

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

---

Sociology Dissertations

Department of Sociology

---

12-11-2023

## Mixed Race Masculinity in 2020 and Beyond

Christina M. Wan

*Georgia State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology\\_diss](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology_diss)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wan, Christina M., "Mixed Race Masculinity in 2020 and Beyond." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2023.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/36370102>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Sociology at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

Mixed Race Masculinity in 2020 and Beyond

by

Christina Wan

Under the Direction of Tomeka Davis, PhD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2023

## ABSTRACT

Studies that center mixed-race identity and the experiences of mixed-race people do not often focus exclusively on mixed-race men. Simply put, more scholarship examines mixed race femininity than mixed race masculinity (strmic-pawl 2023). This project highlights the experiences of 17 mixed-race men, focusing on answers to the research question: “How are mixed-race men navigating multiple racial identities?” This qualitative dissertation is a journey into the lived experiences of mixed-race men at the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and more. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa’s ([1987]2012) conceptualization of the borderlands, this project tells the stories of those who are situated at the intersections of multiraciality, masculinity, multiethnicity and more. Using semi-structured interviews and demographic pre-survey information, this study paints a picture of multiraciality from the unique perspective of mixed-race men.

Findings illuminate the ways in which mixed race men complicate the binaries of race and navigate fluidity and authenticity. Results also chart the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (data was collected in 2020 and 2021) on the lives of respondents. Notably, the rise in anti-Asian violence and attention to racial injustice in the United States during this time sparked action for participants. Findings are organized around three primary themes: 1) Code-Switching & Fluidity, 2) Masculinity & Multiraciality, and 3) Pandemic & Racial Injustice. Making a contribution to Critical Mixed Race Studies (CMRS), this project centers mixed-race masculinity to show how mixed-race men are charting their own paths in the borderlands.

INDEX WORDS: Multiraciality, Masculinity, Mixed-Race, Gender, Race, Borderlands

Copyright by  
Christina M. Wan  
2023

Mixed Race Masculinity in 2020 and Beyond

by

Christina M. Wan

Committee Chair: Tomeka Davis

Committee: Katie Acosta

David Brunsmma

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2023

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my participants who so generously shared their time and stories with me. Thank you so much!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe an immense amount of gratitude to Dr. Tomeka Davis, who has encouraged me throughout my work on this project. I am so grateful for you, and very glad I took that sociology of education class years ago. That class drew me into this field! Thank you also to Dr. Katie Acosta and Dr. David Brunnsma, who have been nothing short of amazing as I navigated completion of this project. Dr. Acosta's qualitative methods course and her impressive qualitative scholarship gave me a model for how to do this work. Dr. Brunnsma's many books and articles in the field of multiraciality have inspired me and helped me find what I wanted to contribute with this project. I could not have done this without looking to all of you for inspiration. A big thank you to my work teams at Georgia State, Georgia Tech, and now Emory University who supported this degree in many ways and encouraged me to get this done! To the Mixed Student Union at Georgia State University, who allowed me the privilege of serving as their advisor and helped me to recognize the research gap: Thank you! Finally, thank you so much to my family who supported me: my husband, my mom and dad, and many more. This is for you!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Key Terms</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.2 Why study mixed-race masculinity?</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 Theoretical Grounding: Borderlands and Intersectionality</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>1.3.1 Why Borderlands theory?</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<b>1.4 A note on language and capitalization</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2 THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1 Multiraciality</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.2 Racial Fluidity &amp; Ambiguity</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.3 Critical Race Theory</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.4 Critical Mixed-Race Studies</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.5 Borderlands Theory</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>2.5.1 Mestiza Consciousness</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>2.5.2 Borderlands Masculinities</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<b>2.6 Standpoint Theory &amp; Intersectionality</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.7 Masculinities</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>2.7.1 Complicit, Subordinate and Marginalized Masculinities</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>32</i>



2.7.2	<i>Mixed-race Masculinity</i> .....	34
3	<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	38
3.1	<b>Pilot Study</b> .....	39
3.2	<b>Study Recruitment</b> .....	39
3.3	<b>Sampling Frame</b> .....	40
3.4	<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	43
3.5	<b>Positionality as a mixed-race researcher</b> .....	45
4	<b>RESULTS – FLUIDITY &amp; CODE SWITCHING</b> .....	46
4.1	<b>“You slip into a different cadence, right?” – Code Switching &amp; Fluidity</b> .....	47
4.1.1	<i>Code switching and being yourself.</i> .....	47
4.1.2	<i>Code switching using gestures.</i> .....	50
4.1.3	<i>Code switching using speech.</i> .....	51
4.2	<b>Authenticity vs. “Chameleon”</b> .....	53
4.3	<b>Fluidity over the life course.</b> .....	57
4.4	<b>Summary</b> .....	60
5	<b>RESULTS – MASCULINITY &amp; MULTIRACIALITY</b> .....	62
5.1	<b>“A comfort level with ambiguity” – Complicating the binaries</b> .....	63
5.2	<b>“You do get conflicting ideas from different cultures” – Masculinity and Culture</b> .....	65
5.2.1	<i>Masculinity &amp; Culture: A case study on Kevin</i> .....	71

5.3	<b>“They’re like the opposite in one”: Multiracial masculinity &amp; whiteness</b> .....	74
5.4	<b>Summary</b> .....	77
6	<b>RESULTS – PANDEMIC &amp; RACIAL INJUSTICE</b> .....	79
6.1	<b>“It’s just now being televised” – The Black Lives Matter Movement</b> .....	81
6.2	<b>“I went out and bought a gun” – Mixed-race Asian Men’s Experiences</b> .....	84
6.3	<b>“This is the year that I can finally do the things and people will understand them” –Action</b> .....	86
6.4	<b>“...a white experience of the pandemic” – Discomfort</b> .....	89
6.5	<b>Summary</b> .....	92
7	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	94
7.1	<b>Key Findings</b> .....	95
7.2	<b>Code Switching &amp; Fluidity</b> .....	95
7.3	<b>Masculinity &amp; Multiraciality</b> .....	96
7.4	<b>Pandemic &amp; Racial Injustice</b> .....	97
7.5	<b>Limitations</b> .....	98
7.6	<b>Suggestions for future research</b> .....	100
	<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	102
	<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	110
	<b>Appendix A</b> .....	110
	<b>Appendix B</b> .....	112

**Appendix C ..... 116**

**Appendix D ..... 117**

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 3.3-1 Descriptive Statistics ..... 41

Table 3.3-2 Participants’ answers to an open-ended question about their racial identity..... 42

## 1 INTRODUCTION

While questions of multiraciality have been on scholars' minds for many years, the United States census in the year 2000 accelerated these discussions, as it gave respondents for the first time the ability to select multiple races on the survey. Who identifies as multiracial (e.g. Harris and Sim 2002), and the factors that influence multiracial identity development (e.g. Miville, Constantine, Baysden and So-Lloyd 2005) have been key questions for scholars. The question of the fluidity of race, and the changing boundaries of racial categories are also prominent in race research (e.g. Saperstein and Penner 2012; Lee and Bean 2007). According to Lee and Bean (2004), in the 2000 census, 2.4% of people in the United States reported a multiracial identification, the first time the opportunity to select multiple options was given to respondents. More recently, according to the Pew Research Center (2015), the estimated multiracial population in the United States is 6.9%, encompassing those who self-reported as multiracial and those who reported that their parents or grandparents were of different races or monoracial themselves. The growth in multiracial identification is significant (and fairly recent in the context of the discipline of sociology), underscoring the need for scholarship examining the intersectional experiences of multiracial people in the United States.

As the multiracial population grows, so has the research landscape on multiracial people. Yet, multiraciality research has far fewer scholars who focus on exclusively mixed-race men (e.g. Newman 2019; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Joseph-Salisbury 2019). Because identity is not a static concept, and identities cannot be clearly separated from one another and considered mutually exclusive, it is important to highlight mixed-race men's experiences to examine the intersection of race and gender. Multiraciality is distinct from monoraciality (and thus the experiences of multiracial men are uniquely important to study)

because, as strmic-pawl (2023) emphasizes, "... multiracial identification contests long-held rules around race and creates space for racial identity to be an active choice". strmic-pawl (2023) also notes that there is more research on the intersections of mixed-race identity and femininity than there is on mixed-race masculinity. I argue that the importance of studying multiracial men vs monoracial men, lies in the shared experience of liminality:

No matter how porous, fuzzy, and thin the boundary, no matter how soft and illusive the center of that collectivity, the shared liminality based on identification with more than one racial background is an integral, fundamental part of the self-conception of multiracial-identified individuals, and a defining component of the mixed-race experience. (Daniel et al. 2014:17)

For this study, I am engaging with self-identified mixed-race men, using an intersectional focus on race and gender to examine the experiences of mixed-race men navigating multiple racial identities. Using qualitative interviews and demographic information collected in a pre-survey, I examine how race and gender intersect for self-identified mixed-race men. In addition, I engage with questions of family, social class, intimate relationships, friendships, and more. The nature of this project is exploratory. The primary research question is, "*How are mixed-race men navigating multiple racial identities?*"

To frame this study, I utilize several concepts of racial identity specific to multiracial and mixed-race identity. To start, I use mixed-race and multiracial identity as synonymous and emphasize that both are distinct from biracial identity and monoracial identity. This is in keeping with the way these terms are used in the Pew Research Center's (2015) report on mixed-race people in the United States. I use mixed-race and multiracial identity to refer to people of more than one race and/or ethnicity, which encompasses biracial people plus those who are not just two races, but more. Often, multiracial people may also have multiple ethnic identities, and as such, ethnicity will be woven into this study where relevant for analysis.

## 1.1 Key Terms

In this work, I talk about *borders* and the *borderlands* often. I seek to understand the perspective of mixed-race men as they navigate the *borderlands* of racial fluidity, through an intersectional lens. I use both terms to refer to the many spaces and identities that mixed-race people occupy – those that are racialized, gendered, classed, and more. The usage of these is grounded in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, whose foundational work will be discussed in robust detail later. For now, a quote from Anzaldúa about her life as a multiracial, multiethnic, border woman gives us an idea of how these terms will be used:

I was born and live in that in-between space, nepantla, the borderlands. There are other races running in my veins, other cultures that my body lives in and out of, and a white man who constantly whispers inside my skull. For me, being a Chicana is not enough. It is only one of my multiple identities. Along with other border gente, it is at this site and time, where and when, I create my identity along with my art. (Anzaldúa [1993]2009: 185)

In the above, the word nepantla refers to a specific word Anzaldúa uses that represents the later evolution of her Borderlands concept (Keating 2009). My study illuminates how mixed-race masculinity is experienced, how the borders of race are constructed for men, and how men are able, or not able, to navigate between and among the borders of race.

Also relevant to the way in which I approach this research are the meanings of racial fluidity, and racial ambiguity. I use racial fluidity in this work to reference changing racial identity over time, either moment to moment, or throughout a much longer timeframe such as life course. I use racial fluidity in the same way that Saperstein and Penner (2012) do, pointing to changes in race longitudinally. Saperstein and Penner (2012:712) posit that “... an individual’s race is best conceptualized as a set of propensities rather than a single mutually exclusive category and that these propensities change over time and across contexts.”

This project uses the concept of racial ambiguity to reference the ways in which mixed-race people are not easily racially classified by others, based on phenotype. This leads to fumbling questions and presumptions from those who interact with mixed-race people. As Bradshaw describes, there is an "...external demand for racial accountability" that is unique to the multiracial experience, particularly for those who are racially ambiguous (1992, p.81). The stress that mixed-race people experience around race, particularly around expectations and how others perceive their race, is unique.

## **1.2 Why study mixed-race masculinity?**

Within the body of scholarship on race, mixed-race identity itself represents a smaller subset of work. Within mixed-race scholarship, mixed-race masculinity represents an even narrower area of focus. Even in projects that include both men and women, male participants tend to be undersampled (eg. Museus, Lambe Sariñana, & Ryan, 2015; Khanna, 2010; Kellogg and Liddell 2012). Even if a study addresses masculinity as it intersects with mixed-race identity, such as Davenport's (2018) work on biracial people in the United States, the intersection of masculinity and mixed-race identity may be only a portion of the study and findings. In using a critical lens of analysis that centers mixed-race men, I am inspired by Collins' (2000) approach to research on, by, and for Black women. As Collins (2000: 269) notes: "Race and gender may be analytically distinct, but in Black women's everyday lives, they work together".

As previously noted, the rise in multiracial-identified people in the United States is indicative of one reason to study multiracial people. Alongside the growing numbers of multiracial people in the United States is the attention to scholarly questions of mixed-race identity. Daniel et. al. (2014) note that in the late 1970s and 1980s, the focus on mixed-race concerns rose to prominence. Therefore, not only has the share of mixed-race people grown in



recent years in the United States, but alongside this the field of Critical Mixed-race Studies (CMRS) has developed. Because of the relative newness of a specific scholarly home for work with a focus on mixed-race and multiracial people, there is also room to make a specific contribution to CMRS by illuminating the experiences of mixed-race men.

Another reason to focus on mixed-race men is that they are understudied, as compared to mixed-race women. Charmaraman, Woo, Quach & Erkut (2014) examined journal articles over a period from 1990-2009 that focused only on multiracial women or multiracial men, found that 13 of those 14 centered on multiracial women. Yet, a look at recent movies and literature provides a plethora of examples of racialized, sexualized, and uniquely intersectional characterizations of mixed-race men. These popular culture examples provide some of the reasons why mixed-race masculinity's depth and breadth merits further study.

In sports, Steph Curry and Klay Thompson's mixed-race heritage is cited as a reason white fans are drawn to basketball, their part-white identities resonating with fans in a way that darker skinned players' identities do not (Schilling 2016). At the same time that the (lighter-skinned) mixed-race players' identities connect with white fans, they are made fun of for being "soft" (Schilling 2016). In a similar way, Chou (2012) notes that sports provided both some benefit from inclusion in a team and the social status of a masculine pursuit for Asian American men. Yet, Asian American men still experience racism and are marginalized as less-than-masculine (Chou 2012). In this way, Asian American men's racialized and gendered experiences illuminate similar treatment that Steph Curry and Klay Thompson receive as mixed-race men. We can see the connection between race and gender prominently in sports because of the connection between sports and power. As Messner (1992) notes, sports are a place for both competition and community building among men, and the context of sports reinforces masculine

hierarchies. Therefore, the intersections of gender identity and masculinity operate in a specific way to marginalize these players. Mixed-race men seem to simultaneously demonstrate hegemonic ideals of masculinity and be kept to the fringes of masculine ideals. In addition, multiracial men seem to be allowed fluidity and flexibility within and between these archetypes of masculinity. This project aims to understand the multiplicities of masculinity, specifically masculinity within the context of mixed-race identity.

According to Harris' (2019) personal essay on the contemporary multiracial experiences makes several intentional and important choices in the multiracial men the author chose to highlight. Using his own experience, alongside that of Keanu Reeves and Barack Obama (both mixed-race men), Harris (2019: 102) highlights the mixed-race experience as "...marked in equal parts by recognition and incomprehension". As a mixed-race person, one can recognize their own multiple intersecting identities, and yet may not be accepted or feel belonging within any one group. In describing the experience of being mixed-race, Harris' (2019:103) calls for history to center more narratives of what he calls "...the spaces between", referring to people navigating the borders of various identities. The work represents a rare tale of mixed-race men likened to superheroes, who are able to find themselves within and between racial identities in various ways. Harris's (2019) narrative highlights some of the mixed-race men's experiences that I would like to center in this project.

### **1.3 Theoretical Grounding: Borderlands and Intersectionality**

The effort of building a theoretical framework to study mixed-race masculinity led me through the search for experiences that would encompass multiplicities. The examples of mixed-race masculinity cited earlier present seemingly opposing views and experiences, that must somehow be presented in a multifold theoretical foundation. The 2021 Call for Proposals for the

Critical Mixed-race Studies Conference refers to mixed-race people as “embodied borderlands”, and I will use this term throughout this project to refer to the manifestation of a racial border within the physical body of multiracial men (Critical Mixed Race Studies Association, personal communication<sup>1</sup>).

This project is grounded in Anzaldúa’s ([1987] 2012) theory of the Borderlands, both figurative and literal. Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) wrote her own personal narrative, poetry, prose, and more in one project, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) was writing from the perspective of her own experience, as a Chicana, queer, mestiza woman. Although this theory is feminist, and undeniably speaks directly to the experiences of women through the voice of Gloria Anzaldúa, authors such as Hurtado and Sinha (2016) and Lennes (2019) have used the framework of borderlands theory to analyze the experiences of men and masculinities. Gloria Anzaldúa’s ([1987]2012) work speaks to people who are able to make meaning and live freely among multiple spaces, and resist. Resistance, in this context, refers to opposition of racial binaries and boundaries, and the rigidity of singular racial categories. To illustrate this particular form of resistance, Harris (2019:106) describes in his work that he would “...hide behind my mixedness...” as a means of pushing back against binary expectations of race. In this way, I am hoping to use Anzaldúa’s ([1987]2012) work to examine the ways in which multiracial men not only exist at the divisions of race, but how they reconcile their identities and practice resistance to racial binaries, and the structures that uphold the rigidity of racial borders.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “embodied borderlands” was used in Feb 2020 in an email advertising the 2021 Call for Proposals for the Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference, which was distributed by email and is no longer available.

Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) did not explore the voices of men as much as women in her work, yet her depth of analysis of borderlands theory and border experiences can be applicable to masculinity. I hope to take her theory of the Borderlands into a new direction to illuminate the experiences of men at the borders of race and gender. I aim to make a specific contribution to Borderlands theory with this work. This project will not engage the physical border between the United States and Mexico as Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) does. However, this project will use the spirit of Anzaldúa's ([1987] 2012) Borderlands to examine the experiences of mixed-race men at the borders of race, and their ability to cross racial borders (or not).

### ***1.3.1 Why Borderlands theory?***

The lens of Borderlands theory has been extended to the multiracial experience as a way of understanding racial fluidity, and the multiplicities of gender, race and intersectionality (eg. Chang, 2014; Hurtado and Sinha 2016; Segura and Zavella 2008). While Anzaldúa's ([1987] 2012) work focused primarily on mixed-race women given her own experience, borderlands theory and the question of how people navigate multiple oppressions and exercise agency can be used to create a lens through which to analyze mixed-race masculinity. It is a goal of this work to shed light on the experiences of mixed-race men using the framework of racial borders, and the intersectional nature of experiences in the racial borderlands. In this way, Borderlands theory will be used to inform description of the mixed-race experience, both for participants and in the researcher's analysis.

### **1.4 A note on language and capitalization**

Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) code switches throughout her work, switching from English to Spanish to Náhuatl with ease and purpose. In using multiple languages throughout her text with fluidity, Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) is making one of many points about the experiences of the

borderlands and the ability to traverse physical and metaphorical borders. As a border woman, Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) would have used language in this way in daily life. Therefore, in this project, I will keep to the original meaning of her words as closely as possible and the original language, to maintain authenticity. While I do not claim fluency, I am proficient enough to employ some linguistic code switching throughout this project with the purpose of staying close to Anzaldúa ([1987]2012)'s original wording and meaning. Where possible, I also try to keep to the spirit of Anzaldúa's careful attention to italicization and capitalization, as told by Keating (2009). Keating (2009: 319) discusses Anzaldúa's use of capitalization below:

For Anzaldúa, Borderlands, with a capital B, represents a concept that draws from yet goes beyond the geopolitical Texas/Mexico borderlands to encompass psychic, sexual and spiritual Borderlands as well. These B/borderlands – in both their geographical and metaphoric meanings – represent intensely painful yet also potentially transformational spaces where opposites converge, conflict and transform.

Thus, when referring to the Borderlands theoretical perspective, I employ capitalization. Additionally, Keating (2009) tells us that Anzaldúa resisted the usage of italics when writing words in languages other than English. This was an act of resistance, as italicization bolstered the framing that words in other languages were abnormal in some way. In addition to the insight Keating (2009) offers us, I argue that mixed-race people employ code switching as a part of living their ordinary lives, and normalizing including words from many languages throughout this manuscript seems authentic and apropos.

In the rest of this dissertation, I will explore the topics of multiraciality and masculinities through the lived experiences of the seventeen participants in my study. The project details their experiences with race, ethnicity, gender, family, culture, and more. This project also includes a special focus on the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic for mixed-race men, as the data collection took place in this unprecedented time. This period created a perfect storm of a deadly

pandemic, racism and racial injustice, and various other crises that made it an important and unexpected analysis point.

In the second chapter, I will present the literature and theoretical foundation of this study. For example, I will discuss Intersectionality, Borderlands theory, and the landscape of Critical Mixed-race Studies. In the third chapter, I will detail the qualitative and exploratory methodology used in this study. This project then includes three results chapters: 1) fluidity and code switching, 2) masculinity and multiraciality and 3) pandemic and racial injustice. These three chapters provide a window into the lived experiences of the mixed-race men I interviewed. Within these three chapters, findings are organized thematically and shed light on the intersections of multiraciality and masculinity through the voices of my participants. Finally, the conclusion of this project provides a broad review of the findings of the study, and offers limitations and considerations for future studies.

## 2 THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of multiraciality is crucial for scholars seeking to understand the dynamics of race and racism in the United States. As strmic-pawl (2023) outlines, contemporary scholarship on mixed-race identity has far greater depth than examining what constitutes mixedness or how many people identify as mixed. Although this study primarily focuses on participants located in the United States, the research on multiraciality crosses borders of nations and more. As is reflective of their multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial heritage, several participants had significant formative experiences outside a U.S. context. Thus, while the U.S. mixed-race experience is the focal point of this study, some literature is included here that draws from the global mixed-race experience (eg Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019).

This project situates questions of multiraciality within the scholarship on critical race theory (specifically, Critical Mixed-race Studies), and highlights the intersections of race and gender. This work approaches race as a malleable category, and inclusion within different racial categories as subject to change. Race is not a fixed category, nor does it always stay the same for individual people. Omi and Winant (2015) define race itself as a “master category”, which itself impacts all other social structures and processes in the United States. It is not that race exists in a vacuum without being interconnected to gender, class, and other identities. Rather, it is that race influences all other categories. Race, for Omi and Winant (2015), is socially constructed. If race itself is socially constructed, then it stands to reason that who is allowed into and kept outside of racial borders is too. Categories such as gender and class must be considered as they intersect with race. It is with this understanding that I approach race, and thus mixed-race identity, in my work.

