
Theses, Dissertations, and Projects

2015

Navigating a paradoxical identity : the experiences of mixed race individuals who are perceived as White

Marcella Emily Galvez Wagner
Smith College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wagner, Marcella Emily Galvez, "Navigating a paradoxical identity : the experiences of mixed race individuals who are perceived as White" (2015). Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA. <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1760>

This Masters Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu.

Marcella Galvez Wagner
Navigating a Paradoxical Identity:
The Experiences of Mixed Race
Individuals Who Are Perceived as
White

ABSTRACT

This qualitative exploratory study examines the experiences of mixed race individuals who are perceived as White by others based on physical appearance. Literature on the mixed race population has only more recently focused on the phenomenon of racial misrecognition, or the incongruence between racial identity and racial perception by others. This study seeks to advance this literature by exploring the experiences of individuals who have a particular form of racial misrecognition where they hold a non-dominant racial identity and yet are perceived as White by others. The study explored racial identity, racial markers, disclosure and passing, family context, experiences of privilege and oppression, and person of color identity in interviews with the 14 participants. This study highlights how these individuals are in unique social locations of understanding the nuances of racial privilege and racial oppression, including forms of monoracism or multiracial oppression. Moreover, this study found that these individuals navigate and negotiate complex positionalities of racial perception and racial identity and are often faced with numerous tensions, dilemmas, and contradictions in their experiences of race. Sitting at the borders of racial identity, the individuals in this study and their experiences help elucidate our understanding of the social construction of race, racial identity, and monoracism in the U.S.

**NAVIGATING A PARADOXICAL IDENTITY: THE EXPERIENCES OF MIXED
RACE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE PERCEIVED AS WHITE**

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

Marcella Galvez Wagner

Smith College School for Social Work

Northampton, Massachusetts, 01063

2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has absolutely been both a labor of love and a painful process. The labor of love part: I could not imagine a more relevant and deeply significant topic for my own personal journey right now. The painful process: I have invested over a year and a half and too much of my life in thinking of a research topic, getting support from those around me to continue, and writing my only (in this lifetime) magnum opus. I am grateful to be finished.

I am also tremendously grateful for those support systems that have held my hand and given me so much encouragement along the way. These include my research advisor Crystal Hayes who showed much patience and kept me motivated and focused despite my (too) many ideas, my dear Smithies, my partner Nico who is my rock as I am his water, my dog Angus, my family, the wonderful teachers and healers who continue to guide me on my path, and my friends and community in Durham that did not blame me for going absent for many months and let me resume my friendships where I left off. Thank you.

And finally to the wonderful 15 participants I interviewed and the over 60 people who contacted me to be interviewed. You and your experiences are what kept me motivated through this process and allowed me to deeply integrate parts of my self that had felt very much unfinished. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
III. METHODOLOGY.....	36
IV. FINDINGS	43
V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	134
REFERENCES	144
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: HSR Approval Letter	149
Appendix B: Protocol Change Forms and Approval Forms.....	150
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer.....	153
Appendix D: Informed Consent for Initial HSR Proposal.....	154
Appendix E: Interview Questions.....	157
Appendix F: Volunteer Transcription Confidentiality Form.....	160

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In my first year at the Smith College Masters of Social Work program, I stepped into my first ever group for mixed and multiracial people. I had no idea at that point that I would embark on a three-year journey exploring what it means to be mixed and perceived as White. I remember though in those early days of the mixed student group meetings, I felt an immediate and deep sense of solidarity and camaraderie. These were my people. Some of us presented as visibly people of color, other of us presented as White; some of us identified as people of color and others did not. There was an immense diversity of experience, yet we all shared something in common: we had parents who were of different races and ethnicities. We navigated a liminal in-between space of coming from families of origin of mostly monoracial identities, yet holding multiracial identities ourselves. This was the first place where I really acknowledged and began to integrate the mixed identity. The identity, the term, and the community that I had searched for so long was now accessible and right in front of me.

During that first summer at Smith, I also began to understand the depth of my own internalized monoracism. Monoracism, which will be explained in more depth in Chapter 2, is the privileging of monoraciality (that which is of a single race) and the oppression of multiraciality (that which is of more than one race). At that time, however, I did not have that phrase or construct to describe what I had experienced for so many

years, just the felt embodied sense. In those early days of exploring my mixed identity at Smith, I started to see more clearly how I had constrained my identity within monoracial terms when I was younger and even in college during a period of racial identity exploration. I was either White or I was Latina; I was Caucasian or I was Peruvian. Never both. It was either or. A way of seeing myself that I had deeply internalized from the dominant cultural discourse on race. There was no in-between space, until I stepped into that group. There I could claim both my identities, not having to choose between them. I could sit in a place of being both, in a liminal space, not either-or.

During the second year of the Smith program, all Masters students enroll in the Racism in the U.S. course where we explore race, social justice, issues of privilege and oppression, and how these affect our work as clinical social workers. We choose a class based on our racial identity. We are offered three choices: a class for the dominant perspective (White clinicians); a class for clinicians of color; or a class of multiple perspectives that anyone could join. Unsurprisingly, there was no class for people who are multiracial and mixed race. During my year to choose this class, while people of monoracial identities had a clearer sense of which class to take, those of us who were mixed were left wondering where we fit in.

I realized early on in that process of selecting a class section that I could take any of the classes. This left me even more confused as to which one I should take or wanted to take. I have at times identified as a person of color. I grew up the daughter of a woman of color in a bilingual household and witnessed the many experiences of both my Peruvian mother and my many relatives of color. Yet, I was also aware of how I am often not perceived as a person of color and do not have the experiences of oppression based on

skin color as some of my peers have who would be in that class. I am always initially perceived as White by others and only could explore the privilege I receive from that in the class for White students. Yet, I do not identify only as White and it would feel like a betrayal if I dismissed the full complexity of my identity to fit into the narrow racialized spaces created. While I could be in any class, there was no class where I could explore my unique positionality as the daughter of a White man and a woman of color and the privilege and oppression I experience and understand as a result of this identity. After attending an anti-racist training in Durham, North Carolina that also created caucuses for White people and people of color, I realized this practice is not uncommon. In many social justice spaces, there exists a binary of racialized spaces of White and people of color. There is often no space for those of us who may hold both identities. This is what motivated me to interview others like me: individuals who are navigating a complex and at times contradictory identity of being mixed race and perceived as White.

Race as a Social Construction

Race, like many other social identity categories, is a socially created construct to justify systems of privilege, inequality, and oppression. While some people believe race is biological, natural, and inherent, it is none of those qualities. As Michelle Alexander details in her book *The New Jim Crow*, race was constructed in the United States during early European imperialism and colonization to justify the genocide of Native people and the enslavement of Blacks from Africa (Alexander, 2011). Race was thus constructed based on arbitrary and, at times, subjective qualities of a person such as geographic area of origin, skin color, phenotype, and family of origin. While race is socially constructed, the real implications of this construct are tremendous on the lives of Americans today. A

system of privilege for whites and a system of oppression, marginalization, and violence for people of color were developed over the course of our history and continue to operate today supported by the larger systems of white supremacy and capitalism.

Race is often assumed to be given and fixed for an individual, static over a lifetime. While this may be true for many individuals, as a social construct, race is created relationally between people. Race and racial identity are developed within social context and in relationship with others through many markers and signifiers such as family ancestry, skin color and phenotype, name, language, and dialect. Because race is a social construction and developed interpersonally, its boundaries can be very subjective and fluid for some people. For example, someone may perceive certain racialized markers of a person such as skin color, assign them a race based on those markers, and then treat them according to the race assigned. This is often how race is constructed interpersonally and how systems of differential treatment (privilege and oppression) are maintained. A different person could assign a different race to that same person based on same or different markers such as accent and facial features and treat them differentially based on this other race assigned. Thus, race is often constructed relationally between people and its borders can be fluid and subjective.

Moreover, while that person may have two different races assigned to them by two different people, that person may actually hold a different racial identity that does not correspond to either of the races assigned to them by others. So, for example, a person may be perceived as Latino by some, as White by others, but actually identify racially as multiracial Asian and White. Thus the race assigned to a person that impacts differential treatment and how systems of privilege and oppression are enacted may actually be

different from the racial identity held by that person. Racial assignment is an overlapping, yet distinct, category from racial identity.

Racial Assignment and Racial Identity for the Mixed Race Person

For individuals who are multiracial (have biological parents of different races and ethnicities), the boundaries of race are often more fluid both in racial assignment and racial identity than for those who are monoracial (have biological parents of the same race). These multiracial individuals often occupy the “borderlands”, or the boundaries and spaces in between monoracial categories, which are constructed on the notion that individuals are of one race or ethnicity. These individuals may experience multiple and different racial assignments by others. They may also experience more choice and agency over their own racial identity because, as the children of parents of different races, there are more possible racial identities from which to choose. Mixed race individuals may identify within one monoracial group or category, occupy two at the same time, create a unique multiracial existence including or outside of monoracial categories, or fluctuate between any of these possibilities over time and depending on context.

Despite the possibility of greater agency in determining their racial identity than their monoracial peers, mixed race people are often policed according to monoracial constructs where monoracial categories are imposed on them by others and they often feel pressure to choose only one race or ethnicity. Moreover, mixed race individuals’ choice over their racial and ethnic identity may be constrained by many factors such as racial perception by others, physical appearance, early socialization, knowledge of language and cultural traditions, access and connection to members of racial groups, and the historical and social context in which they live.

Several mixed race scholars have sought to elucidate the factors or variables that influence the racial or ethnic identity choices of multiracial people (Renn, 2003; Root, 2002; Wijeyesinghe, 1992, 2001, 2012). These models seek to understand how the social identities of race and ethnicity for mixed people are influenced, constructed, and evolve based on social and personal influences and constructs. All of these models understand that racial and ethnic identity development for multiracial individuals can be a choice, potentially fluid and plural, and shaped by multiple factors. All of these models include physical appearance as one factor of many that influences the development, construction, and maintenance of racial identity for mixed race individuals.

Physical Appearance and Racial Misrecognition of Mixed Race People

Physical appearance is by far one of the most significant indicators of the social construction of race. How people racially code and assign race to others and then treat them differentially based on that race is often determined by one's physical appearance. Thus, physical appearance, perhaps greater than any other variable, influences and can constrain the ability of a mixed race person to choose their racial identity. Often, for monoracial individuals, physical appearance may determine and confirm their racial identity. For individuals of mixed race, however, there may exist an incongruence or mismatch between what race or ethnicity others perceive them to be based on physical appearance and how they actually identify racially or ethnically. Thus, many individuals who are mixed race often experience racial misrecognition or misperception where the race they are assigned by others is different from the race they identify as.

There are several reasons why individuals who are mixed race often experience racial misrecognition. First, as described above, race in the U.S. has often been

constructed through monoraciality where people are assumed to be of one race and that race is fixed and static through the lifetime. In contrast, mixed race people hold multiple racial ancestries and may identify with any, part, or all of their racial backgrounds. Thus, they may be assigned one monoracial identity by others because of the privileging of monoraciality in the U.S. but actually hold a different racial identity, leading to racial misrecognition. For example, an individual who has a Black and a White parent may be assigned the singular monoracial race of White by others because of how they are perceived physically, yet may identify as Black and multiracial.

Second, mixed race people also frequently experience racial misrecognition because, since they are the children of parents of different races, they may have physical features that do not indicate an easily identifiable race. These individuals may have more racially ambiguous qualities and thus may be more likely to experience racial misperception. Because of both the privileging of monoraciality and the ambiguity of physical appearance, individuals of mixed race may experience increased racial misrecognition than their monoracial counterparts, in addition to greater fluidity of their own racial identities and the racial assignment given to them by others.

This racial incongruence or misrecognition in how they are perceived and how they identify can create intrapsychic and interpersonal conflict in mixed race individuals. They may find that their choice of identity options is greatly constrained or their racial or ethnic identity is hidden or denied by others. Individuals may experience identity denial and lack of belonging in monoracial or even mixed race groups or spaces depending on their physical presentation. Thus, rather than physical appearance supporting their ownself-understanding, as is the case for many monoracial people, racial misperception

may hinder individuals from experiencing integration and authenticity of their racial identities.

Study Population and Purpose of this Study

In this study, I seek to explore the phenomenon of racial misrecognition for a very specific population of mixed race individuals. The population under study are multiracial individuals who are perceived as White by others based on their physical appearance yet do not identify as White or solely as White. Through a qualitative study interviewing a sample of individuals of this population, I hope to understand these individuals' experiences of racial perception by others based on their physical appearance, their own racial identity exploration and development, and the incongruence between how they identify racially (not as White or not solely as White) and how they are perceived racially (as White).

I am interested in studying these individuals because first, as I described above, this population reflects my own experiences as a mixed White and Latina woman who is perceived as White by others. Moreover, I believe that these individuals sit in a unique positionality of a paradoxical experience. For many people, physical appearance is a primary means of constructing race and determining differential treatment based on systems of privilege and oppression. And yet, for these individuals, other factors, particularly racial background of family of origin, can be more significant than physical appearance in constructing their racial identity. These are individuals who are perceived as White by others and thus receive and experience light- and white-skin privilege, yet they hold a non-dominant racial identity that is hidden. For some of these individuals, I suspect I will find heightened intrapsychic or interpersonal conflict where they may find

that their racial identities are constrained by their physical appearance or denied by others who engage in racial border patrolling. I anticipate that some of the individuals in the sample will have ways of navigating and negotiating their positionalities and may even harness them in informative and integrative ways.

As will be described in Chapter 2 on Methodology, I have used a structured open-ended method to interview multiracial individuals within this population. I seek to understand how these individuals construct, maintain, and negotiate their racial identities given the incongruence they experience between how they identify and how they are perceived. In particular, I will focus on several thematic areas that serve to highlight experiences related to this unique positionality: how these individuals understand their racial and ethnic identities; racial perception by others and disclosure of identity: markers and indicators of race; how race is understood within their family of origin context; experiences of racial privilege and oppression including white privilege, racism, and monoracism; and their identity as people of color.

Definition of Key Constructs

Before describing the implications of this research study, I would like to review how I use and define key constructs of this study including race, ethnicity, monoracial, and mixed race.

Race, Ethnicity, and Racial Identity

Scholars of research and literature of social identities experience the paradox of both seeking to deconstruct notions of biological identity (e.g. race, gender) while at the same time reifying these same identities through their recognition and use in academic literature. This paradox also plagues scholars of mixed race and ethnic studies who seek

to understand and validate the experience of individuals who are of more than one race or ethnicity while also recognizing the social construction and complexity of the concepts of race and ethnicity.

While the U.S. Census creates a strict separation between race and ethnicity, recognizing five races (American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and White) and one ethnicity (Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish), as described before, these categories represent socially constructed categories that are in actuality much more complex and subject to ambiguous and subjective criteria. For example, while the U.S. Census implies that an individual who is Latino (ethnicity) must also be of a separate race, individuals can conflate the constructs of race and ethnicity and assume that if you are Latino, you are not White.

For the purposes of this study, I use Wijeyesinghe's (2012) definition of race and ethnicity as "socially constructed concepts that divide the overall human population into subgroups based on aspects such as physical appearance, place of ancestral origin, historical and cultural experiences, language, and customs," (Wijeyesinghe, 2012, p. 82). This definition recognizes the social construction of race and ethnicity as determined by many factors. As implied by Wijeyesinghe's definition, I will not choose to strictly separate race and ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino). I will describe the implications of this below in detailing the population under study.

Monoracial and Mixed Race

For the purposes of this study, I use the terms "monoracial" and "monoraciality" to refer to things, people, or practices that are of a single race (Hamako, 2014). In contrast to those terms, multiple terms are used to describe people of mixed racial, ethnic

or cultural heritage (e.g. multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, biracial, bicultural, mixed heritage, mixed roots, mixed ancestry, mixed race, mixed ethnicity, mixed). In this study, I primarily use the words “multiracial”, “mixed” or “mixed race” to denote people who have biological parents of different races. I also include individuals of mixed Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino ethnic heritages who have one biological parent who is Hispanic/Latino and one biological parent who is non-Hispanic/Latino. Aside from individuals of two or more racial heritages, I choose to include individuals of mixed Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino ethnic heritages because, as Jackson, Yoo, and Guevarra (2012) describe, these individuals are frequently included in research on multiracial identity and share similar identity development processes with other multiracial groups.

Implications of this Study

This study will explore the experiences of a subset of mixed race individuals – those who are perceived as White by others based on physical appearance. The population and visibility of individuals of mixed racial and ethnic heritage has grown rapidly in recent years and thus this study will contribute to a growing literature on the experiences of mixed race people. In 2000, when the U.S. Census first allowed respondents to identify with more than one race, 6.8 million selected more than one racial category. That year, a surprising 25.7% of the population under age 18 indicated two or more races (United States Census Bureau, 2010). In the 2010 Census, that number increased by almost a full-third to 9 million individuals (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The number of multiracial individuals may actually be much larger than this as the U.S. Census figures do not account for multiracial people who choose to report only one

race nor does it account for individuals of mixed Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino heritage (Jackson, Yoo, & Guevarra, 2012). Because of this rapid increase in the number of individuals identifying as multiracial, the field of clinical social work, along with other academic fields, must explore and understand the needs and experiences of this population.

Additionally, because these individuals are at the boundaries or borders of racial categories, studying this population can elucidate important aspects of race and ethnicity of monoracial and monoethnic individuals as well. Rebecca Chiyoko King-O’Riain, at the Keynote Speech of the 2014 Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference, describes how mixed race people are the terrain where racial and ethnic identities and borders are enacted:

The mixed experience shares something in common across these contexts. This is the experience of being not simply a person in society but a terrain across which a society plays out its identities and borders – and demands that mixed bodies and persons conform to impossible competing demands. These terrains may be radically different across societies but the experience of living with or between them contains some strongly shared elements (King-O’Riain, 2014).

Thus, an exploration of the experience of mixed individuals can further the development and understanding of our constructs of race and ethnicity and elucidate the experience of individuals of any race or ethnicity. .

In the following pages, I will first provide a review of relevant literature in Chapter 2 related to the experience of this population of mixed race individuals who are perceived as White. I will then describe the study’s methodology in Chapter 3. Chapter 4

will detail the many thematic findings of interviews with 14 individuals of this population. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will review and synthesize key points of these findings and highlight areas of future research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

In conducting a review of relevant literature of this study, I could find no literature that specifically examines the experiences of this specific population, mixed race individuals who are perceived as white by others based on their physical appearance and thus experience racial misidentification. Because of the lack of literature on this particular population, I will review literature from several related areas. I will provide a summary of several areas of literature related to the racial identity, identity development, and experiences of privilege and oppression of this population.

First, I will summarize literature on racial identity development models and theories, including models of monoracial identity formation (white and people of color) and models of multiracial identity formation. Next, I will explore the literature that identifies the influences and factors that shape multiracial identity formation, with an emphasis on theories that include physical appearance as a factor. I will then briefly review literature that develops constructs around racial identification and misidentification of mixed race people as the individuals of this study experience. Specific to this population of mixed race individuals who are perceived as white and thus experience white privilege, I will explore literature on whiteness and white privilege. Finally, I will examine some of the emerging literature on monoracism or oppression of multiracial people.

Literature on Racial Identity Development Models

In this section, I will summarize racial identity development models and theories starting with the earliest models of racial identity formation of individuals with monoracial identities (people of color and whites) developed in the 1970s and 1980s to the more recent models of biracial and multiracial identity formation. As will be described, the early models of monoracial identity development focus on systems of power, privilege, and oppression and the implications of white supremacy and racism for white and person of color identity development. In contrast, the biracial and multiracial models of identity development emphasize the non-binary nature and fluidity of racial identity and the process of how these individuals choose and change their racial identity over time and across context.

Because the participants in this study are multiracial, are perceived as white based on physical appearance, and all have one biological parent who is white and one who is a person of color, it is critical to review both monoracial and multiracial identity development models since they each provide a unique lens with which to understand racial identity formation and negotiation of these individuals. While the monoracial identity development models do not take into account mixed race identity, they do help understand how these individuals may navigate systems of white privilege and racism as mixed individuals who are perceived as white. The mixed race identity models do not address issues of privilege and oppression as the monoracial models do, but they demonstrate the fluidity and complexity by which these individuals may identify.

Monoracial Identity Development Models

Before explaining the identity development models for people of color and whites, this section will briefly review a framework for understanding the creation of these models. Janet Helms, a counseling psychologist and pioneer in the development of racial identity formation models, provides a framework for which we can understand racial identity theory and models, particularly the monoracial models. According to Helms (1995), racial identity theory is premised on race as a social construction, not a biological reality. The early theories of racial development for monoracial individuals see race as determined by socially defined inclusion criteria (usually skin color and phenotype) that create different conditions of domination or oppression that are not biologically-based. These models view racial identification with one's societally designated racial group as a response to environments in which societal resources are differentially allocated on the basis of racial group membership. Within the hierarchy that determines allocation, whites are at the top of the hierarchy and members of the entitled group. People of color are members of the unentitled group. Following this analysis, Helms (1995) suggests that racial identity development models for whites involve abandonment of entitlement whereas for people of color they constitute working through internalized racism. The premise of these racial identity development models is the development of racial consciousness where the final stage is an acceptance of race as a positive aspect of self for both people of color and whites (Helms, 1984).

Helms (1995) also describes how racial identity theory assumes a common racial identity development process within each racial group and that this process can be articulated in sequential stages or statuses. These stages or statuses demonstrate the

“dynamic cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that govern a person’s interpretation of racial information in her or his interpersonal environments,” (Helms, 1995, p. 184). The nature of these stages, however, differs depending on the racial group due to differential socialization based on race and differential reactions or adaptation to that socialization. Moreover, the stages or statuses range from least developmentally mature to more mature or sophisticated. The stages or statuses for two monoracial models, for whites and people of color, will be reviewed below.

People of Color Identity Development Models

Many scholars have put forth identity development models for specific racial groups of people of color such as blacks, Latino/as, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans (see Cross, 1971; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Horse, 2001; Jackson, 1976; Kim, 2001). While there are multiple models to describe the identity development of specific people of color racial groups, two models that generalize across people of color are widely cited: Helms’ People of Color Identity Development Model (1984, 1995) and Atkinson, Morten, and Sue’s Minority Identity Development Model (1989). Because of the similarity in content between these models, I will briefly review only Helms’ model in this section.

Helms’ (1995) describes five statuses of identity development of people of color in her model. She describes how in the progression through statuses, people of color unlearn or surmount society’s racist beliefs that have been internalized. In the first status, conformity or pre-encounter, people of color rely on external self-definition that devalues their own group and creates allegiance to white dominant culture and norms. This status, more than any other, is characterized by the experience of internalized racism. In the

second status, dissonance, there is ambivalence or confusion concerning one's own socioracial group commitment and socioracial self-definition. In the next status, immersion/emersion, a person of color idealizes one's own socioracial group and denigrates that which is perceived as white. In this status, people of color use their own-group external standards to self-define, and value own-group commitment and loyalty. Internalization, the fourth status, is characterized by a positive commitment to one's own socioracial group along with the ability to assess and respond objectively to members of the dominant group. In the last status, integrative awareness, a person of color demonstrates the capacity to value one's own collective identities as well as empathize and collaborate with members of other oppressed groups.

White Identity Development Models

In the early 1980s, following the development of the Black identity formation models, several scholars put forth identity development models of white racial identity. Similar to people of color models, early white identity development models stemmed from a racism analysis that seeks to understand the way racial privilege and oppression impact individuals, including white people, rather than an analysis of cultural differences that focuses on white identity built from a shared white culture (Hardiman, 2001). Two identity development models for white people are widely cited: Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model (1995) and Hardiman's White Identity Development Model (1982). Similar to the prior section, I will focus on one identity development model for white racial identity, Hardiman's model, as the progression of the stages in her model are similar to those of Helms' model.

