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Exploring the "Chameleon Experience" Through the Lens of Multiracial People

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology

by

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August 2016

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Erika Noriega

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation, a culmination of my doctoral studies and journey, to my loving and patient husband, Jason C. Pigg; my incredibly supportive and loving parents, Jose and Teresa Noriega; and my siblings, Omar and Iliana, for continuing to ground me when I needed to come back to down Earth.

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the "Chameleon Experience" Through the Lens of Multiracial People

by

Erika Noriega-Pigg

The "chameleon experience," or the phenomenon of fitting in with different ethnoracial groups, has been suggested to be a common occurrence for multiracial individuals, however, has not been fully studied in the field of psychology. It has yet to be determined what or how the chameleon experience functions for multiracial people and how it impacts this population. This study explored the "chameleon experience" in order to gain a deeper understanding of the process and its influence on multiracial individuals. The study included qualitative interviews with twelve self-identified multiracial participants who reported having experienced changing their behavior in order to fit in with different ethnoracial groups. CQR analysis approach revealed three domains (Fitting-in, Not Fitting-in, and the Impact of Blending-in), fifteen categories, and ten subcategories. Results included Strategies to fit-in, Experiences of Marginalization, as well as moments of Empowerment, Disidentification, and Consciousness. Limitations and future directions for practice and research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Within the last decade, the multiracial population has experienced exponential growth compared to other racial/ethnic groups in the United States (Jones & Bullock, 2012). Multiracial is defined as people with parents from two or more racial heritages and/or ethnicities (Phinney & Alipuria, 2006). The multiracial population may include individuals who identify as “biracial,” “ethnically or racially ambiguous,” “multiethnic,” and in some cases “multicultural.” The majority of the multiracial population is made up of people who identify as “White” and some other racial/ethnic group (Jones & Bullock, 2012). Examples of this identity are: “White” and “Black,” “White” and “Asian,” “White” and “Other” or “Latino/a.” With such great diversity in this population, social experiences may be very different and vary among multiracial people. However, it appears that there is a common social theme that this group may encounter: the “chameleon experience” (Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Loyd, 2005). This seemingly common process was first illuminated by researchers who were investigating the racial identity development of multiracial people (Miville et. al, 2005). The term “chameleon” is a metaphor for humans who are able to adopt the behavior, values, and norms to match that of their immediate environment (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Collins, 2000). Therefore, the “chameleon experience” entails being able to blend into different racial and/or ethnic groups in differing situations by adapting behavior and norms (Collins, 2000; Miville et. al, 2005). Although this phenomenon emerged as a common experience in prior research, currently little is known about the chameleon experience and multiracial people. Specifically, what the chameleon process for this group looks like, how it functions with this population, and the consequences

associated for multiracial people. It appears that there are related phenomena such as the "chameleon effect" (Chartrad & Bargh, 1999), "situational identity" (Collins, 2000), "malleable racial identity" (Sanchez et al., 2009), "chameleon pedagogy" (Machado-Casas, 2012), and the idea of "passing" (Khana & Johnson, 2010). Given the lack of information, experts within the field have called for further research to gain a greater understanding of this population (Root, 1992; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004), including social interactions, adversities faced, and strengths.

Some of the most common challenges faced by multiracial individuals are experiencing rejection and marginalization from people of their various heritage groups as well as from monoracial individuals (Morgan Consoli, Noriega, Pavone & Meza unpublished manuscript; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). This means that multiracial people often endure relegation to a certain group based on others' inability to accept or embrace someone who may not meet the stereotypical idea of what it means to be of a particular race or heritage. As an example, a person of White and Latino/a descent may be confronted with a situation in which the other may reject them for not being "White enough," "Latino/a enough," or "too White." Such scenarios may lead to the assumption that all multiracial people confront the experience of displacement. However, multiracial individuals have also experienced being able to blend into different ethnic and/or racial groups, an ability that has been found to be adaptive and may enable some multiracial individuals to behave as "chameleons" (Miville et al., 2005; Morgan Consoli, Noriega & Pavone, unpublished manuscript). By engaging in chameleon-like behavior a multiracial person may find that various racial and/or ethnic groups, regardless of whether those groups are the groups that make up the multiracial person's background, embrace him/her. Using this strategy often leads to the multiracial

person being able to establish relationships with various racially/ethnically diverse groups (Miville et al., 2005).

The chameleon experience has been found to have several psychological benefits for the individuals who engage it. First, it appears that “the ability to ‘fit in’ with various groups allowed for more extensive cross-cultural relationships (Salahuddin & O’Brien, 2011). In qualitative studies, self-identified multiracial people have reported being able to interact with people of different groups and prefer to associate with people who value diversity (Miville et al., 2005; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The ability to adapt one’s behavior based on varied circumstances has been found to be beneficial; for example, in a study participants were asked to mimic the behavior of people from differing racial groups. Then they were asked to take a test measuring prejudice and implicit bias and it was found that participants were less likely to feel prejudice or an implicit bias toward racial groups when they adopted those outgroup’s behavior (Inzlicht, Gutsell, & Legault, 2012). Therefore, the “chameleon ability” seems to be related to a decrease in implicit and possibly explicit prejudice against members of other ethnoracial groups (Inzlicht, Gutsell, &Legault, 2012) Last, this phenomenon has been found to increase rapport between people in that there is a positive correlation between being able to adapt to other people’s behavior and building and eliciting greater empathy and rapport with that person (Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng, & Chartrand, 2003). However, although there are positive outcomes of the “chameleon experience,” it has been found that the necessary malleability of a multiracial person’s racial identity may also negatively influence psychological well-being. For example, there is a strong association between people who change their identity based on their social context and depression (Sanchez, Shih, & Garcia, 2009). Additionally, another study demonstrated that people who intentionally engage in

“chameleon-like” behavior were more likely to feel that their heritage was not valued by others, to have poorer collective self-esteem, and to report lower well-being than those people who felt the multiple parts of their identity were integrated (Downie, Mageau, Koestner, & Liodden, 2006). Although there are existing studies on chameleon-like experiences, research is limited to majority, monoracial groups. More research is clearly needed to explore this experience with the multiracial population.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to explore the impressions of multiracial people about their lived experiences regarding social interactions with people of different racial backgrounds. Qualitative methods have been suggested as particularly valuable for research of an exploratory nature (Creswell, 1998), and for “giving voice” to underrepresented individuals (Morrow, 2007; Yeh & Inman, 2007). Therefore, through qualitative methods, the research will address the following research questions: “What strategies are developed in order to fit in with people of different racial groups? How does the experience of employing these strategies to fit in affect multiracial people?”

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Key Terms

The scope of this study includes terms that are difficult to untangle and historically have been used inconsistently within the published literature that encompass race, ethnicity, culture, and identity (Quintana, 2007). It has been argued that the interchanging of these words is a reflection of today's society's use of this terminology and evolution of their definitions (Quintana, 2007). Nonetheless, the researcher will define relevant terms in an attempt to clarify terminology for the purposes of this paper.

Sociologists originally conceptualized the term "race" as a way of labeling that was used to divide the human species into hierarchal categories based on physical features (Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Winant, 2000). Although weak associations have been found between people of different phenotypic characteristics, such as hair texture, skin color, and nose size, there is not strong evidence demonstrating that race can be determined on a biological basis (Negy, Klein, & Brantley, 2004). Race has therefore more recently been conceptualized as a socially constructed category that assists people with dividing or grouping others into arbitrary classifications based on perceived differences (Phinney & Alipuria, 2006; Quintana, 2007). The meanings attached to race manifest themselves in the form of competition for privilege, power, and status that reinforce the political and social status quo (Negy et. al, 2004; Prochaska & Norcross, 2007; Winant, 2000). As such these categorizations, whether perceived or tangible, have a significant impact on the psychological processes and personality of a person.

In the United States, ethnic groups are often *racialized*, indicating that ethnic groups are treated and incur similar meanings as racial groups (Omi &Winant, 1986). However, despite the terms "race" and "ethnicity" often being used interchangeably, there are subtle differences. Ethnicity, unlike the socially constructed definition of race, is commonly defined by demographic features such as language, national origin, and culture (Quintana, 2007). The development of an ethnic group is acquired by focusing on a group of people who agree on a shared sense of history, values, customs, and traditions (Phinney & Alipuria, 2006). In order to develop a sense of community, members of an ethnic group make a conscious effort to develop a distinct in-group, and to devise a "we" entity (Phinney & Alipuria, 2006). Therefore, the continuity of an ethnic group relies heavily on a group of people being able to practice, internalize, and maintain the shared goals and values of that particular group, which is inclusive of culture. Degree of identification with one's ethnicity has also been shown to have significant influence on psychological well-being (Smith & Silva, 2011). Some research has shown that when it comes to considering and valuing minority group experiences, the differentiation between the terms seem artificial and irrelevant (Quintana, 2007) and both concepts are measured based on the perception of social distance, meaning distance among groups based on "…intermarriage, level of segregation, and interracial attitudes" (Quintana, 2007, pg. 260). For the purpose of this paper the distinct yet sometimes overlapping meanings of race and ethnicity will be captured through use of the term "ethnoracial."

Another term that is important to define for the purposes of this paper is "culture." Culture can be described as "an integrated constellation of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that is learned and transmitted to succeeding generations" (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007, pg. 404). Through these components that are passed on from group to group across

time, the process of uniting individual people occurs and traditions and norms are created. However, culture is not a static concept and changes depending on many factors, such as the period of time, the communities informing or influencing the norms, or the environment. Cultural identity is a "far more malleable concept than ethnicity or race…(and) refers to self-constructed awareness of the cultural elements that inform one's sense of self" (Phinney & Alipuria, 2006, pg. 216). Such elements include both race and ethnicity, but are also influenced by other social factors.

Much like the inconsistencies found in the use of the terms race, ethnicity, and culture, there are frequent inconsistencies in the literature attempting to define the group of people with multiple categorizations within a single domain of race and/or ethnicity (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2008; Phinney & Alipuria, 2006; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The clearest example is people born to parents from different ethnoracial groups. Terms used for these individuals include *multiracial, biracial, multiethnic, biethnic, mixed, multicultural,* and *bicultural*. "Multiracial" is defined as someone who is made up of or represents several or many races (Hall, 1980). As an example, this would include a person being born to parents who are not only racially different from each other, but whose parents may also each be multiracial or biracial. In contrast a "biracial" person represents only two races (Hall, 1980), such as a person who is born to a monoracially Black parent and a monoracially White parent. Biracial people can be and are included under the multiracial category. The term "multiethnic," includes biethnic people, and are people who choose to identify with two or more ethnic groups (Jackson et al., 2012). As an example, a person who identifies him/herself as Italian and Mexican or as Japanese and Jewish. Although ethnic groups are often racialized, at times multiethnic people do not fit under the multiracial umbrella

(Jackson, et al, 2012). For example, a person who is of Korean and Japanese descent, although biethnic is still racially categorized as a monoracial Asian person. Similarly, “multicultural” and “bicultural” people are defined as individuals who have internalized two cultures and in turn utilize these cultures to guide their perceptions and behavior (Mok & Morris, 2009). However, not all multicultural people are multiracial (Sanchez et al., 2009). As an example, a Chinese American person can adopt cultural values of China and the United States, however, still only be identified racially as Asian. Such distinctions are often blurry, but for the purposes of this study the terms “multiracial” to focus on people who are *multiracial, multiethnic,* as well as *multicultural* as both terms have been used colloquially among multiracial self-identified people. However, when literature that uses a certain term is reviewed, the term will remain consistent with how the original author stated it.

The “Chameleon Experience”

The “chameleon experience,” as referred to Miville and colleagues (2005), and related to the “situational identity” experience (Collins, 2000), or the “malleable racial identity” experience (Sanchez et al., 2009), has been documented as common for multiracial people and includes the ability to adapt and negotiate cross cultural, social settings and groups (Miville, et. al, 2005; Sanchez et al., 2009; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). When discussing the “chameleon experience” and “situational identity,” researchers have found that multiracial people use their mixed identity to develop strategies to fit in with different ethnoracial groups (Collins, 2000; Miville et al., 2005). It seems that multiracial people pull from the different components of their ethnoracial background in order to help them navigate varying social situations. In regards to the “malleable racial identity” (Sanchez et al., 2009) this refers to the experience of identifying with specific ethnoracial groups based on one’s

social context. For example, when a multiracial person of Black and Latino decent is in a place with a majority of African American people, they will identity as African American, but when they are around the Latino/a community, they are more likely to identify as Latino/a. Although the implications seem to be that the multiracial identity and its development influence the person's "ability" to cross what seems to be rigid ethnoracial boundaries (Miville et al., 2005), the literature does not fully describe this phenomenon and its parameters.

Although the fluidity of the multiracial identity has been slightly documented, few studies explore the chameleon experience in depth. Rather, extant studies mention this experience as a result of investigating multiracial identity development. In an exploratory study regarding common experiences of multiracial heritage people, for example, the chameleon experience was discussed as an ability that self-identified multiracial people practice in order to facilitate acceptance from other ethnoracial groups (Miville et al., 2005). This ability was further highlighted as a strength as it appeared to enable this group to be more cognitively and emotionally flexible across social environments (Miville, et. al, 2005). In another exploratory study investigating biracial Japanese-American identity, it was reported that participants used their chameleon ability not only to defend against discrimination, but also as a method of integrating their identities (Collins, 2000). Additionally, mixed race individuals have been found to have greater social openness and greater social relationships when compared to monoracial people, which may very well be supported by the chameleon phenomenon, as socialization to multiple cultures includes exposure to a greater range of norms, values, and behaviors (Stephan, 1992; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Based on his/her exposure to multiple cultural cues and behavior, a mixed

race individual may be better able to engage in chameleon-like behavior which may lead to greater, effective social interaction with cross cultural groups (Lakin, et al., 2003; Salahuddin & O'Brien, 2011). More exploration of this process is necessary to understand the relationship of social cues, norms, and behaviors as part of the strengths and challenges of this group.

The "chameleon effect" concept was originally established in the social psychology literature when discussing the social interaction of mimicry among monoracial groups (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). In this scope, as noted above, it refers to a person's nonconscious ability to mimic verbal, nonverbal, and behavioral patterns of the social groups with which one surrounds him/herself. Nonconscious mimicry refers to "the tendency to adopt the behaviors, postures, or mannerisms of interaction partners without awareness or intent" (Lakin et. al, 2003, p. 147), Therefore, it appears that people who mimic others' behavior, do so without knowing it. More specifically, it appears that the chameleon effect is achieved through compartmentalization, in which parts of one's identity will surface based on the social context (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). This idea seems to support counseling psychologists' idea of the "malleable racial identity" of multiracial people, where only one part of a mixed person's identity rises when around specific ethnoracial groups (Sanchez et al., 2009). Facets of the chameleon experience may have negative psychological influence on those who experience it, as it relates to themes of rejection and neglect of the different components of a multiracial person's identity. The experience of rejection and discrimination has an adverse impact on mental health (Jackson, et al, 2012). This appears to indirectly support the finding that having a "malleable racial identity" is positively correlated to depression (Sanchez et al., 2009). However, some studies have demonstrated positive effects

of the chameleon experience leading to higher reports of empathy, liking, and bonding between individuals (Chartrad & Bargh, 1999; Lakin et al., 2003). These findings appear to support the results of the qualitative studies finding that self-identified multiracial people developed "chameleon-like" strategies to buffer against discrimination and increase the ability to be accepted socially by other ethnoracial groups (Collins, 2000; Miville et al., 2005). Therefore, it is yet to be determined if the chameleon experience may indeed be more harmful or helpful for people that experience it.

The chameleon experience has been found within bicultural and multicultural individuals as well. It has been documented as a process that highlights the individual's ability to develop strategies to survive or overcome adversities when interacting with diverse ethnoracial groups. Specifically, this concept has been used with immigrant populations and ethnic minority groups in which the individual must adopt the dominant culture, while maintaining his/her own cultural identity (Machado-Casas, 2012; Hall, 1980). In a qualitative study regarding "chameleon pedagogy," or strategies that use multicultural disguises to protect from marginalization, immigrants reported narratives of fitting into the dominant culture by learning techniques and cues to help them survive physically, socially, and emotionally in their new environments (Machado-Casas, 2012). Similarly, mixed heritage individuals reported hiding certain traits of their identities to survive their social circumstances, a concept known as "passing" (Khana& Johnson, 2010).

Within United States history, the concept of "passing" refers to a person who is of a particular race identifying and presenting him or her as being of another race (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). Stemming from racism, the act of passing was most documented during the time of Jim Crow laws, when people would attempt to pass as "White" in order to gain

privileges and avoid prejudice (Daniel, 1992). This phenomenon is related to the experience of the chameleon experience as a person with a marginalized racial background attempts to identify temporarily as another (Khanna & Johnson, 2010.) In a study in which passing was looked at more closely with Black/White biracial individuals within this generation, it was found that these multiracial individuals had agency in the way they identified and presented themselves to others. Many strategies were employed by these individuals in order to accent or conceal the different backgrounds of their racial makeup. For example, strategies included: verbal identification or disidentification, selective disclosure, manipulating phenotype, highlighting or downplaying cultural symbols, and selective association (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). By using these different strategies, participants reported taking on an active role in their presentation of racial identity to others. The motivations to either highlight or conceal specific parts of their identity were also strategic in nature. For example, some respondents reported attempting to "pass as Black" to avoid being ridiculed and criticized, while others attempted to "pass as white" in order to avoid discrimination at the workplace (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). It appears that by managing the presentation that he or she sets forth, the multiracial individual's ability to exercise "passing" strategies is acting in adaptive and protective ways.

Based on the studies regarding the chameleon experience with mixed race people, it appears that a dynamic relationship exists with multiracial identity development (Collins, 2000). In order to gain a greater understanding of this connection, one must understand the development of a multiracial identity and its relationship with sociocultural correlates.

Racial Identity Development for Multiracial People

Ethnoracial identity for the multiracial population is extremely complex, but can be informative as a person's ethnic identity can inform his/her attitude towards himself/herself (Poston, 1990), as well as "their ethnic background, attitudes about individuals from other ethnic groups, and attitudes about individuals from the majority group" (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Therefore, in order to understand social interactions between multiracial people and others, one must consider the racial identity development of the multiracial group as it may influence the interaction that he/she may have with people of other racial/ethnic groups (Crisp & Turner, 2010; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Thus, the racial identity development of multiracial people may directly impact the "chameleon experience," or the phenomenon of blending into different ethnoracial groups. To date, there are several conceptual racial identity development models that have been developed for the multiracial population.

