EXPERIENCES OF MULTIRACIAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION

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Abstract

This project, undertaken as a Master's thesis, aims to address the following research question: What are the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students in a college setting? As the U.S. multiracial population grows, so too grows the number of multiracial students on college and university campuses nationwide (Museus, Lambe, & Ryan, 2015; PEW Research Center, 2015). However, many of the conversations surrounding race, racial identity, and racialized experiences in higher education continue to rely on a monoracial paradigm. This thesis utilizes a narrative research design to showcase the stories of eight multiracial undergraduate students enrolled in a West Coast, Hispanic-Serving Institution. Placing their stories within the theoretical frameworks of MultiCrit (Harris, 2016) and standpoint theory (Harding, 1995; Wylie, 2012) allows for a discussion of the variable, multifaceted experiences of the student-participants. Such a discussion is necessary if colleges and universities are to ably serve a multiracial student population. While recommendations for higher education practitioners are included herein, the primary goal of this project is to amplify and empower the voices of multiracial students in order to produce a more nuanced understanding of how they navigate schooling, particularly post-secondary schooling.

Dedication

To mom and dad, who made me and mixed me.

Acknowledgements

This work, and the degree that accompanies it, would not have been possible without the support and contributions of many others. Writing may seem a solitary endeavor, but for me is very much a community effort. Everything I write is informed by those who have shaped me and succored me along the way, and to them I offer these acknowledgements.

To the eight honest and giving participants who volunteered to be interviewed, thank you for your stories. Thank you for your time, your thoughts, and your trust. I hope that you will all continue to speak and to make yourselves heard, because each of you has so much to say.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Overview

As I began to write this introductory chapter for my thesis, I executed what I thought would be a quick research exercise; I sought the most recent statistics on the multiracial, college-going population in the United States. I suppose I found what I was looking for, at least at surface value: as of 2016 (the most recent year for which relevant data were available), there were 595,700 multiracially-identified undergraduate students in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, Table 306.10). Multiracial students, then, account for approximately three-and-a-half percent of the 17,046,700 undergraduate students enrolled in colleges and universities across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, Table 306.10). But my simple research exercise revealed much more to me than demographic information. I was confronted by the sheer blankness of the 'two or more races' row in the NCES table. I scanned past columns of struck-through years, several decades-worth, until multiracial students finally sprang into being in the year 2008. As a multiracial person who entered college in 2005, such omission, such erasure both amused and confounded me. I wonder, who was I accounted to be during my first three undergraduate years? I came across article after article on college representation (and underrepresentation), shifting student demographics, and the like in major national publications (the *US News and World Report*; *The New York Times*) that either ignored the presence of multiracial students altogether (Williams, 2014) or relegated them to a parenthetical aside or a footnote (Ashkenas, Park, & Pearce, 2017).

Then there were the articles that did account for us, or, at least, accounted for the problems we seemed to be posing for American institutions of higher education. Such articles noted that "the number of applicants who identify themselves as multiracial has mushroomed, adding another layer of anxiety, soul- (and family-tree-) searching and even gamesmanship to the

[college admissions] process" (Saulny & Steinberg, 2011, para. 8). For the institutional representatives interviewed, our selfhoods were transposed onto checkboxes, we became "new options [that] have forced colleges to confront thorny questions" (Saulny & Steinberg, 2011, para. 9). A fascinating double-bind came into play, as articles ostensibly centered on the existence of multiracial persons simultaneously doubted that we could truly be who we said we were. "For the most part," Ms. Siler [an admissions officer at Rice University] said, "whenever someone does all those boxes, we say, 'Yeah, yeah, but how do you really live your life?" (Saulny & Steinberg, 2011, para. 49).

Such rhetoric, employed by individuals and institutions alike, suggests that multiracial persons are not to be believed, and are not to be believed in. In the view of race-reified America, we are anxious, confused, adrift; we cannot possibly be more than one thing, and so we cannot possibly know all of ourselves. Our identity claims are to be inspected, interrogated, doubted, discarded, ignored, and overwritten. Our voices are not to be trusted. And so here we are, two decades into the new millennium, but ever perceived as the 'tragic mulattoes' of 19th and 20th century lore. Such stories follow a familiar pattern: "Inevitably, the 'Tragic Mulatto' is exposed and rejected by both racial groups, and the story ends—as one might guess—tragically" (Riley, 2009, para. 4). But the fallacy of the tragic mulatto, and indeed of all of the tropes and rhetoric surrounding multiracial persons, lies in the assumption that we have only one story. This project aims to counteract that assumption.

Statement of Purpose

In this thesis, I propose to use a narrative research design to explore the lived experiences of multiracial undergraduate students. I take the following research question as my starting point: What are the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students in a college setting? To explore

this question, I interviewed eight multiracial undergraduate students. I was interested in their stories, in their likeness and their difference, and in what they knew of schooling and living as multiracial persons in America. My hope is that their stories can inform and add to a broader understanding of how multiracial students experience and navigate institutions of higher education. Because the multiracial student population is growing, and in all likelihood will continue to grow (PEW Research Center, 2015), college and university staff and faculty must cultivate a more nuanced understanding of their multiracial students. Institutional leaders must move beyond reified, monoracial conceptions of race and overplayed representational tropes if they are to adequately serve the burgeoning multiracial student population. One way to do so is to listen to, and believe in, the stories of multiracial students.

Theoretical Framework

In order to produce a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of multiracial students, I have chosen to anchor my work in two theoretical frameworks. The first, MultiCrit, is an emergent offshoot of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that reflects the ongoing practice of refining CRT tenets in order to account for specific populations (Harris, 2016). The second, standpoint theory, is an epistemic stance grounded in identity-specific experiences. While it has come to be associated with several broader theoretical movements, I employ standpoint theory from a post-structuralist perspective. In the following chapter I will provide a more detailed overview of both MultiCrit and standpoint theory and their use in this project.

An Explanation of Language Choices

In order to write this thesis, I had to make certain choices about the language I would use in doing so. I did not make such choices lightly and provide the reader with the following explanations.

Multiracial: As previous researchers have observed, "the term Multiracial confounds–it implies that you can be more than one race even though race itself is a social construction of multiple, ever-changing, often undefined dimensions" (Chang, 2016, p. 706). Consequently, the discourse surrounding multiraciality and/or identities that fall outside of a monoracial norm is both limited and contested (for a more in-depth overview, see Chang, 2016 and Harris, 2016). In the context of this study, I use *multiracial* to refer to persons who identify as belonging to two or more races. I also use the term *multiracial* in a manner that is inclusive of other, more specific identifiers (for instance, *biracial* or *Afro-Latina*).

Shes: While not originally conceived as specifically *she*-centric, recruitment for this study yielded no male participants. Seven of the participants identified as women, and one participant identified as androgynous. All participants used the personal pronoun *she*. I therefore use the plural pronoun *shes* in place of *women* to indicate that all participants' experiences are informed by non-male identities.

Racial identifiers as generated by the participants: Because multiracial persons' ability to self-identify is often circumscribed, I have elected to honor whatever language a participant herself chose to identify with. For instance, if a participant described herself as *Hispanic*, that is the term I use in referring to her; if another described herself as *Latina*, then that is the term I use. The same goes for participants who identified as *Black* and/or *African-American*. I do not presume such identifiers to be interchangeable; I am simply respecting their individualized use by the participants.

Racial identifiers as generated by the researcher: I have at times replaced extremely specific racial identifiers (like parental country of origin) to protect the confidentiality of participants. However, I did not wish for subtle differences in identity to be elided in doing so. I

therefore use the replacement term *East Asian* to refer to elements of participants' backgrounds originating in countries such as China, Korea, and Japan. I use the replacement term *Southeast Asian* to refer to heritages originating in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines.

Organization and Orientation of the Thesis

This thesis contains five chapters, each with a different purpose. The present chapter provides an introduction to and overview of the study. Chapter Two reviews the preceding literature on multiraciality in a college context. Chapter Three details the methodological strategies I employed for this study. Chapter Four introduces the participants, their stories, and the findings that they contributed. Chapter Five further contextualizes those findings, placing them within larger theoretical frameworks. Chapter Five also issues recommendations for educators who serve multiracial undergraduate students.

As I worked on this project, I grappled with the ever-present concern that I might reenact what has so often been done to these students by minimizing, essentializing, or appropriating their stories. I have no wish to claim that the multiracial students I interviewed represent a monolithic group or share a simple, single perspective. Moreover, I recognize the danger inherent in even seeming to make such claims. Consequently, I have aimed to write in a way that is expansive rather than flattening. I have also striven to honor the participants' words over all else. To do so I have used non-conventional methods of data representation, I have avoided confining the participants' voices to Chapter Four alone, and I have made every effort to ensure that every participant has the opportunity to speak for herself. I implore the reader to proceed by keeping in mind that stories are multiple and fluid, truths are plural and unfixed, and meaning proliferates.

Chapter Two

A Review of the Literature

The year 2000 marked the first time that the United States Census provided the option of self-reporting identification with more than one racial category (Renn, 2003). At the time, almost seven million Americans elected to do so (US Census Bureau as cited in Museus, Lambe, & Ryan, 2015). By 2010, that number had increased to nine million Americans (US Census Bureau as cited in Museus et al., 2015), although recent research indicates that the percentage of the U.S. population that is multiracial is actually much higher at around 6.9% (PEW Research Center, 2015). Consequently, the number of multiracial students on college campuses nationwide is growing. Research on undergraduates has shown that the experiences and developmental processes of multiracial students differ from those of students who identify as monoracial (Renn, 2003). However, as of 2015, less than 1% of articles published in peer-reviewed journals in the fields of higher education and student affairs during the preceding decade acknowledged multiracial students as a discrete group (Museus et al. 2015).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the literature focused on the multiracial student experience in higher education, to frame this project in the context of this emerging area of research, and to establish an epistemological framework for my analysis. Throughout, I will keep my central research question in mind: What are the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students in a college setting?

Before proceeding to the literature itself, I would like to orient the reader to the organization and context of this chapter. Reviews of fifteen scholarly works, all published in peer-reviewed academic journals within the last 15 years, follow below. With the exception of the closing section on epistemological frameworks, I have chosen to organize the literature

chronologically to parallel the ways in which the literature has grown alongside the multiracial student population. Two major events in the United States inform the context in which these articles were written. The first, as noted above, is the expansion of the US Census to account for multiracial individuals in the year 2000. The second is the 2008 election and subsequent presidency of President Barack Obama, the nation's first multiracial commander-in-chief. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my own standpoint as a multiracial graduate student who attended college from 2005 - 2009, in the midst of the period covered by the literature reviewed herein.

Leading-edge Research in the Early 2000s

Kristen Renn's work, largely undertaken at the start of the new millennium, provided a model for understanding multiracial student identity development that later literature would treat as foundational. In 2003 she published a paper built upon grounded theory research which she began in the 1999-2000 academic year. Taking Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development as a starting point, Renn (2003) explored the identity development processes of 38 multiracial college students attending five different higher education institutions in the Northeast and Midwest. After amassing a study population through snowball sampling with maximum variation, Renn (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with study participants, collected written responses, and engaged in on-campus observations.

Through ongoing refinement and constant comparative analysis, Renn (2003) constructed five categories to represent variations in multiracial student identity. *Monoracial* identified students "create[d] home base in one category," although they occasionally forayed into others (p. 385). *Multiple monoracial* identified students maintained "both feet in both groups" and exhibited the capacity to hold, merge, and cross between multiple perspectives (p. 385).

Multiracial identified students "[sat] on the border" and identified with their mixed-ness above all (p. 385). *Situational* identified students "moved between or among identity patterns" as they consciously shifted identification as needed (p. 385). And *extraracial* identified students included those individuals who "opted out of racial categories" entirely (p. 385).

For Renn (2003), understanding the experiences that led students to identify within these categories was crucial. She found that:

> In addition to important characteristics and knowledge that multiracial students brought with them to college, personal interactions with individuals and groups, as well as the interactions between and among those settings, were critical influences in students' identification in the five patterns (p. 386).

She posited that Bronfenbrenner's elements of *person, process, context, and time* were especially germane in a higher education setting, as "organizations such as colleges and universities provide shared settings where the unique developmental environments of hundreds or thousands of students overlap significantly and are influenced by institutional policies and programs" (p. 387). Renn (2003) therefore generated the following recommendations for colleges and universities: "enhancing curricula to promote student identity development" (p. 398), "aligning curriculum and co-curriculum to support new ways of thinking about student identity" (p. 399), and "engaging peer culture to create boundary crossing" (p. 400).

Renn's (2003) work did exhibit some limitations, such as small sample size, geographic specificity, and the fact that she examined student identities and experiences at only one point in time. Nevertheless, the identity patterns she coined will be widely used by other researchers cited below, and the themes that emerged from her study will reappear throughout the literature. Her work has been cited not only by other researchers focusing on multiracial student identity, but

also by academics examining student development comprehensively. Finally, and crucially, Renn (2003) provided an identity development model that, unlike most monoracial identity models, was nonlinear and dependent on both time and context. This model provided others with an entirely new lens from which to frame their research and supports the notion that multiracial students experience the college environment differently than their monoracial counterparts.

Burgeoning Interest in Multiracial Students Beginning in 2008

The work of Paul Shang (2008) offers a glimpse at the socio-historical context that will color this next set of articles. Shang (2008) argued that multiracial students must be understood as people of color located within the shifting demographics of the 21st century (p. 5). While he did not conduct any fieldwork for this particular article, he undertook a careful historical analysis of attitudes towards multiracial students in higher education between 2000 and 2008. To begin, Shang (2008) summarized the debates surrounding race relations in the post-affirmative action era. Next, he asserted that "how biracial or multiracial students feel about themselves and how they interpret their treatment by others is complicated" and is influenced not only "by the nation's current debate about responding to historical wrongs based on race, but also by the nation's ambivalence about mixed-race people" (p. 7). As an example, Shang cited the fact that despite the US Supreme Court's 1967 ruling in Loving vs. Virginia that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional, the last state law banning interracial marriage was repealed as recently as 2001 (p. 7). He further observed that the multiracial identification option being added to the 2000 US Census "has drawn sharp criticism from monoracial groups that fear that the addition of more racial categories will diminish the numbers selecting one category" (p. 8).

Narrowing the focus of his historical analysis to college campuses, Shang (2008) contended that "traditional-age biracial and multiracial students are part of a cohort of students

entering college at a time of great student diversity, yet they are likely to have little precollege experience with such diversity" (p. 9). To support this point, he cited the fact that secondary schools were more segregated in 2008 than in the 1980s, resulting in many college students' "first significant interaction with someone of another race occur[ing] on [a university] campus" (p. 9). Shang (2008) concluded by arguing that considering the experiences of multiracial students as well as monoracial students was not only necessary, but beneficial. He stated:

> For student affairs professionals, the opportunity and the challenge to serve an ever changing student body requires unremitting examination of the impact of services and institutional policies on students, how students achieve growth and development, and what promising new approaches may exist to serve students and the institution. Encouraged by serving biracial and multiracial students, faculty, staff, and other students may come to consider new ways of thinking about the fluidity of race (p. 10).

This conclusion bridges well to the work of Ozaki and Johnston (2008) and Wong and Buckner (2008), two research teams writing in the same year as Shang (2008) on the subject of student services.

Ozaki and Johnston (2008) offered a snapshot of the challenges faced by multiracial student organizations and their staff or faculty advisers. Their aim was to use Renn's (2003) theories of multiracial student identity development to provide concrete, practical guidelines for student affairs professionals. They began by offering three preconditions that must be present for multiracial student groups to form on campus:

> (1) there must be a critical mass of students interested in and seeing the need for such a group, (2) students need to identify the need for a space to express and explore their

multiracial identity, and (3) they must feel that they do not belong to the monoracial groups on campus (Ozaki & Johnston, 2008, p. 54).

They then delineated the common challenges faced by those groups that do form when the above conditions exist. According to their meta-analysis of prior research, the first challenge encountered by multiracial student organizations was leader and member identity conflict. In other words, according to Root, "the diversity of personal and group identities within the *mixed race* umbrella term" created conflicting priorities for group leaders and members (as cited in Ozaki & Johnston, 2008, p. 56). The second challenge that emerged was a sense of conflict with monoracial student of color groups, because "on predominantly White campuses where resources already feel limited for students of color" an atmosphere of competition for said resources developed (p. 57). Thirdly, as with any student-led group, a high turnover rate can lead to attrition of group members and ultimately dissolution of the group as students matriculate each year (p. 57).

Ozaki and Johnston (2008) suggested that student affairs professionals work to offset these challenges by providing support in specific ways. To begin, student affairs personnel should assist students in focusing the vision and goals of the organization (p. 58). Next, well-placed staff can advocate for multiracial issues. Ozaki and Johnston (2008) cited supporting the right of students to check more than one racial identification box and/or selecting a multiracial identification category on university forms as one example of this type of advocacy (p. 58). Additionally, committed advisers can assess their own racial identity and personal biases in order to more authentically assist multiracial students as they navigate racial politics on campus (pp. 58-59). Advisers can also create opportunities for dialogue between leaders of multiracial and monoracial student organizations, as well as helping students in such organizations understand

the difference between race, ethnicity, and culture (p. 59). Moreover, advisers must serve as resources to the multiracial student community, both by alerting students to sources that may help them better understand their multiracial identity and by functioning as a point of consistency during periods of student leadership turnover (p. 59). Finally, Ozaki and Johnston (2008) implored student affairs professionals to be open to change (p. 59), citing Renn's (2003) findings that multiracial student development is characterized by fluidity.

