced and their interest in befriending the target. We also measured participants’ perceptions of the target’s racial group membership and their perceptions of how the target racially self-identified. In Study 1, we manipulated the target’s race (Black, Biracial, or White) and whether he used the stereotype. In Study 2, we manipulated how a Black–White Biracial target racially self-identified (Black-identified, Biracial-identified, or White-identified). **Results:** In Study 1, when using the late stereotype, participants perceived the White target to be more prejudiced and were less interested in befriending the target than either the Black or Biracial targets. Participants perceived the Biracial target as more prejudiced, and they were less interested in befriending the Biracial target than the Black target. Perceived racial self-identification mediated this effect. In Study 2, participants perceived the Black-identified and the Biracial-identified targets as less prejudiced than the White-identified target and were less interested in befriending that person. **Conclusions:** These findings suggest that Black people are likely to grant Biracial people the benefit of the doubt if they perceive that they self-identify as a racial ingroup member.

Public Significance Statement

Due to the historical legacy of hypodescent in America, Black people typically consider Black–White Biracial people as racial ingroup members. The results of the present research highlight that because of their perceived shared racial group membership, Black people grant Black–White Biracial people the benefit of the doubt in ambiguous contexts.

Keywords: benefit of the doubt, Black perceivers, Black–White Biracial people, hypodescent, racial self-identification

Supplemental materials: <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000790.supp>

In 2016, then-New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio referenced Colored People Time (CPT) when explaining his delay in endorsing Hillary Clinton as the Democratic nominee for the 2016 U.S. presidential election. CPT refers to a long-standing stereotype that

Black people are often late. While CPT is frequently cited in African American literature and film, such as the poem “Dancer” by Langston Hughes and the novel “Jazz” by Toni Morrison, it has often been used in a derogatory way to imply that Black people are

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The data and syntax are available on the Open Science Framework (Oliver & Wout, 2025).

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conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, and writing—review and editing. Katlyn Lee Milless played a supporting role in conceptualization, formal analysis, methodology, and writing—review and editing.

 The data are available at <https://osf.io/dw63t/overview>.

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lazy and have a poor work ethic (Thurston, 2010). While the “late” stereotype has been associated with various non-Western cultures (e.g., Latino Standard Time, Filipino Time, African Time), CPT is a uniquely African American stereotype, which some argue was used by Black slaves as a form of rebellion. For instance, Ronald Walcott characterized CPT as “an example of Black people’s effort to evade, frustrate and ridicule the value-reinforcing strictures of punctuality” that were forced upon Black Americans during slavery (Walcott, 1972, p. 9). Thus, CPT is a uniquely American stereotype that can have both positive and negative connotations.

Given the negative connotations associated with this CPT, most Black people consider it a stereotype that non-Black people should not use. For instance, de Blasio, a White man, was subsequently condemned by many Black people for using this expression. In contrast, it is unlikely that de Blasio’s wife, who is a Black woman, would have experienced the same level of condemnation if she had used this term. In the present research, we explore whether individuals like Mayor de Blasio’s children, who have one Black parent and one White parent, would be condemned like their father or given the benefit of the doubt like their mother if they used the “late” stereotype.

This example highlights a fundamental aspect of social life—membership has its privileges, in that people afford ingroup members the ability to engage in behaviors that they would not allow outgroup members to engage in (Chatman & von Hippel, 2001; Davidson & Friedman, 1998; Krumm & Corning, 2008). We contend that people afford ingroup members the privilege of engaging in these behaviors because they assume those behaviors are not due to ill intent. We characterize this supposed lack of ill intent as giving ingroup members the “benefit of the doubt.” In contrast, people are more inclined to assume ill intent from outgroup members, and thus, they are less willing to give outgroup members the benefit of the doubt.

While ingroup advantages, like the benefit of the doubt, have been demonstrated when the distinction between ingroup and outgroup membership is unambiguous, there is less research on these ingroup advantages when ingroup–outgroup demarcations are less clearly defined, as it may be with Black–White Biracial people (henceforth referred to as Biracial people). While Black people could conceivably consider Biracial people to be racial ingroup or outgroup members, the *principle of hypodescent*, which states that mixed-race individuals should be racially categorized as the same race as their minority parent (Banks & Eberhardt, 1998; Davis, 1991; Harris, 1964), suggests that Black people would consider them to be racial ingroup members. If Black people use the principle of hypodescent to racially categorize Biracial people, then they should grant Biracial people the benefit of the doubt in ambiguous contexts. In the present research, we test this assertion by exploring whether Black participants afford a Biracial person the privilege of using CPT to characterize Black people with few negative repercussions.

The Advantages of Ingroup Status

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that people automatically categorize others into social categories in order to distinguish ingroup members from outgroup members. Research derived from this theory argues that people assume ingroup members are more likely to share their values and beliefs than outgroup members, and therefore, they tend to trust ingroup

members more (Ellemers et al., 1999; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). In contrast, people expect outgroup members to engage in ingroup bias (e.g., Duck & Fielding, 2003; Moy & Ng, 1996) and thus anticipate more discrimination and prejudice from outgroup members than from ingroup members (Judd et al., 2005). As a result of these factors, people tend to favor and advantage ingroup members over outgroup members (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Messick & Mackie, 1989). For instance, relative to outgroup members, people have more positive perceptions of ingroup members (Doise et al., 1972; Hewstone, 1990), expect to be perceived and treated more positively by ingroup members (Shelton et al., 2006; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001; Vorauer et al., 1998; Wout et al., 2009), and allocate more resources to ingroup members (Everett et al., 2015).

Benefit of the Doubt

Another advantage resulting from these ingroup–outgroup expectations is that people are also more willing to give ingroup members, compared to outgroup members, the “benefit of the doubt,” in that they are more willing to make positive judgments and attributions of ingroup members’ behavior compared to the behavior of outgroup members (Chatman & von Hippel, 2001; Davidson & Friedman, 1998; Krumm & Corning, 2008). For instance, Chatman and von Hippel (2001) asked Black and White participants to evaluate either a Black or a White job applicant who was recently terminated from a previous job. Participants from both racial groups evaluated the racial ingroup applicant more positively than the racial outgroup applicant. Furthermore, participants from both racial groups made more situational attributions as to the cause of their previous termination when the applicant was a racial ingroup member than when the applicant was a racial outgroup member. The fact that participants made more situational attributions for the ingroup applicant’s termination suggests that participants were more willing to give the ingroup applicant the benefit of the doubt for why the applicant was terminated by their previous employer.

Similarly, Krumm and Corning (2008) had heterosexual and homosexual participants read vignettes about a heterosexual target who engaged in an ambiguously homophobic act. The target then either engaged in some form of moral credentialing (e.g., stating he had gay friends, engaging in verbal activism for gay rights) or not (control condition). Heterosexual participants were more likely to give the heterosexual target (i.e., ingroup member) the benefit of the doubt by being less likely to attribute this behavior to discrimination when the target morally credentialed himself. In contrast, homosexual participants did not give the heterosexual target (i.e., outgroup member) the same benefit of the doubt. These findings suggest that the heterosexual participants, compared to the homosexual participants, were more willing to grant the heterosexual target the benefit of the doubt in that they were less likely to assume that the target’s actions were not due to ill intent.