Thornton and Watson (1995) found that several approaches have been used to develop multiracial identity models, including: *the problem approach, the equivalent approach,* and *the variant approach.* The problem approach refers to the development of a "marginal" person who lies in between races or ethnicities and will experience poor psychological outcomes (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Negy et. al, 2004). Therefore, this approach assumes that because an individual is of mixed race, they will experience special problems and are assumed an at-risk group for psychopathology (Thornton & Wason, 1995). The equivalent approach refers to identity development being conceptualized the same for multiracial people as for monoracial or monoethnic people (Thornton & Wason, 1995). Within this lens, it is assumed that individuals can learn to identify with one mainstream culture and thus will be able to lead to a well-adjusted life (Negy et. al, 2004). This approach

specifically focuses on linear models of monoracial or monoethnic people in which the end goal is to achieve a stable racial/ethnic identity. This approach raises great concerns because of the diversity found within the multiracial population. Whereas monoracial people will strive to achieve a racial identity, such as "Black" or "White," multiracial people do not have a specific identity label or identity as multiracial identity will vary based on a person's lineage and context. Finally, the variant approach focuses on the development of a multiracial identity, free from comparison to or being impacted by monoracial or monoethnic models and theories (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). In the variant approach, there is an emphasis on strengths, integration, and positive psychological outcomes for multiracial people. Therefore, within this conceptualization, multiracial people are not expected to meet or achieve one specific racial identity.

One additional multiracial identity development conceptualization that has been offered uses an ecological lens (Rockquemore et al., 2009). This approach focuses on the context, including community, class, and family (Root, 1998), and allows for researchers to take into account the various factors that impact the identity of a multiracial person. This lens considers how other sociocultural components influence the racial identity of a multiracial person. For example, this approach considers a person's geographical location and its relationship to racial identity, such as understanding that multiracial people in the South are more likely to identify with their ethnic minority heritage than those in the Midwest (Brunsma, 2005).

Although there is a lack of empirical evidence supporting the following theoretical models, researchers have attempted to explore and articulate the process of identity formation for a multiracial person. For example, Poston and Kich each developed a conceptual model

using a variant approach framework. Poston's model includes five stages: *personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration* (Poston, 1990). A linear process that draws on the various experiences that a multiracial person may have to place the person in stages, beginning with ambivalence and ending in acceptance. Kich's model only includes three stages and closely resembles general identity development models. Stages for this model include: experiencing an initial awareness of difference, experiencing rejection from others, and coming to acceptance of himself/herself (Kich, 1992). Root approaches multiracial identity development as a process that considers other social categories that may influence a person's meaning making such as family characteristics, community attitudes, class, gender, sexual orientation, and history, among others. These contexts impact the person's multiracial heritage identity and that identity may vary depending on the situation or interaction with others (Root, 2002).

These models share commonalities, such as the individual experiencing an initial lack of awareness regarding his/her multiracial background, undergoing a process of awareness regarding his/her unique background, and integration. Integration may refer to a person ultimately identifying with multiple, one, or no racial or ethnic groups at all. For those multiracial people identifying as multicultural, often they will honor their multiple heritages and embrace the traditions of those groups (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). However, this does not mean that because a person is multiracial he/she is multicultural, meaning he/she identifies with multiple cultural groups; it simply indicates that he/she has "the opportunity of developing a (multicultural) identity" (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004, pg. 139). This also means that the multiracial person has the opportunity to develop his/her own identity

category such as identifying as "mixed," thereby demonstrating a high degree of confidence and lack of regard for the restrictive racial/ethnic categories of the past (Root, 1990, 2003).

As further exploration of the process of multiracial ethnic identity development has continued, social scientists have found significant factors that impact ethnoracial identity for multiracial people consequently influencing their interpersonal interactions. Sociocultural factors impacting multiracial identity include but are not limited to: racial history and politics in the United States, age, geographic location and makeup, family influence, social class status, and acceptance by others (Choi-Misalidis, 2010; Stephan & Stephan, 1989; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Although the literature on multiracial people is limited (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004) and little research regarding the direct factors related to the chameleon experience with this population has been explored, the following variables are related to multiracial identity development, which may be indirectly related to the strategies underlying the chameleon experience (Collins, 2000; Miville et al., 2005).

Historical Underpinnings and the Multiracial Experience

Prior to the 2000 Census Data Survey, the U.S. government required its residents to identify with only one "race" (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). However, the historical intermixing of groups has been documented throughout the existence of humankind (Hickman, 1997). In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau allowed people the opportunity to mark more than one race on its questionnaire for the first time ever (Jones & Bullock, 2012). Since that time, a shift has occurred in both census reporting and society so that it has become increasingly common for individuals to identify with more than one ethnoracial group (Saulny, 2011). For example, the 2010 Census Brief demonstrated a 32% increase in the multiracial population from the previous census, and highlighted it as the largest growing racial group in the United States

(Jackson, et al, 2012). Social scientists predict that up to 1 in 5 residents within the United States will identify as having a multiracial background by the year 2050 (Lee & Bean, 2004). However, this situation has not come about without challenges and controversies.

History plays a significant role in how racial and ethnic identity is influenced by the politics and laws of the past. As an example, when the United States began to develop as a nation, government officials highlighted phenotypic differences among groups in order to create a hierarchy and divisions of power and labor (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). It was during this time that the hypo-descendent rule, otherwise known as the "one drop rule," was established (Negy et al., 2004; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). This ruling entailed that anyone who had as little as one drop of "Black" blood would be classified and categorized as "Black" within the United States, regardless of how the person identified him/herself (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). The purpose of this law was to enforce the idea of racial purity and to maintain the notion of "Whiteness" as superior.

The idea behind the One-Drop Rule was legally enforced in 1894 in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a case that is most commonly known as the lawsuit that led to the establishing and acceptance of separate but equal facilities for different racial groups. This separation among groups translated into disparities and inequalities for non-White ethnic or racial groups (Hickman, 1997; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Most relevant to multiracial people, the case institutionalized the idea that any person who had as little as 1/8 of their lineage as "Black," would then legally be categorized as Black regardless of how they looked (Hickman, 1997; Roth, 2005). The principle of the "one-drop rule" is a relevant concept to people of non-White descent, as they too endure the classification as "other" based on their non-White lineage traits. For example, other racialized groups, such as Latino/as, are often

not categorized as “White” even though a Latino/a person may have a European history and phenotypic traits. Latino/a identity is rooted in a history of miscegenation; therefore, the idea of “one-drop” of blood from other groups has influenced the classification of Latino/as as “other.” These practices reinforced the view that multiracial individuals did not have the ability to self-label or identify with groups whom they felt best represented them as well as supported the imposition of racial categories onto others.

Other historical policies, such as anti-miscegenation laws, further reinforced the segregation of groups and also greatly impacted the sociocultural acceptance of mixed heritage individuals. State legislators created these laws, with a majority of states enacting these principles during the time after the Civil War. These laws were enacted in order to prevent children of mixed unions, such as a child born from a union between slave master and slave, from acquiring financial and social status gains from his/her White lineage. At that time, a “White” person was defined by the Census Bureau and later by the Virginia act of “Preservation of Racial Integrity,” as a person who had less than $1/16^{th}$ of Black or Indigenous blood (Hickman, 1997). Sexual relations and intermarriages were prohibited between Whites and other groups, as it was believed that the “purity” and power of the White population needed to be maintained and protected. The upholding of such laws for hundreds of years contributed to further institutional and psychological discrimination. These sets of policies are embedded within racist ideology and monoracial systems, and may influence the method in which multiracial people, specifically people of mixed White and Non-White heritage, identify. Although some of the historical policies no longer exist, the prejudiced ideology that transpired from them continues to impact the people of today as it is embedded within current systems (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

Age and the Multiracial Experience

As stated, the historical race definitions and relations in this country continue to impact views on racial identity, specifically for the multiracial population. Previously stated, interracial unions and offspring existed since the beginning of this nation, however, it was not until the case of *Loving vs. The State of Virginia* of 1967*,* when the US Supreme Court declared the outdated anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional, that the country noticed a baby boom of multiracial people (Negy et al., 2004; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Coincidentally, this was also during the end of the Civil Rights Era, a period of time that saw a rise in people born from individuals seeking ethnoracial equity (Khanna, 2011). Since that time, the baby boomers have become adults and there has been an associated increase in people identifying with multiple racial and ethnic categories (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Scholars argue that the increase in multiracial identification comes as a direct effect of the Civil Rights Movement as multiracial people "born in the post civil rights era appear to have more racial options" (Khanna, 2011, pg. 39) as those born before that time were limited by the "one-drop rule." Age of the individual therefore seems to influence the way that multiracial people identify, given the social contexts of different periods in time (Khanna, 2011; Negy et al., 2004).

Geographical Location and Identification

History also plays a major role in how the geographical location of a multiracial person may influence his/her identity. There appears to be a pattern in which people of mixed heritage are more likely to identify as multiracial in the western region of the United States of America as opposed to areas where there may be people of mixed heritage who do not identify as multiracial (Choi-Misailidis, 2010). Specifically, in a study focused on racial

identification of multiracial children, it was found that three different types of interracial group unions identify their children differently based on factors, such as geographic location (Brunsma, 2005). For example, between Hispanic and White unions, parents were more likely to identify their children as White in the Southern region of the country (Brunsma, 2005; Negy et al, 2006). This study also found that Black-White children were more likely to only be designated as black in the South compared to other regions of the U.S. (Brunsma, 2005). This may be attributed to the long and racist history entrenched in the South between White and Black groups. With Asian-White unions, it appears that these children were identified as multiracial mainly in the Western regions of the country, which supports the Census' pattern of concentrated patterns of multiracial people on the West Coast (Brunsma, 2005; Choi-Misailidis, 2010). This may or may not be related to the state of Hawaii being classified as one of the states with the highest of proportion of multiracial people, with over 21% of its population identifying multiracially (Edles, 2004). It appears that there are general patterns associated with regional location and identity for multiracial people. However, in regards to actual location, a relationship between location, demographic makeup, and multiracial identity also exists.

It appears that the racial composition of a neighborhood may also have a direct impact on the mixed person's multiracial identity (Choi-Misailidis, 2010; Miville et al, 2005; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Although the time of legal racial segregation is past, it appears that the majority of people living in the United States inhabit segregated racial communities, where people choose to live in neighborhoods that are reflective of their ethnoracial backgrounds (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Therefore, as powerful institutions of socialization, schools and churches located within a segregated community can

leave strong impressions on identity based on the community's leaders ideology on racial identity. It has been found that the racial makeup of a school can also influence parents' decisions about their children's multiracial identity (Brunsma, 2005; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005) Additionally, when friends at school understand and categorize a multiracial child's identity in a particular way, the multiracial child is likely to accept the categorization, thereby, being influenced by peers (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005).

Family Influence and Multiracial Identity

Family is the entity that delivers some of the strongest and most enduring messages to children about their identities in the world (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005), either through explicitly exposing a child to traditions or by making implicit references to promote their heritage (Parillo, 2005; Hughes, et. al, 2006).

It appears that the following three components of a parent's racial socialization greatly influence the method that they use to shape their child's multiracial identity: the parent's own experience with race, the parents' relationship each other, and parental responses to his/her child's phenotype (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Depending on how the parent identifies racially, the messages that he/she received about race, as well as the experiences that he/she has had with ethnoracial groups inspires and shapes the messages that they will pass on to their child (Hughes et al., 2006; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). As an example, a parent who is White and has been socialized to have specific attitudes about ethnic minorities may transmit these beliefs to his/her multiracial child, thereby influencing the child's belief about that group and the self. In addition to the individual parent's history with race and identity, the relationship that he/she has with his/her partner may also influence the conceptualization the child forms about race (Choi-Misailidis, 2010; Miville et al, 2005;

Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). For example, if a child witnesses a parent leave or engage in an extramarital affair, the child is likely to experience negative feelings toward that parent and attribute negative beliefs to that parent's racial group, thereby, also impacting the child's own multiracial identity (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Lastly, parents' perceptions and biases towards specific phenotypes not only impact their children's identity, but also affect the family dynamic (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). A specific case is when an interracial couple has children with differing physical features and the couple transmits messages about racial hierarchy and privilege to their children based on the interaction with each of the children. For example, when a parent favors or privileges the child that is light skinned with blue eyes, although the parent may not explicitly communicate a message about race to the other children, the siblings are likely to be sensitive to experiencing differential treatment by the parent (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Although the parent may not intend to send a negative message to his/her child/children, the child interprets the meaning of differential treatment or racism and may apply it to his/her multiracial identity. Extended family and other caregivers may also be responsible for this dynamic (Choi-Misailidis, 2010; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005).

Social Status and Its Influence on Multiracial People

Although there is little research on the topic of socioeconomic status (SES) and multiracial identity development, it appears that a family's and/or individual's social status is related to multiracial identity (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Feagin 2008; Rockquemore, 1998; Townsend, Fryberg, Wilkins, & Markus, 2012). Within the limited research regarding the variables of social status and multiracial identity, it appears that there are two studies in which the two variables appear to be directly related (Townsend et al., 2012). More

specifically, the studies found that multiracial people with higher social status are more likely to claim a multiracial identity as opposed to people with lower SES are more likely to claim a monoracial minority identity (Rockquemore, 1998; Townsend et al., 2012). Even when researchers controlled for racial composition of the participant's community, people with a middle class identification were still more likely to identify with a multiracial identity (Townsend et al., 2012). As suggested in the above section of regional location and makeup, it seems that SES is also indirectly related to multiracial identity, as SES is indicative of the resources that are afforded to people with higher social status. Therefore, people with higher status and more resources are likely to live in wealthier White neighborhoods and attend better performing schools, which impact a multiracial person's social network and activity (Brunsma, 2005; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Feagin, 2008; Rockquemore, 1998). As discussed above while examining the impact of schools and peers on multiracial identity, it appears that social status also has an impact as it indirectly places individuals within specific racialized communities. In addition to a person's social network being a marker of status, education level is also an indicator of SES (Liu, 2002; Lee, Nelson, Englar-Carlson, Tierney, & Hau, 2006). Within the multiracial literature, it appears that there is an association between identification as multiracial and education level. The relationship is described as follows: the more highly educated families are (i.e. advanced degrees), the more likely they are to reject normed racial classification and identify with a multiracial identity (Choi-Misailidis, 2010). So, it appears that social status acts as a catalyst to help multiracial individuals interact with non-minority people as well as understand and become aware of racial stereotypes and prototypes of ethnic minority people, which lead to an impact on multiracial identity.

Acceptance by Others and the Multiracial Experience

In considering the features above, it appears that many factors impacting multiracial identity are rooted in the multiracial person's social context. Particularly, it seems that all factors encompass a *push/pull* dynamic, in which multiracial people are either pushed into or pulled out from different ethnoracial groups (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Feagin, 2008). The acceptance by others for the multiracial person cuts across most sociocultural groups and seems extremely relevant when examining a multiracial person's acceptance based on phenotype (Choi-Misailidis, 2010; Khanna, 2011; Miville et al, 2005; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Therefore, the phenotype of a multiracial person greatly impacts the method in which they identify racially (Choi-Misailidis, 2010; Khanna, 2011; Miville et al, 2005; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005), such that other ethnoracial groups may directly accept or reject multiracial individuals into the group based on how they look.

By interacting with others, one is able to gain an understanding of self and his/her social position (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Feagin, 2008). Social scientists indicate that identity is shaped by others' acceptance or rejection of multiracial people and their identities. Better explained by developmental and social psychologists, the greater the understanding of an individual's group by others, the more likely it is that he/she will develop a sense of self and gain confidence in his/her self-concept (Crisp & Turner, 2010). Hence, the individual forms his/her identity through the interaction and exploration of groups. A person develops his/her self-concept based on how he/she believes he/she *should* be, which is informed by his/her observations of his/her respective group, and how he/she compares to others, both within and outside of his/her group. The theory of social identity explains how an individual associates him/herself with others to reflect his/her own personal identity or gain a greater sense of self (Crisp & Turner, 2010). Social identity, therefore, enables an individual to not

only further develop his/her identity but also create meaning for him/herself and the surrounding world (Crisp & Turner, 2010). Identity formation is influenced by phenomena created by a group of people and how closely that group agrees on the meaning formed by those experiences. The process of defining a person's racial or ethnic identity entails that this component of identity is one that is constructed socially and is internalized at the individual level. As explained by other psychologists, it appears that the interaction between a multiracial person and other ethnoracial people can not only inform multiracial identity, but can advise multiracial people on how to behave with other ethnoracial groups, thus affecting the phenomenon of the "chameleon experience." This dynamic that occurs between multiracial identity development and social interactions with others appears to influence the ability to act as a social chameleon.

Although the literature is limited on exploring the chameleon experience in multiracial people, it appears that experiences related to interpersonal interactions are common. The following experiences are discussed, as they may be associated with the phenomenon of a multiracial person being able or unable to cross racial boundaries as they blend in and "pass" across different racial groups.

Challenges Related to the Multiracial Experience

Common experiences that cut across the varying identities of mixed race people and relate to their interactions with others include perceived racial discrimination, lack of racial socialization, and marginalization based on mixed ethnoracial heritage. Even though monoracial people may experience some of these occurrences as well, these specific forms of intragroup prejudice and marginalization, in part, happen due to the unique place that multiracial people hold within the historically dichotomous United States racial groups.

Mixed race people may find it difficult align themselves within monoracial groups (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2008; Salahuddin& O'Brien, 2011; Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

The psychological well being of multiracial people, as with monoracial people, suffers when perceived racial discrimination occurs (Jackson, et al, 2012). In a study focused on exploring common themes surrounding racial identity development for multiracial people, participants indicated that it was common to suffer from different forms of racism relevant to identifying with being a racial/ethnic minority and being multiracial (Miville, et al, 2005). The varying forms of racism for multiracial people may include overt acts of discrimination that may be associated with being a multiracial person (i.e.- a Black-Asian biracial person may be discriminated against by both Black and Asian monoracial groups) and/or direct discrimination which entails only considering a monoracial population identity (i.e. only mark one box to identify race/ethnic group) (Jackson, et al, 2012; Miville et al, 2005; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). It has been well documented that discrimination based on race has detrimental effects on its victims, including psychological distress, low self-esteem, and diminished subjective well being (Brown, Meadows, & Elder, 2000; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Harrell, 2000; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006), as well as negative feelings including anger, alienation, feelings of abnormality, and shame (Herman, 2004; Miville, et. al, 2005; Salahuddin& O'Brien, 2011). Such discrimination may be experienced at the interpersonal and/or institutional levels (Herman, 2004; Miville, et. al, 2005; Salahuddin& O'Brien, 2011; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Moreover, there has been significant documentation of the prevalent experience of rejection and discrimination of multiracial people by various social groups (Brown, 1990; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The experience of discrimination and/or marginalization may be relevant to

the chameleon experience as it indicates a failure or inability to blend in with a dominant group. Not only do these individuals suffer psychologically from these acts, but also the multiracial individual may either denounce or reject the perpetrating monoracial group, further alienating himself/herself (Stephan, 1992).