While Ozaki and Johnston's (2008) work was entirely based in a meta-analysis of research carried out by others, Wong and Buckner (2008) examined the ways in which student services can serve multiracial students by carrying out three comparative case studies. They began with a snowball approach to data gathering, compiling a contact list of 35 institutions that offered some level of services to multiracial students. Their initial analysis revealed two components that were frequently present at institutions engaged in multiracial student programs and services: professional staff either personally motivated or assigned by the institution to deliver services to multiracial students and/or strong student leadership in the community of multiracial students (p. 46). Wong and Buckner (2008) then narrowed their sample further in order to present three case studies highlighting successful and unsuccessful practices in multiracial student engagement.

The first case study, conducted at the University of Colorado at Boulder's Center for Multicultural Affairs, served as an "example of a service model that pairs formal staff assigned to multiracial student programming with the involvement of student leadership" (Wong & Buckner, 2008, p. 47). Interviews with student affairs personnel employed by the Center revealed that joint staff-student efforts generated a "symbiotic relationship" which resulted in multiracial students being targeted for services on an equal footing with monoracial minoritized

students (p. 47). The second case study explored Brown University's Third World Center, which similarly involved student programmers coordinating multiracial programming under the supervision of professional staff. At Brown University, Wong and Buckner (2008) found that the university's culture as a whole promoted student self-identification; consequently, the Center included "multiracial students specifically in its mission statement and treat[ed] them as a distinct community served by the department while also allowing these students to claim other ethnic identities if they wish[ed]" (p. 49). Conversely, in a third case study, the Chicano Latino student programs at Loyola Marymount University demonstrated an "interest in multiracial student issues among the staff but little student leadership participation in the issue" (p. 49). As a result, multiracial students were included in the department's mission statement but "the multiracial student community was neither advocating for itself nor formally organized" within the larger university context (p. 49).

Beyond these three case studies, Wong and Buckner (2008) discovered that at the 35 institutions surveyed, the most common models for multiracial student services were single events without long-term institutional commitment (such as a one-time multiracial awareness week) or nominal inclusion of multiracial students in multicultural affairs offices without the existence of a standalone department or designated staff support (p. 50). They thus "consider[ed] these efforts to be the beginning stages of a local movement… that will eventually result in discussion of multiracial students in the context of campuswide support for all students' multicultural identity development" (p. 50). Considering the small number of existing programs to survey and the newness of the underlying theoretical constructs, Wong and Buckner (2008) felt that their grasp of best practices for serving multiracial students was limited and that further research was warranted.

The final two studies published in 2008 pulled back somewhat from Ozaki and Johnston's (2008) and Wong and Buckner's (2008) close focus on student services and, instead, addressed the multiracial student experience holistically. Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) sought to approach the topic epistemologically, concentrating on student knowledge-making and self-authorship. They undertook an exploratory qualitative study that involved 22 semi-structured interviews with multi-ethnic college students in the eastern US. Taking a grounded theory approach, Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) began with Renn's (2003) multiracial identity patterns and used constant comparative analysis to generate parallel patterns for multi-ethnic students. Their work drew distinctions between multiraciality and multi-ethnicality, and so their study population contained two subgroups of students: multiracial/multi-ethnic (for example, a Japanese-Caucasian student) and monoracial/multi-ethnic (for example, an Irish-Italian-Czech student). By drawing these distinctions, Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) contributed to the literature by considering how "multi" students, be they multiracial, multi-ethnic, or both, experience identity development along multiple trajectories at once.

Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) found that in accordance with theories of self-authorship, "multi" students established and displayed their racial and ethnic identities across three planes. The first plane, *identity claims*, can be "operationally defined as what individuals say they are--their dominant form of identification in any one setting" (p. 450). For "multi" students, "the constant shifting of contexts resulted in participants' consistent renegotiation and clarifications of their identity claims" (p. 450). Unlike "mono" students, "multi" students' self-authorship process is ongoing and nonlinear, as they have to decide who they are and whom they identify with repeatedly. The second plane, *induced feelings about identity*, referred to students' emotional responses to others' reactions to their claimed identity (p. 450). Study participants

commonly cited instances in which they experienced dissonance between their claimed ethnic identities and the comments others made about them (p. 450). The third plane, *cognitive identity*, described "the process by which individuals understood their identity shifting across contexts" (p. 451). In other words, students were able to use their past intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences to reflect on how they identified themselves. Like Renn (2003), who found that multiracial student identity development was nonlinear, Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) found that multi-ethnic students exhibited asynchronous development across these three planes. Similarities between the two works also extended to their limitations, as Chaudhari and Pizzolato's (2008) study was similarly constrained by sample size and location, with the additional limitation of an overrepresentation of female students.

Renn's (2003) influence extended to the work of Alissa King (2008) as well. Using personal narratives, both her own and others', King (2008) highlighted challenges unique to the multiracial student experience. Beginning with Renn's (2003) finding that settings and interactions on campus influenced student identity development, King (2008) articulated the need for inclusive campus spaces for multiracial students. She observed common peer dynamics that obstructed the creation of such spaces. These were derived from "how others perceive multiracial students' racial identities based on physical appearance and conformity to expected displays of cultural knowledge and ways of acting" (p. 34). She recounted multiple student narratives in which multiracial students' identities were either invisible to others or overwritten by others. Central to this experience was the "What are you?" question, commonly cited in the collected narratives. Multiracial students in her study spoke of the double bind inherent in this question, wherein monoracial students of color deemed them "not really ____" enough and White students categorized them as students of color (pp. 34 - 35). As a result, in many

narratives the students felt doubly excluded. Belonging was made difficult because multiracial students had to "navigate spaces without being visually identifiable in terms of race or having the cultural markers that would legitimize [their] ability to fit into those spaces" (p. 37).

In order to counteract these challenges, King (2008) put forth several recommendations for creating multiracially inclusive spaces on campus. Most of her recommendations echo those of studies cited above. Like Renn (2003), King (2008) supported a unified curricular and co-curricular approach to making multiracial identity visible. King (2008) expanded on this by calling for increased recruitment and hiring of multiracial staff and faculty to increase "visibility, awareness, openness, and support" (p. 39). And like Ozaki and Johnston (2008) and Wong and Buckner (2008), King (2008) wrote of the value of multiracial student organizations and of programming that connects multiracial and monoracial student groups (p. 39). Overall, King's (2008) article did not necessarily produce a great deal of new understanding on the topic of multiracial student development, but her use of personal narratives did support and enhance the work of those that preceded her.

Increased Visibility of Multiracial Student Needs in the Post-Obama Era

The final body of literature presented for review demonstrates increased theoretical depth surrounding the topic of multiracial student development. Writing nearly halfway into President Obama's first term, Literte (2010) argued that race-oriented student services (ROSS), like those examined previously by Ozaki and Johnston (2008) and Wong and Buckner (2008), remain organized around conventional understandings of race that do not account for the growing multiracial student population. Literte (2010) found that ROSS on many campuses continued to assume the existence of only five discrete racial categories: Black, Latino/a, White, Asian American, and Native American (p. 115). This finding demonstrates the institutionalization of an

individual phenomenon wherein "multiracial" is not seen as a legitimate identifier by those who view race as discrete and essential. In an effort to examine the problems that can arise when students' identities are incongruent with universities' views on race, Literte (2010) conducted focus groups and observations at two northern California campuses, interviewing both students and ROSS staff (n=60) (p. 115). Using a grounded theory approach, Literte (2010) operated through the lens of racial formations theory and DuBois's concept of double-consciousness. This approach represents a departure from the developmental ecology frameworks largely utilized in the literature reviewed above, and demonstrates a turn towards critical and cultural paradigms of understanding. In the post-Obama era, critical theories (such as Critical Race Theory and its offshoots) that interrogate institutionalized imbalances of power have been especially useful to researchers working to challenge the notion that President Obama's election signaled the realization of a post-racial society. The development of a critical discourse around multiraciality marks an important shift in the literature regarding multiracial students, one that informs this project (as will be discussed further in the upcoming review of my chosen theoretical frameworks).

Like much of the work previously cited, Literte's (2010) dual theoretical lenses allowed her to conceptualize student identity formation as a "fluid, contradictory, and complex lived experience" with a nonlinear trajectory. Furthermore, Literte's (2010) epistemological stances informed her understanding that the development process "not only shapes the student, but also the institution" (p. 121). Her findings indicated that ROSS at the participant universities complicated the identity development process for multiracial students by engaging "in racial formations that reify monoracialism" (p. 125). Otherwise stated, many student service practices treated race in such a way that the institutional support for racial diversity was exclusively

extended to monoracial student of color identities. However, Literte (2010) emphasized the fact that these findings should not necessarily be read as an indictment of ROSS, but rather that they reflect the ways in which ROSS "are constrained by the ideology and limited resources yielded by their historical" circumstances (p. 125). Given the fact that, as one staff interviewee articulated, the major issue facing ROSS in the next 10 to 15 years is likely to be multiracial students (p. 129), Literte (2010) included concrete practice and policy recommendations in her conclusion.

Literte's (2010) central recommendations are as follows. First, she suggested that ROSS must conduct what she terms "autopsies" aimed at recognizing and dismantling problematic assumptions about students' experiences with race (p. 131). Appropriate first steps in this process would be to eliminate the presumption that all students hail from monoracial backgrounds and to adjust programming accordingly. Next, Literte (2010) asserted that ROSS should evaluate the ways in which their offices present themselves to students, for example by explicitly including multiracial students in organization names or mission statements. Finally, she advocated for expanding the frequency and reach of joint programming, a suggestion that echoes the work of Renn (2003) and Ozaki and Johnston (2008). Literte's (2010) research featured similar limitations to studies cited above, but with some slight variances. While her sample size was small, it was nevertheless the largest sample of the literature featured in this review. Furthermore, though her study was geographically limited, hers was the only study in this review featuring a West Coast setting.

Kellogg and Liddell (2012) also employed a critical lens to examine multiracial student experiences. Using Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique, they applied interpretivist and constructivist analyses to interviews, written responses, and focus groups. Employing snowball

sampling and striving for maximum variation, Kellogg and Liddell (2012) recruited 14 study participants (11 of whom were women) who identified as multiracial students at several Midwest universities. Their completed research argued for increased recognition of "the unique needs and developmental processes of multiracial students" (p. 529). To illustrate these needs and processes, they focused on four categories of critical incidents that emerged during their study. They began with incidents in which multiracial students confronted race or racism on campus. Echoing King's (2008) findings, Kellogg and Liddell (2012) noted that the presence of discrete racial affinity groups and associated pride events on campus "prompted [students] to think about where they 'fit' and how they would identify as a multiracial student" (p. 530). They also expounded upon the visibility/invisibility of multiracial identity, exemplified by instances in which other students would make racially insensitive comments in front of multiracial students after having misidentified them as monoracial (p. 530). Kellogg and Liddell's (2012) second category of critical incidents involved multiracial students responding to external definitions. Like Chaudhari and Pizzolato's (2008) research, such incidents, which tended to be recurring experiences, often reflected a discrepancy between public and personal conceptions of identity (p. 532). As King (2008) did before them, Kellogg and Liddell (2012) found that multiple student interviews featured a discussion of the "What are you?" question and/or the discomfort felt upon encountering the directive to "check one box" (p. 533).

Kellogg and Liddell's (2012) third category of critical incidents invoked students' experiences of being forced to defend their legitimacy. These incidents took two forms. The first was a questioning of academic legitimacy, whereby peers would question whether multiracial students benefited from affirmative action. This experience was often followed by multiracial

students wrestling with their own sense of merit and academic achievement (p. 534). The second form involved a challenging of racial legitimacy:

> Many participants described incidents when they were challenged by their peers—typically peers of color—for not being Asian, Black, Latino, or Native American enough. Students were challenged when they did not fit peers' implicit definitions of what it meant to be a 'real minority (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012, p. 534).

The final category of critical incidents recounted by Kellogg and Liddell (2012) involved instances of multiracial students affirming their identity. Such incidents most commonly involved meeting other multiracial peers or finding spaces of belonging within multiracial student organizations frequently heralded in the earlier literature (King, 2008; Literte, 2010; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008; Wong & Buckner, 2008). Although presented through a critical paradigm, Kellogg and Liddell's (2012) work ultimately shared a crucial similarity with Renn's (2003), specifically locating college as a context in which identity development occurs in a unique fashion. Their research demonstrated that "across all categories, participants shared how their conceptions of race and identity had evolved in college as a result of these critical incidents" (p. 537). As with most of the preceding studies, Kellogg and Liddell's (2012) research was limited by a small sample size, a specific geographic region, and an overrepresentation of female students.

On the heels of Literte's (2010) and Kellogg and Liddell's (2012) work came that of Nana Osei-Kofi (2012). In a shift from the works examined thus far, Osei-Kofi (2012) conducted discourse analysis in an effort "to create space for a broader critical conversation about multiracialization and education," taking as her focal point "multiracial discourse in student affairs education" (p. 246). By examining student affairs literature on multiracial students and

multiracial student services, she "aim[ed] to demonstrate that dominant discourse on multiraciality in education reifies 'race,' reinforces racial categorization, and generally ignores structural realities" (Osei-Kofi, 2012, p. 247). To do so, Osei-Kofi (2012) critiqued three primary assumptions often present within scholarship on multiracial undergraduates. The first assumption under scrutiny claims "that the multiracial student population is rapidly growing, creating an urgent need for educators and administrators to respond appropriately" (p. 249). Second, she troubles the "premise that multiracial students represent a distinct group of individuals with unique racial experiences, therefore making it crucial that educators become aware of these differences to better meet the needs of students" (p. 249). Finally, Osei-Kofi (2012) interrogates the idea that "multiraciality is best understood through a focus on the individual, underscoring how multiracial students understand their own identities, as well as how they are understood by others" (p. 250).

Over the course of her analysis, Osei-Kofi (2012) carefully examined much of the scholarship reviewed above, such as Renn (2004), Wong and Buckner (2008), and Literte (2010). Her argument, in essence, was that "the emphasis on multiracial students as a group in the name of creating awareness and new knowledge is what in many ways has brought the group into being, and in so doing, has reified the group" (p. 251). Interestingly, while Osei-Kofi's (2012) discourse analysis did challenge some of the assumptions found in the existing literature, it also reproduced certain concerns that it purported to displace. For instance, her work eventually posed a question that would not be out of place in Kellogg and Liddell's (2012) study, as she asked "who belongs in this [multiracial] group?" (p. 252). Moreover, her assertion that ongoing scholarly "developments and explorations continue to be problematic because they essentialize multiracial identity by being firmly situated within and focused on the logic of racial

categorization" (p. 252) could be seen as a logical outgrowth of Literte's (2010) work problematizing racial categories as discrete and reified. And, notably, her methodology in engaging in discourse analysis was necessarily divorced from specificity of place and instead situated itself in the broader, more amorphous context of the scholarship of the moment. Osei-Kofi's (2012) ultimate conclusion, that "to focus on multiraciality as identity, and to place this at the center of scholarship on multiraciality, no matter how progressive the intention, is to participate in a reshuffling of America's racial hierarchy, rather than to challenge it" (p. 253) will later prove crucial to the emergence of critical theory perspectives (Chang, 2016; Harris, 2016) to be addressed later in this chapter.

In contrast, MacDonald's (2014) work returned to the narrative research model used by earlier researchers like King (2008). Drawing on the critical race theory tenet of storytelling, she undertook a narrative inquiry study in combination with auto ethnography, resulting in the inclusion of her own voice as an active researcher participant. MacDonald (2014) used convenience sampling to recruit three participants who identified as multiracial and were current or recent students at a medium-sized university in the Midwest. Her central concern was their experiences with advising in the context of a predominantly White institution. Perhaps constrained by this extremely small sample size, many of her findings simply echoed what the preceding literature had established. Issues such as the imposition of identity from without rather than within, the notion of racial categories as discrete and monolithic, and challenges to individuals' academic and social worthiness have been addressed elsewhere in this review (by King, 2008; Literte, 2010; and Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; respectively). However, her emphasis on counterstorytelling and the manner in which she presents student narratives lent a uniqueness to her work.

MacDonald (2014) collected written narratives from each participant, and then presented each narrative in full. In doing so, she delivered snapshots of three distinct individuals who navigated their experiences as multiracial students in diverse ways. She coded each narrative by "voice," offering to the reader: "The Voice of Apolde, the Passifist;" "The Voice of Grange, the Self-Advocate;" and "The Voice of Berlatt, the Optimist" (p. 10). Finally, she included her own narrative, written upon receipt of her participants' narratives and named as "The Voice of the Researcher, the Translator" (p. 12). Macdonald's (2014) method of presentation is unique among the work reviewed in this chapter. By presenting student narratives in full and without comment, she showcased individual, divergent student voices and offered a counterpoint to Osei-Kofi's (2012) concern that scholarly efforts to capture the experiences of multiracial student essentializes them as a monolithic group.

