

M R K C

MULTIRACIAL KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY



Navigating Borderland Communities in a Monolithic Paradigm

NASPA MultiRacial Knowledge Community E-Book
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MultiRacial KC

A Letter from the Research and Scholarship Co-Coordinator

Dear Community,

As a relatively new knowledge community, the MultiRacial Knowledge Community constantly seeks ways to empower and help build community among its members; so, in 2015, the “MRKC iBook project” came to fruition. This year, we are ecstatic to bring back the E-Book, in hopes that we can address the ongoing conversation, what does it mean to find community in monolithic paradigms?

Over the last year the MRKC leadership has grappled with what it means to uplift and support two distinct communities, both of which are often excluded from larger racial narratives and conversations. In choosing this theme, “Navigating Borderlands: Finding Community in Monolithic Paradigms,” we hoped to capture the nuanced experiences of both transracial adoptees and multiracial people.

We would like to acknowledge the work of Gloria E. Anzaldúa and her work on *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and the parallels our communities are able to draw upon to support in contextualizing our experiences. As Asian American transracial/transnational adoptees, we are deeply drawn to Anzaldúa’s (1987) Borderlands Theory. While our experiences differ from the one’s Anzaldúa discusses in her work, we resonate with much of what she speaks of and see the parallels between our different experiences. We feel it is important and timely to share these stories.

This year’s E-Book includes a culmination of scholarly essays and research pieces, personal reflections and narratives, and poems and spoken word. Each piece amplifies the experiences and voices of multiracial students and transracial adoptees, as well as the challenges in navigating a borderland community.

We are so grateful for the time and energy that brought this to fruition. We hope you not only enjoy but can take these stories forward with you in both your personal and professional experiences.

With love and in solidarity,

Willa Mei Kurland and Hannah Hyun White
2019-2021 MRKC Research and Scholarship Co-Coordinator

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we would like to thank all our contributing authors. Thank you for your time, energy, love, and labor that you have put into crafting these deeply personal and powerful pieces of work. This ongoing conversation about finding community in monolithic paradigms would not be possible without each of you. We also want to recognize that many of these pieces are written or inspired by your own truths and experiences, and it is a privilege to be able to read each of these pieces and have a glimpse into your narrative.

We would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to our fellow MRKC Leadership Team members that supported us in the editing and feedback process. To Abby Chien, Caleb Howell, Sharon Jackson, and Sara Kan-Caldwell, thank you for your time and care in providing thoughtful feedback and edits and supporting us unconditionally during the creation of this year's E-Book.

Lastly, we would like to recognize Selina Bustillos; one of MRKC's Communication Co-ordinators. Selina took our vision for this year's E-Book and made it a reality. There are no words to express how truly grateful we are to the time and energy she put into creating this beautiful E-Book. Thank you, Selina for your trust and patience in us.

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Dear Mixed Girl, and other inner discourse I once thought I would never vocalize

Lorene Fisher
University of California, Merced

Dear Mixed Girl,

The not black enough, not white enough, no one even knows you're Syrian girl,
The desperate to know your roots girl,
The exotic-looking green-eyed girl,
The "Black on the outside, white on the inside"
Oreo girl,

If only you knew...

That you are more than enough,
That straddling multiple worlds leads you to a profession of helping others to see that they are enough,
That one day people would come to know you for your creative mind, and not only for your eyes,
That you have been enough since the day you first kicked inside your momma's belly.

I ask you, dear Mixed Girl,

Why do you doubt your beauty? Why do you question your worth?
Who told you that you couldn't achieve your dreams?
And why would you believe them?
Do you not know all that your ancestors overcame for you to be where you are now?

Dear Mixed Girl,

You're going to have a lot of questions in this life...
"Why doesn't my body look like theirs? How come I can't get it to look that way?"
"Why won't this teacher ever give me an A, when I know for a fact, I deserve it?"
"How come I've never met my Black side of the family? What's Momma keeping me from?"
"Why?"

"Will Daddy ever love the whole me? Does he know the whole me? Will I ever get to tell him about my work and my passions?"

"Am I good enough?"

"Am I black enough?"

"Am I enough?"

Dear Mixed Girl,

I want to tell you a story. I want you to be prepared. During my first semester at university, I was told and shown in a million ways that my Black, Mixed body and voice was not welcome in just any space. In dance classes, being told I wasn't selected for performances because my body wouldn't fit the costume well, because I needed to lose weight, or because they were looking for a certain aesthetic (a.k.a. 7 white dancers garbed in white). In math class, no matter how many times I raised my hand, to ask questions or to provide answers, I was never called upon...

In English class, I consistently received lesser grades than my peers on papers. Why? My teacher told me to my face that she didn't agree with my argument in an argumentative essay. I asked for feedback on my writing quality and she could give none, and then I was told not to come back to office hours.

In my residence hall, wow, were some of my hallmates great... we formed a community rather instantly. My residence hall sitting smack dab in the middle of Greek Row, however – not so fantastic or welcoming. Daily, I would walk out the front door of my hall and be confronted by a sea of white faces in nearly indistinguishable attire, A constant reminder that even if I wanted to, I could never be a 'typical Greek' student. And did I mention that our Black, Hispanic, and multicultural

Greek orgs didn't have any houses or even dedicated spaces on campus?

Riding my bike through campus, being pulled over by a police car, who questioned me for 10 minutes and threatened to ticket me every time he saw me not make a full stop at a stop sign ON MY BIKE... on a ONE-WAY street?!

And my most memorable experience of freshman year...

After these moments had occurred, I went to a Black Student Union general body meeting. The topic of discussion was "the black experience on our predominately-white campus."

After listening to my peers, I was ready to share and engage. I dove into the conversation...

"Actually, I had a... –" and before I could speak another word, I look across the room to my black male peer who excitedly cut me off to say "Actually, you're not black enough to speak in this conversation. It's fine that you're here to listen. But you don't really get it."

And there it was... not just racism and bias across campus, but colorism and divisiveness in my own community would determine my experience in my first semester at university.

I had thought it too many times before – "Am I black enough?" but to hear it come out of a stranger's mouth, "you're not black enough," I started to wonder not if, but how true this was.

"the world does not want the dissonance that your existence creates"

Don't worry, dear Mixed Girl, not every college story is a sad one... or frustrating or angry or whatever you might be feeling right now. That semester felt like it took forever, but looking back, it was a meaningful, yet passing moment that

launched me into my purpose of wanting to create truly inclusive intersectional spaces for students – spaces where no one has to pick and choose which identity they want to claim for that day or space...

I had no idea at the time that I would end up working in Student Affairs, no idea that I would come to work in the office of Social Justice Initiatives.

So much of that young me wished I could see a difference made then and there. I'm betting you're hoping so, too.

Dear Mixed Girl,
Change takes time.

The changes you will seek involve changing hearts and minds first, and that is no easy feat.

It will be worth it though –

The fight

The struggles

Those defining moments

You will learn so much from every microaggression, from every act of bias and prejudice

From every judgment of your worth that is not made by you.

You will find others, what society terms "marginalized community" members, to cope with, to grow with, to build with, to fight with (fight for change that is),

And you will THRIVE!

Only if and when you take the deep look into your heart and realize your own worth,

When you look back at all that you have accomplished amidst the hateful words and exclusionary acts,

When you realize that taking up space is not something to be fearful of or sorry for, but something you should be proud of and feel powerful for.

The racist actions and hateful words won't disappear in a day, dear Mixed Girl.

I want you to be prepared, because no matter how

hard I fight, I can't change this world in a day.
 You will do great things (like join a historically black sorority),
 And you will hear some negative reactions (like your dad saying 'why are you doing all these black things? You're white too!')

But how do you tell your father that no matter what you are made of, the world labels you based off the color of your skin, when they look at your face and define your livelihood by their first perception. He just thinks you're ashamed to be white... he's hurt. Not your intention, but it's a good question – are you?

You will do things that your family hasn't done before (like receive two degrees by the age of 23 and then move across the country to work),
 And your family will do their best to support you (like your momma making the 3-day nonstop road trip with you),
 And not every plan will work out the way you'd like it to. That's a good thing. It means there's more out there – more places, more jobs to explore, more people to help, more impacts to make. This time the question is – what are you afraid of?

Prepare, dear Mixed Girl, for the hurt and the hate.
 Prepare, dear Mixed Girl, for the joy and the love.
 You will get it all, you will feel it all, and you will turn every moment into gold and glory. But dear Mixed Girl, don't you forget
 To blur those borders and boundaries you're told to live within.
 You are the rainbow, you are deserved of love, you have the ability to change and make change.
 You are Mixed, yes; mixed with love and power and cultural wealth and resilience and tenacity and knowledge and purpose.

I tell you these stories because you deserve answers, dear Mixed Girl, but not to those questions you asked.
 Instead, ask these questions of yourself...
 Why do you believe the lies you were told about Whiteness?

What's stopping you from sharing your passions?
 How can you use your experiences and questions to help other people?
 How did you come to know your body as different?
 Why do you label your curves as bad, when every ebb and flow of your skin is a gift?
 Did you tell those teachers your worth? Your goals? Your dreams? Your capability?
 Why do you feel alone when you are surrounded by people who care for you?
 Did you advocate for yourself? For others?
 Do you understand what liberation and authenticity really mean?
 What can you do? What are you going to do?

“... coming from a mosaic of racial realities has given me the strength to connect beyond borders and class and mirrored images.”

Oh Mixed Girl,
 I was once you.
 I, a Mixed Girl, had to learn that the world does not want the dissonance that your existence creates.
 I had to learn that the world you are surrounded by is afraid of your greatness. Your greatness means change and progress.
 I, a Mixed Girl, had to push past the doubt and fear of never fitting in. I found a community of people who love me without bounds and realized fitting in was the equivalent to giving up your brilliance, and therefore, was never really the goal.
 Speaking of goals, I, a Mixed Girl, accomplished my goals and made new ones!
 I can only imagine my grandmother's smile if she were here to see this black girl mixed girl magic!
 I, a Mixed Girl, discovered my worth (but I'll

be honest with you dear Mixed Girl, reminding myself of my worth is a daily process when existing in a world where your worth is negotiated and determined by the color of your skin).

I, a Mixed Girl, now know that coming from a mosaic of racial realities has given me the strength to connect beyond borders and class and mirrored images.

I, a Mixed Girl, pray that you a mixed girl feel whole in your existence.

I, a Mixed Girl, hope that this world gets over their fears and embraces you and the strength and wisdom you possess in every vein of your body and through every breath you take.

I, a Mixed Girl, dream of a future where every human being feels seen, heard, valued, empowered, and purposeful.

I, a Mixed Girl, feel for you, dear Mixed Girl. You are not alone.

Dear Mixed Girl,
I love you.
I believe in you.
I'm proud of you.
I won't give up on you.
I am you.
Let's fight for change.

about the author

Hailing from Chino, CA and currently calling Merced, CA home, Lorene Fisher is a multiracial Black cisgender straight woman of faith and brings the lens of her personal experiences into her everyday work. She holds a B.F.A. in Dance, minors in Africana Studies and Business Administration, and an M.A. in Higher Education from the University of Arizona. Currently, Lorene serves a Coordinator for Social Justice Initiatives and Identity Programs at the University of California, Merced, is a dance instructor for STEPS Dance Studio in Atwater, CA, and is working to develop services as an Equity & Inclusion consultant and trainer. Lorene hopes to inform and influence change agents across the nation through social justice education and creative leadership opportunities so that together, we can transform our communities, especially on college campuses, into inclusive hubs for culturally-relevant leadership, innovation, and social change.

RESEARCH

2

Transgressing Borders and Embracing the In-Between: A Transracial Asian American Adoptee's Autoethnographic Reflection Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa

Aeriel A. Ashlee
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In the opening pages of her autoethnographic work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa (1987) contends that "borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them" (p. 25). As a transracial adoptee, who is as an Asian American Person of Color adopted and raised in a White family, I have long wrestled with the rigidity of borders. For most of my conscious life, I have wondered what it means to exist culturally as part of *us* (my White adoptive family) and racially as part of *them* (Asians in America). This duality of identities has been a source of dissonance, depression, and a drive to discover more about myself. This essay chronicles my autoethnographic exploration of my borderland identity as a transracial adoptee. My journey, inspired and guided by Gloria Anzaldúa, has emboldened me to (re)consider my racialized experience as an asset full of insight rather than a deviation void of value. This process has been healing and liberating, and so I offer these reflections as an expression of gratitude to Anzaldúa and as an invitation to other transracial adoptees to transgress borders and embrace the in-between.

Flowing back and forth between Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* (1987) and my own explorations of how race is defined and constructed, this essay traverses across and between time, language, and identity. According to Chang (2008), autoethnography "transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (p. 43). This paper, featuring "intentional self-reflexivity" (p. 45), is a research process that layers my own autoethnographic narrative with an investigation of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* as

a framework of empowerment for transracial adoptees.