Many multiracial people report experiencing the "forced-choice dilemma," in which they feel pressured to identify with only one group from their racial group make-up when interacting with others (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). As discussed above, mixed individuals may experience this phenomenon with their peers or even their families. For example, biracial children often report being teased and marginalized on the school playground or in the classroom for attempting to identify with a group with whom they may not phenotypically fit the idealized stereotype (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Some multiracial people may also actively reject a part of the racial self or modify behavior, identity, and/or self-presentation in order to gain acceptance with peers (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Therefore, in having to conform to the longstanding dichotomous way of thinking about race, mixed individuals may have distinct experiences that most monoracial individuals do not have, which may be psychologically challenging.

Another distinct, common experience for a multiracial person is the challenge of growing up in a racially mixed family. Although there have been suggestions on how to parent or socialize multiracial children (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2010), interracial families often face their own challenges that impact their children. For example, interracial families may face rejection or marginalization from each of their extended families, which in turn may influence the identity of the multiracial child and the negative attitudes or stigmatizations they may hold towards that part of his/her racial groups (Root, 2003). As a

response, parents may move away from their extended families in order to prevent their children from experiencing these types of racism. However, parents may also respond by avoiding talks about race and/or inculcate their children with colorblind ideologies (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Root, 2003). Inadvertently, this may do more harm than good when it comes to racial socialization and its influence on psychological well-being. For example, it has been found in the ethnic minority literature that when parents take the time to racially socialize their children and engage them in dialogue preparing them for a world with racist undertones, children express higher self-esteem, higher academic achievement, less disciplinary problems, and overall greater psychological well-being (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Therefore, it may be that when parents are unable to talk with their multiracial children about race, the children are subjected to greater risk of suffering from racial discrimination. Further, it may also be that by limiting discussions about race, the multiracial child may also be limited on the exposure to his/her cultures, which may impact his/her chameleon experience.

As discussed earlier, parents play a major role in developing their children's identity (Miville, et al, 2005; Hughes, et. al, 2006; Parillo, 2005; Root, 2003). However, another common challenge for multiracial individuals is that their parents do not share their racial background (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Therefore, it may become difficult for multiracial individuals to infer to what is normal for a person with multiple racial identities as there is no clear communication by parents on what is normal identity development for a multiracial person (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). It may be that the chameleon experience is an adaptive strategy formed in order to cope with the absence of a visible multiracial parent and/or community. There is usually no visible community with which a

multiracial person can identify as most multiracial people suffer from racist experiences in which they are pressured to identify with only one racial group, therefore, making it difficult to distinguish who identifies as multiracial (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). When a person is faced with the dilemma of being unable to identify with a group, one's sense of belongingness and self-esteem may be greatly affected (Collins, 2000).

Finally, as identity development for multiracial individuals has been increasingly studied, it has been proposed that because the process of developing a positive multiracial identity includes unique and distinct challenges in comparison with positive racial identity development for monoracial people, i.e., has been suggested that racial identity development is a "more difficult and confusing process for multiracial individuals" (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Multiracial individuals face a very unique experience as they navigate and negotiate identifying with two or more racial groups. A multiracial identity person may be exposed to learning the culture or norms of two or more ethnic and racial groups, which can be complicated in terms of identity formation, but could be beneficial in terms of facilitating the chameleon ability. Although many people have also experienced challenges navigating the multiple parts of their identities, multiracial identity illustrates additional complexity in attempting to negotiate multiple identities within one domain (Phinney & Alipuria, 2006), hence the focus of this paper on navigating social spaces among different ethnoracial groups.

Even when multiracial individuals healthfully develop their ethnoracial identities, they often continue to experience different forms of pressure from society, as at times their identities may not conform to the dichotomous conceptualization of race in which they are identified racially by others based on their phenotypes. This stress may translate into having

to defend and justify their own racial/ethnic self-labels, whether they be multiracial or not, to others and themselves (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Even when a multiracial individual decides on an identity label, he/she then experiences having to rationalize and explain himself/herself to self and others again and again, thereby creating a challenge for multiracial people to feel accepted by others, which in turn may possibly make it more difficult to interact with others.

The “only choose one” experience also occurs at the institutional level when completing job, school, and formerly government-related applications that ask for the applicant to choose a race category (Miville, et. al, 2005; Salahuddin& O’Brien, 2011). Again, multiracial individuals encounter the situation in which they are forced to side with only a part of their identities. All in all, multiracial people suffer negative feelings of anger, alienation, abnormality, and shame after having experienced these challenges with interpersonal interactions (Herman, 2004; Miville, et. al, 2005; Salahuddin& O’Brien, 2011). These hardships, however, have also paralleled strengths within this population.

Strengths within the Multiracial Population

Although studies in the past have focused on psychopathology in the multiracial population, more current scholarship demonstrates that this group generally seems well-adjusted. Based on extant literature it appears that people of mixed race are not necessarily suffering because they are of multiple racial descent, but rather from external factors that influence their mental health (Root, 2003).

Other studies have found benefits in being multiracial. For example, in several studies, participants reported feeling pride in their multiracial backgrounds and being completely comfortable with their sense of self, therefore dispelling the stereotype of a confused or “marginalized” self (Cheng, 2009; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Hall, 1992; Shih &

Sanchez, 2005). Further, it was found that people with multiracial backgrounds appreciate exposure to their respective multiple cultures, have a greater ability to empathize with people of other races and cultures, and also to accept and maintain more cross cultural relationships (Hall, 1992; Miville, et al, 2005; Salahuddin& O'Brien, 2011; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). In fact, many multiracial people report seeking relationships, both friend and romantic, with people who also share the view of embracing diversity (Roberts-Clarke, et al, 2004; Salahuddin& O'Brien, 2011). In accessing people from different cultures, multiracial people are also found to be more perceptive and receptive to identifying social cues (Miville, et. al, 2005; Salahuddin& O'Brien, 2011). Therefore, by experiencing diverse ethnic and racial reference communities, it appears that a person who comes from a multiracial heritage has an advantage in developing stronger interpersonal skills. Further, it is possible that in having access to many different communities, more opportunities for gaining social support from multiple cultural groups may occur, which is a protective factor within the resilience literature (Root, 2003; Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Although there are events related to that of the "chameleon experience" with multiracial groups of people, little is known about how this phenomenon may function, how multiracial individuals may or may not be active agents in this social process, and how this experience may impact this group. The aim of this investigation is to gain a greater understanding of such experiences for this growing population as well as its effect on their psychological well-being. The study is exploratory in nature and the researcher sought to attain rich information about this experience that may inform the literature on the multiracial experiences, enable more efficient case conceptualizations for this population to understand the reasoning behind engaging in chameleon-like behavior and/or tactics, and aid in

development of curricula to help reduce discrimination among ethnoracial groups and increase improved interracial and/or cross-cultural relationships.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Theoretical Approach and Research Design

To investigate the "chameleon experience" of multiracial individuals, a topic that has not been researched fully, a qualitative approach was utilized as it lends itself to an inductive and deeper form of inquiry (Creswell, 1995; Morrow, 2007; Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). The investigator gathered information from individuals from this marginalized population in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of the multiracial experience and its impact on participants. Qualitative inquiry attempts to answer questions focused on the "how" and the "what" of an encounter as opposed to the "why" that is generally sought by quantitative approaches (Creswell, 1998). Typically, features associated with qualitative methods are founded within the naturalistic paradigm, which is defined as the inquiry of "what is" as opposed to what researchers believe it ought to be (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Although answers are formulated based on the gathered data, often studies rooted in qualitative inquiry include listening to the participants' perspective, asking more questions, respecting participant worldviews, and promoting participant empowerment, which is important to consider when working with a disenfranchised group (Ponterotto, 2010). In addition, the American Psychological Association (APA) developed guidelines on how to conduct ethical and appropriate multicultural research, specifically with marginalized groups, which guided the utilization of a qualitative approach for this project as it seemed the most ethical and best for this type of multicultural research (APA, 2003). Within naturalistic inquiry the point is to reach a general idea of an occurrence or a phenomenon, not to reach

one ultimate "truth" and disregard lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1982), especially those whose "truths" have yet to be acknowledged.

The specific qualitative method used in this investigation was Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). This method shares basic tenets related to grounded theory, as grounded theory grew from the study of symbolic interactionism, a theory about studying human behavior and group life (Chen & Boore, 2009). Symbolic interactionism frames human behavior as an exchange of symbols and gestures that hold specific meanings under specific circumstances (Chen & Boore, 2009). In this conceptualization, individuals are active participants in their environments, creating meaning, and interpreting and defining the social situations in which they may find themselves (Chen & Boore, 2009). Borrowing from this perspective, CQR was developed under the principle that individuals influence one another while interacting with each other, form subjective realities that are relevant, and thus are equally meaningful (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, & Hess, 2005). Therefore, this study focused on describing and exploring the social process that has been called the "chameleon experience." Additionally, CQR aims to "faithfully represent how participants describe their experiences" (Hill et. al, 2005, pg. 197), which supports the aspiration to conduct multiculturally sound research with underrepresented groups, as the multiracial population are often an overlooked minority group. CQR was determined appropriate for pinpointing and discovering the meanings attached to the interactions employed by multiracial individuals during social situations with monoracial members of differing racial heritage groups (Hill, et al, 2005).

When developing a strong qualitative study, it is recommended that the researcher state the paradigm in which the study is framed as it influences and impacts the collection of

data, the analysis of data, and its interpretation (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe paradigm as including three different domains: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This study is rooted in a mainly constructivist framework, with some postpositivistic influences.

Ontologically, CQR developers state that the approach is rooted in a constructivist framework, such that multiple subjective realities are respected and legitimate (Hill et al, 2005). In regards to the interaction between researcher and participant (i.e. epistemology), the researcher believes that both parties equally affect one another, whereas the researcher learns information about the experience of interest from the participant and the participant answers the researchers' questions regarding his/her experience or view (Guba& Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln &Guba, 1985; Ponterotto, 2005). The researcher also deemed this a fitting approach as it focused on data generated by the interaction of the researcher and participant via interview methods and important information is grounded in the data to espouse the common and differing factors of the phenomenon under study (Hill, et al, 2005; Lincoln &Guba, 1985; Ponterotto, 2005).

CQR has many standards of trustworthiness embedded in its process. Because CQR is an established and highly structured method of inquiry, it lends itself to being a dependable approach as it guides researchers in areas of sampling techniques, data collection, and data analysis (Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Although replication and/or generalization are not the goals with qualitative methodologies, conveying dependability, or being transparent enough in documenting the process of the investigation and how the researcher arrived at his/her conclusions, helps readers determine the trustworthiness of the study (Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007; Williams & Morrow, 2009).

Participants

CQR researchers suggest obtaining between 8-15 participants for interviews (Hill et. al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). Additionally, it is reported that 12 participants usually has been found to achieve data saturation (Morrow, 2005; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), which indicates that the researcher has interviewed or observed a sufficient number of participants in order to reach redundancy in the results (i.e.- themes and observations) so that no new data add to the findings (Lincoln &Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Williams & Morrow, 2009). The researcher screened 25 potential participants; however, some of these possible interviewees were screened out for the following reasons: not meeting criteria, conflict of interest, residing in a different country, scheduling conflicts, or simply did not respond back to the researcher after stating their interest. Of the 25, a sample of 13 multiracial people participated in semi-structured interviews about their experiences related to interactions with monoracial and multiracial individuals and completed the demographic questionnaire.

Recruitment. Root, a researcher who studies multiracial individuals, calls for caution in conducting research with the multiracial population as it is comprised of great diversity and gross generalizations may not apply to the entire multiracial group (2003). She also points out the importance of studying "individuals who identify with specific combinations of mixed race to make sure the findings and their implications are understood" (2003, p. 121). Therefore, to attend to this concern, the researcher used specific eligibility criteria that allowed for greater specificity of recruitment within this population. Selection criteria included: 1) individual self-identifies as multiracial 2) individual reports having biological parents with differing ethnoracial backgrounds, specifically one "White" parent and one ethnoracial minority parent 3) the person reported being born after 1968 as this year marks

the beginning of the multiracial boomer era and 4) the person reported feeling that he/she has changed his/her behavior when interacting with different racial groups. Additionally, these criteria were used as the researcher aspired to engage in purposeful and criterion based selection in order to obtain participants who have a deep knowledge of the experience, thereby, sharing information-rich data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Initially, participants were recruited through various avenues such as multiracial organizations at the local level, community events, and social media (e.g., Facebook, Craigslist). The researcher used email announcements to recruit individuals that may be interested in the study. Additionally, the study was expanded from its original geographic location of California to include a nationwide sample. Network listservs were also used to assist with recruitment throughout the nation. Additionally, a community contact posted the recruitment flyer on her social media page. The recruitment script included the notice of an incentive of a $20 Amazon gift card to demonstrate appreciation for the participant's time. The utilization of incentives is common within psychological studies and has become more common within qualitative research (Head, 2009). Researchers have viewed the offering of incentives as a method of leveling out the power differential that exists between interviewer and interviewee in order to create a more equitable relationship (Head, 2009). To participate in the study, participants were screened for eligibility by email and by phone. More specifically, as interested people contacted the researcher, participants were sent the screening questionnaire via email (See Appendix A). If they replied with "yes" to every item, the participants met criteria, and an interview was scheduled for a later date.

Participant characteristics. The researcher recruited participants of different genders, socioeconomic statuses (SES), age, and family structures. Of the 13 participants, 12

interviewees were audio-recorded successfully, 5 identified as male and 7 identified as female. There appeared to be interested participants from a wide range of geographical locations, such as the West Coast, Midwest, the East Coast, and the South. Ages ranged from 19 to 42-years-old, which fell within the age range that the researcher sought for the reason of the drastic change within social context and acceptance of multiracial people born after the Civil Rights Movement. Based on the responses on the Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix B), participants were from a wide SES range, as SES may be related to a person's social and racial interactions (Hughes et al., 2006; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). All participants stated that they had the presence of both parents at some point in their life, thereby indicating some level of socialization by the parent to the participant.

Last, the researcher recruited participants with a White and non-White heritage for the specific reason of adhering to the call to conduct more thorough research with this population by specifying a combination within this group (Root, 2003). This framework also allowed for exploring the complexity that may exist in negotiating social spaces for this particular group of multiracial people given the longstanding tension between ethnic minority groups and the majority group. Participants included 5 people with Black and White parents; 4 people with Latino/a and White parents; and 3 people with Asian and White parents. Pseudonyms were given to participants in order to protect their identity.

Adam. Adam is a 28-year-old male who identifies as biracial. Adam's father is White and mother is Chilean. Adam was raised by both parents who are still married. He stated spending much of his developmental years in Sweden and Michigan. Adam was enrolled at a public university of the West Coast of the United States. He identified coming from upper middle class family and is spiritual.

Sarah. Sarah is a 19-year-old female who identifies as biracial. Sarah stated her father is White from the Midwest and mother is Korean, born in Korea. Her parents are married and maintain a middle class lifestyle. Her family was a military family. Sarah spent substantial time on the West Coast as well as the Midwest during her developmental years. She was enrolled at a private university on the East Coast at the time of the interview. She does not identify with a religion or as spiritual.

David. David is a 26-year-old male who identifies as black and/or biracial. His father is Black and mother is White born in England. He was raised primarily by his mother and her family, as his parents are separated. David spent time in New England as well as Hawaii and the Midwest during his developmental years. At the time of interview, he was enrolled in a graduate program in the Midwest and identifies as "lower" class status. He does not identify with a religion or spiritual background.

Megan. Megan is a 32-year-old female who identifies as biracial or "Créole." Her father is White born in Canada and her mother is Black from the South. Although her parents are now divorced and both parents were present, she was raised primarily by her mom. Additionally, she was raised in primarily White dominant environments in the Rocky Mountain region. She attained a high school diploma and is currently working. She identifies as being middle class and religious, however, does not identify with an "affiliated" religious group.

Katie. Katie identifies as biracial and is a 25-year-old female. Her father is White, was involved with the military, and her mother is Korean, born in Korea. She stated being raised by both parents, although she spent more time with her mother due to her father's obligations to the military. Her parents are now divorced. Katie grew up in the Northeast

region of the U.S. and is currently enrolled in graduate school at a private Northeast university. She did not specify a religious or spiritual affiliation.

Kristina. Kristina is a 31-year-old female. She identifies as multiracial, but feels strongly about identifying with her African American roots. Her father is White from a major East Coast city and her mother is black from the South. She suspects that her mother's lineage holds Native American blood, however, does not have enough information regarding this claim. She was raised by both her parents primarily in the Northwest region of the country in a primarily White dominated environment. She earned a Masters degree and was working as a teacher at the time of the interview. She does not identify as spiritual or religious.

Vanessa. Vanessa is 42-year-old female who identifies strongly as a Latina and as biracial. Her father is of Mexican descent and mother is White. She was raised primarily in the Midwest in small farming towns and suburbs, however, experienced a Midwest urban environment during her adolescence. Although she was raised by both parents, she stated strong attachment to her paternal grandmother. She is a college graduate, works full time, and identifies as middle class. Although raised Evangelical Christian and Catholic, she is not religious.

Steven. Steven is a 27-year-old male, born to a Mexican father and a White mother. Steven identifies as biracial. He was raised primarily in the South by both parents, although his mother's family had a stronger influence on his upbringing, specifically identifying a strong attachment to his maternal grandfather. Steven had a connection to the farming lifestyle in the South, but more recently developed a stronger attachment to Latin America. At the time of the interview, he was in the process of applying for graduate school. He did

not identify a religious or spiritual affiliation.

Brian. Brian is a 29-year-old male who identifies strongly as a biracial man. His father is African American and mother is White, born to German immigrant parents. Parents were married at the time of interview. He was raised on various military bases, such as Japan and the Southwest region of the U.S. Brian is a college graduate and identifies as middle class. He reported being spiritual, however, is not affiliated with a specific religious group.

Jessica. Jessica is a 26-year-old female, who identifies as biracial. She was born to a Filipino father and a White mother. Her parents were married at the time of the interview. She was raised primarily on the West Coast in a diverse environment and school system. She was enrolled in graduate school in the Midwest during the time of the interview. She does not identify as spiritual or religious.

Alexis. Alexis identifies with both Hispanic and White ethnic groups. Her father is Mexican and her mother is White. Although both parents raised her, she stated spending much of her developmental time with mom. She is 29 years old and was enrolled as a graduate student at a professional school on the East Coast. She did identify with the religious group of Pagan Celtic Druid. Additionally, she positioned herself as middle to upper middle class status.

Christopher. Chris is a 41-year-old male. He identifies as biracial, with his father being Black and mother being White. Chris grew up in the Southwest in mainly White dominant towns, a move that was influenced by his father's successful career. He reported being bilingual in English and Spanish and positions himself as middle class status. Additionally, he currently lives on the West Coast and identifies with being religious and/or spiritual.