The next two pieces of literature from this period will be examined in parallel, as the same researcher directed both projects. In a short piece, Museus, Yee, and Lambe (2011) criticized the notion of the colorblind campus and the impact of colorblind ideologies on multiracial student development. To make their critique, Museus et al. (2011) interviewed four multiracial students of different backgrounds attending college in the northeast US. All four described predominately White campus environments in which colorblindness was the primary approach to the topic of race. In the experiences of these students, not only did racial dialogues occur infrequently on their campuses, when dialogues did occur "monoracial issues tend[ed] to dominate the discourse and multiracial issues [were] largely ignored" (Museus et al., p. 22). Given that Kellogg and Liddell (2012) and King (2008) found that invisibility of multiracial identities was a problem on college campuses, it logically follows that when race is rarely seen or addressed, multiracial identities would be attended to last. The suggestions made by Museus et

al. (2011) for combatting this problem fall in line with the recommendations of other researchers in the field (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; King, 2008; Literte, 2010; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008; Renn, 2003; Wong & Buckner, 2008). The research team called for cultivating a campus culture that embraces and normalizes racial dialogues, including multiracial issues in programming and supporting multiracial student spaces, and encouraging curricular and co-curricular diversity programming.

Despite its brevity and small scale, Museus et al.'s (2011) study provided an entry point into a more comprehensive research project also directed by Museus, the research team in the second case consisting of Museus, Lambe, and Ryan (2015). Noting that the literature on multiracial students had been largely confined to the subjects of student identity formation and development, Museus et al. (2015) focused on multiracial students' experiences with discrimination and the coping strategies they developed in response. For this study, the team used purposeful sampling to ensure sample intensity and variation, and then conducted interviews with 22 multiracial college students attending seven different east coast colleges. Through open coding, then axial coding of the participants' responses, Museus et al. (2015) identified common types of prejudice encountered by multiracial students specifically. These prejudicial encounters included:

> Instances of racial essentialization, the invalidation of their racial identities, the external imposition of racial identities, the marginalization from racial groups to which they belonged, challenges to their authenticity as members of their racial group, exoticization, and the pathologizing of their multiracial identities (p. 333).

Thereafter, Museus et al. (2015) employed three categories of coping responses– problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant– to understand how multiracial

students navigate their experiences of discrimination (p. 335). Four themes emerged from their interviews. The first theme, *educating others*, allowed multiracial students to employ a problem-focused coping strategy when faced with prejudice. This strategy often operated as an effective response to the "What are you?" question previously examined by Kellogg and Liddell (2012) and King (2008) (Museus et al., 2015, p. 339). The second theme, *utilizing support networks*, was categorized primarily as an emotion-focused coping response and spoke to the importance of interpersonal connections and spaces of belonging addressed throughout the earlier literature (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; King, 2008; Literte, 2010; Museus et al., 2011; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008; Renn, 2003; Wong & Buckner, 2008). The third theme, *embracing fluidity*, was also viewed as an emotion-focused coping response and harkened back to the nonlinear, boundary-spanning models of Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) and Renn (2003). According to Museus and his colleagues (2015), this theme "consisted of two elements: (a) rejecting ascribed identities and asserting a right to identify with whichever racial groups they choose and (b) actively engaging in finding common ground with multiple groups to solidify their membership within them (p. 341). The fourth and final theme, *avoiding confrontation*, typified an avoidant coping response and manifested in both physical and cognitive avoidance. Although limited by selection bias, an overrepresentation of women, specific geographic context, and the inability to disaggregate data from among multiracial subgroups, Museus et al.'s (2015) study built concretely on the work that preceded it. The research team's closing assertion, put forth to "underscore the importance of college faculty and staff recognizing the benefits of developing multiracial undergraduates' situational identities and their abilities to reject racial boundaries and embrace racial fluidity" (p. 345), can be read as a call to action for higher education professionals that could fit within the context of any of the papers reviewed above.

Chang (2016) also grounded her work in the professional context of higher education. Blending discourse analysis and narrative inquiry, Chang (2016) used "a Racial Queer framework to explore the ways in which 25 Multiracial undergraduate narratives question how Multiracial identification disrupts and reinforces our discourses on race and education" (p. 713). Her work had previously defined the theory of Racial Queerness as "the deviation from monoracial categorization, with or without a conscious intent of challenging normative racial constructions," succinctly put as "queering the monoracial norm" (Chang-Ross as cited in Chang, 2016, p. 713). Seeking to answer the question, "how do Multiracially-identified college students come to understand and experience their racialized identities within a predominantly white institution?" (p. 715), Chang (2016) used snowball sampling to gather participants for semi-structured individual interviews followed by focus groups. Using an ethnographic approach "that spoke to 'how we know what we know'" (p. 716), Chang (2016) identified four primary themes that characterized participants' responses.

First, Chang (2016) deployed the language of education to explore what she termed *racial rubrics*, in which individuals are positioned "in distinct, often separate boxes in the continuum of racial authenticity" (p. 718). Like Renn (2004), Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008), and Museus et al. (2015), Chang (2016) prioritized fluidity over absolutism, noting that "racial rubrics are not absolute – they can take on different forms and meanings depending on the person who utilizes [them] to place others" (p. 718). Chang (2016) then argued that the experiences and narratives of multiracial students led to the *disruption of monoracial rubrics*. In Chang's (2016) view, "the students in this study emphasized their awareness and use of multiple sets of racial rubrics which they were scrutinized under, dependent upon how they were racially perceived" (p. 719). This awareness allowed them to enact unique forms of "racial versatility" and agentically

inhabit "a border space, an amorphous space" (Chang, 2016, p. 720). The third theme she identified was *multiracial entitlement and the reinforcement of racial production*, or "a person's belief that he or she was entitled to claim Multiracial identity as a result of one's distinct daily lived experiences, both positive and negative, rather than solely based on one's lineage" (Chang, 2016, p. 724). Finally, Chang (2016) examined *multiracial identity in education discourse*, exploring whether multiracial identities were represented in the language of education, its hidden curriculum, and its institutional practices. Like many of the studies preceding it, Chang's (2016) work was limited in specificity of place and context and sample size. But, just as Museus et al. (2015) did, Chang (2016) concluded her work with an entreaty to other educators, writing that "simply, what this study illustrates are the ways in which Multiraciality presents a complex notion which can translate into a modification of educational practices" (p. 726).

Theoretical Frameworks

To close this review, I will provide a brief overview of the theoretical frameworks that inform my research. I will be using a dual approach to theory application in keeping with the multiplicitous, boundary-spanning nature of multiracial inquiry and discourse. For my overlying epistemic stance, I will call upon feminist standpoint theory, especially as employed from a post-structuralist perspective. Standpoint theory developed as feminist scholars in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s began to identify "in postmodernism and postructuralism concepts and language to challenge the idea of a universal rational knowing subject that exists outside of social and political context, discursive regimes of power, and without gendered, raced, and classed identity" (Gottesman, 2016, p. 97). Standpoint theory represents a move towards situated knowledge; in short, towards understanding and valuing "the contributions made by transformative criticism grounded in identity-specific forms of experience, angles of vision, and 'standpoints" (Wylie, 2012, p. 61).

Standpoint theory has a rich and sometimes contentious history, so I would like to clarify the aspects of standpoint theory I will be incorporating into my epistemological framework. First, I adhere to Harding's (1995) assertion that "what we do in our social relations both enables and limits (it does not determine) what we can know" (p. 341). In Harding's (1995) conceptualization of standpoint theory, "all human thought necessarily can be only partial; it is always limited by the fact of having only a particular historical location - of not being able to be everywhere and see everything, and of being 'contained' by cultural assumptions" (p. 341). And recognizing that knowledge is partial and informed by our positionality compels us as researchers to consider whose lives are marginalized and "to start off from such locations (not to take as truth what people in those locations think or say) in order to explain not only those lives but also the rest of the micro and macro social order" (p. 341). Moreover, standpoint theory dispenses with claims to essentialist or absolute truths and empirical objectivity, instead prioritizing an approach to research that "bring[s] experience, history, and values to the situated (and always normative) process of knowledge" (Gottesman, 2016, p. 108).

According to Wylie (2012), each individual use of standpoint theory, unique as it may be, typically operates according to three social-epistomological theses. The first, "a generic situated knowledge thesis" holds that "there is no 'view from nowhere'; contingent histories, social context and relations, inevitably affect what epistemic agents know" (p. 61). The second, "a systematic situated knowledge thesis," contends that standpoint theorists seek "to understand the impact, on what we know and how we know, of our location in hierarchical systems of power relations… that, in turn, shape our identities and our epistemic capacities" (p. 62). The third, and the most contested, is "a thesis of epistemic advantage." This thesis posits that there may exist certain "kinds of epistemic advantage that may accrue to those who are socially marginal" (p.

62). Wylie explains that the three theses operate to make valuable and visible the ways in which "experience can put those who are socially marginal in a position to recognize what remains tacit for members of a dominant culture, in the process catalyzing counter-narratives and counter-norms" (p. 63). Employing the larger conceptual framework of standpoint theory, then, will allow me to learn from the experiences of multiracial students and the standpoints that they occupy.

I will also be pulling from the realm of critical theory, specifically through the lens of Harris's (2016) critical multiracial theory, or MultiCrit. MultiCrit arose through Harris' 2014 research endeavors, which involved 30 qualitative interviews with 10 female undergraduates at a Midwestern university. In attempting to apply the traditional tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to her study, Harris (2016) found that "while CRT provides a foundation to explore the racialized experiences of multiracial students, the theory must shift and expand toward a critical multiracial theory (MultiCrit) that more adequately accounts for multiracial students' racialized experiences" (p. 795). Harris (2016) found this shift necessary for several reasons. Historically, CRT was developed to address civil rights needs of Black Americans. As a result, CRT is not necessarily designed "to account for the racial realities of students who do not identify as black" (Harris, 2016, p. 796). And while offshoots of CRT have emerged in recent years in research on other minoritized populations (such as LatCrit, TribalCrit, and AsianCrit), "this focus on monoracial populations may unwittingly reinforce monoracial paradigms of race" (Harris, 2016, p. 796).

Harris (2016) took as her starting point four central CRT tenets and adapted them in accordance with her research on multiracial undergraduates. The first tenet, *challenges to*

ahistoricism, arises from the CRT belief that race and racism must be placed in their historical context. According to Harris (2016):

> There are several aspects that should be historically analyzed to further contextualize multiraciality in higher education, including the creation and abolition of anti-miscegenation laws, slavery, immigration, affirmative action, the rule of hypodescent, and the addition of the 'check all that apply' option on the US Census and college admission forms (p. 799).

The second, *interest convergence*, attends to the notion that gains in racial equity are advanced only when it benefits dominant groups, such as when multiracial students "are positioned as objects to market diversity" (Harris, 2016, p. 800). The third, *experiential knowledge*, centers the voice of multiracial students and leads directly into the fourth tenet, *challenges to dominant ideologies* (Harris, 2016). Showcasing the lived experiences of multiracial individuals not only challenges ideologies of white supremacy, but also of race as singular or fixed (Harris, 2016).

Harris (2016) then proposed four additional tenets, also stemming from her prior research. The first, *racism as endemic*, challenges the narrative that "multiracial Americans do not experience their race and do not encounter racism" (Harris, 2016, p. 803). Instead, this tenet "accounts for multiracial students' encounters with racism, as well as monoracism and colorism" (Harris, 2016, p. 800). Monoracism was defined by Johnston and Nadal 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" (as cited in Harris, 2016, p. 806). Monoracism may exist "on institutional, cultural, interpersonal, and internalized levels," exemplified by actions such as "forcing multiracial people to choose one monoracial identity over others, policing the

authenticity of multiracial people, objectification, and exclusion and isolation from monoracial groups, organizations, and resources" (Harris, 2016, p. 806). The second, *structural determinism*, attempts to move beyond a black/white binary by focusing "on the way that race is constructed in neat, fixed categories, disallowing for the recognition of a multiracial reality" (Harris, 2016, p. 800). The third, *differential racialization*, recognizes that "multiracial students are racialized differently on a daily basis to serve the needs of the white institution" (Harris, 2016, p. 800). Here, Harris (2016) gives the example of multiracial students who may be claimed by the institution as people of color for reporting purposes, but otherwise treated as a "buffer class" of "honorary whites" (p. 807). Crenshaw's (1989) concept of *intersectionality* is taken as MultiCrit's final tenet, with the modification that in multiracial individuals multiple races may intersect in addition to race, gender, class, religion, ability, and other salient forms of identity (Harris, 2016).

It is important to note that Harris (2016) herself acknowledged that these eight tenets of MultiCrit are not exhaustive. Still,

> MultiCrit inherently deconstructs monoracial understandings of race that are embedded in society and higher education. The inclusion of multiraciality into critical discourses allows for the introduction of a new language with which to talk about multiraciality in the academy, resulting in a breakdown of a socially constructed monoracial paradigm of race (Harris, 2016, p. 811).

Consequently, I intend to use the language of MultiCrit throughout my analysis, with standpoint theory providing a supplemental framework through which to understand the specifically multiracial vantage point of the participants.

Summation and Future Directions

A review of the literature demonstrates that the lived experiences of multiracial college students are closely tied to crucial higher education issues such as identity development and institutional belongingness. Because multiracial student populations have only recently attained visibility on most campuses, these unique experiences are only beginning to be documented and the conversation about the needs and interests of these students has just begun. In a parallel fashion, theories centered on multiracial student development and those that recognize the implications of larger structural imperatives continue to emerge, as older typological and ecological approaches have been joined by approaches anchored in critical pedagogy and self-authorship theories. Continuing to expand upon existing theories and research will be essential as the multiracial student population grows.

This study distinguishes itself from previous research in several ways. First, only three of the studies reviewed above focused specifically on multiracial student narratives. Furthermore, only one study examined a West Coast context, despite the fact that California, Oregon, and Washington make up three out of the six states with the largest numbers of multiracial Americans (and two others, Hawaii and Nevada are distinctly Western states) (Pew Research Center, 2015). Finally, almost every study was located at a predominantly White institution. Because the multiracial student experience is context-based and characterized by fluidity, a narrative approach located at a West Coast, Hispanic-Serving Institution will provide a new set of parameters from which to explore the experiences of multiracial students. Further, I anticipate that this study will expand upon the existing literature and contribute to advancing our understanding of multiraciality in society and, more specifically, in higher education.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In Chapter One I made the case for further research on the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students in the modern American university. Because multiraciality is varied and ambiguous, thorough consideration is needed to better understand the growing multiracial student population. In the first chapter, I put forth my primary research question: What are the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students in a college setting? In Chapter Two I explored literature seeking to answer similar questions. A review of the literature produced the understanding that the multiracial student experience is complex and fluid, that multiracial student development may be nonlinear and may lie outside of discrete racial categorizations, and that questions of belongingness, fit, and identity are complicated by the "multi" aspect of multiraciality.

Chapter Three details the methods I used in answering my research question. In it, I discuss my methodological strategy, explain my research design, review the theoretical frameworks I utilized to make meaning of my findings, address issues of trustworthiness, and acknowledge my own positionality as the researcher.

Methodological Strategy: Narrative Analysis

Because past research on multiracial students has shown their own self-authored identities to be either excluded from traditional conceptions of race or externally and artificially imposed by those who view race as discrete and essential, this project aims to focus on the fluid and multi-faceted nature of the lived experiences of multiracial undergraduate students. To accomplish this, I chose to utilize a narrative research design. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, "if we understand the world narratively…then it makes sense to study the world narratively" (p. 17). A narrative research design is especially appropriate to my research question

because I have positioned experience as the central concern of my study. Put simply, "narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). More specifically, "narrative inquiry is stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Showcasing the stories of multiracial students is an important step in making visible the ways in which boundaries, belonging, and public and personal conceptions of identity operate in a campus setting. Moreover, stories grant agency to their tellers. This agency is important to me, as research has shown that multiracial students often experience an overwriting or appropriating of their identity and/or personal narrative to suit the needs of the monoracial majority (Chang, 2016; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Museus, Lambe, & Ryan, 2015). Amplifying their voices, then, can increase their visibility. Such visibility is crucial, as the literature shows frequent discrepancies between multiracial students' personal and public identifications. In other words, how they view themselves may differ from how others view them. Narrative inquiry offers the opportunity to speak in one's own voice(s), to be seen on one's own terms, and to assert ownership over one's own experiences (Chase, 2018).