Hardiman (1982) put forth the five-stage White Identity Development model, which sought to understand and explain how race and racism in the United States affected white people. The first stage is no social consciousness of race or naivete about race through early childhood. At this stage, whites lack awareness of the social meaning of race and the value attached to one race over another. The second stage is acceptance, where a white individual accepts and internalizes racism including a sense of racial superiority, although this sense of dominance or privilege is often unconscious. In the third stage, resistance, white individuals begin to question the dominant paradigm about race and resist or reject their internalized assumptions about race. The fourth stage is redefinition where white people begin to accept and take responsibility for the dominant system of whiteness and re-define themselves as working against racism. They take ownership of their whiteness rather than trying to deny it or embrace another racial or ethnic identity. In the last stage, internalization, white individuals integrate and internalize their increased consciousness of race and racism into all aspects of their life.

Biracial and Multiracial Identity Development Models

Following the review of the white and person of color monoracial identity development models, this section will explore the multiracial identity development models. Prior to the 1990s, scholars seeking to understand the identity development of mixed race individuals relied on the monoracial identity formation models put forth for people of color, for example the Helms model described above. The monoracial models, as described above, primarily focus on how individuals navigate systems of power, privilege, and oppression, either unlearning and disrupting internalized racism for people of color or white entitlement and privilege for white people. These models were linear in

nature and did not allow for fluidity of identity. Moreover, they were constructed from a binary perspective of race where individuals are either white or people of color.

Monoracial models did not allow for individuals to hold several positions of identity at the same time (e.g. biracial and Black) nor fluid identities that depend on time and context (e.g. Black sometimes and biracial other times).

Early Models/Theories of Biracial Identity Development

In 1990, two scholars of mixed race studies, Root (1990) and Poston (1990), wrote seminal pieces putting forth separate conceptualizations of biracial identity development theory in response to the dearth of multiracial identity development models. Poston created a model that addressed the dominant cultural norms of monoraciality where a multiracial person may feel compelled to choose a monoracial identity and then experience conflict by doing so. Similar to the models described above, this model is constructed through a linear sequence of stages of racial identity development. Root, however, presented a model that allowed for identity resolution with multiple and fluid identities of multiracial individuals.

Poston's model, the Biracial Identity Development Model, contains five levels: personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration (Poston, 1990). In the first stage, biracial individuals may be aware of membership in a racial or ethnic groups, but their personal identity is separate from the racial reference group and based more on factors such as self-esteem and self-worth learned in the family. In the second stage, choice of group categorization, biracial individuals feel compelled to choose an identity based on factors such as physical appearance, cultural knowledge, perceived group status and social support. While biracial

people will sometimes choose a ‘multicultural existence’ emphasizing the racial heritage of both parents, oftentimes, they will choose one parent’s monoracial heritage as dominant. This choice can create a time of crisis and alienation. In the next stage, enmeshment and denial, biracial individuals experience confusion, guilt, or anger at having to choose one identity that is not fully expressive of one’s background and denies parts of themselves. Moreover, the individual may experience lack of acceptance from either or both social groups. In the fourth stage, while individuals may still primarily identify with one racial or ethnic group, they begin to appreciate their multiple identities and learn about both racial/ethnic heritages and cultures. In the last stage, individuals recognize and value all of their identities and thus experience wholeness and a secure, integrated multiracial identity.

Poston (1990) put forth a linear progression through stages concluding in the integration of biracial identity into a multicultural existence, a sole/singular identity outcome. As Renn (2008) notes, Poston’s model prohibits the possibility of multiple normative identity outcomes for biracial individuals. For example, Poston’s model prohibits mixed race individuals from choosing a monoracial identity over the multiracial identity.

Root (1990) sought to address the limitations in prior racial identity development models such as the resolution of racial identity in only one possible healthy outcome and the expectation that biracial individuals with white heritage reject majority culture and immerse themselves in a minority culture. Root proposed a non-linear model with four positive resolutions of biracial identity: acceptance of the identity society assigns; identification with both racial groups, identification with a single racial group, and

identification as a new racial group (biracial). She also articulated that a biracial individual may self-identify with more than one of these resolutions at same time or move fluidly among identities over time.

Root (1996) elaborated on her original identity development model by describing biracial identity development as “in, across, and/or between categories,” (Renn, 2003). Drawing on literature on borderlands and border crossings, Root described how a multiracial individual may resolve “other” status through one of four “border crossings”:

- (a) having ‘both feet in both groups’ or being able to hold and merge multiple perspective simultaneously;
- (b) situational ethnicity and race, or consciously shifting racial foreground and background in different settings;
- (c) a decision to sit on the border, claiming a multiracial central reference point; and
- (d) creating a home base in one identity and making forays into others,” (Renn, 2003, p. 384). In this model, any mode or combination of modes of border crossing is considered a healthy resolution of mixed race identity in contrast to Poston’s model that puts forth a multiracial identity as the only outcome. Root has continued to refine and expand her model, which is now referred to as the ecological framework for understanding multiracial identity.

Recent Theories of Multiracial Identity Development

Building on the work of Root (1990, 1996), Renn (2000, 2003, 2008) identified five patterns observed among mixed-race college students, some of which mirror Root’s resolution strategies of biracial identity development. These five patterns are: a monoracial identity, similar to Root’s third resolution; multiple monoracial identities, shifting according to situational factors, similar to Root’s second resolution; a multiracial identity as a distinct racial group, similar to Root’s fourth resolution; an extraracial

identity by deconstructing race or opting out of identification with U.S. racial categories; and a situational identity that is stable but demonstrates a fluid identity pattern, identifying differently in different contexts (Renn, 2008). Rejecting a linear progression of identity development toward a sole racial identity resolution, Renn also allows for and finds in her studies that college students often identify with more than one of these patterns.

Another mixed race scholar, Rockquemore (1999), found four types of racial identity options for biracial people in her research of Black and white biracial individuals. These types are: a) a singular identity (singular Black or white); b) a border identity (exclusively biracial); c) a protean identity (sometimes Black, sometimes white, sometimes biracial); and d) a transcendent identity (no racial identity).

In sum, early models of racial identity development of the 1980s focused on the monoracial identities of whites and people of color and explored the implications of white supremacy, power, privilege and racial oppression on the racial identity development process. Starting in the early 1990s, scholars such as Poston and Root articulated models of multiracial identity development. While Poston focused on the identity choice conflict experienced by multiracial individuals, Root's model addressed the fluidity of multiracial identity and the possibility of multiple positive outcomes of identity development. More recent theorists such as Renn and Rockquemore built on Root's work and created similar categories for identity choice of mixed individuals.

As described above, all these models, both monoracial and multiracial, may be relevant to the experience of individuals who are multiracial and perceived as white. The monoracial identity models can elucidate how these individuals negotiate experiences of

privilege and oppression based on their mixed identities (with a white parent and parent of color) and the perception by others that they are white. The multiracial identity development models can highlight how mixed race individuals choose multiple or fluid racial identities over time.

Literature on Factors Influencing Multiracial Identity Development

In addition to putting forth multiracial identity development models, the field of mixed race studies and its scholars have increasingly sought to understand the processes by which multiracial individuals come to hold their identities and the factors that influence these identities, particularly through person-in-environment, psychosocial, or ecological models (Renn 2000, 2003, 2008; Root, 2002; Wallace, 2001, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2001, 2012). As described below, many of these models include physical appearance of the individual as a factor that influences racial identity formation.

Root's Ecological Framework for Understanding Multiracial Identity Development (2003) emphasizes factors such as physical appearance, family socialization, and less visible factors such as generation, gender, sexual orientation, and geographical region. Critical to Root's theory is how physical appearance interacts with other factors to predict life experiences and chosen racial and ethnic identity.

In her studies of mixed race college students, Kristen Renn (2002, 2003, 2008) has pioneered the exploration of identity development among multiracial individuals using an ecological framework based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which focuses on the influences of the Person, Process, and Context. The Person component includes family background and parents' heritage, degree of cultural knowledge transmitted to the student before college, prior experiences with members of

their own and other cultural groups, and physical appearance. The Process component influencing racial or ethnic development of mixed race college students focuses on features of the college academic environment that provide a cognitive and increasingly complex understanding of race and ethnicity. Lastly, the Context component explores the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems of the college environment. In a summary of the literature published by herself and others, Renn (2008) found that there are three recurring ecological influences on multiracial identity development of college student identities across the literature: physical appearance, cultural knowledge, and peer culture.

Wijeyesinghe (2001, 2012) has put forth the Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI) that consists of eight factors that affect choice of racial identity. This model includes the following factors: racial ancestry; early experiences and socialization; cultural attachment; physical appearance; social and historical context; political awareness and orientation; other social identities; and spirituality.

According to Wijeyesinghe (2012), many of these factors overlap with and influence each other. Wijeyesinghe's also put forth the notion of greater incongruence or lack of fit between these eight factors and how as a result of this lack of fit, more intrapersonal or interpersonal conflict can emerge around the individual's racial identity development. This is particularly relevant to the population of this study because all of these individuals experience an incongruence between the racial identity factor of physical appearance and other factors that lead them to hold a non-white racial identity. Thus, according to Wijeyesinghe, we would expect the individuals of this population to experience more conflict over their racial identity than individuals who experience more congruence between factors.

Thus, all of these theories present multiple factors that influence the racial identity development of mixed race individuals including family background, socialization, and cultural knowledge. Significantly, all of these theories include physical appearance as a critical factor in determining how multiracial individuals will choose and negotiate their racial identity. Wijeyesinghe also speaks to the conflict that can occur when there is a lack of fit between racial identity factors, which is relevant to this population under study.

Literature on Racial Identification and Misidentification of Multiracial Individuals

Other scholars in the field of mixed race studies have conceptualized a mismatch or incongruence in the way an individual identifies racially or ethnically and the way other people perceive them, often based on physical appearance. In this section, I will review several constructs put forth by scholars to articulate the mismatch between a person's racial identity and the identity assigned to them by others. These constructs are critical to this study as the participants in this study experience this incongruence of being mixed and multiracial and frequently assigned white racial identity by others.

Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) developed the constructs of *racial identity* as an individual's own self-understanding of their race and *racial identification* as how others categorize that individual and they explored how these two concepts are different. They noted that for mixed race people, these constructs along with *racial category*, or the racial identities that are available and chosen in a specific context, are not perfectly correlated whereas for monoracial individuals they are highly correlated. Thus, a mixed race individual is more likely than a monoracial individual to experience an incongruence between their self-chosen racial identity and the racial identification assigned by others. Another mixed race scholar, Wijeyesinghe (2012), differentiated

between *chosen* and *ascribed* racial group membership, paralleling the constructs of racial identity and racial identification of Rockquemore, Brunnsma, and Delgado (2009).

McDonough and Brunnsma (2012) drew on research conducted for an exploratory study of multiracial individuals with one white parent and one non-white parent to understand the effects of physical appearance on racial identity development. The participants interviewed frequently cited a mismatch in how they perceived their identity and how others perceived them based on phenotype. Informed by these interviews, McDonough and Brunnsma identified the concept of *racial misidentification* or racial misrecognition by others in the development of racial identity of multiracial individuals. They found that racial misrecognition occurred frequently for participants who were often mistaken by others to be monoracial, either as a person of color or white. These scholars developed the construct of racial misidentification after it was identified through interviews that had already taken place; no empirical studies to date have set out to intentionally explore the influence of this mismatch in chosen and ascribed racial identity based on physical appearance on the racial identity development of multiracial individuals. In this study, I will explore the effects of the racial misidentification of multiracial individuals who are assigned a white monoracial identity.

Literature on White Privilege and Whiteness

In this section, I briefly review some of the literature related to whiteness and white privilege. This literature is relevant to this study because the participants of this study are often or always perceived as white by others based on their physical appearance and all the participants have one parent who identifies as white. This literature can help

elucidate how these mixed race individuals navigate and negotiate experiences of whiteness and white privilege.

As described in Chapter 1, race, including the notion of whiteness and white identity, were constructed in the U.S. during European imperialism to justify violence and enslavement of Native Americans and Blacks. Lipsitz (2013) describes how there exists a “possessive investment in whiteness” where the construct of whiteness was created by the capital-owning class in the U.S. and is now supported by a system of capitalism that designates economic benefits to those deemed as white and economic disadvantage for those assigned non-white racial identity. Thus, whiteness was constructed to support the dominant position of European Americans in the economic hierarchy.

Because race and whiteness are socially constructed, the boundaries of white racial identity have shifted considerably over the last hundreds of years in the U.S. For example, the Irish, Italians, and Jewish were once considered not white and now are included in white racial identity. Thus, the borders of white racial identity is not fixed but has changed over time.

The benefits that are designated to people assigned white racial identity are now understood colloquially as “white privilege”. While the concept of white privilege was used as early as the 1960s and 1970s, the term gained popularity in academic circles and public discourse after the publication of Peggy McIntosh’s seminal 1987 article *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack*. In this article, McIntosh defines white privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious,” (McIntosh, 1987).

McIntosh roots white privilege in systems of power and dominance where those at the top of the hierarchy, whites, benefit from the systemic oppression of people of color.

McIntosh goes on to enumerate over twenty conditions where she experiences skin-color privilege such as wide representation, visibility, and sense of belonging of her race in education systems, media, and many other spaces, and the benefits of the invisibility of whiteness such as her action's never being linked to her race.

McIntosh articulates other aspects of white privilege, whiteness, and white supremacy. McIntosh points out that not only do these innumerable privileges exist for white people based on their skin color, but that there is also a system in place that maintains the oblivion of whites to the existence of white privilege. For example, whites are taught that racism is perpetuated through individual acts and not “invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth,” (McIntosh, 1987). Thus, whites are taught they are not racist if they do not engage in individual acts of racism and that their moral state is linked to individual moral will, not to systems of oppression and domination. Moreover, whites are taught to believe the “myth of meritocracy” that their hard work, not their race, determines their life outcomes. In addition to the discourse that suggests individual action only causes racism and achievement, part of how whiteness maintains the system of white supremacy is that whiteness is seen as invisible, normal, and objective or, as Lipsitz writes, “an unmarked category against which difference is constructed,” (Lipsitz, 2013, p. 78). These narratives preserve the system of white supremacy, power, and white privilege and create conditions that obscure the system from visibility.

Because the individuals of this study all have one parent who is white and are perceived as white by others based on their physical appearance, they have experiences of intimacy with whiteness and white privilege. The history of whiteness demonstrates how it has served to create an oppressive economic hierarchy and, like all racial identities, is fluid with changing boundaries over time and context. Whiteness creates a system of white privilege that is based on socially constructed qualities of whiteness as invisible, unmarked, and normal and privileges those who appear white. In Chapter 4 on Findings, we will see how the fluidity of whiteness and the reality of white privilege play out in the lives of the individuals of this study.

Literature on Monoraciality and Multiracial Oppression

As the literature on the mixed race population has developed, so too have the concepts of monoraciality and monoracism or the oppression of multiracial people. We can understand monoraciality as the system of the identification and racialization as of a single race. Within the U.S., there exists a privileging of monoraciality where monoraciality is normalized within the dominant cultural discourse and presumed of individuals (Hamako, 2014).

Johnston and Nadal (2010) originally coined the notion of multiracial oppression, also referred to as monoracism, and defined it as “a social system of psychological inequality where individuals who do not fit monoracial categories may be oppressed on systemic and interpersonal levels because of underlying assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories,” (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 125). Defined by Hamako, monoracism is “the systemic privileging of things, people and practices that are racialized as “single-race” and/or “racially pure” (e.g., “Monoracial”) and the oppression

of things, people, and practices that are racialized as being of more than one-race (e.g., “Multiracial,” “Mixed-Race,” “Multiethnic,” etc.) (Hamako, 2014). Thus, we can understand monoracism as the system of privileging monoraciality and oppressing multiraciality.

In addition to defining multiracial oppression, these authors have also articulated the mechanisms by which monoracism operates. For example, Hamako (2014) describes how monoracism occurs on multiple levels of analysis including interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels. An example of institutional monoracism is the structure of data collection systems of federal, state, and local governments that have mandated that individuals could only check one race nor allow for a multiracial identification.

Johnston and Nadal (2010) have focused on the phenomenon of interpersonal monoracism or what they identify as microaggressions based on multiracial status. Building on the literature on microaggressions towards people of marginalized social identities, these scholars put forth a definition of multiracial microaggressions as “the daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, enacted by monoracial persons that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights toward multiracial individuals or groups,” (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 126). They propose a taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions and identified five categories of microaggressions towards multiracial people.

The first category they identified is exclusion or isolation when multiracial people are made to feel excluded or isolated based on their multiracial status. They identified several subthemes under this category. For example, within this category of exclusion and isolation, multiracial people may be questioned on their authenticity by the

implication of “You aren’t (insert race here) enough” which sends the message that the multiracial individual is different or not normative because they are not monoracial.

Another subtheme within this category is endorsement of a monoracial society and norms exemplified by, for example, demographic forms and applications that only allow for designating a single race.

A second category is exoticization and objectification when a multiracial person is dehumanized or treated like an object. For example, multiracial people are often asked the question “What are you?” by others which indicates the objectification of mixed race people. Subthemes of this category are when multiracial people are objectified physically as “the most beautiful people of the world” or when multiracial people are objectified as “the racialized ideal” of the future.

In the next category of multiracial microaggressions, there is the assumption of monoracial identity or mistaken identity when multiracial people are assumed or mistaken to be monoracial (or a member of a group they do not identify with). Johnston and Nadal (2010) describe how people often make the mistaken assumption that everyone around them is monoracial. This can lead to microaggressions such as others questioning the authenticity of a multiracial person’s biological family or a multiracial person witnessing oppressive comments others might not say if they knew how the person identified racially.

The fourth category is the denial of multiracial reality and experiences such as when multiracial people are not allowed to choose their own racial identities. Johnston and Nadal (2010) articulate an example of this as when a multiracial person is accused of

“acting or wanting to be white” with the implied message that they are not allowed to act or be white even if it is part of their racial heritage.

In the last category, pathologizing of identity or experiences, a multiracial persons’ identities or experiences are viewed as psychological abnormal. For example, the historical stereotype of the “tragic mulatto” caught between racial groups but not accepted by either showcases this phenomenon of pathologizing. A subtheme of this is psychopathology where, for example, a counselor or therapist may often bring up racial issues without a multiracial person having identified those as a presenting concern.

Similarly to Johnston and Nadal (2010), Heather Dalmage (2013) has identified ways that racial borders are patrolled for multiracial people, and specifically multiracial children in her work. While the history of white supremacy is a history of the construction and application of race by people in the dominant position (whites), Dalmage notes that through the civil rights movement, groups of color struggled for liberation and self-declaration where they began to define themselves. The borders of racial groups and identity were suddenly determined within the groups of color rather than solely imposed by whites. Thus, racial categories and groups have been constructed through white supremacy and now are also maintained through within-group boundaries. Dalmage describes how people who patrol the borders of racial identity can come from any racial group. These “border patrollers” or “race police” believe race is fixed and static, that they can determine the authenticity of someone’s racial identity, and that they can offer or refuse another person’s acceptance into a racial group.

Dalmage (2013) goes on to describe the five ways that multiracial children experience border patrolling. First, the multiracial child’s physicality can be patrolled

where there are racial implications to their choice of dress and appearance. Second, the linguistics of multiracial children are patrolled such as their ability to speak the language of their racial or ethnic group, whether it be a dialect of English or a non-English language. Next, multiracial children may experience patrolling of their interactions with members of the out-group where they are expected to deny all connections to people of the out-group. Fourth, the geographies of multiracial children are patrolled. Since all social spaces are raced, where a multiracial child and family chooses to live, eat, sit, etc. can be patrolled racially by others. Finally, the cultural capital of multiracial children is patrolled to determine who, through cultural knowledge, is a loyal and credible insider. While Dalmage articulates the ways that multiracial children are racially patrolled by others, these types of multiracial oppression can easily apply to multiracial adults as well.

The emerging concepts of monoraciality and monoracism or the oppression of multiracial people has been articulated in the work of Hamako (2014), Johnston and Nadal (2010), and Dalmage (2013), among other mixed race scholars. As will be showcased in Chapter 4 on Findings, these concepts of monoraciality and multiracial oppression inform how we can understand the experiences of mixed race people who are perceived as white by others and how they negotiate and navigate this identity. These individuals both experience privilege based on their physical appearance, namely white privilege, and also experience border patrolling and other forms of monoracism because they have mixed race identities in a society that privileges monoraciality.

In addition to an understanding of monoraciality and multiracial oppression, this chapter also reviewed several other literature areas pertinent to this population. The racial identity models of both monoracial formation and multiracial formation were reviewed

which gives a foundation for understanding the racial development of the individuals of this study who experience a multiracial identity, have biological parents with monoracial identities, and experience assumptions by others of monoraciality. Moreover, this chapter described models of the factors that influence racial identity development including physical appearance along with the work of scholars that have sought to understand racial misidentification of mixed race individuals. Lastly, because the individuals of this study are perceived as white by others, hold white racial ancestry, and many speak to experiences of white privilege, this chapter also explored literature on whiteness and white privilege.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the experiences of multiracial individuals who experience racial misidentification or a mismatch or incongruence in their own self-understanding of their racial and ethnic identity and the racial identity assigned to them by others based on their physical appearance. Within this group of individuals who experience racial misidentification, this study focuses on a subgroup of mixed race individuals who racially identify as not white or not solely white (i.e. they hold a non-white racial identity) and are perceived as white by others based on their physical appearance. In this chapter, I will review the study's research method and design, sample, recruitment methods, data collection methods, and data analysis.

Research Method and Design

Because there is limited research that investigates this topic and population, I engaged in an initial exploratory study through the use of a qualitative empirical research design. Within the qualitative empirical research methods, I used intensive semi-structured interviews to capture the experiences related to the research topic of a small number of participants. This research method has allowed for a more open-ended, in-depth, and thorough exploration of the experiences of individuals within this sub-group, including their thoughts, feelings, and past and current experiences related to racial and ethnic identity and racial misidentification.

Sample

The sample of the study consists of 14 individuals. Fifteen participants were originally interviewed but one of the participant interview was omitted because the individual did not meet study criteria. There are several selection criteria for inclusion in the study. Participants in the study are above the age of 18 and live in the United States. Individuals who are adults were sought for the study because, although racial identity development continues into adulthood, adults have likely already navigated early stages of racial identity development and formation as children and adolescents. Since participants all live in the U.S., they are likely to share a common national sociopolitical experience of race and ethnicity.

All the participants also identify as mixed race or multiracial which is defined as having biological parents of different races or racial heritages. The participant whose interview was omitted had parents of the same or similar racial background (Black) and thus did not meet this criterion of having biological parents of different races. All other participants had one parent who is White and another parent who is not White (Black, Latino, Asian, or mixed race). I included individuals who have one biological parent of Latino/Hispanic background and one of non-Latino/Hispanic background because, as described in Chapter 1, these mixed heritage individuals have often been included in research on multiracial individuals and have been found to have similar racial identity development processes (Jackson, Yoo, & Guevarra, 2012). Finally, the participants must experience or have experienced racial misidentification where the racial identity ascribed to them based on their physical appearance is white and their self-chosen racial identity is not white or not solely white.

Human Subjects Review Process

Prior to recruitment, the study was approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee (Appendix A). After the study was approved, there were two amendments to the initial proposal that signified changes in protocol (Appendix B). First, the initial proposal sought to interview participants age 18 to 35 to limit the scope of the population. However, after consultation with the advisor of this study, the age limit was changed to 18 and above to capture all adults and ensure sufficient participants. Second, another amendment allowed for the hiring of a transcriptionist to transcribe interviews and informing the participants via email of this change in procedure.

Recruitment Methods

A non-probability non-random sampling selection method to recruit participants was used in this study. Since limited research has been conducted on this topic and no known data sources collect information about people who meet the inclusion criteria, the scope of the population is not known and thus I could not conduct random sampling. In identifying and recruiting participants who meet the inclusion criteria, I used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling by recruiting participants from known networks and asking others to forward the recruitment email.

