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Asian-White Mixed Identity after COVID-19: Racist Racial Projects and the Effects on Asian Multiraciality

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Abstract: With the onset of the Coronavirus and racist statements about the origins of COVID-19 in China there has been a surge in anti-Asian discrimination in the United States. The U.S. case is worthy of special focus because of former President Trump's explicit racist rhetoric, referring to the 11 Coronavirus as the "China virus" and "Kung-flu". This rise in anti-Asian discrimination has led to a heightened awareness of racism against Asians and a corollary increase in AAPI activism. Based on survey and in-depth interview data with Asian-White multiracials, we examine how recent spikes in anti-Asian hate has shifted Asian-White multiracials to have a more heightened awareness of racism and a shift in their racial consciousness. We theorize how multiracials intermediary status on the racial hierarchy can be radically shifted at any moment in relation to emerging racist racial projects, which has broader implications for the status of mixed people globally.

Keywords: mixedness; multiracial; racism; racial project; Asian Americans 19



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1. Introduction

In 2020, anti-Asian hate crimes in the United States rose more than 73%, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, a disproportionate increase compared to the 13% increase in hate crimes in general (Yam 2021). AAPI Data, a non-profit policy and research group, reports that over 2 million AAPI (Asian American/Pacific Islander) individuals have been victims of hate crimes since the COVID-19 pandemic began (Stop AAPI Hate 2021). Another policy and research organization, Stop AAPI Hate (SAH), reports a total of 10,370 hate crimes against AAPI individuals between 19 March 2021 and 30 September 2021. Pew Research Center also reported on the increase in racism against Asian Americans. The 2021 report shows that 81% of Asian Americans say violence against them is increasing, and 45% reported that they experienced an incident tied to their racial or ethnic background since the pandemic began (Ruiz et al. 2021). This rise in anti-Asian hate is linked to the racist rhetoric that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, which blamed the origin of the virus on China and on AAPI communities in general. Partisan media bias that debated the seriousness of the pandemic and its consequences on the economy led to the stigmatization of Asian Americans (Cho et al. 2021). Many of these sentiments were spurred on by U.S. President Trump. In March of 2020, he posted a tweet that read, "The United States will be powerfully, supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before!" Then, in June 2020, Trump referred to the virus as the "kung flu" (BBC News n.d.). Such comments and subsequent similar ones from Trump and his administration fueled already existing anti-Asian bias and stereotypes, particularly in social media (Chiu 2020). According to Hswen et al. (2021), the weeks before and after Trump's tweets saw a significant increase in anti-Asian hashtags: one-fifth of hashtags mentioning #covid19 included anti-Asian views and one-half of hashtags with #Chinesevirus included anti-Asian sentiments.

Given these events, we are interested in how this pandemic-invoked racism against Asian communities has affected the racial awareness and racial identity of Asian-White multiracials. Prior to the pandemic, many scholars suggested that Asian Americans and, in particular, Asian-White multiracials were increasingly moving toward Whiteness and possibly merging into the White racial group (Alba 2020; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gallagher 2004; Strmic-Pawl 2016). However, we theorize that recent anti-Asian hate has operated as a racist racial project that has interrupted this process and shifted the racial logics of Asian-White multiracials. Through 40 survey responses and five in-depth interviews with participants who identify one biological parent as Asian and one biological parent as White, we find a significant portion of our sample report increased awareness of and sensitivity to racism and do *not* feel they are White. By focusing on how racism is shaping racial awareness and, thereby, racial group membership, this article projects that pandemic-related racism has altered the movement of Asian-Whites away from Whiteness.

2. Literature Review

We briefly review three areas of scholarship that frames our findings: the formation of Asian Americans as a group, the general characteristics of Asian-White mixedness, and the debate over Asian-Whites assimilating or moving into Whiteness. Together, these areas of scholarship inform our study of how anti-Asian hate shapes the contemporary experiences of Asian-White multiracials and, thereby, their status on the racial hierarchy.

2.1. Asian Americans

Asian American is a pan-ethnic identity that encapsulates a wide range of national backgrounds such as Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, and Vietnamese. While many perceive Asian Americans as a relatively new population in the United States, this “forever foreigner” attribution is a long-standing stereotype and a myth. Asian communities have been in the United States since the 1800s, on agricultural farms and then later helping to build the railroads and opening up their own independent shops (Espiritu 2000; Takaki 1993). Asians were racialized as soon as they came to the United States, with Whites describing Chinese men who arrived in the mid-1800s as morally inferior, savage, and untrustworthy, while Chinese women were condemned as a depraved class (Chan 1991; Childs 2009; Espiritu 2000; Takaki 1993). Asian communities were targeted with anti-immigration acts and limited pathways to citizenship in the 1800s and early 1900s. For example, in 1875, Congress passed the Page Law that denied entry to Chinese and Mongolian women who were defined as prostitutes, and later laws (1903, 1907, 1917) allowed for Chinese women to be deported if suspected of prostitution. Chinese women were singled out as prostitutes based on a White racist fear that they would bring in virulent strains of diseases, particularly venereal ones (Chan 1991; Childs 2009; Espiritu 2000). These racialized stereotypes were further used as justification to ban interracial marriage between Whites and Asians in 14 states (Childs 2009; Curington 2016).