Alignment With Theoretical Framework

In Chapter Two I provided an overview of the two theoretical frameworks that inform my analysis: standpoint theory and MultiCrit (an offshoot of Critical Race Theory). Both frameworks value situated, experiential knowledge. Standpoint theory holds that "what we do in our social relations both enables and limits (it does not determine) what we can know" (Harding, 1995, p. 341). Standpoint locates knowledge in the *doing*--in the lived experiences of the knower. MultiCrit, specifically, and Critical Race Theory, in general, "encourag[e] a focus on experiential knowledge that centers the voices of marginalized populations" (Harris, 2016, p. 800). As discussed above, narrative research is a method of rendering experience central and

understandable; consequently, a narrative research design aligns well with the chosen theoretical frameworks.

Research Design

Site selection and participants. The setting for this study was a small-to-mid-size public university located in a rural setting on the West Coast, which I shall call Coastal University. While the university does offer some master's degree programs, it primarily serves an undergraduate population largely drawn from the surrounding region. Coastal University holds a designation as an Hispanic-Serving Institution, or HSI. As of the 2017-2018 academic year, 5% of Coastal University's undergraduate student population selected two or more races on their admissions forms ("Viewbook," 2017).

Recruitment and consent. I recruited eight undergraduate students currently enrolled at Coastal University who self-identified as belonging to two or more races. Voluntary, purposeful, and snowball sampling, as understood according to Creswell (2012), were used to enlist participants. I posted fliers in Coastal's residence halls, student union, multicultural center, and academic buildings to invite students to participate. I also posted an online notice to all student clubs and organizations and emailed copies of my recruitment flier to Coastal University professors and staff who were known to me. I found these additional measures to be necessary as it was difficult to locate multiracial students for recruitment. At present, Coastal University has no centralized meeting place for multiracial students, such as a multiracial student club or society. As I remarked to one interviewee I spoke with, "I [didn't] know how to find us!" Moreover, I had no way of knowing if undergraduate students I had interacted with in the past were multiracial, a difficulty that was echoed by many of the professors and staff whose help I enlisted. Another interviewee whose specific multiracial background is similar to mine remarked

on this unique challenge in identifying one another, commenting that "if I just saw you I wouldn't have thought" that we shared aspects of our background.

As interested students contacted me, I provided them with further details, including a consent form. A copy of the recruitment flier and the consent form can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively. Both documents emphasized the voluntary nature of this project. Individuals were free to end their participation at any time with no negative repercussions.

Demographic questionnaire. Upon agreeing to participate and submitting a consent form, participants filled out a short demographic questionnaire that I provided to them electronically. I intentionally structured the questionnaire to allow for open-ended, self-determined responses to the questions about gender and racial identity so that participants were not constrained in choosing how to identify. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix C. I then scheduled one-on-one interviews with each participant at a mutually convenient time.

Semi-structured interviews. One-on-one interviews took place on-campus at participants' convenience. When participants named a preferred meeting space we met in the place of their choosing (for example, in their residence hall); otherwise, I secured private meeting spaces in campus academic buildings. Interviews were audio recorded, using two different devices in case of a technical malfunction. For one-on-one interviews, I used a semi-structured interview protocol, detailed in Appendix D. I chose to use a semi-structured protocol to allow "leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 579) and to increase the chances that, as the interviewer, I could make myself "visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 579).

Each interview began with an introduction stating the purpose and origin of the project. After all, "interviews are conversations conducted for a purpose" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 580), and I wished to orient interviewees to this fact. After a few warm-up questions to allow participants to relax into the interview, I simply asked participants to tell me about themselves. From there I used a combination of prepared questions intended to "[focus] the conversation on issues… deem[ed] important in relation to the research question" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 579) and spontaneous questions that allowed me to frame knowledge as "co-created through the process of interaction between the inquirer and the inquired into" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 121). I relied heavily on elaborating, probing questions (e.g., "tell me more about…") and paraphrasing, clarifying questions (e.g., "I hear you saying…") (Creswell, 2012, p. 222). Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on how much the participant wished to share and how she wished to share it.

Coding processes. I personally transcribed the audio-recorded interviews in order to attune my ear to the voice and plot of each narrative. Taking as a starting point Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch's (2003) assertion that "every person has a voice or a way of speaking and communicating that renders the silent and invisible world audible or visible to another" (p. 157), I made every effort to attend to "the collectivity of different voices that compose the voice of any given person – its range, its harmonies and dissonances, its distinctive tonality, key signatures, pitches, and rhythm" (Gilligan et al., 2003). I chose to honor participant voice and acknowledge that any one person's voice may multiply and proliferate to further counteract the ways in which the narratives of multiracial students may be essentialized or overwritten in service to the dominant narrative of a monoracial norm.

I used a modified version of Gilligan's Listening Guide Method (as described in Gilligan et al., 2003) to code the interviews. This method "comprises a series of sequential listenings, each designed to bring the researcher into relationship with a person's distinct and multilayered voice" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 159). I completed three listenings in total. First, I "read through the text [of each interview] and listen[ed] to the plot by attending to what is happening and what stories are being told" (p. 160). During this listening, I used a highlighter to mark passages that struck me innately as important or that I recognized (through tone, emphasis, word choice, and so forth) as important to the interviewee. Second, I read through each interview once more and used a combination of in vivo and thematic coding (as defined in Cresswell, 2012) to identify emergent themes. Using a plethora of colored pencils, I underlined related statements and patterns according to 25 different codes. For example, whenever I encountered an 'oh statement,' a code I established using the words of one of my participants, I underlined it in pink pencil. I then sorted those codes into nine categories.

Third, I revisited each transcript to attend to the contrapuntal voices present in each participant's story. The exercise of contrapuntal listening "offers a way to listen for the counterpoint in the text we are analyzing, or the multiple facets of the story being told" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 165). Moreover, listening for contrapuntal voices "takes into account that a person expresses his or her experience in a multiplicity of voices or ways," and "allows for the possibility that some of these voices may be in harmony with one another, in opposition to one another, or even contradictory" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 165). Engaging in such a listening felt particularly appropriate in light of the especially "fluid, contradictory, and complex lived experiences" (Literte, 2010, p. 121) of multiracial students. Specifically, I listened for two sets of contrapuntal voices: voices of self-certainty vs. voices of capitulation, and voices that resist

racial reification vs. voices that reinforce racial reification. The first set of contrapuntal voices was chosen in deference to the post-structuralist strands of standpoint theory that I take as part of my theoretical framework; the second worked well with the critical race framework of MultiCrit.

As my theoretical framework necessitates that I understand not only my participants' standpoints, but also my own, I sought to incorporate the post-structuralist imperative that "directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times" (Richardson, 1997, p. 89). The Listening Guide Method meshed well with my commitment to reflexive research, as it too implores that "we note our own social location in relation to the participant, the nature of our relationship with this person, and our emotional responses" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 161). As recommended by the Listening Guide Method, I wrote a listener's response after each listening, and used these listening responses as an additional coding step. The three listenings I undertook, along with the listening responses that I wrote, produced five themes, to be discussed at length in the next chapter.

Confidentiality and pseudonyms. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout this paper. Because first and last names can be integrally tied to multiracial students' sense of self, as in some cases a name may be the only visible marker of a student's multiracial background, I offered participants the opportunity to select their own pseudonym. In cases where participants did not wish to select a pseudonym for themselves, I made every effort to choose pseudonyms that were representative of the students' names without compromising their anonymity. Ensuring the confidentiality of all participants was additionally complicated by the fact that, in many cases, the specifics of the participants' heritage was an integral part of their stories, yet that same specificity could be used to identify them. (As an example, I know exactly three Irish-Korean-Mexican-American persons in my hometown--myself and my two brothers.

Were we to participate in an 'anonymous' research study that was easy to locate we would not, in fact, retain much anonymity). To mitigate this, I have been purposefully vague about the location of Coastal University and have at times reduced specificity when presenting the participants' words.

Trustworthiness

In keeping with qualitative research best practices, I strove to meet Lincoln & Guba's (1985) four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I used the following techniques in order to meet these standards.

Member checking. To support credibility, I engaged in member checking throughout the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1986) describe member checking as "the process of continuous, informal testing of information by soliciting reactions of respondents to the investigator's reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out" (p. 77). I began member checking during the interview phase, paraphrasing respondents' answers to questions and asking if I was understanding their meaning as they intended me to. All participants were provided with a copy of their transcribed interview and invited to comment on it. Throughout the coding and writing process I maintained email correspondence with the participants, asking them additional questions as I developed themes and prepared for theoretical discussions.

Thick description. I endeavored to use thick description (Geertz, 1973) to support transferability. Throughout this thesis, and especially in Chapter Four, I have made every effort to (re)construct and (re)tell narratives "in their complex specificness, their circumstantiality" (Geertz, 1973, p. 23).

Reflexive documentation. To bolster dependability and confirmability I relied on a number of methods for reflexive documentation. I found this step to be a crucial one, in keeping with Richardson's (1997) belief that "self-reflexivity unmasks complex, political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing" (p. 93). Throughout the research process, from its initial conceptualization to its eventual actualization, I kept a research journal in which I recorded my thoughts and emotions. After each interview I recorded a voice memo chronicling my initial intellectual and emotional reactions to the interview and the interviewee. During coding, I wrote out a listener's response (as described above and in Gilligan et al., 2003) after each listening. Finally, I have made every effort to consciously acknowledge and interrogate my own positionality at every step of the research process. Not only do I address my own role as researcher in the following section of this chapter, I have attended to my positionality in some way in every chapter of this thesis.

Role of the Researcher

Every aspect of my research, from my topic of choice to my methodological strategies to my eventual findings, is entirely bound to who I am and how I make knowledge. I do not write in, nor claim to represent, "the omniscient voice of science, the view from everywhere" (Richardson, 1997, p. 88). Instead, I believe in "the *continual co-creation of self and social science.* They are known through each other. Knowing the self and knowing 'about' the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledges" (Richardson, 1997, p. 89). Therefore, I aim to always attend to the question, "how do we put ourselves in our own texts, and with what consequences?" (Richardson, 1997, p. 88).

Who am I, then, within and beyond this text? The aspect of my identity that is most salient with regards to this project is, of course, my multiraciality. Like my participants, I am a

multiracial she living in early 21st-century America. Moreover, I am also a student, although no longer an undergraduate one. This means that I came to this project seeking to understand the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students, carrying with me and unable to forget or ignore my own experiences as such. Throughout the interviewing, transcribing, and coding processes I felt what previous researchers have referred to as the "shock of recognition" (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988; Brownmiller, 1980; as cited in Wylie, 2012, p. 49). At other moments I encountered seemingly unbridgeable distance or strangeness. And I have endeavored to make such moments visible in an effort to dispel any illusions of omniscience or objectivity. Just as my participants are also researchers, I am not just a researcher, but a participant. My hope is that I have consistently portrayed myself as such.

Limitations

In Chapter Five I take up some of the theoretical limitations of this study; here I discuss its methodological limitations. Firstly, I conducted interviews at only one university (and consequently only one institutional type). Moreover, my graduation timeline limited me to only one round of interviews. In my initial conceptualization of this project, I had envisioned undertaking the additional step of a group debrief with the participants. Additionally, I spoke with no male participants. I did not recruit specifically for non-male participants, nor did I intend to interview only shes. However, no multiracial men came forward to volunteer. Once my participant pool was established, I made the choice to move forward with two theoretical frameworks grounded in research typically undertaken by and about women. Finally, all of the study's participants came from and studied in the same West Coast state. Because multiracial persons' experiences are particularly informed by context, including location, I assume that my study is both informed and limited by its geographic specificity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I sought to provide an overview of, and justification for, my methodological choices. Moreover, I aimed to demonstrate alignment of my research question, my methodology, and my theoretical frameworks. I also attempted to address issues of trustworthiness, locate myself within my work, and acknowledge this study's inevitable limitations.

In the next chapter, I invite the reader to meet the participants, and to come to know more of their stories and their selves.

Chapter Four

Findings

Thus far I have dedicated chapters to establishing why I have chosen to conduct research on the growing multiracial student population in the American higher education landscape, to reviewing what relevant literature is currently in circulation, and to explaining my methodological choices and strategies. These preceding chapters have been guided by my central research question: What are the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students in a college setting? As I move into this fourth chapter, I aim to present the findings that emerged in response to my research question.

I have organized this chapter to include a brief introduction of the research participants, followed by a report on the five themes that emerged from engaging with their experiences. Throughout, I urge the reader to keep in mind that each participant's story was multifaceted, unique, and grounded in her individual standpoint. The findings that I report reflect what Richardson (1997) describes as "partial, historical, local knowledges" (p. 89) rather than any single claim to capital-T Truth. Moreover, in producing this chapter I recognize that "writing is not merely the transcribing of some reality. Rather, writing… is also a process of discovery: discovery of the subject (and sometimes of the problem itself) and discovery of the self" (Richardson as cited in Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 143).

The Participants

The eight participants ranged in age from 19 to 28 years old, with an average age of 22.5 years. Seven participants identified as female, and one identified as androgynous. All identified as biracial, multiracial, or belonging to two or more races. Table 4.1 introduces the participants using pseudonyms.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Alice has a White mother and a Black father, and describes herself as very quiet at first but more outgoing as you get to know her.
Andrea has a mother who is White and Southeast Asian, and a father who is East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander. She feels most herself at home and when doing art.
Rachel loves reading and writing and is East Asian, White, and Jewish.
Charlotte identifies as Afro-Latina and thinks Pumpkin Spice lattes are amazing.
Phoebe identifies as androgynous, has a Southeast Asian mother and a White father, and likes the band Kero Kero Bonito.
Isabel is White and Hispanic and has always wanted to be a teacher.
Amber is Black and East Asian, hopes to work with kids in the future, and loves her sorority sisters.
Cassandra is Latina and White, focuses hard on her grades, and works at a coffee shop.

Rather than produce a sectioned-off table with rows that separate participants and columns for name, race, age, gender, and other dimensions of identity, I have elected to introduce the participants narratively. The description of each student is a composition or bricolage of words they used to describe themselves during their interviews. I do this to place the humanity of the participants at the forefront and to avoid presenting these students as segmentable pieces of data to be compared and contrasted.

Emergent Themes

Using the coding processes described in Chapter Three, I identified five themes that made themselves felt throughout the participants' narratives. These themes are: interrogations and otherings; passing, not-passing, and questions of belonging; battling for narrative control;

embracing the AND; and the significance of schooling. What follows is a description of each theme as generated by the stories of the participants.

Interrogations and otherings. I relied partially on in vivo coding during my listenings, which allowed me to attend to the specific words chosen by each participant. A throughline that quickly emerged in the participants' narratives was the experience of being subjected repeatedly to what Andrea termed "out there questions." Participants expressed that people they encountered, from strangers to acquaintances to friends, frequently interrogated them about their background without reserve. Andrea elaborated:

> They usually ask me 'who is what?' in our family, 'where do you get that background from?' And then they'll ask me, like, 'oh, how did that happen?' [...] And they tend to ask me, like, what my grandparents think about that. Like, I don't know, I don't know what they think about that, I've never asked them. So it's just random questions like that that I really don't have the answer for and I'll probably never have the answer for.

Other participants recounted similar experiences. Rachel described a recent incident that she had found particularly frustrating with a peer she had just met: "And they asked me how am I [East Asian] *and* Jewish? And I just kind of looked at him. And I was like, is he being serious right now?" Charlotte shared, "I've had conversations with people who will just come up to me immediately and be like [curious voice] 'What are you mixed with?' and it's like, [surprised tone] 'Hi." Amber, whose parents met when her father was stationed overseas, explained that she commonly receives questions phrased along the lines of, "Oh, your dad's in the Navy? And your mom's [East Asian]? How do you feel about Pearl Harbor?"

Participants also spoke of feeling like the centerpiece of a race-based guessing game--think of the classic children's game 'Guess Who?' but reimagined as 'Guess What?' and with

living persons instead of character cards. Phoebe, who is White and Southeast Asian, described growing up and growing accustomed to hearing "Oh, are you Japanese, are you Chinese, are you Korean?' blah blah blah, all these things." In her experience, those she encountered insisted on finding out "what kind of Asian, quote unquote, I was," and used questions like "Hey what kind of Chinese are you?" to that end. Andrea, who is White, Southeast Asian, East Asian, and Pacific Islander recalled that "people would look at me and they would be like, 'Oh, so are you like, Chinese? Or are you Korean?" Charlotte, who is Afro-Latina, adopted the strategy of exposing the guessing game by countering with "What do you think I'm mixed with?" She continued, "Then I'll always get something strange. I've gotten Samoan and Hawaiian a couple of times, and then they'll be like, 'well, you're Mexican right?' [...] I'll get Cuban a lot, or Dominican." Rachel, who is East Asian, White, and Jewish, recalled that as early on as elementary school "I'd meet someone and they'd be like, 'Are you Mexican? Or are you Latina?"