Not only is racial identity fluid, racial identification (the way that others identify mixed-race people) changes as well. Saperstein and Penner (2012) find that race is fluid over the life course, with participants identifying, and being identified as, different races longitudinally. This fluidity follows the lines of social class and status, and serves to bolster, rather than break down, racial borders even as individuals may cross those borders (Saperstein and Penner 2012). While Saperstein and Penner (2012) argue that thinking of race as changing over the life course provides evidence of the rigidity of inequality, their study is lacking qualitative detail of the experiences of those whose race is fluid. My study picks up at this point, examining mixed-race men's experiences in the borderlands (of race, gender, class, and more).

## 2.1 Multiraciality

Broadly, scholars have offered us several theories of mixed-race identity that help us to understand ways in which mixed-race people conceptualize their own identities. For example, in their study focusing on Black-white biracial people, primarily of college age, Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008: 38-39) find that individuals identify with the following categories of biracial identity: *a) Singular identity, b) border identity, c) protean identity, and d) transcendent identity*. Participants within the singular identity are those who claim a Black or white identity, while those with a transcendent identity reject racial identification (Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2008). Individuals who identify with Rockquemore and Brunnsma's (2008) border identity take a third-category approach to their biracial identity, embracing both their Black and white identities to create a (border) biracial identity. The protean identity describes people who navigate among their Black, white, and biracial identities, based on their needs (or desires) in particular contexts (Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2008).



Within multiraciality, it is important to consider the way this “master category” (Omi and Winant 2015) intersects with gender. We can see this in the literature on biracial and multiracial women, which is more plentiful than the body of work focusing on multiracial men. The body plays a role in this. Davenport (2018:165) finds that biracial women “... are significantly more likely than men to identify as multiracial than with their minority race only”. Although both biracial men and women are seen as racially ambiguous by others, Davenport (2018:165) points to a specific experience for biracial women:

For non-white/white biracial men and women alike, tan skin, coarse hair, and a somewhat Eurocentric “look” signal a vaguely non-white background. How this non-whiteness is interpreted varies starkly by gender. For women, phenotypical racial ambiguity is tied to stereotypes of femininity and beauty. Not fully white, not entirely minority, biracial women are cast as a mysterious ethnic “other”. This, coupled with the flexibility that women have in modifying their appearance – by accentuating or downplaying certain facial features and hair texture, enables them to stand on either side of their component racial lines.

This is consistent with Sims, Pirtle and Johnson-Arnold’s (2020) finding that the way a woman wore their hair (ie curly or straight) significantly influenced their racial classification by others. Maclin and Malpass (2001) also found that racially ambiguous people are perceived racially in different ways when hair is manipulated in an attempt to indicate race. This suggests that people can make intentional choices to alter the way they are racially coded by others, and that physical attributes such as hair texture and appearance can change the way someone navigates their racial identity. Vasquez (2010) also found that mixed-race women made identity choices that they felt important to accent one of their racial or ethnic identities to their advantage. In short, biracial women are able to make choices about their racial presentation to influence the way they are racially coded by others. It is therefore clear that the body and questions of appearance are crucial to examine the experience of multiraciality.

The Critical Mixed-Race Studies (CMRS) Association (2020<sup>2</sup>) uses the term “embodied borderlands” to highlight that multiracial people embody racial borderlands. Critical Mixed-race Studies Association’s (2020) conference materials preparing for the upcoming 2022 conference included the following:

We consider the borderlands as both an Indigenous and multiracial space that has historically and continues to be occupied, contested, and negotiated, while remaining a geopolitical site of converging and intersecting spaces of cultural history, geography and identity... Yet, the borderlands have also been the site where people have come together to envision and enact alternative modes of survival. As embodied borderlands, how have/can multiracial identity formations expose, challenge—or unwittingly get caught up in—white supremacy steeped in histories of anti-Indigeneity, anti-immigration, and anti-Blackness? In other words, what does decolonizing multiraciality look like?

In the quote above, the association describes multiracial people as embodied borderlands. This further highlights the role of the body and appearance to answer questions about the multiracial experience. Embodiment focuses on the physical, and the role that the body plays in navigating racial binaries. These physical (corporeal) borderlands matter to the question of racial fluidity, and to the embodiment of masculinity. As Connell (2005: 56) notes, “The body, I would conclude, is inescapable in the construction of masculinity; but what is inescapable is not fixed”.

A study by Sims (2012) picks up the question of mixed-race people and embodiment, particularly the subject of attractiveness. Sims (2012) focuses on attraction toward mixed-race people. In her study exploring mixed-race people’s interviewer-rated attractiveness (among other variables), Sims (2012) highlights the connection between mixed-race identity and physical desirability. Attractiveness is more associated with mixed-race identity than monoracial identity, and this effect is most particularly present for Black/Native Americans and Black/Asians (Sims 2012). Sims (2012:64) coins this the “biracial beauty stereotype.”

---

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication. As noted previously, this is from an email advertising the 2020 CMRS conference call for proposals. It is no longer available on the CMRS website.

## 2.2 Racial Fluidity & Ambiguity

Race is malleable, and racial borders change to include and exclude based on social structures. Research also suggests that the racial borders are more porous for some mixed-race people than others (eg. Vasquez 2010; Davenport 2018). Where does this leave mixed-race men? Do multiracial men make choices about their identities and racial presentation the way multiracial women do? Davenport (2018: 165) asserts: “Racial ambiguity for men, in contrast, brings to mind not the presence of whiteness but the presence of non-whiteness – which triggers negative stereotypes about minority status, masculinity, and aggressive threat.” Biracial men feel more forced to select a monoracial identity, and are less likely to “...perceive identity as an overlapping, multilayered concept...” than biracial women do (Davenport 2018:165). Vasquez (2010) similarly found that multiracial men did not demonstrate the same purposeful choice to embody particular identities in the same way as women, again highlighting women’s distinctive ability to cross the racial borderlands. Here, Vasquez (2010) highlights the intersections of race and gender that is key for consideration of mixed-race masculinity. Thus, not only is racial identity construction a gendered process, but the intersections of race and gender at play for mixed-race masculinities is distinct from that of mixed-race femininities. This points to a gendered interaction with race that shapes mixed-race identity, further indicating that the intersection of race and gender is a specific standpoint of importance for this study.

The role of skin color on racial identification for mixed-race people is also important to consider. As demonstrated by Reece (2019) in his study on Black/non-Black multiracials, racial identification is fluid throughout the life course but skin color is key to understanding this fluidity. Using Add Health data, Reece (2019) found that for Black/non-Black multiracials who

changed their racial identification over time (from selecting multiple races to identifying monoracially), those with lighter skin were more likely to later identify with a monoracial non-Black identity. Those who had darker skin were, conversely, more likely to later identify as monoracially Black (Reece 2019). Arguably, this shows us that the border around whiteness is more navigable for some than others.

For Lee and Bean (2007), multiraciality highlights an emerging Black/non-Black divide. Using 2000 census data (the first year people in the U.S. were allowed to select multiple racial categories) and qualitative interviews, Lee and Bean (2007:573) find that: “Based on the interviews, we find that multiracial Blacks are less likely to identify multiracially compared to their Asian and Latino counterparts, in large part, because of outsiders' ascription, which powerfully influences one's choice of identities”. Thus, for Black/non-Black multiracials, Lee and Bean (2007) find that the racial border around whiteness has not expanded to allow for part-Black multiracials to identify as anything but Black. Black/non-Black multiracial men may be less able to choose an identity other than Black. This experience is not the same for Asian/white or Latinx/white individuals. Lee and Bean (2007: 578) find that:

For the Asian-white and Latino-white multiracial respondents, claiming a white racial identity does not preclude them from also claiming an Asian or Latino ethnicity; they can be white, yet also be Asian Indian, Japanese, Hispanic or Mexican, signifying that Asian and Latino ethnicities are adopting the symbolic character of European ethnicity for white Americans. By contrast, the black multiracials we interviewed have not been able to do the same; they have not been able to claim a white or nonblack racial identity and have those identities accepted by others, signaling that black remains a relatively fixed racialized category.

This echoes Khanna's (2010) finding that for Black-white biracial people, even though most participants claimed a biracial identity to others, inwardly, they were likely to self-identify as monoracially Black. Khanna (2010:115), in a study on Black-white biracials in the southern United States, notes: “...while this study shows that the one-drop rule continues to shape

“internalized” black identities (via reflected appraisals), these findings also show a simultaneous rejection of the rule with regard to “public” identities.”

Vasquez (2010) provides us another perspective that centers Latinx identity. In her study on third generation, middle class, Mexican American people living in California, Vasquez (2010:46) highlights access to “flexible ethnicity”, which she defines as “...the ability to deftly and effectively navigate different racial terrains and be considered an “insider” in more than one racial or ethnic group.” Vasquez (2010)’s study is located at the intersection of race and gender for third-generation Mexican Americans, finding that women, and multiracial people have more ability to cross racial borders. Vasquez (2010:64) writes:

While both Mexican American men and women have experiences of racialization and “flexible ethnicity,” women were more often able to effectively enact “flexible ethnicity” than men... I found that society racializes monoracial Mexican Americans more frequently and intensely than multiracial Mexican Americans. The social categories of race and gender intersect here, suggesting that multiracial women lie at the acceptable end of the “flexible ethnicity”-racialization spectrum and monoracial men lie at the marginalized and excluded end.

Thus, access to flexible ethnicity is linked to whiteness, and light skin, according to Vasquez (2010). Khanna (2010:115) also highlights the relationship between whiteness and the ability to choose a white or Black identity:

In short, “white” phenotypic characteristics may not preclude a black identity (as other black people invoke the one-drop rule as an inclusive tool and/or because “white” characteristics do not necessarily conflict with Americans’ image of blackness), yet it appears that having any “black” phenotypic characteristics automatically rules out a white identity (because of the one-drop rule, having any “black” characteristics conflicts with our image of whiteness even today). Thus, the relationship between phenotype and racial identity is still influenced by the legacy of the one-drop rule.

Khanna’s (2010) and Vasquez’s (2010) findings indicate that whiteness, and access to whiteness, matter for multiracial people’s ability to traverse the racial borderlands. Highlighting the difference in ability to navigate the racial borderlands, Vasquez (2010) also incorporates

Gloria Anzaldúa's ([1987]2012) concept of the borderlands to express the unique cultural, social, and racialized experiences of her participants.

### **2.3 Critical Race Theory**

This project is embedded within the approach of critical race theory, specifically with a focus on intersectionality and social constructionism. Race in the United States is socially constructed, with race being a major influence for all other identities and a central role in power dynamics (Omi and Winant, 2015). If race in the United States is a “master category” that influences all other aspects of social life as a fundamental part of an intersectional model, as Omi and Winant (2015, p.106) argue, then this project aims to understand how multiraciality fits into this particular intersectional framework. For mixed-race people, racial ambiguity and the ability to cross over racial borders indicates that the categories are porous. Yet, any ability to cross racial borders (or make choices about racial identities) is not available for all (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002). While a multiracial person might identify in one way, others may not validate this identity choice (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002).

Social constructionism is situated within the critical race theory tradition (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). Thus, this project falls within the broader theoretical framework of social constructionism, and specifically within the framework of critical race theory. In designing this study, it is important to note that in using the terms mixed-race and multiracial, I am rejecting the concept of race as biological, and instead contributing to the scholarship of race as constructed through social interactions and systems. This project is also built on the assumption that race is fluid throughout the life course, at least for some multiracial people. Omi and Winant (2015) assert that race is socially constructed, highlighting that the meaning of race is contextual. For example, it varies based on social structure, historical implications, and location (Omi and

Winant 2015). But if (mono)racial identity itself is socially constructed, what does this mean for mixed-race identity? In fact, Omi and Winant (2015) call attention to mixed-race identity, noting that it complicates questions of race and the body. Omi and Winant (2015:108) write: “Well, how does it come about that people can be “mixed”? What does the presence of mixed people mean for both white and male supremacy?” They offer us these questions, but do not provide us answers in their work.

Even more perplexingly, Omi and Winant (2015) later offer us an argument that the existence of mixed-race people necessitates race as a fixed category. They make the following claim (Omi and Winant 2015: 109): “To consider an individual or group as “multiracial” or mixed-race presupposes the existence of clear, discernible, and discrete races that have subsequently been combined...” To think about race this way is to think of multiraciality as a simple “mixture” of (mono)racial identities, rather than centering multiraciality as a particular standpoint from which to examine racial identity. In the same way that intersectionality is not simply an equation that adds identities together, multiraciality is not simply the addition of two or more races. To view multiraciality in this way leaves no room for individual racial fluidity and acknowledgement of the changing boundaries of racial identity.

#### **2.4 Critical Mixed-Race Studies**

While this project draws from critical race theory, the scholarship tradition within which this project best fits is that of critical mixed-race studies (CMRS). CMRS is a newer field, in which the specific focal point is multiraciality (Daniel et al. 2014). CMRS opens up possibilities for mixed-race scholarship, where the voice and standpoint of multiracial people frames the research (Daniel et al. 2014). Rather than multiracial identity being an afterthought in a wider study, CMRS calls for scholars to center multiraciality (Daniel et al. 2014).

CMRS takes the word “critical” from critical race theory and critical legal studies (Daniel et al. 2014). CMRS also acknowledges that race is socially constructed, in keeping with Omi and Winant’s (2015) assertion (Daniel et al. 2014). CMRS challenges the rigidity of racial borders, and emphasizes an intersectional lens (Daniel et al. 2014). CMRS is a specific home for this project, which endeavors to illustrate the standpoint of mixed-race men. Extending a similar call for scholarship centering mixed-race people based on the tenets of critical race theory, Harris (2016) also argues for theory to be built around multiraciality. Borrowing from the tenets of critical race theory, but arguing that critical race theory does not adequately address multiracial students’ experiences in college, Harris (2016) calls this approach *MultiCrit*. In short, it is clear that there is a place for work on the specific standpoint of multiracial people, and this project will contribute to the body of work within critical mixed-race studies.

## **2.5 Borderlands Theory**

Scholars who explicitly center multiraciality and multiracial experiences in their work bring us new perspectives on the experience of mixed-race identity. Central to this project is the application of Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands theory ([1987]2012). A physical border divides people, places, and many other things. Using the lens of race, a border is not just physical, but as Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) suggests, also metaphorical. The Borderlands are both hard to define and filled with emotion, and are “...in a constant state of transition.” (Anzaldúa [1987]2012: 25).

Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) herself describes several types of Borderlands to which she refers: the physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual borderlands. With the exception of the geographic border between the United States and Mexico, none of Anzaldúa’s ([1987] 2012) borderlands are specific to one type of people or place; that is the beauty and difficulty of Anzaldúa’s ([1987] 2012) theoretical framework. It refers to places of contradiction, both



physical and psychological. For the physical borderlands, Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) primarily refers to the Texas/Mexico border, but this can be extended to any border between two physical places such as countries. The psychological borderlands are those inside us, which may have very tangible consequences.

For example, Du Bois' ([1903]2014:5) discusses the presence of "...two warring ideals in one dark body", referring to the juxtaposition of Blackness and being American in his explanation of double consciousness. Although there may not be a physical war inside our bodies, there are physical consequences. Anzaldúa ([1987]2012:109) points to this when she says "The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains." The psychological seems to become physical in Anzaldúa's ([1987] 2012) work. The borderlands are manifested whenever identities, cultures, classes, or more rub against one another Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012). My project examines the very place where identities "rub against one another", specifically multiraciality and masculinity, this theoretical framework is central to my approach.

Borderlands theory is a way to frame the fluidity of identity, and the specific positionality of those who engage in border-crossings between multiple identities and realities (Hurtado and Sinha 2016). There are four elements of the borderlands according to Segura and Zavella (2008): *a) structural, b) discursive, c) interactional and d) agentic*. All of these aspects of the borderlands can be areas through which to analyze experiences. Segura and Zavella (2008:539) note that the *structural* borderlands are sites of power and domination based on "...globalizing economies, neoliberal state practices, and growing regional interdependence". The *agentic* borderlands center the participants' acts of resistance and agency in navigating the borderlands while building their own identities, and the *interactional* borderlands, which focus on the construction of borders through social practices based on identities such as race, class, and gender (Segura

and Zavella 2008). *Discursive* borderlands focus on specific meaning-making in response to racist, sexist, or otherwise dominating common practice or thought (Segura and Zavella 2008). Segura and Zavella's (2008) interactional borderlands interrogate the borders of identities such as race and class as produced through social experiences, and the agentic borderlands focus on resistance and construction of identity in the context of domination.

In line with Segura and Zavella, agency and resistance is an important aspect of borderland theory. A multiracial self-identification pushes against the boundaries of monoraciality. Chang (2014:27) describes multiracial college students as “racial *atravesado/as*.” In doing so, Chang (2014) borrows from Anzaldúa ([1987]2012), using the term to refer to those who “...assume and assert a Multiracial identity over time, in an effort to understand their positionality...” (Chang 2014:27). Thus, multiracial people boldly cross the borders of monoracial expectations, which requires both choice and effort. For Chang (2014), self-identification as multiracial requires agency and resistance. Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) highlights resistance against whiteness and white supremacy, but with an end goal of reconciling the duality of the enemy (whiteness) and *la mestiza* (her own). For Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012:102), demolishing borders (including monoracial borders), or “...the straddling of two or more cultures...”, is crucial to the framework of “*mestiza consciousness*”.

Chang (2014) highlights the agency exercised by college students in navigating their multiracial worlds, daring to protest against the expectation of monoracial identity. Chang (2014: 36) finds that the most common method of exercising agency within a multiracial context was “improvisational activity”, operationalized by students through making intentional choices about the way they name and cultivate their unique identities. In this project, I hope to understand the

specific agency that mixed-race men exercise in the ability to navigate the borderlands of mixed-race identity.

*Los atravesados*, as Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) names them, are able to pass between and among the borders, and navigate ambiguity. They are border crossers. Yet, this is not to say that the experience of the borderlands, both physical and metaphorical, are not without struggle against oppression, and violence. To survive the multiplicities and intersecting oppressions, Anzaldúa ([1987]2012:101) emphasizes that one must be able to blend multiplicities and be able to adapt in complex contradictions, because “Rigidity means death.” A borderlands existence requires the courage to resist, and to weave within and between. Here, the ability to move between ways of being, cultures, races, and more, is painted as a means of literal survival. Mixed-race people must develop a tolerance for the gray areas, because they exist in the liminal spaces. Anzaldúa ([1987]2012:101) highlights that mixed-race people develop a unique “tolerance for ambiguity”, through learning to reconcile all of the complexities and contradictions of their lives at the intersections of race and culture.

Illustrative of this point is the fact that Anzaldúa ([1987]2012, p. 25) describes the physical border between the United States and Mexico as *una herida abierta*, or an open wound which pits either side against the other. As such, I am interested in exploring whether these acts of border crossing a) are possible for mixed-race men, b) operate in the same way for mixed-race men as women, and c) are a means of survival for mixed-race men. What do the borders consist of for mixed-race men, and how do they cross them in everyday life? How do mixed-race men create a border culture, as Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) describes the place that is formed in-between?

It is important not to lose sight of the question of power and domination in Anzaldúa’s ([1987]2012) work, and the resistance that those who manage to cross the borderlands enact.

### ***2.5.1 Mestiza Consciousness***

Anzaldúa ([1987]2012:99) offers us the concept of a “mestiza consciousness”, which results from the experiences of 1) being on the physical border between the United States and Mexico, and 2) living in the borderlands, a broader concept of mixing racial, social class, language, culture, and more. Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) describes a consciousness that is unique to the experience of the borderlands, one that emerges from the constant crossing of borders. Anzaldúa’s ([1987]2012:99) concept of mestiza consciousness is framed as unique to women in the borderlands, or “...una conciencia de mujer”, a women’s consciousness. Yet, Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) also notes that it is a borderlands consciousness, which I argue extends beyond the experience of women. This consciousness allows for merging of seemingly opposing cultures, embraces fluidity and fights against dualities (Anzaldúa [1987]2012). In keeping with Anzaldúa’s ([1987]2012) mission of illuminating life in the borderlands, I will use the concept of mestiza consciousness as a broader borderlands consciousness in this work.

I will use Anzaldúa’s ([1987]2012) concept of consciousness to examine how mixed-race men adapt and cope within the borderlands, and how they navigate the multiplicity of identities. A hallmark of this borderlands consciousness is an ability to hold multiple truths, and push back against rigid borders of race, culture, and more (Anzaldúa [1987]2012). Specifically, mestiza consciousness is a “third element” that arises out of a major, possibly traumatic instance, and leads the way for the creation of a future that is able to thrive in the contradictions of the borderlands (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012:101-2).

Rockquemore and Brunzma (2008) expand on Anzaldúa’s idea of borderlands in their conceptualization of a border identity, one of four categories they conceptualize. However, I argue that it is not Rockquemore and Brunzma’s (2008) border identity where the strongest

connection with Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) lies, but rather in their conceptualization of the protean identity (or somewhere in between). I argue that Anzaldúa's ability to navigate between and among cultural and social settings in the borderlands is most similar to Rockquemore and Brunσμα's (2008) protean identity. For example, in Anzaldúa's poem, "*Una lucha de fronteras/A Struggle of Borders*", she notes that as a *mestiza*, she navigates within and between cultures, while also being all cultures simultaneously. She writes:

Because I, a *mestiza*,  
continually walk out of one culture  
and into another,  
because I am in all cultures at the same time,  
*alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,*  
*me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.*  
*Estoy norteando por todas las voces que me hablan*  
*Simultáneamente.*

Anzaldúa ([1987]2012:99)

As such, Anzaldúa's ([1987]2012) theory of the Borderlands is perhaps within and between Rockquemore and Brunσμα's (2008) border and protean identities, exemplifying the fluidity that is characteristic of the protean identity in particular.

Anzaldúa's ([1987] 2012) writing style betrays a key point: that the people who reside in the borderlands do not neatly fit within any one defined boundary or category. She carefully employs code switching as a tool to make a point about fluidity and the nature of her life as a person who lives with multiple perspectives, cultures, races, and more. Borderlands theory fits this project as a theoretical underpinning because it encompasses the multiplicities and fluidity of mixed-race identity, while acknowledging the specific act of resistance of crossing a border. I will use the borderlands metaphor throughout this project to describe the experience of mixed-race people, specifically mixed-race men.

