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"What are you?" : understanding the contextual influence on the racial categorization of multiracial adults and the impact on their sense of belonging

Maya N. Hochberger-Vigsittaboot

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Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot
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ABSTRACT

Multiracial individuals can be racially misidentified by others based on the environment and the other person’s racial point of reference. This qualitative study explores the ways the environmental context impacts how Mixed-race adults are racially perceived by others and the impact it had on their sense of belonging to their racial group(s). A total of 36 Multiracial adults participated in in-person, Skype, and phone interviews about the types of environmental messages they receive and how they navigate these messages.

Participants described various common themes about the Multiracial experience such as: family and community racial socialization, feeling ‘othered’, physical racial ambiguity, identity resilience, and sense of belonging to their self-identified racial group(s). Participants expressed how other’s perception of their identity shifted based on environment; however, often their personal views of their identity remained the same. Participants also expressed having unique knowledge and strength due to their Multiracial background.

Study results indicate that the Mixed-race participants shared similar experiences compared to the Multiracial literature. This study adds new knowledge to our understanding of Multiracial experiences and raises questions about where Mixed people stand in regards to the US current race politics and identity-related resiliency and adaptation.

**“WHAT ARE YOU?” UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCE ON THE
RACIAL CATEGORIZATION OF MULTIRACIAL ADULTS AND THE IMPACT ON
THEIR SENSE OF BELONGING**

A project based upon an independent
investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Master of Social
Work.

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Massachusetts 2015

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Thank you to those whose shoulders I stand on. I would not be here without your perseverance and compassion and I am forever grateful.

And in Thai:

วิทยานิพนธ์เล่มนี้จะเกิดขึ้นไม่ได้เลยถ้าไม่มีคนไทยที่ฉันได้รู้จักเหล่านั้นคอยช่วยเหลือ

Meaning: This thesis would not be possible without the support and help from others and the Thai people I know.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

“Are you adopted? Are you sure you are not adopted?” These were questions I was asked when she attended Synagogue with her white, Jewish mother growing up. I am a Mixed-race daughter of a Jewish, white American woman and a Thai man and I grew up often having my race called into question by others. Often times the Jewish people in my mom’s synagogue were confused about why a racially ambiguous child was with a white woman in a predominately white environment. As I got older, it became apparent that sometimes native Spanish speakers thought I spoke Spanish because they would come up to mein restaurants or on the street and start speaking Spanish. Furthermore, academic professors and acquaintances have asked me if I was Native American during casual conversations in an attempt to understand my racial background. These experiences highlight how my racial background was, and is, interpreted differently based on the environment I am in *and* based on other people’s point of reference. These contextual factors comprise the type of messages sent to a Mixed-race person and demonstrate the fluidity of racial interpretation. Furthermore, it demonstrates that sometimes there is a difference between outsiders racial interpretation of a Mixed-race person versus the Multiracial person’s internal racial identification. If a Multiracial person experiences tension between how the environment racially interprets them versus how they racially perceive themselves, the Multiracial person can react in a multitude of ways.

One way Multiracial people have reacted to the experience of living on the boarder of various races is by establishing a sociopolitical identity. In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau

acknowledged Multiracial communities by creating a ‘two or more races’ category, establishing a national visibility for Multiracial communities. This action should not be confused with the idea that Multiracial persons did not exist prior to 2000. Virginia’s anti-miscegenation statute, the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, stood until the U.S. Supreme Court declared it was unconstitutional in 1967 (Hoewe & Almut Zeldes, 2012). This highlights how Multiracial people and interracial marriage were frowned upon by the national government during that time period. Mixed communities have existed in the U.S. since the colonial era, but society continues to struggle with understanding the Multiracial experience because of the belated sociopolitical acknowledgment of these communities.

A manifestation of the U.S society’s struggle to understand the Multiracial experience is seen in the academic literature discussing the Multiracial experience. While the academic literature discussing the Multiracial experience has grown, the topics of discussion focus heavily on identity development (Adams, 1997; Winters, 2003). An advantage of broadening the literature on the Multiracial experience would be that researchers and human services professionals can mature their understanding of the Multiracial experience. By expanding the literature and research on these communities, we can strengthen the theories geared towards understanding the Multiracial experience beyond the identity development process.

As previously mentioned, much of the literature on Multiracial communities focuses on the individual’s identity development; there is less focus on Multiracial group membership and how external factors impact the internal experience (Adams, 1997). In 2014, Charmaraman, Woo, Quach, and Erkut (2014) conducted a review of content and methods of 125 scholarly articles pertaining to Multiracial populations and found methodological and definitional challenges that led to conflicting information. These findings exemplify the difficulties

researchers have historically faced when defining and exploring the Mixed-race experience. Additionally, Adams (1997) finds that Multiracial literature focuses mostly on identity, leaving other aspects of Multiracial experiences unacknowledged. Similarly, Schwartz, Syed, Yip, Knight, Umaña-Taylor, Rivas-Drake, and Lee (2014) studied methodological issues and also found that research primarily focuses on identity development. They argue that because research on the Multiracial experience is still immature, researchers are focusing on the beginning of the identity process that occurs during adolescence instead of how adults utilize and perceive their racial identities.

In addition to much of the literature exploring Mixed-race identity development, there is also plethora of how researchers define identity, specifically racial identity and within this thesis this author conceptualizes racial identity as an idea separate from how previous researchers defined racial identity. First off, previous literature has assigned various meanings to race and racial identity (Fedelina-Chávez& Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Racial and ethnic identities are often researched as collaborative concepts within literature and this results in ethnic and racial identity sharing a definition (Fedelina-Chávez& Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Furthermore, because the definition of racial identity is not consistent within the literature, and sometimes shares a definition with ethnic identity, this creates tension and confusion when analyzing and understanding specifically racial identity (Fedelina-Chávez& Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Racial identity is most commonly defined as a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception of a shared common heritage with a particular racial group (Fedelina-Chávez& Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Fedelina-Chávezand Guido-DiBrito (1999) discussed that racial identity is most often used as a lens to categorize others based off of skin color.

Based off of this information, this author felt that the previously defined term ‘racial identity’ did not provide an accurate or encompassing meaning for what was being discussed within this thesis. Rather, this author believes for this thesis, racial identity is a combination of the previously defined racial identity *and* social identity. Social psychologist, Marilynn Brewer, defines social identity as how a person categorizes him/herself into a group. Brewer’s social identity definition, unfortunately, did not include race and a person’s racial identity as one type of a person’s social identity. This author specifically chose Brewer’s social identity definition because this thesis utilizes her Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) to understand inter and intragroup interactions. Because this definition did not include race and racial identity within its scope of understanding, this author utilized Maria Root’s Biracial Identity Resolution Model to complement the gaps within ODT. This author specifically chose this theory in comparison to the other Mixed-race identity theories because it emphasized the impact the environment plays on a Mixed-race person’s navigation of their racial identity. Furthermore, Root’s Resolution Model analyzes how the more advanced stages of how a Mixed-person navigates their racial identity instead of their identity development.

Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, racial identity is defined as how a person self-identifies racially separate from how other’s racially interpret the person. This author refers to racial identity and racial experience interchangeably because they both refer to a person’s self-identified race and how the person understands how others interpret his/her race based on the environment. This racial experience is influenced by other people’s racial point of reference when they racially interpret others, the types of messages people in different environment send to the individual, a Mixed-race person’s physical presentation, and how the Multiracial person deals with their own racial presentation and the external messages.

In addition to the complexities of defining racial and social identity, AhnAllen, Suyemoto, and Carter (2006) discuss how there is even less research on the interactions between physical appearance, sense of belonging, and racial self-identification among Multiracial adults. Separately, each topic is nuanced and existing research focuses on specific dyads (Black/white, white/Asian) (AhnAllen et al., 2006; Adams, 1997). Based off previous research and for consistency, this author will use the terms ‘Mixed-race’ and ‘Multiracial’ interchangeably throughout this study, as these terms most accurately include people of multiple racial heritages (Root, 1990).

There is a deficit not only in research, but also in identity models that fully encompass the Multiracial experience. The first Mixed identity model developed in 1928 was the “Marginal Man model” that specifically focused on Black/white Multiracial communities and viewed the Multiracial identity as an incomplete one that lacked a sense of belonging (Sechrest-Ehrhardt, 2013; Rockquemore, Brunsmas, & Delgado, 2009). This created the belief that Multiracial people lead tragic lives because of their marginal and incomplete identity (Sechrest-Ehrhardt, 2013). This was the main model that conceptualized the Multiracial experience until 1971, with the introduction of the Cross Model of Nigrescence (Rockquemore et al., 2009), a five stage process modeled on African-American identity development. It was applied to Multiracial persons because it considered them minorities similar to African-Americans (Sechrest-Ehrhardt, 2013). In 1989, Dr. Jean Phinney became seminal through her concept that all members of various ethnic groups undergo a three-stage ethnic identity process (Sechrest-Ehrhardt, 2013; Rockquemore et al., 2009). Newer Multiracial identity models include: Poston’s five stage model of biracial development; Kich’s three stage biracial identity development; Kerwin and Ponterotto’s racial awareness model, which discusses Multiracial people’s public and private

identities; and Hall's Life Span identity model, which examines racial identity development throughout a lifetime (Sechrest-Ehrhardt, 2013; Rockquemore et al., 2009). While these theories postulate about the development of Multiracial identity, each theory lacks an appreciation for how the environment impacts Multiracial people. Root's Biracial Identity Resolution Model, however, demonstrates a more progressive template for understanding how Mixed-race people navigate their racial identity beyond the stages of identity development (Root, 1990). Root emphasizes the importance of the environment when it comes to understanding how the environment can enact certain identities in certain situations (Root, 1990). Furthermore, it provides a more circular and fluid understanding of how people navigate their identity in certain situations. This cyclical format is more beneficial than the previously discussed theories because those theories are linear and view a person's identity development as an end goal rather than a continuous process.

Given the growing literature on the Mixed-race experience, the purpose of this study is to understand how the environment influences how Multiracial adults are racially categorized by others and how these differences impact the individual's sense of belonging to his/her racial groups. This study aims to use ODT to understand how the environment and contextual factors, such as an individual's racial reference point, influences others to racially miscategorize a Mixed-race adult and how the miscategorization impacts the Mixed-race person's sense of belonging to their racial group(s).

This author conducted interviews in-person, via Skype, or on the phone. Participants were adults over the age of 18 who identify with two or more racial groups or with a term that implies their parents are from different racial groups, such as Mixed, Multiracial, or biracial. Participant outreach was conducted through snowball sampling using social media (Facebook),

emailing listservs, and contacting Mixed-race studies professors and other colleagues. This author developed a recruitment form that introduced the researcher and the purpose of the study to interested participants. Finally, this author used her own interview questions to collect data.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This section will review why ODT, complemented by the biracial identity resolution model, was the most efficient and encompassing framework for understanding the Multiracial experience. ODT and the identity resolution model together articulate how the environment can influence how others categorize Multiracial people (Brewer, 1991; Root, 1990; Nakashima, 1996). This author will then discuss common identity themes established within Multiracial experience literature, analyze the dynamics between racial ambiguity and the environment, and reflect on racial identity resiliency.

Optimal distinctiveness theory framework

Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) dictates one's social identity stems from two opposing needs: to assimilate with others, and to be different from others. It was established in 1991 by Marilynn Brewer, who defines *personal identity* as the individual characteristics that differentiate a person from a group in a social context, and *social identity* as how the person categorizes him/herself into a group. Social identities are marked when the "I" becomes "we" and the self becomes an aspect of the group, shifting away from the uniqueness of that person (Brewer, 1991).

According to Brewer (1991), there are four main principles of ODT: inclusiveness, positive group association, context and time specificity, and drive for assimilation and differentiation. First, Inclusiveness means the individual's social identification with the group

meets ODT's drives to assimilate and also sustain his/her individual identity. Second, positive ingroup membership reaffirms a positive group identity and can serve as a buffer for negative societal messages, such as effects of racism and discrimination. Third, societal perception of a group identity demonstrates the time and context of where that identity is situated. Lastly, assimilation and differentiation are intrinsic motivations for people navigating identities. The strength between the two forces is determined by cultural norms, individual socialization, and experience. ODT emphasizes the importance of the environment, which includes both a person's upbringing and current environment, when understanding ingroup membership. While there is no concrete research connecting ODT and Multiracial communities, the concept of the environment influencing group membership can be applied to Multiracial communities (Sanchez et al., 2014; Brewer, 1991).

When a person is in an environment that invokes more than one identity there are three possible pathways people can undergo (Leonardelli et al., 2010). To better illustrate these pathways see Figure 1.

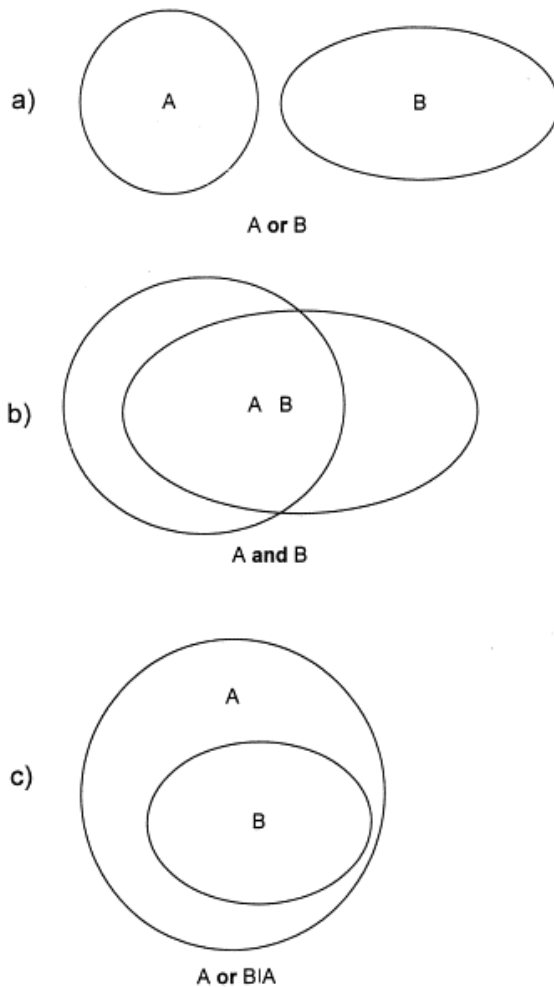


FIGURE 1. Multiple Identity Interactions.

Figure 1a occurs when two identities are separate within the self. In this pathway, the individual consciously keeps the identities separate, so that each identity is activated separately and based on context (Brewer, 1999). Figure 1b is a compound group identity. With a compound group identity, the identity satisfies the need for both differentiation and assimilation, because the membership is strictly the overlap in identities A and B (Brewer, 1999; Leonardelli et al., 2010). Figure 1c is a nested identity. Nested identities occur when one identity (A) is superordinate and the other identity (B) is a subpart identity. Nested identities function in a complementary manner and each identity alternates being superordinate based on context

(Brewer, 1999). Similar to Figure 1b, nested identities can achieve optimal distinctiveness because the superordinate identity satisfies the drive for assimilation within a large collective and the subpart identity serves as a distinction within the larger collective (Brewer, 1999); unlike Figure 1a, the person can simultaneously engage in both identities, but one identity is more prominent than the other based on the situation. Currently, there is minimal research on how ODT understands racial dynamics despite many similarities between ODT and racial identity interactions. Applying ODT to an individual's internal racial interactions can enable a deeper understanding of how context influences these interactions and how society interacts with this person.

ODT is not without its limitations. Leonardelli, Pickett, and Brewer (2010) critique Brewer, arguing that she conceptualizes the social self as one-dimensional, leaving the theory unable to explain the complexities of identities and multiple identity interactions. Furthermore, there is minimal research on how ODT understands racial dynamics, despite many similarities between ODT and racial identity interactions, as illustrated in Brewer (1999). In this article, Brewer described how the dual identification with Hong Kong locals and their Chinese ethnicity embodied ODT. While there is literature documenting how an ethnic identity interacts with the environment, the article does not discuss the racial implications because there are not multiple racial interactions. Applying ODT to an individual's internal racial interactions can enable a deeper understanding of how context influences these interactions and how the individual perceives broader societal interaction with this person. However, not all social groups are viewed equally, and it is important to remain cognizant of the social hierarchy and its influence on how one values his/her identity (Brewer, 1991). This author will also use Maria Root's Biracial Identity Model (1990) to address the pitfalls in Brewer's theory, as Brewer does not address how

racial identities interact within an individual. Therefore, Root's identity model similarly addresses the importance of environment, like Brewer's, but also discusses how a Multiracial person can internally navigate their racial identities.

Biracial identity resolution model

This author utilizes Root's identity resolution model to embellish upon ODT to understand how environmental messages impact Multiracial adults, because it focuses on a person's identity commitment rather than identity development. Root (1990) theorizes that there are multiple influences on a person's identity resolution, and any resolution is positive if the person accepts both sides of his/her racial heritage. This model also assumes that: the person does not necessarily racially identify based on appearance, acknowledges that the environment (extended family, community, society) shapes the sense of self, and that the individual will not have guaranteed acceptance by his/her self-identified racial group.