For members of stigmatized groups, ingroup–outgroup distinctions are important because they can use ingroup status to assess potentially prejudicial behavior directed toward them (Crocker et al., 1998). Specifically, stigmatized individuals are often burdened with the task of determining whether a negative or ambiguous outcome, such as negative feedback or rejection, is due to internal factors, like their personal traits, or external factors, like prejudice (Crocker et al., 1991; Steele et al., 2002). The attributions that stigmatized people make regarding negative outcomes are important

because, unlike internal attributions, external attributions can be psychologically protective (Crocker et al., 1991). Thus, stigmatized people should be more likely to attribute ambiguous behavior to prejudice when the perpetrator is an outgroup member compared to an ingroup member. Supporting this notion, Mendes et al. (2008) found that Black participants were more likely to make attributions to prejudice when rejected by a White person than by a Black person. While not the primary focus of these studies, these results suggest that participants gave the Black partner the benefit of the doubt and did not attribute their rejection to prejudice. As these findings highlight, group membership is a key factor in the attribution process, with people being more likely to attribute ambiguous actions to prejudice for outgroup members than ingroup members.

Black People's Adoption of the Principle of Hypodescent

While ingroup–outgroup distinctions are often clearly delineated, there are situations where the demarcation is more ambiguous. Take Biracial people, for instance. As a result of their mixed racial heritage, Black people could feasibly consider Biracial people as racial ingroup members, as racial outgroup members, or as equally racial ingroup and outgroup members. Thus, how Black people categorize Biracial people should have implications for whether they grant Biracial people the benefit of the doubt in ambiguous contexts.

Historically, the principle of hypodescent has been the predominant factor in the racial categorization of people with Black and White racial ancestry in the United States (Banks & Eberhardt, 1998; Davis, 1991; Harris, 1964). Hypodescent asserts that a person of mixed racial background should be categorized in accordance with the race of their lower status parent. Thus, a person with a Black parent and a White parent is most often considered to be Black. While the primary aim of the principle of hypodescent was to prevent anyone with Black ancestry from becoming White, regardless of their interest in doing so, it has also inadvertently broadened Black people's definition of racial ingroup membership to include Biracial people (Davis, 1991).

Research supports the notion that Black people use hypodescent and, as a result, consider Biracial people to be racial ingroup members (Barnett & Wout, 2016; Chen & Ratliff, 2015; Franco et al., 2019; Gaither et al., 2016; Ho et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2023; Smith & Wout, 2019; Wout et al., 2025). For instance, Ho et al. (2017) found that both Black and White people considered Biracial people to be more Black than White, suggesting that members of both racial groups have adopted the principle of hypodescent. Likewise, Wout et al. (2025) found that Black people expected to experience less social identity threat when anticipating interacting with a Black or Biracial partner compared to a White partner. Importantly, participants' threat expectations did not differ between the Black and Biracial partners, suggesting that Black people considered Biracial people to be sufficiently ingroup to assume that they would not experience social identity threat. Further supporting the notion that Black people consider Biracial people to be racial ingroup members, Oliver et al. (2023) found that while White people made no distinction between their mental representations of Black and Biracial people, Black people had mental representations of Black and Biracial people that were distinct. Thus, while White people lumped Black and Biracial people together (i.e., the outgroup

homogeneity effect), Black people allowed for ingroup variability between Black and Biracial people. Based on the research showing that Black people consider Biracial people as racial ingroup members, we argue that Black people will afford a Biracial person the benefit of the doubt in ambiguous contexts.

Perceived Racial Self-Identification as a Potential Mediator

While we argue that the default for Black people is to give Biracial people the benefit of the doubt because of their perceived ingroup status, people's racial categorizations of Biracial people can shift across time and context (Albuja et al., 2018, 2023, 2024; Cooley et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2011; Ito et al., 2011; Merrell et al., 2024; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008; Smith & Wout, 2019; Wout et al., 2025). For example, Freeman et al. (2011) found that participants' racial categorization of a racially ambiguous target shifted based on the target's attire, with high-status attire increasing the likelihood that the target would be categorized as White and low-status attire increasing the likelihood that the target would be categorized as Black. Likewise, research by Cooley et al. (2018) highlights the fluidity of people's perceptions of Biracial people. They found that, compared to a control condition, participants perceived a Black–White Biracial target as self-identifying more as Black when he had Black friends and self-identifying more as White when he had White friends, thus highlighting the fluidity of the racial status of Biracial people. Further highlighting the perceived racial fluidity of Biracial people, research by Albuja et al. (2018) found that monoracial White participants penalized a Biracial target who contextually racially presented as White or as a racial minority compared to a control condition. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that people's categorizations and responses to Biracial people are fluid and often context-dependent.

We assert that, by default, Black people view Biracial people as racial ingroup members but remain vigilant to contextual cues that might demonstrate that Biracial people do not identify as ingroup members. In contexts where a Biracial person does not identify as Black, Black people should be less willing to give that person the benefit of the doubt.

Based on hypodescent, Black people's default assumption is that a Biracial person self-identifies as Black, or at least more Black than White. Thus, when a Biracial person self-identifies as White, this should signal to Black people that this Biracial person does not identify as a racial ingroup member. Because of this strong group membership cue, when a Biracial person identifies as White, Black people should be more likely to assume ill intent and thus less willing to give this person the benefit of the doubt. Supporting this reasoning, Smith and Wout (2019, Study 2) found that Black participants were more likely to make attributions to prejudice when rejected by a Black–White Biracial target who self-identified as White compared to one who self-identified as Black or as Biracial. Corroborating our assertion that perceived self-identification serves as a strong cue of group membership, the effect of self-identification on attributed prejudice was mediated by participants' perceptions of the Biracial target's group membership (i.e., the degree to which they thought the person was a racial ingroup member). Similarly, Albuja et al. (2023) found that Black people empathized more with a Biracial person who self-identified as Black compared to one who self-identified as White. They also found that this effect was

mediated by the participants' perception of their shared fate with the Biracial person. Collectively, these studies highlight that Black people's response to a Biracial person can be impacted by how that person racially self-identifies.

While there is a growing body of research highlighting that Biracial people receive the benefits afforded to ingroup members, there is also research suggesting that there are contexts in which Biracial people can be penalized. For example, Albuja et al. (2018) found that monoracial people perceived Biracial targets as less trustworthy when they believed that the targets were strategically shifting their racial identity based on the social context. Similarly, Sanchez and Bonam (2009) found that monoracial people perceived Biracial targets who disclosed their racial identity more negatively and considered them less worthy of a minority scholarship. Thus, alternatively, a Biracial target would not receive the benefit of the doubt but could instead be penalized for using the stereotype.

Overview of the Present Research

The present research focuses on whether Black people afford Biracial people the privileges associated with ingroup status. More specifically, we investigated whether Black people would give a Black, Biracial, or White target the benefit of the doubt after stereotyping Black people as being late (i.e., CPT). In the present studies, we used the "Black people are late" stereotype because it is a stereotype that is less inflammatory than the "aggressive" or "intellectually inferior" stereotypes that are often associated with Black people, and thus is more likely to be impacted by contextual factors like the race of the person applying the stereotype or perceptions of how that person racially self-identifies. In addition, the "late" stereotype is generally acceptable for Black people to use but unacceptable for White people to use. Highlighted by the anecdote of Bill de Blasio using CPT, our research examines conceptually whether Black people would grant Bill de Blasio's children, who are Biracial (i.e., their mother is Black), the benefit of the doubt if they applied the "late" stereotype to Black people.