After receiving approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee, a recruitment email and posting (Appendix C) was created that describes the purpose of the study, inclusion criteria, nature of participation, and method of contacting the researcher. I recruited individuals via two ways: through relevant social networking groups on Facebook that pertain to mixed heritage or multiracial individuals and issues, and by contacting people within my social networks. I posted the recruitment posting to several

relevant Facebook groups including the Critical Mixed Race Studies and the Mixed and Multiracial Folk of Smith SSW Facebook groups. I emailed approximately 60 individuals who I know personally either from the social work field (e.g. students at the Smith College School for Social Work or Durham, North Carolina area social workers) or from social justice or race-related groups and activities (e.g. multiracial students at the Smith College School for Social Work or colleagues from the Critical Mixed Race Studies conference) and requested that they forward my recruitment email to anyone they know who may qualify for the study

If a potential participant contacted me through Facebook, I requested an email by which I could contact them going forward. I communicated with all potential participants via email until the phone call interview. In the initial email communication, I explained more details of the study including confidentiality, the informed consent process, the stipulation of no compensation, and asked participants to confirm that they meet the study's criteria and for an address to which I could send the informed consent form. Each potential participant was sent two copies of the informed consent form signed by me as the researcher along with a return envelope and asked to return one signed copy within two weeks of receipt if they agreed to participate in the study. The informed consent (Appendix D) details the purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and the risks of participating in the study. The form also explains that participation is voluntary and unpaid and participants have the option of withdrawing before or during the interview, refusing to answer any questions, and could request that their data not be used up until April 10, 2015. I sent consent forms to the first twenty-two individuals who contacted me, received fifteen consent forms in return, and interviewed these 15 individuals. I did

not know any of these individuals personally. To protect the confidentiality of participants, I kept all written forms, including the informed consent forms, in a secure location - a safe box in my home that only I know the combination to open.

Data Collection Methods

After I received the consent form from a potential participant, I contacted that participant again through email to set up a time for the phone interview. I decided to conduct all interviews only through phone for several reasons. First, I sought a geographically diverse representation of participants and thus could not conduct all interviews in-person with participants because of limited time and resources for traveling. I also decided against utilizing online video communication technology such as Skype or Google Chat to conduct the interview so that my own physical appearance would not influence the participants' responses since physical appearance is a key variable in the study's research questions. Additionally, I sought to maintain consistency in data collection and thus, because of the aforementioned reasons, decided to use phone as the only means through which I would conduct interviews.

I let participants know the interviews would take approximately an hour and the interviews were all conducted between 54 minutes and 1 hour and 31 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the structure of the interview and asked the participant if they had any questions about the information in the informed consent form, the study, and the process of the interview, and I answered these questions. I then conducted the semi-structured open-ended interviews guided by questions pertaining to experiences of racial identity development and racial misidentification from a list I had created and reviewed with my thesis advisor (Appendix E). In addition to the open-ended

interview questions, I asked participants demographic questions not related to race or ethnicity (as these were asked during the open-ended interview portion) including current geographic location, childhood geographic location, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, years of formal education, and socioeconomic status. At the end of the interview, I again asked if the participant had any questions and informed them they could always contact me via phone or email if any additional questions emerged.

I audio-recorded the interviews via two methods using the iPhone Voice Memo application and the Apple computer's Quicktime Player application. As soon as an interview was over, I transferred the iPhone voice memo onto my computer and deleted it off of my phone. If both recordings were usable, I deleted one and saved the other onto my password-protected computer. I ensure that no one, other than myself, had or has access to my computer and no one, other than myself, knew or knows of the password. According to federal regulations, all research materials including recordings, transcripts, and consent forms will be kept in a secure location for three years. These secure locations are a safe box in my home for written forms and a password-protected computer for electronic data. Confidentiality of participants was also maintained by assigning a code number, instead of using their name, to each participant, which was used for any data relevant to the participant such as the recordings and transcript files.

For one participant, only half of her interview was successfully recorded. The individual agreed to participate in the second half of the interview again within two weeks of the original interview and the data was used from the first half of the original interview and the second interview.

Data Analysis

After all interviews were conducted, I hired and paid a transcriptionist to transcribe half (seven) of the interviews. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement form (Appendix F) and agreed to delete the recordings upon completing transcription. I informed all participants via email of the hiring of the transcriptionist and informed them that they could opt out by emailing me back. No participants chose to opt out of having their interviews transcribed by an outside transcriptionist. I cut out the demographic questions and information of the last part of the interviews and sent the redacted interviews to the transcriptionist via an online uploading system DropBox. The transcriptionist sent me all transcripts via password-protected Microsoft Word documents, which were kept on my password-protected computer.

Content and thematic analysis was used to explore the qualitative data obtained through the interviews. In the first review of transcripts, themes or categories of meaning were identified that were mentioned at least once by a participant. Potential overarching themes along with sub-themes were organized and then each transcript was coded for these themes after the initial review. Cross-analysis of transcripts was conducted by aggregating frequency of themes mentioned. In the Findings Chapter, the frequency of many of the themes and sub-themes is reported. Illustrative quotations of the interviews were separated and included in the next chapter. In addition to qualitative thematic analysis, descriptive statistics were used in conducting analysis of the data. Descriptive statistics were used to describe demographic information to demonstrate the make-up of the sample and any strengths or limitations of sample diversity. Limitations of this methodological approach and the sample will be discussed in the Discussion Chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study seeks to understand the experiences of people who are mixed race and are perceived as White by others based on their physical appearance. These individuals experience racial incongruence or misrecognition where the race they are assigned by others (White) does not reflect their chosen racial and ethnic identity. The study explores how these individuals engage in racial and ethnic identity development and how they understand and navigate their racial and ethnic identities.

As detailed in Chapter 3 on Methodology, the interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was used to code each interview. This chapter will detail the findings of this analysis. After describing the demographics of the participants in the study, themes that will be explored include racial and ethnic identity; fluidity of identity; racial perception including markers and indicators of identity, disclosure, and passing; family; experiences of privilege and oppression such as white privilege, racism, and monoracism; person of color identity; and conflict and acceptance or harnessing of identity.

Demographics

In this section, I will describe basic demographic data of the 14 participants. While this chapter contains quotes and coded analysis of all participants, 9 of the 14 participants were given pseudonyms in this chapter because their interviews were more frequently quoted and this allows for continuity of their interviews and experiences. .

Because each participant provided a qualitative response to the question on racial and ethnic identity which will be described further below, for simplicity, the racial and ethnic identity of parents will be reviewed here. All 14 participants have one parent who is White and another parent who is not White (e.g. Black, Asian, or Latino/Hispanic). Of the 14 participants, six identify as having a parent who is Black and a parent who is White. For one of these six participants, their Black parent is also Native American. Of these multiracial Black and White participants, I have created pseudonyms for three of them: Imani, Mia, and Sophie. Five of the individuals have a parent who is White and a parent who is Mexican. All of these participants have pseudonyms in this chapter: Linda, Adriana, Morgan, Salina, and David. The remaining three individuals have a parent who is Asian (Chinese, Filipino, or Japanese) and a parent who is White. The participant who is White and Filipina is named Jessica in this chapter.

Of the 14 participants, 11 identify as female, two identify as male, and one identifies as genderqueer. The individual who is genderqueer, named Morgan in this chapter, will be referred to through the use of the gender-neutral pronouns of “they”, “them”, and “their”. Eight of the participants described their sexual orientation as heterosexual or straight, two as bisexual, and four as queer. The ages of participants range from 19 to 53. The average age is 30.6 and the median age is 29. The participants reflected a highly educated sample; all participants had at least some college education. Six of the individuals were currently attending four-year undergraduate programs. The other eight individuals had completed a Bachelor’s degree. Of these eight individuals, six either had graduate degrees or were currently completing a graduate degree.

The geographic distribution was wide but primarily concentrated in the west coast. Eight of the 14 participants currently live (at time of interview) in California, two live in the Southwest (North Carolina), one in Texas, one in the Midwest (Chicago), one in New England (Connecticut), and one in the mid-Atlantic (Virginia).

Racial and Ethnic Identity

At the start of the interview, participants were asked to describe their racial and ethnic identity and if this has changed over time. Participants described their racial and ethnic identity in numerous ways, including multiple words, phrases, and concepts and oftentimes this very question elicited a complex response. In this section, I will explore some of the themes related to how multiracial individuals described their racial and ethnic identities. These themes include participants citing their parents' monoracial identities, use of the "mixed" or "multiracial" identity, and idiosyncratic words to express their identities.

Citing Parents' (Monoracial) Identity

The most common trend among participants in describing their racial and ethnic identity was to first refer to their parents' identities. Of the 14 participants interviewed, eight of the participants answered this question by first describing their parent's racial and ethnic identity. For example, Imani describes how it's easier to cite her parent's identity rather than her own:

Usually what I say to people is rather than describing myself, I describe my parents because in some ways that's easier than trying to describe myself...I normally say that my mother is African American and my father is a Hasidic Jew.

Linda names the difficulty in describing her own identity and also prefers to identify her parent's race: "Yea it's really complicated. I feel like I still struggle with articulating it. I usually say my dad's from Mexico and my mom's European. I usually describe my family background instead of self-identifying."

As these two participants demonstrate, citing parental race and ethnicity seems to be a common phenomenon among multiracial individuals who often have difficulty explaining their race and ethnicity without referring to their parents who are oftentimes monoracial. In a society where monoracial categories are more dominant, it may be easier for participants to cite monoracial identities of parents before describing their own.

Use of Multiracial or Mixed Identity

Because the recruitment of participants called for people who are "multiracial" or "mixed race", it would be expected that the majority of participants use that terminology to describe themselves and this was found to be the case. Of the 14 participants, 11 actively use words such as "multiracial", "mixed" or "mixed race" to describe their racial and ethnic identities. The remaining three participants describe their racial and ethnic identity using primarily monoracial terms (e.g. Black, White, Asian). This demonstrates that similar to what is described in multiracial identity development models by scholars such as Root (1990, 1996), Rockquemore (1999), and Renn (2000, 2003, 2008), mixed race individuals can have multiple healthy identity outcomes identifying as mixed race, monoracial, or in other ways.

For many of the participants who use the terms "mixed" and "multiracial", they did not have access to this language for their identities until they were older. Imani, for example, spoke of how as a child she was always identified as Black on official

government documents and by her family. She only had access to the mixed or multiracial identity as she got older: “I feel like it’s relatively a new thing within the last 15 years where I will very publicly talk about being mixed and the needs of multiracial individuals and families in professional settings or in social settings.”

Morgan describes how they too have transitioned to using the language of “mixed” although they still feel ambivalent about this:

I’ve been trying within the past year to navigate and describe myself less as White and more as mixed, but the word always feels weird to me because I always associate it with dog breeds or something like pure bred or mixed...I guess “mixed” is more reflective of what my experiences are like versus me just saying “Oh I’m white” or “Oh I’m Mexican”.

These two participants demonstrate the fluidity of and increasing use by mixed race individuals of the terms “mixed” and “multiracial” to describe racial and ethnic identity. Access to mixed and multiracial identity will be additionally explored within the section on fluidity of identity across the lifespan.

Idiosyncratic Words and Phrases to Describe Identity

In describing their racial and ethnic identities, participants used several idiosyncratic words and phrases to describe their identities. Of all these words and phrases, the most common way of describing their identities was by using “half” language (e.g. “I’m half White and half Mexican”). Of the 14 participants, eight referenced their racial and ethnic identity by using “half” language or the word “halfie”.

Several of the participants spoke of how they used the “half” language growing up and then changed how they would describe their race and ethnicity because they felt

that using the word “half” diminished their identity. Imani describes how meeting another multiracial person during college and seeing how she described herself changed her perspective on the use of “half” language:

I think when I was younger, especially when I was much younger, like elementary school, middle school, even high school, I would describe myself as half Black and half White and that changed for me when I went to college... I actually helped to start the first organization at [university] for mixed race students called [multiracial student group]. And it was during and through that process that I became much more confident in naming and claiming my own identity. I remember that there was one student involved in the group, and she had one parent who was Japanese and one parent who was Lebanese... And I remember her saying I’m not half Japanese and half Lebanese, I’m 100% Japanese and I’m 100% Lebanese, and that was kind of a turning point for me because it helped me to realize that I was the same. That it didn’t make sense for me to halve myself up. And so rather than telling people I’m 100% African-American and 100% Russian, Polish, Jewish-American, I just say what my parents are.

Morgan also echoed a similar experience of learning about the limitations of using “half” language to describe their identity:

I used to call myself a halfer, like H-A-L-F-E-R because I was like yeah, I’m half Mexican and half White... but I went to the [multiracial student group] at [university], they always say “You’re not half anything, you’re whole.”

In addition to the use of “half” language, participants also used idiosyncratic words such as “Hapa” and “Tejana” to describe their identities. Oftentimes, participants

felt like these words uniquely captured their identities in a way that no other word could. One participant use the word “Hapa” which is colloquially known to indicate someone who is of mixed White and Asian racial background. In the following section, Linda, who uses the identity “Tejana”, describes why this feels the most accurate for her:

I used to call myself a halfie which I said totally tongue in cheek, and I didn’t really say that to people but to my close circle I would say that, but...what really makes sense to me is to call myself Tejana because I’m from Texas. There is this whole Tejana identification, and that actually to me makes the most sense...Mexican culture is such a part of the culture there in San Antonio, so that combination of Mexican origin and being from Texas that feels like the most accurate label for me.

The use of these idiosyncratic words to describe racial and ethnic identity reflect the unique positionality of these individuals whose identities cannot simply be captured by monoracial categories. Instead, they have created their own language to describe their mixed and multiracial identities.

Fluidity of Identity

In addition to being asked about how they identify racially and ethnically, every participant was asked if their racial and ethnic identity has changed over time. Nearly every participant spoke of how their understanding of their racial and ethnic identity changed over their life span. Fluidity of identity over the life span and within different contexts is a common occurrence for individuals who are multiracial. In addition to identifying multiple outcomes of multiracial identity development, Root (1990, 1996), Rockquemore (1999) and Renn (2000, 2003, 2008) also all described how the racial and

ethnic identity of mixed race individuals can change over their lifespan. Moreover, fluidity of identity reflects how individuals who are mixed race may experience more choice or agency in how they describe their identity than individuals who are monoracial. Within this larger theme of fluidity of identity, I will describe two sub-themes: fluidity across context and fluidity across the lifespan.

Fluidity Across Context

Several participants described that how they identify and how they are perceived racially by others changes depending on who they are with and where they are. David spoke of how his identity changes depending on who he is with:

There are some days that I will feel more one way than another, like I might feel more White depending on who I'm with...identifying more with that tribe than the other and vice versa. It's very situational in that respect.

In addition to David, Jessica also experienced fluidity of her racial identity depending on context. She spoke of how when she left her Filipino community at home including Filipino family and friends to attend a predominantly White university, her racial identification switched from primarily White growing up to more emphasis on her Filipina and mixed identity. Her Filipina identity felt heightened to her in the primarily White space of her college. She also noted that people in the U.S. will sometimes ask her about her racial identity because she has several markers of Filipina identity such as the shape of her eyes. However, when she visits the Philippines, she is perceived by others only as monoracially White. For this participant, her own racial identification and the perception by others changes depending on the context she is in.

Fluidity Across the Lifespan

Another sub-theme that emerged around fluidity of identity is the change in racial identity corresponding with developmental phases. In this sub-section, the fluidity of racial identity across lifespan will be described focusing on three developmental periods: childhood, adolescence and emerging adulthood, and adulthood.

Childhood

During childhood, approximately half of the participants perceived themselves to have a monoracial or monoethnic identity despite having parents of different races. This finding is supported by stage 2 of Poston's (1990) biracial identity development model where, in this point of development, most multiracial individuals choose one of their parent's monoracial identities rather than a multiracial identity. For example, Jessica describes how she identified as "strictly White" because of her last name and light skin despite having a Filipina mother:

My dad is White, and my mom is...full Filipino. And when I was younger I completely identified as White. I mean I ate Filipino food and I had Filipino friends and we had Filipino extended family and all that stuff. But for some reason in my adolescence between early middle school to high school up until the age of 17, I strictly identified as White. I was like "No, I'm light skinned and my last name is Smith. I'm White."

Morgan understood themselves to be "Mexican" until they noticed in adolescence how they are perceived as monoracially White by others:

Growing up... I always thought of myself as Mexican. I grew up with a lot of my mom's family, that's my Mexican half. So I definitely always thought of myself

as part of the Mexican-Latino community. Until I got to junior high and then I started somehow to realize that...I look super White so I was like I'm one of the few White girls like on campus.

This sub-theme of individuals identifying with monoracial categories as children may reflect how the dominant discourse of monoraciality can influence the development of a child's racial and ethnic identity. Multiracial children may often not have access to identities such as "mixed race" or "multiracial" and instead identify with monoracial categories. This is reflected in Dalmage's (2013) article of how multiracial children may experience border patrolling of their multiracial identities.

Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood

For many participants, the ways they understood their racial and ethnic identities expanded during adolescence and in early adulthood. Adriana began to understand her identity differently during high school when she saw how others perceived her as White. During adolescence, she developed an initial awareness of the incongruence between how she identifies and how others perceive her. With this awareness of the misidentification she experiences, she then recalls here and throughout the interview how her experience in college allowed her to feel a sense of belonging among other mixed race individuals:

Usually when people ask me what I am, I would just say that I am half White and half Mexican. I mean issues of my identity didn't really come up until high school for me. As a kid growing up I knew that my Dad was Mexican and that my Mom was White and she was from the US, but...I never thought I was weird or different. I kind of just accepted it and that's how we were for me. As I became more of an adolescent and teenager, I realized that I was half White and half

Mexican, but I'm being perceived as White by society. How does that affect my experience and how does that shape my identity, because you know how I identify is different than how others identified me? It wasn't until like high school that I really started to think about these things. There wasn't a space for mixed people in high school to really talk about these things and at home the issues of identity weren't really spoken about. Once I got to college, I wanted to get involved, I wanted to feel connected, I wanted to find a sense of belonging.

Similar to Adriana, eleven of the fourteen participants cited their college experience as a time when they engaged in identity exploration and their understanding of their racial and ethnic identity shifted. Several factors may contribute to identity exploration during college. First, the diversity of identities of college students may provide a broader range of racial and ethnic identifications than these participants had previously experienced. Because of this diversity, college is a time where individuals may gain access to identifications they previously did not have. For example, individuals may have newfound access to “mixed race” or “multiracial” identity that are mirrored to them by other multiracial students in a society that often privileges monoraciality, or they may have access to monoracial identities that they did not hold growing up. Moreover, the prevalence of affinity and cultural groups and classes on topics such as identity, race, and social justice can contribute to a milieu where individuals explore their identities and unify based on shared identities.

One participant, for example, who identified primarily as White growing up, found that her conception of her racial identity expanded when she went to college and met other people who shared a similar background as her and who identified as Asian or

multiracial. She then had access to additional identities (the multiracial identity, the Asian identity) that she may not have had as much access to during her childhood. This passage demonstrates the influence of monoraciality in her childhood where she saw that others only identified with one monoracial category and limited herself to that as well:

It wasn't really until I got the university and I met other people who were mixed race and who were half White half Asian just like me. And they completely identified as Chinese or as Korean or whatever. And I'm like really? Huh, that's strange cause I'm more White...I knew people from back home who were mixed race but they kind stuck with White. The other non-White identity was kind of just brushed aside I guess. Whenever I saw other people who were mixed race it was kind of one or the other for them. But then when I came to [university] I saw that people were giving equal attention to both. And in some cases more attention to the non-White identity.

Adriana, who was described above as experiencing identity shifts during high school and college, explained how she realized that the mixed identity was accessible to her only when a friend asked her to help restart her college's mixed student group:

It wasn't until then that I realized that I could identify as mixed, this concept of being like multi-ethnic. It kind of popped into my head as being my identity. That was a really big turning point for me. That's kind of how my involvement got started and that's really when I started to explore my mixed identity. I got to be in spaces with other mixed people who...we each had different experiences, but at the same time we still were able to connect with one another. We understood each other. We knew where everybody was coming from. That was really good for me.

It was very eye opening and very transformative for me. Then I got a lot more involved in the mixed community. I found my space on campus where I felt comfortable and I could be myself.

As these two participants demonstrate, adolescence and emerging adulthood are key developmental periods when mixed race individuals experience shifts in identity and find new identities that were previously inaccessible.

Adulthood

While some participants' identities shifted in adolescence and emerging adulthood, several of the participants in the older age range of the sample (mid-thirties through fifties) described how they experienced more acceptance with their racial and ethnic identity as they aged. Younger participants often expressed conflict over their experience of incongruence of how they identify and how they are perceived, however, the older participants generally experienced less conflict over their identity and had found stability in their identity with age. Salina, who identifies as Mexican and White, described the acceptance she feels around her racial identity now in her mid-thirties:

I'm 35 and I don't feel like I have to belong like I did when I was younger. I feel like I don't personally let it me bother me. Like if someone doesn't want to accept me because I don't look or act the way a Latina woman should act, that's fine.

As this section demonstrates, fluidity of racial and ethnic identity occurs both across context and across the lifespan. While many participants identified monoracially as children, this shifted in adolescence and emerging adulthood as they explored other identifications such as the multiracial identity and as they began to understand their

experience of racial incongruence or misperception. Individuals found increasing acceptance with their racial and ethnic identity with age.

Racial Perception: Markers and Indicators of Race, Racial Passing, and Disclosure

In addition to how they identify and how this has changed over time, participants were asked about their experience of other people's perceptions of their race and ethnicity and how their own understanding of their race and ethnicity interacts with other people's perceptions of their race. For example, participants were asked questions about how they know others perceive them as White, markers or indicators of their race, and their experiences of passing and disclosing their racial identity. In this section, I will explore the findings of some of these areas in more depth.

Markers and Indicators of Race

Participants articulated many different types of markers that indicate their race or ethnicity to others. These have been divided into the sub-themes in this section of physical appearance (skin color and phenotype, hair, make-up, dress, and jewelry), name, language, cultural traditions, and performativity or behaviors. Some of these markers, while socially constructed indicators of race, are inherent qualities of the person, such as skin color and phenotype; other markers, such as dress or make-up, at times were adopted by participants as a way of marking or accentuating their non-White racial or ethnic identity. Because these participants are perceived as White by others, many of them attached significance to certain markers that would heighten their non-White identity. Some of these participants even felt like particular markers "compensated for their whiteness" and made their non-White identity less hidden.

In the following longer passage, Imani, a multiracial Black and Jewish participant, describes her experience of how she is racially perceived as White, both noting qualities that are inherent to her and those she intentionally chooses, such as jewelry and dress. We can see how her appearance has changed over time and how she employs agency over her appearance and certain markers of identity to heighten aspects of her racial identity. She goes on to explain how, in her experience, White people are more surprised than Black people when they find out her racial identity is different than what they had perceived:

I'm sitting on a park bench right now in my neighborhood, and my guess is that most people would think that I'm a White woman sitting here. That there isn't anything about how I look today or what I'm wearing or anything like that that would give a different impression. But I do sometimes make a very conscious choice in my dress to bring out aspects of my racial and ethnic identity so the kind of jewelry that I wear, or the kind of clothing I will wear, like African boutiques. Or cowry shell earrings or feathered earrings or hair clips or that kind of thing. But not always, sometimes I make those choices very consciously depending on where I'm going and who I'm going with. If it's a professional meeting where I want to just to put that idea out there that this may not be a White woman, this may be a woman who has a different racial or ethnic background I may accessorize to heighten that. Yeah I think that most people would perceive me as being White. And it's interesting too because actually my hair has changed over time. When I was younger, my hair was an Afro, I mean if you see photos of me when I was three or four years old I had this huge blonde Afro and in elementary and middle school and even high school I just had a lot of hair. I just had big

ethnic hair. And it started to change, especially within the last five years it's changed a lot. It doesn't really look like ethnic hair anymore. It's kind of curly but it's sort of flat, and so I don't think it catches people's attention in that way anymore as kind of striking or anything outside of the norm. Whereas I think I used to have more people who would really explicitly ask me about my racial identity. And I don't feel like I have that as much anymore. Although I do have definitely African and Cherokee features: I have very full cheeks, a very full nose like my mom. I have green eyes like my father, and definitely very very pale skin. If it were any warmer outside today I would definitely have to have sunscreen on. And so what my experience has been over the course of my life is that Black people are not surprised at all to know that I have an African-American mother, they are never surprised by that. Definitely White people tend to be much more surprised by that. It kind of shakes them, "oh that can't be" or "how is that?" But with Black people, they're so accustomed to having this kind of rainbow in their own families and they're able to see more of the phenotypic signs around the hair and the facial features and what not.