Before delving into this creative scholarly endeavor, I am compelled to describe my rationale for examining *Borderlands* in relation to my experience and the broader cultural demographic of transracial adoptees. This is important to acknowledge given that Anzaldúa was a scholar of Chicana cultural theory, feminist theory, and queer theory, and not an adoption studies or Asian American researcher. According to Orozco-Mendoza (2008), Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* is "a project of resistance ... to guide the inner self of a colonized person in its struggle to achieve decolonization and liberation" (p. 3). This is consistent with the goal of my research agenda, which is to facilitate healing and liberation. In this particular project, I seek to challenge colonial, monoracial, and white supremacist constructions of race by weaving together Anzaldúa's reflections on borderlands with my perspective as a transracial adoptee.

Visualizing Borders to Imagine New Possibilities

I close my eyes to visualize the dominant rendering of discrete racial categories: Black. White. Asian. Native American/Indigenous. Latinx. In my mind's eye each category is represented as a small jar of paint lined up in a row on an otherwise bare wooden table. I know it is cliché, but in my mind's eye Black is black. White is white. Asian is yellow. Native/Indigenous is red. Latinx is brown. Summoning Anzaldúa's (1987) written words, suddenly the scene I so vividly projected onto the backsides of my eyelids is disrupted by a crack of lightening that strikes the table, decimating it

and the false sense of stability it provided. All that remains are the small jars of paint against a blank background of openness. Each jar is no more than two inches tall, softly illuminated with their own color; almost glowing. A sense of expansiveness hangs between the jars as they hover in midair. Studying this mental vision, I will away the jars and what are left are amoeba-like figures of color; black, white, yellow, red, and brown floating, fluid, slowing morphing, moving, swirling. As the colors begin to merge and blur, the borders between them shrink away and the boundary between *us* and *them* becomes nearly indistinguishable.

Teetering Along A Steep Edge and Looking Beyond Borders

According to Anzaldúa (1987) “a border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge” (p. 25). No sooner have I read these words that another scene flashes in my mind. This time, I am somewhere amidst gorges of red and brown stretching as far as I can see. Even though I have never been to the Grand Canyon, I have a strong sense that I am somewhere similar. The majesty of the geological rock formations is breathtaking. I scan the horizon and marvel at the different shades of hard earth layered on top of one another. Looking down at the ground beneath me, I can see that I am standing—or rather teetering with the slightest gust of wind—on the very precipice of a high and narrow strip of rock. My stomach lurches as I take in the sheer drop off below. A queasiness rushes through my body. Perhaps this is what it feels like to stand along a steep edge and look beyond borders.

Tasting the Emotional Residue of Borderlands

Anzaldúa (1987) writes, “a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (p. 25). The word “transition” lingers on the tip of my tongue. I mull it over in

my mouth. It tastes bitter, layered, rough. It tastes like transit, transient, trans... transracial. And now the connections start to form. Anzaldúa writes of borderlands as being birthed from emotional residue. In my experience as a transracial adoptee, my identity is dripping with emotional residue.

Insecurity.

Loss.

Love.

Anger.

Joy.

Longing.

The emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. How is this for an unnatural scenario: a Child of Color from one cultural context removed from her birth family and country (companies and nation-states profiting off her trauma) is transported by commercial airline to a new name, new language, and new way of life. The expected (and only acceptable) emotional expression: her gratitude and affection. Talk about unnatural.

Dancing with Grace in the Margins

Anzaldúa’s (1987) borderlands are a third space, a resistant and liberatory location in an oppressive system (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). Rather than being torn between one or the other, or falling short of both, Anzaldúa’s borderlands invite me, as a transracial adoptee, to dance in the liminality of the in-between (Palmer, 2011). This imagery reminds me of author, Jane Jeong Trenka’s (2006) memoir *The Language of Blood*. Trenka, like me, is a Korean adoptee who was raised in Minnesota. She vividly writes about being “neither, nor, both, between” (p. 65):

Because when my body is falling it moves faster than when I move myself; because the state of exile is suspension, caught in the middle of an arc, between psyche, body, and place (neither, nor, both, between); because the

essence of that which is most present is not visible (like love, like your own eye, like an elusive element leaving only its shadow [evidence of its supposed existence] in a closed laboratory); because life is a ballet of consecutive moments - the grace is in the margins. (p. 65)

So much of my experience as a transracial adoptee has been akin to falling; fast and unpredictable, uncontrollable

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s ... tumbling out.

“The state of exile” – neither, nor, both, between. Anderson. Han. American. Korean. White. Asian. Neither. Nor. Both. Between. Banana. Twinkie. “The essence of that which is most present is

“‘Disemboweled’ feels like the emotional wounds of adoption that fester and get infected, as part of my heart was cut out and removed when I was cut out and removed from Korea.”

not visible” – being a transracial adoptee is not immediately apparent, that is unless I’m seen in proximity to my White family. “The essence” – the core quality of my character is not seen; my transracial adoptee identity is invisible. “The grace

is in the margins” – this speaks to my soul. Grace like Asian American activist, Grace Lee Boggs and my incredible daughter, Azaelea Grace. The grace I need to extend to myself and my family as I delve deeper into the rocky landscape of my own adoption. Grace in the margins; in the borderlands, in the in-between.

Confronting the Trauma (and Brilliance) of the In-Between

Describing the trauma experienced by the Native-Indian-Mexican-Texans in the 1800s, Anzaldúa (1987) writes, “we were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history” (p. 30). I know my experience is not the same, and yet the sentiments are painfully similar. By drawing this identity analogy (Combs & Ashlee, 2020), comparing my experience as a transracial adoptee with Anzaldúa’s (her)story, I am able to find solidarity in our similarities, cultivating empathy across our respective pain, all while honoring the differences in our becoming.

“Jerked out by the roots” feels familiar, akin to being torn out of my home country, without my consent. “Truncated” feels like the metaphor of my Korean family registry, which as a result of my adoption has been cut off at the top, shortened to just me. “Disemboweled” feels like the emotional wounds of adoption that fester and get infected, as part of my heart was cut out and removed when I was cut out and removed from Korea. “Dispossessed” feels strangely fitting, not a word I would have initially thought to use to describe my adoption, but which rings true as I mourn being deprived of my birth country, family, and culture.

“Sandwiched between two cultures ... *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (Anzaldúa’s, 1987, p. 100). Yet again, Anzaldúa eerily and accurately describes my racial identity experience as a transracial

adoptee. *La mestiza* is the embodiment of what I have affectionately called my “enoughness complex,” never feeling Asian enough or White enough (Ashlee & Quaye, under review). “We get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference cause *un choque*, a cultural collision” (p. 100). THIS. The racially presenting (Asian) me literally crashes against and collides with the internally (cultural White) me. When I used to joke that I suffered from “an enoughness complex,” I didn’t realize I was pathologizing my adoptee identity. Anzaldúa writes about a similar concept, which she calls the “half and half” and which she describes as “suffering from an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other” (p. 39). It wasn’t until reading Anzaldúa (1987) that I began to consider my transracial adoptee identity not as defective, but radically resistant and brilliant.

embrace the in-between.

Embracing and Becoming the In-Between

Anzaldúa’s (1987) *Borderlands* offers a conceptual alternative to my previously articulated “enoughness complex.” Instead of being overcome with anguish feeling deficient as neither Asian enough nor White enough, Anzaldúa has helped me to see that my borderland positionality as a transracial adoptee can be a source of great strength and insight. Rather than trying to evolve from a border space, Anzaldúa contends that the liminality of a border identity gives rise to a new consciousness. *La mestiza* holds unique wisdom exactly because of her border location. This process—a deeply personal and cultural excavation—has been healing and liberating; and most certainly is an on-going endeavor. I am still learning to embrace the in-between and honor all that I am becoming, but I am no longer embarking on this journey alone (Ashlee, 2019). I have Anzaldúa’s written words to guide me and a growing community of transracial adoptees who are also seeking to transgress borders and

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about the author

Dr. Aerial A. Ashlee (she/her/hers) is an Assistant Professor of College Counseling & Student Development at St. Cloud State University. Her research interests include the racialized experiences of transracial Asian American adoptees in higher education, autoethnography as transformative methodology, and womxn of color empowerment in the academy. As a transracial adoptee, who is in an interracial marriage, and the proud mama to an amazing multiracial child, Dr. Ashlee's worldview and life experience dancing in and along borderlands is largely informed by Gloria Anzaldúa, and so she is both honored and filled with gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to this year's MRKC ebook.

I am Black but...Complexities of Being a Marginalized Multiracial and Implications for Practice

Nicole Belisle
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Michael Dixon
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Introduction

As of Fall 2017, US institutions of higher education enrolled about 20 million students with almost 4% of these students choosing to identify as “two or more races” (NCES, 2019). With the proliferation of the multiracial identity on college campuses, there has been a corresponding rise in empirical research that has focused on the admissions, programming, campus climate, safety, and identity development of Multiracial students. While the picture is clearer than 20 years ago, there is still much to examine about how multiracial students see themselves in the context of higher education, especially for those who are phenotypically Black. The role of Student Affairs is to support students, and thus support multiracial students. The “how” is often debated and handled in many different ways but organizations like American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) have come together to determine professional capacities for those working in Student Affairs.

Developing a Multiracial identity can be a complex endeavor especially when the way a person is perceived is marred by historical oppression and problematic stereotypes. It is imperative that Higher Education and Student Affairs Professionals (HESAPs) are prepared to support these students. In order to aid HESAPs toward this goal, it is important to have a common working definition for concepts like “race” and “ethnicity.” Race is an arbitrary and socially constructed classification of humans, but the concept of race has real consequences (Korgen, 2010; Nakashima, 1992; Winant 2006). The United States Census defines

five races as: White, Black, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native (James & Bullock, 2010). Ethnicity in contrast is defined as “a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language” (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). Thus, multiracial or mixed race refers to having two or more racial backgrounds.

Racial distinctions have real life consequences that could be seen in the concepts of hypodescent and the one-drop rule (Khanna, 2010). Hypodescent refers to the assignment of children of mixed race to their “subordinate” racial group with the one-drop rule as the mechanism by which hypodescent was enforced (Omi & Winant, 1994; Root, 1996; Smith, 1994; Zack, 1995). The one drop rule refers to people who had at least one drop of Black/African blood and were thus designated as Black. There have always been racially mixed people within the United States, but as a result of discriminatory laws that upheld hypodescent and the one drop rule many of those mixed-race people were classified as Black. The prevalence of the multiracial identity has been thought to disrupt the racial order (Daniel, 2010) but this remains to be seen. While historically passing has been associated with Whiteness, some researchers find more people today are passing as Black (Khanna & Johnson, 2010).

This form of “contemporary passing” as Kennedy (2003) suggests that some individuals identify as Biracial or Multiracial but, in some situations, consciously conceal or deny their White ancestry. The Black population in the U.S. is difficult to

trace or identify as just Black because of the racial mixing with Europeans, indigenous, and others that occupied the North American continent in the last 400 years. The complexities of having a mixed-race ancestry but being classified as Black has a complex history that has been discussed in other sociological and historical articles.

Significance

In this piece, we share the experiences of some multiracial Higher Education and Student Affairs Professionals as they navigate their racial identity journey within higher education. The experiences these Higher Education and Student Affairs Professionals (HESAPs) had in their collegiate careers have shaped the type of professional they are and will become. This work explores how multiracial HESAPs, specifically those identifying as or are phenotypically Black/African American, define their racial journey and implications for practice in the field working with students with similar backgrounds. The complexities of their lived experiences, in and outside of the workplace, provide an opportunity to grapple with potential strategies for supporting the multiracial student population.

Positionality

Our identities as Multiracial people greatly affects our positioning in regard to this work. Our experiences as a Black presenting Multiracial people, who have experienced the feeling of otherness, has driven us to re-conceptualize the way we understand ourselves and others. The initial impetus of this research was to seek a sense of belonging and community with others living in the margins of racial identity for ourselves and extended into developing and supporting these opportunities for others working in Higher Education and as Student Affairs Professionals. We have a unique take on this topic because our salient racial identities are those under-represented in college and universities. Our experiences

have been largely shaped by that fact we are not White, nor do we have claim to the White identity. The conversations we have had with Multiracial HESAPs with White identity tends to be slightly to marginally different because of their relationship to that identity.

Research and Frameworks

The one drop rule and the concept of hypodescent have had a lasting effect on the way people perceive racial identity in the United States (Khanna, 2010). The perception of race is often more prevalent than the choice of racial identity, particularly if a person is phenotypically Black/African American (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; 2002). W.E.B. Dubois (2008) developed the concept of “Double Consciousness” in 1897 which focused on divided identity and the difficulty of having a unified identity. For Black Multiracials, the issue is compounded because of their dual status as both Black and not Black at the same time. These notions have shaped the identity development of Multiracial individuals as they have navigated with and around institutions, specifically colleges and universities.