In Study 1, Black participants read about a Black, Biracial, or White target who either applied or did not apply the "late" stereotype to Black people. We operationalized the concept of the "benefit of the doubt" based on whether the target received negative repercussions when using the stereotype. The primary repercussion we explored was the extent to which participants perceived the target as prejudiced. Low levels of perceived prejudice indicated that participants gave the target more benefit of the doubt.

Another potential negative repercussion is that participants could attempt to distance themselves from the target. Therefore, on an exploratory level, we investigated whether participants were less interested in befriending the target when they applied the stereotype. Given the research demonstrating Black people's tendency to incorporate Biracial people into their racial ingroup, we hypothesized that Black people would be more willing to give the Black and Biracial targets the benefit of the doubt, and thus, those targets would be less likely to receive negative repercussions compared to the White target. Study 1 also explores whether participants' willingness to give the Biracial target the benefit of the doubt is mediated by how they think the target racially self-identifies.

In Study 1, we measured how participants perceived the target racially self-identifies, whereas in Study 2, we explicitly manipulated the target's racial self-identification. More precisely, we

randomly assigned participants to read about a Biracial target who self-identified as either Black or White, or did not racially self-identify before stereotyping Black people as being late. As with Study 1, participants reported their perceptions of the target person's prejudice and, in addition, their interest in befriending the target. Given people's relatively fluid categorizations of Biracial people and their group membership (Cooley et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2011; Ito et al., 2011; Smith & Wout, 2019), we hypothesized that participants' willingness to grant the target the benefit of the doubt would be directly related to how the target racially self-identifies. In particular, participants should grant the target who self-identified as Black more of the benefit of the doubt than the target who self-identified as White. Furthermore, we hypothesized that participants would be more willing to give the benefit of the doubt when the target did not racially self-identify compared to when they self-identified as White because, by default, Black people perceive Biracial people as racial ingroup members. The data and syntax for both studies are available on the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/dw63t/overview>, and see the Supplemental Materials for additional analyses.

Study 1

Method

Participants

We recruited 360 Black people through Prolific to participate in a short study on people's impressions of a stranger based on minimal information. We excluded seven participants who did not self-identify as monoracial Black, 11 who were born outside of the United States, six who misidentified the race of the target individual, and five who misidentified the race of the target's friend, thus leaving us with a final sample of 331 participants (146 females, 181 males, two participants who identified as female to male, and one participant who identified as genderqueer). Neither the participant's gender nor age ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.39$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.54$) significantly affected any of the dependent variables and were therefore not included in the reported analyses. Regarding social class, 3% self-identified as lower class/poor, 17.2% as working class, 16.6% as lower middle class, 50% as middle class, 12.1% as upper middle class, and 0.9% as upper class. For the highest level of education, 1.2% reported having completed some high school, 10.2% completed high school, 1.5% completed technical school, 23.5% completed some college, 39.2% have a college degree, 22.6% have a master's degree, 1.2% have a professional degree, and 0.3% have a PhD. Participants were paid \$1.34 as compensation for their participation. A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) revealed that the minimum effect size needed for interactions and main effects was $\eta_p^2 = .028$ and Cohen's $d = 0.34$ for condition effects for a 2×3 factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a sample size of 331 participants, power set at .80, and an $\alpha = .05$.

Procedure

After consenting, participants read that they would randomly receive another person's profile and that their task was to form an impression of that person based on the information provided. All participants then received a profile of a male target named Mike. In the profile, Mike was instructed to report his first name, gender, and

race. We manipulated Mike's race such that participants learned that Mike was either a Black, Black-White Biracial, or White male. In the profile, Mike was also instructed to report the name, gender, and race of his best friend. In all conditions, his best friend was a Black male named Tyrone.

Finally, Mike was instructed to write down one positive and one negative characteristic of his friend. We held the positive characteristics constant across conditions, such that Mike wrote, "The best thing about Tyrone is that he is really fun to hang out with. Whenever he is around, it is guaranteed to be a good time." We then manipulated the negative characteristic to operationalize the stereotype conditions. In the "no stereotype" condition, Mike wrote, "The bad thing about Tyrone is that he is always late," whereas in the "explicit stereotype" condition, Mike wrote, "The bad thing about Tyrone is that he is always late, but Black people are always late." The key distinction between these conditions is that in the "explicit stereotype" condition, the target characterized both Tyrone and Black people as being late (a race-based attribution), while in the "control" condition, the target only characterized Tyrone as being late (a personal attribution). We acknowledge that participants could still make race-based attributions in the control condition; however, we contend that they would be less likely to do so in the control condition than in the explicit stereotype condition. Participants then answered a series of questions about their impressions of Mike, their interest in befriending him, and how much they thought Mike considered himself part of their racial group. This was followed by a series of recall questions about the profile. They then received a debriefing form and were compensated for their participation.

Measures

Perceptions of the Target's Prejudice. After reading the profile, participants completed a series of items about their impression of the target (Mike). Embedded within these items were three items assessing the degree to which participants thought the target was prejudiced (I think that this person is ... "prejudiced," "biased," and "racist") on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).¹ We averaged participants' responses to these items to create a target prejudice measure ($\alpha = .83$).

Friendship Interest. To assess the participants' interest in befriending the target, we also adopted a friendship interest measure (Green et al., 2021; Milless et al., 2022; Wout et al., 2014): "I would like to be this person's friend," "I think that I would be able to get along with this person," and "I would accept this person as a friend." We measured these items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and averaged them to create a friendship interest measure ($\alpha = .96$).

Perceived Racial Group Membership. We measured the degree to which participants considered the target to be a racial ingroup member by having them respond to the following item: "To what degree do you consider this person to be a part of your racial group?" (1 = *completely outgroup*, 4 = *equally ingroup and outgroup*, 7 = *completely ingroup*; see Ho et al., 2011; Smith & Wout, 2019, for additional studies using this measure).

Perceived Racial Self-Identification of the Target. Finally, we measured whether participants thought the target racially identified as an ingroup member by having them respond to the following item: "To what degree do you think this person considers him/herself as a part of your racial ingroup?" (1 = *completely*

outgroup, 4 = *equally ingroup and outgroup*, 7 = *completely ingroup*; see Ho et al., 2017; Smith & Wout, 2019, for studies using this single-item measure). Table 1 includes the zero-order correlations between all measures separated by Studies 1 and 2.

Results

Perceptions of the Target's Prejudice

Our primary research question explored whether Black people would give the Biracial target the benefit of the doubt after stereotyping Black people as being late. As previously stated, we operationalized the benefit of the doubt as the degree to which participants perceived the target as being prejudiced, with lower levels of perceived prejudice indicating more benefit of the doubt. We hypothesized that participants would give the Black and the Biracial targets more of the benefit of the doubt than the White target and thus would perceive the Black and Biracial targets as being less prejudiced than the White target.

To test whether participants gave the target the benefit of the doubt, we conducted a 2 (statement: explicit stereotype vs. control) $\times$ 3 (race of target: Black vs. Biracial vs. White) factorial ANOVA on participants' perceptions of the targets' prejudice. There was a significant main effect of the statement, $F(2, 325) = 52.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .139$. This ANOVA also revealed a significant effect of the target's race, $F(2, 325) = 6.58, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .039$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between the target's race and the statement, $F(2, 325) = 4.41, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .026$. Table 2 includes descriptive statistics by condition and the pairwise comparisons of the condition means for perceived prejudice and all other dependent variables.