There are four possible identity resolutions, and each is fluid. First is acceptance of the societal identity, where the person believes s/he has no control over how others view his/her identity; this resolution is a passive acceptance stemming from societal oppression. Second, the person actively identifies with both racial groups. This resolution occurs mostly in Multiracial communities where the person feels socially accepted and privileged in both racial groups. Third, the person identifies with only one racial group. This person actively chooses a racial group, in contrast to the first resolution where the person is passive. Lastly, a person can identify with a new racial group. This person feels a kinship with other Mixed-race people that do not translate to his/her monoracial counterparts – for example, Hapas (white/Asian) in Hawaii created a distinct sociopolitical identity that is separate to that of their white and Asian monoracial counterparts (Root, 1990).

While this model is helpful in understanding a Multiracial person's identity resolution, it is also flawed. It considers a resolution healthy only if the person does not deny *any* aspects of his/her racial heritage (Root, 1990). This requirement minimizes the effects of institutionalized oppression (e.g., colorism, racism, internalized racism, etc.) and its direct impact on how people of color in the U.S. contextualize and understand their cultures within systems of dominance. Root's demand that all aspects of a person's racial heritage be accepted trivializes the hardship people of color endure when internally navigating their racial heritages. Additionally, Root does not acknowledge that Mixed-race people often have to adapt within the cultural systems of oppression, which may entail navigating their racial identities in ways that may temporarily minimize their racial heritage in an attempt for the individual to thrive. Root's narrow definition closes the conversation to explore how Multiracial people can adapt and shape their identity to coexist within systems of dominance or work outside these systems. Root also assumes Multiracial people in some way identify with having a white heritage. This is highly problematic as Root disregards Multiracial individuals where both parents are racial minorities, thus limiting the scope of the Multiracial perspective. Overall, this model is beneficial for understanding how a Multiracial person conceptualizes his/her race and acknowledges that the environment helps to shape that identity, but it does have its drawbacks.

The Multiracial experience

Multiracial individuals can be racially misinterpreted by others due to various reasons and the impacts of these racially misinterpretations are minimally understood. As previously discussed, Multiracial theories and research are still maturing, but there are themes that remain constant throughout the literature: family and community racial socialization, feelings of otherness/isolation/rejection, sense of belonging, and frequency of thinking about their race

(Jackson, 2012). This author utilizes ODT and Root's identity model to guide how these themes impact society's racial categorization of Multiracial individuals in conjunction with how they interact with society (Root, 1990; Brewer, 1991).

Family and community racial socialization

Racial socialization is the process of acquiring cultural norms and ideologies that provide the individual with an understanding of how they are valued by and perceived in society. Racial socialization teaches a person about the reality of racism and prepares them to navigate a racially charged society (Snyder, 2014). To date, there is minimal research documenting the racial socialization of Multiracial people; the research that alludes to Multiracial socialization comes from literature on monoracial minorities and transracial adoption racial socialization (Jhangiani, 2013). Researchers pinpointed family and environment as the most influential aspects for understanding how a person is racially socialized (Adams, 1997; Snyder, 2014; Jhangiani, 2013; Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Lloyd, 2005). Miville et al. (2005) similarly found that extended family influences the socialization and messages Multiracial adults received growing up. Snyder (2014) found that a parent's race could decide how s/he chooses to approach racial socialization. Bronson and Merryman (2009) found that non-white parents were three times more likely to discuss race than their white counterparts, while another study found that the white parents that did discuss race focused more on a color-blind message (Vittrup, 2007).

Jhangiani (2013) discussed how race and racism were more likely to be discussed when the environment was racially integrated and diverse. If Multiracial participants were in primarily white environments, race was not discussed, while others raised in more racially diverse environments or whose families provided opportunities to interact in an integrated environment frequently discussed race. Snyder (2014) explained in regards to Mixed-race people, racial

socialization varied by maternal race and concluded that Black mothers were more likely to socialize their Mixed children than their counterparts. Racial socialization creates a platform for how Multiracial individuals racially view themselves—early racial messages define a child’s perception of his/her race; therefore, understanding the messages’ impact can help predict how Multiracial adults will navigate environmental messages as adults.

Feeling ‘othered’

Feeling racially isolated is a prominent theme in Mixed-race literature. Jackson (2012) highlighted in her study that all participants felt ‘othered’ in their communities. The contextual factors within the environment often invoked these feelings; such as the racial composition of the neighborhood participants grew up in (Siddiqui, 2011) and the Multiracial individual feeling racially and culturally different from their environment (Sanchez et al., 2014). Miville et al. (2005) also acknowledged that Multiracial participants in their study felt isolated at times because of their unique racial combination. AhnAllen et al. (2006) highlights that while sense of exclusion and belonging are integrated into Multiracial identity models, there is little research directly analyzing belonging and exclusion’s effects on identity. Similar to how the environment, family, and community shapes the individual, so does the impact of feeling excluded (AhnAllen et al., 2006). AhnAllen et al. (2006) discussed how physical appearance could emphasize a Mixed person’s ‘otherness’ from the group and lead to feelings of rejection. Feelings of rejection can also come from the Multiracial person not having a complete knowledge of culturally relevant behaviors, driving perception of the Mixed person as an outsider or ‘not good enough’ based on incomplete assimilation (Leonardelli et al., 2010; Adams, 1997). Sanchez et al. (2014) highlight that if a Mixed person feels persistent rejection from their monoracial counterparts, the Mixed person is less and less likely to identify with the group. Unfortunately, there is little

empirical research addressing the implication of intragroup rejection and the implications for Multiracial populations (AhnAllen et al., 2006; Sanchez et al., 2014). Overall, Multiracial communities often feel and experience rejection and isolation from their monoracial counterparts.

Racial ambiguity and the environment

Racial ambiguity shapes how the person sees him/herself and how society sees him/her. Racial ambiguity means an individual's physical features are not easily categorized, so that they seem to fall into multiple or no monoracial categories (Bradshaw, 1992). Siddiqui (2011) describes that Mixed-race individuals can appear as a monoracial, resemble a racial group they do not identify with, racially ambiguous, and/or a blend of these possibilities, and others' racial interpretation of a Mixed person is heavily influenced by the environment. McDonough and Brunnsma (2013) explained that a person's physical appearance affects how others respond to Multiracials' appearance and also how Multiracials understand and internalize how they are viewed. This was exemplified in the research when Jackson (2012) studied Multiracial adults and found that all participants had their racial identity questioned by others, partly due to racially indistinguishable features (e.g., eye color, skin complexion, etc.). Mixed-race people are then expected to explain and justify their racial lineage to others (Bradshaw, 1992; Jackson, 2012; McDonough & Brunnsma, 2013). Bradshaw (1992) discusses that reconciling the differences between the internal and external experiences is a lifelong process and affected by the environment.

The role of the environment, such as societal perception of a Mixed-race person, must be taken into account for a deeper understanding of a person's self-perception. The environment activates certain individual characteristics to form a social ingroup/outgroup (Leonardelli et al.,

2010; Sanchez et al., 2014). For example, if a racially ambiguous woman enters a room, other racially ambiguous people may be less likely to ask about her racial heritage than monoracial people. The environment and the reference point of the individuals impacts the salience of her characteristics. Because the environment's reference group shares these racially ambiguous characteristics with the individual, those in the group may automatically assume ingroup membership, or they may look for different traits to categorize the woman as part of the outgroup. This differentiation is influenced based on the ingroups willingness to accept others. For example, if this racially ambiguous woman walks into a room of racially ambiguous men, the gender difference may be starker than the racial similarity (Inzlicht, Good, Levin, & van Laar 2006). Additionally, ODT discusses the importance of understanding a situation when interpreting group interactions (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli et al., 2010). A Black/white person being able to 'pass' for white may allow this person to gain access to privileges and opportunities associated with being 'only white'. This may encourage the person to forgo his/her Mixed-race identity in exchange for social enterprise.

The environment's ability to activate certain characteristics impacts an individual's sense of self because these external factors send continuous messages on societal perception and self-perception. There is research that discusses a person's surroundings and racial self-perception; however, the focus is limited to childhood racial socialization (Sanchez et al., 2014). To date, there is minimal research discussing the contemporary impact of the environment on a Multiracial individual regardless of his/her childhood environment.

Sense of belonging

Sense of belonging is the experience of being valued or needed by other people, groups, or environments with shared characteristics that are context specific (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne,

& Early, 1996; AhnAllen et al., 2006). Hagerty et al. (1996) states that relationships sustain a person's sense of belonging to a group, as they reaffirm group experiences and characteristics. Adams (1997) found that a frequent theme in Multiracial experience literature is a person's struggle to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance by his/her racial group(s); this is a key aspect of the Mixed-race experience, as research suggests that sense of belonging provides a foundation for a positive self-esteem and identity (Adams, 1997). In addition, many Multiracial people at some point describe lacking a sense of belonging because their physical appearance does not match their environment, they receive negative messages from their families or others, and/or they do not feel a shared experience within their multiracial families or within the larger community (Adams, 1997; AhnAllen et al., 2006; Jackson, 2012).

Identity resilience

As the academic literature of the Multiracial experience grows, so does the understanding of how Multiracial people adapt to being constantly racially misperceived. Researchers conceptualize the concept of 'identity resilience' differently; some describe it as identity defiance, identity resistance, identity resiliency, and/or the gifts of being Multiracial (Jackson, 2012, Jhangiani, 2013; Sanchez et al., 2014). Jackson (2012) described participants in her study as demonstrating 'identity resistance', where they questioned not their identity but rather why they had to answer other people's questions about their identity. She alluded to how these participants demonstrated racial resistance by educating themselves about race relations; some participants used history to debunk stereotypical myths. While she did not discuss whether this allowed the participant to create a pseudo sense of belonging to the groups that they were racially misassigned to, Jackson discussed that participants educated themselves to better understand other oppression and thus educate others. She also described how Multiracial participants often

sought out communities that could relate to their experience of being Mixed and/or feeling different to strengthen their sense of belonging because there was a deficit between the individual and their racial groups. Similarly, Miville et al. (2005) documented how participants adapted to social interactions by remaining flexible with their identity boundaries to create a semi-superficial sense of belonging without having to compromise their experience. Additionally, Miville et al. (2005) found that Multiracial participants described themselves as being able to be more flexible and open minded towards others. These researchers demonstrate that Multiracial individuals remain resilient in sharing their identity with others and have adapted to navigating through a world that emphasizes monoracial labels. On the contrary, Sanchez et al. (2014) discussed their uncertainty when it came to predicting how Mixed-race people cope with outsiders denying or challenging a Mixed person's racial identity, and suggests that future research should study the effects of intragroup rejection at the individual and group level. Furthermore, researchers discovered how people can be apart of the low race salience paradox (Worrell, Andretta, & Woodland, 2014). Low race salience is defined as the individual refusing to view themselves in terms of their race or even think about race (Worrell et al., 2014). While this study was conducted specifically with African-American youth, as oppose to Mixed-race adults, this paradox can be seen in Multiracial individuals rejecting all racial labels and viewing themselves as citizens of the world (Nakashima, 1996; Worrell et al., 2014).

As noted earlier, the literature acknowledges the roles sense of belonging and identity resilience play in the Multiracial experience, but there is little research discussing how sense of belonging and identity resilience impact a Multiracial person's self-perception (AhnAllen et al., 2006). Instead, this literature review explored the different types of messages Mixed individuals often receive from their environment and the common reactions Mixed-race people have to these

messages. Through ODT and the Biracial Identity Resolution Model, one can strengthen his/her understanding of the Multiracial experience.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand how the environment influences how Multiracial adults are racially categorized by others, and how the environment impacts their sense of belonging to their self-identified racial groups. This author inquired how participants racially identify, meanings associated with their racial identity, environmental perception of the individual, and their sense of belonging to their racial group(s). Multiracial people face unique interpersonal interactions that do not often align with their internal racial experience. This author explored how social situations and interactions shaped their experience and their sense of belonging to their race(s).

This study was a qualitative study of 38 participants. Two participants did not meet the racial identity criteria (identifying with two or more racial groups), so their data is excluded, leaving a sample size of 36 participants. Using semi-structured interview questions, this author gathered narrative data by asking participants to share their racial experiences to understand the nuances between how they navigate their racial identity with the external world (Engel & Schutt, 2012). The interview was conducted via phone, Skype, and in-person to create a diverse pool of participants in various geographic locations. Initially, this author only held interviews via phone or Skype; however, to expand availability to reach those in the nearby area this researcher requested a protocol change that allowed this author to hold interviews in-person (see Appendix

B3a and B3b). In this chapter, this author will look at the study design, sample selection, demographic data, and data analysis procedures.

Sample

The participants in the study were over the age of 18 and identified with two or more racial groups or identified with a term that implied their parents were from two different racial groups, such as Mixed, Multiracial, or Biracial. People who identified as multiethnic or identified with more than one ethnic group were excluded if their parents were from the same racial category (e.g., if a person identified as Chinese/Thai or German/Dutch). For the purposes of this study, those that identified as Bengali-American or Mexican-American were also excluded because both parents identified with the same monoracial group as the participant.

Participants who identified having a parental lineage of one Arab parent and one Caucasian parent were included, because the literature demonstrates Arab populations in the U.S. face similar types of discrimination compared to their monoracial minority counterparts (Tehrani, 2009). To date, there is minimal academic research discussing Multiracial Arab racial identity development, in part because the social construction of this identity is in the infantile stages in the U.S. This study recognizes and appreciates the nuances of the Arab/Middle Eastern Multiracial experience by including these participants. These participants did not feel they could solely identify with either of their parent's races and cultures and believed their parents did not share the same culture of origin.

Those who identify as multiethnic and with a monoracial group were not included in this study. For example, someone who identifies as Dutch/German or Japanese/Thai were not included in the study. This author excluded these individuals because this study focused specifically on individuals who identified with two or more races. Furthermore, Sanchez et al.

(2014) described minimal research on multiethnic individuals who identify as monoracial, limiting the author's ability to claim the validity of any findings on multiethnic, monoracial individuals. Additionally, this author excluded people who identified with multiple cultures and were monoracial—e.g., if someone ethnically identified as Mexican and culturally as American—as these individuals do not fit into the study focus of individuals who identify with two or more races, or identify with a term that implies their parents are from two different racial groups. This author focused on adults because it is assumed they possess the cognitive skills to critically reflect on their racial experience and are exposed to more external messages than their younger counterparts; in addition, the institutional review board (IRB) has an extensive process when researchers want to work with minors. Therefore, given the short timetable of this thesis, it was not feasible to go through the appropriate channels to obtain IRB approval to work with minors (Schwartz et al., 2014).

It should be noted that there was limited to moderate diversity within the sample in regards to parental lineage, gender, and geographic location. Twenty-nine of the 36 participants had a monoracial Caucasian parent; leaving five participants who stated both their parents were racial minorities. For gender diversity, 29 of the 36 participants identified as female, four identified as male, two identified as gender queer, and one identified as unspecified. The deficit in gender diversity could be attributed to this researcher utilizing the Facebook groups and colleagues that attended her single-sex undergraduate college.

Additionally, 25 of the 36 participants lived either on the East or West coast of the U.S., so this researcher struggled to interview Mixed-race persons living in the Midwest region. While this researcher is unable to speculate how the findings of this study would be different if there were greater diversity, it is important to note the sample limitations. This researcher did not

exclude participants that had a previous relationship with this researcher, and that may have created potential bias during the interview process. The author attempted to remain objective, but including participants she knew previously may have posed a limitation.

Recruitment methods

Purposive sampling, a nonprobability, non-random sampling method, was utilized in this study. After receiving approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee (see Appendix A), recruitment was conducted over three channels: a) posting the recruitment letter to Facebook (see Appendix C); b) emailing the recruitment letter to listservs (Smith Council for Students of Color) (See Appendix D); and c) sending the recruitment letter to Mixed-race studies professors and colleagues to forward to their students (See Appendix D).

The recruitment letter (see Appendix C and D) consisted of a brief summary of the study, eligibility requirements, and contact information. Potential participants were instructed to privately contact the author to verify the eligibility requirements—the participant had to be over the age of 18 and identify with two or more races. Upon successful verification, this author sent an electronic or hard copy of the consent form (see Appendix E), which participants had to sign and return before scheduling the interview.

The informed consent form explained the nature of participation, risks surrounding participating, and a list of referral sources. To allow for participants to have time to become familiar with the types of questions being asked, this author submitted a protocol change that allowed this researcher to send the interview questions to the participants two days in advance and during that time participants could email/ask the any questions they had about the interview (see Appendix B1a and B1b). Two days before conducting interviews, this author emailed

participants the interview questions so they had time to read and reflect on the questions to help them prepare to discuss their racial identity in detail.