### 2.5.2 *Borderlands Masculinities*

In the few instances that borderlands theory has been applied to the study of masculinities, it has generally been used in the context of Latino masculinities. Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012), for example, addresses masculinity through a critique of Latino hypermasculinity, which she attributes to a coping strategy to defend against the marginalizing experiences directed at Latino males, both from whites and from other oppressed people. Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) calls for a different type of masculinity, and notes that she has encountered a few straight men who are indicative of this evolving masculinity, but they still are entrenched in sexism. Queer men, Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) finds, have been able to be border-crossers, bridging communities and people.

Yet, there is precedent for Gloria Anzaldúa's ([1987]2012) work being used to frame studies beyond femininities, and beyond Chicano/a identities. Hurtado and Sinha (2016) point to the broader applicability of borderlands beyond Anzaldúa's ([1987]2012) experiences as a queer Chicana woman. Anzaldúa's ([1987] 2012) work can be used more broadly as a heuristic with which to frame the experiences of those who navigate ambiguity, fluidity, and multiplicities of identity and oppressions. Anzaldúa's border is no longer the physical border on a map, but "a metaphorical concept applicable to all categories of social organization..." (Kynčlová 2014:10). Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) acknowledges both the discomfort and the possibilities that open up at the juncture between identities, according to Kynčlová (2014).

In a study examining Latino masculinities, Hurtado and Sinha (2016) draw on both intersectionality and Borderlands theory. They write:

Anzaldúa presages Intersectionality Theory by attributing Chicanas' subordination not only to patriarchy, but also to the intersection of multiple systems of oppression. Within Borderlands Theory, oppressions are not ranked nor are they conceptualized as static; rather, they are recognized as fluid systems that take on different forms and nuances

depending on the context. Borderlands Theory allows for the expression of multiple oppressions and forms of resistance that are not easily accessible through traditional methods of analysis and measurement. (Hurtado and Sinha 2016: 45)

Borderlands theory and intersectionality help to shed light on the nuances of Latino men's experiences, which Hurtado and Sinha (2016) note are understudied. Hurtado and Sinha (2016) provide depth and nuance to Latino masculinity, arguing that counternarratives to the stereotype of machismo are largely absent in the scholarship. Hurtado and Sinha's (2016) work is a model for this project in the way that they successfully integrate intersectionality, Borderlands theory, and more to build a framework from which to examine masculinities. Their study is an inspiration in the way that they draw heavily on Anzaldúa (who wrote largely about, but not exclusively about, mestiza women's experiences) to study men's experiences and attitudes. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, Hurtado and Sinha (2016) focus on the ways in which Latino men identify as feminists, what they think feminism is, and their actions in service of advancing feminist efforts. Hurtado and Sinha (2016: 9) find:

... many Latinos manage the disjuncture created by their Intersectional Social Identities (say, ethnicity – being Latino) and gender (being male) in creative and politically progressive ways. In many instances, respondents gained a deeper understanding of social reality, which led to a commitment to social justice. We address the question of how oppression at the intersections of race, ethnicity, social class and sexuality contributes to the deconstruction of Latino masculinities and potentially develops a feminist consciousness. We have found that an intersectional analysis permits the possibility of *Latino feminist masculinities* that can form alliances with feminism to fight sexism and homophobia, and even to subvert the privileges of patriarchy.

Lenes (2016) extends Anzaldúa's ([1987]2012) borderlands theory by turning the lens to Chicano men, arguing that their unique relationship to the Borderlands has not been examined. Theorizing the borderlands in this way offers us the concept of "borderlands masculinity", which refers to the "...embedding of borderland subjectivity in Chicano masculine identity" (Lenes 2016:12). Lenes' work is a conceptual essay that turns the lens of Borderlands theory to men, in

both the physical and symbolic sense. He advances the idea of "...the study of Chicano masculinity *on* and *as* borderlands" (Lennes 2016:2). Yet, Lennes' (2016) study on borderlands masculinities still focuses on Chicano men alone, thus the question of identities beyond Chicano remains. As a counterpart within this tradition, I would like to locate this study within the realm of a borderlands project, but interrogating masculinity as Lennes (2016) does. I will not study exclusively Chicano men, but a broader community of mixed-race men.

## **2.6 Standpoint Theory & Intersectionality**

This project is grounded in intersectionality, using the framework to tell the stories of mixed-race men, in the tradition of Collins' (1986) theorization of outsiders within (the discipline of sociology). Collins (1986) highlights one of the goals of the Black feminist thought, which is the effort to shift the scholarship to a focus on the specific relationships among oppressions. The goal is to treat the outsider within status as a place to develop theory from the experiences of those who live at the intersections of oppression (Collins 1986). Collins (1986) provides evidence that bringing one's own experience, and outsider within status, to a project enhances the research itself. This makes the work stronger, and truly approaches research from an intersectional lens. Outsiders-within include Black women academics, for example, who are not: 1) white women academics who are insiders to feminist studies, nor 2) Black men academics who are insiders to Black studies, nor 3) white men who are insiders to all areas of the academy (Collins 2000). Instead, Collins (2000:12) offers us: "Prevented from becoming full insiders in any of these areas of inquiry, Black women remained in outsider-within locations, individuals whose marginality provided a distinctive angle of vision on these intellectual and political entities".



Collins (1986) also highlights the opportunity for other marginalized people, not just Black women, to engage with their own outsider within status. This is an entry point for mixed-race men in this project, as they to consider their own racial border crossings. Mixed-race men are both insiders and outsiders as they embody racial borders, and the question of how those borders are navigated is best considered with the intersectional lens that Collins (1986) offers us.

Collins' (2000) illuminates a key point in the intersectionality framework: the role of power. Intersectionality, specifically Black feminist thought, addresses power by not only highlighting the relationship between oppression and resistance, but also Black womens' agency (Collins 2000). Collins (1986) notes that her intersectional approach seeks to shed light on the relationships among marginalized identities, rather than simply adding or multiplying oppressions as related to some main source of oppression. Collins (2000) also points to individuals' ever-changing positionality with respect to power. In some instances, individuals are more able to exercise power than others, and this can change from moment to moment (Collins 2000). In short, Collins (1986: S15) calls for sociologists to consider the perspectives of outsiders within (Black feminist scholars or others) as crucial to the discipline:

Sociologists might benefit greatly from serious consideration of the emerging, cross-disciplinary literature that I label Black feminist thought, precisely because, for many Afro-American female intellectuals, "marginality" has been an excitement to creativity. As outsiders within, Black feminist scholars may be one of many distinct groups of marginal intellectuals whose standpoints promise to enrich contemporary sociological discourse. Bringing this group-as well as others who share an outsider within status vis-a-vis sociology-into the center of analysis may reveal aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox approaches.

When used as inspiration for analysis of mixed-race masculinity, Collins' (1986) heuristic calls for centering the experiences of mixed-race men and focus on the relationship between their mixed-race identities and masculinity. The role of power, individual freedoms, and resistance are important to Collins' framework (2000). Therefore, in examining mixed-race

masculinity, it will be important to illuminate questions of power and domination. Asking if mixed-race people are “enough” of any race, racial legitimacy, the privilege of passing (or appearing white), and resistance to monoracial identification are all ways in which power can be interrogated. Just as Anzaldúa ([1987]2012) was writing from her own particular standpoint as a border woman, I use Collins’ (1986) approach to standpoint as a theoretical foundation for the study of mixed-race masculinity. This project will explore whether mixed-race men experience being an outsider within different groups and contexts.

Intersectionality emerged from feminist scholarship and the experiences of women of color. However, masculinities studies can learn from the idea of intersectionality as a particular framework to address men who are situated at the nexus of various oppressions and privileges. Intersectionality can help us illuminate the experiences of mixed-race men at the intersections of race, class gender, and more. Using the idea of intersectionality as addressing a specific standpoint at the intersection of various oppressions, this study aims to address questions of masculinity and intersectionality. This study aims to take a truly intersectional look at the experiences of mixed men and masculinities, with attention to the intersections of gender, race and class.

Some scholars have successfully used standpoint theory to address questions of men and masculinities. Rios (2011), for example, incorporated his own experiences as a researcher to conduct his study on the criminalization of Black and Brown young men in Oakland, California. Citing his own standpoint as important to his study, Rios (2011) highlights his own experience being in a gang during his youth, and having lived in the same place as some of the young men in his study. Rios (2011) offers us a work that centers the voices of young men and their experiences, and inserts himself and his own life story into the narrative, demanding a clear

focus on their own words and meanings. In addition to Rios (2011), as discussed before, Hurtado and Sinha (2016) weave Borderlands theory and intersectionality together to examine Latino men's relationships to feminism.

## 2.7 Masculinities

Masculinity studies has come a long way in recent years, but the research addressing the specific intersections of mixed-race masculinity is less prominent. Early scholarship debunked the idea of sex roles, pointing to the concept's insufficient engagement with the question of domination, among other criticisms (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985). The shift from sex role theory paved the way for the introduction of the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). Connell (2005:77) defines this concept as follows.

At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

So, hegemonic masculinity is the currently "culturally exalted" (ie praised) form of masculinity (Connell 2005:77). Contemporary examples might include sports stars, movie stars, politicians, and others who demonstrate the currently desired constellation of social norms, actions, phenotype, attitudes and more. However, it is important to note that the concept is not stagnant. Hegemonic masculinity is not one set of actions or a static identity (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Rather, there are multiple hegemonic masculinities that are constructed and contextual (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Yet, some scholars argue, hegemonic masculinity and one static category – whiteness - are linked (Chavez and Harvey Wingfield 2018). This means that access to whiteness allows access to the "praised" form of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is, by default, white masculinity (Chavez and Harvey

Wingfield 2018). The question of where this leaves mixed-race men (particularly white/non-white mixed-race men) is therefore important to the discussion of the intersections of race and gender.

Hegemonic masculinity is not just a characteristic, but rather “the pattern of practice” enacted through behavior, or something that is “done” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832; Messerschmidt 2018:28). Central to the question of hegemonic masculinity is power, and how power functions in the formation of masculinity (Connell 2005). Hegemonic masculinity presumes a power differential over femininities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is oppressive masculinity, or multiple forms of oppressive masculinity.

### *2.7.1 Complicit, Subordinate and Marginalized Masculinities*

Connell (2005) highlights the power differential between different groups of masculinities, pointing to the fact that more than one masculinity exists. Connell (2005) describes 1) complicit masculinities, 2) subordinate masculinities, and 3) marginalized masculinities. Complicit masculinities are those that “...have some connection with the hegemonic project but do not embody hegemonic masculinity...” (Connell 2005:79). These are men that do not challenge the structure of domination, but participate in it willingly. Messerschmidt (2018) offers us Donald Trump as an example of someone who demonstrates hegemonic masculinity; if this is the case, then we can imagine men who do not act so boldly nor say such outlandish things, but still reify and uphold the social structure of hegemonic masculinity. They are complicit in maintaining the status quo of domination of men over women (and other men). Subordinate masculinities, by contrast, are men who are “...expelled from the circle of legitimacy” (Connell 2005:79). In other words, these are men that are excluded from the dominant (or desired) group of masculinity – Connell (2005) gives us the example of gay men.

Connell (2005:78) notes that gay masculinities are thus "...at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men".

Finally, Connell (2005) defines marginalized masculinities, which are those that exist at the intersections of masculinity with other identities. While hegemonic, subordinate, and complicit masculinities in Connell's (2005:80) structure refer to power relations within the framework of gender itself, marginalized masculinities describe those which are oppressed through examination of the "... the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups." For example, marginalized masculinities might be non-white masculinities. But, Connell (2005) is careful to note that these categories are not fixed, and there are many ways that marginalization is contextual. For example, Black superstar athletes might represent the dominant and desired masculinity, but this does not improve the standing of all Black men in the hierarchy of masculinities.

Recalling Chavez and Harvey Wingfield's (2018) assertion that hegemonic masculinity is white masculinity, this theory does not speak from a standpoint of masculinities of color. It is therefore not sufficient to frame an exploration of mixed-race masculinity. Connell (2005) also does not specifically speak to the combination of both white and non-white masculinities, is key for the discussion of multiraciality. In short, hegemonic masculinity is not intersectional enough to provide the theoretical underpinning for a study on mixed-race masculinity.

How do the practices of hegemonic masculinity relate to the experiences of mixed-race men, and where do they fall within this framework? Embodiment is one way in which multiracial men might enact hegemonic practices of masculinity, but is hegemonic masculinity a suitable theoretical perspective to ground analysis of mixed-race masculinity? The answer is, perhaps partly. Hegemonic masculinity is embodied or associated with particular phenotypical

representations of the body and actions involving the physical body (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point to the example of physical performance and prowess in activities such as organized sports as an example of a way in which hegemonic masculinity is embodied. The body is a tool to create our own identities (Messerschmidt 2018), and the question of embodiment of masculinity is useful in considering the ways in which mixed-race men enact (or do not enact) hegemonic masculinity. How then do mixed-race men, with the choices they make about their bodies and appearance, embody hegemonic masculinities? Particularly for white/non-white mixed-race men, what role does whiteness play in their embodiment of hegemonic masculinities (or not).

Hegemonic masculinity will not be used as a primary theoretical underpinning for this project. This leaves us with questions of what frameworks of masculinity best theorize the experiences of mixed-race men, and what pieces of the concept of hegemonic masculinity are applicable to the study of mixed-race men specifically. In the effort to find a particular theory that would better speak to the experiences of mixed-race men, borderlands theory, or border theory, emerges as an option that represents a particular standpoint of racial border crossing, although developed out of a feminist tradition.

### ***2.7.2 Mixed-race Masculinity***

Although the research on multiracial people is growing, narrowing in on the experiences of multiracial men still shows a research gap. Studies such as Davenport (2016) focus on biracial people, but do not narrow in on men specifically. However, they yield useful information to help us disentangle the experiences of mixed-race men. Davenport (2016) notably finds that biracial

men are less likely to identify with multiple races than biracial women. This difference is most pronounced for Black-white biracial men (Davenport 2016). Davenport (2016: 72-74) notes:

Biracial men may be relatively more inclined to identify as Asian, Latino, or black because they are more likely to be culturally perceived as “men of color,” whereas biracial women may be viewed as exotic ethnic “others” and internalize this perception of difference.

This finding betrays that there is something uniquely limiting for mixed-race men in the intersections of race and gender, in particular for white-non/white biracials. Sims (2012), whose study on the perceived attractiveness of biracial people was previously discussed, and Davenport (2016) provide us valuable insight into the experiences of mixed-race individuals, both women and men.

Next, I turn to studies that examine the unique experiences of mixed-race men specifically. Sims and Joseph-Salisbury (2019) are one such study. Sims and Joseph-Salisbury (2019:56) attribute Black mixed-race men’s tendency to identify with blackness in some way (if not monoracially Black) to their “strategic sameness” with Black male peers. Yet, in keeping with Anzaldúa’s ([1987]2012) resistance toward rigid categories (of race, and much more), Sims and Joseph-Salisbury (2019) also demonstrate that Black mixed-race men conceptualize their identities as fluid. Black mixed-race men “...expressed identifications with both blackness and mixedness, sometimes interchangeably and often simultaneously” (Sims and Joseph Salisbury 2019:56). This question of fluidity and the unique experiences of Black mixed-race men is also addressed in Joseph-Salisbury’s (2018) book. In his own work on Black mixed-race men, Joseph-Salisbury (2018) calls for a theory that better explains the experiences of Black mixed-race men without risking positioning mixed-race people as the answer to racism and racial tensions.

Examining the experiences of Black mixed-race men across the US and UK, Joseph-Salisbury (2018) offers us what he terms a “Critical (Mixed) Race Theory of Post Racial Resilience (PRR)”. In this theory, Joseph-Salisbury (2018) posits that the Black mixed-race men in his study demonstrate post-racial resilience, which allows them to bolster themselves against racism and recover from racist aggressions toward them. Black mixed-race men, according to Joseph-Salisbury (2018) cultivate ways to resist racism by managing their identities among different settings, such as friend groups. In doing so, they are able to “...negotiate their positionalities, present a challenge to the regime of dark skin as Black authenticity, and redefine the borders of Blackness” (Joseph-Salisbury, 2018:195). This study highlights the ways in which Black mixed-race men demonstrate agency in their presentation and embodiment of identities in different contexts.

Recalling Sims’ (2012) “biracial beauty stereotype”, the question of how this applies to mixed-race men specifically is left unanswered. Sims’ (2012) work included both mixed-race men and women. However, Newman (2019) picks up here. In a study on Black multiracial high school age boys, Newman (2019) finds that multiraciality is a source of exotification and objectification. Features that betrayed the participants’ “mixedness” were linked to heterosexual desirability, and lighter skin color contributed to this phenomenon, albeit not exclusively (Newman 2019). Clearly, fetishization of multiraciality is not just limited to mixed-race women, but operates distinctively in the experiences of mixed-race men.

Continuing the tradition of examining mixed-race masculinity, my study picks up the search for understanding of identity navigation using the metaphor of the borderlands. Embarking in another direction than Sims and Joseph-Salisbury (2019) and Newman (2019), this study will center mixed-race identity but not specifically part-Black mixed identities, broadening



the scope of examination. The study incorporates a theoretical perspective of the borderlands, which brings a new framework with which to examine mixed men's identities. This work aims to continue the tradition of narrowing in on the experiences and unique social location of multiracial men, to better understand their specific standpoints. This work focuses on the ways in which mixed-race men embody the racial borderlands.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

In conducting this study, I unpack the experience in the racialized and gendered borderlands of mixed-race masculinity, mixed-race men's identities, and their relationship to power and oppression. This study aims to fill a research gap in the experiences of multiracial men. I engage participants in describing their own racial identity development, and inquire how and why experience of mixed-race masculinity is distinct from mixed-race femininity. My study centers mixed-race identity in keeping with the tradition of Critical Mixed-race Studies (Daniel et al. 2014) to illuminate how mixed-race masculinity is experienced, how the borders of race are constructed for men, and how men are able (or not able) to navigate between and among the borders of race. I endeavor to better understand the agency that mixed-race men exercise in choosing mixed-race identities.

In keeping with the usage of intersectionality as a research methodology (Mackinnon 2013), I use intersectionality as a framework to study the experiences of mixed-race men and understand the interplay of class, race, and gender that influences their experiences. In addition, I focus on developing an intersectional analysis of mixed-race identity, theorizing that power interacts with gender, race, and class in particular ways for multiracial men. In using Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) to ground a study of mixed-race men, I aim to better understand the ways mixed-race men make meaning of the racial borders, and construct identities within the multiplicities. Cantú and Hurtado (2012) note in their introduction to *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, that although the theory was developed out of Anzaldúa's ([1987] 2012) own reality as a mestiza woman, Borderlands theory is also salient for people at other intersections, where oppressive systems and resistance shape their realities. Cantú and Hurtado (2012) also note that Anzaldúa's ([1987] 2012) concept of mestiza consciousness or consciousness of the borderlands

is what allows people to survive at these intersections. In keeping with this broad view, I am using Anzaldúa's ([1987] 2012) Borderlands theory in a new way, grounding a study of multiplicities of complex experiences at the borders of race for men.

### **3.1 Pilot Study<sup>3</sup>**

In consultation with my dissertation advisor, Dr. Tomeka Davis, a pilot study was conducted to gather more information about mixed-race men. The study therefore was approved with an abbreviated research protocol and enrolled two (2) participants in Spring 2019. Advertisements for participants were posted on social media in a group dedicated to the study of mixed-race identity, as well as emailed to groups with similar purpose. Preliminary data from this pilot study was presented at the Southern Sociological Society Annual Meeting in April 2019 in Atlanta, Georgia. Findings from data collected after the pilot was complete were later presented at the Southern Sociological Society Annual Meetings 2022 and 2023. Pilot data was not used in the final dataset because of changes to the interview guide after the pilot study, as well as the coronavirus pandemic occurring between pilot data collection and project data collection. Pilot data was, however, used to hone the interview guide for the semi-structured interview and to identify themes to look out for in the final study.

### **3.2 Study Recruitment**

In my study, I focused on mixed-race men's experiences, and in my advertisement specifically asked for men who identify as mixed race. This study moves beyond the question of who identifies as multiracial, only asking those who self-identify as mixed-race to come forward. The advertisement expressly stated for participants that the study was on the topic of mixed-race masculinity. I was clear in the recruitment material that I was looking for multiracial men, and

---

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C for a brief overview of the pilot study.

am thus narrowing the potential pool of participants by excluding those who are mixed-race but do not identify as such. A study which advertises for people with parents of different races, for example, might participants such as these – who do not identify as mixed-race but might be considered so. I used the words multiracial or mixed-race in recruitment material to intentionally gain participants who both are multiracial and identify as such.

Following the recruitment strategy of the pilot study, as well as Joseph-Salisbury's (2019) qualitative study on Black mixed-race men, recruitment material was shared on social media from my account and reposted by others. It was also sent directly by email to groups with a focus on mixed-race identity. Participants who expressed interest by email or otherwise were sent an open-ended demographic survey before participation in interviews, which was matched to their interview data and assigned a pseudonym. Questions for the demographic survey were designed to ensure participants can most authentically describe their identities, particularly as description of mixed-race identity can be very difficult to gather in multi-choice or options. Interviews were conducted via telephone or video conference, particularly given considerations for safety protocols at that time which were in place to protect the health and safety of participants during the pandemic.

### **3.3 Sampling Frame**

In a departure from the design of many studies on mixed-race identity (for example, see Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Newman 2019; Reece 2019) I recruited participants who identified as any racial mixture, not specifically focusing on Black-white biracial. The intended participant number was 15 individuals, with a maximum of 30 individuals. In the end, I recruited 17 participants for the study. The age range of eligibility was advertised as 18-50 years of age, with the hopes that this will capture a group that has primarily come of age in a time when

marriage between people of different races in the United States has been legal. In addition, these participants would have grown up in a time in the United States when there have been visible mixed-race role models in popular culture, such as leaders of government (e.g. Barack Obama) and actors (e.g. Jason Momoa, Keanu Reeves). The table below shows descriptive statistics about the participant group as a whole, painting a picture of the age range, locations, education levels, and answers to the checkbox “race question”.