Instruments

Screening questionnaire. Participants were prescreened with a questionnaire designed by the researcher for the purposes of this study, which entailed questions related to their self-identified, multiracial background and social interactions with members of other racial groups. Specific screening questions included parent's ancestry, birth year, and whether or not participants felt that their behavior changed while interfacing with people of different ethnoracial backgrounds (see Appendix A).

Demographic questionnaire. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire created by the researcher (See Appendix B). Items included racial identity, parent's racial heritage, age, gender, social class, education level, regional location, family status, and religious/spiritual beliefs. These items were created by the researcher based on the literature on sociocultural factors influencing identity and interpersonal relationships. The information was collected to provide context for the social experience of the participants.

Semi-structured interviews. Individuals participated in a semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 60 to 140 minutes. Probing questions were asked as needed, according to participant response. The length of interviews exceeded the initially expected time as participants wished to continue sharing beyond the scheduled time.

The semi-structured interview included nine open-ended questions that aimed at gaining greater awareness of the process of the "chameleon experience," the strategies utilized during the process, and the outcomes from experiencing this occurrence on self-identified multiracial individuals. (See Appendix C). Semi-structured interview questions were piloted on individuals that also self-identified as multiracial in order to gain feedback on the structure and content of the questions. Feedback was incorporated accordingly.

Research Team

This section is about the researcher and the analysis team and their backgrounds in order to provide transparency of context and motivation. The development of this investigation originated based on the primary researcher's connection to the experience and population of interest. The researcher identifies herself racially as *mestiza,* an amalgamation of Indigenous, African, and White races (Comas-Diaz, 2006) and ethnically as Latina. Many of her social interactions include her ability to be a social chameleon, as her unclear phenotypic presentation and bicultural background enable her to enter into ambiguous yet positive cross-cultural interactions with people of a wide variety of ethnoracial backgrounds. Further, the researcher is married to a biracial man, whose ethnoracial background, phenotype, and experiences of moving to various locations with varying sociocultural makeups allow him to be a social chameleon throughout his daily social interactions.

The researcher is a counseling psychologist in training and focuses her research around multiculturalism through a strength-based perspective. The researcher is well versed in the multicultural literature and has been trained under a social justice framework, where psychologists are called to step beyond the therapy room and research lab to advocate for disadvantaged and/or marginalized groups (Goodman et al., 2004). Her preparation also includes much work on community based participatory research projects, conducting semi-structured interviews, and completing CQR investigations.

The research team was comprised of a college graduate and research assistant who racially identifies as White, Italian, and Spanish, and ethnically as American and Peruvian. The researcher holds a bachelor's degree in psychology with two minors in applied psychology and education. Her research experience includes participating in university-

supported investigations as a research assistant for four years. She has received training on conducting CQR investigations and has engaged in two projects that utilized CQR analyses prior to this investigation. She disclosed many interests that motivated her participation in this study, mainly that she self identifies as a mixed race/multi-ethnic individual and believes this research will be a great contribution to the current literature and understanding the complexities of mixed individuals.

The research team also included a third-year doctoral student in Counseling Psychology. While he identified Mexican-American as the most seemingly appropriate census label used to describe him, he identifies as "Chicano." His phenotype and Spanish last name, among other features, have prevented him from feeling fully embraced by others as "American." Chicano is an identity that he believes affords him some space to explore the phenomenon of being between or without race. He became interested in this project because he felt it was important to explore mixed-race from a psychological perspective and as well as understand the experiences of other mixed-race individuals. At the beginning of this project, he had completed one year of qualitative research experience in graduate school.

The researcher also enlisted an external auditor, a person outside of the analysis team whose main purpose was to ensure that the research team stayed true to the data, did not fall into group think, and challenged the coding schema (Hill et al., 2005). The external auditor was a Counseling Psychology faculty member and advisor to the investigator of this study. She identifies as Mixed (European, Latina) with considerable experience in completing qualitative research investigations, specifically CQR, and who has a strong background in studying wellbeing in multiracial people.

Procedures

Persons interested in the study and who met criteria were contacted by the researcher via email and were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. As participants agreed to be interviewed, the researcher gathered information regarding their availability to interview as well as preference of location for in-person interview or phone interview. For those participants completing the interview in person, the researcher asked the participant to choose a location that made them feel comfortable and able to share their experiences. This has been described as ideal when collecting data by interview (Creswell, 1998). Initially only planning to do in person interviews, the researcher modified the investigation to include interviews completed via teleconferencing methods (i.e.- Skype, Google Hangouts, and Facetime) so that she could broaden to a national sample. Therefore, interviews were conducted at a convenient and reasonably quiet and private location selected by the participants. Locations included private homes, coffee shops, university study rooms, work offices, and a parked car.

Before beginning the interviews, the researcher discussed the risks and benefits of the study with participants. The researcher also talked about the incentive and the method of distribution of the $20 gift card to Amazon. The incentive amount was determined based on the working wage payment model, where the participants were paid based on a comparable reasonable wage for unskilled labor and time (Ripley, 2006). Participants were made aware that regardless of whether he/she completed his/her interview, they would receive the incentive. Attempting to pay participants prior to collecting data was intended to demonstrate to participants that they were being rewarded for attendance and not their responses (Head, 2009). However, within this study 5 of the 12 participants declined to accept the incentive as they stated that their interest was deeply personal and were not interested in getting paid to

participate

For those interviewees participating via the teleconferencing method, the researcher emailed the consent form and the demographic questionnaire ahead of time in order to ensure that participants had all necessary materials. Participants were informed that the researcher was available to answer questions regarding the documents and were asked to read both documents prior to the scheduled interview time. Before beginning the interview, the researcher reviewed informed consent in order to verify that participants understood the purpose of the study, the limitations of participant confidentiality, and their rights as a participant. Within the process of informed consent, the researcher communicated the limits to participant confidentiality as well as the methods by which participant information would be protected (i.e. not recording name on interview and keeping signed consent separate from the interview data). The researcher discussed her mandate to report any incidence of harm to self or others and her ability to provide referral information in the event that the participant reported any suffering or distress from the interview. Additionally, at the time of interview, participants were asked for their permission to audio record the interview for transcription purposes. All participants stated that the expectations and guidelines were clear and agreed to have their interviews audio recorded.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with participants. Although three participants used Spanish terms during their interviews, the majority of interviews were conducted in English based on the participants' preference. The researcher was the only interviewer and took copious notes, or memos, during the interview process as a tool to promote trustworthiness of the data. In addition to taking notes during the interview, the researcher recorded memos immediately after every interview and throughout the analysis

process. By memoing, the researcher immersed herself in the data, explored deeper meanings, and facilitated greater momentum in the research (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). After the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed them verbatim from the audio-recordings.

Data analysis

Interview data were analyzed using the CQR method as described above. In this method, analysis entailed the following: individual coding of transcripts, review of interview observational notes, analysis team meetings to discuss coding domains, reaching consensus on coding schema and definitions, review by an external auditor, and cross analysis for verification of accurate meanings and definitions.

The research team was comprised of members who were trained in qualitative research analyses, specifically CQR. All members had a history of participating in CQR projects and had completed CQR training, which included reading and practice coding on pseudo transcripts in order to understand the process of coding as called for by the method (Hill et. al, 1997). As the individual members of the team are the main tools for analysis, the researchers rotated who led the discussion at each analysis meeting in order to guard against any power differentials among group members (Hill et. al, 1997).

Before beginning analysis, team members discussed their preconceived notions of multiracial individuals, their interest in the topic, and their perception of what the chameleon experience may include in order to articulate their pre-existing views. They received a copy of “Guide to CQR” (Hill et al, 1997) and discussed their thoughts and questions with the lead researcher. After these discussions, the researcher introduced memoing to the analysis team. Memos are notes taken by the researchers in which reflections and insights of the data are

recorded for the purpose of remembering the process of analysis and staying close to the data (Groenewald, 2008). Memos are helpful tools that promote interconnectedness and open communication among research team members (Birks, et al, 2008). After the initial meeting, team members received one completed transcript at a time to analyze and code individually. Analysis team meetings were scheduled for 2-3 hours at a time. Due to audio recording difficulties only 12 of the 13 collected interviews were eligible for transcription and analysis, however, saturation was met despite the loss of one interview.

Members met as a team and began the consensual analysis process by forming "domains," or topic areas used to cluster data bits and give a general idea of particularly interesting points found in the raw data, as they analyzed the transcripts (Hill et al., 1997; Ponterotto, 2010). As research team members independently read the first few transcripts, domains were constructed based on the major topic areas, while "core ideas" were simultaneously being documented. "Core ideas" refer to researchers summarizing each case or data bit and placing them within a domain (Hill et al., 1997). When creating core ideas, the researchers remained close to the data in order to do little to no inferring of meaning. Once team members individually constructed core ideas, they convened in order to discuss and reach consensus as to what each piece of data was capturing, referring back to audio recordings when any ambiguous or debatable data was in question. As analysis progressed, core ideas were added, changed, deleted, and combined, based on the progression of the data (Hill et al., 1997). As the team engaged in a cross-analysis phase, data was re-read in order to ensure that all relevant information was coded and clustered correctly. Therefore, core ideas were reviewed in order to form categories and subcategories (themes) across participant interviews for each domain (Hill et al., 2005).

In addition to examining the interview transcripts, the researcher considered and shared with the analysis team notes taken during the interview, such as thoughts, ideas, and information that were not otherwise captured on audio recordings (moments of insight/epiphanies by the participant, tracking subjectivity, etc.) to enhance the understanding of the data. By reviewing the notes, comparing them to data, and using this process to enhance further the analysis of the information being gathered, the researcher was able to grasp a greater understanding of the experience under study.

Throughout the analysis process, members kept team process notes to track thought processes in developing domains, and to record any disagreements, and reactions to the data that came up while coding. Through the utilization of this tool, the researchers were able to retain fresh ideas and recorded decision-making paths (Birks, et al, 2008). The researchers used these notes to develop discussion points that informed possible final conclusions about the data. Audit trails are intended to capture major decisions regarding the process of the study and were reviewed by team in order to ensure that all relevant study developments were made clear (Hill et al., 1997).

The external auditor reviewed the coding scheme to provide feedback on the questions of interest and was involved in the coding and cross-analysis phase (Hill et al., 2005), thus providing quality control. The research team considered the feedback and made revisions.

After the final audit, the team coded one final transcript (which had been held out for this purpose) in order to check for stability and reliability of the domains. Domains and categories remained stable and no new themes emerged, which indicated saturation as well as

stability and reliability of the results. The researcher used the interviews and memos for triangulation of the data.

Coding was conducted with the help of a computer data management software program, NVIVO (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011, pg. 71). The computer program allowed the researcher to upload transcripts, store, and code data, thereby making the analysis process more efficient. Although the researcher was trained to use the program for efficiency, she kept in mind that NVIVO was not the main tool for analysis, as computers do not analyze data without commands (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The researcher sought to investigate the "chameleon experience" as lived by self-identified multiracial individuals. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions: "What strategies are developed in order to fit in with people of different racial groups? How does the experience of employing these strategies to fit in affect multiracial people?" The results of this investigation were organized to specifically answer the stated research questions and therefore are arranged by domain, category, and subcategory.

The analysis of the data as it pertained to the research questions generated three domains, fifteen categories, and ten subcategories. Table 1 below outlines the findings (See Appendix D for more detailed coding schema). Direct participant quotations are provided below in order to illustrate each theme. As suggested by CQR researchers, the results of the analysis are presented in frequency form, not for the purpose of making generalizations, but as an indicator for the reader to grasp how many participants described experiencing similar occurrences (Hill et. al., 1997). This study included twelve analyzed transcripts. Therefore, if a category was experienced by ten to twelve participants, it was labeled as *General.* When a category was experienced by seven to nine participants, it was classified as *Typical.* If experienced by four to six participants, the response was called *Variant.* Last, when a category was experienced by only one to three participants it was labeled as *Rare.*

Table 1

Domains, Categories, and Subcategories

Domains	Categories	Subcategories
Fitting In	Social Acceptance; Accommodation; Cultural Exposure; Phenotype; Family Socialization; Strategies	Discerning Communication Patterns; Universal Connections; Sharing marginalized experiences with marginalized others; Legitimizing Techniques; Protective Stance
Not Fitting In	Inability to adapt to social situation; Moments of marginalization; Family disconnect from ancestry	Discrimination Misclassification by others
Impact of Blending In	Desire for an in-group; Disidentification; Empowerment; Internal struggles; Multiculturally minded; Consciousness	Invisible identity; Isolation; Broader perspective

Fitting In

Beginning with the first domain, “Fitting in” played a major role in the “chameleon experience” for all of these participants. Fitting In was defined by the researchers as factors that led to participants being accepted by different groups. There were six categories and five subcategories under this domain. Categories comprised of Social Acceptance, Accommodation, Cultural Exposure, Phenotype, Family Socialization, and Strategies. The Strategies category included subcategories of Discerning Communication Patterns, Universal Connections, Sharing Marginalized Experiences with Marginalized Others, Legitimizing Techniques, and Protective Stance. The subcategories emerged to exemplify what approaches

the participants developed and how they applied these tactics in order to fit into an ethnoracial group.

Category: Social Acceptance. Social Acceptance was general in frequency (*n*=10) and appeared to be a common experience in terms of feeling like one can fit into a particular group. Social acceptance was defined as the feeling of unconditional positive regard by a group and/or environment, thereby, making one feel comfortable and embraced. As an example, Megan shared her experience of feeling accepted into her new community, regardless of her multi-ethnoracial makeup:

> When I moved to (name of town) the people there were a lot more inviting. Umm, much more liberal. Extremely nice and I felt a lot more acceptance when I moved to (name of town). I still had you know the ideals that me needing to prove to people my blackness; umm, but the people there welcomed me with open arms. Every family that I met there was, umm, just really nice to me and when I got there nobody ever really brought up my race. I just, I was just me, so I liked living there a lot better because I got more acceptance from the people around me...

It appears that for this participant, feeling accepted included a warm reception by people, a region that was progressive in its political ideology, and no discussion of racial identity. Similarly, many other participants talked about the experience of acceptance as not feeling like race was a salient issue and that s/he was generally liked for her/his interest rather than any focus being paid to ethnoracial background.

Additionally, when talking about acceptance within an ethnoracial group, the feeling of being able to be one's "self," uninhibited by ethnoracial divisions, was incredibly valued. As an example, Adam discussed his experience of acceptance into an ethnic minority group:

> It's like when I'm with the 'brown crew' what we talk about is anything and everything. And I feel like in that situation I'm mostly myself because I'm not being judged by, I'm not being judged by what I present, I'm being judged by how well I'm getting along with people.

The absence of judgment based on phenotype appeared to encourage this person to speak freely and candidly when with this group. The participant identifies the ability to talk freely

as a marker of being accepted without conditions. Most participants also identified similar experiences when among others. One participant talked specifically about having her "colors get brighter" when around people whom they felt accepted them unconditionally.

Category: Accommodation. Another general in frequency (*n*=11) category that played a major role in being able to "blend in" with other ethnoracial groups is the act of accommodation. Accommodation was defined as the act of understanding the norms, codes, expectations of a group and/or environment and feeling the demand to adapt accordingly in order to fit in. Kristina discussed her experience of changing the way she looks in order to blend in to her environment that may be dominated by a specific monoracial group. In this example, she offers the following example:

> But like I tie my hair back when I'm going into spaces where I feel like my hair isn't welcomed a lot. Like for my job, teaching, like my hair, I did not wear my hair out while teaching ever. You know, even when I was like student teaching in a school that was like predominantly black students with a black principal, they all had their hair straightened. So, I'm not gonna like wear my big all natural into the school because that's not the culture of the school and like other times I'm working with just white people like I don't wanna be too black and I don't wanna have to talk about it and draw attention to it and all of that.

Others talked about accommodation to different people through other tactics such as humor. For example, David talked about his experience of fitting in by using humor and its impact on him:

> So because like I said a lot of my life had been spent trying to make friends and then kind of do so through accommodating or that kind of humor way, umm I never felt like…I was being me but more like I was being someone that was entertaining and that could be turned on or off at any moment … so I was always putting on an act … so I would have these highs of doing improvisational comedy with people and then going back home and just laying on the floor and being completely drained…

The act of accommodation, though successful as a method of fitting in, appears to have had a tremendous emotional impact for this participant. Similarly, most participants talked about the experience of accommodating to others by either "toning down" racialized behaviors that

would make some ethnoracial groups uncomfortable and/or taking time to observe the group in order to understand the group norms. Participants also talked about the process of accommodation as modifying the way they walk, dress, and converse in order to make others feel comfortable around them. Additionally, accommodation included being flexible in food selection, topics of conversation, and even what one considers funny.

Category: Cultural Exposure. As a category, cultural exposure is defined as participating in or seeking out activities, traditions, or historical content from ethnoracial groups in order to connect with a racial/ethnic group. Cultural exposure emerged as typical in frequency (*n*=10). Exposure included participants sharing experiences about being exposed to cultural practices from their own heritage groups and practices of other ethnoracial groups. Therefore, this category really demonstrated the participant's interest in learning about his/her heritage and the heritage of others in order to develop a connection to that group, which assists with the process of fitting in with that group. As an example, Katie shared her appreciation for being able to learn about her Korean background and how its helped her fit in with the larger Korean population, even more so than Korean-American people who have not had a thorough exposure to Korean culture. She stated:

> I am really glad that my mom actually taught us pretty much more Korean than most of our actually Korean friends. Because our Korean like language is a lot better than a lot of the people we grew up with and we actually went back this summer and people in Korea were telling us, they were really surprised that two mixed girls can kind of outtalk some of the other kids who had been by. And my mom taught my sister how to cook really well too, so my sister can make a lot of like the traditional Korean dishes and stuff.

Though learning about one's own ancestry was identified as critically important for many of the participants of this study, it was also important to learn about other ethnoracial group norms and nuances in order to fit in. Specifically, one participant stated, "I think it just came from my interactions with other people and noticing what gets their attention and

noticing where their, I guess, ignorance lies." This person believes that by taking the initiative to expose herself and interact with people from different cultures, she is better able to understand the group, interpret the norms, and know its limitations.

As these participants talked about exposure as a method of fitting in to groups, exposure also helped loop participants into a community. Vanessa shared her experience of being exposed to Chicano/a feminist literature in college and realizing that she indeed fit into a community and that community embraced her. She shared:

> There was a lot of excitement because I was learning a vocabulary I think for the first time. I mean I encountered ideas and thoughts. Like it was the first time my freshman year in college…it was finally a time where there was this big community and I was being included with them.

Excitement was experienced by this woman in moving away from a community that was predominantly white in which she was marginalized throughout her childhood. It seems for many participants, attending college and being exposed to different cultures was a pivotal moment in learning more about others and self in order to fit in with groups.