This longer interview passage of this participant poignantly elucidates many of the kind of markers that will be explored in more detail below.

Skin Color and Phenotype

Above and beyond any other marker of race, skin color and other aspects of phenotype (e.g. hair color and texture, bone structure, eye color and shape) were cited by the majority of participants as what contributed to others perceiving them as monoracially White and influencing their own racial and ethnic identification. Because race is socially

constructed based on the intersection of skin color, phenotype, and often country of origin, the influence of these factors on racial perception and identification of participants is no surprise. Many participants also described how they experience ambivalence or conflict in claiming their non-White identity because of their light skin color; this will be explored in more detail later.

Adriana observed that while her skin is not very light, she also does not have dark skin which marks her as White and not Mexican to others. She speaks of yearns for markers that do reveal her Mexican identity:

I think usually I'm perceived as White in most spaces. I don't know if anybody has ever approached me and asked me if I'm Latina. I think it does have a lot to do with my physical characteristics I guess because I'm not like super pale or anything, but I'm not very dark either so I think that has a lot to do with it. I don't know. It's something that bothers me a lot because I really want people to see my Mexican identity and I don't think that comes across.

While many participants cited the significance of skin color in determining how others perceive their race, some described how their skin color may not be as much of an indicator of race as other markers. Linda, who is Mexican and White, reports that she has similar skin color to the Latino children and staff she works with at her internship. She notes that other markers, such as her dress, seem to mark her race to others:

I'm sorta like a hippie type of person in the way that I dress and so I think that also makes people think I'm not Mexican. I have nose piercings. I try to keep it under wraps at school, but I don't shave under my arms and I wear looser clothes. I've been grappling with this very question - what is it that makes me seem so not

like everybody else here? Because it's not so much the color of my skin. That's the thing that is really irritating to me, my skin is not any lighter than lots of people who are Mexican and people know that they are Mexican. So it's not really about the color of my skin. I think it's more that I dress sort of like a hippie queer person.

Hair

Hair also served as a significant indicator of race. While not in the majority, several participants, particularly those who are multiracial Black and White, described the significance of hair and hair texture in how their racial and ethnic identity is perceived by others. Mia described through her interview that she is often white-passing because of the color of her skin and because of her hair texture which she calls “curly for a White person but not at all curly for a Black person”. She describes in the following passage how her conception of her own hair as an indicator of race has changed over time. She speaks of a conflictual experience where her Black identity was hidden when talking with her White housemates about hair. This became a pivotal moment for her where she could choose to continue “passing” or choose to disclose her experience of her own hair and thus her identity. In that moment she decided to continue to pass rather than create a separation between herself and others:

There was another time with my housemates where they were like talking about hair. And although my hair is pretty much like White people's hair, I think I didn't actually acknowledge that. Before that I considered it a mix between White and Black hair, which I guess it is. I went to Black barber shops and a Black girl did my hair as a girl and I never thought of my hair as White hair. And so my

housemates... weren't asking me as a Black person, they were just asking me like a peer about hair products and combing hair and brushing hair and how I did my hair? And were touching my hair and braiding it. It was like I could think of stories, I could think of ways to relate like yeah I also grew up like you with the same issues with my hair as you have... I could fit into that but it felt like I was kind of fishing to do it... I was thinking: would I rather fit into this current situation right now of all my friends doing each other's hair or would I rather get upset and tell them they don't know what it's like when it grows back? Our hair is different and I'm not like them and call out my difference from them. And in that situation I felt like I choked on it but I decided to just act like I grew up as a White girl with White hair which maybe I did.

As this passage exemplifies and as will be described later, for multiracial individuals who are perceived as White by others, there are many decision points like this of whether to pass or disclose, which can create conflict for some of these individuals. Moreover, Mia demonstrates how from moment to moment, a multiracial individuals' understanding of aspects of their own identity, such as if they have White or Black hair, can change fluidly.

Make-up

Several female-identified participants explained how they use make-up to accentuate certain facial features that mark their non-White racial identity. Two multiracial Asian and White female participants spoke of how they would use make-up to create more almond-shaped eyes as a marker of their Asian identity. Two Latina and White participants also described using make-up to heighten their Latina identity.

Dress and Jewelry

Multiple participants described how choice over dress and jewelry, more than any other marker, allowed them to heighten their non-White identity even though they were generally perceived as monoracially White. For example, in the longer passage from Imani at the beginning of this section, she spoke of dressing with clothing from African boutiques and African earrings to accentuate her Black identity.

Mia spoke of how at times she will wear African earrings or a t-shirt that says “Stay Black and Remain Proud” to mark her Black identity. She describes the dilemma of wearing Black or African dress or jewelry because while some people may then perceive her to have a Black identity, others may think she is culturally appropriating. This exemplifies another type of tension or dilemma that multiracial individuals who are perceived as White experience:

I’m just hoping that people won’t see me as White and I don’t have to do anything to challenge that. But I also wear these African earrings and I have this t-shirt that says Stay Black and Remain Proud. And I’ll wear African prints. I feel like maybe if I do this then people will at least think “Oh maybe that person could be Black” and sometimes that happens or sometimes people just think I’m appropriating.

Language

Language was another sub-theme that emerged in markers and indicators of race and ethnicity. Language plays a crucial role in the construction of racial and ethnic identity, especially for identities that share nationality, common language, and cultural traditions. In interviews with participants, language emerged with eight of the 14 participants as a marker of their racial identities. Four of the participants with Latino

backgrounds and two of the participants with Asian backgrounds noted the importance of their non-White parent's native language, along with two multiracial Black and White participants who described the significance of the way they spoke American English.

The significance of language as a marker of racial and ethnic identity emerged in different ways across interviews. Several participants described the conflict or tension they experienced with not speaking at all or not speaking well their non-White parent's native language, because of its role in marking that identity. Moreover, these participants described the factors that led to their inability to speak the language such as lack of contact with non-White family members or racism by White family members leading to the severance of the cultural familial transmission of language.

Adriana, for example, elucidates the importance of the Spanish language for her in "proving" her Mexican identity. She first felt this need to authenticate her Mexican identity by speaking Spanish when she spent time with her Mexican dad's relatives. Later, she felt this same need to legitimize her Mexican identity in her Spanish class where she sought to speak Spanish fluently and without an accent. She identifies that part of this feeling of needing to prove her Mexican identity is because she feels like she has to compensate for her whiteness since she is already perceived as White:

I mean the whole language thing is something that I struggle with a whole lot because I feel like it's a very big part of the Mexican identity and that part of the culture. So when I started going to school the language got lost and English was spoken a lot more at home... Interacting with my Dad's family was really difficult because they thought lesser of me and I felt like they felt lesser of me because I didn't speak Spanish, but also they thought that I thought I was better than them

because I am also half White. So it was just a very weird dynamic...I'm a Spanish major so being in my Spanish classes there are a lot of Chicano-Latino identified students and I just feel like I've always felt a lot of pressure to being able to speak Spanish perfectly and speak fluent. That's something that I've been working on because I don't think you don't need to speak the language to identify, but I felt that. I've had that pressure put on me my entire life so it's really something that I want to do, that I want to prove that I can speak this language. I can communicate with you in your language. I am Mexican. Just the idea of having to prove myself. In those spaces I feel like I have to prove myself and I feel like I have to compensate for my whiteness and I have to prove that I'm Mexicana in those spaces...In Spanish class I make sure to speak so that I let people know that I speak, my Spanish is pretty okay. I do have an accent. I take care to pronounce things correctly as well. If I'm having a conversation with somebody and a Spanish word comes up for some reason, I make sure to pronounce it correctly.

This participant convincingly demonstrates the importance of language in the authentication of certain racial and ethnic identities. The need to legitimize identity through certain markers, such as language, will also be explored within the section on monoracism or multiracial oppression.

Additionally, Jessica, a multiracial Filipina and White participant, spoke of how her White father forbade her Filipina mother from transmitting her native language Tagalog to her daughter because of his own racism towards Filipino culture and language. As will be explored more later, this is one example of the effects of racism within the family context and how familial racism by White family members can become

internalized racism and affect the way participants understand their own racial and ethnic identity. This participant later describes how she, similar to Adriana, felt a need to prove her Filipina identity with her Filipino family but found this to be difficult to do so because of her inability to speak Tagalog. Here, she is caught in a bind where her father's racism toward Filipino language and culture severed the cultural and language transmission to her which meant she could no longer legitimize her identity with Filipino family members by speaking Tagalog. As these two participants show, language serves as a powerful indicator of racial identity and a way others attempt to authenticate identity.

Name

Nine participants described how their name serves as a marker or indicator of race. For some of these participants, their last name, depending on whether it has White European origins or origins from another geographic area or culture, can indicate either their White or non-White racial background. For example, one participant whose last name is a common Spanish last name, describes how his name is an indicator of his non-White racial background, unlike other aspects of himself such as his skin color:

I think that most strangers, people who just see me on the street or interact with me day-to-day would probably just see me as just a regular White guy, racially White and ethnically White. I believe that's because of my phenotype, I have light skin, my physical appearance - I have light skin, medium to dark colored hair, although it's getting greyer. My manner of speech, my accent, I don't have a Spanish accent. I think most people probably just read me as White if they first read me...Again, I think they probably perceive me as White because I don't

Speak with an accent. I have really bad Spanish. My physical appearance looks a certain way, but my name at least gives me away a little bit.

Moreover, Imani, who described the many indicators of race above, demonstrates her appreciation to her mother for giving her an African name because it allows her entry into the Black community even though she is often perceived as White:

And one of the things that my mother did for me which I am actually very grateful for is that she gave me this African name and so especially for people in the African American community who hear my name, you only know Imani's who are Black you don't know any Imani's who are not Black. So in some ways it's a point of entry into the community.

She reflects though that as a child, she felt differently about her name and felt like it was another aspect of herself that differentiated her from her family and others:

Names are fairly powerful. When I was a kid I hated having the name Imani... Kids hate to be different, and I was always so different, I was painfully aware of how different I was. I was the only White kid in this Black family and I felt like I just looked like no one else with my hair and my nose and my skin. It was just this painful existence for me. And then to have this name that was just on top of everything, with this name that everyone was so cheesy about.

Several participants spoke of how they noticed differences in how they were perceived by others because of last name changes due to familial circumstances or marriage. One participant, for example, who is Mexican and Irish described the evolution of her last name from a Mexican last name (her biological father's last name), to a Jewish last name (her biological mother's last name) when her parents separated, and now a

Turkish last name (her husband's last name). She spoke of how each of these changes affected how others perceived her racial and ethnic identity. Thus, these participants demonstrate that name is a powerful indicator influencing how others assign racial or ethnic identity.

Cultural Traditions

Participant knowledge, or lack thereof, of cultural traditions of non-White family and background also served as markers of racial identity. Jessica speaks of how she connected with other Filipino students in an organization through cultural knowledge and traditions and felt a need to prove her Filipina identity with these students at first:

When I first started getting involved in my university's Filipino Student Association I would bring up little cultural objects that I know are particular to Filipino communities. Like, for example, I was doing karaoke and there was a certain Filipino well-known brand of karaoke and so I did bring that up as a joke. And I'd bring up that I haven't had "lumpia" in so long. That it sucks there are no Asian markets around here. Just stuff like that. And while it didn't seem forced...I felt like I kind of had to prove something to them. Like yeah, I do want to be here, I am like you...you know? We've experienced the same things. I know what this TV show is etc... I definitely tried to play my Filipino culture when I got involved in the organization... There's no need now. I've kind of like settled myself and established myself in the community. And so I'm a lot more comfortable now. But definitely at first I felt like I needed to prove myself.

Performativity and Behaviors

Another area that participants mentioned that serves as indicators of race are the actions of participants which include performativity, or how participants perform an identity, their behaviors, and the people and spaces they associate with or find themselves in. Several participants described that they are familiar with White cultural norms and are able to perform these White norms to fit into predominantly White spaces. When they do this, they often have the experience of passing where others perceive them as monoracially White. One participant explains how she is able to accentuate her White identity by knowing what to talk about and what to not talk about in predominantly White spaces to “avoid prejudice”. She asserts that this is “problematic” possibly representing for herself the dilemma in passing:

I don't really feel excluded in all White communities however for some reason because I...God this sounds so problematic...because I know how to play up my White identity in order to fit in and in order to avoid any prejudice or whatever. I know the right things to talk about...When I was in high school I would try to talk about like I just visited my dad, he was in Texas. We went to the waterpark and you know things that White people do. I try to just steer away from any topic relating to my mom.

Mia, the participant who spoke of having both White and Black hair, describes how she lives in a mostly White space and alters her behavior when Black people are around to de-emphasize her ties to White identity. While she may resonate with her White housemates when she is with them, she chooses to distance herself when there are Black people present in her house:

I try to represent myself as someone who's...political and who's Black actually and if someone were to come to my house maybe they'd be like oh that wasn't true. You clearly are living with these people who are the Whitest people we've ever met. I know that I felt alienated in my house as one of the only people of color and so I don't want to bring anyone into that and have them experience that....When Black people come over to have parties at my house or something then I end up acting like I don't fit in with people in my house or I don't always support what they're saying.

These two participants show how performativity, or how one acts or performs an identity, can influence racial perception. While some participants used markers such as dress and jewelry to accentuate their non-White identities, other participants were keenly aware of what are culturally coded as White behaviors and norms and non-White behaviors and norms and they were able to code-switch between these to influence how others perceive their race.

Disclosure

After having reviewed markers and indicators of race that influence racial perception, the next two sections will focus on two other aspects of racial perception: disclosure and passing. Participants shared a wide range of experiences of the process of disclosure of their racial identity to others and of racial passing where their racial identity was hidden from others. These will be explored below.

Disclosure is a relational process that involves the context and spaces individuals find themselves in, how individuals are perceived, how the individual identifies, and if and how the individual chooses to disclose their identity if they experience

misrecognition or incongruence between how they are perceived and how they identify. For these participants who are perceived as White but do not identify as White or solely as White, disclosure was a necessary process if others were to find out about their non-White racial and ethnic identities. Oftentimes when disclosing their identity, participants had experiences of needing to authenticate or legitimize their identity to others. This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in the section on Monoracism.

There was a wide range of responses when participants were asked about when they decide to disclose their non-White racial background and how they do this. Five of the participants rarely disclose unless they are asked directly about their racial and ethnic identity while six participants disclose soon because of the significance for them of other people knowing this identity. Mia, who is multiracial Black and White, discloses usually immediately in getting to know someone and describes how she may cut off the friendship if she realizes they do not know about her racial identity:

For the most part I try to tell anyone that I'm becoming friends with my racial background as soon as I can. And I don't always say it at first... I don't know I forget or, or it never comes up... and then you know I've had situations where like months into a friendship with somebody, it comes up with somebody I've been hanging out with thinks that I am White and I pretty much cut off the friendship at that point which isn't right because I should tell them. If they can't tell it's not their fault. But I just be like if they've known me...like they haven't really known me for that long. Considering how big a part of my identity is, if they've been thinking I'm White the whole time then yeah I feel weird about that.

Some participants discussed how they would disclose to create a sense of belonging with other people who share that identity. Other participants described how they disclose as a form of self-protection from potential racism from others if they are perceived as White. While they generally do not experience racism because of their skin color or phenotype, they are still susceptible to racist comments by others who may not know the identities they hold. Imani, who is Black and Jewish, discloses quickly both because of self-protection and because, like Mia, it is a significant identity for her:

I feel like I'm pretty out about disclosing my racial identity. It's important for people to know my racial identity sometimes just out of self-protection so they don't say something stupid to me. But also because I feel like it's an important part of who I am and if we are going to have any sort of meaningful conversation together that's probably good for them to know off the bat.

Racial Passing

The decision of how and when to disclose directly affects the phenomenon of racial passing for these participants. While all the participants have the experience of racial passing, where they are perceived as White by others but do not identify as White or solely as White, only five individuals explicitly spoke about their experiences and understanding of passing. Similar to how Mia described the experience of passing with friends who assumed she grew up with White hair and she did not disclose otherwise, some of the participants actively grappled with the dilemma they experience of passing by not disclosing their racial identity. Several participants described how racial passing can be an easier choice than constantly disclosing their race, perhaps because it requires

no action whereas disclosure requires action. Moreover, while no participant described this, passing also serves as a form of protection from experiences of racial oppression.

Mia describes how she is constantly thinking about how others perceive her racial identity. She also shares her experience of negotiating the phenomenon of passing. She insinuates that while she sometimes allows herself to pass now (by not disclosing), she would like to change this in the future:

Like every time I meet someone, I'm thinking about how they're perceiving me and like how race is playing into the situation. And I wish I didn't but that's how it goes...I don't want to stay like this but I think it's more convenient to pass in a lot of situations. Like if I'm filling out a job application it's easier to just like act like a normal person than to write in this cover letter 'I know you think that I'm White but you're wrong. I'm actually half Black and half White.' Like that's not convenient to do. Even though I want to tell people that so they have a fuller picture of who I am. So I find myself often bringing it up in awkward ways and I don't know how else to do it. But yeah so I guess I'm passing with realizing it and I'm just like trying to associate how to stop passing without losing my job.

Similar to Mia, Morgan also realizes they are complicit in their own passing at times. They describes how their aesthetic contributes to their ability to pass:

I have realized recently that I am very complicit in my own passing. Which is not something that I do or realized a year ago. I've always straightened my hair. My mom has really curly thick hair. And I have curly hair just not as thick, unfortunately. But I've always straightened it. And a lot of that is because I got really negative feedback when I was young and wore my hair curly because

people are racist. And so I straightened my hair for a very long time. And I also have a very white queer aesthetic. I have a very hipster, skinny jeans, oversized glasses kind of style. And I'm also pretty heavily tattooed. And so this all fits into a queer whiteness that I never realized until I realized it. And so that kind of all is how I am complicit in passing and how I think a lot of other folks see me.

During their interview, Morgan also explained how their choice of whether to disclose or whether to racially pass depends on context. When they are in predominantly White spaces, Morgan often chooses to disclose their race even if they may experience questions by others who seek to authenticate their identity. When Morgan is in social justice spaces, they are more reluctant to disclose and often choose to racially pass as White because for them, it does not feel "liberatory" to assert their Mexican identity in these spaces when they experience White privilege. This dynamic will be explored in more detail in the sections on White Privilege and Person of Color Identity.

Not Quite Able to Pass

While all the participants experience passing as monoracially White, five of the fourteen participants describe that they also are sometimes asked about their race or ethnicity because they are perceived as not White. Two of these participants spoke about how, since they are often or always perceived as White, being asked about their race or ethnicity feels validating rather than as a racial microaggression. Questions about one's race and ethnicity can be a type of racial microaggression because it insinuates that the person is not White and is different from dominant norms or does not belong. In contrast, for these participants whose racial identity is often hidden, being asked about their race and ethnicity can actually feel validating because it allows their identities to emerge.

In this section on racial perception, the themes of markers and indicators of race, disclosure, and racial passing were investigated. Participants described a wide range of indicators that served to maintain the perception by others that they are White or served to disrupt these perceptions and accentuate their non-White identity. Some markers, such as skin color, phenotype, and name, are inherent to the person and thus participants could not exercise agency over them. Other markers, such as dress, jewelry, make-up, and performativity, are constructed by participants who could assert choice over whether to use them to mark their race. Other indicators, such as language and cultural traditions, were located in-between inherent and variable depending on the participants' ability and desire to use these markers to influence how others perceive their identity.

While all participants experienced racial passing, only some of these participants found themselves in conflict about whether to pass or not. In interviews, all participants recognized they needed to engage in disclosure to disrupt racial passing and to out their non-White identities. Those who struggled with the dilemma of passing were more likely to explore the implications of disclosure in disrupting the passing dynamic. Lastly, some individuals, while mostly perceived as White by others, found that they were not always able to pass and they appreciated when others would ask them about their racial and ethnic identities because this felt validating to them.

Family

Another recurring theme throughout the interviews with participants was family and their experiences of racial and ethnic identity within the family context. Family came up in multiple ways during the interviews and several sub-themes emerged. Some participants described how family is a means of access to their non-white identity, or that

lack of contact with non-White family members or cultural or language transmission precludes them from identifying with their non-White identity. Other participants spoke of the similarities and differences of racial and ethnic identity between family members and some even described experiences of invalidation where other people outside their family would question the participants' belonging to their families. Participants also spoke of a wide range of racialized experiences within their families including racism towards family members and racism from their family members. In this section, I will explore some of these sub-themes.

Family as Access to Identity

Several participants described how their families provided them access to their non-White identities. These participants described how both culture and language were passed down to them, giving them a more secure sense of claiming their non-White racial identity. Conversely, other participants experienced a lack of cultural or linguistic transmission, which they perceived as giving them less access to their non-White identity. For example, Salina describes how she had little Mexican cultural transmission from her family because of the absence of Mexican family members and this influenced how she identified as White during her childhood:

I was raised in a predominately very White home. So I never had the opportunity to identify as anything other than White. Other than occasional interaction with my dad's family....I had my abuela. I didn't speak with her, I didn't hang with her because she passed when I was young. I knew her but I never absorbed that familial aspect. And like I said my dad disappeared when I was young and only came into my life early in my twenties he came back in...I would love to be able

to embrace it a little more and you know I have a child on the way and we fully plan on letting that child know more about my...my ancestors and our family and our history. Because I know quite a bit about it now but I want my child to be able to embrace that as well. Cause I think the cultural piece is what I was missing. Like I never identified culturally. I could just check the box.

Identity of Family Members

In addition to family serving as access to identity, over half of the participants described similarities or differences in how their family members, particularly siblings, identify racially. Adriana describes how she has five siblings who identify differently. Her sisters are more likely to identify as mixed, whereas two of her brothers identify as White. She goes on to explain how her work facilitating spaces for mixed race students at her university has created more exposure to mixed identity for her siblings:

I think me working in the space and having found this identity and really been part of cultivating spaces for other people that identify as mixed on my campus, I think that has really opened, or like that has really exposed them to the identity. I think just having that exposure has caused them to really think about it more.

Imani who is multiracial Black and White (Jewish) spoke of how she has two sons with different fathers and has seen her own racialized experiences repeated in her children's experiences. One of her sons has felt like other people do not consider them a family because he has darker skin than the rest of them. Her other son is blonde with whiter skin, has dealt with denial of his racial identity by others which resonates deeply with Imani's lived experiences. Her own experiences of identity denial prepared her to understand and be supportive of this son:

My younger son who does look like me, he has a stronger black identity than his older brother... He went to my neighbors house last year. Our neighbors are African [nationality]. Our neighbors had cousins over and he came home and he was really upset. He was like "They didn't believe I was Black" and he was really upset. This is a very blonde child. And so I got it. To be able to say to him, I really understand how important this is to you because I have lived this my whole life too. Just to be able to talk it out with him. I think it's really cool that we can share that together and that I really get it.

In addition to similarities and differences in identification within families, several participants spoke to how their family members are racially perceived differently than they are. For example, Sophie, who has a Black and Native American father and a White mother, described how her sister is darker-skinned than she is and is frequently asked if she is Hispanic or asked where her parents are from, whereas Sophie is perceived as White by others.

Denial of Family as Family

Four of the participants spoke of painful experiences of how others refused to believe their family members were their biological family members. Adriana spoke of an experience where she was at school and pointed out her dad, who was working outside as a groundskeeper, to her peers. These peers did not believe her:

My Dad works as a groundskeeper for [Name] School District and while I was going to high school, he would sometimes be on my campus. He was working. I was in a portable classroom and so you can see outside...and my Dad was working outside doing whatever. So I told the students around me, "Oh my gosh,

look it's my Dad." They were all kind of like, "No, that's not your Dad." And I was just like, "Yeah, that's my Dad." People didn't believe that my Dad was outside. He's very dark, dark features, dark hair, dark eyes. It's clear that he is Latino. Nobody believed me that that was my Dad. That was a really big moment because I was just like, What? They couldn't believe, they wouldn't believe that that was my Dad. Why would I lie about that?