To better understand this interaction, we conducted simple effects tests to investigate the effect of the target's race within each condition. Whereas the target's race did not significantly affect participants' perceptions of the target's prejudice in the control condition, $F(2, 325) = 0.50, p = .61, \eta_p^2 = .003$, it did have a significant effect on participants' perceptions of the target's prejudice in the explicit stereotype condition, $F(2, 325) = 10.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .061$. Specifically, in the explicit stereotype condition, participants perceived the White target as being more prejudiced than either the Black ($p < .001, d = 0.81$) or the Biracial targets ($p = .03, d = 0.40$). Furthermore, participants perceived the Biracial target as being more prejudiced than the Black target ($p = .02, d = 0.40$).

A more direct means of assessing whether participants gave the target the benefit of the doubt is by first testing for differences between the control and explicit stereotype conditions within each of the target's racial groups and then comparing the size of the stereotype usage effect between the target's races. Simple effects tests revealed that for all three target race groups, participants in the explicit stereotype condition perceived the target as significantly more prejudiced than participants in the control condition—Black

¹ Some argue that Black people cannot be racist because they lack the power to be racist. To ensure that "racist" was an appropriate item to include in our prejudice measure, we conducted a factor analysis on these items. The factor analysis yielded a single-factor solution (eigenvalue of 3.01, accounting for 75.12% of the variance), with all items loading above 0.8. Based on these analyses, we included the "racist" item in our prejudice measure.

Table 1
Zero-Order Correlations (Studies 1 and 2)

Measure	1	2	3	4
1. Prejudice metaperceptions	—	-.57**	-.39**	-.37**
2. Friendship interest	-.79**	—	-.48**	.42**
3. Perceived target racial group membership	-.37**	.44**	—	.86**
4. Perceived target racial identification	-.48**	-.58**	.67**	—

Note. Study 1 is above the diagonal; Study 2 is below the diagonal.

** $p < .01$.

target: $F(1, 325) = 5.88, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .018$; Biracial target: $F(1, 325) = 13.20, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .039$; White target: $F(1, 325) = 41.39, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .113$. Because these simple effects analyses demonstrated that all targets were perceived as more prejudiced when they explicitly stereotyped Black people, we then conducted a difference-in-difference analysis using planned contrasts to test whether the effect of stereotype usage (i.e., the difference between the control and explicit stereotype conditions) on prejudice perceptions was larger between any of the target race conditions (i.e., Black vs. Biracial vs. White). This analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in the size of the stereotype usage effect on prejudice perceptions between the Black and Biracial targets, $F(1, 325) = 0.87, p = .35, \eta_p^2 = .003$, but the size of the effect was significantly larger for the White target compared to either the Black or the Biracial targets: $F(1, 325) = 8.52, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .026$, and $F(1, 325) = 3.79, p = .052, \eta_p^2 = .012$, respectively.

Friendship Interest

We then tested whether the stereotype statement and the target's race affected participants' interest in befriending the target. A 2×3 ANOVA on friendship interest revealed a main effect of the statement, $F(1, 325) = 41.08, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$, such that participants had greater friendship interest for the target in the control condition than in the explicit stereotype condition. There was also a main effect of the target's race, $F(2, 325) = 16.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$. As with perceived prejudice, these main effects were qualified by a significant Target Race $\times$ Statement interaction, $F(2, 325) = 5.65, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .03$. We then conducted simple effects tests within each condition. The target's race significantly affected participants' interest in befriending the target in the explicit stereotype condition, $F(2, 325) = 20.02, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$, but not in the control condition, $F(2, 325) = 1.65, p = .20,$

$\eta_p^2 = .010$. Specifically, participants were less interested in befriending the White target than either the Black or the Biracial targets ($p < .001, d = 1.07$, and $p = .03, d = 0.32$, respectively). Additionally, participants were more interested in befriending the Black target than the Biracial target ($p < .001, d = 0.71$).

To examine the benefit of the doubt effect, as with perceptions of the target's prejudice, we first conducted simple effects tests to determine the size of the stereotype usage effect on friendship interest and then a difference-in-difference analysis using planned contrasts to test whether the effect of stereotype usage on friendship interest was larger between any of the target race conditions. Simple effects tests revealed that participants were not significantly less interested in befriending the Black target in the explicit stereotype condition, $F(2, 325) = 1.77, p = .18, \eta_p^2 = .005$, but they were less interested in befriending the Biracial and White targets in the stereotype condition compared to the control conditions: $F(2, 325) = 12.18, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .036$, and $F(2, 325) = 35.33, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .097$, respectively. The difference-in-difference analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in the size of the stereotype usage effect on friendship interest between the Black and Biracial targets, $F(1, 325) = 2.78, p = .10, \eta_p^2 = .008$, but the size of the effect was significantly larger for the White target compared to the Black target, $F(1, 325) = 11.29, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .034$. In contrast to perceptions of prejudice, there was no difference in the size of the stereotype usage effect between the White and Biracial targets, $F(1, 325) = 2.74, p = .10, \eta_p^2 = .008$.

Perceived Racial Group Membership

Our contention that the Biracial target would be given the benefit of the doubt when using the CPT stereotype compared to a White

Table 2
Study 1 Means, Standard Errors, and Omnibus p Values by Stereotype Condition and Target Race

Dependent variable	Stereotype condition							
	No stereotype: Target race				Stereotype: Target race			
	Black	Biracial	White	p	Black	Biracial	White	p
Prejudice	2.42 _a (0.19)	2.70 _a (0.20)	2.55 _a (0.20)	.61	3.08 _b (0.19)	3.72 _c (0.20)	4.34 _d (0.20)	<.001
Friendship interest	5.71 _a (0.18)	5.27 _a (0.19)	5.32 _a (0.19)	.20	5.35 _b (0.18)	4.29 _c (0.19)	3.71 _d (0.19)	<.001
Group membership	6.53 _a (0.20)	4.83 _b (0.21)	3.07 _c (0.21)	<.001	6.12 _a (0.20)	4.13 _d (0.21)	2.30 _e (0.21)	<.001
Perceived self-identification	6.42 _a (0.21)	5.08 _b (0.22)	3.11 _c (0.22)	<.001	6.09 _a (0.21)	4.28 _d (0.22)	3.00 _e (0.22)	<.001

Note. Different subscripts across rows indicate significant differences ($p < .05$) using least squared difference (i.e., equivalent to no correction). The numbers in parentheses are the standard errors for each mean. All comparisons remained significant when using Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, except the Biracial target was viewed marginally more prejudiced when they used the stereotype compared to the Black target ($p = .062$), less prejudiced compared to the White target ($p = .083$), and with more friendship interest ($p = .096$).

target rests on our assertion that Black people view Biracial people as racial ingroup members. This measure of perceived racial group membership enabled us to test this assertion by determining if racial group membership significantly differs from the midpoint of the scale (4 = *equally ingroup and outgroup*; see Ho et al., 2011, 2017, for other examples of this analytic approach). Using this approach, target means that are significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale suggest that participants perceive the target to be part of their racial ingroup, whereas target means that are significantly lower than the midpoint suggest that participants perceive the target members as part of their racial outgroup.