Category: Phenotype. Phenotype was talked about by all participants and was general in frequency (*n*=12). Phenotype in terms of blending-in was defined as one's appearance influencing the ability to fit in or have access to social spaces otherwise not available to out-group people. Therefore, this may mean that the participant talked about the experience of having an ethnically ambiguous look, which allowed them to be seen by a group as part of their group and included as such. Katie shared her experience about how her looks helped her fit in with various groups, with the exception of white groups:

> Actually you know what, maybe either way I look makes it easier for me these days to be in almost every culture except for maybe white groups because uh most groups like they can tell I'm something. But it's like, you know, if they're from a different ethnic group than the majority, they know better than to just come and ask or to act weird around me until they figure it out.

Other participants shared how their White phenotype privilege allowed them to access spaces that were White dominated spaces and how they were able to be seen as one of them. As an example, Vanessa stated:

> … I could walk into a group and be seen as a person…they're inclined to see me as a person because my skin is lighter and my eyes are lighter and I talk like them. And I was educated in the same place where they were educated in.

Further, this participant stated that to be seen as a person in white dominated spaces was extra meaningful for her as her Mexican father and family would never be allowed to attend these social gatherings based on the way they look.

Once participants understood that others viewed their appearance as a marker to including them into the group, some participants found it amusing. Sarah shared her story:

> When I realized people, like I think I'm half Korean half White, but other people don't always see me that way…when I got to college I started playing this terrible like awful game that I shouldn't announce to anyone but I started asking people what they thought I am, just to see what I can get and it's amazing. Like I've gotten like half Black, Puerto Rican, Jordan, Jordanian, Israeli, French, full white, full Chinese, half Japanese, Cambodian, a lot of different Latino/a umm (pause) what else? Saudi Arabian. (pause) I think that's that's the list for now.

This participant is not alone in her amazement at how many groups she has been profiled and confused with. Many other participants talked about being confused for other ethnoracial groups and using it as a way to initially be included into a group.

Category: Family Socialization. Family played a major role in teaching norms to the participants of this study in order to help them blend in or fit in with others. Specifically, this category is defined as relatives and parents taught, modeled, or normalized specific attitudes, values, or behaviors of their ancestral groups. This category was general in frequency (n=12) as all participants talked about the influence of their family on their ability to fit in with other groups. Participants talked about both the ethnic minority parent socializing them to the norms of their ethnoracial group, as well as their white parent would teaching or passing

along information about the participant's ethnic minority heritage. Kristina shared the story of her white father, his appreciation for black culture, and his effort to ensure that his daughter was exposed to black culture:

> So, my dad kind of like looked at black culture and be like, "This is awesome!" … and wanted to be a part of it and wanted to be a part of like making things equal and that definitely influenced my childhood. My father's desire for people to be able to have access to everything and like being politically involved. Last time, he came into my house, he left this whole book that was like the Black Panther photographs and I copied the 10-point plan and put it on the wall because I just grew up with that.

Additionally, participants talked about family members demonstrating a way of being with others that was typical of that ethnoracial group and yet it also helped in fitting in with others. Adam shared:

> I think that part of the way that I hold myself with this open openness to anybody and this sincere desire to connect with people and to learn from them and to just like have a friendship with these people I think comes from my cousin XX... he taught me a lot about what it means to be a CXX. What it means to be you know from Chile…That's how I want to be and that's how I can be. That's my background and that's where I'm from. And so I adopted all those mannerisms, I adopted that mentality about approaching social interactions, you see my cousin XX, he greets you with this broad smile and he's excited about everything that you're saying…the connection happens super fast.

Category: Strategies. Strategies were defined as the methods that are independently developed and practiced by participants in order to help with the process of blending or fitting in to different ethnoracial groups and was general in frequency (*n*=12). Compared to other categories within this domain, "Strategies" were the things that can be chosen, modified, implemented, started, and/or stopped by the participants in order to fit in. Outside of phenotype, the other categories found within this domain involve people teaching or passing down specific information or making specific demands that the participant must respond to in order to fit in. Therefore, Strategies reflect more agency in the participants' method of blending in. Strategies included the following categories: Discerning

Communication Patterns, Universal Connections, Sharing one's Marginalized Experience with Others, using tactics to prove one's legitimacy for belonging to a group (Legitimizing Techniques), and protecting oneself from feeling marginalized or feeling othered (Protective Stance).

Subcategory: Discerning Communication Patterns. Harnessing the ability to notice a difference in verbal and nonverbal interaction among and across racial-ethnic groups was incredibly important for these participants in relation to being able to blend in with different ethnoracial groups. This subcategory was general in frequency with 11 participants identifying this skill as a specific method to fit in with others. Kristina referenced her skill to discern communication to blend in with different cultures:

> So that means you're like a bridge person, so you have to be a bridge between the different cultures because you can communicate between all these different umm barriers and stuff…so there's the one part about communication like I can communicate in the manner of a lot of different people…I'll like I'll pick-up accents in a moment and I can like fall right into being comfortable with a lot of different groups partly because I'm practiced at like you know that cross-cultural thing.

Additionally, Kristina's experience demonstrates that not only can she communicate with different ethnoracial groups, but also she can use her skill to bridge these different communities together. Many participants talked about how they use this skill to connect, translate, and advocate for disenfranchised communities. Communication patterns included the following qualities: language, tone, volume, mannerisms, vocabulary, slang, verbal communication length, texting, touch, topics of conversation, and/or expression of affection.

Subcategory: Universal Connections. This subcategory was typical in frequency (n=8). Though not all participants talked about finding a method to connect with different ethnoracial groups, many participants talked about how universal connections, defined as the leaning on factors outside of race to help in forming a bond with others, aided in their aim to

fit in with other ethnoracial groups. Within this subcategory, participants identified music, pop culture, and clothing as ways to help them fit in. To transcend the boundaries of race and ethnicity the participants used these things to find a niche or a group. Megan tells about her experience with clothing and fitting in at school: “My mom has been pretty well off financially ... So I think that because I was wearing the latest fashions and what not that that helped a lot with being accepted...” This example demonstrates that Megan’s choice to keep up with fashion trends and having the financial means to do so helped her to fit in with peers, other participants talked about how their music preference and display of it allowed them access to different racially based groups. Yet others, talked at length about how they wanted to be like people on TV and would use the knowledge gathered from pop culture media to help them with fitting in with white and non-white groups.

Subcategory: Sharing Marginalized Experiences with Marginalized Others*.* A significant method that most participants talked about in great detail is learning to share their experiences from their marginalized selves with others who may also be or have been marginalized. Specifically, this subcategory was defined as participants using their experiences to find common ground with other minority groups, including other multiracial people, to form a bond and blend in. This subcategory was typical in frequency (*n*=9). David talks about how he is able to use his “struggle” to connect with groups across different fronts of marginalization, including racism. He says:

> I think (pause) a lot of us have a shared struggle of some sort so umm whether or not it was some form of umm racism or sexism or classism … so a lot of this is kind of shared struggle shared kind of immediate unconscious understanding of like okay so the black nod is also really important in terms of when you are in a group and like they're other black people there and like someone says something slightly racist and you kind of look and you then kind of go, yeah (head nod), yeah (head nod), that was fucked up right there. So yeah.

In being able to feel a sense of camaraderie through the shared experience of discrimination or marginalization, David and most other participants were able to feel a sense of community with other ethnic minority people. Furthermore, some participants talked about how being multiracial has offered them the ability to deeply understand marginalization and had they not been of multiracial descent they would be missing this life experience as some of the participants hold much sociocultural privilege. By being able to go through the acts of discrimination against them first hand, these participants learned to use that experience as a method to connect not only with people from their ancestral background, but also with people from other ethnic minority groups. Also, they were able to feel like they fit in with other minority groups, such as sexual minorities or undocumented bicultural people.

Subcategory: Legitimizing Techniques. The strategy to utilize name, lineage, association, or ancestral history to "prove" oneself and defend against the being "enough" experience and was general in frequency (*n=10).* This subcategory was named after the explicit work that is done by our participants to demonstrate to members of their own heritage group or others that they are legitimate members of that group. Those participants who talked about developing and using this strategy talked about it in reaction to the experience of initially not being accepted into an ethnoracial group. It was not until participants used their ethnoracial markers that they were accepted or connected to the group. Adam talked about the conditions and reasoning behind when he uses this skill:

> If I feel like it's going to speed up the degree of which the connection is made. If I'm in a group of Latino people, yeah my mom is Chileno background. It's a (pause) It's a bridge. Because if I mention that, it's like, that's where this guy is coming from. Okay. So he's been to the same kinds of family parties that we've been too. He knows how it works. Ummm (pause) if it doesn't bridge the gap and if it's not relevant, I don't bring it up.

In this comment Adam provided us with insight on his process and his right to use and not use his ethnoracial currency. Many other participants talked about the experience of being initially confronted by a gatekeeper to the group and using facts such as bilingualism, last names, and/or family histories in order to demonstrate their authenticity. By sharing these details and truths about themselves, they were able often to overcome the barrier of being rejected.

Subcategory: Protective Stance. Developing and adopting a protective stance was general in frequency (*n=10).* Ten participants talked about practicing a protective stance, which is defined as intentionally behaving in a way to shield oneself from experiencing discrimination and/or insults from different ethnoracial groups. Katie talked about how she developed this skill to protect herself from being rejected and discriminated against, "When you experience the microaggressions from different cultural groups, you're like "Wow," like that doesn't feel good. So then, I think you're more careful about what you say later, so I think it's just being more aware." Through trial and error, Katie has learned to censor what she says around others in order to protect herself and the relationship that she carries with others. By refraining from talking about specific things, Katie and nine other participants are able to maintain their in-group status. Particularly, the participants talked about using this strategy with white communities. They talked about refraining, avoiding, and/or redirecting conversations in order to protect and carry on the relationships that they had with family, friends, and colleagues. Moreover, they reported that out of fear that the other would say insensitive and/or offensive things about their heritage, the participant took on his/her protective stance to allow the other person save face. They assumed that if the other were to

be embarrassed or shamed for talking about their prejudices and ignorance, an injury or impasse would occur in the relationship, thereby, risking that relationship and/or community.

Not Fitting In

The second domain of "Not Fitting In," was related to the research question of determining what helps these participants fit in with various ethnoracial groups. It was developed as participants also talked at great length about the moments in which they were not able to blend in. The prominence of stories that included moments of rejection or inability to fit in, therefore, generated the domain of "Not Fitting In." Therefore, "Not Fitting In" is defined as the moments that led to participants unable to gain acceptance by the group. This domain included three categories: Inability to Adapt to Social Situation, Moments of Marginalization, and Family Disconnect from Ancestry. Moments of Marginalization included three subcategories: Discrimination, Misclassification by Others, and Objectification. Within each of these experiences, participants highlighted the moments when they found it particularly difficult and/or were unable to blend in with a group.

Category: Inability to adapt to social situation. The category of being unable to adapt to a social situation refers to not being able to understand the expectations of the interpersonal and/or environmental social interaction, therefore, making it difficult to know or recognize how to behave with that ethnoracial group. This category was general in frequency (*n=10)*. Within this theme, participants talked about their inability to decode a situation based on either having a lack of exposure to the group; too young to recognize what was expected of them to fit in; and misinterpreting or misreading cues based on other experiences with that ethnoracial group. For example, Adam shared his experience with

attempting to blend in with a white dominant group. Although Adam looks white, he talked candidly about his misinterpretations and his earnest attempts at trying to fit in:

> So when I started dating (name) she's on the (name) track team, which is like the whitest institution ever. It was like they're like so painfully white. It's like she'd bring me to hang out with her friends and I'd sit in their living room and they'd throw on a movie and like joke about the movie with each other…and I tried to do that with them, but they weren't feeling it really. Like my jokes fell flat every time. It was like Jesus what is happening with this crowd here? …And umm they just got colder and colder … and me not connecting with them brought an end to those relationships. And it is because I could not decode the communication pattern. I could not figure out what they wanted to hear and that the things that they talked about...

Clearly, Adam tried really hard to understand the group dynamic and fit in, however, he was unable to determine how he could fit in with this group. Adam talked with disappointment, as did other participants when discussing their experiences related to being unable to understand what else was needed to fit in to a specific ethnoracial group. Most participants talked about this occurrence in relation to White dominant spaces. Additionally, participants discussed part of this inability to read a situation as it being related to their age. Some shared not being able to decode because at the time they were either too young or did not have a reference point to understand from.

Category: Moments of Marginalization. Moments of Marginalization is defined as experiences in which participants described being rejected, devalued, or powerless due to phenotype and/or ancestral background. General in frequency (*n=12*), this category also generated three subcategories: discrimination, misclassification by others, and objectification. Each of the three subcategories stress how others used phenotype, specifically, to dehumanize the participants in this study.

Subcategory: Discrimination. Under discrimination, incidents of racism, microaggressions, and moments of vicarious learning from discrimination are identified as contributing to the experience of feeling like one does not fit in, blend in, or belong. This

category was general in frequency (n=12) as all participants shared about a time when they or their family members experienced discrimination. Participants talked about these moments happening with strangers, schoolmates, coworkers, community members, and even within their own family members. When talking about these incidents, the participants communicated a clear sense of rejection and hurt. Katie shared her experience of attempting to explain to her white father the insensitivity behind his language of Asian people:

> …they kept calling people oriental and we were like, 'Dad, like you can't say that like it's not oriental.' And they're like, 'No, like we've been saying Orientals for like years, like if it's a bad term it is because people are stupid and they like changed it.' And we're like, 'We are your Asian children telling you and you can't say oriental. Like you can't do it' but they didn't get it.

In this quote, Katie described that not only was her father using racist terminology to identify people who share part of her ethnoracial ancestry, but she was also being dismissed as an Asian person. Others talked about the tension between and across their families, including incidents of disownment of one parent or one family talking poorly about the other.

Also, many participants talked about their ambiguous phenotype subjecting them to being exposed to an elevated amount of racism. Furthermore, many questioned whether not having and ambiguous phenotype would decrease the amount of overtly racist commentary. Chris shared, "Because what I found is that people are much more likely to say racist things around me than they would be, I mean, I believe than if I look different…people police each other more than they ever used…I heard a lot of things that like, for example, my Dad would never hear." Therefore, Chris referred to his unique position because should he be an identifiable Black man, like his father, he believes that the people around him would not speak their racist ideals out loud. Similarly, Alexis shared her experience of being subjected to racist and prejudiced ideals from both of her heritage groups, she stated:

> …a lot of times I heard discriminatory comments from people thinking that I was part of their same group. So, like white people would talk to me how much they didn't like or the things that they were sort of upset about with Hispanic people thinking that I fit into their category sometimes not realizing that I was also affected by what they said. And in the opposite sometimes, I would hear Hispanic people saying things about white people and how oppressive they can be and, you know, they have all the money and whatever and not realizing that I also am hurt by what they're saying because I identify as being white too…

Alexis so eloquently described the unique position that she carries and is embedded within her multiracial experience in trying to manage her two ethnoracial identified groups. Like her, many other participants described having a similar experience, particularly with friends. Some participants talked about the experience of classmates of friends knowing their mixed ancestral heritage and yet still saying discriminatory things because participants believed that somehow their friends thought of them as "one of them."

Subcategory: Misclassification by Others. A related experience in which participants felt marginalized by others was when they were misclassified, meaning that they were labeled as part a group that was not congruent with whom they identified. This experience was typical in frequency as it came up with seven participants. Participants reported people, either in the community or with friends, would treat them as if or tell them that they were not a part of the group with whom they identified. Megan, who is both Black and White, shared her story of being categorized as a part of a group that is completely separate and different from her own ancestral groups:

> When I didn't fit in with the white people they kind of pushed me towards Mexicans which I don't have anything against them but …I don't think that even though we're both of color I don't think our cultures really mesh together… so it was hard trying to get white people to realize that, "Hey you're pushing me into a culture that is not of my own and I'm actually white so why are you pushing something that I'm not when I'm actually really just like you?"

Unfortunately for Megan and many other participants, because she does not present phenotypically as White, she was completely shunned by her white peers and expected to

have more of a connection with a group that does not resonate with her ethnoracial ancestral background. It is clear that Megan has an understanding of who she is and whom she belongs with; however, people from her ethnoracial group did not accept her as such. At times the ethnically ambiguous look may be helpful, unfortunately it can also impact one's ability to fitting in with the ethnoracial group whom they would like to fit in with.

Misclassification also included being placed in a group that the participant may not necessarily feel an affinity towards. Brian talked about his experience when hanging out with his white friends. He shared:

> …you start noticing that a group of people starts to identify you with them even though you don't necessarily feel that way… And you start to notice that they start to differentiate black people from me. They treat me like I'm one of them and I'm like, "What a minute. It's not like that."

Brian shows a strong reaction to being set apart from Black culture and being thought of as different. Some participants shared this experience as somehow being classified as a "token," thereby, minimizing or categorizing the participant as something different than s/he identifies.

Subcategory: Objectification. Tree quarters of the participants in this study talked about the experience of being objectified, thus, this subcategory was typical in frequency (*n*=9). Objectification in this study referred to participants being treated and/or seen as a thing rather than a person. Like the other forms of marginalization, participants experienced objectification by parents, friends, lovers, and community members. Many talked about feeling like an object that was on display for others to figure out, admire, and/or dehumanize. The participants discussed how their parents, specifically white parents, would brag about their "mixed" child as opposed to just bragging about their child. Others talked about feeling

like people were only interested in them, romantically or otherwise, strictly because they were of multiracial heritage. Jessica revealed her thoughts on being objectified:

> I kind of felt like I'm more than my race and so "If I wasn't mixed, would you still find me attractive, would you still talk to me?" And that being mixed, to me is a very personal thing so and I've struggled with it. I continue to struggle with it, so to kind of ask that as if like they have license to do so feels really weird. It's because like I wouldn't go up to a white person and be like, 'What are you?' instead of asking like what your name is. Like I think it's a weird intersection of like privilege and curiosity and racial profiling almost like all at once.

Jessica determined that her multiracial identity is a sensitive topic for her, as others may experience with other parts of their identity, and to ask outright without considering the complexity of identity is insensitive. She presents her perception of feeling as though others believe that they have the right to question her background. Other participants talked about the idea of others feeling the right to objectify, specifically white people, when they would touch their hair without asking or would feel as if they were being "interrogated" about their backgrounds. In these moments, participants identified feeling a strong sense of being violated and removed from those around them.

Category: Family Disconnect from Ancestry. When listening to the stories of participants, a salient theme that grew from the data was the pattern of family disconnecting from their ancestry. "Family disconnect from ancestry" is defined as relatives, such as parents, distancing themselves and the participant from their ancestral roots, which creates a barrier for the participant to adapt his/her ancestral ethnoracial groups. A large portion of the participant group talked about this experience and was general in frequency (n=10). For example, Jessica discussed the difficulty that she has encountered in connecting with her Filipino/Asian heritage due to her own father's distancing from his ethnic background. She shared:

> I think that he (Dad) prescribes more to like a melting pot kind of idea of like, "We're American," umm and like, "Yeah, I'm Asian," but I (Dad) prefer to identify as American… like even we went to the Philippines and stuff. It was always very much like we're separate from the Philippines and that we have our own traditions versus like Filipino traditions or Jewish traditions like whatever. So, I think that potentially has made it (pause) more difficult to navigate my Asianess because my Dad has a very complicated issue with his Asianess.