Ethics and safeguard

The interviews were conducted in-person, via Skype, or on the phone. Because participant outreach was conducted through social media and word of mouth, there was a risk of participants identifying each other in this study. To ensure confidentiality of this study and participants' identities, this author asked participants not to discuss their participation with others. Any identifying information provided during the interview was concealed, and names and locations have been redacted. Interview recordings, transcriptions, and other documents were password protected during research activity and will be stored for at least three years in a secured location, after which time all information will be destroyed if no longer needed by this researcher. Furthermore, this author requested and received approval on required participants to choose a pseudo name that would serve as to protect any identifying information and allow this author to directly quote participants throughout this thesis (see Appendix B2a and B2b).

This author explained the purpose and design of the research project, and the nature, benefits, and risks of participation. This author informed participants that participation is voluntary and that all information gathered will be held with strict measures of confidentiality per Federal Guidelines. They were also informed that they were free to withdraw at anytime during the interview. All participants were provided with an informed consent (see Appendix D).

Participants were informed that there would be no monetary compensation for their participation in the study, and that participation provided an opportunity to share their unique experience as a Multiracial adult and explain their racial identity. This researcher informed them that by sharing these experiences, they were contributing to the relatively unexamined field of

Multiracial racial categorization and sense of belonging, and that these results can help clinicians and educators understand the struggles and strengths of Multiracial people.

Data collection methods

After participants completed the consent forms and reviewed the interview questions, participants attended the interview in-person, via Skype, or over the phone, and all interviews were audio recorded. Participation was voluntary and participants had the option to withdraw at any point before the interview was completed.

Data collection was obtained through semi-structured interviews that ranged between 15 minutes to an hour, depending on the length of their answers. Participants were asked a total of 13 open-ended questions. The first portion of the interview collected demographic information and established racial lineage; participants were asked their age, current geographic location, their parents' racial heritage, and how they racially identify. Then, participants were asked to describe their racial identity and how society impacts their racial identity. Participants discussed how their physical appearance, being racially misclassified, the environment, and their sense of belonging and exclusion impacted their racial identity. At the end of the interview, participants provided a pseudonym to protect their identity and ensured confidentiality within the study.

Prior to sending the interviews to the transcriber, this researcher named each MP3 file to the corresponding pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Recordings were captured with an audio device and sent to a transcriber; only this researcher and the transcriber had access to recordings, which were destroyed after transcription.

Data analysis

The interview data was processed and organized using the open coding method. The open coding method is when the researcher takes the raw data, such as interviews, and labels concepts,

definitions, or emerging themes based on the research question (Engel &Schutt, 2012). Data was systematically analyzed for themes and categorized accordingly (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). This researcher reviewed each interview three times to identify themes relevant to the study's research question and then listened to the audio recording. This author then created an Excel spreadsheet and documented frequent concepts that were relevant to this study's purpose. These concepts were the first codes; as more codes were created, this author was able to see overlapping themes and patterns among the codes. These overlaps will be described in the findings and discussion portion of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study seeks to understand how the environment influences how Multiracial adults are racially categorized and how that impacts their sense of belonging to their self-identified racial groups. This section contains findings that are based on 36 interviews conducted with Multiracial adults. Thirteen interview questions were designed using ODT to help understand and explore the Multiracial experience. Please refer to Table 1 for participant demographics and racial lineage.

The major findings of the study fell into the categories of environmental messages, the complexity of the Multiracial experience, racial identity flexibility and resiliency, and current events. The categories of environmental messages were divided into two salient subthemes: family and community, and physical appearance and stereotypes. The theme of environmental messages, and those messages' subthemes, were expected findings because they directly related to the theoretical framework of ODT. ODT discusses how a person's motivation for group membership is driven by the need to assimilate and differentiate and these opposing forces were seen within each participant as they discussed their sense of belonging to their racial group(s) (Brewer, 1991). Furthermore, ODT states that the opposing forces are determined by cultural norms, the individual's socialization, and experience all of which are touched upon by participants as they discuss what influences their racial identity (Leonardelli et al., 2010). ODT recognizes the role the environment plays, which includes both a person's upbringing and

contemporary environment, when it comes to understanding social identity membership, which is all seen when participants describe the types of messages they receive from different people throughout their lives (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli et al., 2010). The findings that demonstrate the link between the participants and ODT are found in the findings section and the discussion and explanation of the relations between the two is found in Chapter V.

Findings on environmental messages

Three interview questions asked participants to express how the environment impacted their racial identity based on how the participant's physical appearance. Many of the participants (n=27) described how the environment can highlight their racial identity. Answers were split between how the environment highlighted how the participant's racial identity was different than that of the environment; alternatively, participants spoke to how the environment embraced the participant and wanted to impose the common racial identity within the environment onto the participant. Gabe experienced both aspects of being a racialized 'other' in some environments and being ascribed the common racial identity within other environments. How others racially interpreted Gabe was dependent on the situation.

On one hand if people are treating me different because they assume I'm a racial other, or people want to touch my hair or they start making jokes that are inappropriate and also even, if people think I'm white or aren't paying attention to me, it still impacts me because I'm aware of a lot of things they aren't aware of, like if I'm around a lot of white people and they start making jokes that I don't think are appropriate or doing things that I don't think are right, and they're ignoring me or they think I am one of them so it's ok. I'm like aware of it in a way other people aren't and I have to decide what I'm going to do about it. Do I leave the situation?

What if I can't leave the situation? And then when I'm in groups around other people who are people of color identified, it's also tricky because I think those interactions come down to how people are perceiving me and whether I'm part of the group or not.

A number of participants (n=20) described the external messages they faced. Six participants spoke directly about the negative messages they faced about how being Multiracial and/or having parents of different races were detrimental. Participants also described a sense of rejection from their monoracial counterparts. Regardless of whether the messages of rejection were direct or indirect, the participants' feelings were the same—they felt they did not belong. The external messages Becky faced summarizes the experience of being reminded she was different and not completely part of the group:

Growing up, my cousins would be like, "Oh well you have the good hair," and it was like a put down. We'd all be hanging out and doing our hair together and it was like, "oh but Becky has the good hair," and it wasn't really a compliment, it was to let me know here's my boundary or here's my box that I'm in with them and that they are acknowledging my differences from them.

A large number of people (n=26) spoke to how their childhood environment and its racial demographics influenced their racial identity formation. Very few participants (n=5) lived in racially diverse areas; it should be noted that four of those five that described living in a diverse childhood environment lived in California; the fifth lived in Hawaii. Other participants living in California described growing up in white, homogenous communities. The diversity of the childhood environment dictated how the environment perceived the participant and the types of

external messages participants were exposed to, as the individual established how they racially define themselves. Here, David describes his experience of how he learned how his environment racially perceived him:

I remember one day I was walking [home from school] through the walking path and I see these two police cars come up and I thought “oh I need to walk around them, because something is happening,” but that something happening was me. And like they start yelling at me and I’m pinned on a car—you have to imagine the walking paths cut parallel to this main street where like all the parents are picking up their children and driving them home and I have police officers yelling at me like “where is my gun, where is my gun, where is my gun” and it went on for I want to say, 35 minutes and I tried to explain to them, “I’m just coming home from high school; what you are throwing out of my bag right now is my geometry homework; I need to turn that in tomorrow and I had textbooks and I had my track clothes,” and obviously the parade of minivans has come to a stall because everybody wants to see what’s going on because it’s one of those neighborhoods where everybody has to know what’s going on and I’m like trying to find this guy who was like on the track team and I was like trying to use him as my ally, like “I’m coming from high school I couldn’t have just shot somebody” and I’m like crying at this point and I’m like “oh my gosh my life is over and if I wasn’t a social outcast before, I’m totally going to be a social outcast now.” And at some point the police officer finally lets me go and I was like, “can I know what

I did, hypothetically” and he was just like, “oh, you fit a profile,” and I never, I guess I always lived in this world where race wasn’t a thing, my family just exists, we don’t talk about race and nowadays, I feel as though I have a little bit of anger towards my family for a hot second—not-not really, but like “I wish you would have taught me that the rest of the world isn’t like this, right, that the rest of the world needs to put me in a bucket and that the rest of the world needs to label me as such,” and so, you know, I remember I like, I ran home faster than I’ve ever run before and I called my mom’s office and they were like “well she’s in a meeting” and I was like “well you need to pull her out of that meeting I need her now.” I remember she came home super quickly and my mom is, my mom was born in New York City; she is not somebody you mess with and you definitely don’t mess with her kids. So she gets in the car and she like, “we’re going to find this police officer,” and she was like, “We’re going to talk to your police chief with you present.” And she basically says, tells the police chief, “he can either resign today or I will do everything in my power to remove him from his position.”

David described a violent experience of how he became aware of how his environment racially perceived him. Alternatively, another participant, Noah felt that because he grew up in a racially diverse area, he felt “there was probably more space and there were more opportunities for me to have a variety of different ways of being, reflected to me.” These two participants describe vastly different experiences of how the environment can positively or negatively

perceive a person's race. Additionally, Elizabeth described her high school experience and felt that the external messages did not match her internal identity:

There was a lot of pressure to be white, in a sense, you know, there wasn't a lot of Hispanic or Black kids really so I felt it was just kind of like a lot of pressure to be white and fit in, and so I guess in certain situations, it's almost, a lot of times it was like I was white at school but the second I walked in the house I was Hispanic again.

As mentioned above, these were some of the messages participants experienced when they were children and these messages helped shape their perspective on their racial identity. This author will go into detail and now discuss how some specific environments (e.g., family and community) interacted with participants' physical appearances and how it impacted their sense of belonging to their self-identified racial groups.

Family and community

Family and non-family community deeply influenced how participants were racially perceived and how they racially viewed themselves. Almost all participants (n=29) described their family's impact on their self-perception and their sense of belonging to their racial groups. Of the total number of participants, only 14 people described coming into contact with some type of Mixed-race community during their lives; and all of the participants that were exposed to Mixed-race communities described positive experiences. Ping described her Mixed-race identity and community as "like I belong to a club, but it's a very exclusive club and there's not very many of us. To this day, I only have about a handful of not very close friends that happen to be Mixed." Furthermore, Clara emulated the positivity about having a Mixed community and described being

very lucky that all of my friends back home, who I've been friends with for about ten years, are all Mixed, so we all are very open about that and you know when something happens like a micro-aggression or something gross, we have each other to kind of talk through that and it's become sort of a coping mechanism.

Similar to Clara's emphasis on having Mixed-race friends, David described, "Mixed-race people, they see me as a mixed person, it's like 'I get it'. For some reason you see someone and can be like, 'you're not full blood something' right, and there's this kind of unspoken network and sensitivity around understanding when other people are Mixed-race." Those that had access to Mixed-race communities described feelings of similarity when connecting with a community that understood participants' experiences regarding race and racial identity. For example, Kas highlights the feelings of community and shared experiences intertwining with other identity intersectionalities.

When I moved out to California, it kind of dovetailed nicely with becoming a part of the queer community. I found that I was part of a group and that was like, you know, after kind of identifying the community as me and my brother for a very long time, identifying as part of a larger group kind of felt amazing and comfortable. And at the same time, felt a little bit, almost like a little bit sad. I was like, oh no, I'm not like this unique person who is just me, there are all of these other people. They look like me, and there's that other queer person who looks like me and it's awkward because we look the same, and, you know. In that case, sometimes it's also a cultural thing – we were also very culturally similar,

which was amazing but I even feel that way when I even see people who look like me and we don't even have the same culture because I don't even see that many people who look like me.

While it is unclear how many participants had siblings, 12 participants acknowledged their siblings' relationships impacted their racial identity management. Sue described the positives of having other Multiracial siblings, saying, "Another really large aspect has been my brothers because I feel like together we're like this tribe, so having two other people who are going through the same, you know, just figuring out who we are and how we fit into the world and how to look at it in a positive light has been really great, because we regularly have really important conversations." Alternatively, some participants spoke to how they struggled when it came to discussing their racial identity with their siblings. Tanya spoke to the negative external messages she received from her sibling:

My sister, my older sister, she's Mixed and Black too – we have different fathers but she's Mixed and Black as well – and then my younger sister, she's Mixed but white, so because I know our immediate family is really different because they are like, "Well how is that your sister", because she's white. And how is that – you know. But like, so my older sister, because I tend to see things that are more Mexican or Hispanic, you know, my friends might – it's not that I don't have Black friends, but I, I don't just particularly hang out with Black friends...whereas my sister, all of her friends are Black. So like she'll say something to me like, "oh that's because you're white washed," or, you know, things like that. It's like well, I didn't even think about it until you were saying it like that. I don't

particularly feel that way, so... I just have friends... and you know, my best friend is Hawaiian, so it's like, just because she's not Black, it doesn't mean....and if I say certain things, she'll say things like, "oh, you have some ghetto in you too." And so like, when people say like, "oh, you have some ghetto in you too", like that's what they associate with being Black, and it's like, I don't think I should have to show my "ghetto" side of me to – to make me feel like I'm Black. I mean, no matter what, I have Black in me; I'm Black... but, you know, just because I talk proper doesn't mean I'm white washed. That's where I have a problem with it, I'd guess you would say.... That's why I do look at it more. 'Cause it's like, why do I have to talk or act a certain way for you to feel like I'm Black? I'm Black.

Almost all participants (n=29) described aspects of how their families handled discussing race. Four participants described how their family does not discuss race. Of the 29 participants, some (n=13) experienced a positive information exchange about being Mixed-race and/or their parent's racial and cultural lineage. David describes, "It's really interesting to have this conversation about being Multiracial because you know I talk about it a lot at home and when I'm with my grandpa he's like 'didn't we deal with this like a hundred years ago?'" Seven participants experienced negative messages about being Multiracial from their family members. Clara described the different messages she experienced from her family growing up, compared to when she went to college, and how the different environmental messages impacted how she identified:

Well my grandmother on my mom's side was always very "you're in America, you speak English, you don't want to be associated with those

Mexicans who don't speak English." "You know, our neighborhood," she grew up in LA so she used to tell us "It wasn't like this when I grew up, people spoke English" and so she kind of tried to distance herself from it so I thought that was what I was supposed to do. And then I came to Smith College and realizing, hey that's not a thing and I can be proud of being half Mexican and I don't have to distance myself from anything.

Nine participants experienced a cultural blend and described the experience in a neutral manner, so this researcher cannot state whether the experiences were positive, negative, and/or both. Some participants (n=8) directly spoke about how their families had conversations about participants' Multiracial experience. Rachel described how her family discussed her racial identity:

So from that early on it led to a lot of conversations with my parents about why we're being treated differently, why I look differently than they did, why my hair was different, and so I think they kind of did the best they could in helping me navigate feeling different and finding a racial identity that fit, and that I could, at times, feel good about, not all the time obviously, but I think, as early as I remember I knew I was half Black and half white and that was something different than the people around me.

Participants (n=17) also discussed how they physically presented compared to their family members as an influential aspect of how they racially categorized themselves. Eleven participants described how they looked in comparison to their parents and seven described themselves in comparison to their siblings and extended family members. These participants also

spoke to the confusion of looking more like one parent than another. Becky described how looking in between both races left her feeling isolated from her monoracial counterparts:

With my family, especially, like my mom's side of the family, like "you're not quite white enough," like culturally, you know I don't look the same I don't have the same hair texture, I don't have the same skin tone and then on my dad's side, my cousins are all a lot darker, my aunts and uncles married other Black people and so then it's been kind of a sense of like I don't belong anywhere, it's just "yea you're kind of white" or "you're kind of Black" and it's a bit of a rejection feeling from both sides in a sense that it just doesn't feel well.

Mixed communities and family socialization directly influenced how people racially viewed themselves and impacted their sense of belonging to various racial groups. Participants were exposed to a variety of environmental messages, which represented how the environment racially understood participants' physical appearances.

Physical appearance and stereotypes

Participants' physical presentation influenced how the environment interacted with them and simultaneously constructed how the participants viewed themselves. All but one participant (n= 35) described various occurrences where others racially miscategorized them. The individual who did not describe experiencing being racially miscategorized was Jen:

Being in Hawaii, I think my physical appearance allows me to fit in much more readily than say a total Caucasian person and again, because I have dark hair and dark eyes and people tend to be able to tell that I have some Asian influence, so again, living here in Hawaii, helps me to blend in.

However, when Jen was on the continental U.S., or the “mainland,” as she called it, she felt that “people don’t know exactly what I am; they just tend to put me in that category and assume that is what I am.” The physical presentation of participants was dependent on the combination of their racial lineage. The environment can influence how others perceive a racially ambiguous Mixed-race person, based on physical appearance, the environment the Mixed-race person was in, the reference group of those in the environment, and how others perceived the Mixed person. For example, Niki discussed how changing her hairstyle impacted how others racially categorized her:

When I was younger, I definitely looked 100 percent Asian. Everyone thought I was Asian. And then when I grew older, like now, I think I look mixed, I certainly think I look mixed, but usually people read me as some type of Asian, but, it also just depends because I remember for example my first year of college I did the “Smith Chop” – I cut off all my hair, and when I did that, I realized that I would get read more often as Asian than as not, for some reason, my hair when it’s long, it’s not really Asian hair, it’s more kind of wavy and a lighter brown, and so when I had short hair, you couldn’t see any of that, and I felt like that caused people to think I was 100 percent Asian. I think when I have longer hair people are more likely to think I am mixed.

