

THESIS

THE BORDERLANDS OF BLACK MIXED-RACE WOMEN'S IDENTITY: NAVIGATING
HEGEMONIC MONORACIALITY IN A WHITE SUPREMACIST HETEROPATRIARCHAL
SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

THE BORDERLANDS OF BLACK MIXED-RACE WOMEN'S IDENTITY: NAVIGATING HEGEMONIC MONORACIALITY IN A WHITE SUPREMACIST HETEROPATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

This research study examines and deconstructs the identity formation and development of black mixed-race women and highlights the ways in which black mixed-race women have engaged in developing a “borderlands consciousness” that fosters a sense of positive identity as they navigate hegemonic monoraciality and white supremacist heteropatriarchy in the U.S. This qualitative research study analyzes data from three sources: one-on-one interviews; a focus group; and blog posts on the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook that discuss the identity development of black mixed-race women. In this study, grounded theory methodology is used to explore and theorize around the identity development of black mixed-race women and their potential to utilize a “borderlands consciousness” to embody a disidentified position in response to the dualistic stance and counterstance positions that reify monoraciality within the social and political context of the Midwestern state of Colorado. The following themes with incorporated sub-themes emerged from the three aforementioned data sources with an overarching theme of the borderlands: external oppression representative of a stance position; internal responses to oppression representative of a counterstance position; proximity to whiteness representative of both external oppression and internal responses to oppression; and creating a third space towards a position of disidentification.

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DEDICATION

To the women of color who participated in this project, these are the fruits of your labor. Your immense insights and unique perspectives are a beautiful gift that should be cherished and shared. You are all powerful, beautiful Queens. Don't ever let anybody tell you otherwise. Don't ever let anybody dull your shine.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 48-9)

Dualism

What I learned from the black mixed-race women who participated in this study is that to imagine a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking is to engage in working towards a positive, empowering identity and a disidentified position. Dualism acts as a polarizing thought system that creates dichotomies in our perceptions and ideologies, effectively narrowing our perspectives of the world (Lepow, 1987). Dualistic thinking polarizes social groups within social hierarchies, enforcing divisions that alienate men from women, white people from people of color, monoracial from multiracial, the upper class from the working class, heterosexual from queer, cisgender from transgender, and able-bodied from persons with disabilities. These splits, based on notions of perceived differences, enforce us-versus-them thinking that sustains oppositional stance-and-counterstance positions amongst dominant-and-subordinate or oppressor-and-oppressed power relationships. The alienation of the “subjective self from the objective world” thus represents the act of othering or demarcating the subjugated position of the marginalized social group from the dominant social group who act as a representation of the societal standard or “norm” in both representation and ideology (Radford, 1979). Dualistic thinking becomes further problematic in its refusal to engage an intersectional analysis, instead embracing a singular-axis paradigm that only accounts for and analyzes one social category or

identity at a time thereby effectively ignoring the pluralistic nature of individuals' identities and experience.

For example, when the 2000 Census provided a mixed-race designation for the first time, Civil Rights activists argued that existing racial categories should remain unchanged to effectively monitor discrimination and inequality based on the five historically-rooted racial groups that outweigh "self-proclaimed identities," (Jones & Smith, 2001; Rockquemore, Brunson & Delgado, 2009, p. 14). This backlash against a mixed-race designation influenced pressures for mixed-race individuals to identify monoracially or with one of their racial groups for the political purpose of better measuring and combatting racial discrimination and inequality against racially marginalized individuals and communities who identified as black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Mixed-race individuals who choose to identify monoracially for political purposes may be doing so at the expense of acknowledging their mixed-race identities or heritages and any potential discrimination and inequality associated with them. Additionally, the pressure placed on mixed-race individuals to identify monoracially may be invalidating as it contributes to the erasure of their mixed-race identity and experiences through failing to recognize the complexities of their racial identity.