Similar to Adriana, two participants who are multiracial Black and White also spoke of painful experiences of denial of family connection due to differences in how their and family member's races were perceived by others. Sophie described how when her parents visited for parent's weekend at her university, some of her college acquaintances asked her if her father was her step-dad and if her siblings were her half-sisters or step-sisters. Imani poignantly expressed how she was assumed to be adopted as a child and her brother often got in physical fights with other children defending that his sister (Imani) actually was his biological sister and that he was also part of the family:

That whole thing about people assuming you're adopted and so, never like getting that validation of your family that this is a family that you belong to....And so my brother, who looks very looks like a little black kid, was in fights all the time with other kids who would say that can't be your sister, she looks like she's adopted, or you must be adopted or whatever. And he would just fight them. And so that was just a common occurrence growing up, having to literally fight to prove to people that we belonged to each other as a family.

Many families take as given the unquestioned and indisputable connection

between family members. These participants, however, particularly as children in their families of origin, struggled with painful challenges by others of belonging to their own families because of differences in how they and family members' races were perceived.

Racism toward Family Members

Six participants described racism that their non-White family members experienced. Several of these participants spoke of how witnessing racism and oppression toward their non-White family members helped to uniquely position them where they had a personal understanding of racism as experienced by family members while also experiencing privilege themselves because of their skin color. Experiences of racism towards family members and how this influences the participant's sense of privilege and oppression will be explored more in the sections on Privilege and Oppression below.

Racism of Family Members

Many of the participants experienced racism within their families, particularly from their White family members toward their non-White family members. Some of these participants spoke of how racism within their families of origin may have been internalized and affected their self-conception and sense of racial and ethnic identity. For example, two of these participants who witnessed racism from their White family members identified as children as White rather than as their non-White ancestry. They explain how their racial identification as White may have come from how they witnessed and internalized the racism by their White family members toward their non-White ones.

Salina, for example, described how because her racist grandparents accepted her, she then concluded that she could not be a person of color because they had negative opinions about people of color, including her Mexican father. Moreover, as mentioned

previously, Jessica spoke of how her father's racism towards Filipino culture and language influenced her not learning her mother's native language, Tagalog. She also described how she internalized his racism and identified more as White growing up.

This section briefly reviewed several of the sub-themes within the larger theme of family including how family members can provide access or denial to non-White racial identities and differences in racial identity and perception of family members. The sub-themes of racism towards and racism by family members were also discussed.

Experiences of Privilege and Oppression

Within this larger section, I will explore the themes of privilege and oppression of participants. Individuals who are mixed race and are perceived as White is a rich population to explore the nuances and complexities of privilege and oppression. Many of these participants grappled with the tension or paradoxical nature of both experiencing white, light-skin or passing privilege while also not identifying as White or solely as White. They sat in a unique positionality of witnessing and experiencing racism and racial oppression, particularly toward family members, and yet not experiencing racial oppression towards themselves because of their own skin color and phenotype. Before exploring the experiences of privilege and oppression and the sub-themes within each, the following passage demonstrates the tension or complexity of the positionality of these individuals from the viewpoint of Mia:

I'm always trying to negotiate this. But I don't know. I think I'm fairly privileged, I didn't grow up poor. Since half my family's White and I grew up in a place that's 80% white, I know how to interact with White people, which is like a big privilege to have. And to be perceived as one of them is a privilege and I'm not

excluded from jobs or anything like that. But for some reason I still...like I'll get jobs in all White places or almost White places and I'll definitely feel like the only Black person there. And when people make jokes about Black people, I feel like they're talking about me...But as far as oppression I don't know. I can't say that I'm oppressed. It's like I have some knowledge that other people don't have, maybe. Even though people can't even see me as Black, I still feel like I grew up seeing myself as Black and still identify in that way when given the chance to. So I don't know how to characterize that in terms of privilege and oppression. I'll be in spaces where it's people of color spaces and they say like "Okay, White people you've had enough time to speak up so please try to not speak in these spaces." And I don't know if I should speak, because I do experience enough privilege that I can speak in spaces a lot but I also feel like the story I have needs to be said aloud. And I really want people to identify blackness as encompassing of people who are as light as me. And so I'll try to make myself visible in Black spaces where nobody can mistake me for not Black... Yeah I feel there always is a tension. I feel like I'm negotiating...I feel like I have to calculate it and I can't...there's no real numbers to calculate it by. But I'll try to figure it out: Okay in this area do I have enough privilege that I shouldn't share my story or should I step back, or maybe I can't tell? If people are perceiving me as White I'll have to act a certain way than if they are perceiving me as Black. So I have to figure out if people are perceiving me as White or Black and then go on...And I mean I also don't want to be that person, I mean I don't know why I said that person because I don't know who that person is, but the person who says "By the way I'm Black,

you should believe me, this is what I have to say.” Using that as an excuse almost. I feel like the people that are like “Oh I could say this because I have a Black friend.” I mean I don’t feel entirely like that but I feel partially like I might come off like that. People don’t see me as Black but I just want you to know I’m Black so that you can listen to this and put some validity in it or something and I don’t know it’s really frustrating. I don’t know how to negotiate it. I don’t know how I’ll figure it out but maybe one day.

As Mia demonstrates in this passage, the experience of someone who is multiracial Black and White, identifies as Black, and yet is perceived as White is an experience of negotiating a constant tension around privilege, oppression, passing, and disclosure. She articulates how she constantly assesses how she is being perceived by others because this helps her determine how should she act. Should she assert her Black identity to share her unique positionality and experience of blackness as encompassing people as light as her? Or should step back from sharing her story because of her white privilege in these spaces? Mia demonstrates a stark example of one of the constant dilemmas that individuals who hold these identities face. Each choice point in a situation is fraught with different implications; no decision feels ideal.

In the section on experiences of privilege, I will focus on how participants describe and understand their positions of white, light-skin, or passing privilege. I will explore three sub-themes that emerged from their experiences. First, I will look at how participants describe their awareness of white privilege and what let’s them know they experience white privilege. Next, I will explore how participants understand their white privilege through the experiences of oppression of other family members. Finally, I will

describe the ways these participants spoke of using their white privilege after recognizing that they have it.

Within the next section on experiences of oppression, I will focus on both experiences of racism and experiences of monoracism. Because I will have already described the experiences of oppression and racism toward family members, in this section on Racism, I will seek to understand how these participants experience racism in their own interpersonal dynamics. Under the theme of multiracial oppression or monoracism, I will first explore when participants used the concept monoracism or described a need for such a concept. I will then look at three types of monoracism that emerged in the interviews: no liminal space or trying to fit into monoracial categories; boundary policing including questioning, authenticating, and denial of one's identity; and exclusion from spaces.

In the last part of this section, I will explore the implications of privilege and oppression for these participants. The themes within implications of privilege and oppression include how privilege and oppression affect the decision of claiming a person of color (POC) identity; similar to what Mia describes above, ways that conflict or tension of this identity emerge because of experiences of privilege and oppression; and how individuals accept and harness their experiences of privilege and oppression with a focus on serving as bridges or advocates of certain communities.

Experiences of Privilege

Of the 14 participants interviewed, twelve acknowledged and explained that they do experience white or light-skin privilege also referred to as “passing privilege” because their non-White identity is hidden and they are able to pass as White. As described in the

introduction and literature review, scholars such as Peggy McIntosh (1987), Michelle Alexander (2012), and George Lipsitz (2013) root white privilege in systems of racial and economic domination with whites in the dominant position of receiving unearned benefits and people of color in the subordinate position experiencing forms of oppression. Thus, these participants and anyone who is perceived as White benefits from a system of racial privilege and oppression simply because of their skin color.

How Do I Know I Experience Privilege?

Many of the twelve participants described experiences they have that indicate they are the recipients of white privilege. For example, five individuals described that they know they experience racial privilege because they understand what does not happen to them, such as racist experiences like being followed in stores because of how others perceive their race. Mia, for example, speaks to how other people don't attribute qualities to her blackness such as assuming she is "uneducated", "sassy or loud" or "more sexual". The lack of experiences that are Black stereotypes, culturally and oppressively associated with Black people, demonstrates to her that she experiences light-skin privilege:

And so like I think you can be Black without being perceived as Black. But there are lots of experiences that have to do exactly with perceptions. And I might not have those experiences. And it's usually good that I don't. For the most part, the issue of being Black that comes with the perceptions are like not good issues to have. Like people don't look at me and make assumptions that I'm ghetto or uneducated or sassy or loud or more sexual or that I grew up poor or that I would not be a good employee. I mean I just don't get those stereotypes.

Similar to Mia, Linda also describes how she knows she experiences white privilege and does not experience oppression based on how others perceive her race because of what does not happen to her:

I don't get pulled over, like there are all those sorts of things...like people don't make assumptions I'm doing illegal things...I mean, I have been followed in a store but I don't necessarily attribute it to my skin color so I don't have the thinking that someone is doing this to me is because I'm a person of color. More my experience, oh people are talking like this because they think I'm White.

Salina explains how she understands herself experiencing privilege because she has never had to deal with racism or being a token. She also understands her privilege as being able to “blend in” with dominant cultural norms, as described above on the section on Performativity and Behaviors. Of the twelve participants who described their white or light-skin privilege, five of them, including this participant, spoke to the phenomenon of the privilege of knowing dominant cultural norms so that they can appear to be White or blend in within the dominant ways of being. Moreover, she speaks here to the benefits of being White within a White supremacist society, where she has the privilege of “being able to blend in socially and culturally”.

Another participant, David, describes how it is difficult to assess whether he experiences white privilege because the “insidious forms” of white privilege entail that one's experience is normalized so that one will not know that they experience privilege. While other participants above were more conclusive in that they experience white privilege, this participant hints that he may experience white privilege because nothing

stands out in his experience; his experience is normalized. He later says during the interview that he does “probably” experience White privilege.

One of the things I like to talk about when it comes to white privilege, one of the most insidious forms of white privilege is having your personal experience normalized. The reason why I think that's so, I don't want to say evil, but so difficult is because you don't, you can't detect it. How do you know? If your experience is normal, it doesn't stand out. It doesn't feel like you're experiencing anything...I don't know if I've ever experienced a case of white privilege because I just feel like my experience has been normalized. I've been able to live it more or less peacefully and non-harassed. I feel...because of my mixed race experience, I'm more attuned to it, that's something that's been positive for me.

Thus, these participants illustrate their understanding of the light-skin privilege they experience because they understand that they do not experience racial oppression.

Understanding Privilege by Way of Oppression of Family Members

In addition to how participants understand their white privilege because of what does not happen to them - oppression based on how their perceived race - six participants described how witnessing the experiences of their darker-skinned family members who have experienced racism and discrimination provides clarity for themselves that they experience privilege because of their skin color and phenotype. Imani, for example, understands her light-skin passing privilege because she has witnessed the racism and discrimination that her darker-skin sister has faced. When asked about whether she identifies as a person of color (which will be explored in more depth in a subsequent

section), Imani speaks of how she does identify as a POC but does not have the lived experiences of a person of color as her sister does:

I would not say that my lived experience is that of a person of color because I don't get followed around in stores, I don't get pulled over by police. No one clutches their bag, ya know what I mean? Or even just, the difference between my sister and me, I have known my entire life that my sister is much much smarter than I am, and yet, our trajectories have been about as different as two trajectories can be. I'm sure that probably about 90% of that has to do with just our phenotypes that teachers did not realize how smart she was, that they tracked her, that she had kids who picked fights with her and she fought back and usually got the best of them so she was the one who got suspended. Our lives took on these very very different trajectories and I think if my skin were her color that would not have necessarily been the case. So I don't know from personal experience what it is to be a woman of color. I just know from the experience of the people around me, what they've gone through. So that's just why I feel like from a political perspective I can speak to it, but from personal experience, I can't. And I wouldn't try to.

In addition to Imani, Adriana also understands her own experience of privilege by way of witnessing a family member's experiences of oppression. She describes how she has witnessed her father's experience of difference in the U.S. while she herself has been able to assimilate. Adriana speaks to an incident of racism towards her father, which positioned her to understand her own privilege. These experiences also motivate her to claim her cultural identity and heritage to maintain the cultural pride of her family:

This is more recent of me being aware of how privileged I am because I'm half White. I'm perceived as White in our society. He has had to face a lot of discrimination and he has gone through some really difficult things in his life and things that he hasn't even told us yet, just about his experience coming to the US. I don't know about his experience. I don't know what it was like to cross the border. He doesn't really talk about those things... I remember he told us one time that he was working outside in our front yard in our garden and the mailman came or the FedEx guy, somebody dropped off the package and they were like, "Oh, could you give this to the owner of the house?" Obviously, well I guess not, my Dad was the owner of the home. He kind of just took the package and didn't really say anything. I remember him telling that experience. He kind of laughs it off and was like, "Oh, whatever." Maybe at that moment it was kind of funny, but then now thinking about it now, that's not okay. Somebody thought that you were the gardener and not the homeowner. I guess I thought a lot about how my Dad has to deal with that discrimination and how I don't have to... That has been important to me in developing my identity because I want to be out of who he is because I'm proud of who he is and continue that and be proud of how I represent his culture in myself.

These participants, such as Imani and Adriana, show how they understand their white privilege because of the oppression their family members have endured.

What Do I Do with this Privilege?

Of the twelve participants that described their experiences of white or light-skin privilege, eight of them actively grappled with how to be and act given their white

privilege. For most of these participants, their awareness that they experience white privilege is obvious and a given, so they focused less on awareness of their white privilege and more on how to be with and act from this awareness in their daily lives. For some of these participants, they reflected on actions such as working in community or in social justice activism; whereas for other participants, simply deciding what to check on forms that elicit race and ethnic information is a place where they struggle with their own experiences of privilege.

Adriana poignantly speaks to the questions she is left with in understanding how to use her privilege based on how others perceive her as White:

Going back to being perceived as white, it's something that just happens. It's not until recently that I have become aware of this privilege that I have. I don't know how to really deal with it. I've always been very proud of my identity and very proud that I'm half Mexican but I didn't realize the fact that people perceive me as White and not have questioned it. That has afforded me so many opportunities and so much. It's just made my life a lot easier. Do you know what I mean? It hasn't been until recently that I realized these things and it's frustrating because sometimes I'm...having to really look at yourself and realize how much privilege you have. It's just weird. You didn't ask for this privilege. You just have it. So how do you move on? Where do you go from there? How do you decide to use this privilege and how do you decide how to navigate the world having this privilege? It's been really strange for me because it's really frustrating.

Later in the interview, she describes one way she can use this white privilege – as

a leader of the mixed community on her college campus. Adriana talks about how she has become aware of how many of the college students in the mixed organization of her college's campus are mixed with White racial background and are perceived as White. She has sought, with other members of the group, to understand the implications of this for mixed race individuals who may join her organization and who have darker skin and thus experience discrimination.

In addition to Adriana, other participants also grappled with how they can use their white privilege. One participant, Morgan, has deeply considered how to engage in social justice work and activism as someone who experiences white privilege. In the following passage, Morgan describes several decisions they have made because of their experiences of white or light-skin privilege. Morgan, for example, speaks to how they are perceived as White in social justice spaces and choose not to assert their Mexican identity because that does not feel "liberatory" to them. In recognizing how others perceive them as White and the privilege that comes from that, Morgan tries to play the role of the "good White person" and be in the background, unobtrusive, and in a supportive place when engaging in social justice activism:

As I got older I started to realize that oh, I look like I could have walked out of Abercrombie and Fitch ad. I'm not traditionally a blonde hair blue-eyed girl or anything like that, but I could see how people perceive me as such. And then as I got into my mid-twenties, I started doing more stuff around social justice and that made me more aware of how people definitely perceive me as White, especially in social justice spaces. And so as I've gotten older, I have definitely put myself or found that I am often in the space of trying to be the good White person

because that's really the only option. Because I don't want to be in these spaces and assert the fact that I'm Mexican and I just want everyone to know that every five seconds. It does not feel liberatory, it feels weird. So how can I be the best White person or a non-oppressive anti-racist White person in these spaces?

Because that's how people will look at me anyways...I definitely feel uncomfortable with how White I am in these spaces. I am part of an activist collective in [City] and it developed out of folks organizing around Black Lives Matter around the country. And so I am very hyperaware of how I look like in these spaces for obvious reasons. And so I definitely try to play the most background and supportive and unobtrusive roles because of how White I am. I'm by myself making a lot of self-deprecating jokes to make other people comfortable with how White I am as well. I very very rarely say anything about being anything other than White in those spaces. I just let everyone assume that I'm trying to be a decent White person...I definitely try to take the furthest backseat as possible. So instead of being someone holding a sign or being someone who is leading a chant or someone who is holding a megaphone, I definitely opt to do the social media, like photographing, or tweeting during the event. Because then it puts me not in the spotlight and it puts me in a place that is supportive but not direct in a lot of ways. So that's usually how it manifests itself. I also try to not give my opinion or what I think should happen a lot of the time because it's not about me.

Morgan later describes other ways they use their privilege such as not entering spaces that are designated for people of color, because Morgan has access to other safe

spaces. While some participants, such as Adriana and Morgan, consider how to use or act from their white privilege in community or social justice spaces, other participants grappled with questions around their white privilege when choosing how to identify. Salina, who identifies as Mexican and White, describes how she often opts not to identify as Hispanic or Latino, particularly when filling out demographic information on a school or work application, because of the social justice implications of doing this. She acknowledges her own privilege, including privilege of skin color, and describes how because of the privileges she receives, she would not want to take away an opportunity for anyone who has a more marginalized experience:

I think where I notice it the most and where I feel it the most is I'm afraid to identify as Latina when I'm filling out things like graduate school applications or if they need my demographics for a job application because I don't want to take away a position. Basically it comes down to I don't want to take away a position from someone who needs it when I don't necessarily identify with what their idea of a multicultural area looks like. Because a lot of it is about outward appearance and not really what you are...I'm actually honestly going to blame social work on this in starting looking more into a social justice lens because I kind of feel like the nature of being able to pass as White, I've been given so many amazing opportunities. I feel guilty now if a job interview or a job application or school application, I feel guilty crossing it off...I just feel like through nature of privilege - I've had so much and I don't want to take something away from someone who could actually use or benefit from being able to check that box too...I don't feel

like I want the extra leg up even though that's really not what it's about. I've just had so much privilege in my life that it makes me feel guilty.

Linda describes how she too feels conflicted about checking off the "Hispanic box" because it may give her an "unfair privilege" since she already experiences white or light-skin privilege. Linda describes the conflict she feels because she both experiences white privilege and could also receive advantages for people with marginalized identities if she chooses to mark herself as Hispanic.

As described above, there are multiple ways that participants speak of how they choose to act on or use their white privilege. For some participants, like Morgan and Salina, it is clearer to them how. Other participants, such as Adriana and Linda, are continuing to navigate the tension of how to be aware of and use their white privilege when engaging in actions in their daily lives and do not yet know how this will look.

This section has reviewed the sub-themes related to white or light-skin privilege of the participants. Participants spoke of how they know they receive racial privilege, particularly because of what does not happen to them (racist experiences based on their skin color) or in comparison to the oppression their darker-skin family members experience. Moreover, many participants grapple with how to use and act from this place of white privilege through a social justice lens.

While this section has described the sub-themes that have emerged underneath the larger theme of white privilege, there will be continued exploration of the nuances of white privilege and racial oppression in relation to these participants in a subsequent section on Person of Color Identity. As will be described in that section, when asked if

they identify as a person of color, many participants continued to grapple with notions of racial privilege and oppression and the impact of these on their lives.

Experiences of Oppression

Participants spoke of varying experiences of oppression such as witnessing racism in interpersonal dynamics with family members, friends, or strangers, and a form of oppression due to their own mixed race identity: monoracism. As discussed in the literature review, monoracism or multiracial oppression is an emerging concept that describes the systemic privileging of that which is of one-race (monoracial) and the oppression of that which is multiracial, (Hamako, 2014).

In this section, I will describe both participant experiences of racism and of monoracism. In exploring monoracism, I will start by highlighting the participants who spoke to a need for a concept such as multiracial oppression or participants who explicitly used the concept of monoracism. Then, three types of monoracism are identified and explored: the imposition of monoracial categories on participant identities; boundary policing of participant identities through questioning, authenticating, and denial; and exclusion from racialized spaces such as affinity groups.

Racism

In previous sections of this chapter on Family and Experiences of Privilege, the experiences of racism towards family members of participants were highlighted. For example, two participants, Adriana and Imani, described how their father and sister, respectively, have experienced racism and discrimination based on their darker skin color and this gave these participants a deeper understanding of the privilege they experience because of their lighter skin color.

In this section, I will explore the experiences of racism that participants had in their own interpersonal dynamics with others, but not including the witnessing of racism towards family members since that has already been reviewed. Six participants described how they have endured a type of racism where others will make racist comments in front of them, either about other non-White identities or towards their own racial identity. Many of the participants cited how those who engage in racism in front of them perceive them as White and not as a person of color and thus assume they are speaking with someone who is White. Many of these participants grappled with understanding what it means to be perceived as White, hold a non-White racial identity, and then experience racism by others towards their racial background but not because of their skin color and phenotype. For these participants, they often found they were in a complicated position of realizing that the other person did not perceive their non-White racial identity and deciding whether to disclose their racial background to address the racism.

Imani, for example, describes a painful racist experience she had when she was a child which positioned her to understand what her future encounters would be like as a person who identifies as multiracial and is perceived as White:

I had a really painful experience happen to me when I was probably about 12. I had gone to visit my father who was living in [City]. I had made friends with the neighbor kid downstairs and we were hanging out a lot. And then one day he just said something like totally racist about Black people. He probably called them niggers or something. And my jaw just dropped. Here I had been hanging out with this kid for like a week or two and I thought we were cool. But he had no idea that I was Black. And it was one of those moments for me of like, wow, this is

probably what it's going to be like for the rest of my life that people are just going to say what's really in their minds and on their hearts because they think I'm one of them. And how can I avoid that? In a lot of ways, if that is who and what you're about, I'd really rather just not know. I mean it probably would be good to know because then I would know really who you are and stay away from you, but do I have to deal with all of that? I just don't know whether or not I want to.

Similar to Imani, Jessica had an experience of others engaging in racism in front of her while assuming she is White. She describes how she was at her campus' Queer Center and overheard several people speaking Spanish and engaging in racial mocking of Chinese people. As a woman who identifies as multiracial Filipina and White, Jessica felt like this was racism directed at her Asian identity. Jessica describes the tension of how she felt that if she were more visibly "Asian" and not perceived as White, these individuals may not have engaged in racist comments in front of her:

I work at my campus Queer Center and I was sitting at the table the other day and there were four queer-identified Latino people all mixed genders and in Spanish. Cause I know some Spanish, I heard them making fun of the way Chinese people speak. I heard them keep saying "China, Chinita" and then they'd say stuff like "Chong chong"...you know whatever. Even though I'm not Chinese and there are many differences between East Asian and Southeast Asian cultures, I'm willing and ready to defend any Asian community. But I was sitting right there and these four people felt like they had the liberty to do that while I was sitting there. And I couldn't help but wonder would they still do that if I was more visibly Asian? You know maybe they just thought "Oh yeah here's this light-skinned girl. She

probably doesn't know what we're saying. We can just say whatever." And I was just appalled.

Additionally, Salina, who identifies as White and Mexican, spoke of how co-workers described her as an "equal opportunity dream" because she is Latina but is not, according to her co-workers, "a stereotypical lazy Mexican." While Imani and Jessica had experiences where other people assumed they were White, this woman's co-workers knew she was mixed and engaged in racism likely because they perceived her as lighter-skin and thus felt entitled to say racist things because she was more like "one of them."