*Table 3.3-1 Descriptive Statistics*

	%(N)	M(SD)
<i>Race (“checkbox question”)</i>		
White	6(1)	
White, Asian	59(10)	
White, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian	6(1)	
Black or African American, Asian	6(1)	
White, Black or African American	6(1)	
White, Black or African American, Asian	12(2)	
White, Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	6(1)	
<i>Age<sup>1</sup></i>		32(6)
<i>Location</i>		
Western U.S. (CA, HI)	41(7)	
Eastern U.S. (PA, VA, NJ)	29(5)	
Midwest U.S. (MI, IL)	18(3)	
Southern U.S. (TX, FL)	12(2)	
<i>Education</i>		
Undergraduate only	47(8)	
Undergraduate + Pursuing or Attained Graduate Degree	41(7)	
Some college completed	12(2)	

Notes. N= 17. <sup>1</sup>Years (Range = 42-22).

The 17 participants in this study ranged in age from 22 to 42 years old, with an average age of 32. Participants were living all over the United States (interviews were conducted via

zoom or phone call), but there were some commonalities to where interviewees lived. Over 40% of the participants lived in the Western United States, namely California and Hawaii. By contrast, fewer participants (12%) lived in the Southern United States, specifically Texas and Florida. The majority of participants were highly educated, with 15 of the 17 participants having a college degree and 41% having attained (or were at that time still pursuing) a graduate degree.

To create the data seen in table 3.3-1, participants were asked to select one or multiple options of racial identification using “checkbox categories” modeled after (although not an exact match to) the U.S. Census 2020 questions about race and ethnicity. Participants were then offered an opportunity to expand upon this in a series of open-ended questions about their race, gender, and family.

It was crucially important to this study to give an opportunity to elaborate on the answer to the “checkbox race question”, allowing respondents to give qualitative details and more information that they felt salient to capture the nuance of their identities. Those details are provided in table 3.3-2 below. From the rich details provided by participants about their race, we can see that the race and ethnicity checkboxes alone are insufficient as a data point to capture the nuanced question of racial identity for these multiracial men. Thus, throughout later analysis in this project, both participants’ answers to the checkboxes and their qualitative detail below will be used to frame their experiences.

*Table 3.3-2 Participants’ answers to an open-ended question about their racial identity<sup>4</sup>*

**Your race & ethnicity:**

I identify strongly as indigenous Pacific islander, specifically with my Austronesian heritage, and culturally Hawaiian; as well as being Asian (Filipino, Chinese, Malaysian, Indonesian, Bruneian), Mediterranean/Iberian (Italian, Spanish, Basque), and Sephardi (Spanish Jews; my ancestors were exiled during the Spanish Inquisition). Many Americans think that Black people only come from Africa, but Black people are from all over the world; in Southeast Asia

---

<sup>4</sup> Some responses lightly edited to preserve anonymity and / or for clarity.

and the Pacific Islands, many indigenous people are proud to be Black; and my family is proud of being multiracial/multicultural.

I am Black-Filipino-Italian-American. Sometimes I will say "mixed" but usually as an opener to more specificity.

I am half Indian Malaysia, a quarter Dominican and a quarter Norwegian.

Multiracial

I identify as Multiracial, Korean and white.

I identify as a mixed-race person of Filipino and Dutch American ancestry. Filipino is characterized as Asian by the census though I feel poorly characterized by the label. My grandmother on my father's side identified as Dutch, but by all means, our family simply identifies as American.

I am Half Japanese from my father who is born and raised in Tokyo. My other half is White my mother has Scottish roots and she was born and raised in Iowa.

Half Czech / Swiss / British, half Hakka Chinese

Hapa haole - Chinese, Filipino, Scottish, Irish

Chinese, Scottish, Irish, English, Native American (Cherokee and Choctaw)

Asian (Korean) Caucasian (German/Irish/Scandinavian)

White: Polish (Galician), German, British (English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Cornish), Russian/Lithuanian (Ashkenazi Jewish), Asian: Filipino (Bicolano)

My father was white - ethnically western European. My mother is Korean.

I'm mixed white American and Indonesian. My mom's ethnicity is Javanese.

It's been easier for me to say mixed.

I am very white passing - no one guesses that I am half Mexican until they hear/see my name. I have difficulty fully navigating both Latinx spaces and non-Latinx white spaces because I don't feel totally understood in either.

Race: Black and Asian Ethnicity: Jamaican and Filipino

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Interview audio was transcribed either by the researcher or using the transcription software Otter.ai (Otter.ai Inc. 2022) All audio which was produced using transcription software was checked for accuracy, in particular to honor the sentiments around race, culture, and more. Although interviews were conducted in English, I made every effort to honor the meaning and preserve in the transcript any of the participants' words included which were not in English. Data was analyzed using NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd

2020). Throughout data analysis, I searched for patterns and themes that emerged from the stories of participants. The interview guide<sup>5</sup> for each interview was designed for about 60 minutes, although some went longer or shorter, so the transcripts were robust. With the broad research goal in mind to answer the question of how mixed race men are navigating multiple racial identities, I identified sub-themes within three larger themes: 1) Fluidity and Code-switching, 2) Masculinity & Multiraciality, and 3) Pandemic & Racial Injustice. The method of coding used for this data was most aligned, although not exactly matching, with what Braun and Clarke (2013:206) refer to as “complete coding”. Braun and Clarke (2013:210) indicate that complete coding is where “... you begin with your first data item, and systematically work through the whole item, looking for chunks of data that potentially address your research question.”

As such, with the 17 transcripts, I went through and classified portions of text that could relate to participants’ experiences navigating multiple racial identities. I then created themes and sub-themes accordingly, arriving at the three main themes with sub-themes accordingly. As part of the iterative research process, it was important to review and revise codes and review transcripts multiple times in some cases to catch any text that aligned with my themes. Although the codes were primarily what Braun and Clarke (2013:207) call “data-derived codes”, which “...provide a succinct summary of the explicit content of the data...”, it was important to keep the theoretical framework of this project in mind when analyzing the data. In addition, my positionality as both an insider and an outsider to this work and respondents’ experiences was important to consider in this analysis.

---

<sup>5</sup> For the full interview guide see Appendix B.



### **3.5 Positionality as a mixed-race researcher**

My identity as a mixed-race researcher is valuable to this work, and provides me the ability to paint a picture of the true experiences of a community from within. I began conversations with participants by locating myself in the research, indicating that it was somewhat of a “me-search”. I hoped that this would build rapport with interviewees and assure them that I would treat with care the data they provided. I wanted participants to join me in exploration of mixed-race masculinity, and to do so, it was essential for them to know that I would treat their responses with the consideration of someone who understands the mixed-race experience. Still, there is some distance between myself and participants, as I do not share the experience of being a mixed-race man, which I also pointed out carefully to participants. As a mixed-race woman, I am proud to locate myself within this research project, as I am multiracial and multiethnic.

#### 4 RESULTS – FLUIDITY & CODE SWITCHING

This chapter will discuss findings related to racial fluidity and code switching among the mixed-race men in my study. Both topics, although separate concepts, are intertwined in findings and thus I have chosen to report them together. First, I will define these and the way I will use them. In these findings, I use code switching to refer to changing behavior, gestures, language, and more to connect with different communities. For example, a participant who switches languages or accents around different groups of people. Gene Demby (2013:), host of NPR's Code Switch podcast about race, beautifully defines code switching as "...the different spaces we each inhabit and the tensions of trying to navigate between them".

In Demby (2013)'s description of code switching, it is important to note that code switching extends beyond language(s) spoken. This is also what resonates for my participants, who discussed various ways in which they center parts of their identities when they are with different people or groups. The difficulties in navigating between and among various spaces and the various social and cultural expectations of each space are also salient for the mixed-race men in my study.

I use the term racial fluidity to describe the ways in which participants racial identity fluctuates (how they think about themselves) and how they are racialized by others in various contexts. These changes can be over the life course, moment to moment, or anything in between. Saperstein and Penner (2012)'s study on racial fluidity using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth found that "... not only do Americans change the way they identify over time, but the way they are classified by others also changes significantly...". This is the essence of racial fluidity that I will also examine in this chapter with participants. Participants' insights into the way they identify racially in different contexts and at different time points, as well as the way

other people perceive their race, will be discussed.

#### **4.1 “You slip into a different cadence, right?” – Code Switching & Fluidity**

Participants described code switching in their daily lives and throughout their life course in many ways. Tony, 40, who is Indian from Malaysia, Dominican, and Norwegian, described code switching in the context of his multicultural upbringing and connecting with people who share parts of his own identity:

Yeah, I mean, you know, it's not a conscious thing, right? But just because you grew up with even though you're mixed, and you're the combination of these things everyone else isn't, you know, so like, when you interact with people from the distinct aspects of, of your backgrounds, say, then you just find ways, or you just slip into ways which are more understandable to them, like, you know, if I'm with my West Indian, Caribbean, family, or friends, or whatever, I'm not really going to start talking about Norwegian things, really, you know, maybe, maybe sometimes just as a thing, but in general conversation, that's not really a thing that comes up.

For Tony, the code switching he describes is unconscious, and helps him to connect with others and find commonalities. Code switching in this way helps others to understand him better, which helps him to build relationships. Tony doesn't express any kind of discomfort or inability to be himself as a result of navigating the various friend groups through code switching. He describes the code switching experience as something he just does, as very normal and not forced or particularly calculated. Tony describes the code switching as very natural, noting: “You slip into a different cadence, right? Like when you're with different aspects or different people, you just naturally do so.” This ease of code switching is not the case for everyone, however. Kevin, another participant, describes navigating behavior expectations in a way that betrays the feeling that he cannot be himself around his white family.

##### ***4.1.1 Code switching and being yourself.***

Kevin, who is 22, identifies as multiracial (white and Black). He tries to manage both side of his family (the white and Black sides) by changing his behavior when he is around

different members of the family. Like Tony, behaving differently around his white and Black family members is an effort to connect and fit in, but comes with a sense of loss as well. Kevin's code switching occurs around family, which is an intimate space. He describes navigating the difficult terrain of culture, masculinity, and "being himself" while code switching. For Kevin, he can more openly and comfortably be himself, particularly with his multiracial identity, around his Black family members:

You know, my mother's side, the very conservative side, is actually where my both Black and white cousins... or, yeah, my cousins that are both half Black, half white are on my mother's side. And it's a completely different scenario. I take on more of that Southern culture, when I'm with them, that's how I act where... And to bring it back to that masculine identity, I take on far more masculine identity, when I'm with them, far more. And, you know, we, you know, I just take on that more white perspective, like I tried to leave my ideologies and thoughts and multiracial identity, I kind of leave those behind.

For Kevin, both masculinity and conservative political views are intertwined with race and culture. The different expectations of his white family and his Black family members not only impact his behavior, but he expressed a profound feeling of leaving parts of him behind when he is with his white family. He goes on to describe how he is not able to be himself around his white family. He is, in some ways, hiding parts of who he is. He is expected to be more masculine, more "Southern", more white, and more conservative around his white family. In Kevin's case, conservative alludes to political views which bring up strong emotions that he is trying to avoid by leaving parts of himself behind.

Arguably, Kevin's experience goes beyond code switching, and shows some of the intersectional challenges mixed-race men experience while navigating family and expectations of different races and cultures. When he is with his white family, he notes:

But when I'm there, you know, when things are brought up, I just keep to my own. I don't express myself fully. But if we went back to my father's side, I would be myself. I'm not afraid, or I guess you could use the word afraid or of offending people, because they know who I am. They know I'm not fully Black. So it's not that my white side

doesn't know, I'm not fully Black. But it's just one of those things like, I would be far more willing to talk about something with my Black family than I would my white one.

In the quote above, Kevin discusses how he cannot be completely himself with his white family. He can speak freer, and express himself fully with his Black family. Kevin's experience shows how mixed men have to modulate their behavior to follow invisible expectations of various groups, in particular family. Kevin's description of the code switching is less natural, and more calculated to hold back parts of himself that might betray differing viewpoints. The unwritten rules around race and belonging for each side of the family are undoubtedly complex to navigate, and the burden is on Kevin to successfully manage his relationships with each side of the family.

Political views are an important topic that required careful management around different audiences for participants because they often elicit strong emotions. JJ, who is 30 years old and identifies as white, Black and Asian (Black, Filipino, and Italian American), noted that politics was key when asked about changes in behavior around different groups of people and code switching. He said:

It's intonation, it's phrasing, language? How heated I get about politics. And not even just politics, but like, just like topics that are, that matter. Because, you know, something like reparations isn't political in my mind is actually just restorative. You know, so it depends. I think it's mostly do I feel safe to address x y & z in that regard? But in terms of like body language? Yeah, I'm sure you know, I think it's just more of like a level of comfortability. With me. It's just like, do I feel comfortable to articulate and gesture in a certain way, right with my body? Am I trying to be professional? Or am I just like, you know, being me?

For JJ, code switching is also about comfort to be himself, as Kevin also described. Being himself to JJ meant able to express his emotions, talk about important topics, and a basic feeling of safety. JJ also discusses body language and gestures, which are another important dimension of code switching. Between different groups of people, JJ must make decisions about how to

express himself non-verbally during conversation, and manage bodily expression to “fit in” with different groups. Both Kevin and JJ are careful to point to the feeling of fully being able to be themselves, and the opposite of that in some settings.

#### ***4.1.2 Code switching using gestures.***

In the quote above, JJ connects the usage of gestures which add emphasis to conversation with professionalism, which is a raced, classed and intersectional concept. JJ is highlighting for us that gesturing too much and using his body to add emphasis to his talking points would be considered “unprofessional”. The concept of professionalism in the United States is generally steeped in whiteness, as the lens of professionalism is generally through the eyes of whiteness. The concept of white “professionalism” would normally call for a more reserved, less emphatic approach to emotional communication in the workplace. Thus, JJ is describing having to manage his own bodily expression to meet expectations of a raced and classed idea of “professionalism” to be successful. He, like other participants, must know when and where to use more emphatic gestures, where and when he can talk about particular topics, and must make these decisions under threat of not meeting expectations of others in power.

Being able to code switch using body language is an important learned behavior, as JJ notes. Victor also highlights body language as an important and necessary way fluidity is expected. Victor, who is 42, identifies as White, Black or African American, (Mediterranean / Iberian – Italian, Spanish and Basque, and Sephardi), Asian (Filipino, Chinese, Malaysian, Indonesian and Bruneian), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Indigenous Pacific Islander, culturally Hawaiian, with Austronesian heritage). He notes that his Indigenous Pacific Islander identity and being culturally Hawaiian are particularly salient for him. He recounts a story of how learning to dance with rhythm (using his body) was an important way to avoid being

mocked by his relatives. He notes:

And so growing up with reggae music and stuff I would have my relatives who are more islander than me they would be like “Oh your rhythm is completely off or oh your, your body language is too stiff, you don’t look islander enough.”... And so there was that. I became very conscious of even just gestures and body posture like oh if I’m hanging out with my islander relatives I need to be more like this for them, you know and then, um, and then they were right, because in order for me to understand the different beautiful aspects of reggae music I’m like oh, I was too stiff before, I have to really just let my joints go a little bit you know?.

For Victor’s relatives, being able to dance with rhythm, and move more freely, was associated with being more Hawaiian. To dance badly was to be less Hawaiian, and to be less like his Hawaiian relatives. Victor had to learn and demonstrate the appropriate usage of body language to be “islander enough”, and to connect to his Hawaiian family. This is yet another example of the management of social, behavioral, and bodily expectations to demonstrate that as a mixed man, you could fit in with different groups. Victor’s story about his need to dance well enough to be considered islander enough echoes JJ’s need to calculate and control his usage of gestures while speaking to meet the racially coded expectations of “professionalism”.

#### ***4.1.3 Code switching using speech.***

For some participants, code switching is about language use. Participants must successfully make decisions needed to demonstrate linguistic fluidity. Sebastian, a 27 year old participant who identifies as white and Mexican (Mestizo), gives another example of code switching in language and cultural references. Sebastian has a bicultural and multiracial family. His mother is, as he puts it, “white American” (with English and German roots). His father is Mestizo, originally from Mexico, and has “medium brown” skin. Later in life, Sebastian has been more able to get to know the latino side of his family, and this newfound closeness to that side of the family has helped him to feel a part of mixed-race spaces. He is white passing, and his mixed identity is generally something he must name for others. He points to code switching

specifically in language, using “Spanglish”, for example, with other Latino people:

But when I’m with other Latino people that I’m comfortable with, and I’m friends with who understand my identity and where I’m coming from, I feel a little bit more comfortable, code switching a little bit more, using more intentional kind of cultural references that other groups may not understand. I feel more comfortable kind of going...I’m not fluent in Spanish by any means. But I feel more comfortable kind of throwing in random Spanish words that that would be understood by context.

Sebastian’s comfort in cultural and linguistic code switching is similar to the code switching among different groups that Tony describes. Using language and cultural expression in varying contexts is part of their mixed-race experience and adds context that will help them connect with others with whom they share commonalities.

James (39), who identifies as Black and Asian (Jamaican and Filipino) discussed watching his mother’s side of the family code switch often among the various languages that everyone spoke. He said:

So we would go visit and I would listen to them. It was code switching, a lot of times they were talking Tagalog, which is kind of the unifying language. But if depending on where you’re from in the Philippines, you have you know, Masayan, there were some other dialects from the main island of Luzon and Southern Mindanao. But my mom was from Masayas, near Cebu. So she had that language. But if they didn’t know that language, they talked in Tagalog. So I picked up a lot of that, and then a lot of code switching, they would you know “ano” and then “oh”, but then they’ll say a English word and then go right back into Tagalog again.

James lived with his family in the Philippines when he was younger for a time, so he did learn some of the language(s) his family spoke. But his family didn’t have the time to teach him enough so that he would become fluent in tagalog, and he expresses disappointment in not being more proficient. The way James talks about code switching among his mother’s family paints a picture of the ease and normalcy of switching between languages to better communicate meaning. This is similar to the way Sebastian describes using Spanish words in conversation when he is with people who will understand them. Using the words in Spanish convey a meaning



that will not be as clear with an English word.

Another aspect of code switching as a means of avoiding social ostracism for participants is accent and the way they use words. Victor, who moved a great deal in his life, talks about going home to Hawaii. When he does, he code switches back to the accent he had as a child, which he notes "... was beaten out of me by the um, the meanness of the mainland Americans when we came here because they thought we were uneducated because of how we spoke...". His mother also shared this same feeling, and Victor remembers with sadness that his mother also thought his Hawaiian accent was "ignorant". Because of these complex memories around accents, Victor began to pay close attention to how different generations of his family spoke, noting his siblings adapted to a more "mainland American" accent when they moved to the mainland.

Victor's story highlights the raced, classed, and intersectional nature of language and accents. The Hawaiian (creole) accent was associated with lack of education, while the mainland "American" accent is perceived as the "right", "educated" and "proper" way. There is an unmistakable connection to whiteness inherent in valuing a "mainland American" accent, which would be associated with white mainland people. The importance of linguistic code switching to avoid shame, echoes Kevin's need to code switch and hide parts of himself to avoid sticking out too much. Victor, Tony and Sebastian show us that language and fluidity with language use is a key component of connecting with different groups in multiracial and multicultural families.

#### **4.2 Authenticity vs. "Chameleon"**

Participants described various metaphors in sharing with me their experiences of being mixed-race. For example, Sean identifies as mixed (white, Asian, and Native American) and is 37 years old. He described the experience as feeling like he is wearing a costume. Isaac, who is

29, and identifies as Hapa Haole (Chinese, Filipino, Scottish, and Irish), uses the metaphor of fusion food, where various types of culturally specific foods are combined. Sebastian (27) described it as like wearing a costume, also, or wearing a mask. He said that these metaphors encapsulated the feeling of having an outer appearance, and then more complexity being revealed if you dig deeper.

Metaphors were varied, but a theme that rose to the surface for several participants is the metaphoric use of “being a chameleon”. Several participants noted that the term chameleon did not resonate for them, or positioned chameleon as an undesirable behavior. Ricky, for example, identifies as white and Asian (white American and Indonesian), and is 38 years old. He rejects the idea that mixed-race men like himself would be “chameleons”. Ricky points to a tension between the concept of being a chameleon and being true to yourself. He said:

I think that this that whole like chameleon like, oh just be a chameleon discourse and TCK<sup>6</sup> is like, TCK discourse is kinda.... I know, of course, I know what they're getting at. But it's like, I think it's kind of unhelpful, too. Because I think deep down, we don't want to, like put these like shows of fitting in but we want to have something that's always true in all situations.

Ricky is highlighting the idea that being a chameleon, or changing your outward appearance, behavior, or mannerisms, is in tension with being authentic. Yet, does authenticity demand that mixed-race people remain the same in every scenario and context? It was common for the mixed-race men in this study to say that their behavior or language changed when they were with different groups of people. If behavior or language or mannerisms change from context to context for mixed-race people, does this mean that they are not being themselves in one scenario

---

<sup>6</sup> TCK, as Ricky uses it here, refers to “Third Culture Kid” (Useem and Downie [1976] 2011) which is used to describe U.S. children who have grown up outside the U.S. Useem and Downie ([1976] 2011:18) describe TCKs in this way: “Although they have grown up in foreign countries, they are not integral parts of those countries. When they come to their country of citizenship (some for the first time), they do not feel at home because they do not know the lingo or expectations of others--especially those of their own age.”

or another?

James (39) also rejects the chameleon metaphor. He puts it plainly:

I don't like the metaphors that I'm thinking about right now. They're like, initially, like chameleon, for example. I don't like that metaphor. Cause it says, we're hiding something. But I feel like we can be a lot of different things to a lot of different people. Depending on your vantage point, and how you see me and your because of your experiences, how you relate to me or my experiences.

James echoes Ricky's rejection of the chameleon metaphor. For him, being a chameleon means you are hiding something, presumably who you really are. It is about how other people interpret your behavior and how you show up in the world. Each person will see him differently, depending on who they are. For James, it is not about how he changes in different contexts, but about how other people's impression of him changes based on their circumstances and worldview.