Identity Politics

The pressure placed on mixed-race individuals to identify monoracially while invalidating the mixed-race designation as a "self-proclaimed identity" may have complicated mixed-race individuals' sense of community belonging within particular racial groups. Black mixed-race individuals have historically been pressured into identifying monoracially as black persons and have been pathologized when they choose to identify differently (Rockquemore et.

al, 2009). Furthermore, even in cases where black mixed-race individuals freely identify as black, they may experience invalidation of their black identities within the black community due to ambiguous or unidentifiable physical characteristics in relation to de facto or unspoken group membership requirements (Mivill, Baysden, Constatine & So-Lloyd, 2005).

Group membership requirements in the black community privilege the lives and perspectives of heterosexual, cisgender, middle class, able-bodied, black men who represent the black community through a singular-axis paradigm that erases multiply marginalized individuals from the community. The dualistic split that alienates and affords privileges to the dominant groups in U.S. society contributes to the silencing and erasure of the lives and perspectives of marginalized black and black mixed-race women, queer and trans folks, poor and working-class individuals, and persons with disabilities from the black community. One of the more pervasive manifestations of violent identity politics, colorism or discrimination based on skin tone, contributes largely to notions of which individuals are or are not “black enough” or dark enough in pigmentation to identify as black, impacting both black persons of immediate mixed-race heritage and black persons “mixed” over generations that may have lighter skin tones. Both light-skinned privilege and the extensively harsher treatment of darker-skinned people in the U.S., which contributes to internalized oppression and trauma, may contribute to colorism in the black community. For example, many black people growing up in the United States have been subjected to colloquialisms such as, “if you’re white, you’re right, if you’re yellow, you’re mellow, if you’re brown, stick around, if you’re black, get back,” (Maddox & Gray, 2002, p. 1). According to J. Camille Hall, “this form of psychological abuse continues to perpetuate internalized racism and has affected the physical, psychological, emotional, educational, financial, and relational outcomes of African Americans,” (Hall, 2017, p. 71). This represents a

violent appropriation or misapplication of identity politics or the development of a politics that address and reflect the unique material experiences, identity, and oppression of a given social group within their political work.

The Combahee River Collective (CRC), a black feminist lesbian organization, credited with coining the term identity politics, played a crucial role in developing the foundations of Black Feminist Thought. Their intellectual and political contributions enforced an ideological shift away from white feminism which emphasized gender oppression as the primary oppression of women, negating the reality of racism that women of color navigate in their daily lives. For the Collective, identity politics were constructed around focusing on one's own oppression, or the oppression of black women, to avoid their erasure from anti-sexist and anti-racist political work which directly impacted their lives:

We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough (Combahee River Collective, 1978, p 234).

Identity politics thus develop from the objective material experiences of a specific social group (Combahee River Collective, 1978). However, its appropriation by those who essentialized racial identity in a singular way have contributed to the othering of community members located at the axes of multiple additional forms of oppression such as gender, class and sexuality. Furthermore, as the liberation of all black women necessitates dismantling all systems of oppression: sexism, racism, cis-heterosexism, able-bodism, and classism; the Combahee River Collective emphasized the inclusive nature of their identity politics which are concerned with any persons battling these systems of oppression. This juxtaposes the violent identity politics that

sometimes occur in black communities in the United States which denote monoracial anti-black racism as the primary oppression of black people while dismissing multiracial racism impacting Afro-Latinos/as, sexism, cis-heterosexism, transphobia, able-bodism and classism from anti-racist political work along with the lives and experiences of individuals that navigate these various forms of oppression. While the black community has been centered to illustrate how identity politics can be used to erase particular members of the community, it is important to emphasize that this enforcement of stringent group membership requirements occurs in various social communities that embrace essentialized understandings of identity in order to fight singular forms of oppression including racism, sexism, cis-heterosexism, able-bodism and classism. This violent appropriation of identity politics contributes to the erasure of the interlocking and interdependent nature of the various systems of oppression, thus undergirding them.