Alternatively, some people, such as Sue, described how their skin pigmentation impacts how they are racially perceived by others: “I think, because I’m Mixed-race and depending on how much sun I’m getting, I look different and appear different, I’ve noticed in some situations, particularly around people in my same age group, I can almost pass in winter as white.” She

illuminates the concept of passing as monoracial, an aspect that 20 participants described. Of those participants, 14 expressed how they were perceived monoracial white at some point.

Elizabeth illuminates the feelings accompanied by being perceived as monoracial:

By looking at me, you would never be able to tell that I'm Hispanic and I get told that all the time. I'm the spitting image of my mother and my mother was white. I have brown hair and green eyes; I often get told by friends that they forget that I'm Mexican or that they forget that I'm Hispanic at all and it makes me feel like they are forgetting an important part of me.

Along with individuals' physical presentation and being racially misinterpreted, participants faced racially misassigned stereotypes. Of the 35 participants that described being racially misassigned by others, 21 people experienced related racism. Noah's story embodied the feelings of being racially misidentified and stereotyped. Here, he recalled a time being racially profiled by the police:

My friend, who was white, and I were sitting at the bus stop and all of a sudden a police cruiser pulls up and...there are three or four police cruisers all around us and so this police officer was talking with us and wanted to know my name and wanted to know his name and they were interviewing us and asked me my name several times and wanted to reconfirm....we discovered that the police were on the lookout for two young men who had escaped from juvenile detention, one was white and one was Mexican-American and so that was one of those experiences where I felt like it was pretty clear based on my appearance and based on

the people around me that I was being read as someone who was Mexican because I'm racially ambiguous.

On an international level, Kas discussed how their racial ambiguity was constantly up for interpretation based on the environment:

I went to Moscow a little while ago for work. I used to work in the U.K., so I traveled a lot around Europe. People were so mean to me, and I felt like maybe it was because they saw my American passport or something – similar but different, and, well people just weren't holding doors open, or they would actually close the door, or they were rude to me. They would push me out of the way. I wasn't speaking or saying anything so I wasn't outing myself as someone who is either female or American. People just thought I was maybe an Asian guy. And then I passed a construction pit, and I looked down into the eyes of this guy who looked exactly like my brother, and I started to kind of look around and I saw that a lot of the people doing kind of the menial labor in this economy looked like they were actually from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, kind of like areas that genetically, kind of map to my DNA a little bit. It's kind of the eastern European plus the Asian genetics, so I guess physically, we kind of look similar. And so, in that case, I kind of walked into being seen and read and treated as if I was someone who was from a country that was lower down on the totem pole in the former U.S.S.R. And I had no idea, and in that case also, people thought I was male, and so an added layer there of ambiguity that kind of, you know, makes things complicated.

Overall, many participants discussed the effect their physical appearance had on how their environment interacted with them. On a broader scope, participants described how different environments sent different racial messages to participants. As noted above, participants experienced various environmental messages from their families and different communities based on how the participant physically presented. The following finding was an unexpected and expected finding as it expanded upon the complexity of the Multiracial experience.

Findings the complexity of the multiracial experience

Each participant described his/her racial experience as complex at some point. Of the 36 participants, two illustrated the Arab Multiracial experience, one not widely represented within academic literature and within this study. The experiences and feelings these two participants described exactly overlapped with what their other Multiracial counterparts discussed in regards to the complexity, isolation, and resiliency of the Multiracial experience. Christine described a feeling that 24 other participants spoke to – the feeling of the internal experience not aligning with the messages they receive from the environment:

I'm also aware of the duality between how I identify and how the rest of the world identifies me and even though I said I identify as biracial, in many ways I identify as Caucasian because I'm treated that way and I have those privileges. So it's always a very, as we say at Smith, it's both and or whatever; I identify probably both as Caucasian and biracial just because of the world we live in.

Christa also experienced feeling rejected from her monoracial counterparts: "So when I'm in Singapore people would think I am a foreigner because they think I'm white and if I'm in a white community everyone thinks I am Asian, whereas in my head I belong to both equally." Christa's experience of being rejected from both monoracial groups was an experience that eight

other participants shared. Other participants (n=16) described rejecting all socially constructed monoracial labels. David rejected all monoracial labels “because I was being asked to choose sides and I decided that choosing sides was so stressful and in a lot of ways people were choosing sides for me so I was just like, ‘No, I’m going to make up the rules; I’m going to identify as Multiracial and I’m going to expect that you, address me as such.’” Another participant, Mika, also rejected monoracial labels:

It’s challenging for me to identify with a race because it never feels complete for me because I don’t belong to one race or another. I don’t belong to any race other than a human race, which is comforting of course, but when it breaks down to labeling myself or finding community it feels really challenging because I never feel like I have a seat at any table, I just kind of do my own thing or weave through the different groups which is what I have been doing my whole life.

Similar to Mika’s description of not feeling like she belonged to any one race, 25 participants described feeling like an outsider and/or racially isolated. Sue blatantly stated, “when I am in Portland and most of the people around me are white, I feel really different.” Tom also described feeling like an outsider within his environment. He described how he plays

music with two bands... one of them is a bunch of white dudes and the other one is all people of color, there's like women in it; and whenever I'm like playing with the band that's all white dudes they are always like, ‘Are you going to go play with that band?’, ‘Are you going to go play at THAT part of campus at THAT show?’ and it's like, well I want to do that.

Kas also discusses specific race-based terminologies such as the concept of a cultural or racial 'code' that dictates how a Mixed-race individual is never fully apart of the monoracial group, and thus somewhat an outsider:

The way that I understand it or the way that I use it is that, you know, when I encounter a different code, which to me is like a manmade paradigm or structure, that I'm able to switch to fit better in that code. So, you know for me, it has to do with um, you know, in this case, race or culture. When I'm around people who are Chinese or you know, I can kind of – I don't want to say act the part, but there are certain things that I know to do or say, or not to do or say that will allow me to kind of, get along better. And again, I'm always going to be a bit foreign, but there's like, a little bit of a leg up that I have in that I kind of understand that. And so, code switching to me applies to race but also um, to gender, honestly. And uh, you know, when I'm in different situations with you know, half my family are immigrants basically. We've brought a lot of people over from China over the course of my life, and so there's code switching that happens on all levels, and not just race.

Another participant, Christa, described similar feelings about being able to adapt in various environments. She has

lived in Singapore, London, and the U.S., so every of these places I've felt at home in some way, I have friends there, I feel comfortable there, I know the area geographically but part of me feels like I am not from there because, part of me is not from there, and people will see me and think

I'm from somewhere else. Maybe because people perceive me that way, I perceive myself that way, as coming from somewhere else, with that somewhere else not being really defined so I guess I get to choose, so I just choose wherever it is that I am living.

Christine spoke to how she feels racially isolated because her racial group is numerically very small; "there are few Iraqi-Jews left in the world, so there's not really a culture that I can connect to and bond with and be a part of anywhere, because there are so few left and they are really dying off, so really only with my family do I feel connected and really only in the biracial or Multiracial group do I feel like I could talk about it at length or in depth." Fourteen participants felt racially isolated within white, homogenous environments at some point. Rachel described how in an environment she

was often the only person of color or one of the few, and that's simultaneously one of the environments I feel most comfortable in because that's what I'm used to and it's people I'm used to interacting with. There are also these moments and maybe they don't happen on a daily basis but at least several times a week I'll look around and think 'oh my gosh, I'm the only non-white person here' and then feel really uncomfortable.

On the contrary, 16 participants described moments of shared racial experiences with their environment. Becky spoke to how the environment shaped and created stereotypes for how a biracial person looked like: "My hair – people generally say, 'oh yea your hair is nappy or your hair is curly,' and that is the only way that they classify me, so that has been a struggle for what I physically look like and how I identify because I don't fit into the stereotype of what a white and

Black biracial person looks like.” Alternatively, Chiang-Peng described a stronger sense of shared experiences:

In North Carolina, I had at least a handful of friends who were half Asian, half white and I’m not in frequent contact with them anymore, but that definitely is a very unique experience and it was a unique experience to meet more friends who had as close as possible racial identity to myself. So there was definitely a level of understanding between each other that I remember, like knowing what it’s like to have shared traditions, shared experiences of having traditions from all sides of the family and the interesting mix of having white families who are first generation southerners while integrating in traditions from parents who are typically immigrants from East Asia and so that was a special experience I would say.

On a different note, Jen describes how she feels a strong sense of shared experiences to her environment in Hawaii, saying she has “no problem fitting in with any group here in Hawaii because they’re such a melting pot and there are so many different ethnicities.” Overall, many participants described how their Multiracial experience was far more complex than what their environment was able to understand. Participants described constant friction between their internal experiences and the environment, how friction influenced the rejection of monoracial labels and highlighted their sense of feeling like an outsider, and the ability to share or not share similar experiences with their environments. These findings highlighted how participants were able to remain resilient and flexible despite receiving continuous conflicting messages from their environments. This following finding described the Multiracial identity resiliency and flexibility.

Finding on multiracial identity resiliency and flexibility

Each participant navigated not fitting into their environment differently; however, a common theme was remaining resilient and flexible to how his/her race was perceived by others and the impact it had on him/herself.

Those that did talk about the value of their racial identity (n=30) provided an array of answers. People frequently (n=16) said their racial identity gives them a sense of understanding in regards to their racial and cultural histories. Sam explained that her racial identity “means a lot more maybe in the aspect of like, since I don’t know everything there is to know about the culture and things like that, but I do have a really strong connection through my family, that part is really important to me.” Some (n=5) spoke to how their racial identity allows them to have access to both parents’ racial and cultural groups, so they feel fortunate to be exposed to multiple cultures. Here, Morgan describes that her “identity is really being able to, yea, I guess, it’s being able to experience both sides, like hanging out with my white family or my white friends and feeling like I fit in there and hanging out with my Black family and my Black friends and fitting in there as well and understanding the different culture within the groups.” Alternatively, some (n=4) spoke to how they do not feel able to connect with others because they feel racially isolated; Mika explained that her racial identity “means challenge. It’s challenging for me to identify with a race because it never feels complete for me because I don’t belong to one race or another.” Others (n=4) spoke to how being able to not fit in created an opportunity for them to become more open minded. Here, Sophia described how she conceptualized her racial identity:

I think for me, it really means that I have a wonderful opportunity to, not to fit in, with what at the time when I was growing up was the majority culture, um, but it gives me an opportunity to embrace different things in myself as well as in other people. I think it opened my mind to wanting to

learn more about other people about their culture or how they identify in any way, shape or form... because differences remain – bring wonderful qualities, in my opinion, to the table. Brings wonderful, different perspective, of any situation, you know? Um, and I think that by embracing it for myself, it helped me to understand that my differences make me a better person as opposed to this trying to blend in with everybody else.

One of the participants, Ping, was emblematic of the complexities that comprise one's racial identity, saying, “

Being one of few. One, one of the girls that was Mixed, I kind of took it like a badge of pride, and no one told me any different... It means that, I don't know... I don't really belong to either side, I'm not really white and I'm not really Chinese... it feels like, my race feels like I'm part of a weird secret club and there aren't a lot of us but when we see each other we immediately identify each other.

Alternatively, six participants perceived their racial identity differently from the other participants. They described interactions unique from the other 30 participants, saying their race is nothing more than a label. Dale said his racial identity “doesn't really affect me at all, like I said it's not a big deal to me, it's just a thing, other people it's more significant I guess, you know, like I said, people are always like ‘oh what are you’ or ‘how do I define this person?’”

Two others did not often think about their racial identity because they did not feel like they had been racially discriminated, so others did not bring up their identities. Katherine affirmed that her racial identity did not “mean that much to me; it's only a small part of my identity...now I guess

it's not that important to me because I never, to my knowledge, been discriminated against because I look different or am half Asian or anything like that." Two participants explained that they used to frequently think about their racial identity when they were younger, but because they were now parents, they felt they were more preoccupied with raising their children than considering their racial identity. At first glance, this author assumed that the six participants did not outwardly discuss their racial identity because they had not explored their racial identity; however, it became apparent that all of these participants went through some sort of racial identity exploration and then chose not to think about their racial identity, aside from when others bring it up. JJ explained that as her life evolved, so did the value she placed on her racial identity:

It used to mean a lot and used to be very important, but I sort of figured it out...after that trip to The Gambia, it's become clearer and it doesn't matter anymore, I don't constantly think about it or feel like I have to prove myself to anyone or prove who I am, what I am, whoever. Maybe that's because I have a family now, maybe it's because I am too busy to think about those things now. Also, Berlin is a very multicultural city; we're not confronted with it, at least, I have never really been confronted with racism or anything like that.

27 other participants, who described the various ways they controlled their racial identities based on how they explained them to outsiders, demonstrated JJ's exertion of control over her identity. Ally eloquently explained, "It's more about being able to like control my own identity rather than letting other people tell me 'you're white or you're Asian or you're something else.' That

way it's like relatively ambiguous, I make the decision that's a little unspecified, I can't be pushed into a group or pushed out of a group by someone else.”

Of these 28 participants, 24 people experienced having to explain their racial identity and/or lineage to others. Some were told they did not look like a stereotypical representation of their racial lineage. For example, Ava often heard that she did not

look Arab and when I tell people that I am Jordanian American they are like ‘oh really, you don't look like it’ and I'm like, ‘Well I am; it doesn't matter if I look like it.’ Because like I'm really fair skinned and I don't look like it at all, so I get, I don't get really annoyed but I get annoyed when people say ‘you don't look Arab at all.’ And I'm like ‘It doesn't matter what I look like; it's what inside that matters to me’.

Others described being cautious when it came to explaining their racial identity. Christa described feelings of exasperation when “people ask ‘where are you from’ and that for me I always kind of inwardly groan, because I don't have a one-word answer, which is what I think they want, so it kind of depends on the situation and the person so I'll decide how interested they really are and give as much detail as I think they'd be interested in.” The need for participants to explain themselves was not uncommon, as over half of participants encountered this occurrence.

Participants also described their abilities to empathize with other Mixed-race people, monoracial minorities, and other oppressed parties because of their racial identity. Some participants (n=11) reached this conclusion because they were privy to being racially miscategorized and facing racially misattributed stereotypes. Two participants described how they apply feelings of being a racial minority and being Multiracial to their professional lives. In addition, these two participants reframed how they were racially perceived by others and adapted

to these perceptions in a resilient manner that allowed them to be more open-minded towards others. Sophie said, “I think it makes me a better therapist to present as white and to use the power of whiteness to advocate for my clients or to be taken seriously in certain settings, um, but I also think it makes me a more insightful and compassionate therapist to feel complex on the inside and to accept the complexity of the clients.” Likewise, Sophia described how her physical appearance along with the political atmosphere stratified what her racial identity meant to herself and others:

I don't identify with I would say any Middle Eastern race or culture that people mistakenly think I am from and I think in some ways, when, honestly, I think the toughest time was right after 9/11 when I was, um, I had been diagnosed with cancer, and um, you know, I started to lose my hair a little bit, so I would wear covering on my head, and more out of not wanting to show my thinning hair, and it actually emphasized people's mistaken impression of who I was and I think, for a short period of time, it was a challenge. Um, on the positive side of that, it helped me to understand, and sort of empathize with people who truly are Middle Eastern. And you know, just because they happen to be from what you think might be a terrorist country, doesn't mean they are terrorists. So, I think for a short time it was, it was a little challenging.

Mae also felt her racial identity allowed her to connect with others. Mae's description emphasized that the environment shapes how she is perceived. She described how her identity is very, muted, so I think that I really like that I can sort, like my identity sort of transcends and I can be different things I guess, almost like

I'm a chameleon and like I have a way, instead of like some of my friends who are Mixed, like, I think, as they would feel like they don't belong, I feel like maybe I can belong in more situations than I know, so in a way maybe there's a kind of benefit I didn't even know about. I don't think that was always, but now as an adult, you know, I think that, um, is sort of reaffirmed.

The overall result in most people's Multiracial identities was the ability for the individual to remain confident and flexible in regards to respecting their internal experience compared to the environment.

People's identity resiliency and adaptation to the environment varied by participant, but an overarching theme was controlling their own identities and rejecting environmental messages that did not support their experience. When it came to explaining her racial identity to others, Ally described that she "would much rather be in control of who I am and be able to say that and have it be consistent with my own experience." Katherine decided after taking a Japanese course in college, "that class helped me decide, 'oh I'm part Asian, I'm part Japanese, that's okay;' if I decide what I am then it doesn't matter what other people think." Gabe describes the necessity to appreciate and respect people's agency when it comes to defining themselves:

In the Dear White People movie, the whole tragic mulatto narrative or whatever, that was something I was thinking about because like—cause that movie actually is—I'm really glad you are doing research like this, I am glad other people are doing that because I would love to see that dismantled and I would love to see an understanding of identities like mine that takes into consideration people's individual agency in terms of

having relationships in terms of raising their children, because even though there definitely is space for like, maybe like identity to form in different ways and like confusion, I think people are doing that all the time, it's not just some weird accident of nature. I think it would be cool to see more understanding of people's agency and how that plays out in relationships.