It was not until after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that a new wave of Asian immigrants came to the United States, many of whom were highly educated and middle to upper class. Since then, the Asian population in the United States has dramatically increased, from 11.9 million in 2000 to 22.4 million in 2019 and a projected population of 46 million by 2060; currently, Asians are about 7% of the nation’s population (Budiman and Ruiz 2021). The success of these recent waves of Asian immigrants and their descendants led to the contemporary imagery of a “model minority” that depicts AAPIs as high achieving in terms of education and income, which is then used to imply they are a “model” for other communities of color to subscribe to (Chou and Feagin 2015; Wu 2015). In reality, many AAPI communities do succeed in these areas. For example, over half of all Asians in the United States (25 and older) have a Bachelor’s degree or higher compared with 33% of the general population, and the median household income for all U.S. households is USD \$61,800 but USD \$85,800 for Asians. Yet, such statistics can gloss over important differences among Asian Americans; for example, the annual

household income of Burmese is USD \$44,000, and only 15% of Bhutanese have a college degree compared to an average household income of USD \$94,000 for Filipinos, and 75% of Indians with a college degree (Budiman and Ruiz 2021). Furthermore, Asian Americans are projected to be the fastest-growing immigrant group in the United States, but most Japanese are U.S.-born, at 73%, while the vast majority of Bhutanese are foreign-born. We emphasize the differences within Asian American communities to highlight the distinct barriers and opportunities that different Asian ethnic groups face while also recognizing that Asian Americans, as a recognized collective, face anti-Asian discrimination.

The formation of a pan-ethnic Asian American identity, sometimes also known as Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI), is partially a response to discrimination and an effort to bring attention to the collective. Asian Americans uniquely face a set of contradicting stereotypes that center on being a model minority and yet forever foreigner at the same time (Lee and Kye 2016; Ng et al. 2016). For example, on the one hand, they are told they should receive Affirmative Action because they have too many spots in elite colleges, and yet they are presumed to not be proficient in English. Likewise, Asian Americans are the group whom Whites segregate from the least, and yet many of their cultural traditions are not understood, appreciated, or integrated into White society (Alba 2020; Chang 2016; Chong 2021; Chou and Feagin 2015). It is important to recognize that Asian Americans have not been passive in accepting such labels and presumptions. There is a long history of activism with Asian American communities, especially protests and demonstrations as a tool of political action among new immigrant groups (Ōng and Meyer 2008). Previous research emphasizes the connection between racial self-awareness and activism among Asian Americans, finding that Asian Americans who strongly connect to their racial group are more likely to engage in political activism. Several other factors are indicators of Asian American activism, including personal experiences with race and racism and awareness of structural racism (Tran and Curtin 2017). The activism of the Asian American community is not limited to in-group action; in recent times, the rise of Asian discrimination in the face of COVID-19 has influenced a larger racial awareness and an alignment of values with the BLM movement (Litam and Chan 2021; Merseth 2018).

2.2. Asian-White Mixedness

While much of the mixedness scholarship centers on Black-White communities, the second most studied mixed-race group is that of Asian and Whites. Historically speaking, like other mixed-race communities, Asian-White children were considered “mongrels,” and mixed Asian-White children often ended up in orphanages (Spickard 1989; Takaki 1993). After WWII, the perception of mixed Asians began to shift, and laws changed that allowed military personnel to bring their wives and children to the U.S. (Min 2006; Takaki 1993). Furthermore, as Asian communities began to increasingly do well in education and income, both monoracial Asian Americans and Asian-White communities were more welcomed among Whites. Currently, the Asian-White population is significant as it is the second-largest two-race, part-White population at 22%, and 14% of the Asian population identifies as multiracial, non-Hispanic (Pew Research Center 2015).

The factors that have been shown to shape Asian-White identity are similar to those documented for other mixed communities: family socialization, cultural celebrations, and phenotype (Chang 2016; Khanna 2004). For Asian-Whites specifically, a few factors tend to exert a strong influence: language acquisition, cultural knowledge, and phenotype. First, whether Asian-Whites are fluent in, or at least familiar with, an Asian-based language shapes how connected one feels to Asian identity. Those who are fluent in an Asian-based language are more likely to see themselves as Asian or multiracial (Saenz et al. 1995). Two, general cultural knowledge of a particular ethnic background also plays a factor. For example, the celebration of a festival such as Chinese New Year or knowing how to cook certain foods makes an Asian multiracial identity more common. Third, one’s phenotype, including skin-tone complexion but also eye shape, nose shape, and hair color, also plays a significant role. Asian-Whites’ own perception of their phenotype, as well as how they

believe others perceive their racial identity affects to what degree they see themselves as Asian American and have commonalities with other Asian Americans (Khanna 2004).