For participants with the Black target, the means for the control and explicit stereotype conditions were significantly higher than the scale midpoint: $t(56) = 21.47, p < .001, d = 2.84$, and $t(57) = 12.84, p < .001, d = 1.69$, respectively. Mirroring the Black targets, the means for the White targets in both the control and explicit stereotype conditions were significantly lower than the midpoint of the scale: $t(54) = 3.35, p < .001, d = 0.45$, and $t(53) = 7.72, p < .001, d = 1.05$, respectively. In contrast to these targets, the mean for the Biracial target in the control condition was significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale, $t(52) = 3.80, p < .001, d = 0.52$, whereas the mean for the Biracial targets in the explicit stereotype condition did not significantly differ from the midpoint of the scale, $t(53) = 0.59, p = .56, d = 0.08$ (see Table 2 for all means, standard deviations, and pairwise comparisons).

Perceived Racial Self-Identification of the Target

Finally, a 2×3 ANOVA on the degree to which participants thought the target considered himself a racial ingroup member revealed a main effect of the statement, $F(1, 325) = 5.41, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .016$, such that participants in the control condition thought that the target considered themselves to be more a part of their racial ingroup than participants in the explicit stereotype condition. There was also a main effect of the race of the target, $F(2, 325) = 109.44, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .402$, such that the participants thought that the Black target considered himself to be more a part of their racial ingroup than either the Biracial or the White targets, and the Biracial target considered himself to be more a part of their racial ingroup than the White target (all $ps < .001$). In contrast to the other dependent variables, there was not a significant interaction between the statement and the target's race, $F(2, 325) = 1.27, p = .28, \eta_p^2 = .008$.

Next, we tested for differences between the statement conditions within each racial group. For participants with either the Black or the White target, the condition did not affect how participants thought the target racially self-identified: $F(1, 325) = 1.23, p = .27, \eta_p^2 = .004$, and $F(1, 325) = 0.12, p = .73, \eta_p^2 = .000$, respectively. However, in the Biracial target condition, participants thought the target self-identified as less a part of their racial ingroup in the explicit stereotype condition than in the control condition, $F(1, 325) = 6.51, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .020$. This finding was consistent with our claim that Black participants are attentive to cues indicating whether Biracial individuals identify with their racial ingroup, suggesting that stereotype usage may indicate they identify otherwise (see Table 2 for all means, standard deviations, and pairwise comparisons).

Mediation Analyses

Finally, we tested whether participants' perceptions of the target's self-identification mediated the effect of the target's race on participants' perceptions of the target's prejudice and friendship interest, separately, when that person used the stereotype. Specifically, because there was a significant difference between the Black and Biracial targets on perceived prejudice and friendship interest when the target used the stereotype, we tested if racial self-identification mediated this effect. Given that the use of the stereotype only affected the perceptions of the Biracial target's racial self-identification, we expected that the more participants thought the Biracial target self-identified as Black, the less likely they would be to perceive the target as prejudiced and the more willing they would be to pursue a friendship with their target compared to the Black target. Therefore, we entered target race (0 = *Black*, 1 = *Biracial*) as the predictor (X), perceptions of the target's racial self-identification as the mediator (M), and perceptions of prejudice and friendship interest as the outcome variables (Y) in two separate mediation models. It is essential to note that the following mediation analyses are preliminary, and racial self-identification cannot be adequately interpreted as a causal mediator due to several issues with mediation analyses in general (e.g., temporal organization of X and M) without the experimental manipulation of self-identification that occurs in Study 2.

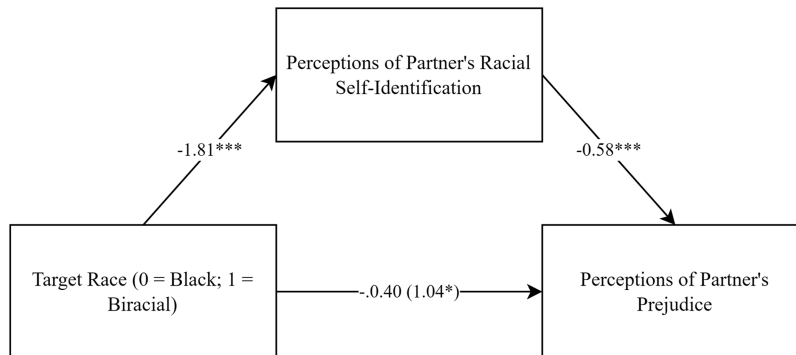
We used Model 4 of the Hayes Process Model in SPSS (Hayes, 2017) with 10,000 bootstraps to test our hypotheses. These mediational analyses revealed that racial self-identification fully mediated the effect between the Black and Biracial targets on perceived prejudice (*indirect effect*: $b = 1.04, SE = 0.25, 95\% CI [0.59, 1.56]$; *direct effect*: $b = -0.40, SE = 0.30, 95\% CI [-0.99, 0.19]$; see Figure 1) and friendship interest (*indirect effect*: $b = -0.74, SE = 0.25, 95\% CI [-1.27, -0.31]$; *direct effect*: $b = -0.32, SE = 0.31, 95\% CI [-0.92, 0.28]$; see Figure 2). Specifically, when controlling for the effect that racial self-identification had on perceived prejudice and friendship interest, there was no longer a significant difference between participants' prejudice perceptions and friendship interests of the Black and Biracial targets.

Discussion

In Study 1, our primary hypothesis was that Black participants would give Black and Biracial targets more of the benefit of the doubt when using the CPT stereotype compared to a White target. These hypotheses were predicated on participants viewing the Black and Biracial targets as racial ingroup members and the White target as a racial outgroup member. The results of the midpoint analyses in the control condition indicated that participants considered the Biracial target as a part of their racial ingroup. Furthermore, we hypothesized that this benefit of the doubt is contingent on Black participants' belief that the Biracial target racially self-identifies as a racial ingroup member. Supporting our primary hypothesis, when using the stereotype, participants granted the Black and Biracial targets more of the benefit of the doubt (measured by perceived prejudice and friendship interest) compared to the White target. These results suggest that because participants assumed that the Black and Biracial targets self-identified as racial ingroup members, they were less inclined to attribute their use of the stereotype to ill intent.

Figure 1

Perceived Racial Self-Identification Mediates Relationship Between Target Race and Perceived Prejudice



Note. In Study 1, the relationship between target race and prejudice perceptions was fully mediated by perceptions of target's racial self-identification. b = unstandardized coefficients; () = indirect effect.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

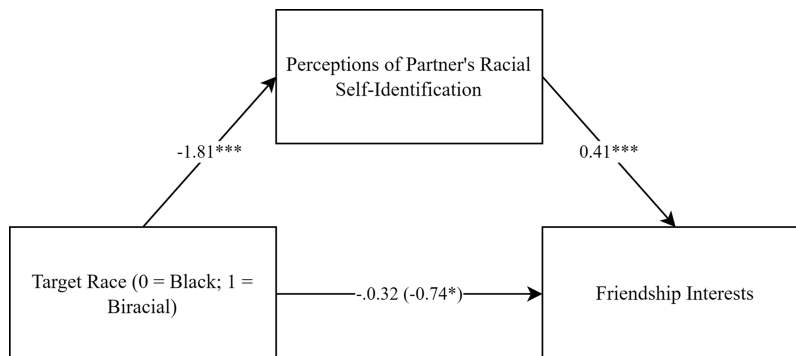
While not our primary hypothesis, it should be noted that participants granted the Black target who used the stereotype more of the benefit of the doubt compared to the Biracial target, when comparing across target race within the stereotype condition. Mediation analyses suggest that this difference is driven by participants' perceptions of the degree to which the target self-identified as a racial ingroup member. Specifically, when the Biracial target was perceived as self-identifying as a racial ingroup member, the differences in the benefit of the doubt between the Black and Biracial targets were alleviated. These results are in line with previous research highlighting the impact of perceived ingroup status of Biracial people (Albuja et al., 2018, 2023; Cooley et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2011; Merrell et al., 2024; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008; Smith & Wout, 2019; Wout et al., 2025) and research that finds that people do not perceive Biracial people to be as loyal as monoracial

people (Chen et al., 2019; Fine et al., 2023). Thus, the results of Study 1 suggest that the privileges given to Biracial people are less stable than those given to Black people and are contingent on Black people believing that Biracial people consider themselves to be ingroup members.