Multiple participants also brought up their experiences with the 'What are you?' question, discussed in Chapter Two as a connective thread throughout the literature on multiracial students (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; King, 2008; Museus et al., 2015). Charlotte, Andrea, Phoebe, Rachel, and Amber all referenced that particular phrasing at least once. Phoebe and an additional participant, Isabel, also mentioned the variant "Where are you from?" or "Where are you really from?" Several of the participants associated the 'what are you' question with a specific feeling or visceral reaction. Rachel mentioned never asking that question of others, "because I know how that feels, to hear 'What are you?" Charlotte said that it was a question that "used to make me mad" and Phoebe said that in one instance it "kind of made me wanna throw up." Here are Amber's thoughts on the question:

That's another thing! 'What are you?' It *bugs* me so much! And I try to like, detach and step back, but every single time someone says, 'What are you?' I'm like, I'm a human being, please don't!

Embedded in Amber's words above, and indeed in many of the participants' stories, was a sense of repetition and, at times, resignation. This was yet 'another thing' that someone has asked Amber, and she signaled that it was not an isolated occurrence with the phrase 'every single time.' Returning to the quote from Andrea that opened this section, you can see the effect of such repetitive, quotidian encounters in the way she constructs her telling. She starts out with 'they usually ask…,' signaling that she has been asked 'out there questions' often enough to rattle them off by rote, and continues to say 'and then they'll ask…,' a phrasing that indicates that these interrogations unfold in familiar and tedious patterns in her life. This notion of repeating similar encounters again and again will be revisited later in this chapter, in the section on battling for narrative control.

Many of the participants shared that just as they experienced the same instances of identity interrogation again and again, they also found that, in Amber's words, "people say the same things, make the same comments to us" over and over. When I asked Amber what kinds of comments she was referring to, she immediately started ticking off each word on her fingers, reciting for me a litany of unsolicited remarks as automatically as if I had asked her to recite her ABCs:

So, people have referred to [my siblings and me] as 'mutts,' uh, the 'Blasian' comments… From what I've gathered over the last couple years, or the last 24 years, I've gotten 'exotic,' 'interesting' and it feels like I'm a brand, or something. They're just so

interested that I feel like I'm an object on display really. Other people are just so curious that they'll ignore me being uncomfortable about the situation just to feed their curiosity.

Amber felt herself transformed into an object of curiosity, an effect certainly reinforced by her recurrent encounters with the question '*what* [emphasis mine] are you,' a construction that replaces the human subject 'who' with the objectifying 'what.' She describes the sensation of feeling "like a brand," objectified and commodified. And Amber was not the only participant to recount experiences with such objectifying language. Andrea reflected that persons she encountered "would just be saying things about how I look 'exotic.' I got that a lot. I got 'exotic' a lot. And I still get that a lot." Rachel recalled similar experiences, remembering comments like "you look exotic" or "oh you're so pretty and you're so exotic." Phoebe talked about "get[ting] weird comments from people" and hearing descriptors like "oriental" and "mystical."

As the participants themselves pointed out, words like 'exotic' not only do the work of objectifying them, but also have the effect of othering them. (For more on how such linguistic representations simultaneously essentialize, commodify, and enact the exaggeration of difference see Said, 1978). Rachel commented on "the feeling of being called 'foreign' or 'exotic," elaborating: "I'm taking this class [on the topic of] perspectives in multicultural literature, and we're all talking about othering, and I'm like, I guess I've been othered. Because of my looks and my last name" (Rachel selected the pseudonym Lee to represent her last name). Phoebe stated that even when she was younger "I knew I wasn't White per se - I mean I am, but I knew I wasn't that because I was always kind of othered when I was growing up." Amber expressed feeling like the descriptor 'exotic' was charged with unspoken meaning, saying "I've gotten exotic *a lot* [emphasis is the speaker's]. Like, 'oh, you look so exotic' [...] I'm like, no—what—like--I don't know--like I know what that means but I don't know at the same time." Andrea also

felt that the word 'exotic' was used in a coded manner to draw attention to her difference—in other words, to mark her as other. When I asked her why she made a face when she said the word, she responded:

> I get that all the time! I mean, it's just--I look different, that's what it is. And whenever you look different you're an exotic person. Exotic is another word for 'I don't know what the heck you are' type of thing. And I get it a lot. Because it's mainly with people who don't care to ask what I am, they're just like 'oh wow, you look so exotic' or 'you have such an exotic background.' And I'm like, I didn't tell you my background, but OK.

As was the case when they discussed being on the receiving end of 'out there' questions, the interviewees quoted above used language marked by a sense of repetition. Certain phrases were used by multiple participants, like 'I get that a lot.' And just like their experiences with the 'what are you' question, the words commonly used to other the participants sparked clear emotional reactions. Andrea put air quotes around the word 'exotic' and her frustration with the term was displayed on her face and in her voice. Amber drew out the word in a satirical way, imbuing it with ridicule. Rachel rolled her eyes when she used it and exhaled in annoyance. Phoebe put air quotes around the words 'oriental' and 'mystical' and dismissed the language as "all that silly stuff." In addition to these vocal and physical manifestations of their experiences as oft-othered objects of curiosity, several participants drew attention to the fact that there is a tangible reminder of their status as other—the box that they check time and time again on demographic forms. The implications of being asked to choose a box will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (and have been discussed previously in the literature--see Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; King, 2008; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008). But this exchange with Amber illustrates how visceral the impact of marking oneself as other can be:

Amber: I've always checked 'Other,' always that 'Other' box…

Steph: And when you do come across 'the boxes,' do they elicit any specific reaction?

Amber: [Inhale, half laugh, words rushing out] Stress and anxiety! I'm just like, ugggggggh [long exhale].

The theme discussed above, interrogations and otherings, is characterized by the ways in which the participants find themselves caught in the gaze of others. The next theme, passing, not-passing, and questions of belonging, takes up the means by which the external gaze expands and intersects with systems of racial identity, privilege, and oppression.

Passing, not-passing, and questions of belonging. An astute reader may have noted that the findings above were largely culled from the narratives of five of the eight participants. Other participants, primarily Isabel and Cassandra, had significantly less experience with interrogations and otherings. Their experiences are in part attributable to the sociological phenomenon of passing, historically understood as the ability of multiracial Americans to identify with or be perceived to belong to the dominant (White) racial group (Ginsberg & Pease, 1996). In modern day America, passing is a complex topic, and the term has expanded to encompass dimensions of identity other than race (such as gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability, class). The present section aims to illuminate how passing or not-passing has impacted each participant's sense of self and access to different social spheres, and how such varied experiences of privilege and oppression present complicated questions of belonging.

Of the eight participants, four expressed an awareness of having attributes (such as skin tone, speech patterns, or access to cultural capital) that allow them to pass for White in certain contexts. For some of them, passing had become their usual experience. The very first thing that Cassandra told me was "My mom was [Latina] and my dad is [White], and more than often I

pass for White versus [Latina]. So that has been interesting in some aspects." When I asked her to elaborate on how she used the term passing, she equated passing with "looking like you can pass for White so you're either European or American… Just passing for someone who looks like they don't have any color in them whatsoever." Similarly, Isabel told me early in the interview that "sometimes I just default White. A lot of the time actually." Rachel also commented early on that "I'm White-passing," and later described herself as "just pretty White-looking." And Alice expressed that "I can mostly go in any [racial] group and blend in."

Cassandra, Isabel, and Rachel were all aware of the privileges afforded to them by their ability to pass for White. Cassandra recalled an instance in which she went to access government services and was served more quickly than patrons "who obviously looked [Latino/a]". She recalled:

> I look around and I'm the only White-ish person there, and—ugh—it made me feel so uncomfortable! 'Cuz like, all these other people had been there for hours, and I just come in and get served right away and I'm like, this is so unfair, I'm so sorry.

Later in the interview I asked her about her experiences at Coastal University as a multiracial student, and she answered, "again, I don't feel like I pass as multiracial" and spoke about going through college as a "White-privileged girl." Isabel repeatedly spoke about how she felt it was important for her to "recognize that… I did grow up in a White community, I sound White, I look White, things like that." Rachel shared the following:

> There's not like an everyday reminder that I'm not White, or that I am White, so I'm just kind of living my life with this White-passing privilege. And I think if I was darker-skinned Asian, like some of my cousins are darker-skinned, and I'm sure that they've had to deal with that—and I know for a fact that they've had to deal with that—

> differently than I have. So just how I've lived, I haven't been constantly reminded 'you're not White' so I've gotten used to thinking of myself as White. Even though I know I'm not, and I've been taught that I'm not.

The last sentence of the above quote from Rachel—"Even though I know I'm not [White], and I've been taught that I'm not"— encapsulates the way in which the White-passing multiracial students that I interviewed navigated conflicting experiences and a wide range of emotions about those experiences. Rachel, for instance, may "feel like I'm super White," but her narrative also included multiple instances of interrogations and otherings. She juxtaposed these conflicting experiences in her own telling. She translated her internal monologue when encountering individuals who are curious about her race as follows: "[They say] 'are you this?' Or like, 'you look so exotic.' I'm like, I'm just pretty White looking, so." Isabel pointed to moments with her monoracial friends who "just see me as White" until "something will come up about Hispanic people and they'll be like, 'Oh yeah, I forgot, Isabel's half-Mexican.' I'm like, 'No, no, no, Salvadorian'." Cassandra touched on being asked about her race by strangers, wondering, "I don't know if that means I look more [Latina] than I think I do." And both Cassandra and Isabel mentioned feelings of ambivalence and guilt about their ability to pass. Cassandra commented that "sometimes I don't like the fact that I can pass for White because I feel like it's an unfair advantage." And Isabel shared:

> I don't always blame people for looking at me and just being like, 'you're White.' Does it sometimes hurt a little bit, on the inside, my little ego, because I would like to still be recognized in the Hispanic community? I don't necessarily blame other people… as much as sometimes I don't really like it, I understand it.

Cassandra and Isabel's remarks bring up the crucial question of how multiracial students make sense of their multiple racial identities, and how much ownership they have in that process, a question that will be addressed at length later in this chapter.

If, for multiracial students with White-passing features, there is no "everyday reminder that [they're] not White," then what of those multiracial individuals who cannot pass? Three of the other four participants, Andrea, Phoebe, and Amber, not only were unable to pass as White due to their appearance but were also typically unable to pass as a member of any monoracial group. This left all three somewhat in flux socially. Andrea commented that "I didn't really get to fit in a lot, because I was either not Asian enough or I was too Asian." Phoebe shared that "I knew I wasn't White per se… But I also felt like I wasn't really [Southeast Asian]" because of her lighter skin tone. She went on the reflect that "I never really had any other people that really looked like me so whenever I tried to go hang out with other people or make friends or something I would always be on the outside of the group." Similarly, Amber "always had a hard time with the African-American kids, or the Asian kids. No one would fully embrace me." Consequently, Amber explained, "I found myself jumping around a lot, so when I did experience that shutout I would go to a different group… I kinda just float around." A fourth participant, Charlotte, was not White-passing, but was occasionally monoracially Black-passing. Interestingly, just as Isabel used the word "default" to characterize passing for monoracial and White, Charlotte used the word "default" to describe situations in which she passed for monoracial and Black, as in one instance where she visited a prospective college and "they kept pushing me to go check out the Black Student Union… but for me it was like that's not what I'm here for." For these four participants their everyday experiences were indeed characterized by reminders that they were not considered White (even in cases where they had a White parent),

and in three of their cases by additional reminders that they fell outside of the monoracial majority.

The theme of passing, not-passing, and questions of belonging is significant because it illustrates how vast and varied multiracial experiences can be. It also brings up thorny, messy questions that will be discussed at length in Chapter Five. For instance, for White-passing students, how do they navigate minoritized group membership when, in Cassandra's words, "It's like I'm the same as you, but I don't look like you"? She continued, "And that's where I feel, not isolated, but a little bit like… I don't have the common [Latina] struggle that there is." For both passing and non-passing multiracial persons, how do they counteract the reality that they are more likely to lack certain cultural markers or access cards, like language? Isabel, who is White-passing, often felt shut out of conversations with other Latino/a students in her residence hall, because "when they start to have little banter in Spanish… I don't really know what they're saying sometimes. I think if I were able to [understand them] it might help them recognize my heritage and that Hispanic side of me a little bit more." And she shares that experience with Andrea, who is not at all White-passing, and who would find that monoracial members of her racial identity groups "would talk about things I wouldn't understand and then they wouldn't explain it to me." But is that shared experience enough to foster solidarity? And how can multiracial persons recognize each other in the first place, since, as Cassandra observed, "you have people who are obviously multiracial… or people who are well-disguised as one race"? Finally, passing or not-passing is mostly predicated on how individuals are perceived from without rather than how they are perceived from within, which brings us to the next set of findings.

Battling for narrative control. The literature on multiracial students has shown that their own efforts at self-definition are commonly challenged, doubted, or even overwritten entirely, with external definitions imposed upon them instead (Chang, 2016; Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; King, 2008; Museus et al., 2015). Certainly, experiencing interrogations and otherings contributes to this phenomenon, as do the effects of passing or not-passing. Interviews with this study's participants shed further light on how multiracial students may find themselves locked in a perpetual battle for control of their own narratives. In some of the interviewees' stories, contestations of multiracial identity played out as overt refusals to accept their asserted identities. For example, Alice, who has a White mother and a Black father, recalled a time that rather than validate her expressed biracial identity, her professor insisted that "according to the US census, you're Black." Rachel recounted instances in which "people don't believe me—like someone was once like 'there's no way you're [East Asian]." Cassandra remembered speaking up against anti-immigrant sentiment and stating that she was, in fact, Latina, only to hear "no you're not" in response. Phoebe found that "technically I'm not Asian to some people," and that even a close family member once told her "I don't see you as Asian." And Isabel shared that often "I'll say oh I'm half Hispanic and I'm half White [and] they'll say 'Girl, you're just White."

In instances like those cited above, the denials are bold and direct. But interviewees also experienced a more subtle undermining of their self-defined identities, tracked through in vivo coding as "oh statements." Amber explained:

> I've always had a hard time with the African-American kids, or the Asian kids. No one would fully embrace me—it would always be like, 'oh well that doesn't count, 'cuz Amber's not full Black' or 'oh she's not full Asian. There was always that oh statement.

"Oh statements" can be understood as statements that undercut an individual's asserted identities by introducing qualifiers or by otherwise covertly challenging an individual's self-image. They are often, but not always, preceded by an exclamatory "oh," which may signal objection, surprise, or dismissiveness. They can be as simple as a "no, really?" (as experienced by Cassandra) or a "oh, wow, I would've never guessed" (as experienced by Andrea). They may not always aim directly at a person's identity claims, but instead might target the markers surrounding those claims. For instance, Phoebe recalled "getting into a huge argument with one of my friends who said the Philippines wasn't Asian. And they kind of got to me because it's like, what am I then?" Charlotte remarked that "I've been told by darker-skinned people that [I] can't call [myself] dark-skinned." And "oh statements" can play out across all categories of social life, as in an instance remembered by Isabel in which a monoracial Latina friend who knew that both Isabel and her roommate identified as biracial tagged them in a social media post captioned, "I miss my White friends."

Because they never knew exactly what types of narrative battles they might be engaged in on any given day, the students I spoke to had largely grown accustomed to navigating constantly shifting contexts. As Andrea said, "I know the different reactions I can get." A question I asked of all of participants was, "How do you feel others see you in terms of your race?" Multiple participants' responses signaled that the answer varied from person to person and moment to moment. As Rachel said, "It depends on the person." A verbal construction used by several participants that spoke to their experiences with contextual shifts was "some people think I'm… and then some people think I'm…" Rachel observed that in addition to encountering a wide range of responses from person to person, "It depends on the situation." For instance, Cassandra, Rachel, and Isabel typically received different responses when their last names were said or

known, and Isabel, Phoebe, Charlotte, Amber, and Andrea found that where they were living and/or travelling altered trends in how others saw them. Context also proved to be a significant determining factor in how they presented themselves to others. As Charlotte explained, "When I'm with certain people they don't really know what [Afro-Latina] means so it's usually easier to just go default and just say 'yeah, I'm Black." Isabel talked about how presenting herself as biracial was "hard[er] in certain settings" than others. And Amber expressed that sometimes her willingness to assert her identity simply "depends on my mood."

As was discussed in the section on interrogations and otherings, the cumulative effect of having one's identity continually litigated and relitigated is one of enormous repetition. For several of the participants, such repetition elicited responses of frustration and fatigue. Respondents were tired of having to convince others that they are who they say they are. As Cassandra expressed, "Whenever [I] go somewhere, for me I constantly feel I have to prove I'm [Latina]. Like, I was born, I come from a [Latina] background, therefore I am. I shouldn't have to prove anything." Andrea shared that "having to list out" all of her different backgrounds to others "gets tedious. And you do get tired of answering the same questions over and over again." Rachel exclaimed that she had to relive the same encounters time after time, and that it became something "I had to deal with just for existing." The following exchange addressed her weariness, borne of dozens of tiny narrative battles:

> Steph: 'That you had to deal with just for existing.' Tell me more.
>
> Rachel: Just like, if I was born, if I was raised differently, if I was only White… And if I had met someone who I couldn't tell what they were I probably would be like, 'you're not White, but you're not quite something else. What are you?' I'd probably do the same

thing, so I don't hold it against people that much. I just see it as [exasperated voice] I have to tell someone *again*, I have to teach someone *again*. [Emphasis is the speaker's]

Steph: That motion you did [extending your arms on each 'again'], and that big exhale, it sounds tiring.