Alternatively, Dale described more ambivalence regarding his identity: "I used to think about it a lot, a long time ago, like back in middle school, when I was younger and I was trying to figure out Who. I. Am. Now it's just...whatever." Tanya described ignoring the impact her race was having on the environment; now, the intersectionalities of her race and her identity of being a mother to a Multiracial child was at the forefront, because her daughter's peers said things that Tanya says "worries me just as a parent, and makes me sort of realize, that I've never really dealt with that stuff, I just stepped aside and just kept going on." Overall, participants described feeling a strong sense of control over their racial identity despite the environment not always supporting the participant's internal experience. Interviews were conducted during the protests in Ferguson, Missouri and the indictment decision about Michael Brown and Eric Garner; several respondents described how their racial identity interacted with the race and racism in the U.S.

Findings on United States current events

The impacts of the Eric Garner and Michael Brown verdicts on participants were an unexpected finding. The protests in Ferguson and indictments occurred right after this author began conducting interviews. It should be noted that this author cannot speculate and present findings on how the participants who were interviewed prior to the release of the indictments would have reacted and/or whether they would have discussed these events in this study. Six

participants were interviewed prior to the indictments; 30 were interviewed after. Eight participants discussed how their racial identity was seen alongside the international news surrounding the protests in Ferguson and the (lack of) legal indictments. Elizabeth spoke to how her physical appearance and racial identity provided her with a different experience with the police compared to what was being publicized through media, saying, “If you were to look at me, you would think that I am just full American and um, it’s you know, like, it’s, it does have its advantages I do have to say because I feel like, especially with everything going on in Ferguson right now, one of the discussions I’ve had with my friends is that I have never, ever had a problem with a police officer.” Michaela described similar sentiments about experiencing about her race and the current events in the U.S.:

I see myself as an American. I know now with all the stuff you see on the TV there are a lot of racial problems going on, and my son always says I ignore things, that I live in a special world and I don’t see what’s going on. I do see what’s going on, I know there is a lot of racism in the world, and I think because I never experienced racism I can’t say I identify with it because I would be lying, ok? But I do know it exists. But ... unless they treat me wrong, then I’m not going to treat you any differently. It doesn’t matter who you are, what color you are, what you believe in, I don’t care. That’s the way I expect people to treat me. If I treat you nice you should treat me nice. And so far it has worked, ok? Um I can’t say it will work three years from now, I don’t know, but as of now, 61 years I haven’t had any problems.

On a different note, Kas discussed how being subjected to (misassigned) racial stereotypes deepened her empathy surrounding the events going on in the U.S.:

[With my racial identity] I find that you know, it kind of helps me in my activism, or given me some fuel for that, because it's a way for me to kind of commiserate and collaborate with other people who are marginalized in some way... The whole thing with Ferguson that's happening right now. I've been having a lot of conversations with people in my life, and um, with a lot of white allies, let's say, who maybe are not actually allies but want to be. And I've had a lot of conversations where people would say, 'I'm not racist.' And 'I treat everyone the same.' And I think being treated in a variety of ways based on a variety of identities that are not actually mine, makes me know, and know for a fact that not everyone is treated the same. And so, I think that kind of harkens back to that, that previous comment about foundation of activism. You know, really understanding that these differences are real in how people are treated and you know, whether someone thinks I'm a Chinese boy, which is probably one of the less good kinds of boys to be in the U.S. in terms of how you're treated... the number of times I've been picked on in bars, you know, all the way up to kind of people thinking that I'm Asian and I went to Harvard and that I study physics, and getting into a stereotype that actually, by all counts, I really don't fit into all that much.

Niko described similar sentiments to Kas, saying he does

activism stuff and especially with the Mike Brown stuff, and you know, I've done a lot of organizing and activism over the years where people

have been really like, um, you know, just like really identity based and I think that's something where I like, I felt like pretty, I myself, I'm with other brown people. Because you know, I have some of the same experiences as somebody who is you know, mixed Black and white. I feel like we have these sort of like, outsider experience.

Furthermore, Elizabeth also felt that her racial identity “helps to keep me open minded about a lot of the issues in our country, I think that because I do have family who have struggled trying to gain entry into this country, it’s kind of helped me with the whole Ferguson conversation going on right now and everyone is saying it’s about race and I do believe that a lot of it is about race, and being Mexican-American helps me to have an open mind and to be able to see our culture from a different perspective and a different view and that is something I am proud of and I am happy to have the opportunity to be.” Monica described feelings of confusion and frustration for where Multiracial people could discuss these race-based events:

Seeing how hard it is to have these kind of discussions and to have these discussions on a mass level when you have all these people wanting to march together wanting to protest Black lives that have been taken by cops and yea, just how, kind of debilitating some of this is just because it is so hard to maneuver or like, talk about and try to figure out how to join together while also acknowledging how unfair it is and trying to give space to tip the scales in other direction, like I liked that there was Black leadership at this march and that was so good and how do we start conversations with the multitude of people who are there who aren't

necessarily in a binary but who are trying to have this conversation together.

Rachel described a similar sense of confusion, saying, “I think one example that comes to mind is um, what’s happening right now with Ferguson and what’s happening in New York, um, you know, race relations being on everyone’s radar and talking about like Black/white race relations. I think um, you know, notwithstanding how awful this event has been, even, it feels super uncomfortable for me and really, really hard to figure out how I fit in that.” Tom also described feelings of uncertainty on discussions of the current events and where non-Black racial minorities could fit in this discussion:

You're probably keeping up with the whole Ferguson thing, um, there's kind of a – there's kind of an often referenced dichotomy between like, what white people should do and what Black people should do and one thing I've realized, not necessarily in terms of activism, but in thinking about these issue, and trying to think through these issues as kind of what People of Color that are not Black should do. Like, where they kind of lie in the political sphere of things, so, that's something that I've been thinking about lately because as I start thinking about my race in a more positive way, I want to like figure out how to use it.

Simone describes the frustrations she felt regarding her physical presentation and with the race relations:

Well in light of what’s going on in this country right now with Trayvon Martin and Ferguson, Eric Garner, um, I just, I just empathize with the difference, the ongoing difference in this country with racial profiling

discrimination, the seemingly lack of respect for Black life, um, and I always bring up to people, it's not just this country, look what happened in Rwanda years ago, the world turned its head and just ignored it. So to me, having to deal with the everyday issues that Black society has to go through does impact me in a negative way. It just makes me angry, that this lack of understanding, a lot of people don't want to understand. You know a white friend of mine said that Eric Garner was a crook and I said, 'He wasn't a crook, he stole mostly cigarettes, yea he got arrested numerous times, but that's not a crook.' You have more people, white people, in Washington who are true crooks than this one guy just trying to make a living...um, but that's a struggle. I mean, being light skinned, I think people think that they can say offensive things like that to me, but I don't let them get away with it. At all.

Overall, participants described feeling that their racial oppressions helped them identify with contemporary racial injustices, confusion regarding where their race placed them in a seemingly a dichotomized discussion, and frustration about recent events. Participants demonstrated the nuances of the Multiracial identity as a lens for how people experienced and responded to the recent events.

Results from the findings provided evidence that ODT did initially explain that environmental messages impacted how others racially perceived participants, and that further impacted their sense of belonging to their monoracial racial groups. Upon closer analysis, the findings highlighted that ODT could only partially explain how the environment impacted and shaped the Multiracial experience. Key findings in this chapter included environmental

messages, which had three subthemes: the environment, family and community, and physical appearance and stereotypes. The second key finding was the complexity of the Multiracial experience; the third was identity resiliency and flexibility; and the final finding was on U.S. current events. These findings provided data that support and conflict with the findings from the literature review. Further description, implications for social work practice, and limitations of the study will be discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study aimed to research how ODT explains contextual factors' influence on racial categorization and interpretation of Multiracial adults and their sense of belonging to racial groups. This study also sought to explore the environment's impact on how Multiracial adults racially identified compared to society's perception, and how that further impacted their sense of belonging to their racial groups. Participants in this study described how environmental messages stratified the complexity of their Multiracial experiences and affected their Multiracial identity. A major finding within the study was the facets and complexities of the Multiracial experience. Individuals discussed how their upbringing influenced how they interpreted messages as an adult. Additionally, one of the findings within my study was the message a Mixed-race person receives based on the environment they were in. These messages were often influenced by the way the Mixed-race person physically presented. Based on the individuals understanding of how they were perceived by their environment, the messages impacted their sense of belonging to their racial group(s). Much of how a Multiracial person reacted and internalized these messages highlighted another finding, how Mixed-race people remain resilient and reframe situations in order to establish a sense of belonging to their racial groups. Lastly, the last major finding was how participants felt the racial politics in the US were affecting themselves and coincided with their racial identity. These findings are summarized in the manner they will be discussed, but they also represent the overarching thematic flow of the narratives

within this study. Within each finding, this author will explore how the data validated, challenged, and contributed to the previous literature. This author will also examine areas for future research, the limitations of the study, and the implications for social workers.

Environmental messages

ODT states that the social identity of an individual is motivated by the two opposing needs to assimilate and differentiate, along with emphasizing the influence the environment has on these needs structured this author's understanding of how participants acknowledged and internalized environmental messages about their racial identity and how they were perceived. ODT illuminates the impact the environment has on a person's identity (Leonardelli et al., 2010); because ODT is a social theory (rather than a racial one), there is flexibility regarding interpretation of how the theory explains the Multiracial experience. As previously discussed, Mixed-race academic literature is burgeoning yet still relatively new. Thus, each Multiracial theory has strengths and weaknesses, but ODT provides a more nuanced and liberal understanding of a stratified experience, as seen when it came to multiple internal identity interactions. ODT describes there are a two opposing forces, the need to assimilate and differentiate, that dictate a person's social identity and group membership. Furthermore, when a person is in an environment that invokes more than one identity there are three possible pathways people can undergo; see Figure 1 (Leonardelli et al., 2010). These pathways were illuminated within the findings and demonstrated how ODT can help understand the Multiracial experience.

As a reminder, Figure 1a occurs when two identities are separate within the self and each identity is activated separately and based on context (Brewer, 1999). For example, Elizabeth described that in High school there was a lot of "... pressure to be white and fit in, and so I guess

in certain situations, it's almost, a lot of the times it was like I was white at school but the second I walked in the house I was Hispanic again." This type of identity 'switch' demonstrates ODT's concept of separate identities because Elizabeth only activate a certain racial identity in certain situations depending on the types of external messages she received.

Figure 1b is a compound group identity, where the identity satisfies the need for both differentiation and assimilation because the membership is strictly the overlap in identities A and B (Brewer, 1999; Leonardelli et al., 2010). For example, David described that he actively rejects all monoracial labels "because I was being asked to choose sides and I decided that choosing sides was so stressful and in a lot of ways people were choosing sides for me so I was just like, 'No, I'm going to make up the rules; I'm going to identify as Multiracial and I'm going to expect that you, address me as such.'" Here David illuminates the compound group identity because he only actively identifies with only with a racial term the demonstrates his complex racial history instead of a monoracial label.

Figure 1c is a nested identity and occurs when one identity (A) is superordinate and the other identity (B) is a subpart identity and each identity alternates being superordinate based on context (Brewer, 1999). For example, Christine describes how she began identifying as Biracial when she started graduate school and joined a biracial student group and she "heard that other women who appeared Caucasian were in the group so I was really interested and so now I identify as Biracial because I realize that I am, even though I appear white." Here the environmental messages from this group encouraged Christine to rethink her identity and formulate nested identities as opposed to separate identities. The positive external messages Christine received demonstrates the strong influence the environment can have on a person's racial identity.

While not every participant's interview was easily formatted to these three pathways of internal racial identity interaction, the pathways provided a temple of understanding a way of multiple racial identity interactions. In brief, this was often seen when it came to a Mixed-race person's multiple racial identity interactions and how the environmental contexts and people's point of racial references would influence how the Multiracial person's race was interpreted. This understanding of how multiple identities interact laid a foundation of understanding for how a person with multiple racial identities could reconcile navigating them in certain situations.

Participants discussed the various external messages, ranging from the messages the participants received from the environment, their family members, their community, and receiving messages of being racially misassigned by others. 27 participants described the environment highlighting how their racial identity differed. Ping described that her racial identity was unique and that she was "one of the [few] girls that was Mixed; I kind of took it like a badge of pride." Ping continued to describe how with other Mixed-race people she feels like, "there aren't a lot of us but when we see each other we immediately identify each other" Ping's description of being 'one of the few' Mixed-race individuals in her environment demonstrates Ping received messages from the environment that made her feel that the environment does not racially reflect Ping's racial identity. Additionally, while she was 'one of the few', she describes being able to immediately identify other people of Mixed-race heritage and this demonstrates she does have a drive to find a sense of similarity within the environment. This suggests that ODT's concept of a person's identity is being driven by the need for similarity and the need for individuation (Brewer, 1991). Ping's experience embodies ODT's dual drives because she does acknowledge being racially different than her environment and also looks for racial similarity from others. This study also confirmed the phenomenon of being optimally distinct, seen when

participants discussed feeling a strong sense of shared experiences when interacting with other Mixed-race people or communities (Brewer, 1991; Brewer, 1999; Leonardelli et al., 2010). David exemplifies this phenomenon, saying, “Mixed-race people, they see me as a Mixed person, and it’s like ‘I get it.’ For some reason, you see someone and can be like, ‘You’re not full blood something’ right, and there’s this kind of unspoken network and sensitivity around understanding when other.”

The direct and indirect messages family members send to one another impacts how each member of the family unit perceives him/herself. For Mixed-race individuals, race becomes paramount within a Mixed-race family because the racial makeup of their family and the how family members discuss race and their own racial experiences impacts how Mixed-race children are racially socialized and how they racially identify (Miville et al., 2005; Snyder, 2014). Participants discussed how their racial identity was directly influenced by the messages they received from their immediate and extended family. Family racial socialization’s influence on a Multiracial adult’s racial identity supports previous literature (Miville et al., 2005; Snyder, 2014). Sue, a self-identified biracial female living in Portland, Oregon, described that an aspect of her identity as it relates to her family members “... has been my brothers because I feel like together we’re like this tribe, so having two other people who are going through the same, you know, just figuring out who we are and how we fit into the world.” Similarly, Ava, a self-identified Arab-American living in Akron, Ohio, described how when she grew up her Jordanian father, “... would tell me all these stories of him growing up in Jordan and like how he came to American when he was seventeen and the struggles he has encountered so it has been a driving force to make me succeed” and now she values her “dad’s culture more than my mom’s culture because she doesn’t really know where she is from, it’s like ‘Oh I’m from England or Scotland’

you know it's just very...vague." Ava's description of the different messages she perceived from her parents as they shared their racial lineage demonstrates how the different messages shaped how Ava shaped her life and how she values her racial identity. While there is little research on how family members sustain a Multiracial person's identity, Sue's comment supports the concept that a Multiracial person is influenced by their family members because of the messages their family sends them and shared experiences between family members (Mivelle et al. 2005; Snyder, 2014). Unfortunately, there is minimal research highlighting how families racially socialize Multiracial kids and how that affects the Multiracial person as an adult (Jhangiani, 2013). This study's finding of direct and indirect messages family members sent to each other further highlights how Mixed race individuals' are socialized by family members impact their and the need for future research.

While participants' internal perception of their race did not change based on the environment, how they were racially perceived by others often did. For example, David identifies as Multiracial and expects others to respect this word choice. He says, "When people didn't I got in their face about it, I was like, what don't you understand about the fact that my family is very complex and has a rich cultural history? And not try to diminish that because you fail to understand that this is a possibility." This confirmed Jackson's (2012) research that discussed Mixed-race people did not see racially miscategorization as a reflection of their personal views on their racial identity. This also demonstrates that society does not fully understand the Multiracial experience—if it did, Multiracial people would never need to explain their racial identity and experience to their monoracial counterparts. While this finding contributes to the previously established research, future research could analyze the long-term effects of the environment continuously misunderstanding Multiracial people.

Oftentimes, when the environment is determining if a person is part of the situational ingroup or outgroup, the individual is expected to demonstrate how his/her individual characteristics align with the ingroup's identity. One method is called racial legitimacy testing, and occurs when the ingroup tests an individual to see if s/he possesses similar characteristics and mannerisms as ingroup members before granting ingroup membership (Adams, 1997). In the literature, researchers discussed how racially ambiguous people were often subjected to racial legitimacy testing by their monoracial counterparts (Adams, 1997). This literature was supported within the study, however, a surprising finding was how participants reacted to being race legitimacy tested by their monoracial counterparts. When others tested participants about their racial legitimacy this drove some participants from wanting ingroup membership to monoracial racial groups, and resulted in participants rejecting all monoracial labels. Kas described how

hanging out with the Chinese side, I felt very white, and hanging out with my white side, I felt extremely Chinese or other, really. I mean in each case I just felt 'other.' And so that's when I realized that my racial identity was really a mix because I didn't really fit in really, either camp. I think kind of, maybe a more nuanced way of kind of looking at that is that, by coming in contact with different kinds of cultures or races.