It is also important to note that when the target explicitly used the stereotype, regardless of the target's race, participants perceived him as being more prejudiced and were less interested in befriending him (see the condition means in Table 2); however, the difference-in-difference analyses suggest that Black and Biracial targets incurred similarly negative repercussions, whereas the White target evoked consistently more negative repercussions than the Black target. The late stereotype is a widely known negative stereotype about Black people that has existed for centuries, and as such, Black people likely prefer that nobody use it. However, central to our premise,

Figure 2

Perceived Racial Self-Identification Mediates Relationship Between Target Race and Friendship Interest



Note. In Study 1, the relationship between target race and friendship interests was fully mediated by perceptions of target's racial self-identification. b = unstandardized coefficients; () = indirect effect.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

these results suggest that participants gave the Black and Biracial targets more of the benefit of the doubt when they used the word compared to the White target.

Finally, while all targets received less of the benefit of the doubt when they explicitly used the CPT stereotype, only participants' perception of the Biracial target's racial self-identification was impacted when he used the stereotype. Specifically, participants thought the Biracial target self-identified *less* as a racial ingroup member when he used the stereotype. Similarly, participants considered the Biracial target as *less* of a racial ingroup member when he used the stereotype compared to when he did not use the stereotype. These findings further highlight the fluid and precarious nature of Biracial people's group status and suggest that their racial standing may not be as solid as Black people's standing.

The mediation analyses from Study 1 suggest that perceived self-identification was central for participants being willing to give the Biracial target the benefit of the doubt. Given the correlational nature of that mediation, we opted to experimentally manipulate the Biracial target's racial self-identification in Study 2. Consistent with previous research (Albuja et al., 2023; Smith & Wout, 2019), we hypothesized that participants would grant the Biracial target the most deference when using the CPT stereotype if they explicitly self-identified as Black. That is to say that when Black people's intuitions that a Biracial person identifies as a racial ingroup member are confirmed, they are more willing to bestow ingroup advantages, such as the benefit of the doubt. In Study 2, we conceptually replicated the mediational findings from Study 1 to directly test this benefit of the doubt hypothesis.

Study 2

In Study 2, we experimentally manipulated how the Biracial target self-identified to more directly assess whether self-identification impacts Black people's willingness to grant Biracial people the benefit of the doubt. Research by Smith and Wout (2019) suggested as much, finding that Black people were less willing to make attributions to prejudice when rejected by a Biracial person who self-identified as Black compared to a Black-White Biracial person who self-identified as White. To further probe how racial self-identification mediates perceptions of the Biracial target, we opted to experimentally manipulate the racial self-identification of the Biracial target by exposing Black participants to a Biracial target who was half Black and half White but racially self-identified as Black or White or did not identify (control) and measured their prejudice perceptions and their friendship interests related to the target when they used the "late" stereotype. In Study 1, there were no target race effects on either perceived prejudice of the target or interest in befriending the target in the control condition; therefore, we did not see a need to include a no stereotype condition in Study 2. Thus, we only included the stereotype condition in Study 2. As a result, Study 2 employed a one-way design with three conditions (Black-identified condition; White-identified condition; non-identified, which served as the control condition).

Based on findings from Smith and Wout (2019) and our own findings from Study 1, we hypothesized that the Black-identified Biracial target would receive fewer repercussions for using the stereotype than the White-identified or nonidentified Biracial target. Specifically, Black people should perceive a Biracial target who self-identified as Black as less prejudiced, and they should be more

interested in pursuing a friendship with them after applying the "late" stereotype than a Biracial target who self-identified as White or who did not self-identify. Furthermore, we hypothesized that participants would perceive a Biracial target who identified as White as more prejudiced and would be less likely to pursue a friendship with them than a Biracial target who did not self-identify. This finding would further suggest that Biracial people are given the same benefit of the doubt by Black people as other racial ingroup members would, and this should be especially true when that Biracial person identifies as Black.

Method

Participants

For Study 2, we collected data from 205 participants recruited from a Prolific panel. We excluded six participants who self-identified as Black in the Prolific prescreening but identified as multiracial in our study, and an additional 13 participants who misidentified the target's race (no participants misidentified the target's acquaintance's race). This resulted in a sample of 185 self-identified Black participants (131 females and 54 males). For the highest level of education, 0.5% reported completing some high school, 17.3% reported having a high school degree, 0.5% reported having a vocational degree, 34.6% reported completing some college, 33% reported having a college degree, 12.4% reported having a master's degree, and 1.6% reported having a professional degree. Participants received \$1.43 for their participation. A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) revealed that the minimum effect size needed for a main effect was $\eta^2 = .05$ and Cohen's $d = 0.46$ for condition effects for a one-way ANOVA with three groups and a sample size of 185 participants, power set at .80, and an $\alpha = .05$.

Procedure

The procedures for Study 2 were similar to those of Study 1. Participants received a profile of a Biracial person, except that the target's gender always matched the participant's own gender. In the "Black-identified" condition, the target wrote, "I am half Black and half White, but I consider myself to be Black," while in the "White-identified" condition, the interaction partner wrote, "I am half Black and half White, but I consider myself to be White." In the non-identified condition, the target wrote, "I'm half Black and half White," but did not explicitly racially self-identify. To minimize the possible protective effects of having a Black friend, in Study 2, the target was asked to describe an acquaintance. The target then described a positive and a negative characteristic of the acquaintance (the acquaintance was always Black and matched the participant's gender). The positive and negative characteristics of the acquaintance were the same as those from Study 1. After receiving this information, participants were asked to form an impression of the target and then reported their responses to the dependent variables. They then received a debriefing form and were compensated for their participation.

Measures

Manipulation Check. To test the efficacy of our self-identification manipulation, we asked participants to indicate their agreement with the

following statement, “This person views herself/himself as a member of my racial group,” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Perceptions of the Target’s Prejudice. We used the same items from Study 1 to measure participants’ perceptions of the target’s prejudice ($\alpha = .84$).

Friendship Interest. We also used the same friendship interest items from Study 1 ($r = .96$).

Results

Manipulation Check

As a manipulation check, we conducted a one-way ANOVA on participants’ perception of the target’s racial self-identification, which revealed a significant omnibus effect, $F(2, 182) = 71.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .440$. Participants in the Black-identified condition ($M = 6.08, SD = 1.10$) thought the target self-identified as more a part of their racial ingroup than participants in either the nonidentified (ostensibly Biracial; $M = 4.60, SD = 1.97$) or White-identified conditions ($M = 2.35, SD = 2.00$): $t(182) = 4.80, p < .001, d = 0.85$, and $t(182) = 11.90, p < .001, d = 2.16$, respectively. Furthermore, participants in the nonidentified (i.e., Biracial) condition thought the target self-identified as more a part of their racial ingroup than participants in the White-identified condition, $t(182) = 7.17, p < .001, d = 1.31$. These results suggest that the target self-identification manipulation was successful.

