

Neither black nor white

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



When focusing on racial identity, the use of appearances as signifiers of group membership is not always clear cut. This relationship between appearances and individual identity choice becomes even more complex when we examine bi-racial identity. Research on bi-racial identity has often cited the reactions of whites to bi-racial individuals, but with Joseph E. Holloway's novel *Neither Black Nor White* the politics of skin color among African Americans are looked at. His novel is an historical account of the Hadnot family whose migration from Gloucester England in 1585 to New Orleans describes a family that were never slaves, but owners of slaves. They never thought of themselves as whites or as blacks, one parent that was white and one black to create a whole new identity.

It is clear that there is only speculation as to the relationship between appearance and racial identity among bi-racial individuals. There has been little to no theoretical development on this relationship. One important distinction is that color is both a personal and a social characteristic. That is one who perceives their skin color and one that interprets their appearance through the eyes of others within any given interactional sphere.

Such as the Hadnot family, they interpreted their sense of belonging within their family structure. It would be difficult for a person to choose an exclusively Black or exclusively White identity if their physical appearances do not match their chosen identity. In the end literature on the appearance identity link is sparse and seriously underdeveloped.

There is a love and hate relationship with this group on the one drop rule with skin color. The argument is that a three leveled society existed in the

South with the following hierarchy from highest to lowest status. White, Mulattos, and Blacks, mixed race individuals often served as a buffer group between Whites and Blacks through which cross color interactions and business transactions could happen.

This situation caused a preferential treatment of Mulattos by Whites and a generational advantage for Mulattos. Perhaps this was true for the Hadnot family in England but there were problems they had to face in New Orleans. The foundation for a social and cultural system of color classisms within Black America was laid. The author provided strong evidence that those members of the community with the lightest skin color and the most Caucasian looking features have been allowed the greatest freedoms and achieved at higher rates.

There is argument that goes further to display the ways that darker-skinned members of the Black community discriminate against mixed-race individuals in the workplace, how patterns of dating with the community are tangled up with phenotype, how networks are constructed or dismantled on the basis of color classism and how culturally, Blacks use unique cultural coding, such as hair or first names, to distinguish between those who are black and those who are not.

This is so because a bi-racial individual's understanding of their own appearance seems to be rooted in others perceptions and assumptions of appearance and its link with identity.

Appearance is distinctly more social than phenotypes because it is created by the bi-racial individual's understanding of their skin color as conditioned through the judgments of others in interactions. So we expect that it is appearance, not skin color, which will influence the racial identification of bi-racial, and that skin color works through one's appearance to affect identity. Mutual identification is critical to both identity construction and maintenance. If an individual exists within a social context where bi-racial has a meaningful existence, then they may cultivate a border identity.

If this cultural category does not exist and one becomes accustomed to and adept at switching from Black to White they will cultivate a protean identity, I think was evident in the novel *Neither Black Nor White*. If their appearance is White then members may develop a transcendent identity, but only if their social context does not demand categorization. If none of these options are available to an individual then the existing cultural norms dictate the racial identity above and beyond their appearance.

Reading the novel and researching the meaning of the novel, colorism. I love history and this historical novel put into perspective an issue I really had never thought of. It gave the reader a good sense of what it was like being in limbo with your identity. I was impressed with the research that went into writing this historical novel and with the detail to genealogy. I recommend this book for all undergraduates to help understand racism and all of its hidden secrets.

Reference:

<https://assignbuster.com/neither-black-nor-white/>

Davis, F. J. (1991) *Who is Black? One Nations Definition*. University Park, P. A.: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Holloway, J. E. (2006) *Neither Black Nor White*. C. A.: New World African Press.