Background

Growing up as a mixed-race woman with a white mother and black father, my personal understandings of race were predominantly shaped by my familial relationships and the communities I navigated. Prior to my birth, my racial identity was already being informed by responses to my conception, ranging from temporary estrangement to pleas that I must be raised by a black mother who understood the cultural nuances of what it means to be black in the United States. These fragmentary reactions intertwined with my limited exposure to either side of my families have created vast limitations in my ability to develop, engage in, and celebrate a mixed-race identity. Instead, I felt caught within a duality in which I was either monoracialized as black or I was deracialized for the sake of being treated like a “normal” person, where “normal” acts as an unspoken signifier of whiteness in the U.S.

Despite growing up in the frontier state of Colorado where 87.5% of the population identifies as monoracially white, I grew up in the diverse city of Denver, inhabited predominantly by Mexican and African American populations who represent a majority of the city's population (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Because of my location within a black metropole, I had access to a large, visible black mixed-race community which made it very easy for me to identify as "mixed" or mixed-race. While I identified publicly as mixed-race, I always strongly identified with my blackness. This strong conviction to identify as a person of color may have been influenced by my limited interactions with my parents' families and the different locations where they grew up, and my own personal experiences with both monoracial anti-black racism and monoracism in which I was discriminated against due to my mixed-race status and inability to fit into fixed monoracial categories.

My mother came to Denver from the small rural town of Garrison, North Dakota. Currently, Garrison has a population of about 1,532 people, with 87.9% of the population identifying as monoracially white (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Given its close proximity to Fort Berthold Reservation and Lake Sakakawea, I was surprised to have just recently learned about the displacement of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara/Sahnish Nation-the Three Affiliated Tribes- in the building of the Garrison dam, from a professor and mentor in my graduate program. Despite never engaging in dialogues around race while visiting my family members there biennially, I recognized our phenotypical differences as my siblings and I were the only members of the family with tan skin and thick, dark curly hair, leaving me to feel like a literal black sheep or the racial "other." My experiences with monoracial anti-black racism at a young age also solidified our differences. While visiting Garrison City Park as a three or four-year-old girl, I was further confronted by these differences through a white peer's remark that

“niggers don’t belong in our park.” Being too young to develop any significant understandings of race, I was met with responses of both shock at the occurrence of overt racism in Garrison and a reassurance that although people aren’t always kind and respectful to each other, not everyone is mean.

Apart from our limited interactions and a lack of familiarity with my mother’s family members, engaging in conversations devoid of any racial analysis contributed to my sense of being unseen. By not acknowledging that intricate layer of my identity, I felt a sense of erasure considering how significantly my racial identity has informed the ways that I am perceived, judged, interacted with, how I interact with others, conceptualize race, my own identity, and my politics. This feeling of invisibility was echoed in conversations I engaged in with my younger sister while visiting Garrison over the summer, which was now under the influence of Trump’s violent racial and political climate. Witnessing the rise of white nationalist and white supremacist groups such as neo-Nazis and the KKK, and the invasiveness of white supremacist ideology, created a greater sense of fear and urgency for us to analyze and deconstruct race and racism in more critical and meaningful ways as they impact our daily lives. Over the duration of our trip, my sister and I experienced being racialized and “othered” by waitresses who disassociated us from our white mother when trying to provide us separate checks and by larger white men who shoved us aside in gas station entryways. Given these instances of microaggressions or more covert or subtle acts of racism, and the fact that my mother’s family never discussed race, we avoided attempting to explain the cultural nuances that shaped those interactions at the expense of internalizing the pain and sense of erasure in not being able to voice our racialized experiences.