James argues that a mixed-race person is subject to the categorizations and opinions of others who interact with them. James' argument is indicative of the socially constructed framework of race (Omi and Winant 2015), but leaves out the agency of people to adapt to fit into their environments. This is especially important in family or intimate situations, such as Kevin's earlier story. In Kevin's situation with his white and Black family members, he must manage both sides of his family and manage how he presents himself to each group. While this is not always comfortable for Kevin, it is necessary. Victor's earlier story of his childhood accent making him a target for physical violence also shows us how necessary being a chameleon can be for some mixed-race people.

Perhaps, mixed-race people are comfortable in environments of difference, where being themselves demands fluidity and adaptation to a changing environment. Like most things, the answer is nuanced. Nick, for example, says that he is most comfortable in a group where

everyone is different races, because that difference is the commonality that binds them. Nick is 22 and identifies as white and Asian (Filipino and Dutch American). For him, there is harmony among people who are all different. He says:

And everything I say is like understandable because we all have to understand each other. Like it's the same level of understanding. Like it's not me having to be different on the inside. It's like we're all we're all different. So difference is normal. Therefore we're all normal.

Nick says in a group where everyone is different, he is forced to be himself. He is saying that his most authentic self is possible when everyone understands that we are all different, and nobody must make an effort to fit in. The commonality for Nick is difference, which helps him to connect with others.

Alan, who is 27 and identifies as white and Asian (Scottish, Japanese), also feels that things were different when he was younger. Alan mentions the chameleon concept as something he has grown out of and no longer is relevant for him. He includes the chameleon metaphor in a discussion on how his interest in code switching has changed as he got older. He uses the chameleon metaphor to describe what his younger self did, and has now matured out of. In this quote, Alan positions the chameleon metaphor in a similar way to James and Ricky, with assertion that it represents inauthentic behavior:

So I always talk about like, kind of feed into what they want to talk about. Like, how are your feelings about certain things? Like I would be different people but I think for sure before I was really like, like a chameleon almost. I really didn't know who I was or what I was looking for."

In the above quote, Alan implies that being a chameleon or changing his behavior to fit in with others was a product of his confusion with himself and his own identity. Alan is portraying code switching as a negative thing that young people might do when they don't know who they are or who they want to be yet. Alan paints a distinctively unfavorable portrait of the chameleon

metaphor for mixed-race identity.

Yet, not all participants felt that way. In contrast to participants such as James and Ricky who reject the chameleon metaphor, Tony embraced this and used it to describe how he behaves among different groups:

I think there is like a bit of a chameleon aspect to, to some of it, like you know, and it's just a naturally occurring shifting thing is, it can be subtle but like, you know, when I'm with West Indian or, or Black friends, I may you know, I have experiences within that. So there will be like references or jokes or even you know slang that I use, which is specific to them.

Tony talked about code switching as a normal and natural thing, to connect with his West Indian or Black friends in ways that they would uniquely understand. He uses the chameleon metaphor to explain this code switching, unlike Ricky and James who reject this metaphor as unauthentic or concealing who they truly are. Thus, the chameleon metaphor is used as a way for him to describe his code switching, just like Alan did in describing the way he felt the need to code switch in his younger years. This shows that like much else, what resonates for some may not for others, particularly given the socially constructed nature of race. For some participants, "chameleon" is salient as a way to describe their experiences, for others it feels inauthentic.

#### **4.3 Fluidity over the life course.**

For some participants, their racial identity or code switching changed depending on the context. Many described developing a stronger sense of mixed identity, or words to explain what that was later in their life. Isaac (29) encapsulates this sentiment very well, saying: "So, um, I, I don't always know how I identify. I definitely identify as mixed". He goes on to say that he feels that white people who he knew growing up were better able to understand who they were as white people that he did as a mixed person:

I feel like the term hapa has been used a lot in my childhood. My grandparents are both from Hawaii. They were born there. My grandpa is Chinese. And my grandma is

Filipino...And that's where like hapa and hapa haole is something that came up a lot. Just to describe me or how my family described me. And but I grew up in like on the central coast of [state], so it's a predominantly white, semi-rural area, I guess you could say it's not like a big city. And yeah, so I think my peers growing up were mostly white people. And they had more opportunity to kind of like, fall into what it meant to be white than I did, to kind of explore my full self.

Isaac sharing that he doesn't always know how he identifies shows us that identity and identification can change in different context, over the life course, and reinforces the socially constructed nature of race. Isaac is not the only one who describes that their identity is not static. Lee describes that his racial identity was constantly in flux when he was younger, but this evolved as he got older. Lee identifies as white and Asian (Chinese, Scottish, Irish, English and Native American) and is 30 years old. When he was a child, Lee was involved in acting, and laments that his mixed-race identity was holding him back from getting jobs:

So my initial outlook on identity was constantly in flux when I was younger, just because there was a part of me that felt like as somebody who was a outsider looking in, I was trying to find a way to break in... But um, I remember I was doing an audition for a commercial. And they asked me what I was. And I remember it sounded like I was gonna get a callback. They had this look of like, yeah, we'll start discussing like, when we want to see you again, maybe we can try some takes, see what happens. But what but we wanted to ask you, what's your race, and I told him that I was half Chinese and half white. And it's hard to forget that look, when the light bulb goes off of like, someone, I don't know, putting the two and two together. I never received a call back for that.

Lee and his mother then changed one of his audition forms to just say white, as if he was only white. After another audition, he was asked if he truly was only white, and remembers thinking that his lie had been discovered. Lee wasn't successful in passing as "just white" in that setting, and this again cost him a callback for the role. Reflecting on this, he wonders if changing his form to just say white instead of revealing his mixed identity was distressing for his mother at all. Yet, it wasn't his race on the forms that was preventing him from getting callbacks, it was the way he looked and his inability to pass as just white.

Lee's poignant statement that he felt like an outsider trying to break in is reminiscent of

Patricia Hill Collins' (1986) feminist standpoint concept of the outsider within. Collins (1986) describes the exhausting challenge of being a Black woman in the academy, a space that is built on the pillars of whiteness. Black women are then outsiders within the academy, where they are simultaneously included and kept outside of the boundaries (Collins 1986). Lee's experience using the words outsider trying to break in are similar, where he experiences being othered for his mixed-race status while doing all the right things to secure work in the industry as a child. His mother realized the barrier might be what was on paper, and thus changed his forms, but it was his outward appearance that gave away his outsider status.

For another participant, Alan, his behavior (feeling the need to code switch or not) is what changed over the life course. As noted earlier, Alan (27) feels that he had to change his behavior and adapt to different groups when he was younger, but now that he is older, things are different. He says:

I honestly think like, I'm past the point myself where I change like, around groups, I think I'm like, pretty much the same person. So it really doesn't change like, I know, because like, I'm, I'm 27. So I'm not like 18 anymore, where like, I really care how [name] feels about me, you know...

Alan describes code switching as something he did when he was younger, but now that he is older and has a family, he doesn't feel the need to fit in as much. He doesn't care how people think of him, and therefore doesn't feel he has to code switch to connect with different groups of people. He says:

I know for sure if I did this, like five or six years ago, it would be like 100 percent a different answer. Like when I was like 20, or 21. I always like if I was around my Asian friends, I tend to talk about more things about my family and like being Asian and like things going on in my life. Or things like that, like around other people, I know that that conversation wouldn't be interesting for them.

In the quote above, Alan indicates that if he did this interview with me five or six years ago, his answers would reflect that he did in fact code switch his behavior around different groups of

people. Now that he is 27, he doesn't feel that way any more. Thus, his code switching behavior has changed over the life course, becoming less prominent as he ages. Alan positions code switching as a means to connect when you want people to like you, not as an unconscious means of connection that unfolds naturally, as Tony does.

#### 4.4 Summary

Racial fluidity and code switching were described in many of the narratives of participants. As mixed-race men, participants described their experiences with multiracial families, and in particular navigating the difficult terrain of code switching when with different groups of family members. Code switching was a contested topic for some participants, and a normal way of life for others. Alan felt that he no longer needed to code switch because he is much more sure of himself now, but Tony felt that it was a normal part of his life as a mixed person. In general, most participants seemed to reject the idea of being a chameleon as a proxy for describing mixed identity. Other examples given included wearing a mask or costume, or fusion food. Interwoven throughout discussions of code switching was the concept of fluidity in racial identity and identification. Participants' identities are socially constructed, and can change over the life course.

Family was an important factor in mixed-race men's' stories. For example, Lee's mother who changed her son's race on forms in the hopes that he would land an acting job. The perceived advantage of changing her son's race (to monoracial white) led her to try deception, which speaks volumes about the power of whiteness and white privilege. In yet another example, Victor's family who felt he wasn't islander enough if he didn't dance with enough rhythm. The assumption in Victor's story is that to dance without rhythm is associated with whiteness, and thus can't be islander. Participants' experiences challenge the binaries and boundaries of race,



culture and gender. In the next chapter, I will dig deeper into participants' experiences of gender and masculinity.

## 5 RESULTS – MASCULINITY & MULTIRACIALITY

This chapter will focus on the intersections of masculinity and mixed-race identity for participants. Important context for unpacking the intersections of mixed-race identity and masculinity is that all seventeen participants identified in some way with the terms mixed-race, multiracial, or with having multiple racial heritages. All participants responded to the advertisement for mixed-race men. Yet, not all participants would use that identity to describe themselves if given the choice. For example on the pre-survey administered prior to the interview, when asked to discuss their race and ethnicity, Sean (37) noted, “It’s been easier for me to say mixed.”, while Sebastian (27) said “I am very white passing – no one guesses that I am half Mexican until they hear/see my name”.

The open-ended question about participants’ racial identity offered on the pre-survey gave participants the opportunity to explain their identity in their own words, and produced a great deal of variation. Each open-ended response was unique, even among those participants who selected the same multi-choice racial identification options. Respondents’ answers to an open-ended question about their gender identity had less variation, however. The majority of respondents listed “male”, including those who specified cisgender and/or heterosexual male. Three participants included their pronouns. One participant, Victor, specifically highlighted how his gender identity changed between how he identified in Western culture and how he identified in his native culture (as a third gender, neither male nor female).

Some participants expressed a complex relationship to masculinity, especially related to privilege and power. Although participants did not always connect masculinity to mixed-race identity, or were not always able to articulate the ways in which those identities intersected, it is clear that they did. In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which masculinity intersected with

multiraciality for my participants. The chapter will include also include a case study on one participant, Kevin, who is 22 years old and identifies as multiracial (Black-white). I will discuss how masculinity intersects with multiraciality through the lenses of 1) comfort with ambiguity, 2) culture, and 3) whiteness.

### **5.1 “A comfort level with ambiguity” – Complicating the binaries**

Participants discussed navigating gray areas in many ways throughout their lives, and some specifically noted gender and masculinity as one way their experiences did not fit the binary.

Isaac, who identifies as white and Asian (Hapa Haole – Chinese, Filipino, Scottish and Irish), describes his experience:

I feel like by nature of like, I don't know, being raised by like a strong single mother, and then the, like, the activities I gravitated towards, like the arts and dance, were always like, female dominated spaces. But I felt more comfortable in those spaces. And I think I've reflected a lot on, like, the experience of being mixed is like, I feel like a comfort level with ambiguity and like, kind of engaging in gray areas. And so, um, you know, I definitely felt like, I could explore like, femininity more, I think, you know, there's lots of messages. That's like, that's not what you're supposed to do. I feel like that was more of a conflict, probably growing up than being mixed was feeling like not masculine enough.

Isaac is connecting his experiences being mixed with his experiences as a man, attributing his comfort in existing outside the rigidly defined gender binary (exploring femininity) to his experience as a mixed-race man. Being mixed and existing between and among racial identities and cultural experiences has allowed him to feel comfortable with exploring femininity as a man. He is more comfortable ignoring expectations to conform to masculinity because he already has experiences that have taught him to navigate the gray areas as a multiracial man.

Isaac offers that he is better able to navigate the boundaries of gender expectations and explore his femininity because he is used to the experience of pushing back against binaries as a multiracial man. Multiracial people are skilled at navigating the borders and imagined

boundaries of race, and Isaac describes how this has given him the tools to push back against hegemonic masculinity in the same way. Living a life “in between” is what Gloria Anzaldúa ([1993] 2009:180) would call *nepantla*, or “an in-between state”. Isaac’s description brings to mind living in *nepantla*, in between expectations of both gender and race. Isaac’s ability to lean into the ambiguity of gender, race, and more is reminiscent of Anzaldúa ([1987]2012:101)’s assertion that *mestizas* (multiracial, multiethnic, border women) like her develop the ability to navigate ambiguity because “Rigidity means death”. Isaac is describing the same need to lean into the gray areas as Anzaldúa, because struggling to remain on either side of a strict delineation is not realistic.

For Sebastian, who identifies as white (Latinx), navigating the complexities of masculinity means rejection of the binary of masculine and feminine. When asked what being a man means to him, he notes:

I kind of struggle with this idea of masculinity as a concept because I I don’t think that is necessarily like my conception that different from femininity. I think these labels are all kind of fraught in various ways. And, and, and I, I feel a little bit uncomfortable kind of defining them in such different terms...I still, like wouldn’t identify myself as, as a woman, or as just like, straight up femme or feminine, I would say I’m somewhere in between. But I think for the moment at least and this changes often, is um I feel most comfortable right now identifying as like a cis-male and like, that’s kind of where I have come to. Is that, is that static? No. Is it complicated? Yes. But I think I would say like, 99% of the time I identify as cis-male, then there’s the 1% of time I’m like, okay, well, maybe there are other things I can explore. And so I think it means compassion, willingness to build up rather than build down, building bridges, not barriers. Kind of helping others to navigate the gray.

While Sebastian doesn’t directly connect his mixed-race identity to his masculinity, he is describing the same fluidity and navigation of an in-between space that Isaac is as a mixed-race man. He rejects the binary of masculinity and femininity, and connects with neither. Instead, he identifies as somewhere in between. Like Isaac, Sebastian is describing gender and existing in *nepantla*, or in between masculinity and femininity. He rejects the expectations of hegemonic

masculinity, and identifies fluidly.

Sebastian's definition of masculinity not only is about his own ability to traverse the borderlands of gender, but helping others to do so as well. Sebastian also identifies as queer, which is important to an intersectional analysis of his experiences. Gloria Anzaldúa ([1987]2012: 40) asserts that queer people are uniquely othered, highlighting the importance of an intersectional approach when considering Sebastian's experiences: "The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human". The multitude of imagined borders and boundaries that Sebastian has to negotiate on a daily basis undoubtedly shape his experiences as a mixed-race man.

## 5.2 "You do get conflicting ideas from different cultures" – Masculinity and Culture

The mixed-race men in this study described their experiences across many different cultural backgrounds, nationalities, and communities. For participants, culture is tied with expectations of what is "masculine" behavior, and thus participants from two or more different cultures are faced with multiple conflicting messages of what is appropriate for them to wear, do, enjoy, and how they should interact. Ricky, who is 38 years old and identifies as white and Asian (white American and Indonesian), describes the conflicting expectations of masculine behavior from both his white and Asian cultures:

...something you do get conflicting ideas from different cultures what being a man is supposed to be like different values so with Asian, yeah yeah like with Asians maybe it's like a kind of assertiveness like white American culture is like so overly like hell bent on mak--- you know, you having that like, take up space all the time. And like speaking loudly and even aggressively that's like totally fine like a Donald Trump but like Asian cultures, they would be like you know, and this is gross generalization, but at least okay like you know Indonesian like, like deference is value even for men and you know take like yeah like harm--- harmony is more being going for our sense of harmony and avoiding conflict is still a value that like is respected for men in speech at least so or being direct I mean yeah, direct it's still pop- Yeah, it's it's like still valued not to be

overly direct but in in, in American culture, like men are expected to be direct.

In the above quote, Ricky points to the “white american” expectation that men are direct and aggressive in communication, giving the example of Donald Trump. Donald Trump is known for brief, brash, and often insulting communication. His communication knowingly stokes conflict and provokes strong reactions, and he relishes in this. Donald Trump’s communication style is, for Ricky, part of the white american masculine way. Ricky then contrasts the aggressive, conflict-driven behavior of Donald Trump with the behavioral expectations for Indonesian men, which include deference to others and avoiding situations that provoke such strong reactions.

As a mixed white American and Indonesian man, Ricky feels he is faced with expectations tied to his two cultures that are very dissimilar. It is up to Ricky to determine how and when to act according to either the white american ideals of direct communication or the Indonesian ideal of harmony. He notes:

...you have to pick (laughs) and that can feel like you know, you’re it feels like it can feel like you’re marginalizing a part of yourself. You pick the one that’s like if I choose to be more Western like I, I feel bad about like not bringing forward my Indonesian side, but then if I bring forward my Indonesian side, like am I just gonna be seen as like, some passive guy? You know, it’s really annoying and then you’re and when people are like, Oh, you’re mixed you can be anything you can like pick and choose when it’s like strategic or appropriate and then it’s like... It’s like that’s on the other side of that is like, you know, being always unsure of who you are and like, it’s confusing it’s like you know, mental energy is like always switching between all kinds of and, and it’s not necessarily what people take. People don’t see it as you doing that. They might take it as just like, you’re.. can’t pick.

In the above quote, Ricky highlights having to “pick”, and powerfully, relates this to feeling like he is marginalizing a part of his himself. Ricky feels bad about pushing aside his Indonesian cultural heritage, if he communicates in a more aggressive and direct way. Ricky also points out that it takes emotional work to navigate various expectations and decide appropriate behavior based on context. The worry about whether he will be seen as a “some passive guy” is

indicative of a unique experience for mixed-race men like Ricky, who have to contend with not only others' expectations but the feeling of ignoring some part of themselves in the process.

Ricky echoes Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012:85), who offers us a similar sentiment about her experiences as a border woman, navigating the cultural, linguistic and racial complexities of the border between Mexico and the U.S:

We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one.

Anzaldúa and Ricky are describing a “borderland conflict” between cultural expectations, and the work it takes to navigate between and among these. Ricky brings up the point that it is, put simply, tiring to have to manage his behavior to fit expectations of different cultures and contexts. He knows that others won't be able to see or acknowledge that emotional work, and worries that he might just be seen as someone who can't pick which cultural norms he should abide by. As Anzaldúa put it, he might just be seen as zero, nothing or no one. Ricky is describing, as did Isaac, living in nepantla, the in between space where he must determine whether to use more American or more Indonesian communication norms.

The work it takes to manage multiracial and multiethnic contexts is a common theme among participants. Victor (42) describes this experience related to food and masculinity. For Victor, his gender identity is also intertwined with his cultural heritage, which is Hawaiian and Indigenous Pacific Islander. Victor identifies as Māhū, which he defines as “...the indigenous Pacific islander third gender; that is, we exist between male and female”. We then return to the idea of an in-between space, or nepantla, which for Victor is both gender and race. He is careful to point out that “In Western culture, I identify as male (assigned male at birth); in my native culture, I more accurately identify as māhū (mah-hoo)...”. Using Victor's description, māhū

exist beyond the boundaries of gender, much as multiracial identity does for race. Victor does note that he uses he/him pronouns. By highlighting that his gender identity shifts based on context, Victor's narrative shows us the intersectionality of race, gender, nations, and cultural context. I include Victor in this study because he self-identified as a fit for the study based on a U.S. lens of gender, and also hope to honor his māhū identity throughout this study. Victor's story is also connected to Anzaldúa's perspective, which I hope to honor in this work. Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012: 41) writes:

There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds. Contrary to some psychiatric tenets, half and halves are not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender. What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other.

Victor shows us another example of the intersectional nature of masculinity, race, and culture through food. He says:

And I, I identify as māhū, and in the pacific island culture there's not, there's never a big deal about like "oh are you māhū you know you have to come out or whatever" I, I didn't have that experience of having to come out because it was just part of our culture and so when we add that layer of masculinity into how we dress, into how we hold the banana leaf, into how we hold the egg roll when we're eating it, all of that comes into play as well, which is very strange because then you know I was able to understand from a young age my biological father's Spanish and Italian the machismo aspect where he's like "You're holding your egg roll like a woman" or something you know?... You're holding that like a girl like what? That's.. and I'm looking at an uncle of mine who's you know indigenous islander and he's holding it the same way I do, I'm like "Why are you not yelling at him..." And you know its like "Well because he's islander!" Well I'm an islander as well... But somehow that was unacceptable because I'm part Mediterranean and Iberian, like what?

The quote above shows us how hegemonic masculinity is enforced and behavior is policed, even in the context of a simple family meal. Victor's father has an expectation of how one should hold an egg roll, influenced by this particular cultural and racial context, to ensure that Victor is not holding his food "like a girl". Victor attributes this strict policing of his eating habits to his



father's expectation of him because he is mixed, and to his particular mixed identities.

He shows us that his uncle, who is islander (Victor is also a mixed islander) isn't subject to the same expectations of how he must eat an egg roll. Broadly, this anecdote reveals how masculinity and men's bodies and behavior are policed in service of upholding hegemonic masculine ideals. More specifically, this anecdote shows us one way in which mixed-race men are subject to gendered and racialized expectations unique to their particular mixed identities. Unique to the mixed-race experience, Victor is also able to identify that his uncle, who shares his islander identity, is not subject to the same gender policing. I liken this to the experience of being an "outsider within", where Victor is an islander like his uncle, but is also an outsider due to his mixed identity (Collins 1986).

Victor's experience is also an example of what Segura and Zavella (2008) call interactional borderlands, where Victor is positioned as an outsider by his family based on race and gender. In the interactional borderlands, race and gender (and more) are the foundation of exclusionary borders which are actively reified to keep people separated. This is what is happening to Victor, in that he isn't meeting expectations of being an Islander nor being sufficiently masculine. Falling short of these expectations, he is positioned as an outsider, based on how he holds an egg roll. The simple act of his father policing how Victor eats an egg roll reveals his 'outsider' status. The machismo that Victor attributes to his father's expectations of him as a mixed Mediterranean and Iberian man shows that even though Victor is an islander like his uncle, he isn't seen that way and feels his gender is policed as if he is not an islander. His body is also policed through the simple act of eating an egg roll, revealing that Victor as a mixed-race man is not treated as an Islander, even though he identifies as an Islander. His father treats him differently than his Uncle, because he does not see Victor as an Islander. This story

gives us an example of how mixed men exist within and between boundaries of race and gender, and how they might be treated as outsiders to the very cultures and communities they identify with.