Rachel: It is tiring!

Steph: What's tiring about it?

Rachel: You know how people switch careers? It's like I've been doing this for 20 years, so I kind of want to switch careers and not have to explain myself anymore to strangers or acquaintances, but I can't. So I'm just looking at the rest of my life… And I'm like, I just feel like I'm just going to be stuck in this career, this dead-end career, forever.

Rachel's observation likening the task of explaining and re-explaining her identity to a dead-end career demonstrates how multiracial students find themselves employed in the never-ending work of convincing others. To illustrate how flatly tedious such work can be, I employed a method adapted from Gilligan et al.'s (2003) Listening Method. Gilligan et al. (2003) recommend using the words of interview participants to form what they call "I Poems." Starting with Amber's conceptualization of "oh statements," I instead opted to form an "oh poem," presented below. Every line in the poem was taken directly from interview transcripts, as I wished for the participants' words to stand for themselves. Each of the first four stanzas are composed of a different participant's words; the final stanza contains utterances made by multiple participants.

Figure 4.1

An "Oh Poem"

"The Never-Ending Work of Convincing Others," by Rachel, Isabel, Charlotte, and Amber

Oh you're just White
Oh you look kind of Asian
Oh there's no way you're Chinese.

Oh you're just White
Oh yeah, I forgot, Isabel's half Mexican
Oh, you White girl.

Oh you're mixed with something
Oh I don't really like Black girls
Oh, I don't see color.

Oh Amber's only half Black
Oh she's not full Asian
Oh you're being very Black right now.

Oh that doesn't count with her
Oh well that doesn't count because
Oh that doesn't count.

The final finding that emerged in considering the theme of battling for narrative control was the degree of variance in how the interviewees responded to the endless challenges levied at their identity claims. While coding, I identified a set of contrapuntal voices (Gilligan et al., 2003): voices of self-certainty and voices of capitulation. These voices spoke to how the participants reacted to external impositions of identity. Did they reject them? Refute or renounce them? Ignore them? Allow them to erode their own claims? Give in to them entirely? When considering these voices, it is vital to remember that self-description is always a difficult task (when confronted with the question "Tell me about yourself," half of the participants remarked that it was a "hard question"). It is also important to understand that both voices can (and did) emerge throughout the course of a single interview.

In some moments, interviewees pushed back against identity challengers. Rachel, for example, responded to a person who said "there's no way you're [East Asian]" by forcefully replying, "I know what I am." She responded to another person, who told her "oh you're so exotic," by saying, "I'm just Rachel." Early on in the interview she told me, "I know who I am, I have a strong sense of self." Cassandra asserted herself to a peer who said "no you're not [Latina]" by answering "Yeah I am, you wanna bet? I'll show you I'm [Latina]." Charlotte expressed similarly self-certainty, not only about how she saw herself, but how others saw her. She describes herself as Afro-Latina because "I feel like that term fits for me." While Charlotte acknowledges that, with most of her peers, "I'm Black to them. I know I am," she felt that "I respect myself and I know what I'm about." For her, "If you're an important person in my life then you understand how I identify." Amber expressed that she intends to tell her future children, who will also be multiracial, what she tries to tell herself: "I can tell them from a young age that this is what's gonna happen, but just try to push it aside. Just be mindful of who you are and keep being yourself." Andrea remembered that her mother, who is also multiracial, had given her similar advice, letting her know that "no matter what, I was still me." One interviewee, Alice, attempted to avoid identity contestations all together, stating, "I see myself as my own person. Kind of like a separate identity, just like, Alice. Just, that's who I am."

In other moments, interviewees shared doubts that external perceptions and pressures had sparked in them. Andrea shared that, especially in her younger years, her peers' comments "did hurt my sense of self and my sense of belonging because I wouldn't know where I would belong." She continued, "I wouldn't look like the people I wanted to belong with, but the people who I did belong with thought I wasn't enough of what I was." Cassandra explained that "sometimes I feel like, as if, since I can pass as White I feel like I'm pretending. But that's sort

of an odd feeling. Because like, no, I *know* I'm both, but you look at me and it doesn't feel like you can see both." And Isabel shared that "although I am very proud of the fact that I am biracial and that I am half Hispanic… other people, especially other Hispanic people, kind of only see me as White and I don't really get to own that I am Hispanic sometimes." She continued, "I'll say, oh I'm half Hispanic and I'm half White [and] they'll say 'Girl, you're just White.' And sometimes, a lot of the time, I don't really challenge that. I'm just like yeah, you know, you're right." When I asked her if she could tell me why she doesn't challenge their description of her, she said:

> I feel like they will always have a reason—how do I say this?—I feel like I won't win. Like I won't win them over… Whenever I envision myself having a conversation with someone who is a full [Latino/a]… if they were to just totally label me as White… and I was like 'hey, I'm also half Hispanic,' I always see them saying 'yeah, but you grew up White. You've been whitewashed. You don't speak Spanish. All these things kind of against it. And I don't really have anything to say back. Because all of those things are true. I mean, of course it doesn't take away from the fact that I'm still half Hispanic… but I feel like I don't have anything else to say… to make them believe.

In this excerpt of Isabel's interview the battle for narrative control turns inward, as two sets of voices, of self-certainty (e.g., "I'm still half Hispanic") compete and coexist with voices of capitulation (e.g., "All of those things are true"). And while one set of voices may speak more loudly in the end, "the things that [monoracial persons] say do have an impact on how multiracial people feel about themselves," according to Andrea.

Embracing the AND. Perhaps in response to receiving so much competing input on their identity claims, several of the students interviewed for this study made the move towards

embracing the AND. Rather than succumbing to the notion that they had to choose one aspect of their racial heritage over another, they often chose to assert and reassert that they were able embody multiple aspects of themselves simultaneously. Alice grounded this choice in the daily reality of her family life. When asked to declare her race, "I would mark multiple boxes. I would never just pick one… why do I gotta leave out my dad or my mom?" Other interviewees echoed her objection towards 'just pick[ing] one.' Andrea remarked, "I just have, like, all these different things and it's like 'choose one!', and I can't really choose one." Amber explained, "I've always identified as Black and [East Asian], or always multiracial or biracial. I've never been like 'oh, I'm Black' or 'oh, I'm [East Asian].' Honestly, I don't feel I'm *one* of them. I feel like I'm both." Rachel said she always employs an AND when introducing her racial identity to others, saying "I'm [East Asian] and [European]' or 'I'm Asian and I'm Jewish." Charlotte chose to describe herself as Afro-Latina because "it kind of sums up how I feel about myself… just the Black and the Hispanic part and embracing both of my cultures." She continued, "I don't want to shun either side of who I am." And Phoebe remarked, "I just am what I am. I've never really, you know, separated it out."

For some of the interviewed students, embracing the AND coincided with a pivot towards pride, in some cases after many years spent feeling less than confident about their racial identities. For instance, Cassandra shared that, compared to when she was younger, "now I'm kind of, more proud of the fact that I am both [White and Latina.]" Andrea recalled that "growing up, I was confused about what to put most of the time when it came to race and ethnicity," but "typically now I'm pretty open with saying everything that I am. And I'm more comfortable with it." As she's aged, embracing "everything that I am" has become interwoven with her sense of self. In fact, she carries a physical reminder of her mixed-ness in the form of a

tattoo on her shoulder that "mixe[s]... native tattoo symbols" from different parts of her heritage. For Andrea, it symbolizes how she is now able to "just mesh everything together and that's who I am." Charlotte also shared that finding the right mode of expression for her racial identity was a process, saying that she found the term Afro-Latina when "I was probably about 18. It took me a while. For me, it was always this kind of in-between where I had to choose. I was either Latina or I was either Black." Embracing Afro-Latina as a descriptor allowed her more narrative control: "I feel like Afro-Latina is there to fit whatever realm I want it to fit, for me." It also allowed her to express pride in a new way. She continued, "Now, it's kind of like, I think because I found the term Afro-Latina, it makes me kind of proud. Like, yeah, I'm Latina *and* Black. I am —I'm like Wonder Woman."

An additional finding related to embracing the AND was the fact that many of the participants felt that their experiences with multi-ness were an asset when it came to their university studies. Rachel said that her experiences "taught me to be open-minded and taught me to know that there are different people with different backgrounds and struggles." Consequently, she felt that she was able to take a wide variety of courses in her literature major, and even if the subject matter "may not identify with me personally" varied perspectives were "very interesting and really rewarding for me." Amber felt similarly, remarking, "I like having different cultures. I feel like I'm more open-minded when it comes to dealing with other people." Likewise, Alice expressed, "I feel like [being multiracial] kind of helps you have a more well-rounded understanding. Maybe not of all cultures, but at least be able to maybe understand others in a way." Andrea felt that "what I can bring to my studies [is] the fact that I can kind of, how do I word this? I can give them a different perspective than they're used to." Moreover, her experiences with navigating varied contexts led her to observe that "they talk about how you

have to put on masks at different social interactions that you're in. I can do that in a lot of different ways. So I think that's a plus that I can bring." Isabel also talked about her ability to adapt to the situation at hand, having "been able to see two very different environments growing up," namely "this very little White town I grew up in with my mom… and then, you know, being able to go see my dad living in a very rural part of [large California city] surrounded by Hispanic people." She reasoned, "So I think being able to see both experiences has kind of helped me a lot in my academics."

Chapter 5 will discuss at greater length how embracing the AND can empower multiracial students to defy categorization and resist the monoracial norm. Before we get there, however, we need to understand the findings presented in this chapter's final section, which elucidates the role of schools and schooling in the lives of this study's participants.

The significance of schooling. In speaking with the participants, it became clear that, for many of them, their sense of who they were, and their reflections on how they had developed their self-images, were closely tied to their experiences in school. Only one of the questions I used in my interview protocol asked directly about school experiences, and it was a question specifically about their experiences at Coastal University. Moreover, I always asked it in the latter half of an interview. Nevertheless, multiple participants spoke early and often of their time in school and how their experiences with schooling informed their conceptions of multiracial identity. In an attempt to address why school was so central to the stories of so many participants, I offer several possibilities, each illustrated by anecdotes or observations taken directly from the interview transcripts.

School is where dominant narratives, including narratives about race, are (re)produced.

Isabel: We really, in my head, in my experience, we only have, like, four or five races, you know what I mean? We have like: White, Black, some sort of Hispanic (and for a lot of people that default is just Mexican), and then Asian and Middle Eastern.

Alice: Even when I was a little girl, in elementary school, for like the Stanford 9 [standardized test], I would mark multiple boxes. I would never just pick one. And I told myself, even when I was younger, I was gonna go to the government and complain.

Amber: I remember on my SATs in high school, like we all have to pick a box and I remember my college counselor at the time, he said pick African-American 'cuz that makes you a minority and that looks better. So, I was like, right when he said that I was like mmmmm [groans]. I had this like, this internal conflict. I was like that doesn't sound right to me, just automatically this doesn't sound ok, so I was just… I remember being really hurt by that.

School is where students learn where they (do or do not) fit into the prevailing narratives.

Phoebe: When I went to school - I went to _____ _____ Elementary School - so it was a lot of Black kids, and I knew that they were Black because they looked Black. And there were a lot of Mexican kids, or Hispanic kids, and I knew they were Mexican or Hispanic because they spoke Spanish and they looked Hispanic and Mexican. But there was really only, only a very small handful of students that looked like me.

Andrea: It was difficult to find kind of a place for me to fit in as a kid. And once I got to high school it kind of got better because I was in sports so we would go to different

places and we got interactions with other areas. But it was still kind of hard to hear the things [my peers] were talking about. Because we would go back to where I'm from, we would play [inner-city schools], and they would be like 'oh my gosh this place is so ghetto, I don't wanna ever come back here, I don't know why we play their division.' And I was—I would just kinda sit back. And I would just listen.

School (may) provide opportunities for students to explore how they see themselves.

Amber: I started to experience, or be aware of, my bi-racialness in elementary school.

Phoebe: I didn't know I was Filipina until I went to high school… I think it was an English project… And there was this thing where we had to put down the country we were from. And I was putting down Germany, Ireland, England, Finland, Sweden, blah blah blah, all that stuff in Europe and then I was like holding the little sticker and I was looking at China and I was like, 'I'm not Chinese. And I'm not Indian, and I'm not Indonesian. And I'm not Japanese.' And then I saw the Philippines and I was like 'oh shit! I've been confused!' So I put it down on the Philippines… And then I'm like 'oh shit, I'm Filipina!? I'm not just some blanket Asian term or something.'

School provides opportunities for students to learn how other people see them, which may or may not align with how they see themselves.

Rachel: I was in elementary or middle school, and some older adult person just said 'Oh you're so pretty and you're so exotic.' And I'm like, I'm just Rachel. I'm just living my life in school. Because exoticism to me is foreign, and I was born in the US, and I only know English and the limited US history that I was taught. So it doesn't align with the word's connotation.

Andrea*:* That was hard when I was into art, and I was trying to become an art minor. It was difficult because most of the time, when I was in community college, I had professors who would say things like 'Oh why don't you put your ethnic background into your artwork?' And I would be like, that's not what I want to do, so I'm not going to. And they would see my artwork as something different than what I wanted it to be. And they would try to change it so that I had to be Asian, or I had to put in that [Pacific Islander] background, or something like that.

School demonstrates to students that they may not always be in control of their own (counter) narratives.

Charlotte*:* I've filled out [school] forms before where I'll put of Hispanic and Latino background and then they'll ask for the race and I'll put Black and they'll completely wipe out the Hispanic part and just focus on the Black part, and it's like wait— but—no—'cuz they think you can only be Hispanic or you can be Hispanic White but that's not, that's really not how that works.

Amber: So once the whole multiracial subject came up [in a psychology class] I just felt this [mimes heads turning toward her] *awkward*—like 'oh no it's gonna happen'—and the professor's like 'does anyone have any stories they wanna talk about?' and I'm just like '[exhale] oh no, no no no no no no no.' And I remember the girl sitting next to me, Caucasian girl, around my age, early 20s, and she's like, 'Do you wanna talk about it?' I'm just like [inhale, pause] I just remember that day I had to call my dad I was sooo [pause] I felt like my skin was on fire that that actually happened to me. Like, I've heard about that and thought oh that's never going to happen but then it actually happened to me and I was like—I was shocked. I was like ok, I was actually really pissed off. But of

course, to the professor, I was like I'm just gonna ignore the student and [polite voice] 'Sure I'll talk about it.' But I felt like communicating my feelings and thoughts—everybody in the class was just like 'ok' but they couldn't understand, there was no connection.

School may do all of the above at once.

Alice: The thing in high school. It was junior year. We had a unit on race, and basically what the teachers wanted us to do--they took the entire junior class into this auditorium. And then they wanted to separate us into groups by race. So, all the African-American students went this way, you know, and Asians, and what have you. Basically from that, they told us to look around and it was like 'Oh our friends are in different cliques, so what do we do?' And me being both, I'm like, do I go with the White students or do I go with the Black students? I made a mistake that day. I was wearing cornrows... And I had a Black Student Union t-shirt on. So, my mistake was that I went to the White group, and I was still wearing that. But they still were like, 'You're Black, go to the Black group.' I guess it was their way of trying to teach us about race.

The student narratives displayed above speak to the ways in which the transmission of lessons in school happens officially and unofficially. Figure 4.2 illustrates this phenomenon.

Figure 4.2

How School Teaches Us That We Are Other - Formally

How do you identify your race?
Please choose one:

- ○ White or Caucasian
- ○ Black or African-American
- ○ Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin
- ○ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ○ Native American or American Indian
- ○ Middle Eastern
- ○ Other

How School Teaches Us That We Are Other - Informally

How do others identify your race?
Please select all that apply:

- ○ Gringa
- ○ Morena
- ○ Mutt
- ○ Oriental
- ○ Mystical
- ○ Foreign
- ○ Exotic

In Figure 4.2, the box on the left represents the officially-sanctioned collection of students' demographic information prior to standardized tests, on school application and enrollment forms, and so forth. The box on the right represents comments that multiracial students might hear in a school setting (from peers, teachers, administrators, or the parents of other students). All of the words used in the right-hand box are words that interviewees had been called in the past.