Months later, as I had been working on my master's thesis, I had just begun having conversations about race with a few members of my mother's family. I entered these conversations experiencing a mix of hesitation, anxiety, pain, love and optimism. This lack of engagement in dialogues around race previously has contributed to a fear of provoking cognitive dissonance in my family members around the prevalence of race in shaping my experiences, my identity, and the society we live in. Deconstructing the role race has played in informing perceptions of my identity has encompassed harmful statements such as "I don't see or think of you as black," or "for the most part you look 'normal.'" With undertones of love and good intentions, I was again subjected to a duality in which blackness became a demarcation from the "norm" in both identity and ideology. Colorblind and post-racial ideologies which are devoid of racial analyses and operate under the assumption that racism no longer exists post-Civil Rights Era characterize the hegemonic or dominant discourse in the U.S. which privileges a Eurocentric lens as the standard or "norm." Society socializes us to avoid discussing or acknowledging race which effectively erases the lives and experiences of people of color, dehumanizing them and severing opportunities to build empathy and coalesce to engage in the anti-racist political work necessary to dismantle racial oppression and white supremacy. Choosing to avoid engaging racial dialogues with our mother's family stemmed from a fear of hurting them through disrupting these hegemonic ideologies by exposing how they dehumanize and harm us. We often avoid these necessary interactions around race through "code switching," interacting differently within different social contexts and with different individuals, at the expense of perpetuating internalized oppression.

Despite my father's family members living in various cities across the U.S. from Youngstown, Ohio to Huntsville, Alabama, my passion to do anti-racist work stemmed from

conversations around race that I have had with my father. Growing up as a baby boomer in the 1960s and 1970s, my father has experienced both overt and covert racism over the course of his lifespan. Sharing stories of his experiences with police brutality, his determination to desegregate military spaces in the 70s, and his ability to found a successful community-centered non-profit business without a college degree bestowed a great sense of passion and pride in our black identity, considering the inherent struggles associated with being black in America. My father has always spoken through a racial lens addressing topics of generational trauma, extreme poverty, colorism, and a lack of access to socioeconomic and political mobility in the black community. These conversations solidified my passion for pursuing an education in ethnic studies in order to both educate others about systems of oppression and to do the political work necessary to dismantle them.

Over time, as I have slowly begun meeting and interacting with my father's family members, I continue to feel the salience of a strong black identity. I always felt monoracialized as black within our interactions, especially given a history of anti-whiteness where overt attempts were made by some to drive a wedge between my parents. The strong preference for my father to be with a black woman echoed black separatist sentiments in which integration and racial intermarriage or miscegenation are opposed. Again, rather than recognizing my humanity as a mixed-race woman, I was caught in a duality of black-versus-white where I was either recognized monoracially as a black woman, or felt disliked in spite of my whiteness; both instances discarded the complex nature of my mixed-race identity and the unique material experiences attached to it.

The lack of recognition my mixed-race identity has been given has necessitated code-switching. Depending on the setting or individuals I am interacting with, my behaviors and

language may shift, causing me to navigate multiple roles simultaneously. My inability to publicly embrace my mixed-race identity in many settings contributes to a performative form of racial identification in which I speak, behave, and appear in various ways to align myself with the membership standards of the group I am interacting with in order to better “fit in.” In instances where I have been deemed insufficient in meeting these requirements, I have been measured up against racial stereotypes regarding perceived “white behavior” and “black behavior” and called names such as “yellow bone,” “nigger,” and “wanna-be cracker nigger.” Despite my phenotypic ambiguity, my identity as a woman of color has always disassociated me from being white identified due to my inability to “pass” as white and my strong desire to identify politically as a woman of color. While I never anticipate or desire being identified and validated as white by others, as a woman of color, feeling that my racial identity as a black or black mixed-raced woman has been invalidated has caused the most significant pain and internalized oppression.

Entering an Ethnic Studies graduate program in a frontier state has further illuminated the salience of a monoracial paradigm in the U.S. in which several mixed-race students, faculty, and administrators have chosen to identify monoracially as people of color without publicly disclosing their mixed-race heritages. Furthermore, the curriculum rarely addresses mixed-race identities, emphasizing instead the five primary racial categories that promote monoracial designations. Identifying in the institution predominantly as a black woman, I began this research project looking at identity development in black women whose voices and experiences are largely invisible in both anti-sexist and anti-racist political work. However, witnessing several instances of violent identity politics within the institution, such as receiving the message that lighter-skinned black-mixed race women such as myself were not “black enough” to teach in the

black intellectual tradition, made me feel inadequate in meeting the standards of blackness. Instead, I turned the focus onto myself and began theorizing around my own identity and how difficult it has been for me as I explored my identity to find a sense of belonging, feeling caught in an in-between space where I am everywhere and nowhere at the same time due to my racial invisibility as a mixed-race woman. Mirroring my sentiment and speaking to a mestizaje (Chicana mixed) identity within her radical Chicana feminist project, Anzaldúa (2012) expressed:

She has this fear,
That she has no names,
That she has many names,
That she doesn't know her names,
She has this fear,
That she's an image,
That comes and goes,
Clearing and darkening,
The fear that she's the dreamwork inside someone else's skull,
She has this fear that if she digs into herself,
She won't find anyone,
That when she gets "there,"
She won't find her notches on the trees,
She has this fear that she won't find the way back (p. 29).

I discovered that it was critical for my thesis to center and analyze my own racial identity and development as I have been navigating dualism and violent identity politics that have

continuously informed my process. The experiences of anti-black monoracial racism and monoracism that I have faced provoked a deep interest in examining how black mixed-race women racially identify themselves and what factors contribute to their racial self-identities. Furthermore, I was interested in examining how common material experiences of black mixed-race women can offer insight into promoting positive identity and moving towards a disidentified position which disrupts the black-and-white monoracial duality that promotes monoracism at the expense of erasing mixed-race identities and experiences. This study sought to investigate the unique material experiences of black mixed-race women who identify as mixed-race by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1) What are the material experiences of black mixed-race women?

RQ2) How have the material experiences of black mixed-race women contributed to how they develop self-identity?

RQ3) How can black mixed-race women define and use healing practices that address their material experiences and self-identity in order to promote positive self-identity?

Contributions to Scholarship on Mixed-Race Identity

This study analyzes the identity development of black mixed-race women navigating hegemonic monoracism and white supremacist heteropatriarchy in the United States. Analyzing the relationship between the identity development process of black-mixed race women and the structure of white supremacist heteropatriarchy has assisted in illuminating the use of monoracism as a tool of white supremacy. Additionally, analyzing this relationship has helped to explicate why marginalized populations choose to engage in separatist identity politics regarding mixed-race individuals. Furthermore, centering on the identities of black mixed-race women who inhabit the borderlands of multiple social hierarchies helped to illuminate the

potential for black mixed-race women to embody a disidentified position that can disrupt white supremacy through the rejection of monoraciality which undergirds the racial hierarchy by enforcing strict, mutually exclusive monoracial categories. While the scope of the project focuses on black mixed-race women, exploring their potential for disidentification through embracing complexities and engaging an intersectional analysis contributes to an expansive applicability regarding who is able to disidentify in order to disrupt the interlocking systems of oppression and white supremacist heteropatriarchy. The literature review chapter analyzes historical accounts of black mixed-race identity development models in order to highlight the problematic nature of externally assigned monoracial identities which have contributed to the pathologizing of mixed-race identity. Additionally, the literature review addresses the use of contemporary mixed-race identity development models in correcting the pathologizing nature of previous models in order to promote a positive identity in mixed-race persons. Furthermore, the literature review recenters mixed-race scholars to reclaim the mixed-race narrative which seeks to embrace the complexities of mixed-race individuals' identities as a movement towards developing a "borderlands consciousness." The methodology chapter outlines the incorporation of grounded theory methodology and methods, and a feminist research paradigm into the research study. The findings chapter illuminates the themes that arose from the data collected from one-on-one interviews, a focus group and blog posts on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. The following themes and their sub-themes will be outlined in the findings chapter with an overarching theme of the borderlands: external oppression representative of a stance position; internal responses to oppression representative of a counterstance position; proximity to whiteness representative of both external oppression and internal responses to oppression; and creating a third space towards a position of disidentification. Finally, the discussion chapter will

outline the grounded theory that has been developed in tandem with the findings that have emerged from the study. Additionally, the discussion chapter will present future areas of research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