Victor also tells a story of race and racism within the context of dating, that underscores the intersectional nature of culture, race, gender, social class, and more. His story of dating a man who wished his accent was more Asian and that he was more feminine, points to racist and sexist tropes that frame the lives of mixed-race men.

And what's really sad to me I've actually had, um, you know, when I was, when I was single and dating I had somebody he, he broke up with me, and I, I just asked, I wasn't, you know, uh shattered by it, I was like okay so what's, what's the deal? Like just be straight with me and he goes, you know, "I was hoping that you would, you could be a bit more dependent on me, and that you would have you know more of an Asian accent..." So essentially he wanted me to be fresh off the boat, uh and really latch on to that like whole white savior fantasy, like oooh you're my white savior, you're saving me from my, my poor asian background. I can be your m-butterfly...Like that's what he wanted, that's what he was looking for! I was like oh, and then, you know as we talk about masculinity, there was that too, because already I'm, you know, I'm kind of in between masculine and feminine, I'm a bit soft here but then I can be a butch here and there and he's like you know "I was wishing that you could be like a whole lot more feminine" and you know really just like wow.

Victor's story above points to the intersectional "isms" of racism, sexism, classism, and the convergence of those in intimate relationships. Victor later notes that he was working a very good job at the time, and the fact that he could support himself perfectly well on his own was another source of discontent for his former partner. Victor notes that being a US citizen was also important, as his former partner "...would've probably preferred someone who was here on a visa." Victor is painting a picture for us of his partner, who wanted someone to depend on him for stability and who wanted to actively exploit their privilege and power over him.

His former partner imagined someone who looked like Victor, a mixed-race man, to fit the picture he had in his head of someone marginalized in numerous intersectional ways. He

expressed dissatisfied with the relationship when it turned out that Victor was capable of standing up for himself and the power imbalance was not as stark. This story points out for us how a mixed-race men who identify with multiple marginalized identities might navigate intimate relationships and power within them. Power dynamics within intimate settings are not unique to the context of multiraciality, but in Victor's case as a mixed-race man he experiences multiple different contexts of masculinity. For example, in the intimate relationship, he describes his former partner as desiring someone who is totally dependent on him, his "m butterfly". "M Butterfly" refers to a play (and movie) in which a white man believes he is in love with an Asian woman who is completely deferential and docile (Ebert, 1993). Because this woman is what he is looking for in a partner and he so craves this subservient Asian woman trope, he does not realize that his partner is actually a man (Ebert, 1993).

His partner wanted him to be more "feminine", and subservient. But, in another context, Victor's father urges him to eat his egg roll in a more "macho" way. How is Victor to interpret all of these mixed messages? If Victor was not mixed, would he have to navigate such social and cultural contexts that were almost polar opposite? Victor takes all of this in stride.

### ***5.2.1 Masculinity & Culture: A case study on Kevin***

Following up from earlier discussions of Kevin, this section is intended to be a deeper dive into a case study of one particular participant who describes key intersections between race, gender, politics, culture, whiteness and more. Kevin (22) also describes the varying expectations of masculinity in different cultures in his family. Kevin is Black-white biracial, and the white members of his family (his mother's side) are, as he describes them, conservative and Southern. Kevin is the only solely Black-white biracial participant in my study, although other participants identified with both of those racial identities along with more. Kevin paints a picture of his

family and where is from for us:

I'm from a rural town. So there's so much like, southern dialect and southern style, that, you know, I wouldn't say my cousins are lighter toned than me, but they kinda are, but they're not, I wouldn't say they're passing as white. But they take on a completely different identity than me, like, they take on white identity so holistically, like they wear the cowboy boots, that's their, their country strong. And I think that's amazing. Like how I, I never took on that identity. And I wouldn't say my brother took much of it on, but he kind of did. But my cousins who are also half Black, half white, just take on that identity so strongly like that, that's their life. Like you're gonna tell me I'm Black, I'm country. You know? That's, that's one of those things, you know, it's so weird to see how diverse you can be. It's, you know, we often get that notion like multiracial people are just, you know, they're multiracial, they're the other we--- then we're not going to lump them in anywhere. But yeah, I think it's I think it's so cool. It's just cool to look and reflect, self reflect and look at other people and just understand how diverse the whole community itself could be. And is.

This quote from Kevin tells us a great deal about his experiences. First, his cousins embody “country strong” identity which intersects with their white racial identity and masculine gender identity, while he does not. Kevin doesn't embody that same country identity, even though his cousins are also Black white biracial like he is. For his family, Kevin describes that the “country” identity is more salient than racial identity – although intertwined. His example of his family's identification with a country identity shows us the salience of different identities in varying contexts. We of course know that racial identity and multiraciality is not a monolith, and Kevin's story further reminds us that Black/white biracial masculinity is just as nuanced.

Kevin goes on to tell us more about the different sides of his family and their southern identities. He shows us the usage of identity work, particularly with his white family, to take on a more masculine identity (and thus a more acceptable performance of white “Southerner” identity). He feels that around his white, southern, conservative family, he must demonstrate more stereotypically masculine behaviors than he does with his father's side of the family. In a quote also used in an earlier chapter to demonstrate fluidity of identity, he tells us:

That is a good question. Um, and it changes a lot. You know, my mother's side, the very

conservative side, is actually where my both Black and white cousins... or, yeah, my cousins that are both half Black, half white are on my mother's side. And it's a completely different scenario. I take on more of that Southern culture, when I'm with them, that's how I act where... And to bring it back to that masculine identity, I take on far more masculine identity, when I'm with them, far more. And, you know, we, you know, I just take on that more white perspective, like I tried to leave my ideologies and thoughts and multiracial identity, I kind of leave those behind... It's like, I don't take on a very masculine identity with my Black family, cause [unclear] but with my white family, I guess you could say it's a more masculine, let's go throw the football kind of thing. So yeah.

While his cousins demonstrate their "southern culture" or "country" identity, Kevin actively aligns himself with them as a means of fitting in. The more you fit in, the less you would stick out. I argue that Kevin's account shows us an example of what Joseph-Salisbury (2018) terms Black mixed-race men's post-racial resilience (PRR). In Joseph-Salisbury's (2018) work, he argues that Black mixed-race men negotiate their identities in an effort to connect with different friend groups. For Joseph-Salisbury (2018), engaging in management of identity is part of a larger effort to resist and recover from actions of racism. Although Kevin has to manage his presentation of self to fit in with family rather than friend groups, I argue Joseph-Salisbury's (2018:183) assertion that "...fluidity manifests as a form of PRR that engenders the ability to engage in processes of hybridity and resist identity fragmentation" is still applicable in this intimate setting.

In short, Kevin has to do the work of managing his identity around his white family. He must behave in a more masculine, "southern" and "country" way to align himself with his cousins and family group. In an effort to build positive relationships with this side of his family, I argue he is also managing his masculine behaviors to buffer against any actions of racism. In order to not draw attention within his very conservative southern family (although some are also Black-white biracial) he is expected to be throwing the football with the family, for example. This shows us that "throwing the football" is both a more white and more masculine activity than

he would normally engage in with his Black family. Kevin's experience is an important lens to consider in the experiences of multiracial people, in particular their interactions with family and culture in the southern United States.

### 5.3 “They’re like the opposite in one”: Multiracial masculinity & whiteness

An important aspect of the multiracial experience for participants was their relationship to whiteness, and how power and privilege shaped their lives in relation to whiteness. But how does whiteness and white privilege show up in the lives of multiracial men? Do multiracial men benefit from “passing” as white? The intersectional nature of race and gender was highlighted in their stories, as we see in Isaac's below:

I feel like, you know, white men have a lot of power in society. And I know that there are ways that I benefit from that for sure. But I also know that Asian males are very much sort of stereotyped as being like, more, I don't know, like emasculated or delicate or, you know, shorter and all those like tropes, right? So it's, I feel like that's an interesting mix. To have like very strong notions of masculinity that are race based and then having sort of like, they're like the opposite in one. And like, I wouldn't describe myself, like a super masculine person, I also feel like there's not really shared language around what it means to be masculine either. But I do know that you know, my experiences with my own white father and like, kind of like really wanting to be distance from him and like, how he is in all ways. So like, I just don't feel like I really had a father figure of either race... I feel like, I don't know, I I don't think I yeah, I don't think I grew up around like, white masculinity. So I feel like, less likely to claim that as like, something I hold even though, I know that I benefit from it. You know, it's like, regardless of if I identify as white male, I get to experience the world in many ways as a white male.

Isaac (29) identifies as white and Asian (Hapa Haole – Chinese, Filipino, Scottish and Irish), and is acutely aware of the racist and sexist tropes of Asian masculinity. In his story above, he points to the privilege of passing as white (navigating the world as a white man) while simultaneously identifying as multiracial. He acknowledges the socially constructed nature of gender, and the powerful place of whiteness in the United States. He is clear that his proximity to whiteness affords him the ability to pass, while also grappling with what it means to be both Asian and

white.

Isaac doesn't identify as a white man, but that is how others treat him and see him. He therefore benefits from whiteness (and the power dynamic of white masculinity) while he attempts to make meaning of being a multiracial man. He explains the dichotomy between the stereotypical tropes of Asian and white masculinity by simply saying, "...they're like the opposite in one". Isaac's story shows us how multiracial men experience and benefit from whiteness, yet also grapple with making meaning of their multiracial identity.

Isaac's story is reminiscent of Sebastian's, complicating white masculinity with questions of how to acknowledge and honor multiracial identity as a white-passing man. A recurring theme for participants like Isaac and Sebastian is the question of "being enough", and their place in relation to both whiteness and mixedness. Living in the in-between space of nepantla and navigating situational contexts to frame their identities put the men in my study in an incredibly complex situation. Often, they either suppressed or emphasized their mixedness accordingly based on the group they were with. This was in an effort to acknowledge their privilege as a white man, and as Sebastian notes, that they may "walk through the world as a white man". When he is with a group of Latinos, he de-emphasizes his multiracial identity, because he doesn't feel he is "enough" to be able to claim space in the community. But when with white peers, he does the opposite, in the effort to create a teachable moment for those who might not recognize his multiracial identity. He describes engaging in identity work in this way:

And then when I'm with other Latinos, it's, it tends to be a bit a little bit more complicated because, um, I recognize I, um, I walk through the world as a white man and, and a lot of Latinos like there's a substantial part of part of Mexican culture, specifically that is white, but they're definitely the minority and are definitely significantly more privileged than non-white Mexicans. And it's and, and so I tend to kind of shy away from my mixed-race-ness when I'm with more kind of explicitly Mexican or Latino groups out of a feeling of like, not feeling quote, unquote, like authentic or real enough to, to identify in that way. Um, and so I am sure I think when

with white people, with European only white people, I tend to emphasize the fact of my Latino identity as like a marker of like, my experience is different from yours. And you shouldn't make assumptions about me, based on how I look, it's more complicated than that. But then when I'm with other Latino people, I tend to shy away from mentioning mixed-race-ness, other than the fact that my name is very obviously Spanish at least. I have a feeling of like, not feeling like this is an identity that I can fully claim or feel fully in tune with. So it depends on the situation.

Both Isaac and Sebastian acknowledge the power and privilege of white masculinity that they have access to, while simultaneously exploring what it means to be a multiracial, multicultural and multiethnic man. To acknowledge the way that they benefit from white supremacy and white masculinity while living in the borderlands of multiracial identity is a unique challenge for the mixed-race men in my study. Living between and among the intersections of race, gender, class, (and more) was a part of their uniquely multiracial experience.

Vincent, who is 34 and identifies as Multiracial (Korean and white) expresses similar feelings of concern about belonging in spaces that he perceives as dedicated to people of color.

He says, when asked what he thought was unique about being a multiracial man:

I don't know if I so deeply articulated some thoughts around that before, but I think what's coming to mind is that yeah, I think like, within multiracial identities, especially identities that are mixed with white identities, there's a for me, there is a constant internal negotiation around my privileged racial identity, my whiteness compared to my marginalized racial identity, koreanness I think an added layer of that is, you know, negotiation of by white maleness with my Korean maleness. And the ways that those things all intersect in different ways...I think when I lean into my white maleness. Yeah, that probably leads me to a lot of the things that are associated with white folks or whiteness, around shame and guilt. And also like being really really... huh, what's the right word. Really nervous or cautious in spaces of how I take space. Yeah, now that I think about it like anytime like I'm in POC spaces or queer spaces or organizing spaces. Those are the identities that come to the forefront of my mind of like, do I belong here as a light skinned, white identified, Cis man. Yeah, and I think I think there's still some of those tensions within my cis-ness and maleness as a Korean man. And also, I think that looks very different. Because when I'm centering my Korean-ness, and I feel validated to belong to those spaces and to take my space and to engage and show up and have a voice and a story to tell.

In the quote above, Vincent expresses shame around his whiteness, and makes a concerted effort



to ensure he is not claiming too much space or decentering others. He questions whether he belongs in spaces for people of color. For Vincent, there is tension between his white and Korean identities and their intersections with masculinity. As multiracial men, participants describe unique tensions between the privileges of white masculinity and the oppressions of their marginalized identities.

I argue that multiracial men (particularly multiracial men who are white-passing) occupy a distinctive location at the intersections of race and gender. Participants express guilt around their white masculinity in particular, and work actively to combat that by not taking space from others with marginalized identities. Yet, participants also honor their multiracial identities and take pride in their multiracial heritage. The delicate balance of not taking resources or attention from those who need it most while working to combat white supremacy and acknowledging the privilege of your own white masculinity is an example of the borderlands that multiracial men must navigate.

#### **5.4 Summary**

In this chapter I have shown that multiracial men must determine how to thrive within and between the multiplicities of their own identities. Participants occupy the borderlands of multicultural, multiethnic and multiracial lives and do the work of finding their place at these intersections. Multiracial men must make meaning of the competing expectations of the cultures they identify with, and develop a comfort with ambiguity as a result of occupying a constant gray area. Multiracial men learn to be conscious of the privileges of their white masculinity and must combat white supremacy by learning how to decenter themselves and their experiences. In short, multiracial men must navigate immense complexity while exploring and honoring their multiracial masculinity. This is a unique challenge for them, and one that leads participants on a

journey of learning to acknowledge their own privileged and marginalized identities. Participants are charged with determining how they can hold these identities simultaneously and center their own multiracial identity without taking space from others.

## 6 RESULTS – PANDEMIC & RACIAL INJUSTICE

I collected data for this study between October 2020 and March of 2021, which was by all accounts a traumatic and tumultuous time. I described this time to participants as a global pandemic and a national reckoning regarding racial injustice in the United States. Participants were invited to discuss how the concurrent pandemic and attention to injustice had impacted their racial identity. Many of the participants mentioned different aspects of the racial justice issues and racism prominent in 2020, 2021, and years prior. This chapter illustrates that while the summer of 2020 and beyond has been a “racial reckoning” for some in the United States, some mixed-race men in this study had been attentive to injustices long prior. It was not a racial reckoning for them, but rather an opportunity to watch as others’ came to terms with what they already understood: that racism existed, and affected their lives.

Although when the study was originally conceived COVID-19 was not an analysis point, it was an undeniable part of the data collection given the time we were all living in. The years 2020 and 2021 were also framed by the trauma of a tumultuous political climate in the United States, in which race and race relations were a constant point of contention. Additionally, in the summer of 2020, there was a wave of social action in the United States following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery (Chang, Martin, and Marrapodi 2020). Too add to these traumas, many people were struggling economically as a result of illness, layoffs, or death of a family member who contributed to family income. In short, the time period in which this study was conducted represent what Patricia Hill Collins (2019) calls a conjuncture. A conjuncture (Collins 2019) is a place at which varying aspects of power and inequality intersect. Using a description that Collins (2019:234) uses to refer to 2016 election cycle, I argue that the COVID-19 crisis, specifically in the United States, has been “a seeming crisis at the conjunctures

of factors”. Collins (2019) also offers the example of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as a crisis that could be analyzed through the articulation framework as a conjuncture, or a site where many oppressions meet. Less than a year after the publication of Collins’ (2019) work, another conjuncture was exposed by a global pandemic. At conjunctures, injustices are laid bare, as they were at the intersection of a global pandemic, systemic racism, and a political climate that divided United States in many ways. Although the impact of the pandemic is global, the unique intersections of power and oppression in the U.S. context led this pandemic to be disproportionately deadly, destructive and out of control.

I argue that the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States unearthed a conjuncture best analyzed along the lines of class, nationality, and race, among others. Relevant to class, COVID-19 has drawn lines between front-line (often, but not always, lower paid) workers and those who can work safely from home. Relevant to nationality (and intertwined with race), COVID-19’s emergence in the United States affected Black and brown people differently than it did their white peers, as a result of longstanding systemic and social inequalities. For these reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States is a clear example of an event that exacerbated multiple intersecting oppressions and inequalities. Although COVID-19 struck the United States after Collins’ (2019) work was published, the pandemic in the US context specifically is a clear example of a “saturated site of intersectionality” (Collins 2019:235). It is a conjuncture at which racism, classism, xenophobia and much more had deadly consequences for Black and brown people. COVID-19 put this conjuncture in the national spotlight, making it clear with easy access to death and case rates that were being published and reported in media consumed by the public.

This chapter will analyze several important aspects of mixed-race masculinity and men’s experiences during this difficult time. Themes that emerged for respondents are 1) the Black

Lives Matter movement and conversations about racism, 2) the rise in anti-Asian violence, 3) their own actions and advocacy for change in various settings, and 4) reflection on their own place in these movements as a mixed-race man. My findings show how participants rejected the idea that racial injustice was a new concern, and highlights the ways participants chose to take action.

### **6.1 “It’s just now being televised” – The Black Lives Matter Movement**

Even though there was immense attention given to the impacts of racial injustice in the United States, several participants expressed that the attention to racial injustice that was happening alongside a global pandemic was not new to them. They had followed justice movements, taken bold stances in their own lives and workplaces, and noted that while the attention highlighting systemic racism were much needed, this was not novel to them. The mixed men interviewed for this study discussed anti-blackness, and the role of protests and social movements in lighting a collective fire of interest in combatting racism. They also discussed Anti-Asian injustices, brought to the forefront during the COVID-19 crisis.

Nick is a 22 year old who identifies as white and Asian (Filipino and Dutch). He questioned the idea that this time was a “racial reckoning”, asserting that this activism was not new. To him, the Black Lives Matter movement was years old, and the current post-pandemic time that we were living in wasn’t a reckoning at all. He said:

And if we’re referring to like the racial reckoning, like I was in Minneapolis, like not during the immediate protests, but like the afterwards, and like recent racial reckoning is, is uh kind of I think in my mind is a loaded thing to say, because Black Lives Matter started four years ago. And just because it was like, not recognized on mainstream for like two or three years, doesn’t mean it wasn’t there.

Nick was not alone in asserting the importance of the history of Black Lives Matter and the struggle for racial justice prior to the summer of 2020. James, a 39 year old who identifies as

Black and Asian (Jamaican and Filipino), pointed to the fact the newfound attention to racial justice movements has brought the ability to be in a space where he feels like his life matters:

So not so much from the COVID COVID-19 piece, but definitely from like so like, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and like Black Lives Matter movement, and how that has kind of bubbled up to the surface, we... People who have been minoritized for many years, know, like this is not a new thing. It's just now being televised, which is fine. Sorry, not fine. It's great. Because finally just shedding a light, and people are really understanding like, this is serious like this has been happening like don't, don't just throw it on the rug or sweep it under the rug, because you didn't know about it, or oh, you know, all of a sudden, you're aware or woke to the fact that this has been happening to people for many, many, many, many years. Well, now, I feel like, you know, I can sit in a space where my life matters.

Tony, a 40 year old who identifies as white, Black, and Asian, (Malaysian, Dominican, and Norwegian), echoes James' sentiment that the racial reckoning and social movements happening during this time were simply not new to him. Home for Tony is in Europe, and he highlighted a global perspective, noting that the protests were happening worldwide this time:

Not really, I mean, it's just things that I've always known which are apparent and needed to be said, you know, even though it originated here, with Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. It was around the world that protests were happening, and they to me were just necessary. Being much too long in the reckon, to occur and they're important stands to make you know.

Tony also expressed disappointment at perceived performativity inherent in participating in protests and insincere efforts at change. He talked with his Black friends about their experiences with white friends who would try to impress upon them the importance of going to the protests, in what he describes as "well-intentioned overcompensation". He noted frustration with people who would simply attend the protests to see and be seen, so to speak. They would take a picture for social media and leave, while these injustices were a fact of life to Tony and his friends. Consequently, going to the protests didn't have the same meaning, and they did not feel that they had to attend the protests in the face of their entire lives in which they couldn't escape racial injustice.

Ricky, a 38 year old who identifies as white and Asian (white American and Indonesian), echoed the impact of the movements for racial justice on the world beyond the United States. Ricky had grown up in the Global South, across multiple cities, and had a global perspective on mixed identity and ethnicity. He had been in Germany at the time, where protests were also happening. Ricky felt that he was now able to engage in these conversations more openly with others, and wondered why he hadn't been more engaged in the past:

And this really felt like mainstream or yeah, mainstream society woke up to this thing that like, I had been caring about but always feeling on the sidelines or this like, radical person that was had to be really careful whenever we're bringing things up. That was like, people were just waking up to that and using that language that which is like, wow. And then that's not where it stopped. It's also like, I felt kind of stupid, like, not stupid. But like, I felt like, like, wow, why wasn't I as passionate before? As if I didn't know that was legitimate enough to be passionate about.

It is clear that for Ricky, James, and Tony, understanding racism and white supremacy in the United States were not new in 2020. They were aware of the Black Lives Matter movement and the struggle for against racism in the United States, and felt that others were just catching up. But was it really a "summer of racial reckoning" as Chang, Martin and Marrapodi (2020) call it? For the participants in this study, it was not so much a reckoning as it was a confirmation of what they knew to be true – that systemic racism shaped the lives of those living in the United States and globally. The conjuncture of a global pandemic, systemic racism, high profile instances of racial injustice, and a precarious economy, were enough for a renewed sentiment of outrage for many. Yet, as Ricky, Tony, and James demonstrate, some had been outraged all along. Victor (42) also sums this up very eloquently: "So that, and it's so sad, it's tragic, and we're in this pandemic, and we're in Black Lives Matter, you know? And we, we should've always been in Black Lives Matter."