Here, it is noted that a parent's identity can impact how the participant relates to his/her heritage, more particularly how s/he will relate with that group. Embedded within this experience is a legacy of internalized racism. Many other participants shared how their parents were interested in making sure that they did not learn their native language, learned how to interact exclusively with White culture, and/or talked negatively about their own ethnic group in order to remove the participant from relating with that ethnic group. Some specific examples were to speak English only, purposefully withholding of history and stories, enrollment in etiquette classes, and being scolded for identifying oneself as the ethnic minority group. These strong experiences of disconnecting from the legacy of the ethnoracial group, therefore, created a barrier for some participants from connecting or blending into all of their ethnoracial heritage groups.

Impact of Blending In

This domain generated five categories including: Desire for An In-group; Disidentification; Empowerment; Internal Struggles; Multiculturally Minded; and Consciousness. Multiculturally Minded included one subcategory of Broader Perspective; whereas, Consciousness included two subcategories: Invisible Identity and Isolation. Patterns associated with blending-in include both negative and positive experiences. Most participants reported holding both negative and positive feelings and thoughts regarding the blending-in process. This domain was defined as the outcomes of undergoing the process of attempting to fit-in with different groups.

Category: Desire for an In-group. With the experience of feeling as though one needs to adapt or utilize different strategies in order to potentially fit in with an ethnoracial group or being rejected, many participants talked about their desire for an ethnoracial in-group. This was defined as the yearning to be a part of exclusive group with a shared identity. This category was typical in frequency, with nine participants talking about this wish. The desire to have an in-group refers to both wishing one could have a unified multiracial in-group and/or wanting to feel as though one has a true mono-ethnoracial in-group, regardless of whether the group is comprised of multiracial people or not. David shared his perspective on the lack of roots regarding the biracial experience in the United States:

> For the biracial or for the mixed race experience it is always kind of been just whatever people (just) kind of mixed together rather then having its own kind of culture in its own right. So that's more how I feel in terms of there is a lack of history or a lack of experience umm just being biracial umm even if it has always been there it just has been glossed over the history books because it's been easier to separate these things that way...

Other participants shared the experience of coming into contact with other biracial or multiracial people and engaging in a "celebration" for finding another person who is also born with a mixed heritage background. They discussed this occurrence as being joyful because it is not often when one realizes that they are in the presence of a biracial/multiracial person given the ambiguous phenotype of some multiracial people. There is an assumption that on some level there is a consensus regarding the biracial or multiracial experience among multiracial people. However, despite the mentioned joyful moments, a few participants talked about their experience of encountering other biracial people and feeling surprised and/or disappointed to find that there was not a shared experience or affinity between them. Thus, this also contributed to a desire to someday encounter a unified biracial group. In fact,

this made their yearning for an in-group stronger as well as opened their perspective toward not making assumptions about people's experiences.

Category: Disidentification. In response to the blending in process, over half of the participants talked about disidentifying with a part of their heritage. Disidentification was defined as distancing oneself from a part of his/her ancestral groups. This reaction was typical in frequency (*n*= 7). Distancing, as presented by the participants, occurred in many forms including self-deprecating comments or humor, directly denying a part of your heritage, and wishing you were not associated with colonization and/or white supremacy. Adam talked about his struggle with white privilege and not identifying with its roots:

> … I have white guilt. I definitely have white guilt because I know that my Dad is Caucasian and I know that our history is so detestable. I mean (pause) every time I go into history and I start reading about some event it's like it's like my ancestors on the Caucasian side were so greedy and so violent…so bent on domination and that's not something that I identify with. It's not something that I'm proud of...

Many other participants had similar reactions to their "white passing" phenotype and blatantly stated that did not identify with white. Others shared that the relationship that they held with their white ancestry was complicated and complex.

Even so, others felt that in order to fit in with white dominated groups or spaces, they had to distance themselves from their ethnic minority background. Jessica shared, "…making jokes about Asians or about myself, I felt like that was me trying to like distance myself from Asians which at least would put me or get me, I guess, closer to white people potentially but umm I never identified as white." Jessica highlights the complex reaction to attempting to fit in where one will distance themselves from one part of their identity, while not fully identifying with another part of their identity. Another participant also talked about using humor to distance himself from either parts of his ethnoracial identity. Meaning he would

make fun of the part of himself should he find himself with the opposite group and conversely do the same when with the other group.

Category: Empowerment. Although there was the response to distance oneself from one part of identity, there was also the category of empowerment, defined as feeling confident in oneself to experience pride and advocacy. Most participants did talk about an empowered state in relation to the experience of being a chameleon and was general in frequency (*n*=10). For those participants that did cite a feeling of empowerment, this included feeling secure in their identity, feeling like they can assert who they are unapologetically, as well as feeling comfortable being a chameleon, whether to be a chameleon was warranted or not. Sarah talked about her experience of coming to a point of confidence:

> …once I realized it was helpful because I think for a while it was like I needed to decide like I'm going to be Korean or I'm going to be white and I'm going to stay that way…but then I, more and more, I have to tap in to different things. It's not going to be you know black and white. It will always be somewhat ambiguous and I think that realizing that it is, it's helpful and it's not hurting, it's really important. And it's not that you need to make yourself unambiguous…just realizing you don't need to be one or the other, you don't need to be unambiguous because it is, it really is strength to be able to kind of mesh in into all the different networks...

There were other participants that shared the process of reaching peace and confidence with existing in the in-between space of different ethnoracial groups. For example, Chris stated that he is "still learning but I'm way more comfortable… I'm enjoying the gray space. I'm learning how to thrive in it, and like I said, find happiness and find, you know, meaningful relationships on both sides of the color spectrum." Chris highlights that although he is currently in the process of learning more about existing in "the gray space," he is understanding that it can be a strength and lead to positive feelings as well as cross cultural relationships.

In addition, it appears that once the participants realized the strength of their unique position, they came to appreciate their identities and asserted how they would like to present and represent themselves among others. Vanessa explained her process, its challenges, and how she arrived at feeling secure in herself and how she presents herself to others. She said:

> … I readily offer that my mother is white and my father is Mexican. I don't feel that that makes me less than and I think it's fine that I've had different experiences than other people have that's what's shaped…I have a much more well rounded view of what authentic means to me, and…I'm pretty happy and pretty clear of who I am, where I come from, and what that means with how I wanna represent myself in the world...

Category: Internal Struggles. Although these participants felt a sense of empowerment, they also reported suffering from "internal struggles." The data revealed that some participants expressed undergoing conflicting dialogue that occurred within their own minds, which lead to skepticism, confusion, and/or negative feelings. A large group of the participants reported this experience as a response to attempting to fit in across ethnoracial groups. This category was general in frequency (*n*=10).

Internal struggles included this feeling of "pressure." Participants shared almost identical experiences when they talked about the pressure being born from within. For example, Jessica shared:

> I think I do sometimes feel pressure but I think that's maybe not from them but from myself. Maybe from them but I'm gonna own some of that, a lot of it. Sometimes I feel that I don't belong only because I felt that way for so long...

Similarly, Megan said, "I wouldn't say that it's pressure that they themselves put on me…it's a pressure that I put on myself because I was so worried …I just wanted all of my life, I've just wanted to blend in." When sharing about this pressure, participants identified that it was in relation to their prior experience of feeling as though they had to manage and navigate fitting in to different ethnoracial groups.

A few participants talked about their internal struggles in managing their internalized racism and/or their white privilege. Specifically, many talked about having internalized racism as a developmental phase, whereas, they were at that point unable to make meaning of what it meant to be one ethnicity and the other. David said, "…then with my own kind of perception on…what I thought, umm, black, what I thought about to be black but to also be white umm I had a lot of kind of combating feelings and also negative and positive ones." Others talked about internalized racism as a message they received from family members and attempting to understand how they can amend the conflicting parts of their multiracial selves.

While some participants talked about conflicting messages about the different ethnoracial parts to their selves, others were conflicted about what it meant to be a multiracial person and sensed a great responsibility around what they or others thought it should mean. Brian, Chris, Jessica and Kristina all talked about their parents' thoughts and expectations around the participants' unique position to fit-in between and across ethnoracial groups to act as a "bridge" for cross-cultural communities. At some times, this expectation was welcomed and at others they talked about feeling pressured to meet that expectation and wanting to just be themselves. A related experience was that of navigating a positive and negative feeling around one's privilege or challenge of being looking ambiguous. As an example, Alexis stated:

> Sometimes I appreciate it (ambiguous looking) a lot and other times I'm really angry about it …because I feel like why should I be neutral for someone else? Why does it take me being a blank slate for somebody to kind of be a little bit more willing to hear what I have to say? Why can't I just be black or Hispanic like very clearly identified as a particular race and have people still treat me like a human being?… And the part about it that I do like is I've—and sometimes I'm almost embarrassed to say this but I think it's the safety issue for me … I'm a blank slate and people just kind of project on to me what they want to project on to me. I can allow them to think or feel however they want to without putting myself in danger…

Alexis appeared to feel aggravated by others not respecting ethnic minorities, having to be the voice of social justice, and having to use her ambiguous look to cultivate that bridge of understanding. Additionally, it seemed like Alexis also understood though she may be irritated with having to use her ambiguous look to be heard by others, she also appreciated that it serves to protect her.

Category: Multiculturally Minded. Though the experience of blending into and out from different ethnoracial groups can create conflicting thoughts and emotions, it also appeared to lend itself to the development of a multiculturally sensitive, aware, and attuned mind. The information provided by these participants generated clear themes related to being Multiculturally Minded, which is defined for this project as embodying the principles of multiculturalism (i.e.- openness, empathy, compassion, flexibility, sensitivity, curiosity, and social justice). All participants talked about their experiences as a chameleon as one that led to the fostering of these ideals. The Multiculturally Minded category was general in frequency (*n*= 12).

Participants discussed that being a social chameleon opened up many opportunities to interact and interface with people from different cultures and backgrounds. Although participants acknowledged that this might not be a unique occurrence specific to only multiracial people, they did stress that by being multiracial one is subjected to different cultures early on in their life. Brian shared his thoughts on being biracial and multiculturally minded as an effect from trying to fit in with different ethnoracial groups. He said:

> …we've (biracial people) gone through experiences (fitting in with different groups) and I'm not the only one that's been through any of the experiences … but because we have to go through those, I think we develop tolerance faster and because of that are able to just makes friends easier...

Brian, as well as most other participants, talked about his experience of interfacing with different communities leading to more “tolerance” for diversity- in views, in attitude, and way of being.

Other participants highlighted how their experience of being multiracial may differ from those people who are monoracial and how that impacts the way that one is able to relate to others. David shared:

> …I think there's an aspect of naiveté or ignorance in being monoethnic or monoracial in terms of I mean…where you don't know how to navigate the kind of different mixed cultural experiences or in that way you never really have to think about it until something goes awry and you bring into it what you know from those monocultural experiences whereas from the get go I have always been in a multicultural multiracial world...

David pointed out that monoracial/ethnic people might not have to necessarily expose themselves or come to a point where they have to interface with people from different ethnoracial groups. However, by simply being multiracial, one inherently develops an understanding for others as they are exposed to others early on.

Having had this exposure, most participants talked about how this helped in building compassion and empathy for others. Specifically, all participants talked about having experienced some form of vicarious learning of discrimination through their parents, their friends, or their own experience of attempting to blend in. As such, they talked about forming and developing a sense of empathy and compassion both for others who experience discrimination and others who are limited by their prejudice because it feels familiar. Adam expressed an example of how participants empathized with victims of discrimination:

> …it makes me empathize with my mom. It makes me empathize with that struggle. Because I know that throughout her life she was following my dad from one white community to another white community. Finding her place in those communities was always a struggle for her...

Like Adam, most participants talked about being present for moments of discrimination towards their ethnic minority family and friends and feeling empathy and sympathy for them. Relatedly, they talked about their white family or friends not feeling sympathy or not talking about racism because they had not necessarily been exposed to it or could not necessarily relate it to their experience. Ironically, most participants also talked about feeling compassion for people who suffered from ignorance. Alexis said:

> I feel like a lot of it comes from understanding maybe where the bigotry or the racism (it) comes from…my childhood. So, sometimes when people say things that are not politically correct or kind of uncouth about another racial identity I feel like I have compassion for them because I remember being surrounded by that as a child and still loving my grandfather, you know, my dad sometimes will say things. But so does my mom's side of the family...

Alexis pointed out what so many other participants talked about in their responses, the development of compassion for racist and prejudiced people born from growing up and/or navigating interactions with her family who are from different monoethnic-racial groups. Some participants talked about both not necessarily agreeing with their family's perspective, and loving their families anyway. In being able to have compassion for both victim and aggressor, participants talked about how they utilized their unique position of blending-in to educate or broaden the mind of the aggressor; thereby, promoting a social justice agenda. As an example, Vanessa shared:

> I have less of a tendency to make an ogre out of somebody than to kind of say, "You know, it's beyond their experience." They don't know because it's beyond their experience and I can still call them out and feel angry about the ways in which that lack of experience and fear and bigotry kind of plays out and in the way that they're able to exercise power that other people cannot.

Subcategory: Broader Perspective. Most participants talked at great length of having developed a broader perspective in relation to being a social chameleon and blending into different ethnoracial groups. This subcategory formed under the category of being

multiculturally minded and was general in frequency as ten participants talked about this asset. A broader perspective is defined in this study as having a greater outlook or ability to see greater points of view. When he talked about the impact of fitting into different ethnoracial groups, Chris said:

> I think that's the best thing I've gotten, you know, a way of thinking that I got. I do a better job than I think I would have otherwise in seeing other people's point of view, you know, seeing the complexities of issues. Identity probably helped with that. It's not like you can't do that without, you know, if you're not mixed but I think it probably helped me...

Here, Chris highlighted that although this may not be an ability that is unique to multiracial people, for him as other participants, the experience really helped with developing this asset of being able to hold complex, multiple, and at times conflicting perspectives. Not only did participants talk about how this ability helped them individually, but how they utilized it to help others. Kristina talked about how she applies her broad perspective:

> I'm able to see both sides of where people coming from like really really easily and my ability to do that has definitely been really apparent…(talked about a conflict between friends)… nobody else had been able to diffuse the situation and I got it diffused and done in like three minutes…they stopped yelling as soon as I started talking to them both because I was obviously listening to both people and I was obviously respecting both peoples' different perspectives...

Like many other participants, Kristina shared that understanding and being open to different perspectives has helped her help others with resolving conflicts. This example highlighted that a broader perspective can be helpful in resolving interpersonal conflicts and assist in maintaining cross-cultural friendships.

Category: Consciousness. The moment of consciousness in which participants talked about becoming aware of one's mixed heritage position or awareness of how one's mixed heritage is perceived by others was a category, which was general in frequency (*n*= 11). Furthermore, this category also included two subcategories: *Invisible Identity* and *Isolation.* Most participants talked about learning about being "different" from monoracial or

monoethnic people through interfacing and attempting to blend in with them as well as maturing developmentally. As an example, Sarah said:

> The more I learned about Korean things and even like the more I learn about Korean culture, not like what you see the food and the music, but really like the ways they form relationships and the ways that certain people speak to each other umm then I really realize that I grew up different...

She talked about not knowing that there was anything different about her Korean self until she began to learn more deeply about Korean culture and interact with more Korean people. At this point, Sarah became conscious of her unique position of being part Korean but feeling that she is not like other Koreans. For other participants, they talked about not realizing that they were racially or ethnically different until growing older. Vanessa remembered:

> …there was this awkwardness that was very hard to make sense of when you're 11, you know, and I think continued to for some time… as much as I get it and as much as I so much wanted to be a sense of their sense of community, I think overall it was awkward. It didn't feel like a perfect fit...

A few participants shared Vanessa's experience of attempting to fit in with a group, not feeling a sense of acceptance, and feeling a sense of dissonance that tuned her into understanding that she is different from others. When becoming aware of their unique social position, some participants talked about themes associated with both awareness and attempting to blend in with different ethnoracial groups. The following subcategories emerged: invisible identity and isolation.

Subcategory: Invisible Identity. Interestingly, as participants talked about becoming aware of their difference from monoracial and/or monoethnic peers, they also talked about realizing that a multiracial identity can be an invisible identity. The invisible identity was defined as ethnoracial marker(s) not seen or recognized by others. This was typical in frequency (*n*=9). For many participants, they shared that at times understanding an invisible identity can lead to positive opportunities or experiences as discussed from some of the

categories under the domain of “fitting-in.” For example, not being easily identifiable can allow for participants to utilize the ambiguous look to blend in, if desired. Not being easily identifiable can also lead to negative experiences such as “misclassification.” Adam talked about his experience with the invisible identity:

> You know it’s hard to tell because I don’t think people come out and say…I think I’m ignorant as to the people in my life who are biracial. Umm I think that we kind of are taken for granted. I think that externally we assign people their race before they get a chance to represent themselves or what their background is and I think that you move forward with a friendship and it just never comes up because there’s never really a proper channel for talking about that kind of thing...

Adam pointed out that although others may assign him to a race group, he also highlighted that he too assigns people to groups without knowing if they are biracial. In talking about this unique experience, Adam beautifully exposes that even biracial/multiracial people are susceptible to categorizing people in racial groups.

Others talked about an invisible identity as the impetus to seek out a multiracial community that is visible through social media. A few participants talked about engaging in social media groups in order to connect with other multiracial people. These participants also shared that by finding community through the internet, they were able to learn from other visibly known and identified multiracial people’s experience, thereby, informing their approach and/or finding comfort in knowing others share similar experiences.

Subcategory: Isolation. Though rare in frequency (*n*=3), there were a few participants that talked about feeling isolated or isolating after becoming conscious of their special position. For the purpose of this study, isolation is was defined as feeling displaced from others after realizing that you do not specifically fit with any monoracial group. Chris shared:

> And I can say that it was a difficult because…there was no one like, you know, mixed…from the age of five was when I first kind of realized that I was not the same

> as everyone…I had a difficult experience definitely with kids...I was made to feel pretty isolated and alone...

Through this story, Chris presented how awareness of difference and being unlike others led to feeling isolated. Chris later shared that he had difficulty establishing a strong social support network throughout his childhood because he never quite felt like he fit in anywhere. Yet other participants like Vanessa talked about isolating herself from peers once she learned why others thought she was different. She stated:

> …I think that when confronted with difference, my response was just to get angry and so it was 'well screwy y'all then,' you know, that sort of thing... so I just sort of retreated inside and started to write and started to read everything and that's how I dealt...