What of the interviewees' present experiences with schooling in a university setting? Half of participants felt much more positively about their experiences at Coastal University than they did about their earlier educational experiences. Andrea, Rachel, Charlotte, and Phoebe all described Coastal using similar language. Andrea stated that "at [Coastal] it's way more welcoming, I think, than everywhere else that I've been." Rachel observed that "This is a super liberal, open-minded, welcoming, very inclusive campus. They make a point to be like, we accept everyone." Charlotte commented, "I feel welcome here… it's been a welcoming experience, I will say that, it's been different than experiences I've had at other schools." And Phoebe said simply, "It's very welcoming." Even those participants who expressed more

ambivalence about their time at Coastal indicated that it was better than other school settings they had known. Cassandra mused, "I feel like there is diversity [on campus]." Isabel felt that "at [Coastal] it's a little bit better… I have gotten more recognition here, because I think there's a lot of different types of people here in comparison to where I grew up." And Amber reflected, "I feel like especially with this school I've put more effort, time, more of a relationship into this school." More of the participants' feelings about Coastal University will be explored in Chapter Five, in the 'Recommendations' section.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced this study's eight participants: Alice, Andrea, Rachel, Charlotte, Phoebe, Isabel, Amber, and Cassandra. Using their own words as much as possible, this chapter aimed to present five themes that arose after interviewing, transcribing, and coding processes were completed. These themes are: interrogations and otherings; passing, not-passing, and questions of belonging; battling for narrative control; embracing the AND; and the significance of schooling. Individual participants may have had similar, different, complementary, or contradictory experiences with the stated themes.

Consequently, this chapter had two secondary aims. The first was to honor the range of experiences recounted by the student participants. Each interviewee was her own person and lived her multiraciality in her own way. This chapter sought to acknowledge that fact by allowing original, contrapuntal voices to ebb and flow throughout. The second aim was to report findings in a way that did not obscure the humanity of the participants. Non-traditional methods of data representation were used to achieve alignment with this goal.

In the next chapter, I embark on a discussion of how the findings presented herein relate to larger structural and theoretical conversations. To bridge between this chapter and the next, I

leave the reader with the following thought: my research question, as originally conceived, was: What are the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students in a college setting? After hearing the stories of the participants, I wonder if a more appropriate question might have been: What are multiracial undergraduate students' experiences with systems of schooling?

Chapter 5

Discussion

Chapters One, Two, and Three provided the necessary context to understand this project's undertaking. They tackled, respectively, the research problem(s) I wished to address, the existing literature on the subject, and the methodological choices I made when actualizing my research. Chapter Four introduced the study's participants and the findings that emerged through listening to their stories. After collecting, transcribing, and coding eight multiracial students' narratives, five themes emerged. Documented in Chapter Four, the five themes were: interrogations and otherings; passing, not-passing, and questions of belonging; battling for narrative control; embracing the AND; and the significance of schooling. Moreover, Chapter Four demonstrated the range and richness of the multiracial student experience, as each student's story contained within it multilayered voices which at times converged with, departed from, and even contradicted other participants' stories.

Chapter Five, then, begins with the understanding that there is no single story that captures the multiracial student experience. This chapter aims to discuss the findings presented in Chapter Four, contextualizing and conceptualizing them within larger theoretical frameworks. As mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, this study takes the epistemological stance of standpoint theory. From a standpoint theorist's perspective, what matters is situated knowledge: each person's standpoint, their position in the world, their experiences with social relations and hierarchies or power, informs how and what they know. Additionally, the experiences of the socially marginal (usually understood as women, as standpoint theory originated in feminist research; in this study understood as multiracial shes) can make visible hidden norms. I will also be making use of the language and concepts of MultiCrit, an offshoot of Critical Race Theory (CRT). MultiCrit was developed by Harris (2016) in order to better understand multiracial

persons' racialized experiences. Harris (2016) identified eight tenets of MultiCrit, to be kept in mind throughout this chapter: challenges to ahistoricism, interest convergence, experiential knowledge of people of color, challenges to dominant ideologies, the monoracial paradigm, racism/monoracism/colorism, differential micro-racialization, and intersections of multiple racial identities. I will use these two theoretical frameworks to anchor discussion around a central question: How can we conceive of a multiracial 'us'?

Discussion

> "It's like, I'm the same as you, but I don't look like you." -Cassandra
>
> "I think it [figuring out where to fit in] will be with me forever. Because there's not really a spot, or a large group of people, of half-White, half-Salvadoran." -Isabel
>
> "So it's exciting to see, like, one of me… but it's always only half of me." -Phoebe

I chose to open the discussion with these three statements because they illustrate some of the difficulties inherent in conceiving of a multiracial "us," multiracial solidarity, or even a shared multiracial identity. As both the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the findings outlined in Chapter Four have demonstrated, navigating one's racialized experiences and identity as a multiracial student is profoundly complex. The discussion will center around three complicating factors that must be considered when contemplating a multiracial "us": the monoracial paradigm, the question of what multiraciality looks like, and the "POC question."

The monoracial paradigm. The reification of race in the modern US landscape has led to what MultiCrit terms "a monoracial paradigm of race" (Harris, 2016, p. 803) that is reinforced by dominant ideologies. One of the themes addressed in Chapter Four was battling for narrative control, wherein the multiracial students interviewed found their identities contested by individuals conditioned to view race as discrete and reified. Students found that "just for existing" (Rachel), just by being multi, they confounded others. MultiCrit ties this phenomenon

directly to the norming of monoraciality, for "monoracial understandings of race cause individuals and institutions to place a monoracial identity on multiracial students" (Harris, 2016, p. 804). As Andrea put it, "I think it's just like, beat into people's minds here in the US that there's specific things that people are, and there's usually not mixes. So they like to categorize us." MultiCrit labels such processes "external classifications." External classifications may be manifest on an individual level, as when Isabel's peers declared that she was "just White" or Charlotte expressed "I'm Black to them. I know I am." Additionally, external classifications may be made at the institutional level, illustrated by the way in which Amber felt constrained to check one box only for college admissions or Charlotte's feeling that she was expected to make use of student services designed for the (monoracial) Black student population during a college visit.

And they may even be imposed on individual and institutional levels at once, and in the most intimate proximities. Of the eight multiracial students I interviewed, seven had monoracial parents - only Andrea had parents who had also lived as multiracial persons. In several cases, multiracial students were externally classified as monoracial even within their own families. For instance, in Charlotte's recollections:

> Growing up [with my dad] it was like a Black mantra, like you're Black and you're proud and you're Black and you're proud. It was kinda like--but my mom isn't Black, so what does that make me? [...] So it was kind of weird growing up that he was very one-sided about the whole situation when he had multiracial kids. But I guess he doesn't see us as multiracial.

In Charlotte's experience, the monoracial paradigm was dominant both in the institution of her family and in the individual mentality of her father. It also extended to her siblings. Charlotte explained, "When I told [my siblings] 'Hey, I'm Afro-Latina so that makes you Afro-Latino,'

they were like 'No, I'm Black." Their response points to the fact that the prevailing monoracial paradigm may "also force multiracial students to identify as monoracial" (Harris, 2016, p. 804), as multiracial persons may consciously or unconsciously engage in "internal classifications."

In speaking with this study's participants, it became clear that in many ways their views on and conceptualizations of race were shaped by the monoracial paradigm. As Isabel said, "I see myself doing it sometimes too, without noticing it… we just kind of classify people by race, you know?" I attended to this phenomenon in my final coding step by listening for contrapuntal voices within the student narratives. One set of contrapuntal voices that I listened for was voices that reify the monoracial norm and voices that resist the monoracial norm. When I reviewed the transcripts, I found that only two participants spoke in voices that resisted the monoracial norm more often than in voices that reified it. Three of the participants spoke in both voices with about equal frequency, and three relied heavily on voices that reified race and the monoracial paradigm. MultiCrit posits that:

> This forced identity choice and erasure occur[s] because legal and social systems are set up in ways that discount the complexities of various racial representations and force individuals to assign themselves, or be assigned to, a category that may not be their primary identity (Harris, 2016, p. 805).

Some of the interviewed students were able to call into question the monoracial paradigm and, in doing so, counter some of its dominant ideologies. Rachel, for example, recognized that many of the interrogations and otherings she experienced were a result of a widespread inability "to talk about and understand race outside of a monoracial paradigm" (Harris, 2016, p. 804). She commented, "Most of the time when people ask [about my identity] it's just like, 'I don't know how to categorize you'. And I'm like, 'Ok, but you don't really have to." She went on to state,

forcefully, "People are not just one race." Similarly, Charlotte told me her defiance of commonly held, monoracially-based stereotypes "kinda throws people off. They're kind of like, well, how do we fit you into this box? And I'm like haha jk--you can't fit me in a box!" She went on to say, "You know, there's a bunch of people like me in the world." I would posit that Rachel and Charlotte's ability to see, to say, to know that identities extend beyond the monoracial paradigm speaks to the engagement they have with their standpoints. By critically examining their own experiences, they have "developed the interpretive heuristics necessary to understand and to navigate dimensions of the social and natural world that the comparatively privileged rarely engage, or are invested in avoiding" (Wylie, 2012, p. 63). But this development has taken time; Chapter Four spoke to the ways in which several participants came to engage with aspects of their racialized identities only recently and as works-in-progress. So, still, the monoracial paradigm stands as one obstacle to a multiracial "us." How can multiracial students establish a sense of shared identity when the monoracial paradigm limits the language available and makes it difficult for them to articulate their 'multi' identity to themselves and to others?

What does multiraciality look like? Notions of multiracial solidarity and community are additionally complicated by the fact that multiracial students may have difficulties finding or meeting one another. In Chapter Three I touched on the fact that recruiting for this study was challenging, in part because, as I mentioned to one interviewee, "I [didn't] know how to find us!" My recruiting hurdles were partially attributable to Coastal's institutional reliance on the monoracial paradigm. As of this writing, no student clubs, organizations, or services that I or any interviewee knew of catered specifically to multiracial students. This shortfall will be discussed further in the "Recommendations" section. I was also struck by the simple conundrum of not being able to "tell" if undergraduates I encountered casually were multiracial. Chapter Four's

presentation of the theme of passing, not-passing, and questions of belonging spoke briefly of this phenomenon. As Cassandra said, "You have people who are obviously multiracial… or people who are well-disguised as one race." In many instances, we simply do not, or cannot, see each other. Indeed, multiple participants explained that their own lived experiences with interrogations and otherings dissuaded them from asking questions that would help them identify multiracial peers. As Rachel said, "When I meet someone and they're just like racially ambiguous I'm like, I wonder what they are… But I usually don't ask them because I don't want to--because I know how that feels, to hear 'What are you?" Amber, Andrea, and Phoebe similarly mentioned that they avoid asking others 'What are you'? And participants did not have language at their disposal to replace the 'what are you' question. The monoracial paradigm has resulted in "a dearth of vocabulary and knowledge, disallowing" conversations about multiraciality (Harris, 2016, p. 804), and often disallowing multiracial persons to recognize each other.

Imbued in the conversation surrounding passing, not-passing and what it means to be visibly or invisibly multiracial is the fact that multiracial persons' specific racial backgrounds vary enormously. Much of the previous research and media representation around multiraciality has been constrained by the ways in which America's "black/white paradigm of race often essentializes this [multiracial] population as all black/white biracial students" (Harris, 2016, p. 804). But, in reality, multiracial "individuals, who are often lumped together, have a plethora of diverse experiences due to their racial/ethnic makeup, lived realities, and histories" (Harris, 2016, p. 809). In this study alone, every participant's "mix" is different. As the MultiCrit tenet that speaks to intersections of racial identity reminds us, "the 'mix' matters for multiracial

students" (Harris, 2016, p. 809). Otherwise put, "the multiple races that multiracial students embody impact their experiences on campus" and in society writ large (Harris, 2016, p. 809).

Participants' stories suggest to me that the 'mix' may also matter in how multiracial persons recognize and relate to one another. For instance, Cassandra and I shared aspects of our heritage--she is White and Latina (specifically, Mexican-American) and I am White, East Asian, and Latina (also specifically Mexican-American). When I asked her if she had been able to meet other multiracial students on campus, she mentioned that she had, but with some difficulty. She elaborated that, for instance, "If I just saw you I wouldn't have thought that you are Mexican, I would have thought Asian--that's just it." She then immediately worried that she had offended me (she had not, but her concern speaks to the lack of nuanced language available to us in such discussions). In our case, even the slightest difference in our respective "mixes" made it difficult for us to recognize our likeness in one another. In other instances, that difficulty was even more pronounced. After an interview with a different participant, I recorded a voice memo expressing that I felt that I had disappointed or let down the student I had just met. She is neither White-passing nor monoracial-passing, whereas I, depending who I am with and where I am, may be either or both. I memoed:

> I couldn't shake the feeling that I wasn't who she expected to show up. I felt like she was really excited to talk to someone like her—who looked like her, who she could trust. But we look so different from one another, to each other and to the world. And I didn't know how to be less disappointing.

I cite these encounters because they illustrate how I came to be thinking about the possibility of a multiracial "us." When I began the interview process, I was concerned with how to find "us." As

I exited the process, I was more preoccupied with whether we can conceive of ourselves as an "us" at all.

The POC question. A sort of corollary to the question of a multiracial "us" is the question of whether multiracial persons are considered to be (by others, by themselves) persons of color (POC). I began to consider this question because of the way the MultiCrit tenets of interest convergence and differential micro-racialization played out differently in the lives of the students I interviewed. Interest convergence "exposes how multiracial students, who are positioned as objects to market diversity, are acknowledged only when it benefits the needs" of the surrounding institution (Harris, 2016, p. 800). Differential micro-racialization accounts for the ways in which "multiracial students are racialized differently on a daily basis" (Harris, 2016, p. 800), again often in service of institutional or individual priorities informed by the monoracial paradigm. As noted in Chapter Four, the multiracial students I interviewed navigated constantly shifting contexts, and differential micro-racialization is a part of those contextual shifts.

Various examples of both phenomena appeared throughout participants' narratives. Amber, for instance, spoke repeatedly of feeling "like a brand," and recounted instances in which her sorority sisters would position her as such. She reflected, "I've noticed sometimes it's like 'oh, have Amber do it,' 'put her there,' 'let her talk to that group'. I see a different motive there." Others, like Isabel, experienced a type of micro-racialization wherein "many multiracial Americans have become differentially racialized as 'honorary whites" (Harris, 2016, p. 807). She remarked:

> I think that's another reason that they [the White majority in my hometown] just want to default me as White, just to kind of keep me with them, if that makes sense? Just like,

'Oh, you're with us, you're just White'... They want to just keep me in their little White bubble.

Amber and Isabel's experiences are illustrative of the fact that there was a marked difference in the way White-passing and non-White-passing multiracial interviewees experienced interest convergence and differential micro-racialization. Non-White-passing students, like Amber, Andrea, and Charlotte, were more likely to be tokenized and/or subjected to "model minority" characterizations. White-passing students like Isabel and Cassandra were more likely to be, in Isabel's words, "whitewashed" and treated, in MultiCrit's terminology, as a "buffer class" of "honorary whites." Passing and non-passing interviewees also experienced racism, monoracism, and colorism differently. Some interviewees mainly experienced monoracism, and even, however unwillingly, benefited from systems of racism and colorism (see, for instance, Cassandra's anecdote about waiting in line for government services in Chapter Four). Others had more frequent encounters with what Charlotte called "good 'ol American racism," (with Charlotte also noting that her male and darker-skinned family members endured such encounters even more frequently than she). MultiCrit, being newly emergent, has not yet developed tenets to contend with the experiential gap between White-passing and non-passing multiracial persons. As Harris (2016) explained, "passing as White was not a concept I thought much about while conceptualizing the foundation of MultiCrit. However, this does not mean that whiteness/lightness as property and passing privileges should not be further explored" (p. 810).

In many respects, in fact, MultiCrit seems to presume that multiracial students are to be considered persons of color. Interestingly, multiracial students are referred to as such multiple times throughout Harris's (2016) text. This assumption is also prevalent in earlier literature on multiracial students, made by researchers as varied as Shang (2008), Ozaki and Johnston (2008),

and King (2008). Yet, I am not sure that multiracial students can always be presumed to be persons of color. During the member checking process, I emailed all participants the following question: Do you consider yourself a person of color? Why or why not? Half of the respondents answered yes; the other half answered no. Here is a sampling of participants' reasoning:

> Charlotte: I would say YES. I think, if I have to choose a term to be lumped into, 'person of color' does the most justice. I don't find it offensive and sometimes prefer it if someone 'isn't sure' what I am.
>
> Cassandra: No, I don't believe I am a person of color because of the typical stereotype of being of color. Another reason why is because I don't want to offend anyone who is [a POC]… I'm just worried as someone who could pass for White of offending others, which is something I never want to do.
>
> Phoebe: Yes. I do consider myself a person of color. This is because I have the cultural background of a person of color, plus I have some of the same social experiences as a person of color.
>
> Isabel: No, I do not consider myself a person of color. I don't consider myself a POC for a number of different reasons, one of them being that I don't face any of the common prejudices and judgments that POC often face… Being that I am seen as White, I receive all of the privileges that go along with being a White person in America, therefore identifying as a POC would, in my opinion, disregard the minority struggle of a lot of the people who do not receive the same amount of privilege I do. Though I am fully proud of my Hispanic heritage and acknowledge that I am biracial, I would not call myself a person of color.

Amber: Yes, I do consider myself a person of color. This is because when society looks at me they see my dark skin first.

To be absolutely clear about it: I think that the question of whether or not multiracial students are positioned as POC (by others and/or by themselves) must be asked and must be considered. I do not, however, have any definitive answers. But I think this conundrum is worth thinking about, especially when thinking about conceptions of a multiracial "us."