Kas described desiring neither monoracial acceptance nor labeling; instead, they were interested in the road less traveled. Kas felt that because they were not granted ingroup membership from either monoracial groups, they did not want to view this as a negative. Instead, Kas felt this feeling of being 'other' provided them an opportunity of learning and interacting with multiple monoracial groups. This embodies the concept of ODT where if one force—in this

case the force of differentiation—becomes too powerful, then the monoracial identity will become less important. The drive to remain optimally distinct becomes obsolete, and the individual embraces the Multiracial identity (Brewer, 1991). As seen through Kas, Kas felt too much rejection from both monoracial groups, so they adapted by not trying to fit into either group and exploring their Mixed-race identity.

This study differed from the other studies that analyzed ODT, because this study applied ODT to a Multiracial person's racial identity. To this author's knowledge, there are very few studies that use this application as most existing studies discussed monoracial identities. The concepts and fundamentals of ODT partially but did not completely apply to the Multiracial experience. Only the broad concepts and the four fundamental assumptions of ODT remained applicable to the Multiracial experience (Brewer, 1991). For ODT applications to intra- and intergroup interactions, there was no research discussing how multiple races interacted and what could be predicted in regards to better understanding the Multiracial experience.

Complexity of the multiracial experience

While each human experience is uniquely complex, the Multiracial experience presents its own set of complexities of being exposed to and navigating multiple cultures, races, and traditions. The Multiracial experience contains facets that researchers and academic literature have yet to understand, so while there is an understanding of thematic experiences, researchers are still learning about the overarching identity patterns and interactions. Each participant's narrative was complex and depicted the facets of the Multiracial experience.

The unexpected finding about the Multiracial Arab participants neither confirmed nor denied the literature; to this author's knowledge, there is almost no academic literature discussing the Multiracial Arab experience (Tehrani, 2009). There was, however, literature

discussing the monoracial Arab American experience. According to John Tehranian, author of *Whitewashed: Americas Invisible Middle Eastern Minority*, Tehranian speaks to how there is little attention on the Middle Eastern populations within American society despite rising degrees of discrimination and racial profiling. Tehranian (2009) discussed how monoracial Arab Americans faced a history of institutionalized oppression and racism, similar to their monoracial minority counterparts; and similar to the previous research, the Multiracial, Arab participants in this study shared similar experiences about their identities being called into question by outsiders, like with the other Multiracial participants.

When this author spoke with the two Multiracial Arab participants, the complexity of their experiences frequently aligned with the themes within the Mixed-race literature, yet it was distinct in that the Multiracial Arab participants physically presented differently than other their monoracial counterparts. The difference of appearances was an expected finding because this study focuses on how Multiracial adults physically present and how people in the environment racially interpret Multiracial adults. Therefore, when this author interviewed two Multiracial Arab participants, there was no template for understanding the race-specific complexities of the Multiracial Arab experience and comparing/contrasting it to other Multiracial communities. While there was valuable information learned about the nuances of the Multiracial experience because of these two participants, their narratives cannot be generalized to other Multiracial Arab individuals. Alternatively, their stories embody themes and findings that do align with other Multiracial individuals within the study (Adams, 1997; Jackson, 2012). Similar to other Multiracial participants that described feeling their internal experience did not align with the external messages they were receiving, Christine described, “My racial identity means that I’m connected to my family in England who looks like me, and it’s also interesting because I feel

much closer to my Arab side and that's really interesting because I don't look like them. That's been complicated." Christine's mixed feelings about her appearance and her identity complement Jackson's (2012) research on how Multiracial people handle racial ambiguity. While there is no academic literature documenting the experiential themes of the Multiracial Arab experience, this narrative does overlap with the preexisting Multiracial identity literature.

A common experience amongst Multiracial individuals was feelings rejected and/not a feeling a sense of belonging with their monoracial counterparts and subsequent feelings of isolation. These recurring feelings of isolation can result in Multiracial people not feeling completely understood and accepted by their monoracial counterparts. The findings in this study confirm previous research suggesting that Multiracial people struggle to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance from monoracial people (Adams, 1997; AhnAllen et al., 2006; Jackson 2012; Sanchez et al., 2014).

An unexpected finding that was not heavily represented in the literature was how Multiracial participants reacted to being rejected by their monoracial counterparts. Niki felt that she "never even fully identified with being 100 percent Asian or Latino, so, it kind of was like, well I'm both and I guess the only word I know for that is Biracial." The literature described that when Multiracial people felt rejected or 'otherized' by their monoracial counterparts, they simply accepted the feelings of being marginalized and did not discuss how Mixed-race people adapted to persistent rejection (AhnAllen et al., 2006; Jackson 2012). In this study, however, many participants reacted to the racial exclusion by rejecting all monoracial labels and embracing only labels that represented their complex experience (e.g., Multiracial, Biracial, Mixed-race, Hapa). This finding broadens the literature and documents that Multiracial people have various ways of

adapting to persistent negative messages. Future research could study the depth and process of how Multiracial communities adapt to these messages.

While the data confirmed much of the experiential themes in Multiracial literature, this study expanded and deepened the understanding of the Multiracial experience. Previous studies heavily focused on the interactions that resulted in Multiracial adults explaining their racial lineage; this study focused on how Multiracial adults navigated these environments and how they were impacted (Jackson, 2012; Sanchez et al., 2014). This author's finding contributes to the next step of understanding the process of the Multiracial experience.

The data also confirmed Leonardelli's et al. (2010) idea that a person will reject a group if they do not feel validated by group members. For example, Barrett felt because "now that I have a daughter and my husband is Filipino and my daughter looks very Asian and I just wish that people would realize 'oh yea you're Asian and your daughter is Asian and your husband is Asian, so you guys are all an Asian family.' I just wish people would identify us as an Asian family. They just always see a white mom with an Asian child so they think she is biracial which she—she's multiracial." Compare this to Ping, who described being in China as "I pretty much get stared at a shit-ton. It's nonstop. I have to make a game out of it; I have to sort of keep eye contact with everyone and see how long they keep it." Ping described how initially the stares did not bother her, but she grew increasingly annoyed and angry as time went on. Ping felt, "...the last few weeks I almost wanted to start a fight, quite honestly" because she was so fed up with people staring at her, acknowledging how she did was 'different' than those she was around. As a result, Ping adapted her frustration and comically turned it on the people who were making her feel frustrated and she started staring back at them to show them how it felt. While reactions varied, these Multiracial people embodied Leonardelli's et al. (2010) research because they felt

constant rejection from their monoracial peers, which led to the Multiracial individuals rejecting the monoracial group. Previous research did not discuss how people handled persistent feelings of rejection from multiple groups, but this study drew findings on this topic from the participant sample. Because many participants described experiencing rejection and rejecting monoracial labels, this study not only bridges Leonardelli's et al. (2010) research to Multiracial identity research, but also documents how people handle persistent feelings of rejection, an area that researchers had yet to explore.

Overall, this finding in some ways confirmed the previous literature that discussed the common themes of being Multiracial; however, the findings went beyond the scope of existing literature by expanding upon the depth of the Multiracial experience and the influence social context can have on a person's experience. This finding partially supported the research purpose, which was to understand how the environment influences how Multiracial people are racially perceived by others and the effects it has on their sense of belonging, because it highlighted how the constant misperception from others negatively affected a person's sense of belonging to their monoracial counterparts. This finding also created a foundation of understanding for how others racially categorized a Mixed-race individual.

Physical appearance and the environment

The racially ambiguous appearance of Multiracial people is well established within Multiracial literature. In this aspect, the finding of how physical presentation significantly impacts how the environment racially categorizes Multiracial individuals was an expected finding within this study. As discussed in previous literature, the participants' felt that their racial appearance was often racially ambiguous, and the individual was racially categorized based on the current environment (Bradshaw, 1992; Siddiqui, 2011). For example, Jen, a self-identified

Hapa living on Oahu, Hawaii, described that because of her appearance, when she is in Hawaii she feels she looks like the majority and when she is on the continental US, “people don’t know exactly what I am, they just tend to put me in that category and assume that is what I am.”

Furthermore, Sue, a self-identified Biracial female from Portland, Oregon, also described, “depending on how much sun I’m getting, I look different and appear different, I’ve noticed in some situations, particularly around people in my same age group, I can almost pass in winter as white.” This supports the previous research that found that the reason outsiders may racially interpret a Mixed-race person a certain way reflects the environment the interpreter is in (Siddiqui, 2011; Jackson, 2012; Milville et al., 2005; Adams, 1997; AhnAllen et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the finding of racially ambiguous participants experiencing aspects of racially misassigned stereotypes from their environments also supported the literature (McDonough & Brunsma, 2013). For example, Noah, a self-identified male living in Seattle, Washington, recalled the time where the police racially profiled him and “that was one of those experiences where I felt like it was pretty clear based on my appearance and based on the people around me that I was being read as someone who was Mexican because I’m racially ambiguous.” While this finding confirmed the literature, this type of literature should be conveyed to those working in public policy, because it documents how the negative stereotypes of others are directly affecting Multiracial people. Public policy and other leaders could use this information to inform their teaching and lawmaking practices, so situations as described above can be avoided.

This study continued to confirm this research and highlighted how the social theory ODT can be applied to the Multiracial experience. These findings also supported the theoretical framework and model that structured this thesis. Leonardelli et al. (2010) discussed how the

environment activates certain individual characteristics to form ingroups and outgroups. This was seen in Kas' experience when they described how when they were in Europe, "people were so mean to me... And then I passed a construction pit, and I looked down into the eyes of this guy who looked exactly like my brother, and I started to kind of look around and I saw that a lot of the people doing kind of the menial labor in this economy looked like they were actually from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, kind of like areas that genetically, kind of map to my DNA a little bit. It's kind of the eastern European plus the Asian genetics, so I guess physically, we kind of look similar. And so, in that case, I kind of walked into being seen and read and treated as if I was someone who was from a country that was lower down on the totem pole in the former USSR." Here, Kas' experience demonstrated how the contemporary social environment activated Kas' physical characteristics as someone who had a socially less desirable racial background. As Kas became aware of how those in a particular environment understood their race and the social implications associated with their race, Kas was better able to understand how their physical appearance interacted with the views and social status of others within that environment. This represents ODT's emphasis on understanding a situation when interpreting group interactions because as Kas understood the views of those within their current environment, the social interactions became clearer to them (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli et al., 2010). By connecting the previously described experiences (Jen, Sue, Noah, and Kas) and this theory, future research can continue to explore the nuances of the Multiracial experience, which could allow for a more expansive understanding of how Multiracial people utilize their Mixed identity within a society that tends to view them monoracially. Multiracial participants' conceptualization of their racial identity and their sense of belonging rarely shifted when others racially miscategorized them. This demonstrates that while a Multiracial person's racial ambiguity can be interpreted

differently based on the social situation the person is in, that does not mean that the Multiracial person's racial identity shifts with how they are racially interpreted by others. The confidence most of these Mixed-race participants felt in their racial identity and unwillingness to dictate their racial identity on how others racially interpreted them demonstrated that these Multiracial people were resistant towards internalizing the continuously conflicting messages they received from others. This finding provided an understanding of how participants remained resilient and flexible with their racial identities given their complex experience.

Identity resilience and sense of belonging

Multiracial people also display personal identity resilience when adapting to strengthen their sense of belonging to a racial group(s). Participants' ability to remain resilient while receiving messages that did not align with their internal experience was an unexpected finding within this study and both confirmed and challenged the literature (Adams, 1997; Brown, 1990; Jackson, 2012, Jhangiani, 2013; Sanchez et al., 2014). Much of the previous literature discussed how when Multiracial individuals did not receive environmental positive affirmation about their identity and belonging, it had the potential to negatively influence how Multiracial people viewed themselves and their racial background (Adams, 1997; Brown, 1990). Within this study, however, there appeared to be resilience from the participants in their refusal to accept imposed monoracial labels, and instead embrace their own labels. Ally stated that she racially identified as 'other,' because "that way it's like relatively ambiguous. I make the decision that's a little unspecified; I can't be pushed into a group or pushed out of a group by someone else." The research on identity resiliency was minimal and viewed as a topic for future research (Jackson, 2012; Jhangiani, 2013). Therefore, this research directly contributed to further establishing a foundation of understanding how Multiracial people remain resilient and resistant to monoracial

labels. It is important to understand this aspect of the experience because it highlights the positivity and adaptation factors within this experience. The study findings also highlighted that all participants reported that their race was not a negative aspect of their lives, even if their racial identity was just a label. Finding a positive Multiracial identity confirmed the literature that also stated that being Multiracial was a positive concept, as opposed to the U.S.'s negative social history surrounding being Mixed (Brown, 1990; Hunter, 2013). It is important for the research to reinforce the positivity of having a Mixed-race identity given the negative social history. In addition, some participants faced negative external messages about being Mixed-race; therefore, this finding further documents how in the face of negativity, Multiracial participants adapted to the situations and preserved the beauty of their identity by not viewing it as a deficit within their lives.

This study established identity resilience while supporting much of the previous literature, including Root's (1990) second type of identity resolution – many Multiracial participants that felt they were able to identify with both of monoracial sides of their parental lineage. For example, Morgan felt that the way she racially identified allowed her to “experience both sides, like hanging out with my white family or my white friends and feeling like I fit in there and hanging out with my Black family and my Black friends and fitting in there as well and understanding the different culture within the groups.” Participants frequently think about their race both because others call their identities into question and they independently think about their race, confirming findings from the previous literature (Miville et al., 2005; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). While previous research documented that these situations often occur to Mixed-race people and result in the individual choosing how they want to react, this study found that it in fact resulted in participants identifying perhaps in a superficial way or a moment of belonging to

the misidentified racial group they were perceived as belonging to (Adams, 1997; Dadlani, 2013; Jackson, 2012; Jhangiani, 2013; Miville et al., 2005; Sanchez et al., 2014; Sechrest-Ehrhardt, 2013). This finding was not discussed within the literature, and documents an area of development for Mixed-race research. It is already established that a sense of belonging is important for a person's identity; however, what does it mean when a person feels they look like a group member, but do not know the appropriate behavioral characteristics to act like a member? The concept that some Multiracial people feel a superficial sense of belonging is unique because it blends together many aspects of the Multiracial experience – it highlights racial ambiguity and the influence of the environment, but the sense of belonging stops at surface level. How does this affect the individual? How does this affect the group? These are areas of future research that will help explain how Multiracial people establish strong communities where they can fully belong, and the overall fluidity of group membership.

Many participants exerted control over their racial identity in various ways, which supported previous research – researchers discussed that a common reaction to imposed labels is correcting these labels and voicing one's own opinion (Jackson, 2012; Sanchez et al., 2014). This leaves the individual empowered to shape how others perceive them. Kas knew at a young age that Multiracial individuals have “to find out who you are and like, stand up and be like, ‘I'm this person, and you're going to put me in all of these boxes but I don't actually fit and I'm actually this person.’” This embodies the previous research of needing to represent one's identity because others were not going to understand it. This exertion of control documents identity resilience and resistance by conveying how Multiracial people will not belittle their experience if it is not well understood by others.

Previous literature described how Multiracial participants felt like they were ‘people of the world’ because of their exposure to many cultural groups. This study stratified that concept with the finding that Mixed-race participants felt they were able to identify with different oppressions because of their racial experience. Participants felt they were able to empathize with different identities and oppressions because of their complex experience, representing a finding modestly found in the literature (Miville et al., 2005; Jackson, 2012; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). Within this study, Sophia described how wearing a headscarf “actually emphasized people’s mistaken impression of who I was and I think, for a short period of time, it was a challenge. Um, on the positive side of that, it helped me to understand, and sort of empathize with people who truly are Middle Eastern.” This finding was briefly referenced in Cynthia Nakashima’s (1996) research, but Nakashima’s research focused more on the sense of belonging and the human experience, not necessarily the experience of oppression. Nakashima (1996) discussed that Multiracial people are ‘citizens of the world’ because they transgress racial, geographic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries because they are often exposed to multiple cultures during their upbringing. Therefore, this allows Multiracial people to move past racial boundaries and emphasize a human race community, rather than socially constructed racial communities. Additional research included the same finding, but it was discussed as an area of the Multiracial experience that needs further exploration (Jhangiani, 2013). Additionally, all six participants stated that their racial identity “doesn’t really mean anything to me”; and while they stated their racial identity did not carry much meaning, they described similar experiences of a sense of belonging and rejection from their racial group(s) that the other 30 participants experienced. It is perplexing as to why these six participants do not place meaning on their racial labels despite similar experiences as the other participants. To the best of this author’s knowledge, these

participants exhibit the low race salience profile (Worrell et al., 2014). As discussed in the previous literature, this is a relatively new paradox and there is little research and understanding how some people do not see themselves in terms of their race and have lower race-based rejection sensitivity (Worrell et al., 2014). The participants in this study not only described their racial identity as an impertinent identity in their lives, they seemed more ambivalent about feeling a sense of rejection impacting their identity and a general sense of belonging. For example, JJ described her sense of belong as “two cultures that I have, I feel connected to them, I don’t feel excluded from any of them. I feel, I am German but I’m also Gambian, so that is, I know who I am and exclusion... not in a long time.” While this author can not directly states these six participants represent the low race salience paradox, they do possess the characteristics and do not view themselves in terms of their race. This paradox not only warrants continued research to understand this phenomenon, it will also be advantageous to understand how Multiracial people adapt and benefit from having a low race salience profile.