When it comes to racial identity and perceived closeness with Asian Americans and with Whites, previous research shows a complex picture. On the one hand, Asian-Whites often report feeling significant commonalities with Whites, and Asian-Whites often mark White on the Census (Harris and Sim 2002; Saenz et al. 1995; Xie and Goyette 1997). On the other hand, Asian-Whites often retain ties to their specific ethnicity, such as Japanese, Chinese, or Filipino. Asian-Whites also continue to face racial and ethnic discrimination (Chang 2016; Childs et al. 2021; Chong and Song 2022; Khanna 2004; Strmic-Pawl 2016; Williams-León and Nakashima 2001). It also must be noted that Asian-Whites might also lean toward affiliation with Whites because they do *not* feel a sense of closeness with Asian Americans; Asian-Whites who feel they do not have enough cultural similarities with and/or do not feel welcomed by monoracial Asian Americans are more likely to feel closer to Whites (Chen et al. 2018; Chong 2021; Chong and Song 2022). This in-between status for mixed Asian-Whites has led to a significant focus on whether Asian Americans and Asian-Whites specifically are “moving into Whiteness” or should be grouped under an “honorary White” status (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gallagher 2004; Kim 2007). We turn to this debate next.

2.3. *The Debate over Assimilation and Movement in the Racial Hierarchy*

In evaluating the positioning of racial groups on the U.S. racial hierarchy, the general consensus is that Whites are at the top, Blacks occupy the other pole, and Asian Americans place near the top of the hierarchy, just below Whites. When it comes to Asian-Whites specifically, it is often presumed that they are even closer to Whites on the racial hierarchy, even perhaps moving into or otherwise modifying that White boundary to be included (Alba 2020; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gallagher 2004; Kim 2007). The primary data that are used to support this projection are indicators of integration, such as marriage and residence.

A major indicator of the closing gap between Asians and Whites is the intermarriage rate. Although intermarriage does not equate to less racism or cultural assimilation (Childs 2005, 2014), scholars still look at marriage as an important measure of perceived distance/acceptance between racial groups (Alba 2020). Overall, about 3 in 10 newlywed Asians have a spouse of a different race, and among U.S.-born Asians, that percentage rises to 46% (Livingston and Brown 2017). Asian and White intermarriage is particularly common, with 21% of AAPI men with a White spouse and 32% of AAPI women with a White spouse (Cohn et al. 2021). With this rise in interracial marriage also comes a high Asian-White mixed population; the population who identifies as White and Asian on the U.S. census is the second-largest two-race, part-White population at 22% and 14% of the Asian population identifies as multiracial, non-Hispanic (Pew Research Center 2015). The intermarriage trend with Whites is even more apparent among those who identify as Asian and White; over 70% of Asian-White women marry a White man, and 64% of Asian-White men marry a White woman (Alba 2020). This Asian-White mixed population tends to do well and has a standard of living akin to Whites. Asian-White children are much more likely to live in suburban homeowner spaces in areas that are predominantly White compared to their monoracial counterparts (Alba 2020). Furthermore, Asian and White segregation is at 41, while Asian-White and White segregation is at 21 (Kwon and Kposowa 2017). Similar trends are found in educational attainment. Asian-Whites with an Asian father or Asian mother are the most likely to have two parents with a BA at about 80%, a rate that is even higher than a child with two Asian parents (~75%) or with two White parents (~55%) (Alba 2020). Such trends are bolstered by previous research that indicates Asian-Whites identify as White in some respect (Davenport 2016; Gallagher 2004; Lee and Bean 2010; Miyawaki 2015; Saenz et al. 1995; Warren and Twine 1997; Xie and Goyette 1997). For example, Davenport’s (2016) study finds that 1 in 10 Asian-Whites identify as White compared to only 1 in 20 Black-White. Similarly, a Pew study shows that

40% of those with a White and Asian background mark both racial groups when asked about their race, but, for comparison, only 12% of Black and Whites do (Parker et al. 2015).

While scholarship has largely focused on the decreased distance between Asian-Whites and Whites and, therefore, the projection that Asians are moving into Whiteness, the conversation is not that clear cut. Asian American communities, including those of Asian and White descent, often have socioeconomic indicators that are not comparable with Whites and continue to experience racial discrimination and even racial violence, yet this is often ignored or “white-washed” in academic studies (Chong and Song 2022; Kim 2016). Additionally, research that argues Asian-Whites have more identity choices than other multiracial people, especially in their ability and desire to claim a White identity, tends to be based on anecdotal evidence and ignores the voices of Asian and Asian-Whites, while also missing the complexity of Asian-White identity negotiations (Chong and Song 2022, pp. 7–10). Therefore, in this study, instead of focusing on personal racial identity options via culture, foods, language, and names, we move to structural analysis, emphasizing how the pandemic affected awareness of racism, racial group membership, and, therefore, possibly racial identity.

3. Materials and Methods

In order to see the possible effects of anti-Asian hate on multiracial identity, we chose to look at those of Asian and White descent. While there are certainly other significant part-Asian mixed communities, we chose to look at those who are part-White because Asian-White multiracials are those who are most often theorized to be moving into Whiteness and we wanted to see if such a projection was disrupted. If those with a White background and White family members felt their racial identity and/or awareness shifted by recent events, then this outcome would exhibit the strength of recent politicized hate against Asians to alter multiraciality and perceived group membership with Whites.