Though Vanessa isolated herself from her peers after attempting to blend in, she implied creating meaningful and strong relationships with her immediate family, which inspired her to learn more about her father's ancestry. This seemed to help her mature into a strong and form a strong Latina identity.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to deeply explore how multiracial people interact and fit-in with people from different ethnoracial backgrounds as well as the impact that this process may have on these individuals. The researcher was also interested specifically in the chameleon experience for multiracial individuals. This qualitative investigation is not intended to make generalizations about an entire group of people, but to begin the endeavor of learning more about the specific experiences of some members of this group and to understand further the challenges that they face and strengths they attain.

The Chameleon Experience Uncovered

Through this investigation much was learned about the chameleon experience from the perspective of these participants, including- a) knowing whether or not these individuals encountered a chameleon-type experience, b) beginning to understand how mixed race people navigate their social world, c) the challenges they encounter, and d) the possible impact of these experiences, which included both positive and negative outcomes.

Based on the data gathered from this investigation, the chameleon experience is the process by which these multiracial people were able to blend in and fit in with groups across different ethnoracial backgrounds. The chameleon experience involved abilities, features, and tools that were learned from others (Cultural Exposure and Family Socialization), developed independently (Accommodation and Strategies), or were factors outside of one's control (Phenotype and Social Acceptance).

Another interesting finding was that despite engaging in chameleon-like behavior at times, these participants highlighted that they had a strong sense of self. Contrary to the idea

cited in early literature (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Thornton & Wason, 1995) that a multiracial person experiences a period of confusion in forming his/her identity, for these participants it appeared that they understood who they were, including the makeup of their family, but often found it difficult to identify themselves in the larger social space. This is reminiscent of Poston's biracial identity model, as initially biracial individuals feel confident in their personal identity (1990). However, as the young biracial person begins to interface with and become aware of different ethnic groups, he/she is usually faced with making a decision to identify with an ethnoracial group (Poston, 1990). In this investigation, these participants did experience many stages that were described in identity models (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Root, 1998). However, the chameleon experience was not talked about in relation to these participants' identity formation. Nonetheless, many of the participants appeared to have awareness and strong sense of a multiracial self as they frequented and engaged in multiracial websites, social media, and interviews.

While exploring the chameleon experience further, it appeared that the dynamics and behaviors embedded within it seem to be related to both nonconscious and conscious imitation of behavior, or mimicry. While interviewing the participants, it was found that the participants felt their chameleon abilities were developed and fostered early in life, without their explicit awareness. It seemed as though for most participants, there was a process of becoming aware of their difference and their chameleon like abilities. When asked if they were actively aware that they were utilizing these abilities, most all participants referenced moments that they did not know they were acting as a chameleon and there were other times in which they were aware, however in retrospect, the concept/action was familiar to them. A few participants described their perception of the experience as a "reflex," as something that

they did without being aware that they were doing. As an example, many participants talked about how they picked up others' forms of communication, noticed afterwards, and continued to do so to help others near them feel more comfortable in hopes of acceptance. This example is similar to examples offered in past social psychology documentation of the chameleon effect, in which people from monoracial groups will also mimic or imitate various factors of communication when around different groups (Lakin et. al, 2003). Other participants referenced the moments when they initially became aware of this ability or dynamic, hence experiencing a moment of realization.

After becoming aware or conscious of the chameleon-like abilities, participants stated using them as a tool to access different groups and spaces of their choosing. More specifically, a few participants talked about how once they realized they could blend-in with different groups, they used it to establish networks with different groups of people, which brought them great satisfaction. Past studies have documented the chameleon experience from the monoracial perspective and have found that there appears to be a link between people who engage in the imitation of behavior and being liked by others (Lakin et. al, 2003). Once the participants were conscious of it, it appeared they could then use these abilities as tools to navigate the social world; however, the contributors of this study did note that even after becoming aware, nonconscious moments of mimicry continued. At times, they continued to be unaware of using chameleon-like abilities in daily interactions and only realized after the interaction had ended. Therefore, it seems that the chameleon experience can happen both at the nonconscious and conscious level at the moment that it is occurring. Though there seems to be some overlap with monoracial people's imitation of behavior in that these participants wanted to be liked, there also seems to be a different and separate

motivation for the development of this process as stated by these participants. They talked about consciously using their chameleon abilities to minimize their difference from other groups and to blend-in, while others used it to promote a social justice agenda given their personal experiences with marginalization.

As described by the participants, their "chameleon experiences" involved the adoption of certain behaviors and communication styles. Specific examples that almost all participants referenced included changing how they talk (tone, volume, word choice, accent, language) and what they talk about (topic of conversation) when around different groups (Discerning of Communication), both consciously and nonconsciously. This also included choosing what to reveal and what not to reveal to others, such as ancestry. As such, many participants talked about initially observing a group before interfacing with them in order to get a sense or a feel for the group. Perhaps this was done to assess for risk, but it also may have been done to lead into and adapt to the group dynamic and behavior. By having these combined abilities, the participants demonstrated great agency and power to choose whom they would like to blend in with, thereby, showing that the members of a group do not hold all of the power for group membership, rather it is a dynamic that is co-constructed by participant and group members. Perhaps this occurrence of the chameleon experience challenges the social psychology framework of boundary permeability, as traditionally the strictness of boundaries for a group appear to be set by the group itself (Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001). These boundaries are socially constructed by the cultural group, are used to define the group from others, and dictate how easy or difficult it may be for individuals to move across group boundaries (Shamir & Melnik, 2002). Therefore, it

appeared that these participants were able to transcend the boundaries formed by the cultural group by utilizing their chameleon abilities to permeate different ethnoracial groups.

Interestingly, many participants described that in the times that they were unable to decode social interactions and transcend boundaries, it was due to something that they were not able to do or understand. Participants that talked about this experience (Inability to adapt to social situation) appeared to be taking accountability for something that they believed they were missing. However, it may be that for those participants, the inability to decode was not something that they could be completely responsible for. Rather, perhaps they suffered from being discriminated against and were not aware of it in the moment, as group acceptance may be an interaction that is co-constructed by both participant and group members.

As shared by many participants, many of the chameleon methods of fitting-in were developed early on in their childhood, both nonconsciously and consciously. During this time frame, participants had to contend with developing their social skills, attempting to find a group of peers to fit-in with, and to prevent encounters of having one's racial/ethnic difference exploited. As such, a couple of participants identified the chameleon experience as one being "born out of need," meaning that the chameleon experience was adopted out of necessity. Similarly, Collins noticed a similar motivation in his study with Japanese-White biracial participants, in which some reported using their biracial identity as a method of survival (2000). Perhaps the chameleon experience initially is something that is nurtured for the purpose of getting by or blending in without others noticing. Participants talked about utilizing accommodation techniques and others mentioned staying silent when peers would attempt to make fun of their differences (i.e. hair, skin, interracial parents). Therefore to protect oneself from getting picked on, insulted, or attacked, participants talked about taking

on a Protective Stance as part of the chameleon experience. Essentially, they reported developing a sixth sense about the possibility and risk of being singled out or being the target of a racialized aggression. This interpretation of the "need" to be a chameleon may also be influenced by participants' vicarious experiences with their parents of color discrimination experiences. Many participants told vivid stories of being a child and remembering when their parent of color encountered racist people and remembered understanding that it was a negative experience, though at the time, they could not fully grasp the factors behind racism.

For these participants, it appeared that phenotype played a major role in their experiences of interfacing with people from different ethnoracial backgrounds. Though how one looks may not necessarily align with how one identifies racially or culturally, it seemed that phenotype took precedence in the way others viewed the participants. Participants talked at great length about how their racial presentation often was considered first by others before their self-identity. Specifically, participants who stated they looked "Black," experienced more restriction in their abilities to blend in across different ethnoracial groups; whereas those participants that reported a more ambiguous phenotype had more flexibility. An ambiguous phenotype references the absence of specific physical features (i.e.- skin tone, eye shape, hair type, etc.) that indicate a clear racial group (Buchanan & Acevedo, 2004). Often, participants used the different strategies they developed (Strategies) or referenced things they had learned from others (Family Socialization or Cultural Exposure) to express their racial identities or at the very least allow for others to feel more comfortable around them (Accommodation), thereby, allowing them to feel more accepted. As an example of phenotype taking precedence over identity, Chris talked about how his physical presentation as a White man often overpowered his chameleon abilities. He reported experiencing an

incredibly difficult time blending in with the Black community due to his appearance, despite his strong identification with his Black heritage. This was not an isolated experience as many participants referenced holding an invisible identity (i.e. an identity that was not seen or validated by others). It seems as though, phenotype, specifically for this group of people, can be both inclusive and exclusive, and can also lead to feeling as though one is not fully being seen. It could be that these feelings can lead to a desire for an in-group, isolation, or experiencing an internal dialogue impacting their self esteem or perspective of others.

Though it has long been recorded that the perception of phenotype by others influences ethnoracial group membership (e.g. one-drop rule), multiracial people appear to have the opportunity to transcend these perceptions through their chameleon abilities, including when one has an ethnically ambiguous look. It appears that this gives them more freedom in whom they choose to blend in with or not, and even when they choose to blend in or not. This can lead to a sense of empowerment, a sense of agency and a reclaiming of the control to gain group membership. An example of this is that many of the participants talked about feeling excited upon becoming aware that they were able to fit in across different cultural groups. As an example, a few White and Asian participants talked about how they were able to fit in and blend with different types of Latino/a groups. Interestingly, only the Latino/a and White participants did not talk about fitting into or blending in with groups outside of their ancestral heritage. Perhaps this is due to Latino/a groups having their own histories of miscegenation and racial presentation, which vary greatly in phenotype.

This investigation also highlighted how skin tone and other phenotypic features played a role in these participants' chameleon experiences as it relates to White privilege. It appeared that those participants who presented as White had a much easier time being able to

fit in with White groups. However, these participants also reported feeling guilty about their White privilege and even used the term “White guilt.” It seemed as though these participants struggled with accepting their White heritage and the privilege that comes with it. As such, many of these White presenting individuals used their White privilege to enter White dominated spaces or used the White classification by others to promote a social justice agenda of educating others. They did this based on their experiences with and exposure to social injustice through their non-White parent, family, and/or friends. As an example, a few of the participants talked about engaging in non-threatening conversations with White people, who also held positions of power such as restaurant owner or CEO, and were able to speak with them about the needs of the ethnic minority workers. It appeared that through their close proximity and relationships with White and non-white others, these participants were able to straddle the boundary that separates Whites and non-Whites and chose to exist in this space to help increase understanding. They hoped this would narrow the gap between these communities. For those multiracial individuals in this study that did not present as White, they did not talk about White privilege or engaging White others in discussions around privilege, rather, they took on a more protective stance when around White people. Perhaps, this highlights a difference in the ability to be a chameleon among this group of multiracial people.

All participants, regardless of racial presentation, stated although they loved their White parents, their White parents did not talk about race and/or would objectify them, which led to some tension or conflict in the family. Participants talked about understanding their White parents and/or family members perspective, however, struggled to assert their feelings because they did not want to hurt their parents’ feelings or create problems in the family.

This rendered them silent and subject to microaggressions from within the family and/or simply avoiding conversations around race-related topics or issues. As an example, two participants talked about how their parents read about their experience as a multiracial non-White being and began to cry. Both participants felt the need to comfort their parents and afterwards were unable to talk about their racial experience with them for the sake of the parent's wellbeing. This dynamic is known as "white fragility," a condition that White people experience when they are unable to tolerate race-related topics, which leads to a variety of defenses (i.e. crying, yelling) to avoid deconstructing internalized White supremacist ideologies (DiAngelo, 2011). This reaction was not the only barrier encountered between these multiracial participants and their White parents.

Even when participants did not encounter the fragility of White parents' feelings around this topic, some participants shared that their White parents held a colorblind or universalist perspective on race. The colorblind phenomenon essentially "is really a denial of differences…of the unfair power imbalance that exists in society" across racial groups (Sue, 2004, p. 763). Similarly, the universalist approach states that "we all need to see each other as human beings (everyone is the same)" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 59). Therefore, embedded within the White parent's belief that there is no difference among people and all people are the same, is the idea that any difference must be due to some factor outside of race. Additionally, these approaches breed microaggressions, which can be detrimental to a marginalized individual's well-being (Sue, 2004; Sue et. al, 2007). As such, participants talked about how they felt that White parents were dismissive of their experiences, felt disappointed, and could not count on receiving the empathic ear that they needed from White parents for these matters. Therefore, it appears that these multiracial individuals with White

ancestry struggled to find comfort and support from their White parents when it came to racial issues and this possibly could have informed their interactions with White groups.

Interestingly, almost all participants shared that they were more comfortable with their parents and family of color, even more so when considering social matters that included race. It appeared that the families of color were more accepting of the participants' various ways of behaving and some participants reported that they were more "relaxed" when around these relatives. References were made to being able to talk and joke with these family members about race related topics and experiences (Shared Marginalized Experience). Although theoretical identity models point to multiracial people aligning themselves with the parent who phenotypically looked like the multiracial individual (Collins, 2000; Root, 1992, 1996), this study suggests a possible alternative reason as to why these participants felt more comfortable with their families of color. In being able to discuss these issues with their families of color, it appeared that participants did not feel the responsibility or worry of offending or hurting their family's feelings. As an example, one participant shared that she was able to watch a TV show and make jokes about the racial dynamics of the show with her Black family. In being able to laugh with them about this, she stated feeling a sense of closeness and comfort with them. Many participants talked about feeling less constricted and more "easy" in how their families of color related to one another, with others, including the method in which conflict is resolved.

Although most participants talked about feeling relaxed with their families of color, one participant voiced that although he felt closer to his Black family, limitations still existed in his ability to be "completely free" with them. He reported that though he could talk with his family regarding White supremacy and the Black struggle, he could not share with them

his experience as a biracial person. He stated that his family was unable to empathize with his mulatto experience, as they believed that it included a sense of privilege, something that they could not identify with, therefore creating a boundary on his comfort. It may be that this dynamic with people of color informed this group of multiracial individuals' experience as a chameleon, where they are able to find allies with marginalized others, but, still felt a sense of Isolation or a Desire for an In-group.

Though only talked about a few times in this investigation, a significant topic that was mentioned was the idea that there is a mistrust of people exhibiting chameleon behavior by groups. Specifically, this refers to the idea of questioning loyalty to the group because one is seen accommodating or blending in with another ethnoracial group. As an example, when being "exposed" for his chameleon abilities, the group wondered if Adam was "enough" like them or if he was a better fit for the other group. Though only talked about specifically by a couple of participants, most other participants talked about the experience of not being trusted to be "enough" of the ethnoracial group in question. Participants used Legitimizing Techniques to prove that they did belong to the group and could in fact be loyal. Examples of this was when several participants referenced their last name and blood lineage to the group in order to demonstrate that not only did they have the ancestral lineage to be included into the group, but they could be as loyal to the group as they were to their parents and family. It was a common occurrence among these participants to experience resistance by their various heritage cultural groups. This experience is similar to the experience of intragroup marginalization, in which there is a distancing by the ethnoracial group of color from an individual who is behaving like the dominant culture (Castillo, 2009; Castillo, Conoley, Brossart, & Quiros, 2007; Thompson, Lightfoot, Castillo, & Hurst, 2010). The experience of

these participants differs from monoracial groups of color intragroup marginalization as they do have ancestral ties to the dominant group. Furthermore, the susceptibility to rejection by all ancestral groups is a common experience for multiracial individuals (Shih & Sanchez, 2005), therefore, subjecting them to multiple marginalization. For these participants, the chameleon experience helped mediate rejection and led to blending-in with different ethnoracial groups once past the gatekeeper of the group.

Another major underlying factor that surfaced within this study is that in order for the chameleon experience to be better understood, intersectionality and specific environmental context must be attended to. Intersectionality refers to the "analytic approaches that consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of social group membership" (Cole, 2009, p. 170). Specifically for this investigation, it appeared that the following social categories were also important, as noted in the results section: region, demographic of the environment, socio-economic status, gender, social climate of the "time," and public sentiment towards specific groups. As an example, a few of the participants talked about how their strategies shifted as soon as they moved from one school to another, one town to another, or even one state to another. As participants talked about the shifting conceptualization of race/ethnicity by the community around them, their circumstances highlighted a need to pay attention to how race/ethnicity intersect with other social categories and behavior. For instance, Megan talked about how socioeconomic class status shifted the way she was able to fit-in with different ethnoracial groups. She talked about her ability to afford access to fit-in with her White peers based on material objects. She was not questioned about her background so long as she had the markers of brand name objects. She used her socio-economic privilege to fit in with White people until she moved to another region and

socio-economic status no longer mattered. Ultimately, phenotype continued to play a major role in the chameleon experience for these participants, but pointed to socio-cultural factors intersecting with physical features to influence their chameleon ability and/or behavior.

Another very common theme was the chameleon experience as something that allowed them to exist in-between spaces, thereby increasing multicultural sensitivity and skills. Often they were able to exist in and across different ethnoracial groups, which broadened their perspectives and exposed them to many others' point of views. Furthermore, they obtained exposure to marginalization either through their own personal experiences or through vicarious learning as a witness/bystander to their parent's experience of injustice. As such, all participants reported developing, attaining, practicing, and/or promoting multicultural principles through a social justice agenda in life. It seemed that through interfacing with different ethnoracial groups, either within the family, friends, or community, participants acquired skills and attitudes such as openness, empathy, compassion, curiosity, humility, and respect. For example, participants talked about struggling to accept others' attitudes or ways of being, but remained open and compassionate as they already had a deeper understanding that there is "no one way to be" and there is "no universal set of rules." Specifically, a couple of participants talked about struggling to accept White coworkers prejudice views on people of color, however, instead of "making an ogre" out these people, participants described initially feeling compassion for these people as the attitudes felt familiar. Many participants knew these attitudes well as they existed within their own families. As such, participants felt as though they could bridge groups together as they belonged to multiple ethnoracial groups.

Limitations

This investigation, like other scientific studies, was susceptible to limitations. First of all, recruitment was initially difficult as the goal was to recruit from a specific state only, to gain a better understanding of the experiences of individuals within a certain geographic region. As such the researcher decided to open up recruitment to include a nation-wide search for self identified multiracial people. Although expanding recruitment nationally created for a more diverse sample, it may have taken away from a deeper understanding of people located in a specific location and context. A future study may want to address this.

Expanding the search for participants also impacted the researchers original intent of doing in-person interviews only. As participants were located across the nation, the researcher utilized teleconferencing methods to complete interviews, which was not ideal. Although the researcher was able to have face-to-face contact with the participants, at times the wireless Internet network was unreliable. Some interviews were interrupted by poor reception and even call disruption. On one occasion, the interviewer had to redial the participant in order to complete the interview. This may have influenced what and how the participants shared their experience and/or related to the interviewer.