Perceptions of the Target’s Prejudice

A one-way ANOVA on participants’ perceptions of the target’s prejudice revealed a significant effect of the manipulation, $F(2, 182) = 11.55, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .113$. As predicted, participants in the Black-identified ($M = 4.08, SD = 1.60$) condition thought the target was less prejudiced than participants in either the nonidentified ($M = 4.73, SD = 1.52$) or the White-identified conditions ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.25$): $t(182) = 2.50, p = .01, d = 0.44$, and $t(182) = 4.80, p < .001, d = 0.87$, respectively. Also supporting our predictions, participants in the nonidentified condition perceived the target as less prejudiced than those in the White-identified condition, $t(182) = 2.34, p = .02, d = 0.43$.

Friendship Interest

A one-way ANOVA on participants’ interest in befriending the target revealed another significant effect of the manipulation, $F(2, 182) = 10.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .105$. Supporting our hypotheses, participants were more interested in befriending the target in the Black-identified condition ($M = 4.28, SD = 1.54$) than in either the nonidentified ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.88$) or White-identified conditions ($M = 2.88, SD = 1.62$): $t(182) = 2.70, p = .008, d = 0.48$, and $t(182) = 4.58, p < .001, d = 0.83$, respectively. Participants in the nonidentified condition did not significantly differ in their interest in befriending the target from those in the White-identified condition, $t(197) = 1.93, p = .056, d = 0.35$.

Discussion

In Study 2, we aimed to further test how a Biracial target’s racial self-identification impacted Black people’s willingness to give him

the benefit of the doubt. We did so by experimentally manipulating the racial self-identification of the Biracial target who described their Black friend using the CPT stereotype. Specifically, we presented participants with a target who described his racial background in one of three ways. In the Black-identified condition, the target stated, “I am Black and I am White, but I identify as Black,” and in the nonidentified condition, the target merely stated, “I am Black and I am White,” while in the White-identified condition, the target stated, “I am Black and I am White, but I identify as White.” This manipulation appeared to work as expected, as the participants’ perception of the target’s racial self-identification matched that of the target’s explicitly stated racial identity.

Consistent with Study 1, we found that Black participants were more likely to give the benefit of the doubt to a Biracial person who self-identified as Black than when they self-identified as White or did not racially self-identify. More specifically, participants viewed the Black-identified Biracial target to be less prejudiced and were more interested in pursuing a friendship with them than either the White-identified or nonidentified Biracial targets. Additionally, participants viewed the nonidentified target as less prejudiced and were more interested in forming a friendship compared to the White-identified target. These findings, in conjunction with Study 1, suggest that Biracial people are given the benefit of the doubt when they self-identify as Black and less of the benefit of the doubt when they self-identify as White. In the General Discussion, we unpack the implications of this research for understanding the dynamics between racial fluidity and ingroup membership advantages, as well as the distinction between perceived ingroup membership and racial self-identification.

General Discussion

Research has consistently shown that ingroup status provides people with various advantages (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Chatman & von Hippel, 2001; Davidson & Friedman, 1998; Ellemers et al., 1999; Everett et al., 2015; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005; Krumm & Corning, 2008; Messick & Mackie, 1989; Shelton et al., 2006; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001; Vorauer et al., 1998). We argue that one of those advantages includes being able to use stereotypes when describing a racial ingroup member with few repercussions. Before the present research, there was limited evidence on whether a Biracial person would be afforded such a privilege (see Smith & Wout, 2019, for one example). In contrast to previous research that showed that monoracial people penalize Biracial people if they act inappropriately or strategically self-identify (Albuja et al., 2018; Merrell et al., 2024), the present research demonstrated that monoracial Black individuals were more likely to extend the benefit of the doubt, as measured by perceived prejudice and friendship interest, to a Black or Biracial target (vs. a White target) who applied the CPT stereotype to describe a Black person. The design of the present research differs significantly from that of previous research. The most important difference is that, unlike the research by Albuja et al. (2018), we designed the present studies to minimize participants’ perception that the target was strategically racially self-identifying. Thus, the lack of strategic self-identification likely prevented participants from questioning the target’s intention. If we had designed the study to signal to participants that the target was strategically self-identifying to use the stereotype without

repercussions, likely, they would not have granted the target the benefit of the doubt.

The results of Study 1 found that Black participants gave the Black and Biracial targets more of the benefit of the doubt compared to the White target. Additionally, they gave the Black target more of the benefit of the doubt compared to the Biracial target; however, the difference-in-difference analyses suggest that Black and Biracial targets provoked similarly negative repercussions when using the CPT stereotype, while the White target invited decidedly more negative repercussions than the Black target. Mediation analyses revealed that when Black individuals perceived a Biracial target as identifying with Black people, they were more likely to extend the target the benefit of the doubt when he used the CPT stereotype (Study 1). Collectively, these findings suggest that Black people gave the Biracial target the benefit of the doubt, but maybe not to the same degree as they gave the Black target. The mediation analyses suggest that the difference between the Black and Biracial targets may be due to participants questioning the degree to which the Biracial target saw himself as Black.

To more directly investigate the effect of racial self-identification, in Study 2, we experimentally manipulated how the Biracial target racially self-identified. The results showed that Black participants were more likely to give the benefit of the doubt to a Biracial target who self-identified as Black compared to one who self-identified as White or one who did not explicitly racially self-identify. Furthermore, participants were more likely to give the Biracial target who did not racially self-identify the benefit of the doubt compared to the target who self-identified as White (Study 2).

Collectively, these studies contribute to the growing literature on people's perceptions of Biracial and multiracial people by accentuating the psychological experiences of Black people when interpreting the behavior of a Biracial person. Specifically, these studies are consistent with other research, which suggests that Black people, as a default, think that Biracial people racially self-identify as Black (Barnett & Wout, 2016; Franco et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2023; Smith & Wout, 2019; Wout et al., 2025). As a result, Black participants were inclined to grant a Biracial person who uses the "late" stereotype the benefit of the doubt. Thus, perceived ingroup status can have implications on how Black people respond to Biracial people and on social dynamics between Black and Biracial people. Specifically, it appears that self-identifying as Black leads to greater benefit of the doubt.

Importantly, these results highlight the impact of the fluidity of Biracial people's racial group status. Self-identifying as Black resulted in the Biracial target getting more benefit of the doubt, compared to not explicitly identifying as either Black or White (control condition), whereas identifying as White led to less benefit of the doubt. As previously noted, people's perception and categorization of Biracial people are not fixed and can shift based on the social context or on phenotypical characteristics of a Biracial person (Albuja et al., 2018, 2023; Cooley et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2011; Ito et al., 2011; Merrell et al., 2024; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008; Smith & Wout, 2019; Wout et al., 2025).

To our knowledge, this is the first research to demonstrate that Black individuals actively seek identity-threatening cues, such as a target's use of stereotypes, particularly when the target's ingroup status appears malleable. Specifically, we examined how Black people viewed a Biracial person who explicitly stated their self-identification as "Black," "White," or simply as "half Black and half

White" and then used the "CPT" stereotype to describe an acquaintance. We found that when the Biracial person was unlikely to identify as an ingroup member and used the stereotype, Black individuals perceived the target as more prejudiced and were less inclined to pursue a friendship with them. Although the present research makes a significant contribution to the social identity literature, it also raises questions about the distinction between racial ingroup membership and self-identification, as well as the psychological importance of identity safety in interracial/intraracial interactions.