Therefore, this finding stratifies the previous research by creating a different understanding of how Multiracial people utilize their racial identity. This finding is paramount to understanding that some Multiracial people and communities are able to use their unique experience to empathize with other oppressed groups. Identity resilience and adaptation needs to be further explored and understood by researchers, so they can gain a better understanding of how empathizing with other oppressions impacts the Multiracial individual. The ability of participants to extend their identity into other types of oppressions demonstrates the true resiliency and flexibility that the Multiracial experience possesses.

Overall, identity resilience and flexibility are in some ways supported by the literature, and also represent the nuances of the Multiracial experience. This finding addressed the purpose

of this study – to understand how ODT can explain how the environment influences a Multiracial person’s racial categorization by others and the impact it has on their sense of belonging – because identity resiliency is an adaption to remain optimally distinct and frame racial identity as a positive. As previously discussed, participants felt little sense of belonging to their monoracial groups, and while participants did feel a sense of belonging to Mixed communities, few had access to these communities. Constant rejection from monoracial counterparts led many to embrace the rejection and simultaneously reject the labels imposed upon them. This supports Brewer’s (1991) concept of an identity being driven by two opposing goals – to assimilate and to differentiate. Because ODT is a social psychology and group identity theory, not a race theory, there is no literature supporting what was found in this study.

Current events in the United States

Race politics within the United States are complicated and affect individuals differently based on their experience. In the midst of the interview process for this study, the media was sensationalizing the protests in Ferguson, Missouri and the lack of indictments for the cases of Michael Brown and Eric Garner were released. While these current events impacted the participants differently, some felt these events were related to their Multiracial experience. While only some participants spoke to the current race politics happening in the U.S. in regards to their racial identity, the stories embodied the complexity of the Multiracial experience. While race politics are not new to academia, hearing participants discuss topics of Ferguson, Missouri and the deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and Trayvon Martin were chilling. People passionately spoke of how race politics were rigidly dichotomized, leaving little room for discussion from Mixed-race individuals who had a parent of racial privilege and a parent who faced racial oppression. Tom described his thoughts on the protests in Ferguson:

There's kind of an often referenced dichotomy between like, what white people should do and what Black people should do and one thing I've realized, not necessarily in terms of activism, but in thinking about these issue, and trying to think through these issues as kind of what People of Color that are not Black should do.

Despite these cases being quite recent, there is much published literature discussing and analyzing them, but none focuses specifically on their impact on Multiracial communities. On December 13, 2014, the Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC) posted a statement, saying:

MASC stands in solidarity with all people who are saddened by the grand jury verdict on the Mike Brown shooting. Equality is of utmost importance to our organization's mission. We will continue to do our part to expand the dialogue on race in this country. Our hearts are with the people of Ferguson.

In addition, the post included a joint response from a number of Multiracial community organizations, including Critical Mixed-race Studies, Mixed Roots Stories, MAVIN, the National Association of Mixed Student Organizations, and more:

As members of the Multiracial community, we want to express our concern and compassion for the family of Michael Brown Jr. We are connected to these events and stand in solidarity with the many individuals and communities that have been harmed by the legacies of white supremacy, privilege and racism. As community organizers, scholars, activists, writers, and artists, we remain resolute in dismantling racism through our work and actions. #BlackLivesMatter

While this statement documents how these Multiracial organizations stand in solidarity towards resisting and undoing oppression, there are no other comments on how these political events effect Multiracial communities. This lack of public conversation about how Multiracial communities are affected by these events highlights how the Multiracial experience is not given precedence when it comes to discussing race politics; or that these communities are not considered by social activists and/or political leaders to be incorporated in these discussions. There is minimal further discussion on how Multiracial communities have internalized and involved themselves in discussions relating to the current race politics in the U.S., although there are monoracial minority organizations and communities that discuss their alliance with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Chen (2015) interviewed Ellen Choy, a leader in the #Asians4BlackLives movement in Oakland, California. During the interview, Ms. Choy discussed the necessity for Asian Americans and other non-Black communities to support the #BlackLivesMatter leadership and movement. Her argument emphasizes a discussion between monoracial minorities and their white counterparts and fails to address Multiracial people with a parental lineage of a racial minority parent and a white parent. Where do they stand? Where do they find solace in these conversations if they feel neither side of the conversation accurately depicts their experience? These answers are not easily found, which can leave Multiracial communities, once again, standing on racial borders unsure of where they can claim space.

A common theme was the feeling that the conversation on race politics was dichotomized and invoked feelings of rejection from monoracial counterparts. Some participants, who did not have a Black parent, felt that their racial identity allowed them to empathize with the current racial tensions and ignited their passion for racial justice. Kas described that their racial identity “helps me in my activism, or given me some fuel for that, because it's a way for me to kind of

commiserate and collaborate with other people who are marginalized in some way.” Monica described feelings of uncertainty about a protest she attended that was impacted by racial dynamics, saying it was

debilitating. Some of this is just because it is so hard to maneuver or like, talk about and try to figure out how to join together while also acknowledging how unfair it is and trying to give space to tip the scales in other direction...how do we start conversations with the multitude of people who are there who aren't necessarily in a binary but who are trying to have this conversation together.

The counterintuitive nature of this rejection embodied why race relations have struggled to progress, and also affirmed the aspect of ODT on how the environment can highlight an individual's personal characteristics that set him/her apart from the environment (Leonardelli et al., 2010; Brewer, 1990).

These events also invoked feelings of confusion about where Multiracial people were allowed to take space in race-based discussions. Monica's feelings of confusion confirmed previous literature that discussed as Multiracial people learn to navigate and articulate their identity, they also learn where they are placed among the monoracial social status hierarchy (Hunter, 2013; Gans, 2012; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Lee & Bean, 2007). This was further reaffirmed by this study because participants discussed feelings of frustration when it came to describing feelings of oppression to those in positions of privilege and power (Gans, 2012; Lee & Bean, 2007). This feeling is common when racial minorities, or any oppressed individuals, attempt to explain an experience that may be foreign to someone else (Jackson, 2012).

This finding was one not commonly found in existing literature, and embodied this thesis' research purpose as it demonstrates how the environment can influence the conversation and how each person derives meaning from a conversation. In Teun A. Van Dijk's book *Society and Discourse: How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk*, he states that in order to fully understand a discussion, we need to understand the context, defined here as the specific situation of a given text or talk, and "the non-verbal, social and situational aspects of communicative events" (p. 2). Van Dijk argues that there is no direct relationship between social characteristics (race, gender, class, etc.) of a person and the way they talk. Instead, it is the way the speaker and listener subjectively understand, interpret, and/or construct these social characteristics within a situation that influences understanding (Grădinaru, 2013). For example, when the interviews for this thesis were conducted, the media were publicizing the cases of Michael Brown and Eric Gardner, and these cases impacted each participant differently. Those that spoke about the events felt they related to the discussion of their Multiracial identity. Additionally, several participants discussed how this social context made their racial identities salient in regards to how they understood race relations. This exemplifies Van Dijk's idea because he assumes the environment impacts each person differently, and only those that felt the cases impacted themselves described contemporary race politics in their interviews (Grădinaru, 2013; Van Dijk, 2009).

Participants' feelings of confusion, frustration, and motivation to create space for themselves in race-related conversations demonstrate the complexities of their personal experiences. The findings highlighted the embodiment of the many facets of the Multiracial experience and the need for a more blended conversation in respects to the Multiracial experience and race politics. This finding was unprecedented and created uniqueness to this

study because no previous literature discussed how these current events affected Multiracial people on an experiential level.

Overall, the major findings of this study were relatively confirmed by the previous literature. This study also highlighted multiple areas for future research. Similar to Jhangiani's (2013) findings, future research needs to explore how Multiracial people feel they are able to empathize with various types of oppression because of their racial identity. In addition to validating previous claims, this study further established and explores how some Multiracial people felt they were able to empathize with oppressions they did not identify with. Additionally, there needs to be more research discussing the Multiracial and Arab American experience (Tehrani, 2009). As the Arab racial identity continues to be constructed in the U.S., it is important to remember the social and political nuances and differences between white Americans and Arab Americans.

This study also confirmed that the Multiracial experience is complex and should be viewed separately from its monoracial counterparts (Adams, 1997; Jackson, 2012; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Lee & Bean, 2007). Lastly, the environmental messages found in this study strengthened the previous research that discussed how the environment does impact how others perceive a Multiracial person. The primary theory and model, ODT and the Biracial Identity Resolution Model, were both validated and challenged throughout this study, proving to be a successful and advantageous theory and model to guide this study.

Strengths and limitations

This study had various strengths and limitations within its methodology. In recruiting a diverse sample of participants, this author speculates that requiring physical signatures on the informed consent form led to a large loss of interested participants who contacted this researcher,

but did not respond after learning they would need to sign and mail the consent form. Another limitation was the diversity of the sample used in the study. There was an overwhelming number of female participants, which may be attributed to this author attending a single-sex undergraduate college and advertising within this author's Master's program and alumnae populations. Social Work's reputation as a female-dominated profession, along with this author being female and utilizing her undergraduate resources may account for the limited gender diversity (Jhangiani, 2013). This study did not account for class diversity in the interview questions; however, participant outreach was circulated within predominantly educational settings often attended by a wealthier-than-average population. Building on this limitation, the main recruitment sources were undergraduates from a liberal college, social workers, and social work affiliates. This insinuates that participants were more likely to have interest, the language, and the sensitivity to articulate issues of race and Multiracial identity than the general population. Additionally, because this author chose to only study adults, this author was only able to explore the later stages of a person's identity development and resolution, excluding people in the midst of organizing how they view their race(s). These limitations weaken this study's generalizability because of the lack of gender diversity, but are somewhat combated by the large sample size for a qualitative Master's thesis. Because these findings frequently confirmed with the previous research, there is reliability and validity to this study.

The strengths in this study were apparent in that after the interviews were conducted, many participants expressed appreciation for this type of research. Multiracial people often describe feeling a lack of nearby Mixed-race communities, and this translates into outsiders not fully understanding their experiences. By participating in this study, Mixed-race participants felt they were able to share their narrative through their own words, providing an opportunity a voice

they had not experienced before. For future research, it would be interesting to explore how social workers can help facilitate Multiracial communities so Multiracial people feeling a stronger sense of community and do not have to feel that they mostly receive environmental messages from monoracial people. Another strength was being able to interview Multiracial Arab participants. As noted above, the Arab American identity is in a highly fluid state given the sociopolitical nature of the U.S.'s relationship with the Middle East. Hearing and documenting these participants' voices will help continue this identity construction on a national scale. A bittersweet strength to this study was that the interviews were conducted in the midst of verdicts to not indict the law enforcement officers involved with Michael Brown and Eric Gardner's deaths. While it must remain clear that these deaths are neither a strength nor a benefit to this study, they created a worldwide conversation that transcended global communities including Multiracial ones. This author had the privilege to bear witness to how Multiracial participants empathized with and embodied the pain of the oppressed, and where they fit into this conversation.

Implications for social workers and future researcher

This study provides several implications for social work clinicians and similar professions. First, these participants shared a diverse set of narratives that complicate the rigid concepts of monoraces and monoracial-prescribed stereotypes. These Mixed-race individuals and their narratives are proof that racial categories are fluid. Hopefully, clinicians can hear these narratives and learn to empathize with these struggles as they work with Multiracial individuals. Furthermore, social workers can help facilitate Multiracial support groups, where Multiracial people can begin to establish a more concrete Mixed-race support system in their local communities. Fostering a stronger physical and emotional sense of belonging to their Mixed-race

identity will likely create a stronger sense of solidarity, helping decrease feelings of racial isolation and an inability to share experiences.

At the macro level, social workers and other professionals working with Multiracial individuals may be in need of Multiracial-based lectures and trainings to gain a deeper understanding of how the Multiracial experience can be separated from the monoracial experience. One way social workers could influence the multiracial experience is by working with educators, employers, and businesses to help them understand the unique challenges and benefits Mixed-raced individuals possess and assist them with ways to create a stronger sense of belonging within the classroom and in the workplace.

This study also highlights the need for more complex racial models. As noted above, Brewer's ODT and Root's Biracial Identity Resolution were helpful in providing a framework for understanding how Multiracial people navigated their identities; however, this theory and model were not comprehensive enough. This shortcoming was seen in the need to use both a theory and a model to more accurately describe the Multiracial experience, and still, there were findings that surpassed the boundaries of these two frameworks. While this demonstrates how researchers and scholars are understanding the Multiracial experience, this study's findings may also suggest that a more contemporary model needs to be created to best understand the Mixed-race experience. For example, there needs to be future research on how Multiracial people sustain their identity resiliency when they constantly receive messages from people that they are 'different' or that their racial identity does not align with the social contexts' dominate racial identity. Furthermore, Mixed-race models need to start acknowledging Multiracial people that have racial minority parents from different racial backgrounds (i.e. Latino/Asian) where neither

parent is white. Root's model that only acknowledges Mixed-race people with a white parent (Root, 1990).

Additionally, it is imperative that future research explores how some Multiracial people feel that their Multiracial experience creates a phenomenon of being able to empathize with other oppressions. It is possible this is the next step in a Multiracial person's identity that has yet to be established in the literature. There also needs to be more research exploring a Multiracial person's low race salience and explore how people come to this conceptualization of their racial identity. Lastly, there needs to be further research that flushes out the Multiracial Arab experience. Similar to the needed research to understand how Multiracial people can understand multiple oppressions, the Multiracial Arab experience is largely under-researched despite it being an important aspect of a community of people's experiences. Let the narratives of these people create a deeper-rooted understanding of how the Mixed-race internal experience interacts with the external environment and how the environment can become more accepting of Multiracial complexities.