Participants had to meet three requirements for eligibility in the study: age 18–30, current or previous identification as multiracial, and one biological White parent and one biological Asian parent. The age restriction was used to try and get participants with an overall shared experience by limiting the likelihood of previous experiences when Asian hate was overt in society. Identification as multiracial, either currently or previously, was required as we were interested in how those with a multiracial identity may have shifted that identity after their recent experiences of anti-Asian hate. In the recruitment text, there was no definition provided for “Asian” or for “White”: participants were open to defining and identifying into those groups. Most participants had a White father and an Asian mother (80%). Participants noted the following specific ancestries: 3 Asian Indian, 13 Chinese, 4 Filipino, 7 Japanese, 5 Korean, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Native Hawaiian, 1 Guamanian, 10 other Asian, and 1 other Pacific Islander.

Participants were recruited via flyers/posts made to Facebook groups associated with multiracial identity and specifically part-Asian multiracial identity, such as Hapa groups. The call was also posted to Twitter and shared through public networks. Our data collection largely comes from a 37-question survey that was created using Google forms. Most of the questions were closed-ended and consisted of three main types: demographic questions such as those on education, family structure, and income; questions about racial identity that included one’s preferred racial identity as well as the racial identity most often ascribed by others; and the third set of questions was most critical to our findings. These questions were centered on racial discrimination, such as feelings of comfort with Asians, Whites, and Blacks, personal or close friend/family member’s experiences with anti-Asian hate arising from the pandemic, and the participant’s own thoughts on recent anti-Asian hate and participation in any anti-racist events. In this set of questions, respondents were also asked not only about participation in rallies on Stop Asian Hate but also Black Lives Matter (BLM); we inquired into both types as a means to evaluate broader racial awareness and politicization, with the implication that involvement in BLM suggests cognizance of systemic racism against all people of color. Throughout the survey, when

possible, questions were asked to get a sense of how the participant's feelings and/or actions may have changed since the pandemic. For example, participants were asked how many marches/rallies they attended prior to and post pandemic; participants were also asked if they felt their racial identity had changed since the pandemic. All surveys were anonymous unless the participant indicated an interest in a follow-up interview. Those who completed the survey were asked to provide contact information if they were willing to be interviewed. Based on interest from participants, we were able to conduct five follow-up in-depth interviews. Interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide and lasted approximately 35 min to an hour. Interviews were an expanded set of questions from the survey, probed more into findings discovered from the survey, and allowed for more nuanced conversations on if/how participants felt the effects of pandemic-related anti-Asian hate. All interview respondents were assigned pseudonyms, which are reflected in this paper.

Survey data were analyzed by looking for the overall majority of responses across each question. Then, we looked for patterns in responses across sets of questions. In other words, we looked at the results of each question individually but also how responses to questions inquiring into similar areas compromised an overall narrative. In-depth interviews were coded and analyzed by two of the authors and then compared with survey data, which resulted in many of the same themes emerging across both types of data. Interview excerpts in this paper are used to further exemplify in more detail the themes discovered via the surveys.

Reflexive Statement

We recognize the importance of discussing our own positionality in relation to the research (Collins 1990; Haraway 1991; Smith 1990). All three authors identify as White cis-gender women and/or members of multiracial families. We conceived of this project in response to the disturbing anti-Asian rhetoric and growing violence against Asian/Asian American communities. As scholars whose work has focused on many different aspects of mixedness, and multiracial identity, we wanted to contribute further to the understanding of how structural factors impact mixed-race individuals and center on the experiences of Asian-White individuals given the rise in anti-Asian violence and discourse.

4. Results

Our findings show two important interconnected themes: (1) Asian-White multiracials show increased attention to discrimination against AAPI communities and overall heightened awareness and sensitivity to racism; and (2) Asian-White multiracials indicate a closeness to Asian communities and/or distance from White communities. Together these two findings suggest that Asian-White multiracials are not moving toward Whiteness and do not identify primary group membership as White. Prior to discussing these findings, however, we do acknowledge how a cursory look at structural indicators, such as high education and income attainment, align with movement into Whiteness. In this manner, we acknowledge how our participants do match with previous scholarship that uses such variables to evaluate movement into Whiteness while arguing that a sole focus on such indicators overshadows important discussions on how awareness of racism disrupts the projection that Asian-Whites are becoming White.

4.1. At a Glance: Structural Indicators of Movement into Whiteness

The Asian-White participants do not embrace Whiteness, but they do fit certain structural indicators identified in previous literature as moving toward Whiteness and mirroring those of White communities. A total of 85% of participants (35) grew up in a suburban neighborhood, with 88% (36) reporting that they lived with both biological parents for all or most of their childhood. In terms of education, 67% (26) reported that both parents had a Bachelor's degree or higher, and 73% (30) reported that at least one parent had a Bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of their own education, the group was

highly educated and/or were pursuing high levels of education. For example, 68% of the participants (28) had already completed a Bachelor's degree or higher, yet 95% (39) reported that they expected to complete at least a Bachelor's degree. Additionally, 76% (31) reported they expected to complete a Master's degree or higher, with 44% (18) indicating that they planned to complete a Ph.D. or post-doctoral training. (See Table 1).