Similarly, Mia describes how even when she would disclose her racial identity, she would still experience racial micro-aggressions from others. Mia explains how she initially thought that others say racist comments about Black people around her because they perceive her as White, but she still experiences racism even when she discloses her racial identity:

When I was in middle school and high school I think I always, and maybe also in college partially, I thought that people were saying racist things around me because they didn't know I was Black cause I was undercover somehow. But as I've started telling every single person that I am Black I found out that people doing micro-aggressions actually don't give a fuck. Like they really don't care. Black people who are visibly Black definitely experience more racism than I do, which I didn't know that before. I just thought: no one would ever say those things if they knew I was Black, which now I don't think is true.

Moreover, a few participants spoke about how the racism they witnessed or experienced became internalized for them and then affected how they identify racially.

As described in a previous section, Jessica, for example, spoke of how the racism she experienced from her father toward Filipino culture and language was internalized by her so that she shunned her Filipina identity and preferred to identify as White growing up.

This internalization of racism caused her to feel ashamed of her identity:

I didn't [speak Tagalog] cause like I mentioned my dad forbid me to learn it. But I had really close ties to the people themselves. But for some reason I just didn't include that in my identity. It was something I was almost ashamed of. That I think I was conditioned to be ashamed of.

In the following description, Jessica continues to describe how even her peers who were Filipino also rejected a Filipino identity and sought to be White. This passage reflects the impact for these young individuals of living in a society with White supremacy where the racism toward people who are not White is internalized and is manifested in these young adults wanting to be White and mocking Filipino immigrants:

I think we [my high school] were fairly diverse. So it's not that we had a lot of White people and I wanted to be part of the majority. It was just that even the Filipino people I hung out with, they wanted to be more White. My close girlfriends would complain about how dark their skin was. They would buy special soap that lightens their skin. Just you know general beauty stuff. Even my half Filipino, half Black friend would be "Oh my god, my hair is so nappy," complaining about her blackness. There was just this general sentiment of wanting to look and wanting to act more White. My parents or my friends and I would make fun of our Filipino relatives' accents. They're like "Oh my god, they're so FOB, ha ha." F-O-B, like fresh off the boat. When they have a thick

Filipino accent or if they eat a lot of Filipino food or whatever. There were a few people who would wear shirts that said “Filipino Pride” with the flag on it. And we’d be like “Oh my god that’s so embarrassing. You’re so dumb, you’re so FOB and why are you wearing that?” And make fun of people like that. So I think there was a lot of internalized racism in my high school.

As Imani, Mia, and other participants demonstrate, many participants experience interpersonal dynamics of racism. In some of these racist incidents, the participant’s non-White identity is hidden, whereas others experienced racism even when those around them know of their non-White racial identity. Furthermore, the racial oppression toward non-White identities was internalized by some participants, such as Jessica who rejected her Filipina identity as a child.

Need for and Use of Concept of Monoracism

More so than experiences of racism, experiences of multiracial oppression or monoracism emerged in the majority of interviews. Of the participants interviewed, however, only two participants explicitly mentioned the emerging concept of monoracism. While only two participants mentioned monoracism, several participants spoke of the need for a way to articulate and conceptualize the experience of mixed race individuals, particularly those who experience incongruence between how they identify racially and how they are perceived by others.

In the following passage, Morgan explains the need for language to describe the experiences of mixed race individuals. Morgan describes an experience where they were attempting to relate to a friend who experienced a racist microaggression with their own experience of being called a “mutt” baby in their family. This friend told them the

experiences are not comparable. As Morgan describes, the discourse on race focuses on racism “for good reason”, but this also means that because Morgan does not experience racism based on their skin color, there is not a lot of room for them to have experiences that feel “raced”:

For good reason the discourse on race centers racism, which makes sense because that’s how that system of oppression manifests itself and that’s what we should be centering in our discussion in order to dismantle it. But in casual, every day conversation, I don’t feel like there’s really a lot of words to describe the experiences that folks who are mixed, both White and of color, have, even directly in the family. I have a situation where someone I randomly knew was talking about a random experience they had that was a racist microaggression within their family, someone married in who didn’t share a racial identity. And I was like “Oh that is wrong, it’s your family.” I was like I have very similar experiences with my dad and my grandparents but specifically my grandparents love to call my brother and I “mutt” babies. They think it’s hilarious. And the person I was talking to was like “Yeah but this is not the same.” And I was like “Yeah I totally know it’s not the same. I just know what’s it’s like to have people that are supposed to love you be jerks.” And they were like “But you don’t understand what it means because you don’t experience racism in the world.” And I was like “That’s totally valid and real, but I feel like on the flip side I almost can’t have any sort of experiences that are raced in any way.” We accept certain types of racism and certain types of narratives around that as legitimate and other ones as not as legitimate.

Despite expressing a need for a concept to articulate the experiences of multiracial oppression, Morgan does not use the term monoracism because of the critiques of this term. Morgan cites a blog that asserts that monoracial privilege exists only for people whose parents are both White and that people of color who have parents of the same race do not experience racial privilege, including monoracial privilege. Thus, because of these critiques of monoracial privilege and monoracism, they do not use those terms.

In contrast to Morgan, David does use the concept monoracism. He explains that while he experiences white privilege, he also has monoracist experiences:

What I'm really attuned to is monoracism, basically bias or discrimination against multi-racial people. Usually it's in the form of like the census forms and applying for a job or being at the hospital and filling out their form...I would say that I probably experience privilege as a person that appears White phenotypically, typically sounds White culturally. I feel like a person of color, but I don't necessarily feel...I don't feel monoracial all the time. I guess what racist experiences I feel are monoracist experience or racism against multiracial people.

No Liminal Space: Fitting into Monoracial Categories

After reviewing how two participants' spoke to the need and use of the concept monoracism, in the following sections I will explore different types of monoracism expressed by participants. While I categorize the types of monoracism differently than previous researchers such as Johnson and Nadal (2010) and Dalmage (2013), the three categories identified here overlap with the categories put forth by those scholars.

One very prevalent form of multiracial oppression is the imposition of monoraciality on the participants where they are expected or required to fit into singular

monoracial categories and there is no liminal space for their mixed identities. All 14 participants described experiences like these. For many participants, trying to fit into monoracial categories is a cause of conflict, distress, or pain because for the mixed race individual it often requires them to hide, suppress, or minimize a part of their racial and ethnic identity. For example, Linda expresses the pain and anger she feels around not having an “in-between space” or a liminal space for her to racially identify:

I just think I was really eager to talk to you about this because it has been such a persistent trouble especially in the past year but over my whole life. I have had so many thoughts about it this past year and I have felt really angry and I’m just really aware of how angry and hurt I am about needing to choose and not having this like in-between space really available and how painful it is to not be recognized and be invisible in various ways. You are begging people to notice things about you.

Salina also describes the feeling of always having to pick between monoracial identities and the implications of this:

I honestly I struggled a lot with not feeling like I had a place. Because I felt like as long as I would verbally identify as Mexican I could never be totally accepted by the people in the White or Jewish community...I felt always stuck between having to pick and choose where I wanted to identify. I couldn’t just be both. I had to pick one or the other.

For many of the participants, the imposition of monoracial categories on their identities often took the form of being required to identify as White by others because of their physical appearance. Two participants describe how they believe that others require

them to be White because it is easier and more comfortable for other people. For example, in the following passage, Morgan describes how other people assume they are White and how people may deny their mixed race identity and avoid conversations on mixed race because it complicates the discussion on race:

I think that not only do people assume that I'm White but I think they want to also. I don't think people really want to talk about people who are mixed. Or give that identity any visibility because I feel like it vastly complicates our discussion of race, which is already very complicated. We just have been really trying to have a very serious conversation about race. I feel like we don't want to talk about mixed race identity because it complicates something that is already so complicated and because it's been brushed under the rug for so long that we're like please don't disrupt the productive conversation we're already having. So I feel in part they assume that I'm White and also there's no discourse on mixed race identity so people just assume that everyone is monoracial so why would someone look at me and assume that I'm mixed when mixed people, to some degree, don't exist.

Sophie also spoke of how others push her to identify as White so they do not need to accept the dissonance of how she looks and how she identifies:

Because I'm a passing person I guess sometimes people push me to just say that I'm White. I guess it is more comfortable for them if they were confronting a person who looks White and who is White and they don't have to question that or problematize it. And for me, sometimes I feel like people are all too willing to allow me to just say that I'm White and not really upset the category of whiteness.

She goes on to describe a painful and confusing experience for her when she had to choose a race on a standardized test and the teacher imposed monoraciality on her:

I remember being young in elementary school, maybe in fifth grade, and I remember having to take a standardized test on a computer and there wasn't a multi-racial option and I was just very confused and very troubled by that. I asked a teacher for help. This sticks in my mind because this is a painful experience. She was like "Oh, just check White." And I thought oh that is how she sees me, just check White. I think even though people did know me and my parents sometimes they unintentionally made upsetting decisions to say or do things.

While many participants like those quoted above described experiences of being required to identify as White by others, Imani spoke of how when she was raised in the seventies, she was marked as monoracially Black. At that time, there was no multiracial identity in dominant discourse and thus, the multiracial identity was not accessible to her. She also describes how her mother feared her passing and eschewing her Black identity and that contributed to her reluctance to identify as multiracial:

I think when I was younger I felt more apologetic about having the multiracial identity, the mixed race identity because I was raised during a time when you weren't supposed to do that. I mean that wasn't even an option when I was a kid. When I was a kid, you were just Black. My birth certificate says that I'm a Black. And my social security card when I was in high school said I was Black. And whatever forms for school and that kind of thing, that's what you put. And my mother was really really concerned that I was going to pass, that I was going to eschew being Black. And turn my back on being Black because obviously there

are a lot of things that come with being Black that aren't great in this country....So growing up I really felt like I had to contend with this loyalty thing with my mother around being Black which make me apologetic about being anything other than Black. So I feel like it's relatively a new thing, within the last 15 years, where I will very publicly talk about being mixed and the needs of multiracial individuals and families in professional settings or in social settings and just talk about it. And just put it out there.

Imani goes on to describe experiences of other children asking her what her racial identity was when she was a young girl. Because multiracial identities were not accessible to her at that age in that era, she only identified through monoracial categories by saying she was "Black on the inside and White on the outside":

I remember just the way in which people, mostly Black kids, would demand to know what I was. They would stop me on the street to ask me what I was and a lot of times it would take me back. And when I was very little, I actually remember, and I only remember this because I wrote it in a poem, I was in maybe second grade, that some Black girls stopped me and asked me what I was and I said I'm Black on the inside and White on the outside. And that's how I identified when I was little, and then when I was in middle school, we moved up to Sacramento and the very first day I was on the middle school's campus, a few black girls came up to me during the break and said "What is you?" And I was like, are they asking me what my name is, are they asking me where I'm from? It took me a minute. What is you? And then I was like oh they want to know am I Black? Just like always sort of being confronted with not who are you but what are you.

While many participants could describe explicit experiences of being forced to choose between monoracial categories, for other participants, the way this type of monoracism played out was more subtle. Many participants experienced a form of internalized monoracism where they may have policed their own identity by requiring themselves to identify within monoracial categories, even during the interview. As described in the introduction, I too have struggled with the ways that I have internalized monoracism and have kept attempting to fit myself into monoracial categories. Given that monoracism is so dominant in the U.S., it is no surprise that these participants may have internalized the imposition of singular monoracial categories to their identities, particularly because they have experienced that from others.

For example, my conversation with one participant who is mixed Mexican and White was framed exclusively within the binary of White or Latino. She used singular monoracial terms to describe herself but experienced a lot of conflict around not having inclusivity of both identities. When I asked questions about mixed race or multiracial identity, she would answer within the binary. For this participant, the possibility of identifying as mixed race or multiracial was not within her conceptualization of herself; she had taken in cultural norms of monoracism where she only identified in monoracial categories even though that created a lot of conflict and distress for her.

Another participant, Mia, would on occasion also apply a binary of monoracial categories (White or Black) to herself. For example, she describes her music preferences in one part of the interview and then asks: “Am I just a White person listening to white music or am I Black person listening to white music? I don’t know. And also I don’t

think there's really like white music or black music." This is a clear example of how, on occasion, she applies singular monoracial categories to her own identity.

This section has focused on the exploration of a type of monoracism: the imposition of monoracial categories onto mixed race people and the negation of a liminal multiracial space. While this section focused on specific monoracial categories such as White, Black, and Mexican, in a later section, the experiences of participants in identifying as White and person of color will be explored in more depth.

Boundary Policing: Questioning, Authenticating, or Denying Identity

In addition to experiences of the imposition of monoracial categories on their racial identities, participants also experienced a wide range of boundary policing of their identities. Boundary policing occurs when someone has a culturally-informed idea of how a person of an identity should look, sound, behave, act, etc. and challenges that person based on those dominant conceptions of that identity. In her article on multiracial children, Dalmage (2013) refers to this phenomenon as "border-patrolling" of racial borders by others. In this study, participants described how their racial identities are policed in several ways. These include outright denial of their identity, questioning, or asking the participant to authenticate and legitimize their identity in different ways.

Of the 14 participants interviewed, five described how at times when they disclose their racial or ethnic identity, their identity is outright denied by other people. Salina, for example, described this dynamic where others do not believe she is Mexican and she feels she needs to prove it to them:

It's so so silly but usually when I disclose, people look at me and say no, no that's not true. And I start to get angry and feel I really have to defend who I am. Like

no this is me. What do I have to show you, my birth certificate? And I find myself needing to qualify. So it's always that first initial worry of what that reaction is going to be. Like will people accept me at face value? Or am I going to have to go through and really prove to them that this is what I am? It's always felt like I've had to prove it.

Sophie, who is multiracial Black and White, also experiences others denying her racial identity. She grew up in a small town where everyone knew her family and her racial background but when she went to college, she was often challenged:

If I'm meeting new people sometimes or when I came to college and met just lot of different new people, I think for the first time in my life, because I'm from a small town, I encountered the conversation where people just flat out didn't believe me and asked me to justify myself and in a way that really took be back. The process of disclosure became something that felt kinda weird and threatening for the first time in my life. I would sometimes not bring it up and not say it when someone would assume I was White and feeling like if I tell this person and correct them, they are going to demand to see photos or tell me that I'm not telling the truth or give me a lot of disbelief. It's almost easier to just let this person keep assuming. Sometimes I would have friends that were with me who would defend me and say "Yeah well she is. I've met her family. This is how it works, you're being very offensive right now." Those weren't always comfortable conversations to have and I'm sorry to admit that I avoided them a little bit.

In addition to flat-out denial of their identities, almost all the participants described experiences of feeling like they are questioned about their identity or that their

identity is minimized by others. Linda describes how experiences of others assuming she is White and her needing to authenticate or legitimize her identity are common and painful for her:

It's very familiar, it's painful, it's really painful and it's also very familiar. It's just been happening, I just feel like it's so up right now for me. I feel it has happened to me at least once a week that someone has said something to me about my ethnicity, assuming that I'm White. I was on a bike ride and this man was talking to me and I was saying something about my dog being from Mexico. I can't remember what I said to him, and he said but you're White and I said I'm not, let me show you pictures of my dad because he's not White, like really.

Mia expressed many experiences of feeling like needing to authenticate her racial identity or that her identity was minimized by others. Pertaining to the sub-theme above on outright denial of identity, Mia describes how she experiences that as well. She describes that while outright denial is rare, more often she is asked to legitimize her identity through questions about her parents' skin color:

I have had people want me to authenticate in various ways. I told someone and she said "No you're wrong, you're lying to us. You're not Black, there's no way. How could you have come with that? There's no way." Most people won't do that but other times people are really surprised but they believe me. And then other times people want to see pictures of my family. Or actually a lot of times people will ask me "Okay, which one of your parents is Black?" And I'll say my dad is Black...And they say "Okay but how black is he? Like what shade is he?" They already don't see me as Black and they're trying to get me to authenticate my

dad's blackness and that's a weird thing. I don't know what to tell them. What am I supposed to say? Moderately? Medium black? I don't know. He looks like Tiger Woods...And then other times it's more subtle or something. But they'll ask me weird questions like "So you're half Black, what kind of music did you listen to growing up?" Or "Oh you're half Black, what kind of food did you eat in your house?" And it's just weird. I can see where they set their boundaries for what is Black. I feel like most Black people have like relatives or people they know that are Black that are as light as me. And I think that people within their own races have a broader net for what counts.

In describing how she can see where others "set their boundaries for what is Black", she speaks to the patrolling and policing of the racial borders of what is Black, including physical appearance, behaviors, and preferences. In addition to having her identity denied or questioned by others, Mia also described multiple experiences of others minimizing her identity or markers of her identity. In the following passage, Mia speaks to how when she would disclose something pertaining to her that is racialized as Black, others would laugh at her:

I would mention that my family had a soul food restaurant and people would just laugh at me or things would come up and I would just get like laughed at or people would make fun of me for just things that were maybe coded as Black. But I didn't want to notice that my friends were racist so I just stopped bringing it up which I don't feel good about that...I was wearing a Stay Black and Remain Proud shirt one day and I walked into a room of White people and they read it and they laughed because they wouldn't of laughed if they saw me as Black. They

would've thought oh this person is like proud to be Black or something. But they laughed cause they thought this was a joke I was making, which is even more...that's also very fucked up. That somebody that they knew thought it was reasonable that that would be a joke they would make.

While many of Mia's experiences of monoracism and boundary policing occurred with White people, below she describes an experience where her actions seemed to be policed by a Black person selling Black literature at a flea market. While she could tell that this individual perceived her as White as she was trying to buy Black literature, she chose in that moment to not disclose her racial identity:

There's a primarily black flea market by my house, the African flea market. And I went there once to buy some books. There's these Black booksellers there who they specifically for the most part just want to educate people in the Black community about their history and politics. They sell all kind of books but mostly books for Black people. I read Black literature and I'm interested in Black history and such. And I was trying to buy some books from this man and that were about Black feminist thought or W.E.B. DuBois and he was raising the prices on me and he was really trying to get me to not buy those books. And trying to steer me towards books that were not about Black people. And I was really trying, I'm really trying to negotiate to buy these books and I asked him all these questions about the books and he got upset with me. He did not want to sell me the books at all and that was a situation where I was actively being Black with another Black person and he couldn't see me in that situation.

Sophie too describes a painful experience of how denial or questioning of her identity can even occur in very public spaces like academic talks:

I came into a situation again where being in those spaces I was being called out and challenged. I remember having this one hideous experience. A Professor was giving a talk about racism and the Asian-American community and this Professor I knew pretty well and they knew me and my racial background because I had taken classes with him about race and ethnic studies. So I was sitting in a talk and I raised my hand cause it was the Q&A part and I wanted to say something and I had a woman two rows in front of me look at me and say out loud what would I know about anything because I was White. That was so hurtful and so terrible, in a room full of people and my professor came to my defense and said first of all that is a terrible thing to say and also I happen to know her and she doesn't claim the category of just White, she's mixed race or she has these other parts of her identity. So that was really stark example of how someone had treated me or challenged me.

Experiences of boundary policing can lead mixed race individuals to feel like they constantly need to prove or legitimize their identity, even if others may not necessarily police them in that moment. Earlier, for example, Adriana spoke of how she feels the need to speak her father's native language, Spanish, as well as possible in her Spanish classes in college to prove her identity as Mexican. This stems from past experiences with her father's relatives who thought lesser of her for not knowing Spanish:

It's really something that I want to do, that I want to prove that I can speak this language. I can communicate with you in your language. I am Mexican. Just the

idea of having to prove myself. In those spaces I feel like I have to prove myself and I feel like I have to compensate for my whiteness and I have to prove that I'm Mexicana in those spaces.

As described in this section, boundary policing or border patrolling of identity of mixed race participants is a second type of monoracism and occurred in numerous ways and in multiple contexts. Some participants described other people outright denying their racial identities and many participants spoke of frequent experiences of being questioned or asked to legitimize or authenticate their identities. The prevalence of such experiences can lead individuals to constantly feel like they need to prove their identities.

Exclusion from Spaces

The last type of monoracism that frequently occurred for participants is exclusion from spaces, particularly spaces that are occupied by mostly people who identify as monoracial. Approximately half of the participants described experiences of being excluded from spaces because of how their race was perceived by others. Several of these participants spoke of experiences where they would enter a space that targeted a racial identity (e.g. Asian-American student group or African-American Student Alliance) and felt like others doubted or invalidated their identities. Often, participants would describe subtle exchanges such as non-verbal communication that indicated questioning of their identities. For example, Adriana spoke of her experience of entering into a Chicano Latino designated space and feeling like her identity was invalidated by the way another asked a question of her:

Once I got to college, I wanted to get involved, I wanted to feel connected, I wanted to find a sense of belonging at the school. I went to a Chicano Latino

welcoming ceremony for incoming freshman and transfer students. I went with my roommate, both of us are Mexican, but she also kind of was perceived as White where people can't really identify her ethnicity. So we went to this welcome ceremony and there was a bunch of student organizations and clubs there. We went up to one that was for the Chicano Latino students in the STEM field. I remember going up and saying "Hi", and then the person at the booth asking us, "Oh, are you Latina?" And I really just remember feeling so...not disrespected, but just feeling...she didn't realize, I just didn't understand why that question even had to be asked because it didn't matter. I just remember saying "Yea" and feeling like...what word...feeling invalidated, having my identity be invalidated. It was an event specifically for the Chicano Latino community and like what does it matter who came to the event. That was a really interesting experience and that was one of my first experiences because that was at the very beginning of the school year. That was my first year and I was like how do I navigate this community and how do I become a part of the Chicano Latino community...I didn't feel like myself. I felt welcomed by the community, but I wasn't necessary accepted by the community, so that was difficult.

While many of the participants described subtle experiences of questioning or rejection when entering spaces that targeted one race or ethnicity, Salina spoke of an experience of being rejected outright by a group for Hispanics:

I think I tried and embrace the Mexican culture and my Mexican family. But people just kind of thought I was lying and making it up. So it became more a mark of shame than actually something I could be proud of...I was working in

one of the science labs and I went to the Hispanic Students Union. I went in with one of my friends who was Cuban and we both got laughed at. And they told us that we didn't belong there. And that there was clubs for White people and we didn't need to be in their club. And that was one of those things that I was just again well crap maybe I don't belong. Maybe the world isn't that accepting of people like me that don't really fit into a neat little box. I was an outsider because I didn't match what people's expectations were.

As described above, exclusion from spaces that target a race or ethnicity is a third type of multiracial oppression. Above, the experiences of participants of racial privilege and oppression have been explored in-depth including white privilege, racism, and monoracism. In the following sections, the implications of these experiences of privilege and oppression will be examined particularly as they relate to identification as a person of color, the conflict and tension in navigating this identity, and harnessing these experiences as a bridge or advocate.

Person of Color (POC) Identity

For many participants, the intersecting experiences of white or light-skin privilege and racial and monoracial oppression were heightened when asked to describe whether they identify as a person of color. Every participant was asked if they identify as a person of color and this question elicited a wide range of responses. No participants affirmatively and definitively identified as people of color without any exceptions or qualifications. Five of the participants described that they do not describe themselves as people of color. The remaining nine participants at times or all the time described themselves as people of color, either with qualification or further explanation. Many

participants cited how their identity as a person of color (or not) is fluid, both changing over time as their own conception of their racial identity changes or changing depending on context such as whether they are in a predominantly White- or person of color space.

Because person of color identity, similar to race, is socially constructed, it is no surprise that there was a large range of responses to this question since participants used subjective criteria to identify themselves as people of color. Some participants focused on how their physical appearance affects their decision to identify as a person of color or not, while other participants cited lived experiences, both what they have personally experienced around their race and also witnessing the experiences of their non-White parents and other relatives. Other participants spoke of the person of color identity through a cultural lens or as a political identity and choice. Similar to what was described in the previous section on privilege and oppression, many participants recognized their unique positionality of the paradoxical nature and tension of living as a mixed race person without being perceived visibly as a person of color.