Theoretical Frameworks

The following three frameworks were the most essential in grounding this phenomenon. Cross and Fhagen-Smith’s Model of Black Identity Development (2001) supported the notion that Black Multiracial people have a racialized experience stemming from their childhood. This model demonstrates that “most Black people, by adulthood, have adopted one of several Black identities” (Patton, Renn, Guido & Quaye, 2016, p. 96). The second, Critical Race Theory, is a theoretical framework, grounded in law to critically examine race, racism and power, often in the form of counter storytelling (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2017). And lastly, Johnston-Guerrero and Renn (2016) discuss strategies for supporting the Multiracial population within colleges, that focus

on service delivery programming that span from policies made at the institution level all the way to the classroom.

Methods

Four Higher Education and Student Affairs Professionals who identified as Black and/or Multiracial were identified and interviewed. Two of the participants identified as women, one a director of student life at a private college in southern California, and the other a residence life coordinator at a public university in central North Carolina. The other two participants identified as men, one working as a senior student affairs officer at a public university in Northern California and the other working as a director of a joint doctoral program at a public university in Southern California. The names of the participants have not been mentioned and their titles and universities masked through generalization in order to protect their identity. The participants were asked about their racial background, racial identity, the fluidity of that identity, defining moments that have impacted their racial identity, the impact of their racial identity on their working and learning environments in student affairs, how they negotiate their racial identity within their role in higher education and lastly, their advice to others.

Results

The participants shared how their genetic background *and* lived experiences work together to shape the type of people they have become, what they believe and how they identify. They shared a snapshot of experiences from across the field of higher education student affairs. They individually have a story to tell as Black multiracial Higher Education Student Affairs Professionals.

These participants also shared their advice for others. For them, it is important to acknowledge that identity development is a challenge and it is essential to engage in intentional self-reflection.

One should also explore literature, culture, art, other narratives, or anything that validates one's identity. And finally, there's not a monolithic multiracial experience so finding your village and finding support should be done in a careful but meaningful way.

One theme presented from their stories and conversations was that Black racial issues are worth fighting for no matter your racial makeup. This was illustrated best by one of the female participants indicating that growing up in the South,

If you were seen as Black, you needed to be proud of your Blackness and anything less than that is anti-Blackness. And ... a form of self-hatred. But, the same feelings of pride that you have being Black, [you could] give yourself that space to be proud of being... whatever.

Another theme that emerged, conclusive with the literature on patterns of Multiracial identity (Renn, 2000), was demonstrated in the identification of a monoracial identity, in this case Black, despite having mixed heritage. After describing a salient moment, when his ability to articulate well was ascribed to his Ashkenazi Jewish background rather than his African ancestry, this participant shared that since then, he has never identified as mixed. His earlier experiences have led him to focus his work projects and research interests towards combating the negative stereotypes associated with Blackness.

Another theme illustrated is that location matters. The demographics of the institution and institutional location can have a profound effect on how one racially identifies, sometimes for simplicity. One of the female participants shared:

I'm able to maintain who I am in my current position as a liaison with my living learning community because I proudly serve Black and

Brown students, and my colleagues, or the other professional staff members are also Black and Brown and so I often find myself navigating my graduate assistantship in a very authentic way. Being able to connect with students deeply. Being able to build rapport with my colleagues and so I think I'm able to sort of maintain my identity in culturally engaging environments versus in White environments that lack that cultural engagement and I find myself code switching, as well as often serving as the voice of a person of color, and being presumed as, you know, a safe person of color because I am White presenting.

The last emerging theme is how history and context of race in the area is important. If there has only been a history of monoracial understanding in the area (i.e. Black and White paradigm), that will have a significant effect on how Black multiracial people may choose to engage with the conversation about being Black and multiracial in that particular context. And thus, some poignant advice given by the female participant from Southern California:

It is important for Black folks especially to know that there is no shame, there's no spitefulness [and] no guilt in saying that you are Black, and even though history has taught our ancestors, that you can only be one. I think that it's important for all of us to recognize that we are more. And that is okay.

There is still much to learn within Multiracial and Black communities and the ways in which they intersect and impact each other.

Implications for Future Research

This topic came about because the authors share the same identities (Black and Multiracial) as the subjects interviewed. After listening to these conversations again, future research can expand on this study by increasing the sample size and delving into specific strategies that have been

effective in their roles and at their institutions. The multiracial field should also explore the role of colonialism and colorism in the framing of anti-Black sentiments within the Multiracial identity. There could be continued conversations with multiracial individuals on their racial identity development, specifically with those individuals that are Black and White. In 2016, The American College Personnel Association chose to make racial justice a strategic imperative (ACPA, 2020). This imperative focuses on reducing intersectional oppression knowing this work is ever present and on-going. More information can be found here https://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/SIRJD_092217.pdf. Ultimately, while engaging in racial social justice work, make sure to include spaces for conversations about students with multiple identities, particularly those Black and Multiracial.

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Mixed-Race & Mixed Experiences: Analyzing Support for Mixed-Race Students in Higher-Education Institutions

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Abstract

This research offers insight into the mixed-race, or multiracial, student experience within institutions of higher-education. For students who identify as mixed-race, finding a sense of belonging or community on campus can be challenging as they may not always be accepted by their monoracial peers. Currently, there is not much support for mixed-race students offered on institutional levels. Support for mixed-race students often comes in the form of mixed-race student organizations; however, these organizations only exist on a select number of institutions. In acknowledging the struggles that mixed-race students may face, and the lack of support presently offered, this paper provides concrete recommendations for student affairs professionals to consider adopting within their institution in order to better serve the mixed-race student population on their campus.

Keywords: mixed-race students, education, student development, multiracial, race

Mixed-Race & Mixed Experiences

Analyzing Support for Mixed-Race Students in Higher-Education Institutions

Being mixed-race (multiracial, of mixed ancestry) is truly a unique experience; however, it is also often very isolating. Those who identify as mixed-race often find difficulty in feeling a sense of belonging in their varying racial identities. As mixed students enter their college years, a time of further development in one's life, they may face further challenges in finding community and connection on campus. As the population of mixed-race students in higher education continues to grow, so does the need for specific resources and spaces dedicated to this particular body of students. The purpose of this research is to address this need

by identifying: 1) What struggles are found within the mixed-raced student experiences? 2) What support exists for mixed-raced students at various institutions of higher education? 3) What are potential solutions that can be made to give these students the space to feel uplifted and to create a sense of belonging within their higher education journey?

Methodology

The research presented in this paper was conducted using a content analysis of existing articles and scholarly work on mixed-race students, as well as through an informal, qualitative online survey which utilized existing online groups for mixed-race individuals across the world. The open-ended survey, included as Appendix A, was circulated among two prominent mixed-race communities on Facebook: 'Subtle Mixed Traits' and 'Subtle Halfie Traits.' The survey asked for self-identified mixed-race students to reflect upon their higher education experience based on their mixed identity. There were 120 participants, representing 94 universities across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.

My Positionality

As a mixed-race person and as an emerging student affairs professional and scholar, I am very passionate about exploring the experience of mixed race students. Growing up with both Korean and European ancestry, most of my childhood and teenage years were spent struggling with feeling like I belonged in neither of my identities as I was seemingly 'too much' of one or 'not enough' of the other. In the Southwest where I was raised, the Asian community was so lacking that (despite being both half-Asian and white-passing) I became

the “token Asian” for my classmates. For my undergraduate education, I went to a university in California which had a 40% Asian/Asian-American student population. While I found community with other Asians, I was still “othered” for only being half. It was not until I discovered the ‘Subtle Mixed Traits’ and ‘Subtle Halfie Traits’ mixed-race communities that I began to feel like there were others who really understood my experience. In the last few years, I have spent time unpacking my identities and have embraced my mixed identity above all else. In my professional capacity, I would like to increase visibility and recognition for the mixed-race student experience, and work to actively build community for mixed-race students at any and all institutions. The research presented here is intended for my own understanding of mixed-race/multiracial student development and experiences, as well as to further the research on mixed-race identities as a whole.

Struggles of Mixed-Race Students

For mixed-race students, there is a myriad of struggles that mixed-race students face as they navigate a “monoracial paradigm of race” which only accepts a very narrow definition of racism that does not address the complexities of race outside a black/white binary (Harris, 2016). Due to this monoracial-only understanding of race, institutions of higher education are “ill-equipped to recognize multiracial people as anything but monoracial” (Harris, 2016). As a result, mixed-race students can face adversity in applying to higher education institutions, as well as in developing a sense of belonging and community once they arrive onto a campus.

Admission into an Institution

Even before enrolling in a higher education institution, the application process can be a place of contention for mixed-race students. On college applications, mixed-race students find themselves

in a dilemma with “what box to check?” in regards to their ethnic identity (Saulney & Steinberg, 2011; Chamber, 2012), and can be concerned about “the implications for identifying or not identifying with certain racial backgrounds” (Barone, 2018). Before 2011, college applications did not have to allow students to select more than one identity which had students torn and forced to silo themselves into one identity as “people were telling you that you’d have to choose between your heritage” (Chambers, 2012). In 2011, “the Department of Education started requiring universities to collect more information about applicants’ race and ethnicity” (Chambers, 2012). As a result, many college applications, including the Common Application, now allow students to self-identify and “check multiple boxes when it comes to describing their racial and ethnic identities” (Chambers, 2012).

However, even though students can select multiple ethnicities, there can still be a stigma around being accepted to a university based on their minority side (Saulney & Steinberg, 2011; Jaimes, 2018). At schools with affirmative action, can face backlash from other monoracial students who believe they are getting their incentives taken away as mixed-race students “only [embrace] their minority side when it came time to fill out college applications” (Saulney & Steinberg, 2011). According to Jaimes (2018), their high school counselor “recommended emphasizing my Native American and Latino backgrounds because ‘that would help [them] get admitted.’” So while students are no longer forced to choose just one of their racial identities, mixed-race students are still scrutinized for potentially identifying themselves with their more marginalized/minority identity, and are sometimes even encouraged to do so rather than embracing their mixed/multiracial identity.

On Campus Identity Conflicts

Unfortunately, despite struggles with their identities

during the application process, mixed-students continue to struggle with how others perceive their identities even upon entering university. According to Barone, “once admitted, some students might feel discomfort as they are questioned about their racial backgrounds by peers, or as they participate in identity-based student organizations and other co-curricular activities. (Barone, 2018). Within my research, when participants were asked about feeling a sense of belonging as a mixed-race student on their campus, there were not many clear cut answers of yes or no. Of the students who felt a sense of belonging on campus, many spoke to attending a diverse school, a school with many international students, or schools where they could connect with others outside their ethnic identity. However, the majority of participants did not feel that they belong as mixed-race at the institution as they experience microaggressions from people both inside and outside of their ethnic communities.

When asked if they feel accepted in monoracial spaces, 77.5% of participants said that they do not. Monoracial student-of-color associations “can create communities that may not be perceived as inclusive of multiracial students” (Ozaki & Johnston, 2008). This was reflected by participants who spoke to how they are excluded from ethnic-specific student organizations, often based on their appearance or inability to speak a certain language. One participant shared, “I have attended events in monoracial spaces but often felt singled out due to my appearance, this is especially obvious when it is a Chinese event. People would always try to speak English with me or treat me like a foreigner.” Another participant said:

I feel so uncomfortable in the Latinx Student Association and the Black student organizations. They see me very much as other because I'm not too much like them in appearance or mindset. I once proposed talking about mixing with other minorities at the black organization and got the

harshest look of judgment I have ever received in my life.

Other participants noted that they were “technically welcome” in the groups that represent their racial identities, but expressed discomfort actually being in those spaces. One participant stated that, “there are always little jokes/comments/subtle exclusion that hold me back from being comfortable in monoracial spaces.”

Part of the discomfort mixed-race students can experience comes from a feeling of ‘not being _____ enough’ for the differing monoracial student of color organizations. Mixed-race students are often perceived as ‘not enough’ of one culture for their monoracial peers, and thus are forced to either choose one monoracial identity over others (Harris, 2016), or elect to not participate in any groups of monoracial students of color (Renn, 2003). In my research, several students spoke to this feeling of not being “enough” of any single race, primarily their more marginalized racial identity. At the same time, many mixed students with European ancestry shared feelings of exclusion from white spaces because they were “too much” of their other identities. According to one participant, “Both groups enjoy telling me I clearly belong in the other so much such that I then belong in neither.” Thus, there is a polarization from both sides of mixed-race students’ identities that can leave them feeling like there is nowhere for them to belong.