Lastly, the historical self-report and passage of time element may have been problematic. As participants recounted their stories and experiences with fitting in, many stated a struggle with remembering clearly what it was like during specific moments in their history. It appeared that most participants remembered moments of marginalization vividly; however, when they talked about other experiences, they stated making meaning of those instances in the present as opposed to what they may have experienced in that moment. Additionally, some of the participants referenced the context and/or climate of the "time" and the difference of the climate and/or their perspective now impacted their view of the past.

This, perhaps, may have influenced the researcher's ability to capture how strategies are developed or how one lives the chameleon experience, as it seemed that many of the strategies were developed during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.

Implications for Human Services Professionals

This investigation highlighted many critical points regarding how a multiracial person may experience and manage interfacing with different ethnoracial groups, including their family members. Therefore, helping professionals in human service occupations, can benefit from learning and reflecting on this group's experiences in order to better serve this growing population. By reflecting on the experiences of these participants, helping professionals are encouraged to increase their level of awareness and sensitivity towards this group and the unique challenges they may face. Specifically, psychologists can use this information to inform practices of inclusivity at the organizational, systemic, or institutional level, such as a university or community mental health agency.

More specifically, psychologists can use this insight to inform psychotherapy practice. For example, a lesson learned from this study is that most participants mentioned that this was the first time that they had been asked about their experience as a multiracial person. It was clear that this specific group of people might benefit from finding a visible community of self-identified multiracial people in which they could share their unique experiences and find support and guidance. Psychologists could work toward initiating and/or facilitating a psychotherapeutic group for multiracial individuals that suffer from intra- and inter- group marginalization. Additionally, if conducting individual psychotherapy, psychologists should be mindful that this might be the first time that the person is talking

about their multiracial experience. Utilizing an approach like narrative therapy, in which storytelling is encouraged, may be beneficial to this group of people.

Psychologists can also be extremely helpful in addressing a major concern that was highlighted by participants- the experience of racism, microaggressions, and objectification by family members. With a focus on multiculturalism and social justice, psychologists can work toward developing psychoeducational materials for family members on the effects or impact of within-family microaggressions or marginalization on multiracial individuals. More specifically if working with multiracial people with White parents and/or relatives, it may be extremely helpful to discuss with White parents topics such as White privilege, White fragility, and multicultural sensitivity as these themes appeared to greatly impact the participants of this study both with their families and with their communities.

Future Directions

Psychologists and other helping professionals may gain more insight into multiracial identification and experiences through conducting further research. Although the researcher was unable to reconnect with participants to verify results given her constraints with time for this study, perhaps in future investigations, investigators can perform member checks with participants in order to gain feedback regarding participant transcripts and account for any misinterpretations.

This investigation highlighting aspects of the chameleon experience for first generation multiracial individuals with one White and one non-White parent, hopefully inspires broader exploration of this experience. Participants talked a great deal about dis-identifying with their White heritage and it leading to curiosity around what this occurrence would look and feel like for a multiracial person descended from two non-White ethnoracial minority parents.

This would be an interesting direction for future studies in this area. Similarly, this investigation included participants that self-identified as multiracial, however, it would be interesting to investigate if and how the chameleon experience operates with people who are of first generation mixed ethnoracial descent, but do not identify themselves as multiracial.

Additionally, this investigation focused on first generation multiracial people, meaning they are direct descendants of parents who were born to same-ethnoracial parents (i.e.- Indian as both parents are from India). Participants often discussed the influence of socialization practices of family, specifically parents on their ability to understand and practice fitting in nuances and strategies. It may be interesting to explore this experience with later generation multiracial individuals, meaning people born to at least one parent who identifies as multiracial, and may be a role model. It may also be worthwhile to learn about the challenges and strategies that multiracial parents may come across as they attempt to instill a positive sense of self within their child. How are discussions around race and ethnicity managed and discussed? Will their strategies or approaches lead to a high correlation with positive sense of self or self-esteem?

Many participants talked about their experience compared to that of a mixed sibling or a cousin. It may be worthwhile to conduct an investigation to understand what factors influences differences among siblings and whether the chameleon experience exists in individuals of other races. Last, the researcher wondered about the differences that lie between White appearing multiracial people and non-White presenting multiracial people. A deeper look at the chameleon experience between these two groups may be interesting and lend itself to understanding further the diversity of experience within the multiracial population.

Conclusion

This investigation explored the experience of blending and fitting into different ethnoracial groups by multiracial people. This study shared the perspectives and experiences of twelve self identified multiracial individuals in order to gain a deeper understanding of the mixed race experience and how something like the "chameleon experience" may fit into that, as it had been found to be a common occurrence for the multiracial population. The data revealed that the chameleon experience includes times in which participants fit-in and did not fit in with different ethnoracial groups, while employing several different strategies to actively attempt to fit-in with others. The impact of this experience on these participants has been illuminated, including both positive and negative outcomes. Outcomes included feeling a sense of empowerment, applying a multicultural perspective to relationships, and feeling a desire to have an exclusive, ethnoracial, in-group without requiring too much thought or effort. In addition, participants also talked about dis-identifying with part of their heritage, experiencing internal conflicting dialogue, and becoming keenly aware of their differences with monoracial others. It appears that the chameleon experience is an experience that demonstrates the mixed race person's ability to be fluid in presentation and perhaps the chameleon presentation is not necessarily indicative of the identity of multiracial people.

The researcher conducted this research in order to promote greater insight and sensitivity towards this group's challenges and abilities. She hopes that the findings transcend the context in which they are rooted in to promote a more socially just environment for mixed race people. It is her hope that others can adopt much of these participants approach towards others in order to engage in dialogue with one another to begin to deconstruct the differences that divide us.

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Appendix A: Screening Questionnaire

1) Do you identify as multiracial? (i.e.- biracial, mixed, multiethnic, biethnic, mixed, or multicultural)

2) Are your biological parents of different racial backgrounds? (for example, one parent is Black, the other is White or one parent is Asian, the other is Latino/a)

3) Is one of your biological parents White?

4) Are you at least 18 years old?

5) Were you born after the year 1968?

6) Have you ever felt it was necessary to change the way you act around people of different racial groups to fit in?

Appendix B: Demographics Questionnaire

Instructions: Please read and complete the following questions

1. What is your race (please check all that apply)?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black, African American, or Negro
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or some other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- ☐ Some other race:

2. Do the groups marked above (#1) match your identity?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

If not, please write in how you identify:

3. What racial groups do you choose to hang out with (please check all that apply)?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black, African American, or Negro
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or some other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- ☐ Some other race:
- ☐ Multiracial, biracial

4. What is your biological mother's race (please check all that apply)?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black, African American, or Negro
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or some other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- ☐ Some other race:
- ☐ Multiracial, biracial

5. What is your mother's highest level of education?

___ Vocational/Trade School

___ College graduate

___ Graduate student

___ Some college

___ High School diploma
___ Some high school
___ Other:
___ I'm not sure

6. What racial groups does your mother hang out with (please check all that apply)?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black, African American, or Negro
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or some other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- ☐ Some other race:
- ☐ I'm not sure
- ☐ Multiracial, biracial

7. What is your father's race (please check all that apply)?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black, African American, or Negro
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or some other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- ☐ Some other race:
- ☐ Multiracial, biracial

8. What is your father's highest level of education?

___ Vocational/Trade School
___ Graduate student
___ College graduate
___ Some college
___ High School diploma
___ Some high school
___ Other:
___ I'm not sure

9. What groups does your father hang out with (please check all that apply)?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black, African American, or Negro
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or some other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- ☐ Some other race:
- ☐ I'm not sure
- ☐ Multiracial, biracial

10. Who raised you?

☐ Both biological parents

☐ Adoptive parents. Race: ___________

☐ Other family member(s): ________________Race:____________

☐ My biological mother

☐ My biological father

☐ Other: _________________Race:______

11. Age? ______
12. Gender? ____Male ______ Female ______Other

13. What city do you live in? ___________________________

14. What city did you grow up in? ___________________________

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in the United States.

At the **top** of the ladder are the people who are the best off – those who have the most money, the most education and the most respected jobs. At the **bottom** are the people who are the worst off – who have the least money, least education, and the least respected jobs or no job. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.

Where would you place yourself on this ladder?

Please place a large **"X"** on the rung where you think you stand at this time in your life, relative to other people in the United States.

15. A.

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in their communities.

People define community in different ways; please define it in whatever way is most meaningful to you. At the **top** of the ladder are the people who have the highest standing in their community. At the **bottom** are the people who have the lowest standing in their community.

Where would you place yourself on this ladder?

Please place a large **"X"** on the rung where you think you stand at this time in your life, relative to other people in your community.

B.

16. My annual income is:

¨ <$10,000
¨ $10,001-15,000
¨ $15,001-20,000
¨ $20,001-25,000
¨ $25,001-30,000
¨ $30,001-35,000
¨ $35,001-40,000
¨ $40,001-50,000
¨ $50,001-60,000
¨ $60,000 and above

17. What is your highest level of education?

___ Vocational/Trade School
___ Graduate student
___ College graduate
___ Some college
___ High School diploma
___ Some high school
___ None of the above

18. What languages do you speak?

____

19. a. Are you religious or spiritual?

☐ YES ☐ NO

a. If so, please check all that apply?

☐ Evangelical

☐ Historically Black Church

☐ Catholic

☐ Christian/Protestant

☐ Mormon

☐ Orthodox

☐ Jehovah's Witness

☐ Jewish

☐

☐ Muslim

☐ Buddhist

☐ Hindu

☐ Unaffiliated

☐ Other Faiths: ________________________

____

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me about what it was like to grow up being ----- and White in your neighborhood.
    a. What racial groups were found in your neighborhood?
    b. How well were you able to fit in with ----- group? (repeat with other identified racial groups)
    c. What did you do to fit in with ---- group? (repeat with other identified racial groups)
2. Please tell me about what it was like to grow up being both ----- and White in your school.
    a. What racial groups were found at your school?
    b. How well were you able to fit in with ----- group? (repeat with other identified racial groups)
    c. What did you do to fit in with ---- group? (repeat with other identified racial groups)
3. How do you think other people would describe your race based on your looks? Why?
4. How does that description match up to how you would describe yourself?
    a. How do you describe your race based on how you look?
    b. What do you think influences that label?
5. Have you ever made a conscious decision to hang out with one racial group over another?
    a. If so, with which group? Why?
    b. What helps you fit in with this group? (prompt whether they "do" something to fit in)
6. You reported that you were raised by -----, what was it like to be raised by a parent who is (racial group here)?
    a. How would you describe your relationship with them?
    b. What did you learn from this parent that helps you fit in with (---racial group---)?
7. (REPEAT #3 as many times necessary if raised by more than 1 caregiver)
8. Can you please tell me about your relationship with your (insert caregiver here) family?
    a. Were you able to fit in with the (----) side of your family?
    b. What did you do to fit in?
    c. How did it feel being around this side of the family?
9. (REPEAT #6 as many times necessary if raised by more than 1 caregiver)
10. Please tell me about your experience of the last time you were around (insert identified racial group here) people.
    a. Were you able to fit in? Why or why not?
    b. What did you do to fit in?
        i. (if struggling, ask about language, clothes, hair, conversation topics)
    c. How did you feel?
11. Please tell me about your experience of the last time you were around White people.

a. Were you able to fit in? Why or why not?
b. What did you do to fit in?
    i. (if struggling, ask about language, clothes, hair, conversation topics)
c. How did you feel?

12. When was the last time you highlighted/downplayed one part of your racial identity over the other?
    a. …. with white people?
        i. Why?
        ii. How do you act?
        iii. How does it make you feel?
    b. … with (--insert racial minority group--) people?
        i. Why?
        ii. How do you act?
        iii. How does it make you feel?
13. Where do you think these strategies to fit in with (insert each group) people came from?
    a. Did your family influence these strategies? If so, how?
    b. Did the neighborhood you grew up in influence these strategies? If so, how?
    c. Did your friends influence these strategies? If so, how?
    d. Does the way you look influence these strategies? If so, how?
    e. How do you feel about having to change your behavior in order to fit in with (----) and (----)?
14. Tell me about a time when you were not able to fit in with (----) people. Why do you think this happened?
    a. How did this impact you? Your relationship with this group?
    b. How did you feel?
15. Tell me about a time when you were not able to fit in with White people. Why do you think this happened?
    a. How did this impact you? Your relationship with this group?
    b. How did you feel?
16. This ability to change the way you act to fit in with different racial groups seems to be a common and special ability for mixed race people.
    a. What do you think about this?
    b. How does this make you feel?
    c. How do you think this impacts that way you view yourself?
    d. How do you think this impacts the way you view others?
    e. Has this ability to change helped you overcome challenges? How?

Appendix D

Table 2

Coding schema.

Domain/ *Category/ Subcategory*	Frequency/ #	Illustrative Core Idea(s)	Sample Quote
Fitting In		Factors that led to participants being accepted by the group	
Social Acceptance	General / 10	Feeling unconditional positive regard by a group or environment, thereby, making one feel comfortable and embraced	"I feel like in that situation I'm mostly myself because I'm not being judged by, I'm not being judged by what I present"
Accommodation	General / 11	Understanding the norms/codes/ expectations of a group or environment and adapting accordingly	"So because like I said a lot of my life had been spent trying to make friends and then kind of do so through accommodating or that kind of humor way, umm I never felt like…I was being me"
Cultural Exposure	General / 10	Participating or encountering activities, traditions, or historical content from ethnoracial groups to connect with a racial/ethnic group	"I am really glad that my mom actually taught us pretty much more Korean than most of our actually Korean friends."
Phenotype	General/ 12	One's appearance influencing ability to fit in or have access to social spaces otherwise not available to out-group people	"When I realized…other people don't always see me that way… I started asking people what they thought I am, just to see what I can get and it's amazing."
Family Socialization	General/ 12	Relatives, including parents, help to teach, model, or normalize specific attitudes, values, or behaviors of ancestral group	"I hold myself with this open openness to anybody and this sincere desire to connect with people and to learn from them and to just like have a friendship with

			these people I think comes from my cousin”
Strategies	General/ 12	Methodologies developed and practiced by participants in order to help with the process of blending or fitting in to different ethnoracial groups	
Discerning Communication Patterns	General/ 11	Ability to notice a difference in verbal and nonverbal interaction among and across racial-ethnic groups	“…you’re like a bridge person, so you have to be a bridge between the different cultures because you can communicate between all these different umm barriers and stuff”
Universal Connections	Typical/ 8	Leaning on factors outside of race to help in forming a bond with others	“…I think that because I was wearing the latest fashions and what not that that helped a lot with being accepted...”
Sharing marginalized experiences with marginalized others	Typical/ 9	Finding common ground with other minority groups, including other multiracial people, to form a bond	“…a lot of us have a shared struggle of some sort … so a lot of this is kind of shared struggle shared kind of immediate unconscious understanding of like okay”
Legitimizing Techniques	General/ 10	Utilizing name, lineage, association, or ancestral history to “prove” oneself and defend against the being “enough” experience	“If I feel like it's going to speed up the degree of which the connection is made. If I'm in a group of Latino people, yeah my mom is Chileno background. It's a bridge.”
Protective Stance	General/ 10	Intentionally behaving to shield oneself from experiencing discrimination/insults	“When you experience the microaggressions from different cultural groups, you’re like ‘Wow,’ like that doesn’t feel good. So then, I think you’re more careful”

Not Fitting In		Instances that led to participants unable to gain acceptance into the group	
Inability to adapt to social situation	General / 10	Not being able to understand the expectations of the interpersonal/ environmental social interaction.	"…me not connecting with them brought an end to those relationships. And it is because I could not decode the communication pattern. I could not figure out what they wanted to hear and that the things that they talked about…"
Moments of marginalization	General / 12	Experiences in which participant described being rejected, devalued, or powerless due to phenotype and not being accepted into an ethnoracial group	"…even though I am Hispanic, I was the white girl…I felt more like an outsider like at school or in the neighborhood because my last name is X and … (but) I was kind of like the white nerdy girl."
Discrimination	General/ 12	Racism, microaggressions, vicarious learning of discrimination	"So, like white people would talk to me how much they didn't like or the things that they were sort of upset about with Hispanic people"
Misclassification by others	Typical/ 7	To be labeled as part a group that is not congruent with whom you identify	"Hey you're pushing me into a culture that is not of my own and I'm actually white so why are you pushing something that I'm not when I'm actually really just like you?"
Objectified	Typical/ 9	To be treated and/or seen as a thing rather than a person	"It's because like I wouldn't go up to a white person and be like, 'What are you?' instead of asking like what your name is."
Family disconnect from ancestry	General/ 10	Relatives, such as parents, distancing from ancestry creates a barrier for participant to adapt to ancestral ethnoracial groups	"So, I think that potentially has made it (pause) more difficult to navigate my Asianess because my Dad has a very complicated issue with his Asianess."

Impact of Blending In		The outcomes of undergoing the process of attempting to fit-in with different groups	
Desire for an in-group	General/ 9	The yearning to be a part of exclusive group with a shared identity	"…the mixed race experience it is always kind of been just whatever people (just) kind of mixed together rather then having its own kind of culture in its own right."
Disidentification	Typical/ 7	The act of distancing oneself from a part of his/her ancestral groups	"…I definitely have white guilt because I know that my Dad is Caucasian and I know that our history is so detestable… and that's not something that I identify with. It's not something that I'm proud of…"
Empowerment	General/ 10	Feeling confident in self to experience pride and advocacy	"…realizing that it's helpful…just realizing you don't need to be one or the other, you don't need to be unambiguous because it really is strength to be able to kind of mesh in into all the different networks…"
Internal struggles	General/ 10	The conflicting dialogue that occurs within the mind of the participant, which leads to skepticism and/or confusion	"I do sometimes feel pressure but I think that's maybe not from them but from myself…I'm gonna own some of that, a lot of it. Sometimes I feel that I don't belong only because I felt that way for so long…"
Multiculturally minded	General/ 12	Embodying the principles of multiculturalism (i.e.-openness, empathy, compassion, flexibility, sensitivity, curiosity, and social justice)	"…whereas from the get go I have always been in a multicultural multiracial world…"
Broader perspective	General/ 10	Having a greater outlook or ability to see greater	"I do a better job than I think I would have otherwise in seeing other

		points of view	people's point of view, you know, seeing the complexities of issues."
Consciousness	General/ 11	Becoming aware of one's mixed heritage position or awareness of how one's mixed heritage is perceived by others	"The more I learned about Korean things and even like the more I learn about Korean culture… I really realize that I grew up different…"
Invisible identity	Typical/ 9	Multiracial identity is not seen or recognized by others	"I mean it's not even like comes up pretty easily, so maybe I run into some mixed people and I don't even know it"
Isolation	Rare/ 3	Realizing that you do not specifically fit with any mono-ethnoracial group and feeling alone	"And I can say that it was a difficult because…there was no one like, you know, mixed…I had a difficult experience definitely with kids...I was made to feel pretty isolated and alone…"