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Table 1. Participant Demographics and Racial Lineage

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Current Geographic Location	Racial Self-Identification	How Participant Is Perceived by Others	Mother's Race and Nationality	Father's Race and Nationality
Niki	F	21	Northampton, Massachusetts	Mixed, Biracial	Monoracial Asian, Peruvian, Bolivian	Asian; Filipina-American	Latino; Colombian-American
Sophie	F	30	Rockville, Maryland	Mixed	Monoracial Caucasian, part Japanese	Mixed (Half Chinese/Caucasian); American	Caucasian; American
David	M	29	Boston, Massachusetts	Mixed, Multiracial, Person of Color	Monoracial Black, Dominican	Mixed; Half Puerto Rican/Panamanian	Mixed; Moroccan and Australian
Sue*	F	25	Portland, Oregon	Mixed, Biracial, Multicultural	Native American, Mexican, Latina, Half-Black	Asian; Indian	Caucasian; American
Noah	M	37	Seattle, Washington	Multiracial, Asian-American, Japanese-American, Person of Color	Mexican, Monoracial Caucasian, Native American	Caucasian; American	Asian; Japanese-American
Dale	M	23	Rockville, Maryland	Half Caucasian /Asian	Monoracial Caucasian, Monoracial Asian,	Caucasian; American	Asian; Japanese-American

					Latino		
Gabe	Unspecified	24	Northampton, Massachusetts	Biracial	Puerto Rican, Dominican, Latino, Hispanic	Black; American	Caucasian; American
Ally	F	26	Boston, Massachusetts	Other	Hawaiian, Latina, Filipina, various types of Asian, Native American	Asian; Chinese	Caucasian; British-American
Elizabeth	F	25	North Potomac, Maryland	Mexican American, Hispanic and Caucasian	Monoracial Caucasian	Caucasian; Scottish	Latino; Mexican
Jen	F	54	Oahu, Hawaii	Hapa, Japanese-Cherokee	Latina	Asian/Caucasian; Half Japanese/English	Native American/Caucasian; Half Cherokee/Irish
Mika	F	28	Florence, Massachusetts	Biracial; Person of Color	Indian, Black, Latino, Middle Eastern	Caucasian; Hispanic-American	Black; Cuban-American
Jordan	F	22	Berkeley, California	Mixed; Half Caucasian /Black	Monoracial Caucasian, Latina	Caucasian; American	Black; American
JJ	F	31	Berlin, Germany	Afro-German	Monoracial Black, Hispanic, Indian, North African	Caucasian; German	Black; Gambian
Ava	F	19	Akron, Ohio	Jordanian-American, Arab-American	Monoracial Caucasian	Caucasian; American	Arab; Jordanian

Katherine	F	21	Bronxville, New York	Half Caucasian /Japanese, a little more on the Caucasian side	Part Chinese	Asian; Japanese	Caucasian; American
Barrett	F	36	Berkeley, California	Biracial	Monoracial Caucasian	Caucasian; Irish-American	Asian; Chinese-American
Sam	F	19	Belleair, Florida	Hispanic and Caucasian, Person of Color	Monoracial Caucasian, Mexican	Caucasian; Italian	Latino; Puerto Rican
Tom*	M	21	Oberlin, Ohio	Biracial	Middle Eastern, Latino	Asian; Indian	Caucasian; American
Ping	F	23	Bakersville, California	Mixed	Monoracial Caucasian, Japanese, Korean, Hawaiian, Mexican	Asian; Chinese	Caucasian; American
Christine	F	28	Los Angeles, California	Biracial; Caucasian and Iraqi-Arab	Monoracial Caucasian	Caucasian; British	Arab; Iraqi-Israeli-American
Morgan	F	21	College Park, Maryland	Mixed; Caucasian and Black	Latina, Middle Eastern,	Caucasian; Scandinavian	Black; American
Clara	F	23	Phoenix, Arizona	Mixed, Half Caucasian /Mexican	Korean, Chinese, Native American, Filipino	Latina; Mexican-American	Caucasian; American
Rachel	F	25	Denver, Colorado	Biracial, Multiracial, Mixed, Half Caucasian /Black	Latina, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Brazilian	Caucasian; Norwegian	Black; American

Kas	Gender Queer	30	Cambridge, Massachusetts	Mixed	Part Vietnamese, Kazakhstani, Uzbekistani, Native American, Latino, Monoracial Caucasian	Asian; Chinese-American	Caucasian; Polish-American
Rosemary	F	21	Kupferzell, Germany	Thai-German, Third Culture Kid, International Person, Person of the World	Russian, Turkish, Kazakhstani, Korean, Japanese	Asian; Thai	Caucasian; German
Chiang-Peng	Gender Queer	32	Boston, Massachusetts	Multiracial; Chinese-Malaysian and Caucasian	Monoracial Caucasian	Caucasian; American	Asian; Chinese
Becky	F	32	Denver, Colorado	Black and Caucasian, Mixed	Latino, Puerto Rican, Monoracial Caucasian	Caucasian; American	Black; Creole-American
Simone	F	60	Brooklyn, New York	Mixed, Black	Puerto Rican	Caucasian; American	Black/Native American; American and Cherokee
Michaela	F	61	Franklinville, North Carolina	Mixed	Monoracial Black, Latino, Middle Eastern	Biracial; American	Biracial; American
Tanya	F	32	Denver, Colorado	Latina and Black	Monoracial Black, Ethiopian, Puerto Rican, Indian	Latino/Asian; Hispanic and Indian	Black; American
Sophia	F	37	Albany, New York	Black and Latina (Puerto Rican)	Native American, Middle Eastern	Black; American	Latino; Puerto Rican

Christa	F	22	Heidelberg, Germany	Mixed, Caucasian and Asian	Portuguese, Spanish, incorrect Asian groups, various South American countries	Caucasian; American	Asian; Singaporean-Chinese
Daniela	F	22	Queens, New York	Mixed; Person of Color	Half Caucasian /Black; part Asian; Monoracial Black	Half Caucasian/Black; Dominican	Caucasian; Uruguayan
Monica	F	27	Berkeley, California	Mixed, Jewtina	Monoracial Caucasian, Part Black	Caucasian; American	Latino; Nicaraguan
Niko	F	36	Oakland, California	Mixed, Person of Color, Desi	Indonesian, Latino, Greek, Italian	Caucasian; German	Asian; Afghani
Mae	F	30	Chicago, Illinois	Multiracial	Monoracial Black, Monoracial Caucasian, Hispanic, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Persian, Egyptian, Indian, Greek,	Caucasian; Italian	Black/Caucasian / Native American; American-Irish-Native American

Note: Pseudonyms were self-selected by participants.

**Tom and Sue are siblings.*

Appendix A: Human Subjects Committee Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

November 4, 2014

Maya Hochberger Vigsittaboot

Dear Maya,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elaine Kersten".

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix B1a: Protocol Change Request Form

RESEARCH PROJECT CHANGE OF PROTOCOL FORM – School for Social Work

You are presently the researcher on the following approved research project by the Human Subjects Committee (HSR) of Smith College School for Social Work:

What are you? Understanding contextual factors influence on racial categorization and/or interpretation of multiracial adults by others and the impact on sense of belonging

Maya Hochberger-Vigittabaat
Tasha Keyes

I am requesting changes to the study protocols, as ~~they were originally approved by the HSR Committee of Smith College School for Social Work~~. These changes are as follows:

A. I have altered my interview questions to:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What city and state do you live in?
4. What race and nationality is ~~your mother's~~?
5. What race and nationality is your father's?
6. How do you racially identify?
7. What has influenced you to racially identify in this way?
 1. Follow up: How did you arrive to your current racial identity? Have you always identified this way or was it a process?
8. What does your race mean to you?
 1. Follow up: Is your racial identity something you think about often?
9. How does your physical appearance impact your racial identity and how others define you?
 1. Follow up: How does it feel when people ~~questionably~~ identify you? Does that impact how you see yourself?
10. What other racial groups have people assigned you to that you don't identify with?
 1. Follow up: Have people ever asked you if you were a race you are not?
11. What role does the social environment play in how you see yourself racially and how others see you?
 1. Follow up: How do certain situations or people change how others see you and/or how you see yourself? Does your racial change in a situation or around certain people?
12. Sense of belonging is defined as feeling attached to a group. So based off of that definition, what impacts your sense of belonging and sense of exclusion to your racial groups?
 1. Follow up: Have you ever felt pushed out of your racial groups?

B. Additionally, based on how the participant contacted me (either Facebook message or email), I will send the participant the interview questions 2 days in advance so they can have time to familiarize themselves with the questions. I am sending them the questions in advance because these may not be questions people ask themselves or converse about regularly and therefore, by providing the participant extra time to think about these questions they will be able to provide more thoughtful answers. The participant will be made aware they will receive the interview questions during the first initial meeting and it will be written in the informed consent form that they will receive the interview questions in advance.

I understand that these proposed changes in protocol ~~will~~ be reviewed by the Committee.

I also understand that any proposed changes in protocol being requested in this form cannot be implemented until they have been fully approved by the HSR Committee.

I have discussed these changes with my Research Advisor and he/she has approved them.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Signature of Researcher: ~~M. Hochberger-Vigittabaat~~



Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): ~~Maya Hochberger-Vigittabaat~~ Date: 11/9/14

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED & COMPLETED FORM TO Laura Wyman at LWyman@smith.edu or to Lilly Hall Room 115.

*****Include your Research Advisor/Doctoral Committee Chair in the 'cc'. Once the Advisor/Chair writes acknowledging and approving this change, the Committee review will be initiated.**

Appendix B1b: Protocol Change Request Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

November 12, 2014

Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot

Dear Maya,

I have reviewed your amendments and they look fine. These amendments to your study are therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Tasha Keyes, Research Advisor

Appendix B2a: Protocol Change Request Form



RESEARCH PROJECT CHANGE OF PROTOCOL FORM – School for Social Work

You are presently the researcher on the following approved research project by the Human Subjects Committee (HSR) of Smith College School for Social Work:

What are you? Understanding contextual factors influence on racial categorization and/or interpretation of multiracial adults by others and the impact on sense of belonging
Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot
Tasha Keyes

I am requesting changes to the study protocols, as they were originally approved by the HSR Committee of Smith College School for Social Work. These changes are as follows:

1. I want participants to create a pseudo-name at the end of the study that I will use when I quote them in my finding/discussion sections of my thesis. I want to institute a pseudo-name because it provides them anonymity and is less sterile than replacing their name with a number. I will ask them to provide a pseudo-name at the end of the interview.

- I understand that these proposed changes in protocol will be reviewed by the Committee.
 I also understand that any proposed changes in protocol being requested in this form cannot be implemented until they have been fully approved by the HSR Committee.
 I have discussed these changes with my Research Advisor and he/she has approved them.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Signature of Researcher: M.Hochberger-Vigsittaboot

Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot Date: 11/17/14

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED & COMPLETED FORM TO Laura Wyman at LWyman@smith.edu or to Lilly Hall Room 115.

*****Include your Research Advisor/Doctoral Committee Chair in the 'cc'. Once the Advisor/Chair writes acknowledging and approving this change, the Committee review will be initiated.**

Appendix B2b: Protocol Change Request Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

November 17, 2014

Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot

Dear Maya,

I have reviewed your amendment and it looks fine. This amendment to your study is therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elaine Kersten".

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Tasha Keyes, Research Advisor

Appendix B3a: Protocol Change Request Form

RESEARCH PROJECT CHANGE OF PROTOCOL FORM – School for Social Work

You are presently the researcher on the following *approved* research project by the Human Subjects Committee (HSR) of Smith College School for Social Work:

What are you? Understanding contextual factors influence on racial categorization and/or interpretation of multiracial adults by others and the impact on sense of belonging

Maya Hochberger-Vigsittabont
Tasha Keyes

I am requesting changes to the study protocols, as ~~they were originally approved by the HSR Committee of Smith College School for Social Work.~~ These changes are as follows:

1. When provided the opportunity to meet with a participant in person to interview, I will meet with them in person. This option to meet in person will be offered to every person and will be documented in the informed consent form from here on out.
2. When provided the opportunity to meet with a current Smith SSW student asked to participate in my study. Is this allowed or would it be breaching any ethnics since I know the participant (we attend the same school)? And if it matters-- she emailed me after seeing an email I sent to Council for Students of Color list serve (which was initially approved in my HSR application as acceptable outreach), so I didn't directly email her and ask.
3. A participant asked if I could share the results of the study with them once it is all completed. Can I refer them to my thesis once I have submitted it in May?
4. Initially stated I was looking for 12-15 participants. Because of the massive response I have received from people, I would like to broaden my sample to at least 20 people. I believe opening up my sample size will increase generalizability. Additionally, because I began my outreach so early, through time management, I can handle coding at least 20 different interviews because I will close my recruitment mid December.

I understand that these proposed changes in protocol ~~will~~ be reviewed by the Committee.

I also understand that any proposed changes in protocol being requested in this form cannot be implemented until they have been fully approved by the HSR Committee.

I have discussed these changes with my Research Advisor and he/she has approved them.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Signature of Researcher: M. Hochberger-Vigsittabont

Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): Maya Hochberger-Vigsittabont Date: 11/18/14s

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED & COMPLETED FORM TO Laura Wyman at LWyman@smith.edu or to Lilly Hall Room 115.

*****Include your Research Advisor/Doctoral Committee Chair in the 'cc'. Once the Advisor/Chair writes acknowledging and approving this change, the Committee review will be initiated.**

Appendix B3b: Protocol Change Request Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

November 18, 2014

Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot

Dear Maya,

I have reviewed your amendments and they look fine. These amendments to your study are therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elaine Kersten".

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Tasha Keyes, Research Advisor

Appendix C: Recruitment Post

Are you over the age of 18? Do you identify as multiracial (2+ races)? Have people ever asked, “What are you?” or “No. Where are you really from?” I am an MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work and I want to hear about your experience! I am looking for participants for my master’s in social work research study that explores how the environment influences how you self-categorize racially and how others have racially categorized you and how these categorizations have impacted your sense of belonging to your race(s). If you are over the age of 18 and identify with 2+ races, I want to talk to you! The 45-minute to 1 hour interview would be conducted via skype or phone and is confidential. My research offers a chance for you to share your story. Please reply to this post or Facebook message me if you are interested and I will provide you with more information. Also, if you know anyone who fits this these criteria and who might be interested in participating please let them know of my study and have them Facebook message me or email me at multiracialinterview@gmail.com. PLEASE NOTE: multiracial is defined as identifying with 2 or more racial heritages (Asian, Native American, Black, etc.). Identifying as mixed Hispanic/Latino (white/Latino, Asian/Latino) is considered multiracial in this study. Identifying with two ethnic groups from a singular racial heritage (such as identifying as German/Polish) is not considered multiracial. THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND INTEREST!

Appendix D: Recruitment Email

Dear (insert group here),

My name is Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot and I am a MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work and I want to hear about your experience! I am looking for participants for my master's in social work research study that explores how the environment influences how you self-categorize racially and how others have racially categorized you and how these categorizations have impacted your sense of belonging to your self-identified race(s). If you are over the age of 18 and identify with 2+ races, I want to talk to you! The 45-minute to 1 hour interview would be conducted via skype or phone and is confidential. My research offers a chance for you to have your voice heard and share your story. Please reply to this email if you are interested and I will provide you with more information. Also, if you know anyone who fits these criteria and who might be interested in participating please forward this email to them or have them email me at multiracialinterview@gmail.com. PLEASE NOTE: multiracial is defined as identifying with 2 or more racial heritages (Asian, Native American, Black, etc.). Identifying as mixed Hispanic/Latino (white/Latino, Asian/Latino) is considered multiracial in this study. Identifying with two ethnic groups from a singular racial heritage (such as identifying as German/Polish) is not considered multiracial. THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND INTEREST!

Appendix E: Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot and I am a social work student from the Smith College School for Social Work. This study is part of research I am conducting to better understand how the environmental impacts a multiracial adult's sense of belonging to their racial groups. This data will be used for my master's thesis, and possibly for presentation and publication. You are being asked to participate in this study because you identify with at least 2 racial identities and are over the age of 18. To participate in this study you must engage in a 45-minute to 1 hour phone, skype, or in-person interview; in this interview I will ask you questions about your demographics (ex, race, age, gender) and questions surrounding the topic of your sense of belonging to your self-identified racial groups. Two days prior to our scheduled interview you will electronically receive the interview questions so you can familiarize yourself with the questions and ask me any questions. By participating in this study you will have an opportunity to share your unique experience as a multiracial adult and explore how you racially categorize yourself and how others racially categorize you. By sharing these experiences, you will be contributing to the relatively unresearched field of multiracial racial categorization and sense of belonging. These results will help clinicians and educators understand the struggles and strengths of multiracial people. There are minimal risks for participation in this study; however, some questions related to race and racism and may cause emotional distress. Questions may bring up painful experiences. If you wish to talk to a mental health provider or seek out resources for multiracial individuals, please see the list of resources provided at the end of this letter. There will be no financial compensation for this study.

For this study we will be conducting the interview through phone or by skype. Because my participant outreach is based off of social media and word of mouth, there is a risk of you becoming aware of other participants in this study. To assure confidentiality of this study, your identity, and other participants identities, please do not discuss your participation (such as the interview) with others. Any identifying information provided during the interview will be concealed; I will remove names or place names that could potentially reveal you or anyone else's identity. The recording of the interview will be kept on a password-protected computer and after the interview is no longer needed, it will be destroyed. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can choose to withdraw at any time during the study. You may choose to skip any question, but once the interview is completed the data cannot be extracted from the study. In order for your answers to be used for my research you must complete all of the demographic information and more than 50% of the questions. You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or any other aspects of the study, please email me at multiracialinterview@gmail.com or the chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974 extension 80

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, agree to be audiotaped during the interview, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. After you have signed and dated this form, please make a copy for your personal records and return the original form back to me.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Maya Hochberger-Vigsittaboot
Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, MA
multiracialinterview@gmail.com

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

If you are experiencing distress as a result of this study, please refer to the following websites to find a therapist:

<http://www.helppro.com/>

http://www.networktherapy.com/directory/therapist_results.asp?c1=64137

<http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/>

If you wish to find multiracial resources and education please refer to the following websites:

<http://www.mavinfoundation.org/new/>

<http://www.swirlinc.org/>

Appendix F: Interview Guide

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What city and state do you live in?
4. What race and nationality is your mother?
5. What race and nationality is your father?
6. How do you racially identify?
7. What has influenced you to racially identify in this way?
 1. Follow up: How did you arrive to your current racial identity? Have you always identified this way or was it a process?
8. What does your race mean to you?
 1. Follow up: Is your racial identity something you think about often?
9. How does your physical appearance impact your racial identity and how others define you?
 1. Follow up: How does it feel when people misracially identify you? Does that impact how you see yourself?
10. What other racial groups have people assigned you to that you don't identify with?
 1. Follow up: Have people ever asked you if you were a race you are not?
11. What role does the social environment play in how you see yourself racially and how others see you?
 1. Follow up: How do certain situations or people change how others see you and/or how you see yourself? Does your racial change in a situation or around certain people?
12. Sense of belonging is defined as feeling attached to a group. So based off of that definition, what impacts your sense of belonging and sense of exclusion to your racial groups?
 1. Follow up: Have you ever felt pushed out of your racial groups?
13. As you know, I am writing a thesis and may quote something you have said in this interview within my thesis; therefore, to protect your identity, can you provide me with a pseudo-name or nickname I can use instead of your government name