Additional Thoughts

Being mixed-race is, in and of itself, a challenge as mixed individuals must navigate conflicting identities with their various cultural beliefs and other ways of being. Upon entering into and within the university setting, identify conflicts can be amplified as students are silo themselves on college applications, or find themselves torn between or excluded from monoracial student groups. As students of all ethnicities come to make

sense of their identities during their college years, special attention should be paid to mixed-race students who face a more nuanced marginalization than their monoracial peers.

Existing Support for Mixed-Race Students on Campuses

In acknowledging the difficulties mixed-race students can experience during their educational journey, there is a definite need for institutions to support this group of students. As one participant shared feelings of needing to be “a lot more support for people who are mixed” as being mixed-race is “a completely different challenge than being one race or the other, and people tend to only give support for the two or more separate races rather than look at the person as a whole mixed person.” However, as it stands, there is a substantial lack of formalized support offered from institutions for mixed-race students. Of the institutions represented in my research, the only resources extended to mixed-race students were in the forms of multicultural student centers, centers for students of colors, cross-cultural centers, or other race/ethnicity identity centers. Yet even within these centers, participants shared that there was not always a focus on or space for students of multiple races.

With the lack of institutional support, mixed-race students have had to rely on themselves to create community on campus through the formation of student groups and organizations. According to Barone, mixed-race and multiracial student groups/organizations are “on the rise,” as there has been an increase in efforts to “create a sense of belonging for students who do not feel that they fit neatly into one racial category” (2008). The purpose of these student organizations are to create spaces where mixed-race and multiracial

students can create embrace their multiple identity and come together through their shared experiences (Barone, 2018). Barone shares that: “In these groups, mixed and multiracial students don’t need to answer the much anticipated ‘What are you?’ question or experience the feeling of having someone categorize them according to different racial stereotypes” (2018).

Table 1
Institutions of Higher Education with Mixed-Race Student Organizations

Arizona State University	University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign
Biola University	University of Massachusetts – Amherst *
Boston University ^	University of Minnesota – Twin Cities
Georgetown University	University of Oregon ^
Harvard University *	University of Pittsburgh
Malacaster College	University of Southern California *
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	University of Victoria *
Rutgers University – New Brunswick	University of Washington *
University of California – Berkeley	Vassar College
University of California – Los Angeles	Western Washington University
University of Chicago	Yale University *

Note. * indicates Multiple Student Organizations
^ indicates Organizations had in past but not currently

In my research, participants identified 22 (out of 94) institutions of higher education which had (or previously had) some kind of mixed-race student organization, as represented in Table 1. Six of the 22 institutions had multiple mixed-race student organizations, with some being dedicated for half-Asians— or “hapas”— specifically. Participants spoke of their student organizations very differently as some were discussion-based, focused on retention, or “activism towards the elimination of

racial discrimination.” While 22 institutions may be a small number in comparison to the thousands of higher education institutions that exist today, several participants spoke to how great it was to be a part of a community with other mixed folx. One participant shared: “Once I found a Hapa club, I felt fully accepted and fully supported by my peers that could also relate to my ethnic struggles. We felt unified and united.”

Other participants without mixed-race student organizations expressed that they ‘probably could’ create an organization for mixed students, but some were doubtful that such a group would be successful. One participant expressed a distinct disinterest in a ‘mixed-only’ organization as they “should be able to find meaning and acceptance” in monoracial communities. However, for the 77.5% of participants who did not feel accepted in monoracial spaces, it is clear that having mixed-race organizations would provide a space for them to be themselves and be in community.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals

Given the struggles that mixed-students can experience, the growing mixed-race student population on college campuses, and the current lack of support for mixed-race students offered on an institutional level, departments within student affairs should consider providing more intentional support efforts for mixed students. Several participants said that they would “love to be able to talk about the mixed-race experience” on their campuses, and called for their institution to “do more to support mixed students.” While there are many ways that student affairs professionals could go about providing support for mixed students, some possible first steps could include: dedicating spaces for mixed students, supporting/ advising mixed-race student organizations, and including mixed-race identities within diversity

trainings or other programming.

Dedicating Spaces for Mixed Students

Such as supporting students of color, or LGBTQ+ students on campuses, mixed-race students must be given a space for them to create a community of fellow mixed-race student and staff members on campus. From my research, participants were clearly interested in having more opportunities to connect with other mixed-race students at their institutions. According to one participant: “I think affinity groups and other spaces that are dedicated safe zones for people to come and be their whole selves are very important and very helpful to have on this campus as well.” So where is it that can student affairs professionals create these spaces for students?

While it might not be feasible for an institutions to create a physical space for mixed students, such as a Multiracial Student Center, student affairs professionals can work to create spaces within existing departments on campus. For example, student affairs professionals can support the creation of sponsored affinity groups housed in existing multicultural or other race/ethnicity identity centers. Having these university-sanctioned mixed-race affinity groups would allow students a space to be in community and process their identities as one participant shared that: “Dialoguing with other mixed race people has definitely been one of the most beneficial things for me as I grapple with identity.” Another example might be include departments of Residential Life offering a specific living communities for mixed-race students within a residence hall. A mixed student living community would provide mixed-race students the opportunity to physically be in community with other students with similar lived experiences and learn from their similarities and differences.

Supporting Mixed-Race Student Organizations

Despite my research showing that there are

some institutions that have mixed-race student organizations, these groups are not standard on most campuses. Although these student organizations are usually created by students, for student, student affairs professionals could extend support to mixed-race students wanting to establish an organization on campus. While these organizations may be student led, student affairs professionals could assist students to determine what requirements must be met to be recognized as an official group of campus, help recruit students/get the word out, and also act as an advisor to the organization. According to Ozaki & Johnston, advisors of multiracial student organizations can support their groups by helping students to: focus their vision and goals for the organization, advocate for multiracial issues beyond the organization, navigate potential racial politics on campus, understand the difference among race, ethnicity, and culture, and create opportunities for dialogue between leaders of multiracial and monoracial student organizations (2008). Additionally, student affairs professionals wanting to help a mixed-race student organization get up and running on their campus should also center the communicated needs of their particular students.

Including Mixed-Race Identities in Diversity Training & Programs

For a field that is so focused on Social Justice and Inclusion, student affairs has done very little to acknowledge students with mixed-race/multiracial identities. To honor, acknowledge, and better understand the experiences of mixed-race students, institutions should seriously including discussions on mixed-race identities during diversity trainings offered to faculty and staff. Student affairs professionals could take it a step further by facilitate trainings or inviting speakers who can speak to the mixed-race experience to the student body or community at large. Just as institutions to acknowledge the experiences of various student

identities, institutions should recognize being mixed-race as a real, valid identity with its own set of nuanced experiences and struggles (as demonstrated in previous sections).

Concluding Thoughts

In summary, the research presented here looked at three areas relating to the mixed-race student experience in higher education. First, there are different challenges that mixed-race students can face while applying to and entering institutions of higher education as a result of not being accepted by their monoracial peers. Second, despite the struggles that mixed students may face as a result of their identities couples with the lack of institutional support, students have found ways to create community through mixed-race student organizations. However, these organizations are not standard on all campuses. Finally, this paper explored what student affairs professionals could do to address the lack of institutional support, such as: dedicating spaces to mixed race-students, standardizing and supporting mixed-race student organizations, and including mixed-race identities in diversity training for faculty and staff. Overall, it should be noted that, as one participant stated, “the mixed-race experience is very specific to the individual.” In general, student affairs professionals and scholars should avoid assuming that all mixed-race students have the same wants, needs, or desires from an institution. However, it was evident from my research that there are at least some mixed-race students who would benefit from having increased support on campus; these students are who would most benefit from this work.

Appendix A – Open Ended Survey Questions

- 1) Name of your institution?
- 2) Do you feel a sense of belonging as a mixed student on your campus?
 - a. If yes, how? If no, why not?
- 3) Do you have ways to build community as a mixed student?
 - a. If yes, how? If no, why not?
- 4) What kind of support does your institution offer for mixed-race students (i.e. identity centers, affinity groups, etc.)?
- 5) What kind of support have students created for fellow mixed-race students (i.e. student organizations)?
- 6) Do you feel accepted in monoracial spaces?
 - a.(ex: if you are half Black, do you feel like you can be a part of your Black Student Union?)
- 7) Anything else you want to share about your experience as mixed?

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Defining Blackness through Lived Experiences

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Abstract

Many students coming to college do not identify with one racial population. While institutions are embracing the racial diversity on their campuses, many students who identify as biracial or multiracial still have to defend the various aspects of their racial identities. The multiracial college student population is often left out when considering ways to implement more equity minded practices on college campuses. Multiracial students are faced with the challenge of navigating their racial identity development on their own the majority of the time. It is crucial for scholar-practitioners to understand how they can dismantle problematic systems that further perpetuate biracial and multiracial students having to prioritize their multiple racial identities against each other. It is important for higher education and student affairs to understand the power of intersectionality when serving this student population. The authors' goal is to provide tangible recommendations that are rooted in identity development theory and complemented by Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) work on Borderlands Theory, along with W.E.B. Du Bois' (1903) theory on Double Consciousness.

Introduction

Multiracial individuals are leading a demographic shift in today's racially categorized society. The mixed-race American population has increased 10% over the past 40 years (Parker, Horowitz, Morin, & Lopez, 2015). With an escalating increase in the multiracial identifying American population, more specifically, those mixed with Black or African American descent, student affairs professionals, must address the need to put an end to the perpetuated picture that all

Black experiences are the same. *In Fifty Shade of Black: Challenging the Monolithic Treatment of "Black or African American" Candidates on Law School Admissions Applications*, Tadjioqueu (2014) expressed how the Black experience must be expanded to reflect the distinct differences of individuals self-identifying as Black. Black individuals have various linguistic, cultural, and religious distinctions as any other racial group.

Looking at our multiracial Black identifying college population, student affairs professionals must learn how to acknowledge the individual lived experiences of each student. As professionals, we cannot categorize a student by their assumed "dominant" identity based on how they look, speak, act or associate themselves. It is crucial for scholar-practitioners to understand how they can dismantle problematic systems that further perpetuate multiracial students having to prioritize their multiple racial identities against each other. Now, as student affairs practitioners, we hope to provide the field with tangible recommendations to put an end to the assumptions of what "being Black" means using the works of Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands Theory, and W.E.B. Du Bois' (1903) theory on Double Consciousness.

Theoretical Frameworks

Borderlands Theory

Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) work was designed to examine the concept of borders: geographical, social, racial, ethical, and others, as a means to partake in the decolonization of one's self. We honor and acknowledge Anzaldúa's (1987) seminal work as a blueprint to inform how we overcome

varying obstacles that relate to our multiracial identity.

Double Consciousness Theory

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) developed the term Double Consciousness to explain the psycho-social experiences of individuals whose identities are split into various facets. Double Consciousness theory allows us, as Black individuals to articulate what the Black experience can be like, varying by each individual's own personal experiences.

Black Identity Development Theory

William Cross (1971) created a model to detail the experience of how one comes to terms with their Blackness. The model is best known as the Nigrescence model or the Black identity development model. Cross' (1971) model is an integral part of how we have come to terms with our Black identity, and at the same time, we are still in need to find a balance of acknowledging and honoring the other aspects of our racial identity.

Biracial Identity Development Theory

Poston (1990) Biracial Identity Development Model focuses on the uniqueness associated with the experiences of biracial individuals in America. Poston's model highlights the internal and external obstacles mixed-race individuals face throughout their lives. Poston (1990) allows us to understand the difficulties mixed-race individuals face. These challenges include, feeling conflicted on how to identify or feeling like mixed race individuals must make a choice between their multiple identities by selecting the one that society deems to be the "best fit".

Personal Narrative/Lived Experiences

Brianna Miloz

In undergrad I wanted to find a way to explore my culture more, which led me to attend the Black Student Union (BSU). It only took one meeting for me to never return to BSU again. At my first meeting I was asked, "You're not full black are you?" I responded by saying, no I'm half black half white. From there the judgement in the room was heavy and exiling, and I never went back. That was just one of many times I can recall my identity being criticized. Whether it has been the questioning of my father being my father, me not being black enough, not white enough, do I speak Spanish, am I Latinx, and the list goes on. The majority of these incidents have shaped my beliefs and feelings of what it means to be biracial.

“I have felt conflicted in terms of my own identity and trying to decide where I best fit.”

My black identity will always be more salient than my white identity due to the color of skin, which is how I have

come to accept my black identity. No matter how white I am, others will always see me as black before white. This was something I struggled to accept for a long time, but I now recognize that there is nothing I can do to change other people's perceptions. I must be confident and embrace all aspects of my identity.