Table 1. (A): Projected education; (B): perceptions of skin tone.

(A)				
	N		%	
High School	0		0	
College	39		95	
Master's Degree	31		67	
PhD/Post-doctoral Training	18		44	
(B)				
	Self-Described		Others' Perception	
	N	%	N	%
White	13	32	19	46
Olive	12	29	10	24
Yellow	6	15	2	5
Light Brown	9	22	10	24
Medium Brown	1	2.5	0	0
Dark Brown	0	0	0	0

Another significant factor that is often taken into account when evaluating racial boundary movement is skin tone. Skin tone also plays a significant role in how individuals negotiate their identity, as well as how others identify them. A total of 32% (13) described their skin tone as white, and 29% (12) reported their skin color as olive. A total of 22% (9) marked light brown as their skin color, and 15% (6) described it as yellow. None of the participants identified their skin tone as dark brown, and only one person reported that they identified their skin tone as medium brown. Thus, most of the participants placed themselves on the light end of the skin tone spectrum. Yet, how they felt others' perceived their skin tone did not neatly fit with their own assessments, similar to the arguments made by Roth (2016). For example, when asked, 46% (19) reported that others identified their skin color as white, which was 14.5% more than identified themselves that way. A total of 24% (10) said they believe others identify them as having an olive skin tone, which was less than those who self-identified that way. The same proportion, 24% (10), said they believe others see them as light brown, which was one more than identified that way. No one said others identified them as medium brown or dark brown, and only 5% (2) said they believe others identify them as yellow.

The complexity of racial identity is highlighted. On the one hand, the participants report certain indicators of assimilation or closeness to Whiteness for Asian Americans and Asian-White multiracials, such as skin tone, education, and other markers of socioeconomic (Alba 2020; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Glen 2009; Iceland and Nelson 2010; Kwon and Kposowa 2017), which at a quick glance, fit the structural factors associated with being "honorary Whites". Yet, as Chong and Song (2022, p. 2) argue, this framing of Asian-Whites as close to Whiteness is based on a "white racial frame", where Asian Americans are understood as a "compliant, upwardly mobile "model minority", suitable for absorption into the White racial majority through interracial marriage" and desiring to be White. Furthermore, as we will see in the next section, how Asian-Whites understand their identity is also impacted by not only how others categorize them but also their experiences and awareness of racism.

4.2. Anti-Asian Hate and Racial Awareness

While the Asian-Whites in this study fit some of the structural trends that are often cited as indicators of moving into Whiteness, in this section, we discuss how their racial awareness was affected by the recent rise in anti-Asian hate. By racial awareness, we mean Asian-White multiracials' feelings and thoughts about rates of racial discrimination, policies to address racism, and overall cognizance of racism. Our survey questions inquired into specific issues that reflect this racial awareness, and follow-up questions during the interviews revealed additional detail.

First and foremost, over 92% (37) of the respondents feel that anti-Asian hate has increased "a lot" or "near a lot" since the pandemic, while less than 1% of respondents felt it had not increased. In this question alone, we see how anti-Asian rhetoric during the pandemic heightened Asian-White multiracials' awareness of discrimination against Asian Americans. For example, Carrie, who prefers a multiracial identity, described how she felt afraid for her Asian American family members:

"It felt so nasty, and I felt really afraid. And for me, like, I'm just really worried about my grandparents mostly because they're old and they're frail. Already being worried about the pandemic . . . and then, who is going to mistreat my grandmother? . . . I was just really worried all the time and angry that someone would put her in a compromising situation".

Carrie describes how the daily racist rhetoric and increase in physical attacks on Asian Americans led to great concern for her family, particularly her grandmother. Similarly, Jude, Thai-White, described how he felt anti-Asian hate has increased, mentioning an incident with his cousins who are also multiracial Thai. They were confronted by a group of young White men on the upper west side of New York, who yelled, "the Asians are here" while making Ninja noises and coughing. In the in-depth interviews, overall, we particularly saw the attention to multiracials' concern for their Asian family members. Fears around racially motivated attacks on family were connected to palpable connections to Asian communities. Recurring news stories on attacks on Asian women, followed by the attack at the spa in Atlanta, Georgia, made these fears all too real (Chen 2022). It is also important to highlight here that there was no clear correlation between those who felt anti-Asian hate had increased and those who felt Whites saw them as Asian. Among those respondents who felt anti-Asian hate had increased since the Coronavirus pandemic began, 29% (12) indicated that they felt White people perceived them as Asian, 24% (10) responded that they felt Whites perceived them as biracial, 22% (9) stated that they were perceived as White by other Whites, 14.5% (6) said they felt Whites perceived them as Latinx and only one felt that they were perceived as Pacific Islander by White people. In other words, the perception of the increase in anti-Asian hate *does not* only belong to those who are perceived as Asian and, therefore, it is not simply a matter of phenotype.