While racial mixing has always existed within the United States, it has seen a sharp increase since the passage of Civil Rights legislation and the dismantling of state anti-miscegenation laws that banned interracial marriages (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). Despite a long history of interracial relationships in the U.S., contemporarily, society struggles to understand the development of a mixed-race identity due to historically specific assumptions regarding race and racial group membership (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). This racial ideology contributes to three historical approaches to examining the development of mixed-race identity: the problem approach; the equivalent approach; and the variant approach (Thornton and Wason, 1995). This chapter seeks to explicate the identity development of black mixed-race women in the United States by accomplishing the following: analyzing the three historical psychological approaches to examining mixed-race identity in order to understand the external perceptions and prescriptions of racial identity on black mixed-race women; and recentering the voices of mixed-race scholars in an attempt to understand the complexities and political potential of the identities and social location of black mixed-race women. In this context, it is important to note that the term “mixed-race” will be used to refer to black biracial and black multiracial individuals or individuals that identify as racially black as well as one or more other racial identities. Furthermore, scholarship on mixed-race individuals thus far predominantly presupposes a black-and-white biracial mix.

Problem Approach

The problem approach to examining mixed-race identity originated in the late Jim Crow era, when social scientists sought to examine the racial identity development and personalities of

mixed-race people who were navigating a racially segregated social world (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). In this historical context, the one-drop rule, hypodescent, was implemented thus prohibiting mixed-race individuals from identifying with any racial designation other than black. Consequently, it was assumed that existing as a mixed-race person in a segregated world was a social position “inevitably marked by tragedy” premised on assumed experiences of isolation, rejection, and stigma from the dominant and marginalized racial groups they belonged to (Rockquemore et. al, 2009, p. 16). Within this historical context, it was assumed that black mixed-race individuals navigated an identity development process characterized by: a level of assimilation into both cultures of belonging; navigating defining experiences indicative of the mutual exclusivity of their racial identities which negatively impact their mixed-race self-conceptions; and adjusting towards the dominant social position through acting as a leader to the marginalized black community or, alternatively, experiencing withdrawal and isolation from the community (Stonequist, 1937).

The Role of Hypodescent in Black Mixed-Race Identity Development

Rainier Spencer (2004) defines hypodescent or the “one-drop rule” as “the social mechanism that works to place the offspring of two different racial groups into the lower-status category (p. 361). Hypodescent operates on the premise of whiteness as a “pure essence whose purity cannot withstand mixture with blackness,” enforcing the myth of white racial purity and black racial impurity (Spencer, 2004, p. 362). Under the laws of slavery, hypodescent constructed and perpetuated mutually exclusive monoracial categories on a black-and-white racial duality in order to demarcate the enslaved status of the children of enslaved black mothers (Root, 1996). Black mixed-race persons, who were typically the offspring of white slave masters and enslaved black women, thus represented the interracial sexual violence utilized to increase

the labor force that fueled slavery and white supremacy (Larson, 2016). Because of hypodescent black mixed-race persons were treated as though their racially marginalized identities were their only racial identities, forcing them to accept a monoracial black identity over a mixed-race identity (Davis, 1991).

Biological Determinism: Eugenics on Mixed-Race Identity

Notions of a biological basis of race in the United States are rooted in a black-and-white duality that positions whiteness as superior in intellect, cleanliness, beauty and chastity while juxtaposing blackness as representative of intellectual inferiority, filthiness, ugliness and animalistic hypersexuality (Sundstrom, 2009). Historically, the father of Eugenics, Francis Galton developed the theory of “fractional inheritance” which deemed that every person received one-half of their genetics from each parent, one-fourth from each grandparent and so forth (Gonzales, Ketérsz & Tayac, 2007). The notion of “biological determinism” which posited that all human behavior is innate to genetic and biological attributes was an essential component of asserting a false narrative of races as distinct groups of peoples who could be identified and quantified by their blood and other biological characteristics (Gonzales et. al, 2007). This biological basis for race contributed to the legal construction and implementation of the false narrative of the “pure” and “superior” blood of the white “normal human type,” in contrast to the “tainted” and “inferior” blood of “degenerate” or biologically “defective” black people and other people of color who were deemed “savages,” (Omi & Winant, 1986; Gonzales et. al, 2007; Higham, 1956). The ideology of biological inheritance has historically informed the attempt to disambiguate the “intermediate identity” of mixed-race persons through monoracializing them. This was operationalized through quantifying their blood, thus measuring their perceived authenticity and access to either citizenship or self-determination (Omi & Winant, 1986).