Being biracial still comes with many challenges at various times in my life. Although I have learned to accept my identity that does not mean I no longer face adversity. As a child I think I was simply oblivious to my biracial identity until incidents of others calling out my differences. I have felt conflicted in terms of my own identity and trying to decide where I best fit. I often feel the need to code switch depending on my environment and who I may be around. And I struggle with trying to fit in at times for being accused of not being black or white enough. Just when I feel like I have

fully come to terms with being my full self, society questions who I am and makes me rethink where I am in my racial journey.

Kevin Wright

As an individual who identifies as Creole and Native American, my journey of racial acceptance has not been easy. It becomes exhausting educating others on the rich history of both cultures; many people only learn about the oppression and struggles of both cultural communities. People look at my skin, and say I'm not Native enough. Then people will say I do not "sound like a Black person," which brings my Blackness into question and is rooted in ignorance, racism, and bigotry. My linguistic skills have also been tested and if I cannot speak French (Creole) or the mother tongue of the tribal nation I belong to, then the validity of my racial identity is also questioned.

The way I show up in varying spaces is informed by three major notions: 1. I wake up every morning to watch the news and make sure I still have my rights; 2. I mentally prepare myself to experience some form racism or bigotry; and 3. I look at my calendar to see how many meetings I have in order to determine how many times I will either need to code switch, or exude more emotional labor than my White counterparts. This kind of mentality contributes to the mindset that my existence is an inconvenience; I am damned if I do, and at the same time, I am damned if I do not.

Having critical conversations about my multiracial identity was always difficult growing up. These conversations did not start really happening until I got to college. While they were not easy, they were worth it, and contributed to how I developed a better understanding of my Blackness and my Native American heritage. They encouraged me to continue researching the history of my racial identities while developing strategies to serve them

equitably. This journey is not over.

Future Recommendations

Need for Self-Awareness

When working with multiracial Black students, it is crucial to acknowledge the value in learning who the student is through their own personal narrative and not that of a Black monolith. Sue (2007) explores perceptions of racial microaggressions and discusses how many White individuals find it difficult to realize they may hold unconscious racial biases, prejudices, and stereotypes that unintentionally make their appearance in interracial encounters. Student affairs practitioners must take on the responsibility of overcoming difficulties in being self-aware of one's privilege associated with their dominant identity to create more inclusive environments on college campuses for multiracial Black students.

Race is visible, making it highly prevalent in the effects of privilege and oppression, and must be considered in discussions around equity (Ching, 2013). Self-awareness allows us to question and reflect upon where we are in our own understanding of self and others. Through self-awareness we must admit the lack of knowledge that we have and commit to increasing one's self knowledge and knowledge of others (Ortiz & Patton, 2012). Self-awareness is key to effectively begin making more inclusive efforts for our multiracial Black college students.

Practitioners willing to engage in dialogue with multiracial Black students will begin to understand the student perspective. This can lead to more equitable change and inclusive narratives opposed to the reoccurring stereotypes that are often perpetuated. This is a great start for practitioners who need to assess where they are in terms of their equitable practices and where they need to be more involved with initiating change at their own

institution.

Barbara J. Love (2000) shares tangible steps for developing a liberatory consciousness which is, the ongoing examination of ourselves in all humanity, while building alliances with and understanding others. The steps included in developing this consciousness consists of the following:

1. Awareness- the capacity to notice, our thoughts, behaviors, actions
2. Analysis- think about it. Why? Get information to know and develop understanding
3. Action- what needs to be done and putting it into action
4. Accountability/Allyship- perspective sharing/ liberation work

Love's (2000) recommendations for developing a liberatory consciousness allows individuals to slowly work on their own self-awareness by going through these various steps. The final step appears to be most powerful because not only does it require the individual to be self-aware, but also challenges the individual to move further in this consciousness by bringing others to self-awareness and the liberatory conscious development. Through this consciousness development individual's will recognize the significance and value in taking the time to truly get to know an individual for who they are; especially for the multiracial Black community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, and as previously noted, the lived experiences of Black-identified individuals cannot be told through a single story. Please note the aforementioned recommendations were not written in an exhaustive context, and we challenge our readers and their colleagues to take initiative to determine the best course of action, as it relates to their perspective campus communities. Students within the African diaspora are all going through a unique journey, and their racial identities only inform parts of that journey. Institutions, along

with its scholar-practitioners need to understand how serving these students requires more than the development of a multicultural affairs office, as diversity, equity, and inclusion is everyone's responsibility.

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The Never-Ending Performance: The Role of Identity & Personal Narrative as a Diversity Educator

Benjamin Beltran
University of Maryland, College Park

As student affairs practitioners, we have likely all been prompted at some point to reflect on our identities and/or personal narratives. It may have come in the form of a paper during a graduate program, perhaps in a course that has “multicultural” or “social justice” in the title. Maybe we’ve encountered this in activities during a staff meeting or retreat. At times it may even be expected that this be included in a job interview as part of an introductory statement or a presentation. The assumption is that awareness of who we are is the foundation of our ability to understand and serve students from diverse backgrounds, and a necessary way for us to examine our own positionality as we embark on advancing equity and justice within higher education.

After one year of my student affairs master’s program, I lost track of the number of times I had talked about myself, my life story, and my identities. I lamented on this in a blog post I wrote at the time:

“As I told my story throughout the semester, I became conscious of the image I was painting of myself for the people around me. After a few months, I was exhausted from the elaborate construction of my personal narrative and identity; it felt like a never-ending performance. I felt the need to oversimplify and synthesize my background, experiences, and aspirations in a way that made sense to others.”

My perceived need to oversimplify was a result of my identities being anything but simple. Many of my identities are characterized by in-betweenness, of navigating back and forth among different

groups and cultures. This experience is perhaps best represented by the “borderlands” framework popularized by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). As a multiracial person, I have always existed on the border of racial and ethnic groups. Some stories of navigating this border are lighthearted and cute — a unique Thanksgiving tradition of eating turkey, mashed potatoes, lumpia, and pancit. Many of the stories are more unsettling and upsetting—xenophobic comments at family gatherings,

“As a multiracial person, I have always existed on the border of racial and ethnic groups.”

language barriers, and an unrelenting focus on phenotypical features. Filipino culture is already a hybrid resulting from colonization; to have Filipino and White ancestry only adds to the hybridity, to the layers of borders.

I’ve also spent much of my life traversing social class borders. My dad is a doctor and our family benefited from immense privilege because of this. We also lived on the outskirts of a city where over 1 in 3 residents lived below the poverty line. Every day that I drove to school I watched the streets, houses, and people change drastically in a short 10-minute period. Sometimes my dad would drive me to school in his Porsche, dropping me off in front of a dilapidated building where there was universal free lunch because so many students were in financial need. There were resources not

available in my school or community that so many other upper-SES folks have access to; yet I was incredibly (and unreasonably) privileged because of my dad's salary, and this opened doors for me that would never open for so many of my friends.

Even putting these words to a page is a difficult process, one filled with constant scrutinization and revision. Trying to articulate this to classmates and professors in graduate school was exponentially more difficult. It continues to be challenging today as I engage students. Yet as a diversity educator, the challenge of sharing my story and my complex identities is a necessary one. Modeling vulnerability and self-awareness is important when I am teaching a class or

facilitating a dialogue. Showing students that we don't have to fit into neat archetypes of identity is critical, and sharing a little bit about myself and my story can serve as a great illustration of this. The classes I teach satisfy a "cultural competency"

general education requirement and draw students from a variety of academic backgrounds, many with limited experience discussing social identity, power, and privilege. It is common for these students — particularly those of privileged identity groups — to view these courses as a quick way to learn about "others." The expectation is that they will leave at the end of a semester knowing the Black/LGBTQIA/immigrant experience, as if these marginalized identities are monolithic and can be "learned." Identity is messy, and it is only through listening to many individual stories that we can even begin to piece together broader narratives about identity groups, and even these broader narratives can be extremely limited.

“Identity is messy, and it is only through listening to many individual stories that we begin to piece together broader narratives about identity groups...”

As an intergroup dialogue facilitator, I've found one particular introductory activity to be especially useful. My co-facilitator and I will prompt students to make guesses about us — our favorite food, our go-to music genre, where we grew up. We also ask them what they think about our social identities, such as our ethnicities. To voice initial assumptions that we all make in this way is extremely uncomfortable for many students, yet illustrates some important points. For one, we have a much easier time talking about music and food than we do about race, religion, sexuality, etc. Additionally, assumptions about who people are (although natural) are often incomplete or wrong. Revealing that I am a multiracial Filipino after a

variety of incorrect guesses from students is a lighthearted way of me giving insight to my daily lived experience, an experience that is always filled with guesses from others and typically followed by surprise and disbelief after I reveal something about myself that so

many others don't have to.

In the years since graduate school, there have been countless opportunities for me to share my narrative. All of this practice has made me a bit more comfortable. Furthermore, I now feel a greater sense of purpose when I talk about my experiences related to race, socioeconomic status, and other facets of identity. What seemed like reflection for the sake of increased self-awareness in graduate school now feels like an opportunity for learning, a way for students and sometimes even colleagues to get a sense of what it means to have border identities, to have complex relationships with certain identities, to have uncommon narratives that are just as important as they are

seemingly novel.

Even as a professional tasked with engaging students on topics related to diversity and identity, I continue to be challenged as I grapple with my story and share it. It still does get exhausting at times. Often I critique the wording I use, the details I choose to share and the others that I forget to include. Although I have the common tendency to speak to my experiences of marginalization, I continue to challenge myself to talk openly and thoughtfully about my privileged identities — identities that are not as salient because privilege often pushes them from the realm of my consciousness. I am learning to give myself grace. I also make it a point to listen closely when students share personal stories and reflections related to identity, to validate them and thank them for their vulnerability. Given how challenging it has been for me as a professional in this field, I can only imagine how difficult it is for them. This discomfort and self-consciousness is a roadblock that limits people from what I believe is the most important first step in having meaningful conversations about diversity, identity, and power: digging into our own individual stories and who we are. If we don't start with this, then conversations about social identity, privilege, and oppression are not appropriately grounded in the personal, lived experiences of people.

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Benjamin Beltran is the Coordinator for the Common Ground Multicultural Dialogue Program, a student-facilitated dialogue experience at the University of Maryland. He has also taught several courses on identity, dialogue, and multicultural leadership over the past few years. Originally from Michigan, he received his B.A. from Loyola University Chicago and his M.Ed. from the University of Maryland.

What's in a Name?: My Racial Atravesado Story

*Juan Cabrera
University of Oklahoma*

For as long as my adult brain allows me to reflect on my childhood, I clearly remember being defiant in the construction of my nickname. Born Juan Rogelio Cabrera, Jr. to a White mother and Mexican father, my nickname came mostly to discern from my father's name. Like my cousins, there were many juniors in the family defined by similarly constructed nicknames. J.J. – Juan Jr., a nickname that I was sure to spell out for you, “dots” and all, until I was ready for the more professional, no period look, JJ. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my nickname would eventually come to define my suppressed identity.

I grew up in a small coastal town in South Texas where the demographic majority was Hispanic/Latino. My Mexican heritage and culture were prevalent in our community. Being biracial wasn't out of the ordinary. Many of my friends also had a White and Mexican parent. While the “what are you?” questions did come here and there, I never felt the need to defend my Mexican identity. However, the complexity of my ethnic name and skin color packaged with my lack of fluent Spanish often cast a shadow on how Mexican I felt. Juan was a common name that I shared with other classmates, the only difference was that their mothers and fathers were both Mexican. My halfness began to define me, I rationalized racial wholeness and felt I wasn't Mexican enough. Hiding behind a white-passing nickname would save me from rationalizing my

halfness and proving my Mexican identity.

As a first-generation college student, I had little to no concept of the collegiate experience. I attended a 4-year private Christian university for my undergraduate studies. I wasn't equipped with any knowledge of historical structures and foundations of higher education (spaces created for White, Christian, wealthy men). My collegiate experience would lead me to understand a minoritized perspective at a Predominately White Institution. I quickly came to understand my otherness and clung to others who shared a similar identity. In fear of still not being Mexican-enough, I forwent joining any multicultural groups on campus. A friend turned brother was my saving grace.

We had a shared bond and sense of connection over growing up and living on the South Texas coast. These were the best of all worlds offering the freshest seafood and the best and most authentic Tex-Mex. But, mostly, it was the connection to our Mexican culture that truly got us through surviving spaces that were not created for us. We had many jam sessions featuring our favorite

“I quickly came to understand my otherness and clung to others who shared a similar identity.”

Tejano and Mexican artists. It wasn't uncommon to find us playing racquetball at the student life center to the sounds of Selena, or driving through campus blasting Vicente Fernandez, or front row to hear the sounds of and chat with Flaco Jimenez (this was my dream come true). It was like being home, except this time I didn't have to prove my “Mexicaness”. While I was lost in navigating the

White spaces of higher education, I was able to delve deeper into my understanding of self as a biracial Mexican-American. I left my white-passing nickname and began using my birth name, Juan.