We also saw Asian-White multiracials' heightened awareness of racial discrimination translated into Asian-White multiracials having conversations about racism. Approximately 27% (11) said they had 1–3 conversations with family/friends about anti-Asian discrimination in the last six months, 29% (12) had 4–6 conversations, 17% (7) had 7–9 conversations, and 27% (11) had more than 10 conversations. This means the vast majority of respondents actively chose to have conversations about racism, and 44% reported that they had, on average, more than one conversation a month about Asian discrimination, a strong indication that they feel these conversations are important and pressing. We find the importance of these conversations is affirmed in how respondents feel about President Biden signing into law the "COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act" in May of 2021. This act was created in response to the increase in the violence against AAPI communities and provides greater resources and outreach on hate crimes related to COVID-19 (Sprunt 2021). In our survey, respondents were asked if they felt this act was necessary, to which 46% (19) said it was "very necessary" and 14.5% (6) said "sort of necessary". Notably, only one person said it was *not* necessary, while 29% (12) reported they did not know enough about the

bill to say one way or the other. Two people said they did not think the bill was necessary because they do not support law enforcement, in general, as a solution to violence. Thus, about 60% of respondents believe that the federal government should take direct action to address discrimination specific to AAPI communities and, at least, implicitly agree that AAPI communities are targeted for hate crimes. (See Table 2).

Table 2. Indicators of increased racial consciousness.

	N	%
Respondents Who Feel Increase In Anti-Asian Hate	38	92
7+ Conversations about Racism/Month	18	44
Feel “COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act” was Necessary	24	59
Increase in Racial Awareness	25	60

A second set of questions inquired into participants’ personal participation in fighting against racism, such as attending informational lectures or going to marches. This type of active participation was lower than support for the federal government’s action but was still present. While our data on this topic are limited, it is interesting to note that some participants reported they chose to attend a march or rally during the pandemic: 70% (29) reported they had *not* attended a march or rally on racial discrimination before 2020, *but* 22% (9) attended an event on Asian discrimination *and* 36.5%(15) attended a BLM march/rally since 2020. While we cannot know for sure, there seems to be a correlation between the rise in anti-Asian hate and these Asian-White multiracials’ active support for BLM. For example, Leah, Japanese-White, who participated in an interview, explicitly addressed the connection:

“I do think that it’s linked. I think before I would feel very sad for these communities [Black and Brown] but I’m not a part of these communities so I could just live my life normally. But I think with the pandemic and a lot of the Asian discrimination, having this be brought to light. I think that, I, for the first time, in my life, experiencing fear because of who I was. And not just like, ‘oh, it hurts my feelings when you say that’ but actually I experienced fear. So I think that, it made me understand a little bit more . . . I can relate a little bit more [to Black and Brown communities.] I definitely think attending protests and stuff has given me more confidence to speak up or call people out”.

Leah explains how the emphasis on her own identity and racial experiences brought on by the pandemic helped her feel more of a connection to the experiences of Black and Brown communities. Participants may also have been likely to attend a BLM because of the relative frequency of them during the pandemic, but we argue it is still revealing of their racial consciousness that these Asian-White respondents chose to participate in an event specific to Black communities. We examine the implications of this solidarity with Black communities more in the Discussion section.

One of the closing questions of the survey asks whether overall awareness and knowledge about racism has increased since the pandemic, to which the majority, at 60% (25), said yes. Interview data confirmed how the pandemic shaped feelings and thoughts on racism. Cassie, who has a Taiwanese father and White mother and prefers a biracial identity, expressed that recent social movements have made her more aware and pushed her to want to know more: “I’m still learning about stuff. I’m far from being, from knowing it all. I’m trying to become more informed. During the pandemic, and with the rise in all these movements, it has made me more knowledgeable”. Similar sentiments were expressed by Henry, who has a Filipino mother and White father and identifies as Asian-White. Henry noticed a shift in his political stance, which moved “more left” since the rise in anti-Asian hate during the pandemic; he notes: “on the political spectrum I was definitely more right . . . my algorithm was from the right and now I am center left”. The fact that Henry shifted his entire political ideology reflects how significantly racism during the pandemic

affected some multiracials' views. Indeed, that over half of the participants feel their racial consciousness has shifted in some way indicates how much recent anti-Asian hate has had an impact. In the following section, we look at how this awareness of racial discrimination is connected to perceived closeness with White and Asian communities and participants' preferred racial identity.

4.3. Racial Group Closeness and Preferred Racial Identity

We found that not only did our participants show an increased awareness of racism, but they also indicated a lack of closeness to Whites. When participants were asked what racial group they feel the strongest connection to, most did not indicate White: 63% (26) answered multiracial/mixed, while another 30% (12) said Asian/specific Asian ethnicity/nationality. Only 7% (3) claimed the strongest membership in White communities. When asked specifically to gauge how close they felt to Asian Americans, 54% (22) said they felt very close to Asian Americans, and 34% (14) felt somewhat close to Asian Americans, with only one person reporting that they felt not at all close. In contrast, when asked how close they feel to Whites, 39% reported they felt not at all close to Whites, and 39% (16) reported that they were somewhat close to Whites, while only 22% (8) reported they felt very close to Whites. Even among participants reporting feeling close to Whites, there was also a growing closeness to Asian communities, often one that was purposefully cultivated. For example, during an interview, Jude, whose mother is Thai-White and whose father is White grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood and attended a private school with mostly White students, reported feeling comfortable in White communities and is often perceived as White within these communities. Yet, he describes being drawn to Thai communities growing up, and, more recently, to Asian communities more generally:

"A senior friend told me to join (Pan-Asian student group) and I took on a leadership role kind of quickly . . . and there I found my home . . . and I don't know if I hadn't noticed it before but now I started to hear a bunch of stuff like this White girl who was close to my roommate was talking about a school trip to Taiwan and I heard her say 'I would never go to a place like that'".