Before delving into the themes around person of color identity, the passage below by Linda describes how this tension plays out in her decision of whether to call herself a person of color. She demonstrates how while she is on a “crusade” to expand the person of color identity, she still questions whether she qualifies for it or not:

Lately I have just felt so, like “No, I’m a person of color” and part of that feels like this crusade right now because I want the world to understand... we need to expand our definition of what it means to be a person of color... I feel that I am in this crusade and sort of claiming that label that I feel that I am not doing as much work around analyzing my privilege. And that’s maybe coming up for me in the

past year...I don't feel like I have anything sorted. I don't know really how to answer that question. I already knew that phrase and I talked about it but I feel like in terms of really grappling with me being a person of color or not...that feels like a recent thing...So, lately, I'm trying on what if I just call myself a person of color? Then what?... you know, I think I identify as mixed, I think that's what I have claimed most of my life.

As Linda discusses, for multiracial individuals who are perceived as White, the decision of whether to identify as a person of color is complex with different areas of tension and conflict. Below, participant responses have been divided into several sub-thematic areas. First, I will explore those participants who do describe themselves as people of color with qualification or explanation. Next, I will investigate the experiences of those participants who do not identify as people of color. Finally, I will look at the experiences of boundary policing, and inclusion and exclusion in POC spaces that participants cited around their person of color identity. Throughout these sections, the tension or paradoxical nature of both holding a hidden non-White racial identity and experiencing racial privilege showcases itself in the words of the participants.

Yes, I am a Person of Color (With Qualification)

The largest number of participants (nine) described themselves as people of color with qualification. A common occurrence among interviewees was creating diverse qualifiers for the term "person of color" to reflect their unique positionalities as people with hidden racial identities. Four participants created qualifiers for the person of color identity and these were "mixed person of color", "multiracial person of color", "white person of color" and "person of color with no color". I will explore each of these below.

Jessica calls herself a “mixed person of color” since she could be challenged by others when she identifies as a “person of color” without a qualifier. She also recognizes the advantages of being mixed race and experiencing white privilege:

I don't claim the phrase person of color because I realize that if I did, people would look at me and say “What the hell, no you're not.” And I realize that I would get backlash from it. And that's part of the reason why I don't identify as a person of color but that's not the only reason. I also realize that I do get a lot of advantages and privilege by being mixed. And so that's why I just leave it at “mixed person of color”. Hoping that the prefix “mixed” kind of implies whiteness. Even though mixed person of color could be two faces that are both of color. But I feel like mixed person of color is not inaccurate.

Another participant, David, responded to the question by definitively and affirmatively claiming person of color identity. Several factors influence his decision to identify as a person of color such as how social justice issues affect communities of color like the attack on “undocumented immigrants”, perhaps reflecting POC identity as a political choice. Moreover, he identifies as person of color also because he does not want to purposefully pass and if he did not claim this identity, it would be easy for him to assimilate and be a “White” person. Despite his identity as a person of color, he also later qualified this as “multiracial person of color” which reflects his recognition of his white identity and white privilege where he is rarely treated as a person of color. This passage is interesting because the participant both rejects assimilating as a “White person” while also embracing that he is not “not White” towards the end:

I would say definitely I consider myself a person of color. I do. I'm probably not always treated as a person of color so I have to kind of check myself sometimes and realize I probably do benefit from white privilege at some level either on purpose or not...I wouldn't say I'm trying to pass, but really to be honest with myself I have to admit the fact that most people don't see me as a person of color even though that's how I feel and how I identify....Has that changed over time? I think I've probably become more attuned to it, more aware of it. I think the politics today, they are so polarized. The attack on undocumented immigrants. I think it's forcing me more to identify as a person of color as a reaction to the opposite side....So I guess over time I've identified more and more with a person of color. If I didn't identify more as a person of color and make it a conscious choice, it would be very easy for me to slip into a non-POC identity. If I wanted to assimilate as White and just be a White person that would be very easy for me. All I have to do is change my name. Even though I see myself as a person of color, I don't necessarily see myself as being not White. It's like a very particular kind of person of color. It's a multi-racial person of color. It's not White, but it's not exactly Black or Latino either. It's sort of still kind of like its own group that I feel strongly a part of.

Similar to David, Imani also speaks of how, for herself, the person of color identity is a political identity and choice. She describes how she identifies as a person of color politically and culturally but does not have the lived experiences of a person of color. She speaks of serving on a Black alumni panel at her alma mater and how she qualifies her experience as a “woman of color without color” because she does not share

the same lived experiences as people of color who are visibly of color. As mentioned in a previous section, Imani also compares herself with her half-sister who has darker skin than she does to demonstrate how she experiences racial privilege while her sister experiences racism and discrimination based on her physical appearance. Imani understands the experience of people of color by witnessing the lives of her family members, but not through her own lived experiences of racism and discrimination:

I do a really tongue-in-cheek thing with it. I was actually just at [alma mater university] last weekend. I get invited to come out each year as an alum...to be part of the panels and things like that, and the affinity groups. And so basically they have an affinity group with the African-American students and just being a part of that and openly acknowledging you're asking questions basically of what it is to be a person of color in the workforce. And I'm a woman of color without color. So I'm going to give you my perspective but take it with a grain of salt... I feel like I identify as a person of color politically but not in reality. Like I would not say that my lived experience is that of a person of color because I don't get followed around in stores. I don't get pulled over by police. No one clutches their bag...ya know what I mean?...I don't know from personal experience what it is to be a woman of color. I just know from the experience of the people around me, what they've gone through. So that's just why I feel like from a political perspective I can speak to it, but from personal experience, I can't. And I wouldn't try to... I think that's something I've been pretty clear on for a long time actually. Yeah. I don't think that that's one of things that's changed. I think how I identify myself has changed, but I don't think that I ever identified myself

generically as a person of color. When I was in college I was involved in a lot of person of color, women of color type circles or groups or that kind of thing. But I think for me that was more, this is my political group. This is where I am coming from with my sentiments or my leanings but it isn't where I am coming from my personal experience. Other than my experience of being a mixed person which has it's own unique ways in which people approach you and make assumptions about you and that kind of thing...I can be supportive of that experience in a whole lot of ways and culturally I can live that experience but in terms of how it shows up in a day to day existence with what for the most part is fairly negative treatment from the dominant society, I don't share that with you. And so I don't want to take away from that experience of yours which is really uniquely yours and try to pretend somehow that I know what that is because I don't.

In addition to the qualifiers "mixed", "multiracial", and "without color" for the person of color identity used by the above participants, Mia explains that she has used the term "white woman of color" to describe herself. She also points to this recurring paradox of participants who are mixed race and perceived as White: a person can lack the shared experiences of differential treatment based on race by being perceived and treated as Black that help construct the Black identity, yet they still may identify as Black:

As soon as I learned the term [person of color] I identified as that. I think for a while I...I mean I guess I still do but I think I mentioned to my dad once that I felt like a white woman of color. And I don't know what that means. I think it means that I feel like...I have both, I have both happening....I think you can be Black without being perceived as Black. But there are lots of experiences that have to do

exactly with perceptions. And I might not have those experiences. And it's usually good that I don't...for the most part the issue of being Black that comes with the perception are like not good issues to have.

None of the participants cited in this section identified as a person of color affirmatively and definitively with no qualifying statements. All the participants described themselves as people of color with qualifiers such as "mixed", "multiracial" "white" or "no color" or explanations of why the identification fits in some ways and not in others. These participants grappled with their unique positionalities of holding a non-White racial identity while not being visibly perceived as people of color by others.

No, I am not a Person of Color

Five participants responded that they do not identify as people of color. Of these participants, most cited their physical appearance and the implications of being perceived as White as the reason for why they do not identify as people of color. For example, Salina describes how she does not identify as a person of color because she does not look like one. She equates the person of color identity primarily with physical appearance, and less so or not at all with political identity or lived experiences:

I've never identified as a person of color and I don't think I could in good faith. I don't look like one. I would just feel like crap if I did... I feel like when you look at me I don't see person of color. So on a lot of superficial basis, I think that maybe if I were a little darker skinned or had more like different features I might be able to say that. But I mean aside from my hair and like me being darker skinned than my brothers, which isn't really saying much because they're pretty

much transparent. Um I...I think I would be laughed at if I ever tried to identify as a person of color. And I would laugh at me for trying to identify as one.

Morgan convincingly describes how they do not identify as a person of color because of their understanding of white- or light-skinned privilege and their social justice values of solidarity with people of color that posit not to use this privilege to “infiltrate” those spaces. As contrast, they also describe how they know of other mixed race individuals who look similarly to them and do identify as people of color:

I do not. I don't identify like that very intentionally. I honestly never thought of identifying as that because I'm so white, it just didn't make any sense to me. And I assumed that no one else who is white did either, but when I joined that Facebook group, one of the questions was “How do you identify?” And a lot of folks who I perceive as looking very similar to me identify as people of color and they were like “I don't understand why you wouldn't identify as a person of color.” I feel like that then gives me access to spaces that I don't really have business being in. And I feel like part of using your privilege to not be a garbage can is not infiltrating spaces that are not meant for you. And I could argue that it's space that is meant for me as somebody who is Mexican. But, part of showing solidarity for me is not stepping into those spaces because I don't think that I belong there, I don't think my experiences as a Mexican person are, I could find other spaces to talk about that stuff. And I don't need to infiltrate their space for people of color with my shit...I just don't feel like that's being a good ally when we talk about folks of color is like me coming up all into the space and being like “Hold up I'm here, see how white I am?” It's just that the whole thing with white

privilege is me being a relatively white person and white supremacy saying “Yeah, you can do anything you want, you can go anywhere” and part of trying to combat that is saying: No, there are spaces I should not.

This section examined several participant experiences who definitively do not identify as people of color.

Inclusion and Exclusion with the POC Identity

Finally, in this last section on person of color identity, the experiences of participants around boundary policing of the POC identity and inclusion and exclusion in POC spaces will be explored. Many participants described interpersonal experiences of their sense of belonging in or exclusion from POC spaces and being challenged or questioned by others. These experiences of inclusion and exclusion affected whether or not some participants identified as a person of color, or their feelings, such as fear or guilt, in doing so.

Jessica, for example, in this passage describes how a friend, a monoracial white man, challenged her person of color identity because she does not experience racism based on physical appearance. While hearing his words was painful, she also agrees with the “validity” of his argument because of the privilege she receives as a mixed person:

That is one thing I get challenged on...I feel like the most I can say that people will approve of is like “mixed person of color”. But if I just straight up say POC - you know, there was a guy I knew who would say “No you’re not even a person of color. I don’t know why you talk about that all the time. I don’t know why you so closely identify with that. You’re not even... like you don’t suffer the injustices that a visibly Black person or a visibly Latino person suffer so you can’t

even... you don't even get it." And I'm like see that's the exact kind of attitude of displacement that you know that's just perpetuating everything. And that really sucks...but while it hurts, I agree that there is some validity to it.

While Adriana did not speak of being directly challenged by another individual as Jessica did, she did recall an experience where a co-worker of color assumed that she was in conflict about her person of color identity. She speaks to the complicated dynamic of another more visible person of color serving as a legitimizer of the person of color identity for those who are less visibly so:

Recently, somebody was putting on a workshop specifically for people of color and I was just reading the flyer to one of my co-workers. I was like, "Oh, this is so cool. I don't know if I can go..." He was like "Oh well you're a person of color." I was just like, "Oh. Thank you?" I just didn't know how to respond because I wasn't even talking about that. I just wasn't sure if I could make it. I was just like oh, thanks for...but you didn't have to say that. So again, it brought up this question of am I a person of color? He said I was a person of color, but I felt like he said it just because he felt like I wasn't sure.

Similar to Linda's passage above of being on a "crusade" to expand the boundaries of the POC identity, Sophie explains that she sees POC identity as not a "monolithic identity" but one of solidarity for all people who are not White. She has witnessed how others are offended by her using the term to describe herself and expresses her conflict over whether to use it or not. She speaks to one subjective criteria of the person of color identity, experiences of racism, and her confusion over whether her and her family members' experiences of racism would qualify:

I've come across I suppose in more recent years during student activism or student protesting, I'm finding that claiming the category of a person of color as part of my identity has offended and upset some people where I have the idea that the person of color is a solidarity term and not some monolithic identity. Yea it's come from unexpected places. I've come across people I thought you of all people who professes to be so socially justified and so aware and with it and with the times and modern can have such weird views of a person in that way... The definition sometimes seems to be like the solidarity term for all people who are not White but whiteness is also part of my identity so sometimes I struggle with knowing like if I should use that or not, but I know it's used also to emphasize a share common experiences of racism. I have felt that before and so sometimes I am like I don't know if I should claim it or not claim it or if I am supposed to decide if my experiences of racism or have any family members who are minorities and get hurt by this sort of thing.

In addition to direct interpersonal experiences of being challenged or questioned about POC identity by others, some participants described their tension or conflict in entering POC-designated spaces and their sense of inclusion and exclusion. Linda speaks about the person of color orientation at her graduate school and her complex feelings and questions when entering this space. She also describe another POC space, person of color yoga, and her fear in participating:

When we did the people of color orientation at [College] last summer, I was really really nervous to go and I was really nervous that people weren't going to believe me and that I shouldn't be there and that it wasn't right for me to be there...and

when I got there, there were a lot of people who were lighter than me and it was like oh great I'm not the lightest person in the room and that was a relief. It took me awhile to feel like... I'm trying to think of the word... entitled to be there or had access to the space or whatever but I was actually really glad that I stayed because I made some of my best friends there, that was really important... There is a people of color yoga...or meditation group here, and my friend is always like it's so unfair that you can go and I can't go. I'm like I want to go but I'm afraid to walk into that room and feel like I need to show my card or have a pictures of my family on my phone so I can be like "I'm related to these people, I swear!"

Lastly, Adriana describes her conflict over attending a Student of Color Conference. In deciding whether to attend, she had to first decide whether she identifies as a student of color in this context. While she feels like she is not perceived as a person of color by others, she was convinced to go particularly because there would be spaces of mixed-identified people. This demonstrates the influence of context and fluidity of POC identity because had this space for mixed-identified people at the Conference not existed, she may not have seen herself as a student of color and meeting the criteria to attend:

I went to the Student of Color Conference...Again, I haven't been exposed to spaces like this before working at the cultural center so I was even hesitant to go. Even the whole idea of student of color, am I a student of color? Sort of, but to the outside world I'm probably not perceived as a person of color. That was always interesting for me initially going in, but I knew that there was going to be spaces for mixed identified people at a conference. So I was thinking: Let me go. Let me go connect with other student leaders from different universities, be able to have

conversations. If we can have a connection with one another and support one another. So I went and decided to go in with the best attitude possible.

At the conference, she experienced a difficult and painful situation in the mixed-identified group where an individual forcefully sought to caucus the group into people with only person of color background and those with person of color and White background. After that “altercation”, Adriana left with more questions about her POC identity and has recently settled on describing herself as a person of color, particularly because she can use this positionality as a person of color with white or light-skin privilege to advocate for communities of color:

That's something that I've been struggling with recently because for a while...when I first started my position, I was like yeah I'm a person of color. Yeah, like no question. Then I went to that conference and I was like a wait. I was kind of like whoa! Am I a person of color? Because just having that whole altercation with that one student at the caucus I was just like Oh my gosh. Why am I even a person of color? Then coming back and just having conversations with people. So, yes, I identify as a person of color. My experience has been very different than from the traditional experience associated with people of color. Definitely. And I recognize that and I acknowledge that...That's something again that I just have been trying to deal with. So my identity has definitely changed over time, but yes. I do identify as a person of color. Not only that but I want to be an advocate for people of color because again I have this privilege. I have this, I guess this passing privilege and I think I can use that to be an advocate for these marginalized communities that aren't represented.

In sum, the participants were divided on whether they describe themselves as people of color or not. Participants cited many subjective criteria informing this decision including their physical appearance and the privilege they experience based on how they look, experiences of family members, POC identity as a political choice, and POC as a cultural identity. All nine of the participants who identified as people of color sought to qualify or explain their unique positionality with this identity and four of them used qualifying words with the person of color identity. Many of these individuals also had interpersonal experiences that led them to question or qualify their person of color identity. Several participants chose not to identify as a person of color because of their physical appearance and experiences of privilege. While one participant sought to use her white or light-skin privilege to advocate for communities of color as a person of color, other individuals decided that being in a position of privilege precludes them from identifying as a person of color and entering POC spaces.

Conflict and Belonging, Acceptance, and Harnessing Identity

As described in the preceding sections on racial perception and markers of race, experiences of privilege and oppression, and person of color identity, many participants eloquently explained experiencing conflict, dilemmas, and paradoxes in their lived experience of mixed race individuals who are perceived as White by others. Participants described numerous ways that these tensions and contradictions manifest in their lived experiences. Because these tensions and contradictions were described throughout this chapter, I will summarize and integrate these dual-natured experiences in the next chapter Discussion. Here, I will examine how participants found acceptance with their identities and harnessed their identities in their work and organizations.

For some participants, belonging and increased acceptance of their unique positionalities came through two ways: with age and with connection to other mixed race people or communities. In the section on Fluidity of Identity, Salina described how she finds increasing acceptance of her identity with age and no longer feels like she needs to prove herself. Four younger participants spoke of feeling acceptance and belonging in mixed race spaces. Adriana, for example, describes the mutual understanding she experienced in her college's mixed student union:

I got to be in spaces with other mixed people who...we each had different experiences, but at the same time we still were able to connect with one another. We understood each other. We knew where everybody was coming from. That was really good for me. It was very eye opening and very transformative for me. Then I got a lot more involved in the mixed community. I found my space on campus where I felt comfortable and I could be myself.

Sophie also finds this mutual understanding when she goes to the multiracial student group on her campus, along with a group for low-income students, because these students understand the nuances of identity and that it can be fluid:

There is a multiracial student group and also there's the Quest Scholars group for the low-income students who have been admitted through Quest Bridge. Those are definitely two spaces I think where I come together with people whom I feel like its nice because I feel like there is just so much I don't have to explain. I'm not having to justify so many parts of myself. I'm like they get it, they understand that I am poor and mixed and the different parts of my identity because they are also poor or mixed or a person of color. I feel more relaxed, there is just so much

more that I'm not having to justify or explain or deal with assumptions... It is really nice to be around people who I guess understand that identities can be very fluid categories and a person of color can be a fluid category and also whiteness can as well. People don't just embody that one thing and they are not just that one thing. It can change through your lifetime and have revelations about yourself and identify in different ways.

Some participants found increased acceptance and belonging with their mixed race identity and others sought to use and act from their position of white privilege as described in the section on White Privilege. Only a handful of participants, however, described how they use and harness their unique positionalities as mixed race people who receive white privilege in their involvement in work and organizations. Adriana spoke multiple times in her interview of how she can use her white privilege in her organizational work of bringing together mixed people in the mixed student union at her college's campus. She also described wanting to be an advocate for people of color by using her privilege.

More than any other participant, Imani spoke of how her unique lived experiences and white privilege positions her to be able to have conversations and sit with decision-makers in a way that her monoracial peers may not be able to. She describes turning her lived experiences as a mixed race woman with white privilege from something that was "destructive" to something she can "capitalize" benefiting herself and others:

I do a lot of work professionally around cultural competence and health equity and so I actually bring my personal story into my work quite often because it actually, in some ways, helps people to talk about difficult issues around culture

and race and ethnicity and all of that. Because I am kind of putting myself out there. And so I have found in that space, it's actually really important because I'm able to crack that nut in a way that most people cannot do. These are really really difficult conversations to have with people but because of how I look and who I am, I'm able to have those conversations. So I've learned that I can actually capitalize on it in a way that most of life, it has been a thing that was destructive in my life, to turn it into something that actually was of benefit to me and other people. So in that professional space, quite often I need for people to know [my racial identity] because I need for them to know that I know what I'm talking about. But also doing things for example, like grant proposal reviews. If we are doing proposals that have been submitted from communities of color, for them to know that I understand these communities, I come from these communities, my family lives in these communities. And so to have a certain level of credibility ... In this whole realm of doing training, training people around cultural competence, and diversity, and inclusion issues, it gives a platform for me to be able to start those conversations with folks, and kind of open them up in ways that I think it would be much harder to do if I were monoracial in part because it's almost like there are more parts about me that people can identify with. So I think that's part of it. I think also kind of capitalizing on the whole white privilege thing, I'm pretty sure that a lot of the experiences that I've had in my life, I've had because people think that I'm White as opposed to people thinking I'm a person of color, where they give you the benefit of the doubt. And so I feel like I've been able to get my foot in the door to places. Or even ya know for like

teachers to assume that you're smart or capable or employers to assume that you're smart or capable so that you get your foot in the door to then be able to do what you need to do...I feel like it's a real responsibility that I have, I have been granted this light skin privilege and I want to use it in whatever ways I can to uplift my communities and to shed light on the kind of discrimination that there is. So in some ways, it feels like it's this blessing that I am able to see things from a lot of different perspectives and from a lot of different sides, and in some ways it feels kind of burdensome because there are definitely areas that I just won't put myself out at all because I get it that there really isn't a right answer to this.

Imani articulates the many ways she has come to harness her identity as a light-skin multiracial woman in working towards cultural competency and social justice for communities of color. As these last sections on privilege, oppression, person of color identity, and conflict and acceptance of identity exemplify, all the participants are continuously negotiating the numerous tensions and paradoxes of living as a mixed race individual who is perceived as White by others. Some of the participants have found belonging and acceptance and an increased ability to harness their unique positionality as a mixed race individual with white privilege.

This chapter has explored many themes and the rich complexity of the experiences of race of these individuals. Participants showcased a large diversity of experience in the thematic areas of racial and ethnic identity, markers and indicators of race, racial perception, family, experiences of privilege and oppression, person of color identity, and conflict and harnessing of identity. The next chapter will reflect on these findings, discuss limitations of this study, and put forth future areas of research.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study has examined the experiences of mixed race individuals who experience racial incongruence where they are perceived as White by others based on physical appearance and yet they identify not as White or not solely as White. A qualitative study of interviews of 14 participants was used to understand how these individuals navigate their, at times, paradoxical experiences of racial and ethnic perception and identity. In this chapter, I will review some of the key findings of the study, with an emphasis on how these individuals negotiate the experiences of tension of their racial identities and its implications for our understanding of race as a social construction. Then, I will discuss the limitations of this research study. Finally, I will look at future areas of research.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

In Chapter IV, many themes emerged of the experiences of these mixed race individuals who are perceived as White. Individuals described the many ways they identify racially and ethnically such as citing their parents' monoracial identities, using the language and identity of multiracial and mixed race, or using idiosyncratic language to capture their unique positionalities. Moreover, their experiences of racial identity were fluid and the fluidity of the racial identities across context and over the lifespan was explored. Participants cited many markers and indicators of their race, such as skin color

and phenotype, dress and jewelry, language, and performativity. Individuals described varying levels of agency over these markers where some were inherent and static such as skin color and others involved a level of choice such as dress and make-up. Lastly within this section, participant experiences of disclosing their racial identity and passing as White were explored.

One significant finding from that section was that these experiences of markers and indicators, passing, and disclosure were often areas of tension or dilemmas for the participants. Participants struggled with balancing the desire of disclosing their racial identity with the implications of doing this given their experiences of white privilege and monoracial oppression. Some participants, for example, accentuated certain markers of their racial identity to bring out their non-White identity. While for these participants these actions seemed to feel authentic, one participant wondered if she was “compensating” for her whiteness while another feared that others would perceive her as culturally appropriating.

Often, disclosure was rooted in the desire to not have their racial identity be invisibilized or hidden and a desire to be more fully known. Disclosure also stemmed from a desire to connect with others with their racial identity, to not be complicit in their own passing, or to protect themselves from racism. Yet, disclosure at times created conflict for some participants who had then had oppressive experiences of identity denial or policing by being asked to legitimize or authenticate their identity when they would disclose. Other individuals did not want to disclose because they feared they were unduly seeking attention for their racial identities especially because they do not experience racism due to skin color and are the recipients of white privilege. Thus, experiences of

passing and disclosure were often complicated by the significance of maintaining a hidden identity and the implications of disclosing as a mixed race person who is perceived as White.

Next, the experiences of participants within the family of origin context were explored. Participants described how family served as access to racial identity. Other participants cited differences in the racial identities of their family members and how, at times, others have painfully denied their biological family as their family. Racism towards family members and by family members were also considered, including the internalization by participants of racism by racist family members leading to a stronger identification as White during childhood.