Upon entering the professional realms of higher education as a graduate student and graduate assistant in a student affairs program, my concept of identity grew and solidified. This was the first time I was introduced to scholarly writings and research that described my experience and who I was as a biracial person. All the while, I delved into Chicano literature that dually explained how I felt as a Mexican-American. Here sat a crossroads of complexity, trying to make sense of what it was like to be a biracial person but also what it was like to be a Mexican-American. One common theme that became apparent was existing at the margins of society, our multiple identities/races, and even within our own families. When diving into Gloria Anzaldúa's work, a passage struck a chord with me that perfectly described my idea and thoughts of margins as borders, putting my biracial Mexican-American identity into words.

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los atravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal". (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 25)

This passage speaks to my identity as a biracial Mexican-American in intimate ways. "Us from them" describes the innately othered status multiracial persons face as they begin life but also

describes the racial binary of white/non-white that continues to challenge society in monoracial and multiracial spaces (Root, 1990, pp. 185, 187). The unnatural boundaries of socially constructed concepts of race through physical features (such as hair, skin color, etc.) and cultural knowledge (such as food, music, language, etc.) create the vague and undetermined places where multiracial people long to belong and exist simply for who they are (Renn, 2008, p. 18). The narrow strips of border are where we exist, at the margins, neither here nor there but also here and there, our identity transits dependent on situation, experience, and choice (Wijeysinghe, 2012, p. 88). We were the prohibited and forbidden, both as multiracial people whose ancestral unions were unlawful and as Mexicans continue to be the scapegoat of fear. Nonetheless, we persist and defy what society perceives as "normal".

Applying Anzaldúa's concept of *atravesados* to race, an intentional space of agency is created for positive identity development (Chang, 2014, p. 27). Racial *atravesados* are those that cross the lines of monoracial normalcy with "unapologetic courageousness" (Chang, 2014, p. 27). In simple terms, racial *atravesados* intentionally challenge and deconstruct social constructs of race that create space and agency for multiracial identifying persons. Marginality, imposed by society (Root, 1990, p. 188), becomes a way of life where multiracial people "feel permanently locked into two worlds" and have a keen awareness of "otherness" (awareness of difference) increasing their self-consciousness and becoming constantly aware of their situational status (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 7, Root, 1990, p. 189). Anzaldúa's borderlands theory aims to create a new consciousness by dismantling the oppressive structures in which we exist that maintain the space occupied between two, or multiple, worlds.

Navigating higher education as a multiracial

person has helped in my personal quest to understand my identity as it provided a space for scholarship and conversation about race, but this doesn't erase the challenges endured. Monolithic paradigms of race continue to challenge the existence and lived experience of multiracial persons, creating a racial imposter syndrome. I'll spare the textbook research that profoundly speaks to the need to better address and understand multiracial people through presenting my personal lived experiences.

“..my name is my name, and no fear or intimidation should exist to serve as an authenticating factor..”

When posed with the questions, “What’s in a name?”, there isn’t an easy answer to respond with. When I left my white-passing nickname, one of my first tasks was to officially change my name on my social media platforms. This was an anxiety-driven decision, but why? My name is my name, but fear and intimidation set in that others would see this as inauthentic, a strive to look, feel, or to be more Mexican or some form of an identity crisis. Nonetheless, my name is my name and no fear or intimidation should exist to serve as an authenticating factor of such. After entering graduate school, this was the first time in my life where I introduced myself as Juan in every setting. What I noticed was a more immediate reaction, specifically from those of my own Latino identity, caught off guard that an ethnic name somehow needed to match their ideology of a specific skin tone or accent. Not so subtle were the various names I was greeted as by White colleagues as if any Mexican name would suffice (Jose was a close one, but Carlos was quite the stretch). Additionally,

I was continually questioned by both sides of my family about whether I had learned Spanish yet as if I wasn't born with the same name I now use and this somehow equated to being an authentic or true Mexican. While my Mexican family identifies my family as White, my White family would go so far as to explain their guilt of having biracial children because their pure White race would no longer be carried on. While I wish these experiences on no one, they opened my eyes to an opportunity of activism and education.

My experiences proved that society still favors monoracial identities. This was an opportunity to build and relay a new consciousness to dismantle the oppressive structures of race. So what's in a name? Names embody identity, those that are socially constructed and those we construct for ourselves. My name embodies my parent's union, defying years of anti-miscegenation ideology that stands to represent a form of activism in its own right. My name embodies the challenge of entering a world that has continued to disregard the experience of multiracial people. My name embodies the space between borders I created for myself, where I enjoy the uniqueness and truth of my experience to share with others. My name is Juan Rogelio Cabrera, Jr., I'm a biracial Mexican-American, and I am a racial *atravesado* seeking to challenge and deconstruct social norms of race. How will you seek to create a new consciousness to challenge the confines of “normal”?

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You Belong Too: Creating Community for Multiracial Students

Lisa Combs | Kinana King | David Lescano | Ethan Chiu
Loyola University Chicago

This is a personal narrative told through an interwoven dialogue about creating a student organization at Loyola University Chicago for multiracial students and transracial adoptees. This is a dialogue story that is co-written by a student affairs professional and three students who created a space for community within a monolithic paradigm at Loyola University Chicago. The monolithic paradigm that will be at the center of the piece operates within the student organization community. Most cultural student organizations at the institution make students feel like they have to choose which identity is most important to them, while Mixed Heritage Union *literally* exists within the borderlands that multiracial folk and transracial adoptees live within. All four of the authors will explore what their multiracial identity means for them, and how they found community with one another to revive this student group.

Each author will share their story of how they came to understand their multiracial identity and in responding to one another's experiences, the dialogue will further convey that even within the multiracial community the experience is not monolithic. This piece conveys the importance of the multiracial community for student affairs professionals and how their existence within higher education space can lead to a catalyst for community and change within the monolith.

Kiana:

My multiracial identity is something that has always played a backseat role throughout my life. Throughout every chapter it has ebbed and flowed in its salience. It is something that I grew up feeling

shameful about and torn between two different identities. It has been a decision. It hasn't been until recently since I've expanded the possible choices. I've realized that choices don't have to be binary- White or Asian- but that they can include an 'all of the above'.

My multiracial identity is something that is still in development. It has grown into something integral to who I am. No matter how hard I try to hide or erase a piece of it like balancing a Jenga puzzle.

Ethan:

To me, multiraciality means being able to experience and own not just one, but two cultures. Being Chinese and Mexican, those are two groups that have very strong cultural influences, and I have experienced them a lot in my life. Growing up, I would experience parts of both cultures but not realize that they were different and separate things, but that they were just a part of my life. Though as I grew older, I did learn that there wasn't really anyone else like me, no one who understood my unique mix of cultures. For a long time, I thought this was a bad thing. I thought I didn't fit in, because I never felt Chinese enough or Mexican enough. It wasn't until more recently when I began to reflect on my experiences and recognize how grateful I am for the rich cultures I have been able to explore.

David:

Multiraciality to me is all about the extended feeling of belonging to more than just a singular culture and community - at least that's what it's supposed

to feel like, but not everyone has the luxury of experiencing that sort of thing. I'm sure there are many others out there who can relate with having parents that were either never married or never lived together, and so if you were fortunate enough to maintain some sort of contact you would spend time with the parent you didn't depend on daily. Although I didn't have the chance to integrate both of my ethnic backgrounds in the same time or space, I have been fortunate enough to be able to learn pieces about the cultures that form my parents brought with them to the US.

“...you can see the blending between two destinations where cultures intertwine and an overwhelming feeling of bothness exist.”

Making meaning of my multiracial identity has seemed very difficult because of my upbringing and parent situation. Both cultures are independent with me, but with time I hope to bring them together in a way that means something to me so that I may share my culture with my future children.

Lisa:

For me multiraciality is really about existing as a “both and.” My entire life, I often searched for spaces where I can show up as my full authentic self. I often feel as though my self is fragmented into pieces that's trying to fit themselves together. There are days the glue comes undone and every day you can still see the scars from the pieces being torn. Multiraciality is also about navigational capital and understanding the ways in which I move through spaces offers me strength. It allows me to understand the “both and” because I am a “both and.” It's about finding community with those who know what it means to exist beyond the boxes, exist beyond the expectations, and exist beyond the assumptions. It's about unlearning my Whiteness

and knowing that I am enough. It's about finding confidence in who I am each and every day.

I have made meaning of my multiracial identity in so many ways and I continue to do so because I am in a constant state of growth and a constant state of learning and unlearning and everything in between. I have made meaning of my identity through finding community and through reading my story. I am thankful for the scholars who have written my story into existence. It's like for the first time, I am real. I can be me.

Kiana:

The word ‘borderland’ kinda feels like purgatory. For many reasons. It is that space between heaven and hell. Or even that haze that exists between two arbitrary lines somewhat like the middle of a spectrum. On one hand, you can see the blending between two destinations where cultures intertwine and an overwhelming feeling of bothness exist. Where no one cares if you're being ‘too XXX’ or ‘too YYY’. It's the Heavenly side where belongingness exists. But all at the same time this borderland is narrow. It's a tightrope walk along purgatory where you look up and you're just not enough—it's Hell. A place where you constantly are measuring yourself up to those around you. Its side effect is an overwhelming urge to self-contort so that you are able to fit in and fulfill the boxes that qualify as ‘enough’. It's this multiracial feeling of ‘not-quite’ness. And when you move into the borderland you still aren't quite free. You're an educator, a comforter, a forgiver. On some days the questions about “where are you from?” and “what are you?” are able to hush down and you can find community with the other citizens within the borderland. But society is our border patrol

and in isolated and well-calculated moments a gesture of generosity opens that border and lets you flow into the heavenly side. Organizations like Mixed Heritage Union are these gateways. It's a place that lets you get out of the borderland and into a place of belongingness.

Ethan:

When I think of the word borderland, I think of this expansive, gray area between ideologies. I think of the gray area that we tend to fall in, not fitting in to one area enough but also not fitting into another area enough. It is this awkward area in between, where we find ourselves kind of questioning what's going on and where we are.

But I also think it is a nice place, a place where we are able to build community with others here. I find that since it is almost a "no-man's-land", we get to make the rules. The multiracial community is growing quickly, and the current generation is building it to be what we want. There is no 400 or 6,000 year history to our mixed identities, which gives us space to make it a positive force and strong community.

David:

When I think of a borderland, I visualize the oppressive and forceful nature of the U.S.-Mexico border and the people on both sides of that border. The U.S. side, vibrant with privileges and supposedly the land of the free and opportunity, two things that many seek, yet our leaders want to keep to their monolith of power. And then there is the Mexico side, which has people trying to create a better future for themselves, even support their families and future generations, or people who may be trying to run for their lives. It is especially those who are trying to seek refuge from a hostile environment back in their native lands who truly suffer the hardships of a borderland since they can

either go back home and face certain dangers, or push forward and take a chance in a place where they are made to feel like they don't belong.

There are times in which multiracial people go through a similar kind of borderland experience, though hopefully not as life threatening, simply by the nature of their mixed heritage and existence. On one hand, there are those in your family who are monoethnic who may lead you to feel as though you aren't (insert ethnicity here) enough to fully belong to that culture. And on the other hand, there are other areas in which our identities are oppressed by the cultural norms of society on a much grander scale. In a similar vein as the U.S.-Mexico border, multiracial people risk being pushed to the borderland in which we end up dissecting ourselves to feel as though we need to suppress part of our identity to fit in or that we can't belong because we just inherently aren't enough.

Lisa:

I remember hearing the word borderland when I was in graduate school as this concept of being in between. Multiraciality is often about living in that borderland. I think the Mixed Heritage Union at Loyola is a borderland. I think living in between has been something I have been taught to do my whole life. Multiracial and transracial adoptee affinity groups are often borderlands that have been created in order for people to feel like they belong. I often wonder what it would be like to live in a world in which borderlands did not exist.

Borderlands is also about navigational capital in which I can access different spaces. I love to view this as an asset of my identity and I also want to acknowledge the pain I have experienced because of the expectations on me as a multiracial person to have to be the middle person between people of color and white folk. It's exhausting to feel

exoticized and to know that people who look like me will always be the first to die in a horror film. Sometimes living in this borderland...it can be empowering and exhausting at the same time.

Kiana:

It has taken quite some time, but I have found my community with other multiracial folx through my genera Loyola community as well as Mixed Heritage Union. In both spaces I have been able to talk about my core life experiences and have those validated by people who have been in similar spaces. It has given me a sense of belonging in that I feel like campus has a spot for me to fit into. A space where I can stand with both feet in rather than just one.