Given that Jude had grown up in a White social world, his embrace of and closeness to the Asian American community was a journey he chose, moving from closeness to his Thai family and community in Thailand to joining the Pan-Asian student group in college to moving to China upon graduating from college in 2021. Yet, it also corresponded timewise with negative experiences he had with fellow White students' views of Asian countries and with the rise of anti-Asian hate across the country. Similarly, when interviewees were asked how racial discrimination impacted their identity, Carrie, Biracial White-Asian, described her thoughts about the impact of the anti-Asian hate in the following way:

"I think, like, uhm, just like having shared worries with other mixed race and Asian people has made me feel more Asian, I guess. Like, everyone being worried about their grandparents and that sort of thing".

These examples point to a shift in how these Asian-White participants relate to and connect with Asian communities and a push toward identifying with their Asian racial and ethnic identities.

Although we cannot claim direct causation, we believe awareness of racism and lack of closeness with Whites is connected to participants' racial identity. We know how the question about racial identity matters, such as preferred self-identification versus classification by others, so we asked participants about racial identity in several different ways (Roth 2016, 2018). Overall, participants did not choose White as their racial identity. For example, when asked to choose one racial identity they would mark on official forms, 88% (36) chose biracial/multiracial/mixed. Only 10% chose Asian (4), and 2% chose White. When given the option of providing their preferred racial identity as an open-ended question, 81% (33) wrote multiracial (or equivalent) or their specific mixture of ethnicities, while the rest listed Asian or their specific Asian ethnicity. When participants were asked

how they believe others identify them racially, their responses also contradicted any pattern of moving toward Whiteness. For example, when asked how they assume Whites perceive them, 78% (32) said Whites would choose an identity other than White for them. For example, 37% (15) said Whites identified them as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 24% (10) said they were identified as biracial by Whites. A total of 22% (9) reported that Whites identified them as White, and 17% (7) said they were identified as Latinx. Regardless of how the question was asked, the participants overwhelmingly did not identify as White and embraced their Asian identity, either as part of a biracial identity or singularly as their Asian ethnicity. Participants also noted that their racial identity was important to them; 37 respondents (15) reported that their racial identity was extremely important to their sense of self, while only one said that it was not important. For example, Leah, who has a Japanese mother and a White father, firmly identifies as mixed. When asked why she prefers this racial identity, she discussed how other identities did not fit:

“... even calling yourself Japanese American, that’s what the children of immigrants also call themselves that. I think that’s also true of me but I don’t usually say that. Uhm, I don’t know, it felt weird. I’m not sure what I can claim, you know. Like during Asian American heritage month, it’s like, I feel like I’m part of it but I’m not sure if I can say that. I feel like mixed is the most accurate, other people who are mixed race, I feel like I relate to them so much. I want to be immediately understood”.

Most participants preferred affiliation with multiracial and did not identify as White. We know that racial identities are multidimensional and increasingly divergent with changing societal trends, from immigration to interracial marriage to social movements (Campbell et al. 2016). Our findings suggest that the increased anti-Asian hate and violence, flamed by the racist characterization of the pandemic as a Chinese virus, affected participants’ feelings of racial group membership and racial identity. (See Table 3).

Table 3. Preferred racial identity.

	N	%
Biracial/Multiracial/Mixed	36	88
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	10
White	2	5

5. Discussion

In our results above, we show how Asian-Whites, on many indicators, do look like they are nearing Whites on the racial hierarchy. Yet, a cursory look at structural indicators glosses over meaningful and significant ways that the recent spike in anti-Asian hate affected how participants’ racial awareness shifted as well as how close they feel to Whites and their preferred racial identity. We now turn to discuss the broader implications of these results in two interrelated manners: (1) how does an evaluation of Asian-White multiracials’ racial awareness affect their projected movement into Whiteness; and (2) how has the recent rise in anti-Asian hate (re)racialized Asian Americans and therefore Asian-White multiracials?

5.1. (Re)Racialization of AAPI Communities

As noted in our introduction, much of the work on racial and ethnic group shifts, either via assimilation or via racial boundary crossing/movement, uses variables such as education, income, residence, and intermarriage as the key indicators (Alba 2020; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gallagher 2004). For example, based on such indicators, Bonilla-Silva (2006) suggests that some Asian American communities and Asian multiracial communities, especially those with a light(er) skin tone, will become “White” or “Honorary White” while others will fall into a “Collective Black”. While these variables do undoubtedly tell us much about mobility and changes in status on the racial hierarchy, there may be an overreliance on

these variables in assessing movement into Whiteness. In addition to looking at structural indicators, a group's beliefs on race would also have to change, or in other words, to become fully "honorary" White, the group would have to think more like White people. Indeed, Bonilla-Silva also suggests that a group's upward mobility would have to be matched with a change in racial attitudes; he writes: "That is, honorary whites may be classifying themselves as 'White' or believing they are better than the 'collective Black'. If this is happening, this group should also be in the process of developing White-like racial attitudes befitting their new social position and differentiating (distancing) themselves from the 'collective black'" (Gallagher 2004, p. 937). We refer to this shift in thoughts on race and racism as *racial logics*.