Hyperdescent, the inverse of hypodescent as a process of racialization was used exclusively to prohibit Native Americans who did not meet a specific blood quantum requirement from gaining membership into Indigenous tribes (Rabin, 2012). While hypodescent was used additively to classify any person with “one-drop” of “black blood” as a black person, hyperdescent or blood quantum was imposed reductively by requiring a particular quantity of “Native blood,” and stripping away Native identities and their claim to self-determination and tribal sovereignty when that requirement was not met (Gonzales et. al, 2007). Due to internalized notions of racial purity, black-and-Native mixed-race persons have an especially challenging time becoming recognized and enrolled tribal members due to the denigration of blackness in U.S. society (Montgomery, 2012). Furthermore, because of external perceptions of “Indianness” and blackness, they are stuck between exoticism as Natives and denigration as black people, where their blackness perpetuates their inferiority (Montgomery, 2012).

Biological determinism provides immense insights into the feelings of inadequacy, confusion, invisibility, and lack of belonging that black-mixed race women may experience. Because notions of biological determinism were used to categorize individuals into perceived “measurable and quantifiable” monoracial groups, mixed-race individuals experience a form of erasure and invisibility in being subsumed into such rigid categories that do not account for their locations within multiple racial groups. By using phenotypic markers as a crucial component of group membership, black mixed-race women feel denied a place of belonging and attempt to adjust their physical appearance in an attempt for recognition into the monoracial group. These physical alterations occur in various forms such as altering hair texture and style through hair straightening to align with a more eurocentric beauty standard or using black hairstyles to align with images of black beauty. Despite altering physical appearance to align with monoracial

groups, black mixed-race women may still feel “incomplete” due to subscribing to the theory of fractional inheritance which posits mixed-race individuals as being “parts” or “fractions” of different racial heritages rather than being whole individuals with more amalgamated and complete racial identities. Furthermore, because eugenics positioned whiteness as the “standard,” black mixed-race women with lighter skin complexions may be deemed the “idealized black beauty,” creating tensions among other darker-skinned black women that render it difficult to completely integrate into the community.

Within the Eugenics movement, anthropometrics or the study of human bodies was employed to associate all “non-white” individuals with savagery and primitiveness justifying the need for their discipline and “redemption” through the use of “tender violence,” (Gonzales et. al, 2007; Balce, 2006). Despite manifesting predominantly through sexual violence against enslaved black women, their perceived hypersexuality positions black mixed-race children as products of lust of the racially inferior person for the racially superior (Sundstrom, 2009).

Based on hegemonic understandings of race in the U.S. which purport mutually exclusive monoracial identities, excessive attention to mixed-race aesthetics denotes the significance of using phenotypical characteristics to identify and assign mixed-race individuals to the existing monoracial categories and racial hierarchy (Rabin, 2012; Montgomery, 2012). As scholar Ronald Sundstrom (2009) explicates, “popular conceptions of race associated skin color and other somatic features, such as hair texture, with racial divisions, so the somatic ambiguity of multiracial persons has attracted attention in those locales where racial categorization has been active and been the subject of curiosity, attraction, and fear,” (“Mixed Race Looks,” 2009). An important motivating factor for determining the racial identity of mixed-race individuals was to ensure that they were not phenotypically misrepresenting their identities through “passing” as

racially white. For the white racial elite predominantly, the act of mixed-race persons passing as white could be perceived as dishonest or as a failure to publicly identify and have solidarity with their non-white racial groups, which they were perceived to truly belong to (Ginsberg, 1996; Sundstrom, 2009).