Ethan:

Meeting other multiracial folx has been a huge factor in finding community. David was my mentor last year and when I found out he was also multiracial I felt 100 times more connected to him, even if we didn't have the same experience. Additionally, hearing Lisa and Kiana both share parts of their stories inspired me to reflect a lot on my experiences, and find peace in myself. I wanted to do the same for others and when we came upon the opportunity to build up Mixed Heritage Union I was ecstatic to find a place to do that, to try and be a resource for other students going through the same thing as us. We are in it together.

Ultimately this dialogue serves as a beautiful depiction of what it means to live within the borderlands of a monoracial paradigm. All four authors explore how they found belonging through a student organization that is focused on their experiences as multiracial students and transracial adoptees. Centering these stories calls for student affairs professionals to create spaces for multiracial students and transracial adoptees on college

campuses. These spaces are imperative in order to operate within the "both and" narrative and work against the monolith.

about the authors

Lisa Combs (she/her/hers) is a Program Coordinator at Loyola University Chicago in the Student Diversity and Multicultural Affairs Office. She received her bachelor's degree in Political Science and English from The Ohio State University and her Master's degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Miami University. She identifies as Filipina and White.

Kiana King (she/her/hers) is a senior student at Loyola University Chicago studying biology and leadership studies. She enjoys spending time mentoring first year students, researching, and acting as treasurer of the Mixed Heritage Union. She was raised by a transracial adoptee Korean mother and she identifies ad both Korean and White.

David (he/him) is a third-year Psychology student at Loyola University Chicago with a diverse background in cultural and social justice leadership. As a multiracial student he helped reinstate the Mixed Heritage Union, a student organization for multiracial students, as one of its Co-Presidents. If he isn't out eating good food with his friends, he's off somewhere listening to music or playing video games to recharge.

Ethan Chiu (he/him) is a second year student at Loyola University Chicago who identifies as Chinese and Mexican. Born and raised in Chicago, IL, Ethan enjoys food around the city and photography. He currently serves as the co-president of the Mixed Heritage Union, designed in hopes to build a space on campus for the multiracial/transracially adopted community.

What's In A Home - My Journey to Finding Home as a Multiracial Military Child

*Mecia Lockwood
Baylor University*

I have never felt like I had a home.

I always find myself stammering or drawing a blank every time I get the question “where are you from”. My mind does mental calculations trying to figure out what information the asker is trying to gather. Where I was born? Where I live now? Where is my family? What race am I? For some it may seem simple to answer, but it's never that straightforward for me. I am a military child. My mother was a military child, and my grandfather was the child of missionaries so for three generations my family hasn't had one specific place that we could return “home” to and be greeted by a long congregation of extended family. So naming a home state or city has always been impossible. In addition, I also walk through the world very aware that many consider me to be ‘racially ambiguous’, and “what are you” is a question on the tip of the tongue of countless people I meet. I never know how to answer “where are you from” because I'm from everywhere and nowhere. I was raised around the world. I'm Black, White, and Chinese. I'm a mix of cultures through heritage and through countless travels.

As an “Army-Brat”, my childhood was defined by constant moving, and combined with being multiracial, has always left an underlying feeling of not ‘fitting’ anywhere. This fact has shaped my life almost more than anything else. The otherness I always felt growing up and the immense pride I now have in each of those identities has made me who I am today.

I was born to a bi-racial mother who had her own set of struggles and triumphs related to her racial identity. She was born in Taiwan to a Chinese

mother and a white father, but only spent the first five years of her life there, before her father moved her and her brother back to the states following a divorce. Once there, my grandfather remarried my now grandmother, a white woman. In a time period that understood what being multiracial meant much less than we do now, my mom was plopped into a world where she was neither Chinese enough, nor white enough. She responded by thriving on the outside, popping in and out of social groups, and being a friend to all.

I grew up as a Black, White, and Chinese woman. My mom, understanding the importance of not just choosing one identity, always celebrated the multiple ethnicities that came together to make up me - but her affirmations alone weren't enough as I ventured out into the world. I wanted desperately to feel at home within one culture but always felt on the outskirts of all three. My childhood solution was to pick one identity and reject the other. I don't know any of my Chinese family outside of my mom and uncle, so it was easy to not identify there. Because of my experiences and the way I was raised, I most closely aligned with “my Black side”. By pre-school, I was already trying to cling on to my own understanding of where I belonged, telling a random man in the grocery store “my daddy is Black too”. Around the same time, I was rejecting a white baby doll and telling my mom that “mommy's are supposed to be Black”. From an early age, I was acutely aware of race and that I didn't fit tidily in one box.

Every three years, the Army packed us up and shipped us to a new “home”. I had to sit down a few years ago and literally write it out because

my memory is too scattered across the world to keep track: I attended nine different schools across at least six different cities from kindergarten to high school graduation. I cannot deny the multiculturalism that military communities exposed me to. I have always been around different people and cultures. But that did not protect me from the continued feeling of having to choose. Amidst making new friends and exploring a new town, I felt the pressure to pick a side and prove that I belonged there. I carefully curated my clothes, my speech, and my behaviors in order to firmly plant myself in one identity. But the façade often fell through and I found myself constantly hurt by seemingly harmless comments- "...that's your white side coming out" "But you don't look like you are..." I was accepted within aspects of my identity, but quickly reminded that I didn't truly fit and felt a greater push to prove that I met the vague criteria for acceptance.

In college, I continued to feel on the margins and I coped by immersing myself in the multicultural affairs office and organizations. In some ways, these organizations helped me find and accept myself as a multiracial woman. In other ways, it continued the same patterns of me stepping into spaces with the intent of further proving myself as a Black woman. I still sometimes feel the pang of anxiety when I enter into a fully African American space, wondering if I'm enough to be there too. Sitting down to write this, I thought it would be easy. I discuss my identity often and am in a much different space. However, in thinking through and reflecting on my stories and memories, feelings were brought up that I thought were long put to rest. It wasn't, and isn't, a perfect journey.

Today, I embrace my identity as a multiracial woman. The shift began in graduate school as I supported students in building community through my graduate assistantship in the Multicultural Student Center. Engaging in the work of celebrating the diversity of others and advocating for identities different from my own helped me feel confident in my own identities – all of them. In addition, my graduate program introduced me to the idea of multiracial identity development models. I finally saw myself represented through the lens of research and saw that I wasn't alone in my struggle to define who I am and where I fit. Monoracial language never seemed to fully encompass me and those theories helped me understand myself as a fully multiracial woman.

“I still sometimes feel the pang of anxiety when I enter into a fully African space, wondering if I'm enough to be there too.”

Despite the struggles along my path, one constant has always been the community I have found. Growing up, it was my mom and sister who understood me and loved me as a full person. In K-12, it

was those friends who stayed in contact with me long after I left the state. I held on to community through those who embraced and included all of me. In college, the community I found through the student organizations I joined, the peers I met, and the faculty and staff that championed me were incredible. So much so, that Student Affairs became my career of choice, giving me the opportunity to help students find and create their own homes on campus and in the larger world.

The work that I do can directly contribute to the community that students feel while in a deeply transformational space in their lives. Some may be away from home for the first time in their lives, and others may be more migrant as I was but they all come together

to learn and grow from one another. As an adult, I still have waves of feeling out of place, but the diverse communities and connections I've found in each new location that helps to overcome those feelings. Student Affairs allows me to use my experience to open students up to themselves and facilitate those connections and acceptance in the campus community.

While I've never had a traditional home or a city/state that I resonated with, people have always felt like and created home for me. I often answer "where are you from" with "everywhere". I have friends and family across the world that I stay connected with through social media, phone calls, and traveling. I've traveled and been in community with people from across the world. I also carry a little bit of multiple cultures within me, immensely proud of each piece that makes up the full me. Home isn't a place; it's a feeling that I finally fully feel and can share.

about the author

Mecia Lockwood serves as the Assistant Director for Leadership Development at her Alma Mater, Baylor University. She received her M.A in Higher Education and Policy Studies from the University of Central Florida. Mecia is a proud "Army Brat" and continues to have a love for traveling and meeting new people.

The 5 Stages of Hapa-ness

*Cory Nam Owen and Rachel Miho Christensen
The Juilliard School*

1. DENIAL

Cory is Tan

“Why is your sister white and you’re tan?” My sister and I are only eighteen months apart and with a unique last name like Shaffstall, it was obvious to everyone that we were siblings, but in name only. She was fair with light brown hair that looked blonde in certain lights. Her hazel eyes only confirmed to teachers and students alike that she was white. I, on the other hand, clearly was not. They couldn’t really put their finger on what about me was different, but between my jet-black hair, smaller eyes, and round face, they knew I couldn’t be considered white. And so I became the tan sister. Because the term biracial wasn’t part of everyday vernacular. And to be honest, interracial couples were still viewed with a raised eyebrow. So I denied my heritage and just embraced the tan identity and never corrected anyone. With a name like Shaffstall, how could I be Asian?

Rachel Goes on a Field Trip

I remember my first field trip vividly. We went to the zoo, but I don’t remember learning about the animals. I only remember lunch, specifically the moments that followed me opening up my Hello Kitty bento box. Immediately, the room erupted with laughter and my classmates blurted out, “EWWW! What is that?” I glanced down at the hand-shaped onigiri my mother made for me, quickly placed the lid back on, and uttered, “I don’t know. My mom just packed it for me. I don’t know why...” while staring at the ground and

fighting back tears. Before that moment, I hadn’t considered myself different from my peers, but it became abundantly clear that I was. And not in a good way. I felt confused, ashamed, and angry. How could my favorite onigiri turn an entire class of kindergarteners against me? When I brought the onigiri home after school, my mother asked why I hadn’t eaten it. I burst into tears and told her the whole story, emphasizing that I really love the food she makes, but that I couldn’t bring it to school with me. She comforted me and agreed to send me to school with a sandwich for lunch from then on, just like my classmates. This was the first time I had publicly denied my Japanese heritage, and I continued to do so via brown bag sandwich lunches throughout elementary school.

2. ANGER

Rachel Goes Goth

By the time I had reached middle school, eating sushi was widely accepted by my peers and even seen as “cool”. Given the humiliation I’d experienced in Kindergarten coupled with other microaggressions I faced growing up, this really stung. One weekend afternoon, I was at the mall with my mother and decided to stop into the retail chain store, Hot Topic. The store was littered with counterculture t-shirts and stickers, one of which read, “You laugh because I’m different? I laugh because you’re all the same.” Something clicked for me. Why did I work so hard to fit in when I could just fight back? I was impressed by the shop clerks, decked out in chains, piercings, and studs, unapologetically demonstrating to other shoppers that they weren’t like everyone else,

rather they were proud to be different. Impressed, I also began dressing in all black, wearing t-shirts covered in skulls, and wouldn't leave home without my studded belt. I felt a shift when I debuted my new extreme look. I was labeled a goth and the focus seemed to shift away from my racial background. At the time, it felt like I had found a way to turn my anger into strength. I developed a defensive and hostile attitude, determined to make people think twice before approaching me. In doing so, I further isolated myself from my peers, which ultimately led to depression.

Cory is Human

"What are you?" There are just some sentences that trigger you and that sentence is the ultimate landmine for me. The exhaustive nature of trying to explain my multiracial identity to people who were not interested in me as a person, but rather just satisfying their own curiosity became infuriating. For many years, I tried to respond thoughtfully with an explanation of all my cultural heritages and clarifying that yes, while I am from Alaska, I'm not actually "an eskimo." (Often this would then diverge into a long discussion about the word "eskimo" and its problematic history.) Over time, it just got irritating. Trying to justify my own existence. And use language that was understood by all. This constant barrage of questioning was not only annoying but dehumanized me to the point where I gave up having meaningful conversations about my multiracial identity and would respond with anger. This exhaustion led me to respond to "What are you?" with a stony pause and an angry, "I'm human, what are you?" I was just too bitter to try and educate others about how this microaggression had worn me down and gave up in anger.

3. BARGAINING

Cory = Ji Eun

I'd always had a close relationship with my Korean grandparents who I lived with when I was a young child. They were very involved in the Korean church and on the few occasions when I went to church with them, I was ostracized by my Korean peers, some of whom were classmates. Just as I was othered in my classes for not speaking English perfectly, I didn't fit in here for my broken Korean. Just as I was deemed to tan by my white classmates, I didn't fit in here for being too white for my Korean peers. That's when I asked my grandfather for a Korean name so I could try to fit in. He named me Ji Eun which I embraced wholeheartedly while at church as a way to fit in with the other girls. And so during the day at school, I was Cory. On the weekends, I was Ji Eun. And for years, I tried to negotiate my own existence within these two realms.