A multiracial standpoint. What the literature, local and national demographics, and my interviews do bear out is the fact that multiracial students are still a marginalized group. Keeping this fact in mind, I think that it may be possible to conceive of a solidarity amongst the eight multiracial shes who met with me, told me their stories, and shared their knowledge. For they each occupy a *specifically* multiracial standpoint, on the margins of monoracial conceptions of race and racial identity. While each of these students may occupy her standpoint differently, and in doing so may see herself, others, and the world around her differently, she has intimate, undeniable access to her multi-ness. From this position she produces knowledge that is also multi and, in doing so, acknowledges "what remains tacit for members of a dominant culture, in the process catalyzing counter-narratives and counter-norms that have the conceptual resources, lacking in dominant culture, to name and to make sense of this dissident experience" (Wylie, 2012, p. 63). Perhaps, then, it is possible to conceive of multiracial students as members of an epistemic community, engaged in multiracial ways of knowing. In my view, a multiracial "us" may be based in the unshakeable knowledge of multiracial students that "people are not just one race" (Rachel) and that "there's a bunch of people like me in the world" (Charlotte).

Recommendations

Given the above discussion highlighting the ways in which experiencing community and solidarity may be complicated for multiracial students, it is notable and encouraging that several interviewees described Coastal University as a site where they felt welcome (Andrea, Rachel, Charlotte, Phoebe). Additionally, the findings presented in Chapter Four about the significance of schooling in multiracial students' lives offer a compelling argument for universities to embrace and uphold the responsibility of supporting the multiracial student population. This section will consider those initiatives and aspects of Coastal University that provided multiracial students with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging. Additionally, I will offer recommendations as to additional measures that might be taken to further support multiracial students.

Two factors were cited across multiple interviews as having a positive impact on the experiences of the interviewees. The first factor concerned the diversity of the student body. For multiple interviewees, the level of diversity in Coastal's student body contrasted favorably with their earlier schooling experiences. Rachel remarked, "This is the first time I've had a group of friends at any of the schools I've attended from elementary on that it's like 'Oh, I'm not the only Asian person in my friend group, this is so cool!" Andrea shared that Coastal is "way more welcoming, I think, than everywhere else that I've been, just because there is a big mix in the area." Isabel said that, having been raised in what she described as a predominantly White region, "coming out here, just meeting all different kinds of people, that's one of the things that I really enjoy." Their observations support Shang's (2008) finding, discussed in Chapter Two, that "traditional-age biracial and multiracial students are part of a cohort of students entering college at a time of great student diversity, yet they are likely to have little precollege experience with

such diversity" (p. 9). And, as Rachel put it, in Coastal's comparatively diverse setting multiracial students "don't stand out as much."

These students' experiences support this study's first recommendation: that colleges and universities actively cultivate a diverse student body. This recommendation is also supported by the experiences of interviewees who had more ambivalent feelings towards diversity at Coastal. Isabel, for instance, felt that "at [Coastal] it's a little bit better--a little bit--there are more people I guess who are willing to recognize me as Hispanic… But it's still not necessarily where I want it to be." Several times during the interview, Isabel recalled feeling excluded or externally classified as "just White" by other students, particularly by her Hispanic peers in her first-year residence hall. Amber commented that "I'll be with my sorority sisters, and I notice I'm the only Black girl in there." She elaborated:

> Overall, [Coastal] doesn't have that many multiracial people. It's predominantly Caucasian and Hispanic from what I've seen personally… I think it's just the people that [Coastal] takes in, honestly. We don't have that many Black people as it is, there just aren't that many… I feel like this school's just so--it's just where we are. We're more Hispanic-driven.

Isabel and Amber's remarks serve as a reminder that, again, multiracial students are not a monolithic group. Their experiences also speak to the ways in which "monoracism may be horizontally perpetuated by communities of color" (Harris, 2016, p. 806). I mention this specifically because much of the research on multiracial students has focused on their experiences within predominantly White institutions (PWI). Coastal, however, is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Isabel and Amber's experiences illustrate that it is not safe to assume that an HSI designation automatically exempts a university from efforts to improve inclusion

practices. Increasing the presence of multiracial students on any campus may help alleviate some of the effects of structural monoracism.

A second recommendation is that colleges and universities carefully and consciously attend to campus culture in a way that encourages inclusivity and supports students' self-identifications. When I asked interviewees to elaborate on why they described Coastal as "welcoming," several spoke about the campus culture. Rachel explained:

> The school makes a point of trying to be very inclusive in everything we do. Like, I worked as a new student orientation leader over the summer and we were very pointedly told to make sure to convey to the [new] students that this is an open-minded campus.

Similarly, Andrea talked about how "we put that big multicultural emphasis here, which is really nice. It's different when you go to [other schools in the state system]." Charlotte also compared Coastal favorably to other schools she had visited in the state system, where she had felt "pushed" to identify as monoracial, whereas she felt "accepted" as an Afro-Latina woman at Coastal. For her, Coastal has "been different than experiences I've had at other schools." One of the ways that Coastal has distinguished itself to her is in the way that the university's representatives respect student's self-authored identities. She spoke of professors enforcing the use of students' chosen identifiers and explaining to their classes that "there is a difference between Black and African-American, between Hispanic and Latino… it comes down to how people identify themselves, which we should be respectful of." Because multiracial students' ways of self-identifying may lie outside of the dominant monoracial paradigm, it is crucial that the universities in which they study include and respect their voices as well.

The final three recommendations included herein stem from participants' suggestions as to what more could be done to serve Coastal's multiracial student population. One such

recommendation is that colleges and universities provide formal as well as informal spaces for multiracial students to meet one another. I asked all of the interviewees whether or not they had had opportunities to meet other multiracial students at Coastal. Six of the eight students said that they had met multiracial student peers, and two said that they had not. Andrea, who had, spoke to me about why she valued having multiracial friends:

> We have a lot of common interests and a lot of common goals because of our multiracial background… Not everything is gonna be the same when you're a multiracial person, but you do connect on that level because you know how it feels.

When I asked her to tell me more about "knowing how it feels" to be multiracial, she shared:

> I would say that it's mostly just like, a hard sense of confusion most of the time because you don't know where to belong… so it's hard to feel like you are something within the community. It's like there's no one place for you.

To reframe Andrea's words, then, colleges and universities have the opportunity to signal to multiracial students that they are seen and valued in the campus community by providing a "place for" them specifically. The interviewees who had met multiracial peers had done so in three ways: by chance, through participation in student organizations, and through campus jobs. In some cases, such circumstantial meetings had been quite impactful; for example, Isabel mentioned that in her on-campus job she worked alongside two other students who shared her precise racial and ethnic heritage, and that they were "the first people I've met that are the same race as I am, the same mix." Such significant meetings, however, are left up to happenstance on many college campuses, including Coastal's. When I asked Rachel how she had met other multiracial students, she answered, "Probably just by chance. There's not a specific club for multiracial or mixed people, so anyone I've met that happens to be mixed is just by chance."

Isabel and Andrea also specifically mentioned that Coastal had no clubs or organizations that catered to multiracial students. Establishing such spaces would provide a way for multiracial students to meet each other when they otherwise might not, either because their paths never happen to cross or because they are unable to recognize each other as multiracial. Doing so would also designate an official "place" (Andrea) for them within the campus community. And the very existence of such spaces would challenge the monoracial paradigm, helping multiracial and monoracial students alike to broaden their understanding of race.

A fourth, somewhat related recommendation is that colleges and universities hire multiracial faculty and staff to visible, student-facing positions. To place myself in the narrative for a moment, the finding that surprised me the most was that not a single one of the eight interviewees could respond in the affirmative to the question, "Have you found any multiracial role models among Coastal's staff or faculty?" Moreover, only three participants could name any multiracial role models outside of their immediate family (all three named figures in the entertainment industry, and none named anyone they had personally met). If I am being fully transparent and reflexive, I ached deeply upon hearing this. One of the most impactful aspects of my own college experience was the fact that, for the first time, I found multiracial adults to look up to among my college's faculty and staff. These multiracial role models were hugely important to how I made sense of my own multiracial identity, which I grappled with throughout college (and beyond). Meeting them made my own multiracial identity more salient and made me feel like less of an exception to the norm. I could not help but to wish for similar opportunities for the students I interviewed.

The participants spoke powerfully of what it would have meant to them to have multiracial role models at their college. Some started by talking about rarely seeing themselves

represented elsewhere, whether in the media, or even in their own family (again, seven of the eight participants had two monoracial parents). Phoebe shared, "I would like to see more mixed-race people in media." When I asked her what it means to her when she does see a highly visible multiracial person, she responded, "Finally someone's acknowledging that we exist, you know?" She also pointed out that even the representation that she has found is limiting. She explained:

> I mean maybe I've found some mixed-race characters, but not that were [Southeast Asian] and White. So it's exciting to see, like, one of me on the screen, but it's always only half of me. It would be really amazing to see somebody that's [Southeast Asian] and White on screen. That would be really cool.

Similarly, Charlotte talked about being 18 years old when she finally saw an actress speaking openly about her Afro-Latina identity. She recalled, "And so for me that was like, 'Yes, I can understand that, I can connect with that, that's amazing.' And it was the first time I had ever felt that." Many of the other interviewees were still waiting to feel "that." And colleges and universities have the opportunity to provide them with the representation and role models that they are hard-pressed to find elsewhere. The following exchange with Amber speaks to what a rich experience that could be:

> Steph: Would you like to see more faculty and staff that look like you, or even don't look like you but actually are like you in their multiraciality?
>
> Amber: Yeah, Exactly, Totally.
>
> Steph: What would that mean to you?
>
> Amber: It would mean the world to me, honestly. 'Cuz just growing up and not having many people from a multiracial background, just being multiracial they would understand that day-to-day 'What am I gonna do?', 'How am I gonna react?', or just these

uncomfortable conversations that get brought up. I feel like they would just understand. Just having someone who understands you is just worth it, honestly, it makes everything easier in life.

Finally, colleges and universities should consider whether their student body is adequately represented in their course catalog with a diverse set of curricular options. The students interviewed for this study held a range of opinions on whether they had had access to courses that spoke to specific aspects of their heritage or to their multiraciality as a whole. Some felt that they positively had, some were not sure or had not looked into such coursework, and others had actively looked but had not found courses well-matched to their needs. Again, the "mix" seemed to matter, as students whose racialized identity included Hispanic/Latina were more likely to feel that they had access to personally representative coursework. In an HSI context, this trend makes sense. But 22% of Coastal's student population identifies as neither monoracially Hispanic/Latina nor monoracially White ("Viewbook," 2017), and while this study did not include an audit of Coastal's course offerings, the interviewees' experience indicates that course offerings for this segment of the student population may not be robust. Several interviewees shared sentiments similar to Phoebe's: "I just really wish that [the state university system] would have more of a 'let's look at it from a global point of view', and not just a Western point of view." Consequently, I felt it worthwhile to include their recommendation that colleges and universities consider the curriculum on offer to their students.

Limitations

In Chapter Three, I explained some of the more obvious limitations of this study, having to do with oft-cited factors like location, sample size, and so forth. Rather than rehash these more methodological limitations, I would like to use this space to consider what I have been unable to

achieve from a conceptual angle. For me, a crucial outcome of this study has been the exposure of the experiential divide between White-passing and non-passing multiracial students. I believe that a study delving further into the ways in which forces of oppression and privilege operate on and through multiracial students differentially would be illuminating. Moreover, I harbor concerns that my own positionality as White-passing multiracial woman has limited both the ways in which I make and access knowledge, and the degree to which I can relate to and access the stories of non-White passing participants. Consequently, I believe there would be value in a future study co-created by researchers of who occupy both passing and non-passing positions.

Conclusion

In the last year, I have been asked more times than I can count, "What is your thesis about?" Ostensibly, my thesis strives to answer a straightforward research question: What are the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students in a college setting? This question led me to other questions, most notably, how can we conceive of a multiracial "us"? I chased after these questions for the better part of the year. So what conclusions have I come to? In keeping with the conventions of qualitative research, I have explored participant narratives, in doing so generating five themes applicable to the experiences of multiracial students: interrogations and otherings; passing, not-passing, and questions of belonging; battling for narrative control; embracing the AND; and the significance of schooling. As a dutiful student in the field of higher education, I have proffered recommendations for colleges and universities that wish to support their multiracial student population, namely: cultivate a diverse student body, attend to campus culture, provide formal and informal spaces in which multiracial students can meet, hire multiracial staff and faculty to student-facing positions, and consider who is represented in the curriculum. Such are my conclusions, in a conventional sense.

But really this thesis is, at its core, a borrowing of the stories of eight multiracial students: Alice, Andrea, Rachel, Charlotte, Phoebe, Isabel, Amber, and Cassandra. The stories retold above are theirs, not mine. Their words led me to my conclusions, and their knowledge shaped mine. Thus, I would rather conclude by asserting that this thesis is about them, is by them, is for them. By rights, they should have the last word. Here is Amber, claiming this project as hers and by extension belonging to all the participants. She exclaimed:

"I saw your [recruitment] flyer in the student housing. I did a double-take. I was like, does that say 'multiracial'!? And I was like, oh my goodness! This is my moment!"

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Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

Research Study

Exploring the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students at [redacted]

Seeking participants for a qualitative study of multiracial undergraduate student experiences.

If you:

- Are an undergraduate student at [redacted]
- Are at least 18 years of age
- Identify as multiracial, mixed race, or belonging to two or more races

I would like to speak with you about your experiences.

Confidential, semi-structured interviews will last approximately one hour. Participants may also join together for a group debrief at a later date.

To learn more about this study, please call, text, or write:

Steph Bundy, MA candidate at [redacted]
[Redacted phone number; redacted email address]

Appendix B

Participant Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

You have been invited to take part in a research study, the purpose of which is to explore the experiences of multiracial undergraduate students residing on campus.

This study will be conducted by a graduate student from CSU Channel Islands. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Should you decide not to participate in this study, your decision will not prejudice your current or future relationship with [redacted].

Data will be collected through 1) a demographic questionnaire, 2) at in-person,semi-structured, one-on-one interviews as well as 3) a possible, optional one-time group debriefing session with all available participants.

Should you agree to participate, I will arrange a mutually-convenient time and location to meet. It is anticipated that the interview will last approximately one hour. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. The same conditions apply for the optional group debriefing session. Your name or that of the institution will not be associated in any way with this study and only I will know the identity of the participants. Pseudonyms will be used in reporting results to ensure confidentiality. All data collected in this study will be stored in a secure and locked cabinet.

It is anticipated that participants will experience minimal risks from this study. However, different people react differently to stimuli, and it is possible that some may experience negative feelings or recall a difficult event during the interview or group debrief. If you are tired, you may take a break. Also, if you do not wish to answer a question, you may decline to answer without any negative consequences. If you experience any discomfort, you can terminate the process at any time. Furthermore, you may reach out to me or my thesis advisor, Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément, should you wish to discuss any issues that may arise from your participation in this study.

You may ask me or my thesis advisor, Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément, any questions you may have about this study either beforehand, during or after the data collection process. My contact information and my advisor's contact information are provided below.

I will be happy to share the findings from the study with you after the research is completed. Findings from this study may help students, faculty, and staff advance their understanding of the unique needs and interests of multiracial students. Moreover, findings from this study may be submitted to an academic journal for wider dissemination and publication.

For questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject, please feel free to contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [redacted].

I have read the information provided above. I understand that by agreeing to be interviewed, I am agreeing to participate in this research study. I understand that I must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. I will be given a copy of this form to keep.

☐ By selecting this box, I agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

☐ By selecting this box, I do not agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

Signature _____

Date _____

Contact details:

Stephanie Bundy, Graduate Student and Primary Investigator
[Redacted]

Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément, Thesis Advisor
[Redacted]

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Name:

How many semesters have you attended [redacted]?

Do you/have your attended any other colleges or universities?

Where have you typically lived during your time as a [redacted] student?

Please indicate your age:

Please indicate your gender:

Please indicate your race:

Please indicate your hometown:

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Thank you for meeting with me. As you know, the purpose of this project is to explore the lived experiences of multiracial students at [Coastal University]. I formulated this project out of my own experiences as a multiracial student in various settings. Your participation is voluntary and your confidentiality will be protected. This interview will be tape recorded, and I may take handwritten notes as we speak. You may leave the interview or request a break at any time. Are you ready to begin?

Warm-Up Question(s) (one to be chosen dependent on the flow of initial conversation):

- How is your semester going?
- What is your major, and why did you choose it?
- Where are you from?
- What brought you to [Coastal]?

Opening Question (the same at each interview):

- Tell me about yourself.

Main Set Questions:

- How do you see yourself today in terms of your race?
    - How do you feel others see you?
- Tell me about what it has been like to be multiracial at [Coastal].

Wrap-Up Question:

- Speaking from your experience as a multiracial student, would you suggest any changes to how things are done at [Coastal]?

*Note: Transition and probing questions will be used as needed throughout the session. Additional main set questions were co-created with interviewees and added to later interviews. Such questions have been discussed in Chapters Four or Five.