## 6.2 “I went out and bought a gun” – Mixed-race Asian Men’s Experiences

Participants also mentioned Anti-Asian violence exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to put participants’ fears of violence in the context of the pandemic, which was a global event that triggered xenophobic and racist sentiments against Asians, and Asian Americans, broadly. One example that illustrates the context in which participants were living is the effect that the COVID-19 crisis had on the restaurant industry. Early on in 2020, it was clear that consumers began avoiding Asian owned and operated restaurants. In the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Figueras (2020) writes on February 28 (before many businesses began even taking precautions) that Chinese restaurants specifically on Buford Highway in Atlanta were seeing a significant drop in business. The reluctance of customers to go to Chinese restaurants as the pandemic was beginning points to the intersections of xenophobia, racism and more. Customers, presumably, believed that the virus was going to be present at a Chinese restaurant, regardless of the restaurant’s connection (or not) with China.

This conflation of race, ethnicity, nationality, and public health guidance led to people avoiding Chinese restaurants. As part of the mismanagement of the pandemic, travel restrictions and bans further highlight the intertwined complexities of COVID-19 and nationality. Ignoring what should have been a focus on public health measures, the pandemic became intertwined in a fight about borders, and the porosity of borders. In many ways, the start of COVID-19 was as much about nationality and borders as it was about a virus. This was coupled with an existing undercurrent of outright racism led to very difficult times for Asian business owners and employees. In addition, incidents of violence against Asian Americans (such as the spa murders in Georgia) sparked fear and outcry. In 2021, eight people at spas (many of whom were Asian women) were murdered by a white man (Associated Press 2021). This incident, and other acts of



violence toward Asian Americans during 2020 and 2021, sparked renewed calls for national attention to anti-Asian racism and violence. Living during this time led mixed-race men in my study to consider anti-Asian racism and the threat of violence in their own lives. The possibility of violence against their families and themselves became important during this time, and led them to take action in various ways.

Alan is 27 years old and identifies as white and Asian (Japanese and white, of Scottish roots). Alan lamented what he termed “people’s already non-existent understanding” of Asian identity prior to the heightened instances of violence, particularly in the south where he lives. He notes that bought a gun in response to recent violence against Asian Americans:

Especially because I’m going to tell you honestly like when those beatings and things happen with Asian people. First thing I did since I’m in Texas, I went out and bought a gun. And then I was like, well, one gun might not be enough. And then there’s always like home defense and reason to have one. But I always thought like, am I now is the time to have a gun? In case something does happen.

As a mixed Asian man, Alan felt a gun was important to protect himself. He also expressed frustration with others’ lack of knowledge, particularly now at this time in 2021. He recalled the time when a person at work told everyone they were from the Micronesian Islands. He was disappointed to see coworkers didn’t seem to know where that was. He watched in frustration as someone pulled out their phone and googled the Micronesian Islands, having hoped that people would know more about the world than they did.

Sean, who is 37, and identifies as white, American Indian, and Asian. He talks about realizing that his mother, who is Korean, Native American, Spanish, and South African, is fearful of being out after dark lately:

When she was out walking, you know, she was like, “Oh, I have to go it’s getting dark I wanna get home.” And for a moment, you know, I was like, she’s not normally someone that like would be that cautious. You know, she’d be like, oh it’s getting dark. I better get home just to be safe, but she seemed she seemed tentative, you know, almost timid. And

like, oh, oh, there's a really good chance that she's scared too. And she's just not saying anything, you know.

The realization that his mother might be scared of violence because she is Asian, along with the racist actions that became more common as a result of the pandemic, pushed Sean to assert a more Asian identity. He started to say that he was mixed and Asian to others more, in effort to push back on racist views and statements made by others. His Asian identity became more salient, and rose to the forefront in the face of heightened racism against Asians and Asian Americans. He said:

And so, for me, just because I'm the kind of person that I am, it's emboldened me more. I feel like I've referred to myself as being mixed, you know, Korean or being Asian more during the pandemic, and challenged people who have because I do look white passing made incredibly racist comments in front of me...I would, you know, gladly take the term like, social justice warrior as like a compliment.

For Sean, publicly saying that he was Asian was a way to counteract racist comments, perhaps even to avoid having to endure them again. Using the term "emboldened", Sean describes how the threat of violence and racism led him to think differently about his own identity, and express his racial identity in a different way.

### **6.3 "This is the year that I can finally do the things and people will understand them" – Action**

Others described the pandemic and racial tensions laid bare in the United States as having spurred them to action, too. In this section, I show how the men in my study took action in various ways to respond to racial injustice in the United States, and bring attention to system racism. For Alan, increasing violence against Asians and Asian Americans led him to buy a gun. For Sean, he had felt lately that he could challenge racism more directly and openly, taking pride in being a "social justice warrior" (a term which has been used to belittle activists and those openly challenging social inequalities).

It is clear that the pandemic coupled with increased attention to racial inequality encouraged the men in this study to take actions to support racial justice efforts. It was the right moment for these actions, for them to gain attention or have impact. JJ, who is 30 years old, and identifies as white, Black and Asian (Black, Filipino, Italian American) had been working toward a goal of starting a podcast for a couple of years, but decided this was finally the time that it would be successful. He said:

And this year, I was like, this is the year that I can finally do the things and people will understand them in a level on a level that perhaps a year ago, they wouldn't have. And when I say people, I mean, I guess personal to me, my white friends and family. That has drastically changed.

For JJ, this conjuncture of a pandemic and a focus on racial injustice in the United States created an opportunity for him to contribute through launching a podcast. He also felt that it was a time in which he could more openly discuss intersectional issues of inequality with his white people in his life such as friends and family. He hadn't changed, but other people had in their openness to these conversations. Encouraged by the changing social climate, JJ was able to take off his "mask", as he put it, of whiteness. Especially in intimate settings such as family, this is no easy task.

Family proved to be an important setting in which the mixed-race men in this study took action. Tony, for example, described a recent conversation with his mother:

...she actually said, "Yeah, I think the whole Black Lives Matter thing has gone too far now." And we had to have a whole discussion with her, with my own mother, and I was like, "What does that mean to you?" And she's like "Well you know can't blame white people now for the things that they've done in the past" or whatever.

Tony told his mother that while you didn't have to blame white people, you could put that in the context of understanding the privileges of whiteness. He and his mother didn't normally have

conversations like this, but social media had brought the topic to the forefront, as it did for many families during the summer of 2020 and beyond.

For Victor, his action was taken at work with his company. Victor works in arts and entertainment, where there was a great deal of conversation about racial disparities in summer 2020. He talked about a specific effort in the arts during that summer that performers of all kinds signed on to. The group put out a public statement on June 8, 2020, entitled “Dear White American Theater” (We See You White American Theater, 2020) pushing for more equitable working conditions and attention to issues of racial injustice in the arts. Signatories include household names such as Issa Rae and Lin Manuel Miranda. Victor took his own bold actions in his workplace, although he was nervous. After a note was sent to employees (as they were in many companies during that time) regarding efforts toward combatting racism from leadership, he sent a note back:

I wrote an email and I said, you know, “Thank you so much for sharing this communication and I really really hope that you mean what you say when, when Black indigenous people of color are able to speak up and talk without repercussion, I hope you mean that because for, for people like me we have heard this from white people over and over and over again for years and years and years...”

In the end, Victor’s story echoed Tony’s sentiments about performativity in those who attended the protests just to take a picture for social media. Several months later, Victor had simply been told that leadership was considering his message. He felt that this was more evidence of no actual change being made to advance racial justice efforts. He said:

I’ve gotten three other emails from them saying “We’re still thinking about your email. Thank you so much for bringing it to our attention, and we want to formulate an appropriate response to you.” I got that three times. And nothing. And so they’re proving everything I said, where like we’re just being given non-promises, we’re being placated to shut us up.

Victor and Tony's experiences of performativity are not unique after the summer of 2020. Companies and people alike who had never had interest in racial justice before then made statements and social media posts in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. This newfound dedication to dismantling systemic racism and acknowledgement of white privilege was an important tool to maintain the appearance of allyship. While companies were disingenuously making prepared statements about their dedication to racial justice issues, the men in my study were embarking on their own explorations of their role in racial justice movements as mixed-race individuals.

#### **6.4 “...a white experience of the pandemic” – Discomfort**

For some participants, the year 2020 and the many inequalities that were laid bare helped them to reflect on their own racialized, classed and gendered experiences. These reflections were uncomfortable, and often centered on whiteness and privilege. Sebastian is a 27 year old who identifies as white. Yet, his mixed experience man extends beyond just his race, to his intersecting identities. His dad is mestizo, originally from Mexico, but Sebastian is, as he describes it, “very white-passing”. Sebastian notes that he has trouble navigating the dualities of Latinx and white spaces, and does not feel at home in either. He said: “I have difficulty fully navigating both Latinx spaces and non-Latinx white spaces because I don't feel totally understood in either.” I use the term Latinx here because this is the way Sebastian uses it, to refer to his own identity. Latinx is a gender neutral way to refer to Latino/a identity and culture. In expressing that he does not feel understood in either space, Sebastian's description again brings to mind Anzaldúa's ([1987]2012) borderlands theory, where she posits that to survive in the borderlands between dualities such as multiple races, ethnicities, and cultures one must be able to adjust to survive. Sebastian, in constantly navigating between white and Latinx spaces, is having

to survive in the in-between spaces (nepantla). According to Keating (2009:322), nepantleras are those people who “live within and among multiple worlds.” I argue that Anzaldúa’s concept of nepantla is exactly the space that Sebastian describes, in between identities and expectations of both white and Latinx cultures and communities.

Regarding his experience in the past year, he says:

Um I think over the past year in particular, I, well, I think I’ve had a pretty decent, I would say decent, understanding of the way that my whiteness kind of allows me to enter and like move around certain spaces but I think the last year in particular well, frankly, the last four years under the past president have made me very aware of my race and my whiteness in particular and how it protects me and keeps me safe when it very much doesn’t do that for other people. Especially people like I still live in a majority Latino community and so I’m very aware that my experiences are very different from many of my neighbors many of whom have a variety of different immigration statuses and so the fact that I’m white and also a US citizen carries a lot of power.

Sebastian is thoughtful about his whiteness and immigration status privilege, and about the ways in which these have advantaged him throughout the many intersectional injustices in 2020. He reflects that this time has made his mixed identity more salient, and he is now more comfortable with identifying as both white and Latinx. He is very reflective on the role of power in these questions of whiteness. He feels it is his responsibility to be aware of, and use his power to work toward change:

...the events of the past year in particular made me realize all of this is completely made up. And none of it is real. It’s all fake. But it all but it’s all extremely powerful. And is violent in so many ways. And so I’ve had to, like, untangle what all of that really means of like, this is simultaneously completely made up, but it’s also violent in so many ways. And like, how do those things kind of overlay over each other, um, has led to a lot of really interesting and like really fruitful conversations with, with my other white friends and my other mixed-race friends and that have led to like really fruitful conversations, I think have led to meaningful action. That has been really gratifying and really nice to see.

For another participant, Isaac, the conjuncture of the global pandemic and systemic racial injustice did produce feelings of discomfort. Isaac is 29 years old, and identifies as white and Asian. He offers the term “Hapa Haole” for himself, and points to his Chinese, Filipino, Scottish,

and Irish heritage. Like Tony, Issac also turned the lens to his own family and reflected on racism within this setting, noting that he has become less accepting of his Asian grandmother's anti-blackness. Additionally, he specifically highlighted his own class privilege and white privilege to describe discomfort in his own experiences of the pandemic:

So I think it's made me more aware of that, that like, anti-Blackness exists, like in a lot of spaces and across a lot of identities. And, yeah, I've more been thinking about, just like privilege in general that I get to live in a house that I own that I like, I feel safe in a pandemic. I have a job that doesn't require me to be in person and that you know, like our most marginalized groups are also sort of on the frontlines of the pandemic in terms of like being essential workers or, you know, all those kinds of things. So I've been kind of like, processing all of that not so much through, like a multiracial lens, more like in a.... I feel like my experience of the pandemic is probably, like a white experience of the pandemic. And that's definitely like uncomfortable.

Isaac describes his experience of the pandemic as "white", to refer to having housing security, safety, the ability to work from home, and more. This experience was uncomfortable, because it prompted him to reflect on his own privilege. Another participant, Vincent, echoes Isaac's feelings of discomfort in thinking about his own positionality. Vincent is a 34 year old who identifies as white and Asian (Korean). He also makes a point to include multiracial as one of the ways he specifically names his racial identity. Vincent also describes discomfort and self-reflection on his own privileges during the summer of 2020. Yet, as Vincent points out, mixed-race men are also affected by racial injustices and triggered by the events of that summer. He wondered if he was doing enough, but also noted the need for self care during this time. He said:

And I think the other thing that comes to mind is, you know, after everything really exploded at the end of May, and early June, with George Floyd and the BLM protests - I think some of those feelings I described earlier, were also were also prevalent around my Asian-ness, just in terms of like, feeling a lot of tension or guilt, or shame around like, doing enough. Am I doing enough, not doing enough? And I remember like, in the midst of all that my therapist was, was really encouraging me to center myself as a person of color. And I, so much tension with that, I felt so much resistance to that. But I think that was really pivotal for me to, to do that. And, you know, I think I think that, that tension is still there. But I think there is a healthy tension. But I also feel more validated, especially in my POC-ness and my Korean-ness in terms of like, you know, we are also in

reference to all POC folks, including like non-Black POC folks, we are all harmed by white supremacy, we are all impacted by this.

The discomfort that the mixed-race men in my student described is what will hopefully prompt change and the desire to contribute to the movements for racial justice. Ricky sums this up well:

...it just really helped me, the whole pandemic and, you know, all this anti racism discourse just really helped me to just understand, like, my positionality as someone also acting whiteness, um, but then also affirming my Asian-ness. And so, yeah, it's complex, but like, it definitely, like woke me up and made me actually want to do more social justice work. And, and it's about dreaming up a new world together.

## 6.5 Summary

As others such as Chudy and Jefferson (2021) discuss, the mixed-race men interviewed for this study challenge the idea that the summer of 2020 (and beyond) was a racial “reckoning”. Instead, for many, it was a confirmation of the fact that racial injustice underpins their lives in the United States. The many happenings of this time complicated some participants’ understanding of their own identities, and prompted deep self-reflection. Some participants experienced discomfort prompted by their own reflections on instances of racism in their own families. The conjuncture of COVID-19 and systemic racism also prompted the men in my study to reflect on their own privileges, such as class and proximity to whiteness.

The renewed attention to these social issues and related self-reflection offered an opportunity to take action, in various ways. Whether it was writing a letter to company leadership like Victor did, starting a podcast like JJ did, or simply having a conversation with family like Tony, the tumultuous time offered a chance to make a contribution. That’s not to say that the mixed-race men in this study weren’t outraged or afraid for their safety during this time, as is evidenced by Alan purchasing a gun for protection. Or, perhaps they were fearful for their family’s safety, such as Sean’s concerns about his Asian mother being out after dark. Yet this particular moment in time opened an opportunity for the men in my study to figure out what they



could and should do to contribute. Whether that was challenging their own family on their racism, or embarking on a journey to reconcile the dualities of their own mixed-race identity, participants were prompted to action. William, a 30 year old who identifies as white and Asian (Korean, German, Irish, and Scandinavian), offers a poignant statement about this particular era. He describes this time as having "...given me like a fire, or lit a fire of actually wanting to do something."

## 7 CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I have discussed the experiences of mixed-race men in this particular moment in time, during a global pandemic and with racial injustice laid bare in the United States. Their unique narratives shed light on how they navigated racial fluidity, multiraciality, code switching, and more. Using the frameworks of Borderlands theory and Intersectionality, I explore how seventeen mixed-race men navigate their everyday lives and traverse multiple races, ethnicities, and cultures while striving to live authentic lives. This project seeks to make a contribution to the field of Critical Mixed Race Studies, centering the experiences of mixed-race men.

Building on the work of authors who have offered contributions to the study of Black-white biracial men, such as Sims and Joseph-Salisbury (2019), Joseph-Salisbury (2018) and Newman (2019), my study invited participants beyond those who identify as Black-white biracial. Mixed-race men remain understudied, particularly those who are not Black-white biracial. As strmic-pawl (2023:104) notes, “the research on the race-gender intersection for PMA<sup>7</sup> men is largely on Black-White men, often led by the motivating question of why Black-White men are less likely to identify as multiracial.” I wanted to focus on mixed-race men not only because they are understudied, but because, as sociologists, we approach identities intersectionally. It is not possible to study just race (or mixed-race) experiences without considering ethnicity, gender, culture, or class.

In this project, I have offered another look at the lives of mixed-race men, broadening the scope of study beyond Black-white biracial men. The research question (How are mixed-race men navigating multiple racial identities) provided an open ended, qualitative starting point for

---

<sup>7</sup> strmic-pawl (2023: 19) uses the abbreviation “PMA” to refer to “People of Mixed Ancestry”.

this journey into the lives of 17 participants, who carefully wove race, ethnicity, gender, family, community, culture and more into their stories.

### **7.1 Key Findings**

This study covered new ground for the study of multiraciality and masculinity in several ways. Three broad themes emerged for participants: 1) code switching and fluidity, 2) masculinity and multiraciality and 3) the pandemic and racial injustice. Within each of these themes, sub-themes of each were identified. The findings demonstrate how mixed-race men navigate the borders of race, illuminated by theoretical grounding in Borderlands theory and Intersectionality. Studying mixed-race men during the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique opportunity to highlight their experiences during a time of renewed push for racial justice, very prominent racist incidents, and a country (the United States) in turmoil. This represented an important conjuncture (Collins 2019) which laid bare injustices that uniquely affected mixed-race men.

### **7.2 Code Switching & Fluidity**

Mixed-race men engage in code switching using gestures, speech, and more. Yet, participants identify a tension between constant code switching in different contexts, and authenticity. Participants express a desire to be their authentic selves, while still code switching among different contexts, such as family and friend groups. The “chameleon” metaphor for the mixed-race experience was largely rejected by participants. As one participant, James, put it, the chameleon metaphor implies that you are hiding something. The participants in my study were not hiding anything – or any part of their identity. Largely, participants described that they did engage in code switching, whether this was for comfort or necessity, and consciously or not. This shows us that mixed-race men can, and do, navigate racial borders with ease and purpose.

### 7.3 Masculinity & Multiraciality

My study demonstrates that mixed-race men live their lives between and among the borders – of race, culture, and more. Their lives are, as Isaac states, marked by a “comfort level with ambiguity”. The ability to be one’s whole self while resisting the binaries and boundaries of race was evident in participants’ narratives. Participants not only question the rigidity of racialized boundaries, but gendered ones as well. This study has shown that mixed-race men find comfort in the gray areas – and must find their place within these liminal spaces. In addition to making meaning at the intersections of race and gender, participants often talked about navigating expectations of different cultures. Particularly within the context of family, multiracial and multiethnic men must learn to manage different behavioral expectations of masculinity, or what is valued as “masculine”. An example is Ricky’s story, in which he must navigate Indonesian cultural value placed on harmony and U.S. based dominant representations of masculinity in the Trump era.

Included in this chapter is a case study on Kevin, whose story carefully wove not only race and gender but politics and family in the unique context of the southern United States. As the only solely Black-white biracial participant in my study, I chose to highlight Kevin’s story. Kevin’s self-management and identity work around his white “southern” and “country” family demonstrates Joseph-Salisbury (2018)’s concept of Black mixed-race men’s post-racial resilience. Kevin notes that he feels like he must leave his multiracial identity behind when he is with his white family, indicating that he is protecting himself against racism from his family. Kevin’s story demonstrates yet another way in which mixed-race men must reconcile the intersections of multiraciality and masculinity to successfully navigate the gray areas.

My findings also illuminated the specific role that access to whiteness plays for mixed-race men. Mixed-race men such as Isaac and Sebastian are white-passing, and as such benefit from the privileges of whiteness. Yet, this puts them in an incredibly complex place, where they must determine how best to honor their mixed-race identity and simultaneously decenter themselves so as not to take space where they may not be considered “enough” of their non-white identity. Vincent described this as a “...constant internal negotiation around my privileged racial identity...” which results in feeling ashamed of the privilege of whiteness. This is a unique burden for mixed-race men, who must navigate being seen as a white man (a combination of two privileged identities) while also searching for wholeness in the in-between space of multiracial masculinity.

#### **7.4 Pandemic & Racial Injustice**

Collecting data during a global pandemic presented a unique opportunity to study the impacts of this conjuncture (Collins 2019) on mixed-race men’s lives. While the pandemic and simultaneous “racial reckoning” may have been a pivotal point for some to recognize racial inequality in the United States – some of my participants felt that this was not a “reckoning” at all. Instead, the pandemic coupled with the fight for racial justice revealed racism that had been there all along. The racist acts were, as James put it, “...just now being televised.” However, even though racism experienced by many during this time was not surprising, the rise in racist violence against Asian and Asian American people in the United States prompted action for some participants. For example, realizing for the first time that his mixed-race Asian mother was afraid to be out after dark prompted Sean to lean into his multiracial identity. This was a way to resist. Sebastian, similarly, developed a deeper understanding of his white privilege and the ways he benefits from being white passing because of the prominent racism in last few years (during

the Trump presidency and the pandemic). In short, the inequalities exposed by the conjuncture of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted participants to reconsider their own identities, and how to protect their families. In addition to thinking more deeply about their own identities, mixed-race men considered the ways that whiteness benefits them, and what action they could take now. This particular moment in time in which I collected data for this study provided a rare data point that was unexpected, and proved very useful to frame the overall mixed-race experience for these men.

### **7.5 Limitations**

This study has two key methodological limitations, both related to the sampling frame. The first limitation was an intentional methodological choice which acted as a double-edged sword, so to speak. In my advertisement for participants, I wanted to intentionally recruit those who identified as multiracial men. Therefore, my advertisement stated as such. However, this could exclude men who did not identify as mixed-race (but had parents of different races, for example). They would not, perhaps, have thought this population included them. This was an intentional choice that I made with the understanding that it could exclude a portion of the mixed-race population who simply do not identify as mixed-race but might, for example, still check multiple boxes on the census questionnaire if given one. In doing this, I wanted to ensure that I recruited participants who had previously thought about being mixed-race, and thus could speak to their experiences with this framing. Although this is a limitation, it is also an important methodological choice for me that I argue provided the context for the data I sought to collect. In contrast to Davenport (2018:193), for example, who defines biracial as "...having one parent of one race/ethnicity and the other parent of a different race/ethnicity...", I sought to recruit

participants who reflect the multiplicities of mixed-race identity rather than limit the sampling frame in this way.