In a previous study that examined the racial logics of Asian-White multiracials, one of the authors of this paper, Strmic-Pawl (2016), reveals how Asian-Whites exhibit racial logics similar to Whites. She built upon research on White racial ideologies by scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2006), Doane (2003), and Hale (2010) to identify White racial logics with which Asian-White multiracials tend to align: a sense of "feeling normal" and non-racialized, a perception that residential segregation among Whites is natural, and a belief that racism in contemporary society is not a massive barrier to people of color. Based on their adoption of these White racial logics, strmic-pawl thus described Asian-White multiracials' status on the racial hierarchy as "White Enough" rather than "Honorary White". "White Enough" more accurately captures how "Asian-Whites are White enough on most occasions to feel normal and attain the benefits of White networks, but their Asianness can still be highlighted at will by others" (Strmic-Pawl 2016, p. 90). Indeed, what we saw over the course of the pandemic was how Asianness was "highlighted at will" by Whites and how Asian Americans were re-racialized as deviant. In this vein, we see anti-Asian hate spurred by the pandemic as a racist racial project (Omi and Winant 2014). This racist racial project then connected to a shift in Asian-Whites' racial awareness and movement *away* from White racial logics. Moreover, we also saw the potential for AAPI communities to align themselves (more) with the fight for justice through their attendance at Black Lives Matter events. Recent conversations on how AAPI communities are coalition building with Black Lives Matter while Black communities are supporting "Stop Asian Hate" and related events support our finding that Asian-White multiracials are *not aligned* with the majority of Whites who lack support for BLM (Asian American Advocacy Fund n.d.; Browning and Chen 2021; Horowitz 2021; Song and O'Donnell 2021). If this trend were to continue, it would pose a significant rupture in the projection of Asian-White multiracials merging into Whiteness.

The anti-Asian hate, largely spurred by the hate rhetoric and racialization of COVID as the "China virus", was directed at all Asians, regardless of ethnicity, including Asian-White multiracials. We thus saw how this racial discrimination was linked to participants embracing their Asianness, feeling distance from Whites, and identifying as multiracial (not White). It is, therefore, possible that Asian-White multiracials are undergoing a (re)racialization as further from Whiteness. Racialization is a layered process in which race and ethnicity are combined with changing social, economic, and demographic realities to construct racial groups in ways that benefit Whites. Just as Middle Easterners were racialized as Brown, foreign, and more specifically as anti-American Muslim terrorists after 9/11 (Beydoun 2018; Zopf 2018), Asians went from "model minority" and arguably "honorary White" right back to being perceived as a "foreign virus" or "disease" as a result of the Coronavirus global pandemic. These are markedly the same racialized stereotypes Asian immigrants struggled against in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

While we are still early in documenting the myriad effects of how the pandemic affected monoracial and multiracial AAPI communities, there are already many studies that align with our findings. For example, Wu et al. (2021) document the disproportionate impact on the mental health of Asians and Asian Americans; Roberto et al. (2020) theorize how Asian communities have been "othered" and the negative treatment they have faced; Wang et al. (2021) show how Chinese communities in France have united in taking more activist roles against racism; and Elias et al. (2021) "contextualize racism under COVID-19"

to show the effects of the increase in pandemic-related racism on group relations and boundaries. Furthermore, the newly drawn boundaries between Asian Americans and Whites are supported by research on Asian Americans that shows how an increase in felt racial discrimination against one's group is highly linked to more restrictive group boundaries (Casarez et al. 2022; Gibson 2022). We thus argue that Asian multiracials' intermediary status on the racial hierarchy can be radically shifted at any moment in relation to emerging racist racial projects, which is what occurred during the pandemic. We also argue that this finding has broader implications for the status of mixed people globally as backlashes against progress occur across different national contexts.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

We recognize that our findings are limited by our reliance on a survey that was mostly composed of closed-ended questions. While the survey resulted in a large response rate, it limited the types of questions we could ask. However, we were able to ask some questions that reflected temporal shifts in thinking by referring to pre and post pandemic. We also conducted five follow-up interviews that resulted in the affirmation of our survey findings. Our data thus serve as an important indication and step in the direction of further research that needs to occur. We suggest several particular areas for future research: comparisons between Asian-White multiracials of different class statuses as it is possible those of a lower SES may feel this shift in their racial consciousness even more acutely; comparisons among Asian-White multiracials and other mixed Asian communities to see the effects of recent anti-Asian hate on non-White multiracial Asians; and investigations into how Asian-White multiracials may be more supportive of BLM and related movements in connection with their own experiences of anti-Asian hate.

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