Experiences of privilege and oppression were thoroughly examined in the Findings Chapter. Most participants spoke openly about the white racial privilege they experience and could identify how they know they receive it, especially in comparison to family members who experience racism. Some participants described how they choose to act and use their white privilege. Participants also cited areas of oppression such as racism and monoracism or multiracial oppression. While participants do not experience racism due to their skin color, they described witnessing racism towards family members and experiencing racism in more subtle interpersonal dynamics. A key finding was that participant experiences of multiracial oppression included three types: the imposition of monoracial categories on their identities; boundary policing through identity denial or legitimization or authentication of identity; and exclusion from certain racialized spaces.

The implications of these experiences of white privilege and racial and monoracial oppression were also understood within the context of identifying as a person

of color. Another key finding was how most participants do identify as people of color, however, all of them qualified this identity in some way because they felt they did not have the full lived experience of people of color who are perceived as such.

This section on person of color of identity along with the above section on racial privilege and oppression were other places where participants struggled with the tension and dilemmas of their unique positionalities. These are participants who hold a marginalized racial identity and yet do not experience marginalization based on their physical appearance, a primary indicator of race. Thus, these individuals experienced tension around the privilege they received based on their light skin color and phenotype while also seeking to claim their non-White identity and speak from their social location as a mixed race person. The paradoxical nature of this positionality showcased in several ways in this section on privilege, oppression, and person of color identity. Some participants felt torn of whether to speak in social justice spaces or spaces exploring racial issues because, while they felt like their positionality offered a unique take on experiences of race, they also worried about taking up space as a White-perceived individual. Several participants described wanting to mark their non-White identities on applications but experiencing guilt over taking away advantages from other individuals who hold that identity and may experience more marginalization. Most participants experienced a constant navigation and negotiation of these continuous dilemmas and paradoxes of their racial identity.

Lastly, a theme of how individuals found belonging acceptance and harnessed their racial experiences and identities was explored. A significant finding here was that some individuals found a sense of acceptance and belonging in mixed race spaces.

Several individuals reconciled the tensions and dilemmas of their identities by harnessing their unique positionalities of understanding deeply the dualities of privilege and oppression in their work and organizations that focused on social justice. Overall, many participants fluctuated between both describing areas of conflict around their identities and also places of deep appreciation and acceptance of their identities.

Implications of Findings

All of these findings demonstrate the constant navigation and complexity of the experiences of individuals who are mixed race and perceived as White. The conflict, tensions, and dilemmas above reflect the meeting of inner truths and outer realities. These individuals seem to seek to live their life and racial identities authentically and yet face continuous external experiences, such as the constraints of dominant notions of race and monoraciality, that complicate their experiences of race.

The experiences of these participants reveal several realities around race and mixed race experiences in the U.S. While race has historically been based on such factors such as skin color, phenotype, and geographic area of origin, today many individuals choose their racial identity based on other factors such as family ancestry, and this choice may not always reflect how they are perceived by others. As described in the Introduction, this is especially true of mixed race individuals with biological parents of different races who may have more racial identity choices available to them and thus may more frequently experience racial misrecognition than individuals who are monoracial.

The choices of these individuals, however, are constrained by the subjective criteria that comprise racial categories and racial borders and change relationally and within context. This reflects the social construction of race. These are individuals who sit

at racial borders and have complex and contested experiences of race. The choice of racial identity by these individuals may be influenced by and also subject to border patrolling by individuals who seek to uphold dominant notions of monoracial categories. Moreover, the choice of racial identity by these individuals reflects their paradoxical racialized experience of holding a marginalized racial identity while not experiencing racism based on skin color and phenotype, the essence of how race was created in the first place. Thus, the experiences of these individuals highlight the subjectivity and arbitrariness of race as a social construction that also has tremendous implications on the lives of many people.

Limitations of the Study

There are multiple limitations of this study that affect its generalizability including characteristics of the sample and the recruitment process and the qualities of the researcher. In this section, I will review each of these areas briefly.

First, there are limitations with the study's sample and recruitment efforts that may affect the generalizability of the study. One primary limitation of the study is its sample size. Because of limited time and resources as a Masters student, I interviewed 15 participants despite having a large response of almost sixty individuals expressing interest in being interviewed. Thus, the small number of participants may mean that the study cannot be generalized to the entire population of mixed race individuals who are perceived as White by others based on their physical appearance. However, because of the limited research in this area, the intent of the study was less focused on generalizability and more on conducting an exploratory in-depth study of the experiences of a small sample of participants.

Moreover, there are some limitations in my method of recruitment that may also affect the generalizability of the study. The method of recruitment by convenience and snowball sampling signifies that I was likely to recruit participants from only a handful of communities and that these individuals potentially may differ in some regard from the entire population of individuals who meet the criteria for participation. For example, I recruited through academic and activist communities on Facebook and through my own social networks such as the Smith College School for Social Work. My participants ended up being concentrated in California (likely due to the presence of Californians on the Critical Mixed Race Studies Facebook group) and all of them are highly educated, either in undergraduate or graduate programs at the time of the study or having completed a Bachelor's or graduate degree. The education level of participants may be due to the high education level of my own social networks and those who participate in an online academic social network group such as Critical Mixed Race Studies. Moreover, the majority of the participants are female with twelve identifying as woman. Thus, for all of these reasons, the sample of this study may have unique attributes that mean it differs from the entire population in significant ways that may affect its generalizability.

In addition to characteristics of the sample and recruitment methods, qualities of the researcher likely affected aspects of the study such as participant responses. As a researcher, I am informed by feminist research methods and believe that the qualities of the researcher can never be totally separated from the study to create a purely "objective" research design and analysis. This study is created from and heavily informed by my own experience as someone sharing the aspects of the identities of the participants who are mixed race and perceived as White by others based on physical appearance.

While my own identity has a significant role in the creation of the study, there are several qualities of myself that may impact the research study and participant responses. First, the characteristics of myself such as the way I speak (accent or dialect), the language I use, my name, my affiliation with Smith College School for Social Work, and my way of being in the interview all affect the interpersonal dynamic between the participants and me, particularly because these may indicate or code me racially and culturally, in addition to being indicators of other social locations such class, education, and sexual orientation. I believe I am often coded as White by others not solely because of my physical appearance, but also because of the aforementioned qualities such as the way I speak. Anticipating this influence, I did remove the variables of my own physical appearance and the participants' physical appearances in influencing us in how we may engage with each other by conducting all interviews through phone. The other qualities, however, may lead individuals to perceive my own social location and identities through their lens, which may then affect how they interact with me and answer the questions I posed to them during the interview. For example, even if a participant cannot see that I physically present as White, they may assume I have internalized white dominant cultural norms by my American English accent or the language I use and thus may answer the questions differently than, for example, if I were coded as Latina based on how I speak.

Moreover, as a mixed race individual in the U.S., I have likely internalized aspects of monoracism and may enact these in interviews with other multiracial people without necessarily realizing it. My own journey in understanding my racial and ethnic identity has more recently opened to observing how the binary of white and person of color identity in the U.S. lives inside me. I found that I often police my own thoughts,

feelings, and reactions according to this binary rather than allow myself to sit in a liminal space of holding both these identities. I also find that what I have internalized undoubtedly comes through in the interviews with participants. For example, in several interviews, I asked candidly if there were indicators or markers of a participant's white identity or non-white identity (e.g. Black identity). By asking this question, I am already reinforcing a binary of race of white and person of color without allowing for the possibility that racial identity cannot be spliced into two but exists as an integrated whole.

Future Areas of Research

This study represents a preliminary look at the experiences of mixed race individuals who experience racial misidentification, specifically those who are perceived as White based on physical appearance but do not identify as White or solely as White. Because this is a first study of this specific population and there is limited literature available on this population, there are many avenues of future research.

Future studies can explore the phenomenon of racial misidentification in general or focused on mixed race individuals. In conducting the review of literature, I found few studies that examined how individuals may experience an incongruence in their racial identity and how they are perceived, particularly if they are mixed race. Moreover, future research can also examine this phenomenon for individuals of a particular race or ethnicity, rather than generalize across races as I have done in this study.

Because this is an in-depth look at a specific population, future studies can examine more deeply any area that was covered in this study such as the markers and indicators of race or the experiences of race within the family context. Moreover, future studies can further explore the physical appearance and racial perception of participants

in the study. In this study, the perception of others as White was mostly taken as fixed and static, however, racial perception and socially constructed and thus changes relationally and across context. An exploration of how racial perception changes for people who experience racial misrecognition could be another fascinating area of ongoing research.

In sum, this study was just a first look of the experiences of mixed race people who are perceived as White. This is a population that experiences a paradoxical experience and can showcase and highlight the many realities and nuances of race, the construction of race, and monoraciality in the U.S. Because of the growing population of mixed race individuals and the ongoing significance of racial privilege, oppression, and justice in the U.S., scholars need to continue to explore the experiences of multiracial individuals who sit at racial borders and this study contributes to that scholarship.

References

- Alexander, M. (2011). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press
- Atkinson, D., Morten, G., & Sue, D. W. (1989). *Counseling American minorities: A cross-cultural perspective*. Dubuque, IA: Brown.
- Cross, W. E. (1971). The Negro-to-Black conversion experience. *Black World*, 20(9): 13-27.
- Dalmage, H. (2013). Patrolling racial borders: Discrimination against mixed race people. In M. Adams, W. J. Blumenfeld, C. Castañeda, H. W. Hackman, M. L. Peters, & X. Zúñiga (Eds.), *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (pp. 96-101). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ferdman, B. M., & Gallegos, P. I. (2001). Racial identity development and Latinos in the United States. In C. L. Wijeyesinghe & B. W. Jackson, III (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development: A theoretical and practical anthology* (pp. 32-66). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Hamako, E. (2014). An introduction to Monoracism. *Global Mixed Race: Critical Mixed Race Studies*. DePaul University, Chicago, IL.
- Hardiman, R. (1982). White identity development: A process oriented model for describing the racial consciousness of White Americans. Doctoral dissertation. University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Hardiman, R. (2001). Reflections on White identity development theory. In C. L.

- Wijeyesinghe & B. W. Jackson, III (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development: A theoretical and practical anthology* (pp 108-128). New York, NY: New York University Press
- Helms, J. E. (1984). Toward a theoretical explanation of the effects of race on counseling: A black and white model. *Counseling Psychologist, 12*(4): 153-165.
- Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helms's White and people of color racial identity models. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181-198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Horse, P. G. (2001). Reflections on American Indian identity. In C. L. Wijeyesinghe & B. W. Jackson, III (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development: A theoretical and practical anthology* (pp. 91-107). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Jackson, B. (1975). Black identity development. *Journal of Educational Diversity, 2*, 19-25.
- Jackson, K. F., Yoo, H. C., & Guevarra, R. (2012). Role of identity integration on the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological adjustment of multiracial people. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 59*(2), 240-250.
- Johnston, M., & Nadal, K. (2010). Multiracial microaggressions: Exposing monoracism in everyday life and clinical practice. In D. W. Sue (Ed.), *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics and impact* (pp. 123–144). New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Kim, J. (2001). Asian American identity development theory. In C. L. Wijeyesinghe &

- B. W. Jackson, III (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development: A theoretical and practical anthology* (pp. 67-90). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- King-O'Riain, R. C. (2014). Mixed race, transconnectivity, and the global imagination. *Global Mixed Race: Critical Mixed Race Studies*. DePaul University, Chicago, IL.
- Lipsitz, G. (2013). The possessive investment in whiteness. In M. Adams, W. J. Blumenfeld, C. Castañeda, H. W. Hackman, M. L. Peters, & X. Zúñiga (Eds.), *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (pp. 77-85). New York, NY: Routledge.
- McDonough, S. & Brunson, D. L. (2013). Navigating the color complex: How multiracial individuals narrate the elements of appearance and dynamics of color in twenty-first century America. In Hall, R. E. (Ed.), *The Melanin Millennium* (pp. 257-272). Netherlands: Springer.
- McIntosh, P. (1989, July-August). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, 10-12.
- Poston, W. S. C. (1990). The biracial identity development model: A needed addition. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 69, 152-155.
- Renn, K. A. (2000). Patterns of situational identity among biracial and multiracial college students. *Review of Higher Education*, 23, 399-420.
- Renn, K. A. (2003). Understanding the identities of mixed-race college students through a developmental ecology lens. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(3), 383-403.
- Renn, K. A. (2008). Research on biracial and multiracial identity development: Overview

- and synthesis. *New Directions for Student Services*, 123, 13-21.
- Rockquemore, K. A. (1999). Between black and white: Exploring the biracial experience. *Race and Society*, 1, 197-212.
- Rockquemore, K., Brunsma, D. L., & Delgado, D. J. (2009). Racing to theory or retheorizing race? Understanding the struggle to build a multiracial identity theory. *Journal of Social Issues*, 65(1), 13-34.
- Root, M. P. P. (1990). Resolving "other" status: Identity development of biracial individuals. *Women and Therapy*, 9(1/2), 185-205.
- Root, M. P. P. (1998). Experiences and processes affecting racial identity development: Preliminary results from the Biracial Sibling Project. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*, 4(3), 237.
- Root, M. P. P. (2003). Racial identity development and persons of mixed race heritage. In Root, M. P. P. and Kelly, M. (Eds.), *The Multiracial Child Resource Book: Living Complex Identities* (pp. 34-41). Seattle, WA: Mavin Foundation.
- United States Census Bureau. (2010). Two or more races population. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-13.pdf>
- Wallace, K. R. (2001). *Relative/Outsider: The art and politics of identity among mixed heritage students*. Westport, CT: Ablex.
- Wallace, K. R. (2003). Contextual factors affecting identity among mixed heritage college students. In Root, M. P. P. and Kelley, M. (Eds.), *Multiracial child resource book: Living complex identities*. Seattle, WA: MAVIN Foundation.
- Wijeyesinghe, C. L. (2001). Racial identity in multiracial people: An alternative

paradigm. In Jackson III, B.W. and Wijeyesinghe, C.L. (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development; A theoretical and practical anthology* (pp. 129-152). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Wijeyesinghe, C. L. (2012). The intersectional model of multiracial identity: Integrating multiracial identity theories and intersectional perspectives on social identity. In Jackson III, B.W. and Wijeyesinghe, C.L. (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development; A theoretical and practical anthology* (pp. 81 -106). New York, NY: New York University Press.

APPENDIX A



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

January 29, 2015

Marcella Wagner

Dear Marcella,

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 black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

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

CC: Crystal Hayes, Research Advisor

APPENDIX B

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:

The Impact of White Physical Appearance on the Racial Identity Development of Mixed Race Individuals

**Student Name: Marcella Wagner
Research Advisor’s Name: Crystal Hayes**

.....

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 would like to change the age inclusion criteria for participation in my study (see section a) under Participants in approved HSR application). Currently, the inclusion criteria is listed as age 18 to 35. I would like to take out the upper limit and allow participation in my study for individuals age 18 or over. I would need to change the list of criteria on the consent form to reflect this change.

.....

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: Marcella Wagner (electronic signature)

Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): Marcella Wagner Date: 02/06/15

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.*

.....



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

February 6, 2015

Marcella Wagner

Dear Marcella,

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,



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

CC: Crystal Hayes, Research Advisor

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:

The Impact of White Physical Appearance on the Racial Identity Development of Mixed Race Individuals

Student Name: Marcella Wagner
Research Advisor’s Name: Crystal Hayes

.....

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:

- I will hire a transcriptionist who will have access to the audiorecordings of participant interviews to transcribe the interviews. The transcriptionist will sign (wet signature) the confidentiality agreement (attached) and return to me. I will inform the transcriptionist of the confidentiality procedures that are within my original consent form and HSR application. I will also email each participant who has been interviewed to inform them that I will hire a transcriptionist who will have access to the audiorecorded interviews to transcribe them and who has signed a confidentiality agreement. I will let each participant also know that they can refuse having their interview transcribed by the hired transcriptionist if they email me back within three days of my email. If any participants refuse to have their interviews transcribed by the hired transcriptionist, I will transcribe the interview myself for that participant.

.....

MW I understand that these proposed changes in protocol will be reviewed by the Committee.
MW 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.
MW 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: Marcella Wagner (electronic signature)

Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): Marcella Wagner Date: 03/17/15

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.*

.....



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

March 18, 2015

Marcella Wagner

Dear Marcella,

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 black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

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

CC: Crystal Hayes, Research Advisor

APPENDIX C

Dear friends and community members,

I am reaching out to you because I am looking to interview multiracial individuals for my thesis study for the Smith College Master of Social Work program. Specifically, I am looking to interview individuals who **identify as mixed race or multiracial*** and are **perceived as white by others based on physical appearance**. As someone who is mixed and presents as white, I am interested in exploring the experiences of people who navigate a non-white (or not solely white) racial identity while being assigned white identity by others.

The interview will be approximately **one hour** and can take place in-person (in the Durham, NC area), through Skype, or over the phone. If you would like to participate in the study, live in the U.S., and are over age 18, please respond to this email. Or, if you know of any people who may be interested or any relevant email lists (such as social work, social justice, or mixed race groups), I would appreciate if you could pass this email along!

Thank you for your time and support,
Marcella Wagner

*for this study, I am including mixed race or multiracial individuals who have biological parents of different races including Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino

APPENDIX D



**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA**

.....

Title of Study: The Impact of White Physical Appearance on the Racial Identity Development of Mixed Race Individuals

Investigator(s): Marcella Galvez Wagner
Master of Social Work Program, Smith College School for Social Work
(XXX) XXX-XXXX
XXXXXXXXXX@smith.edu

.....

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study exploring the experience of multiracial individuals who experience racial misidentification based on physical appearance.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you are between the ages of 18 and 35, live in the U.S., identify as multiracial or mixed heritage (your biological parents are of different races and/or one is Latino/Hispanic and the other is non-Latino/Hispanic), and are perceived to be white or assigned white racial identity by others based on your physical appearance. You also consent to be interviewed either in person, over the phone, or through Skype by audiotaped means and you consent to the use of your research for educational purposes.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.
- If you agree to participating in this study, please sign on the last page and return this form within two weeks of receipt or no later than _____.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to learn about the experience and identity development of multiracial individuals who experience racial misidentification based on their physical appearance.
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my Master’s in Social Work degree.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: participate in an approximately one hour (60 minute) interview that will be audio-recorded. During the interview, confidentiality will be reviewed and you will be asked to discuss your experience

of your racial and ethnic identity and your experience of racial misidentification with the researcher.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. However, I will be asking you questions about your racial and ethnic identity and its development, along with questions about how others perceive your physical appearance. Since all of these questions are of a personal and sensitive manner, please feel free to decline to answer any question or end the interview early if you are experiencing discomfort or distress.

Benefits of Being in the Study

- The benefits of participation are having the opportunity to talk about your racial and ethnic identity and your experiences of this along with the possibility of gaining insights into how racial misidentification may affect your identity.
- The benefits to social work/society are: to provide additional research on multiracial individuals, a growing population in the U.S. that is under-represented in social work literature; and to further understand the impact of physical appearance, and specifically racial misidentification, on multiracial identity development.

Confidentiality

- Your participation will be kept confidential. The interview will take place over the phone, through Skype, or will take place in-person at an agreed-upon location such as a private office or study room at a library. I will keep your identity and any information you provide confidential and I will not reveal to anyone your participation in this study. In addition, the records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Any physical materials (such as this consent form) will be kept in a locked secure box. The audio recordings will be transferred to my computer with a password lock and deleted from any recording devices within a day of the interview. No one except for myself will have access to these recordings or physical materials.
- All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments/gift

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time up to April 10, 2015 without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by April 10, 2015. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- 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 further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Marcella Galvez Wagner at mwagner2@smith.edu or by telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

.....

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

.....

1. I agree to be *audio taped* for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be audio taped:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Before we start, I want to check in with you if you had any questions about anything in the consent form or any other questions?

1. Can you start by describing your racial and ethnic identity to me?
 - Has this changed over time, and if so, how?
2. I'm curious how you have experienced others perceiving your race and ethnicity?
How do you think others perceive your race and ethnicity?
 - What qualities of yourself do you think influence that perception?
Whether it's physical qualities or ways of being. (*for me to remember:*
physical appearance, performativity)
 - What lets you know that others perceive you in this way?
 - Does this change depending on context (such as over time, with different people, or at different places)? If so, how?
 - Can you tell me about any general experiences or specific memories you have had around how others perceive your race or ethnicity?
3. Sometimes when we have a hidden identity, we may accentuate or perform the identity in other ways such as through name, language, dress, behavior, or social networks. Are there any markers or indicators that emphasize or disclose your racial or ethnic identity?
4. Can you tell me about the process of disclosing your racial and ethnic identity?
How does this happen for you? What factors (place, people, time) may shape if or how you do this?
5. Do you ever have experiences of feeling like others want you to authenticate or legitimize your racial and ethnic identity? Can you tell me about general experiences or specific memories of this?
6. What is it like for you in different spaces – people of color spaces, white spaces, or spaces of mixed race?
 - What is your experience of inclusion and exclusion in these spaces?
 - In which do you find yourself most often?
7. Do you identify as a person of color? Why or why not?

- Has this changed over time or place?

The next set of questions are around your experiences of privilege and oppression, white identity, and whiteness...

8. I am curious about both experiences of privilege and oppression of mixed race people who are perceived as white. Can you tell me about how you may have experienced either or both privilege or oppression based on your racial identity and presentation?
 - Do you have any specific memories or general experiences of this?
9. How do you understand your connection to Whiteness, which may mean the connection to your white family and ancestry or community, experiences of white privilege, white cultural norms?
10. Since you are perceived as white by others, do you ever identify as an ally to people of color or communities of color?
 - What does allyship look like to you?
 - Can you give any examples?
11. Do you hold any other identities that may be hidden or you may pass (sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, others)? How do you think holding these other hidden identities may impact your experience of being mixed and perceived as white?
12. Do you think others' assignment of white racial identity to you has affected the development of your racial and ethnic identity? If so, how?
13. Is there anything else that you haven't spoken about yet that you think would be important or helpful for me to know?

Demographic Questions

14. Before we end the interview, I would like to ask you a few demographic questions...
 - How old are you?
 - What is your self-identified gender?
 - How do you identify your sexual orientation?
 - What is your highest level of education? Are you currently a student?

- How would you identify your socioeconomic class now? Growing up?
- Where did you grow up?

We are wrapping interview now. Thank you so much for letting me interview you. Do you have any questions about anything we talked about, or about the interview or thesis process?

APPENDIX F

Volunteer or Professional Transcriber's Assurance of Research Confidentiality

This thesis project is firmly committed to the principle that research confidentiality must be protected and to all of the ethics, values, and practical requirements for participant protection laid down by federal guidelines and by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee. In the service of this commitment:

- All volunteer and professional transcribers for this project shall sign this assurance of confidentiality.
- A volunteer or professional transcriber should be aware that the identity of participants in research studies is confidential information, as are identifying information about participants and individual responses to questions. The organizations participating in the study, the geographical location of the study, the method of participant recruitment, the subject matter of the study, and the hypotheses being tested are also be confidential information. Specific research findings and conclusions are also usually confidential until they have been published or presented in public.
- The researcher for this project, - Marcella Wagner - shall be responsible for ensuring that all volunteer or professional transcribers handling data are instructed on procedures for keeping the data secure and maintaining all of the information in and about the study in confidence, and that that they have signed this pledge. At the end of the project, all materials shall be returned to the investigator for secure storage in accordance with federal guidelines.

PLEDGE

I hereby certify that I will maintain the confidentiality of all of the information from all studies with which I have involvement. I will not discuss, disclose, disseminate, or provide access to such information, except directly to the researcher, - Marcella Wagner - for this project. I understand that violation of this pledge is sufficient grounds for disciplinary action, including termination of professional or volunteer services with the project, and may make me subject to criminal or civil penalties. I give my personal pledge that I shall abide by this assurance of confidentiality.

Christy Sanders

Signature

3-17-15

Date

Marcella Wagner

Insert name of researcher

03/17/15

Date