The second limitation that is important to the overall findings in this study is the proportion of one racial mixture in the sampling frame – 10 of the 17 participants identified (using “checkbox” categories only) as white and Asian. This is more than 50 percent of participants in the study. While I did not seek out white and Asian biracial people intentionally, this is a population that featured prominently in my study and thus shapes my findings immensely. One possible reason for the skewed sampling frame is a reflection of myself as the researcher, whose identifiably Chinese last name was on the call for participants. Important to the understanding of this limitation, however, is that the “checkbox answers” to the race question do not tell the whole story, and in this case I argue provide a counterargument to this limitation.

For example, Nick, a participant who selected white and Asian when provided with checkboxes, elaborated in the open-ended text box (emphasis mine): “I identify as a mixed-race person of Filipino and Dutch American ancestry. *Filipino is characterized as Asian by the census though I feel poorly characterized by the label.* My grandmother on my father’s side identified as Dutch, but by all means, our family simply identifies as American.” Echoing Nick’s feelings about inclusion of Filipino in the checkbox category of Asian, Anthony Ocampo (2016:11-12) writes about Filipinos in Los Angeles: “They are neither black nor white; rather, they have vacillated between identifying with Asian American and Latino communities. Filipinos know they are considered Asian, but the cultural residuals of their Spanish colonial past – their surnames, their foods, their strict Catholicism – cannot be ignored either.” Indeed, Ocampo’s (2016) book is entitled “The Latinos of Asia: How Filipino Americans Break the Rules of Race.” Isaac, another participant, identified as Hapa Haole – Chinese, Filipino, Scottish and Irish – but

when presented initially with checkboxes, selected white and Asian. Another participant, Lee, selected white and Asian when given checkboxes, but wrote more detail subsequently: “Chinese, Scottish, Irish, English, Native American (Cherokee and Choctaw).” When given the opportunity to provide more detail, we can see that Lee includes Native American in his detailed response, but when given checkboxes, simply selected white and Asian. Thus, as those of us who study multiraciality know all too well, checkboxes are insufficient in telling the story of our participants.

### **7.6 Suggestions for future research**

Although this project is not the first nor last to make mixed-race men the focal point, it is my hope that with this work I have made a contribution that enriches the ways in which we understand the lived experiences of mixed-race men. In this study, mixed-race men are neither an afterthought nor part of a larger dataset – they are the center of this study. Findings from this study show us that mixed-race men are deserving of further specialized study, rather than as an add-on or passing mention. It is my hope that future researchers will continue to focus on the intersections of race and gender, specifically masculinity and multiraciality. Building on my research, I hope to see future projects investigate the role of social class in mixed-race men’s lives. The majority of my participants were highly educated, with fifteen holding a bachelor’s degree or higher degree, which may be one reason why social class was not as prominent in my discussion. I also hope that future research considers the role of community, neighborhoods and where participants live as a part of the discussion of mixed-race masculinity. The experience of living in a California “multiracial belt” (Park, Myers and Wei: 2001) where the population of mixed-race people is very high may lead to very different lived experiences for multiracial men. In my study, seven of seventeen participants considered California or Hawaii to be home, both of



which have very high multiracial populations comparatively (Park, Myers and Wei 2001). This, I argue, could materially impact both their experiences and their likelihood to have identified as multiracial (thus likelihood of participating in my study). Finally, I simply hope that more scholarship centers mixed-race men and their distinctive lived experiences, and resists the treatment of “mixed-race” as a monolith without attention to gender and other important intersections.

## REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. ([1987] 2012). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1993. "Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera." Pp. 176-186 in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, edited by AnaLouise Keating. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Associated Press. 2021. "A Man Accused of Killing 8 in Atlanta Area Spa Shootings Pleads Guilty to 4 Deaths." NPR. July 27. <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/27/1021144933/georgia-man-pleading-guilty-to-4-of-8-atlanta-area-spa-killings>.
- Bradshaw, Carla K. 1992. "Beauty and the Beast: On Racial Ambiguity." Pp. 77-88 in *Racially Mixed People in America*, edited by M. Root. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke. 2013. *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Cantú, Norma E. and Aída Hurtado. 2012. "Breaking Borders/ Constructing Bridges: Twenty-Five Years of Borderlands/La Frontera." Pp. 3-13 in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell and John Lee. 1985. "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." *Theory and Society* 14(5):551-604. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657315>.
- Chang, Aurora. 2014. "Identity Production in Figured Worlds: How Some Multiracial Students Become Racial Atravesados/As." *The Urban Review* 46(1):25-46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-013-0247-4>.
- Chang, Aurora., Rachel Martin and Eric Marrapodi. 2020. "Summer Of Racial Reckoning." *NPR*, August 16. <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/16/902179773/summer-of-racial->

reckoning-the-match-lit

- Charmaraman, Linda, Meghan Woo, Ashley Quach and Sumru Erkut. 2014. "How Have Researchers Studied Multiracial Populations? A Content and Methodological Review of 20 Years of Research." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 20(3):336-52. doi: 10.1037/a0035437.
- Chavez, Koji and Adia Harvey Wingfield. 2018. "Racializing Gendered Interactions." Pp. 185-97 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*, 2nd ed., edited by B. J. Risman, C. M. Froyum, and W. J. Scarborough. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Chou, Rosalind S. 2012. *Asian American Sexual Politics: The Construction of Race, Gender, and Sexuality*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Chudy, Jennifer and Hakeem Jefferson. 2021. "Support for Black Lives Matter Surged Last Year. Did It Last?" *New York Times*, May 21. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/22/opinion/blm-movement-protests-support.html>
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1986. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33(6):S14-S32. doi: 10.2307/800672.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2019. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Connell, R. W. 2005. *Masculinities*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W. and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19(6):829-59. Doi: 10.1177/0891243205278639.
- Daniel, G. Reginald, Laura Kina, Wei Ming Dariotis and Camilla Fojas. 2014. "Emerging

- Paradigms in Critical Mixed-race Studies.” *Journal of Critical Mixed-Race Studies* 1(1): 6-65. <https://doi.org/10.5070/C811013868>.
- Davenport, Lauren D. 2016. “The Role of Gender, Class, and Religion in Biracial Americans’ Racial Labeling Decisions.” *American Sociological Review* 81(1):57-84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122415623286>.
- Davenport, Lauren D. 2018. *Politics Beyond Black and White: Biracial Identity and Attitudes in America*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. 2017. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. New York: New York University Press.
- Demby, Gene. 2013. “How Code-Switching Explains the World.” Code Switch, *NPR*, April 8. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/04/08/176064688/how-code-switching-explains-the-world>.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. [1903] 2014. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Millennium Publications.
- Ebert, Roger. 1993. “Reviews – M. Butterfly.” *Roger-Ebert.com*, October 8. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/m-butterfly-1993>.
- Figueras, Ligaya. 2020. “Chinese Restaurants See Steep Drop in Business Amid Fear of Coronavirus Outbreak in Atlanta.” Atlanta Restaurants & Food, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 8. <https://www.ajc.com/blog/atlanta-restaurants/chinese-restaurants-see-steep-drop-business-amid-fear-coronavirus-outbreak-atlanta/rDciJZnqNfQCLXeaEIEdCN/#>
- Harris, David R and Jeremiah Joseph Sim. 2002. “Who Is Multiracial? Assessing the Complexity of Lived Race.” *American Sociological Review* 67(4):614-27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3088948>.

- Harris, Jessica C. 2016. "Toward a Critical Multiracial Theory in Education." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 29(6):795-813.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1162870>.
- Harris, Will. 2019. *Mixed-Race Superman: Keanu, Obama, and Multiracial Experience*.  
Brooklyn, NY: Melville House.
- Hurtado, Aída and Mrinal Sinha. 2016. *Beyond Machismo: Intersectional Latino Masculinities*.  
Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Joseph-Salisbury, Remi. 2018. *Black Mixed-Race Men: Transatlanticity, Hybridity and 'Post-Racial' Resilience*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Joseph-Salisbury, Remi. 2019. "Wrangling with the Black Monster: Young Black Mixed-Race Men and Masculinities." *The British Journal of Sociology* 70(5):1754-73.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12670>
- Keating, AnaLouise, ed. 2009. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Kellogg, Angela H. and Debora L. Liddell. 2012. "'Not Half but Double': Exploring Critical Incidents in the Racial Identity of Multiracial College Students." *Journal of College Student Development* 53(4):524-541. doi: 10.1353/csd.2012.0054.
- Khanna, Nikki. 2010. "If You're Half Black, You're Just Black': Reflected Appraisals and the Persistence of the One-Drop Rule." *The Sociological Quarterly* 51(1):96-121.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2009.01162.x>.
- Kynčlová, Tereza Jiroutová. 2014. "Elastic, Yet Unyielding: The U.S.-Mexico Border and Anzaldúa's Oppositional Rearticulations of the Frontier." Special Issue: Transnational

- Approaches to North American Regionalism. *European Journal of American Studies* 9-3:1-17. doi: 10.4000/ejas.10384.
- Lee, Jennifer and Frank D Bean. 2004. "America's Changing Color Lines: Immigration, Race/Ethnicity, and Multiracial Identification." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:221-42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29737692>.
- Lee, Jennifer and Frank D. Bean. 2007. "Reinventing the Color Line – Immigration and America's New Racial/Ethnic Divide." *Social Forces* 86(2):561-86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20430754>.
- Lenne, Kostia. 2019. "Constructing, Negotiating, and Performing Chicano Manhood as a Borderland Masculinity." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34(1):1-16. doi: 10.1080/08865655.2016.1257364.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. 2013. "Intersectionality as Method: A Note." *Signs* 38(4):1019-30. doi: 10.1086/669570.
- MacLin, Otto H. and Roy S. Malpass. 2001. "Racial Categorization of Faces: The Ambiguous Race Face Effect." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 7(1):98-118. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8971.7.1.98>.
- Messerschmidt, James W. 2018. *Hegemonic Masculinity: Formulation, Reformulation and Amplification*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Messner, Michael A. 1992. *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Miville, Marie L, Madonna G Constantine, Matthew F Baysden and Gloria So-Lloyd. 2005. "Chameleon Changes: An Exploration of Racial Identity Themes of Multiracial People."

- Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52(4):507-16. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.4.507>.
- Museus, Samuel D., Susan A. Lambe Sariñana and Tasha Kawamata Ryan. 2015. "A Qualitative Examination of Multiracial Students' Coping Responses to Experiences with Prejudice and Discrimination in College." *Journal of College Student Development* 56(4):331-48. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2015.0041>.
- Newman, Alyssa M. 2019. "Desiring the Standard Light Skin: Black Multiracial Boys, Masculinity and Exotification." *Identities* 26(1):107-25. doi: 10.1080/1070289X.2017.1377420.
- Ocampo, Anthony Christian. 2016. *The Latinos of Asia: How Filipino Americans Break the Rules of Race*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 2015. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Otter.ai, Inc. 2022. *Otter.ai*. 2022. <https://otter.ai/>
- Park, Julie., Dowell Myers and Liang Wei. 2001. *Multiracial Patterns in California by County*. Race Contours 2000 Study: A University of Southern California and University of Michigan Collaborative Project. [https://bpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.usc.edu/dist/6/210/files/2018/08/2001\\_Park-Myers-Wei\\_Multiracial-Patterns-by-County-CA-2gla4ue.pdf](https://bpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.usc.edu/dist/6/210/files/2018/08/2001_Park-Myers-Wei_Multiracial-Patterns-by-County-CA-2gla4ue.pdf)
- Pew Research Center. 2015. "Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse, and Growing in Numbers." Washington, DC. [https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/06/2015-06-11\\_multiracial-in-america\\_final-updated.pdf](https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/06/2015-06-11_multiracial-in-america_final-updated.pdf)
- QSR International Pty. Ltd. 2018. *Nvivo 12*. (Version 12.7.0).

<https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>

- Reece, Robert L. 2019. "Coloring Racial Fluidity: How Skin Tone Shapes Multiracial Adolescents' Racial Identity Changes." *Race and Social Problems* 11(4):290-98. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-019-09269-w>.
- Rios, Victor M. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: New York University Press.
- Rockquemore, Kerry Ann and David L. Brunsma. 2002. "Social Embedded Identities: Theories, Typologies, and Processes of Racial Identity Among Black/ White Biracials." *The Sociological Quarterly*, 43(3):335-56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2002.tb00052.x>
- Rockquemore, Kerry Ann and David L. Brunsma. 2008. *Beyond Black: Biracial Identity in America*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Saperstein, Aliya and Andrew M. Penner. 2012. "Racial Fluidity and Inequality in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 118(3):676-727. doi: 10.1086/667722.
- Schilling, Dave. 2016. "Kobe Bryant's 'Light-Skinned' Remark Hints at NBA's Peculiar Racial Politics." Sport. *The Guardian*, January 6. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jan/06/kobe-bryant-steph-curry-light-skinned-remark-hints-at-nbas-peculiar-racial-politics>.
- Segura, Denise A and Patricia Zavella. 2008. "Introduction: Gendered Borderlands." *Gender & Society* 22(5), 537-44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243208321520>.
- Sims, Jennifer Patrice. 2012. "Beautiful Stereotypes: The Relationship between Physical Attractiveness and Mixed-Race Identity." *Identities* 19(1):61-80. doi: 10.1080/1070289X.2012.672838.



- Sims, Jennifer Patrice and Remi Joseph-Salisbury. 2019. “ ‘We Were All Just the Black Kids’: Black Mixed-Race Men and the Importance of Adolescent Peer Groups for Identity Development”. *Social Currents* 6(1):51-66. doi: 10.1177/2329496518797840.
- Sims, Jennifer Patrice, Whitney Laster Pirtle and Iris Johnson-Arnold. 2020. "Doing Hair, Doing Race: The Influence of Hairstyle on Racial Perception Across the US." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43(12):2099-119. doi: 10.1080/01419870.2019.1700296.
- strmic-pawl, hepzibah v. 2023. *Multiracial: The Kaleidoscope of Mixedness*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. *2020 Census Questionnaire*. [https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/technical-documentation/questionnaires.2020\\_Census.html](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/technical-documentation/questionnaires.2020_Census.html)
- Useem, Ruth Hill and Richard D Downie. [1976] 2011. “Third Culture Kids.” Pp. 18-24 in *Writing Out of Limbo: International Childhoods, Global Nomads and Third Culture Kids*, edited by Gene H. Bell-Villada, Nina Sichel with Faith Elise and Elaine Neil Orr. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Vasquez, Jessica M. 2010. "Blurred Borders for Some but Not ‘Others’: Racialization, ‘Flexible Ethnicity,’ Gender, and Third-Generation Mexican American Identity." *Sociological Perspectives* 53(1):45-71. doi: 10.1525/sop.2010.53.1.45.
- We See You White American Theater. 2020. “Dear White American Theater.” June 8. <https://www.weseeyouwat.com/statement>.

**APPENDICES****Appendix A**

## Demographic Pre-Survey

Some interview questions below (noted with asterisk\*) draw inspiration from Davenport (2018)'s interview guide as presented in her work on biracial people in the United States. Survey was provided to participants when they contact to express interest in the study.

Email: (This will be used to identify your survey submission. You will later be assigned a pseudonym for purposes of this study)

How old are you?

What is your occupation?

Where do you consider to be home?

Where do you live now?

What is your educational background?

\*Describe the neighborhood you grew up in:

\*What language (or languages) do you speak?

<sup>8</sup>Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

- Yes

- No

What is your race? Select all that apply:

- White

- Black or African American

---

<sup>8</sup> This question about ethnicity and the next about race are based on the United States Census 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) questions about race and ethnicity. These questions are, however, less detailed than those in the Census 2020, to allow for more open-ended response from the participant in a subsequent question.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
- Some other race (write in box)

Provide any descriptions or words that provide more detail about:

Your race & ethnicity:

Your gender:

Your family:

## Appendix B

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

NOTE: Some interview questions below (noted with asterisk\*) are taken directly from or draw inspiration from Davenport (2018)'s interview guide as presented in her work on biracial people in the United States. Not all questions were asked to each participant, as the interview was semi-structured.

Begin interview by telling the participant: Thank you for agreeing to this interview! I'm really excited to be working on this project, as I'm a mixed race person myself, and really interested in highlighting the experiences of mixed race people. I have just a few notes to go over before we start. The informed consent that was included in the pre-survey included some important information, which includes the fact that you may choose to stop this interview at any time, or to not participate in the study. We will assign you a pseudonym to protect your identity as part of this process. As we go through these questions, please try not to share information that could identify other people, such as names. Did you have any questions before we begin?

1. Just to start with, can you give me a few words that come to mind to describe the experience of being [mixed-race, or multiracial] or [the words they used on their survey]?
2. We're going to start with a few questions about what your experiences were growing up:
3. Tell me when you first realized that you were mixed-race [or multiracial]?
4. Was there an age or period of time at which you started identifying as mixed-race?
  - a. [If yes], when was this and how did you come to start identifying this way?
  - b. [If no], what was your earliest age and memory you have of identifying as mixed-race?

5. \*Can you tell me about the language (or languages) that were spoken in your home growing up?
6. What about the language (or languages) you use the most now?
7. What are your earliest memories of masculinity that you had growing up?
8. \*How did your family talk about being mixed-race/multiracial?
9. I'd like to ask you a few questions about the specific experiences of being a \_\_\_\_\_ (identity of participant in their words, eg. Mixed-race man or multiracial man).
10. What, if anything, do you think is unique about being [mixed-race or multiracial]?
11. What does being a man mean to you?
12. What, if anything, do you think is unique about the experience of being a mixed-race man in particular?
13. As a man, what are expectations for you to identify racially?
14. How would you describe, if any, pressure to identify as one race?
15. Do you know any mixed-race women, in your family or otherwise? How is their experience, if at all, different for them?
16. \*How do others address your [multiracial or mixed-race] identity?
  - a. How do you react?
17. \*How do you describe your racial identity to others?
18. \*Does the way you describe your race, or think about your race, ever change? Or does it always stay the same?
19. \*Do you have friend or family groups of different races and/or ethnicities? Please describe them.

- a. \*How does your behavior change, if at all, around those different groups of people?
20. What role do you think money plays in how people see your race?
21. Given that there is a global pandemic, many people are quarantined or with family. At the same time, there has been a national reckoning regarding racial disparities in the United States. In what ways, if at all, have either of these affected the way you think about or express your racial identity?
22. Now I'd like to talk a little bit about navigating being [mixed-race or multiracial]:
- a. How would you describe being mixed-race? Is there a metaphor you would use to describe being mixed-race, that would help someone understand what the experience is like?
    - i. [if they struggle to provide a metaphor, go on to prompt with some of the below:
    - ii. Would you say that being mixed-race is like being "in between"?
    - iii. Would you say that you can think of race as a border, with multiple races being on either side of the border?
    - iv. If not, how would you describe being mixed-race?
23. Sometimes I think of race as a border, or borderland, that I have to navigate every day. Some days I am in between the two sides, some days I am on one side of the border.
- a. If you think of race [as a border or set of borders that you can cross over] or [their own metaphor], how do you navigate those borders [or the boundaries of race in the metaphor]? How do you cross them?
24. What actions do you take, if any, to demonstrate your inclusion in a particular race?

25. Now, a little bit of a story: If you imagine someone, we'll call them Sam, [change to Joe if the participant's name is Sam], is a mixed-race guy, let's say college - age. As far as race, he's pretty light skinned. It's hard to tell what race he is. He gets asked a lot of questions about his race, even from people who are his friends. He's also not super sure how to answer those questions, since it's hard to tell by looking at him and sometimes how he thinks about his race changes, even for himself. What advice do you have?
26. If you had (or have) a multiracial child that is a boy, how do you raise them? What do you teach them about race?
27. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

## Appendix C

### Pilot Study Brief Summary

N = 2, participants recruited from groups related to mixed-race identity.

Participant 1: 37 year old, works in education.

Participant 2: 46 years old, works in technology.

Themes identified in both transcripts:

1. **Being able to be on both sides of the racial borderlands in some way**, with Participant 2 describing that they navigate the border "...right down the middle...", and Participant 1 noting "I can navigate both worlds...".
2. **Resistance against what people expect their identity to be**, such as for Participant 2, intentionally giving the wrong racial identities in response to questions about their racial identity. For Participant 1, resistance was described more in terms of response to filling out surveys, for example, in which they might select Black, or other, depending on what is easier. They described that they would sometimes talk about their multiraciality because "...I need to educate people about the fact that we're not just one".
3. **Perceived differences between mixed-race femininity and masculinity**, with Participant 1 describing that for women, there seemed to be "...a lot more room to be who you want to be", and Participant 2 describing that mixed-race women "...seem to be more fetishized than mixed-race guys".



**Appendix D**

## Full Demographic Table

Pseudonym	How old are you?	Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?	What is your race? Select all that apply: White,Black or African American,Asian,Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
Victor	42	Yes	White,Black or African American,Asian
JJ	30	No	White,Black or African American,Asian
Tony	40	No	White,Black or African American,Asian
Kevin	22	No	White,Black or African American
Vincent	34	No	White,Asian,Other (multiracial) <sup>9</sup>
Nick	22	No	White,Asian
Alan	26	No	White,Asian
Matthew	28	No	White,Asian
Isaac	29	No	White,Asian
Lee	30	No	White,Asian
William	30	No	White,Asian
Sam	31	No	White,Asian
Simon	32	No	White,Asian

<sup>9</sup> For Vincent's checkbox answers, I included him in the number of participants who identified as White and Asian, rather than treating multiracial (other) as a separate category. This is because the overall project was centered on multiraciality, so all participants (including Vincent) in some way identified with multiraciality. In addition, Vincent's experiences and identity as a multiracial person were honored throughout the project through his qualitative responses to the open-ended race question.

Ricky	38	No	White,Asian White,American Indian or Alaska
Sean	37	No	Native,Asian
Sebastian	27	Yes	White
James	39	No	Black or African American,Asian