Rachel Studies German

For my foreign language requirement in school, I studied German, even though my school offered Japanese language courses. While I spoke Japanese with my mother as a child, I couldn't really read or write in Japanese. Hoping to have a chance to expand these skills in school, I signed up for the Japanese class. The school declined my request as they felt I might have an unfair advantage over other students since they knew I had a Japanese mother. I was disappointed, but I understood, until I found out that they had allowed students who spoke Spanish fluently to enroll in Spanish classes. Was I too Japanese to study Japanese? When I graduated high school, there were students in the Japanese class that could read and write at a higher level than I could. I felt threatened by these students. Was I really Japanese if I couldn't read the newspaper or a street sign, when my non-Asian peers could? Even after I moved to New York City for college, a professor heard me speaking Japanese to another student and confronted me about it. He asked if

I had studied Japanese in school, and I explained that I didn't, but that my mother is Japanese, so I learned to speak it at home. He stared at me as if trying to verify the authenticity of my answer before responding that he refused to believe that I was half-Japanese, because I didn't "look" or "act" Japanese.

4. DEPRESSION

Cory is Silent

So many parts of my existence were erased or conflated throughout my life and I often lacked the vocabulary to combat this. With my insecurities about my English, I found myself retreating into myself and staying silent. I'd often overhear conversations about me both in English and Korean, dissecting my very existence, but I'd remain silent and internalized it all. When I didn't get into any Ivy Leagues, I overheard some of the agimas saying that it wasn't my fault—how could it be since my dad was white? When I got a C in math, I heard teachers wonder at how an Asian didn't ace the class, only to be assured by another teacher that it wasn't their teaching skills, but rather that I wasn't full Asian, so we couldn't expect the same level of success as the other "real Asians." And so I remained silent. I heard the justifications and then blame. I was never enough for either sides of my identities and my straddled existence led to my silence.

Rachel Goes to Therapy

I went to therapy for the first time when I was in high school. I was isolated and disconnected, but the strange part was that my mother agreed to send me to therapy. Therapy is often viewed as a sign of weakness in Asian culture, but my parents didn't know what else to do, so I went. My therapist asked me to tell her about myself and I rattled off a long list of accomplishments. When she asked

me what I liked about myself, I couldn't come up with a response. Several therapists later, I still only defined myself by my accomplishments and it later became clear that I didn't have a sense of identity. I had been a chameleon for years, trying to fit in with those around me and ignoring my own interests. The results of two studies reported by Townsend, Markus, and Bergsieker in *My Choice, Your Categories: The Denial of Multiracial Identities* showed that "...mixed-race individuals in the United States who identify as biracial or multiracial can encounter difficulty in asserting their identities, and that such constraints can lead to negative psychological consequences." This was true for me. I blamed myself for not being able to connect with others, and I punished myself for it with negative self-talk. I sought out every flaw I could find about myself and vowed to fix it. I believed if I was "perfect" then people wouldn't have a reason

"I no longer feel the need to justify or hide either part of my ethnicity, rather I'm empowered by it."

not to get to know me. The double-negatives are overwhelming. One day after therapy, I discovered that the reason I was having trouble connecting is because there was nothing to connect to. People didn't care so much about my accomplishments, they wanted to know what my genuine likes and dislikes were. Socializing wasn't some sort of test that required a perfect score, and it wasn't about giving the "right" answer as I had believed it was. With this realization, I slowly dipped my toe into the pool of human connection, growing more comfortable with each connection and friendship.

5. ACCEPTANCE

Cory is Cory

On a good day, I'm just me. And I accept my anger and my denial and my negotiations about all my multiple identities with grace and compassion. And now when I hear the question "What are you?", I often take a deep breath and explain a bit about my racial and ethnic history, while including a tiny lecture about how problematic that question is. And it is a daily struggle to not respond in complete anger. Or denial. Or bargain for a space that makes sense for the questioner. I'm coming to terms with my own complex and beautiful existence. And while I may still roll my eyes when I'm questioned about my racial background, I now recognize that all of this leads to who I am now. Cory is Cory. And my denial, anger, bargaining, and depression about my own identity have led me to become the person who I am now. And I'm finally okay with that.

Rachel is a Badass

These days, I view my multiracial background as a point of connection rather than separation. I've finally accepted that I can exist in both cultures and that I don't have to choose. I still find myself ready lash out when faced with microaggressions and assumptions about my identity, but I am becoming more comfortable having conversations about my mixed heritage and how it's shaped me as a person. Instead of hiding, I can let myself be seen as a whole, and being accepted for that has changed my life for the better. I no longer feel the need to justify or hide either part of my ethnicity, rather I'm empowered by it. Most of the time. Self-doubt and loneliness still creep in from time to time, but then I remember that I'm human. The strength I felt when I was "goth" was a false strength based solely on appearance and intimidation, but true badassery comes from within. Accepting the complications of my identity has helped me discover what my true strengths

are. I no longer need my studded belt to feel like a badass. I am enough and owning my true strengths allows me to be seen as a human, which is badass.

about the authors

Cory Nam Owen currently serves as the Associate Dean of Student Development at The Juilliard School in New York City where she engages with performing artists from around the world. Her research has focused on identity development which is inspired by her own multiracial background.

Rachel Miho Christensen is the Administrative Director of the Alan D. Marks Center for Career Services and Entrepreneurship at The Juilliard School, where she is dedicated to providing strategies, resources, and opportunities for emerging performing artists to create sustainable careers. Prior to working in higher education, Rachel worked in artist management and received her Bachelor of Music degree from New York University. Originally from Salt Lake City, Utah, Rachel currently lives in New York City with her cat, Moshi.

Multiraciality in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation Programs

*Kamrie J. Risku
University of Maryland, College Park*

My Journey

I spent months agonizing over where I would choose to pursue my graduate education. I traveled to various preview weekends, scoured websites, investigated curriculum, and I even went as far as to see what practitioners and scholars were doing post-graduation. These things mattered to me, but as a Black Multiracial woman, I knew what mattered most to me was feeling like I belonged in the community I would immerse myself into. I also knew that in my practice and scholarship I needed to center diversity, equity, and social and racial justice. I wanted a program that aligned itself with those values.

I knew entering a graduate program would not be easy work. I expected my ideas and my understanding of the world and myself to be pushed and challenged. However, at times, I felt this growth was unnecessarily painful. Perhaps even cruel. One of the most painful moments of my graduate education occurred during a student development theory class. It was mid-semester and we were discussing Multiracial identity development, a topic I had been looking forward to discussing. That excitement soon turned into anguish when another student equated O.J. Simpson's infamous quote, "I'm not Black, I'm O.J." to the identity development of Multiracial students. I remember the class erupting in laughter as I sat there in disbelief. I tried to explain that this was not a fair comparison but the moment had been missed and we swiftly moved on to the next subject. This would not be the only time my racial identity was challenged during my graduate experience.

During an assessment course, Multiracial identity was referred to as being "messy" and hard to make sense of in quantitative data. When facilitating an intergroup dialogue in an undergraduate course, a student questioned why I did not like being complimented on my light skin or "good" hair. What has been most hurtful has been my colleagues and peers questioning my commitment to social and racial justice. Most notably, a classmate claimed that Multiracial people with white parents (such as myself) only identified with our white ancestry to align ourselves with whiteness, rather than the very real experience of trying to understand our racial identity through our family history.

While I felt deeply misunderstood, what concerned me the most was wondering how my classroom experiences represented the attitudes practitioners have about Multiraciality. I worried that Multiracial students were facing the same micro- and macro-aggressions from student affairs practitioners. I often questioned what my role was in holding folks accountable for these hurtful remarks, but identifying and dismantling monoracism often felt like I was constantly being gaslighted. I did not want to say "race is not real" because that felt demeaning to the marginalized monoracial identities, but I also did not want to be seen as "in-between" white and Black racial identities.

Critical Reflection

At times, reflecting on these experiences made me bitter and resentful and even months later, I feel saddened. My expectation was student affairs practitioners, at all levels, should understand and respect the social identities of their colleagues

and students. However, I did not feel that was my experience. I have taken a number of courses, held an assistantship, completed a number of internships, and served in a few instructional roles. While grateful for the many opportunities I have had, I realized my Multiracial identity was missing from the curricula and often unnecessarily challenged in my paraprofessional experiences.

Despite a strong push toward diversity, inclusion, and social justice (Flowers, 2003; Long, 2012), student affairs research and practice have been slow to respond to the unique needs of an increasingly visible student population, Multiracial students. Between the years of 2006 to 2016, only one percent of the scholarly content in the top five higher education and student affairs journals focused on issues of Multiraciality (Museus, Lambe Sariñana, Yee, & Robinson, 2016). Research that has been published—and unquestionably studies that have not been selected for publication—have shown Multiracial college students are having different experiences than their monoracial peers (Root, 1990; Renn, 2000; Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002). Often times, these different experiences are difficult ones in which Multiracial students feel misunderstood and denied by peers, faculty, and student affairs practitioners (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Museus et. al, 2016). Through my experiences, I found this research not only applies to undergraduate students and their experiences but also to graduate students such as myself.

Building Community

The first half of my graduate program was spent in isolation. I did not have the words to explain the feelings I was experiencing and did not know who I could turn to. It was not until a co-instructor connected me with one Multiracial practitioner who pointed me in the direction of quite a few others. Once I began having conversations, I understood my experience in graduate school was not an

anomaly. I was struck with relief that something was not wrong with me but felt sadness with how commonly the dismissal of Multiracial identities occurred. Our experiences highlighted a critical issue that the student affairs field has with race.

Despite the difficulty, I have found community in a handful of powerful ways. Most transformational for me has been the opportunity to grow close to a group of undergraduate Multiracial students. Our relationships started in a number of ways, but my initial goal was to connect with these students and serve as an example of what it could mean to live authentically in one's Multiracial identity. In reality, they have given me an incredible amount of space to critically reflect, (un)learn, and heal. By choosing to live authentically as a Black Multiracial woman, I have been able to build small but powerful communities that foster transformative healing. These students rejuvenate me and help me to reimagine my purpose as a practitioner.

Lessons Learned

By making my personal narrative political I hope to offer practical knowledge that continues to urge practitioners, administrators, and faculty to consider Multiracial voices and experiences in practice, policy, and pedagogy. While the following recommendations may not work for all Multiracial students and all institutional contexts, these recommendations are significant because they offer an alternative that dismantles and decenters normative and essentialist ways of thinking about race.

- 1) Multiracial students represent a growing population on many college campuses. However, the literature on Multiracial college students demonstrates that they are experiencing their college years differently than that of their monoracial peers (Renn, 2000; Root, 1990). Research suggests that Multiracial students do not feel affirmed in their racial identities

and often face monoracism, discrimination, and prejudice based on their racial identities (Harris, 2017; Johnston & Nadal, 2010). This may lead to serious implications for how Multiracial students will engage in their college environments (Literate, 2010).

It is unknown how student affairs practitioners are learning about Multiracial students' identity development models or their racialized experiences. It is also unclear how practitioners are learning about Multiraciality and applying the knowledge, theories, and frameworks to their practice. However, current research has demonstrated that Multiracial students are in need of something more from student affairs practitioners. The field needs to investigate and assess the ways that student affairs practitioners are (un)learning race. There is a misalignment in what researchers, faculty, and student affairs practitioners know about Multiracial students and whether that knowledge is being translated into practice in the same ways it is for their monoracial classmates.

2) Previous studies have indicated that racism is pervasive in graduate education, notably in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2015). Education scholars have called for faculty to develop inclusive pedagogies that decenter whiteness and adjust classroom practices that favor socially dominant groups (hooks, 1994; Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2015). My experiences—and the experiences of other Multiracial practitioners—speak to the need to improve the classroom experiences of Multiracial graduate students. Student affairs preparation programs need to continue decentering whiteness and monoracism in the curriculum, in practice, and in the classroom environment. This approach needs to be taken not only to prepare practitioners to work with Multiracial students but

to also improve the experiences of Multiracial practitioners. As bell hooks (1994) said, "The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility" (p. 207).

3) I recently moderated a panel conversation on the experiences of Multiracial undergraduate students and posed the question to the panelists, "What do you wish people understood better about being Multiracial?" The answers varied but a theme arose: do not make Multiracial people justify their racial identities; rather, trust that they know what they are talking about and assume they do not have a reason to lie to you. I could see that many practitioners in the audience were grappling with what this meant for them and perhaps some were considering previous situations in which they unfairly questioned a Multiracial person's identity. In short, student affairs practitioners must continue to unlearn what we have previously been socialized to associate with racial identity and not question the authenticity of one's identity when they do not fit our criteria of that race.

Concluding Thoughts

Though my graduate experience has been difficult, I have not been discouraged to continue working towards racial justice in student affairs. I especially think it is critical to educate student affairs practitioners to understand the history of race in the United States and to challenge how we think about race in our practice. As Multiracial students continue to become visible, the field will have to reckon with our monolithic understanding of race. I am constantly in critical reflection of the ways I can decenter race but still honor the ways race has deeply impacted the lives of many people, including Multiracial people. I have a tremendous amount of hope for the student affairs field and will continue to trust that hope.

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