Perceptions of Racial Ingroup Membership Versus Racial Self-Identification

Typically, people rapidly, accurately, and effortlessly identify other's races (Kubota et al., 2012), automatically categorizing them as ingroup or outgroup members (Castano et al., 2002; Castelli et al., 2004; Paladino & Castelli, 2008; Ratner et al., 2014). Most often, people's perception of another person's group membership matches well with how they think that person self-identifies. However, when the target is not monoracial, this automatic process may become more deliberate, and social cues, such as the use of stereotypes, may influence these perceptions. In our work, the data suggest that stereotype usage influenced Black people's group membership and self-identification perceptions of the Biracial target but not the Black or White targets. This finding supports other research suggesting that people's racial categorizations of Biracial people can be influenced by contextual social cues (Cooley et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2011; Smith & Wout, 2019). Despite that, this seems to be one of the few studies to show that a Biracial person's racial ingroup advantage is contingent on whether others perceive that they view themselves as ingroup members. This is important because it implies that Biracial people, in particular, can engage in behaviors that can impact their ingroup status, whereas monoracial people likely cannot.

We found evidence to suggest that perceived self-identification is an important factor in how Black people respond to Biracial people. In the present research, we found that explicitly identifying as Black for Biracial people conferred ingroup membership advantages. That is, self-identifying as Black when using Black stereotypes increases Black people's perception that a Biracial person is an ingroup member and thus is unlikely to be prejudiced, increasing Black people's interest in befriending them compared to when they identified as White or did not racially self-identify. This means that Biracial people's self-identification can be an important aspect of social interactions with Black people. Although perceived group membership and self-identification overlap significantly, perceived self-identification can either mark one as a group member or increase suspicion of their behaviors.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

Despite the contribution of this work on how Black people perceive and respond to Biracial people, there are some limitations, as well as opportunities for future research. For instance, the present research only focused on Black people's response to a Black-White Biracial target. Research suggests that different monoracial groups respond differently to Biracial people (Chen et al., 2019; Fine et al., 2023; Merrell et al., 2024). For instance, while monoracial Black people tend to assume that Black-White Biracial people self-identify as Black, monoracial Asian Americans tend to assume that

Asian–White Biracial people self-identify more as White. Thus, unlike monoracial Black people, monoracial Asian Americans question the loyalty of Asian–White Biracial people; thus, their default may be to not give Asian–White Biracial people the benefit of the doubt in ambiguous contexts. An Asian–White Biracial person may have to provide more evidence of their loyalty, like explicitly self-identifying as Asian American, before they are given the benefit of the doubt. Further research is needed to understand the generalizability of these effects to other racial groups.

Additionally, in the present research, we intentionally avoided providing extra information about the target, such as an image. We did this because we wanted to isolate the impact of the target's racial self-identification and his use of the stereotype. If we had provided an image of the Biracial target's face, it may have impacted participants' racial categorizations and responses to the target above and beyond the use of the CPT stereotype. For instance, people are less likely to categorize racially ambiguous images as ingroup members (Albuja et al., 2024). Thus, if we had provided an image of the Biracial target, participants may modify their willingness to give the target the benefit of the doubt, depending on the degree of Black phenotypicity. While outside the scope of the present research, future research should explore the potential effects of combining racial self-identification and phenotypicity.

Another limitation concerns how the Biracial target described his race. In Study 1, he identified as Black–White Biracial, and in Study 2's control condition, he identified as half Black and half White—both phrasing choices were intended to prevent participants from inferring his racial self-identification. In contrast, in the other Study 2 conditions, the target explicitly self-identified as either Black or White, an approach consistent with prior research (Albuja et al., 2024; Smith & Wout, 2019). Biracial people can self-identify in various ways, such as self-identifying with both racial groups, neither racial group, one but not the other, as Biracial/multiracial, or not subscribing to race as a valid construct. Therefore, additional work is needed to examine how different forms of Biracial self-identification shape Black people's perceptions and responses.

An additional limitation is that the present studies do not fully disentangle whether the benefit of the doubt is driven by Black people's belief that the Biracial target self-identifies as Black or by the target not identifying as White. Based on the results of Study 2, it appears that the target received more benefit of the doubt when he explicitly self-identified as Black and less when he self-identified as White, compared to when he stated he was half Black and half White. While these results strongly suggest that Black people granted the Biracial target more of the benefit of the doubt when he identified with Black people, it is less clear why he received less of the benefit of the doubt when he identified with White people. It could be that he received less of the benefit of the doubt because he identified as White or because he did not identify as Black. To better understand if this distinction matters, future research should include a condition where he explicitly states that he does not identify as Black (e.g., "I'm half Black and half White, but I don't think of myself as Black"). If the effect requires only that Biracial people dis-identify with Blackness, then the target should lose a similar amount of ingroup advantage (i.e., benefit of the doubt) when he does not see himself as Black as when he sees himself as White. Because people often think of race as zero-sum, there would likely be no differences between these two conditions because they both signify a lack of

identification with Black people. Future research should explore this question in more detail.

While we contend that the present effects are due to how the target racially self-identifies, there are other possible alternative explanations that we did not test. Previous research has highlighted the impact of shared fate (Ho et al., 2017), solidarity (Chen et al., 2019; Merrell et al., 2024), and loyalty (Chen et al., 2019; Fine et al., 2023) on people's categorization and responses to Biracial individuals. For instance, Ho et al. (2017) found that Black people consider Black–White Biracial people to be racial ingroup members because they perceive that Biracial people have experienced race-based discrimination and because they have a shared fate with Biracial people. In contrast, Chen et al. (2019) found that perceived discrimination led monoracial Asian Americans to question the loyalty of Asian–White Biracials. While we did not measure perceived discrimination or shared fate in the present studies, we argue that participants would perceive a Biracial target who self-identifies as Black to have experienced more discrimination than one who self-identifies as White. Thus, there are a few possible relationships between self-identification, perceived discrimination, and the benefit of the doubt. For instance, self-identifying as Black could lead to more perceived discrimination, which, in turn, leads to more of the benefit of the doubt. Alternatively, self-identifying as Black could lead Black people to assume that the target has experienced more discrimination and to independently grant the target more of the benefit of the doubt. Additional research is needed to understand the relationship between self-identification, perceived discrimination, and the benefit of the doubt.

Finally, we intentionally opted to use the CPT stereotype because it was less offensive than the typical stereotypes regarding Black people, such as violent or unintelligent. As such, CPT is a stereotype that Black people use with few repercussions. Black people would likely be less understanding or willing to give the benefit of the doubt to anyone, even a Black person, who endorsed the stereotype that Black people are unintelligent. Hence, the findings of the present research should not be generalized to suggest that Biracial people, or Black people for that matter, have the privilege of applying any negative Black stereotype to Black people. In essence, there are likely some lines that no person should cross because they are universally offensive.

Conclusion

Ingroup membership has its advantages, and Black people seem to give Biracial people the benefit of the doubt when they use Black stereotypes when describing another Black person because of Biracial people's relative ingroup membership status. The present studies also suggest that Black people are more willing to give Biracial people the benefit of the doubt when they explicitly self-identify as Black. The current work has implications for the racial malleability of Black–White Biracial people and their interactions with Black Americans. Because of the rapidly growing Biracial population in the United States (Jones et al., 2021), it will become increasingly important to understand how certain factors, like the use of stereotypes and racial self-identification, impact their interactions with monoracial individuals. The present research extends our understanding of how Black people perceive and respond to Biracial people.

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