Anti-Miscegenation

The first anti-miscegenation law was enacted in Virginia in 1664, banning interracial unions as a method of protecting white individuals from the perceived racial inferiority of the enslaved black population (Larson, 2016). The extensive attention paid to mixed-race aesthetics as a mode of determining monoracial group membership can dehumanize and position mixed-race women as merely “embodiments of the sexual crossing of racial boundaries and taboos,” (“Mixed Race Looks,” 2009). Despite the approval of some interracial unions, such as those between Natives and white people, black-and-white miscegenation, or racial mixing, was deemed “a threat to the natural, moral, and political order,” (“Mixed Race Looks,” 2009). Thus, mixed-race children came to represent “a great social evil” which challenged the dualistic nature of the monoracial black-and-white racial hierarchy in the U.S. (Larson, 2016, p. 3). Hypodescent was later adopted into the state of Virginia’s 1924 “Act to Preserve Racial Integrity,” which prohibited sexual liaisons or marriages between non-white persons and white persons with “no colored blood,” with the exception of one-sixteenth Native ancestry, perpetuating the illusion of white racial purity (Gonzales et. al, 2007; Greene, 2013, p. 182). This legislation was used to protect against black mixed-race individuals that could “pass” as racially white to position mixed-race individuals trying to claim their European heritages as “racial frauds,” further perpetuating the notion of white racial purity (Green, 2013, p. 183). The Racial Integrity Act defined “Negro” as any free person of color and white as those “having no trace whatever of any

blood other than Caucasian” perpetuating the black-and-white racial hierarchy and subsuming both non-black monoracial groups of color and mixed-race persons (Gonzales et. al, 2007, p. 60). As a consequence of the anti-miscegenation law, the Bureau of Vital Statistics recorded a significant drop in the “mulatto” or mixed-race population, contributing to their erasure from the racial discourse.

Equivalent Approach

During the implementation of hypodescent, because mixed-race persons were identified as monoracially black, it was assumed that no distinction needed to be made between black mixed-race people and monoracial black people. Known as the equivalent approach, this identity development model does not make the distinction between persons mixed by immediate parentage, such as interracial families, or the majority of the black population that have been racially mixed over generations, but treats them as equivalents within a racially black identity (Spencer, 2004; Rockquemore et. al, 2009). Additionally, it was assumed that developing a positive sense of black identity was the healthy ideal for all black mixed-race persons with negative mental health outcomes attributed to internalized anti-blackness (Erikson, 1968; Rockquemore et. al, 2009). Embracing a linear model of black mixed-race identity development, it was assumed that black mixed-race individuals went through a process of: learning about race and racism; becoming involved in aspects of black cultural, social and political life; and centering a salient monoracial black identity as a foundation of their identity (Erikson, 1968; Cross, 1971).

Fetishizing Mixed-Race Aesthetics

An important point of distinction between monoracial black persons “mixed” over generations and black mixed-race individuals of immediate “mixture” is that their perceived

proximity to whiteness grants them particular privileges. For example, for lighter-skinned individuals, their appearances are celebrated, desired and accepted in comparison to darker-skinned and monoracial black women in the community who are aligned with being aesthetically inferior due to their proximity to blackness and distance from whiteness within the anti-black U.S. racial climate (Sundstrom, 2009). Mixed-race persons are thus stereotyped and idealized as naturally 'exotic' and beautiful (Nakashima, 1992; Rosa, 2001; Campbell & Herman, 2010). One effect of what bell hooks (1992) deems the "colonizing gaze," which privileges a European aesthetic over a black aesthetic, is the internalization of anti-blackness in both monoracial black women and darker-skinned black mixed-race women in the community. One consequence of anti-blackness that contributes to internalized oppression is the harsher treatment darker-skinned women face in the community where their experiences and voices are erased, leaving them further marginalized within the already marginalized community (Anzaldúa, 2012). For example, black-and-Native mixed-race persons with darker-skin are force to defend their stake to a Native identity in comparison to lighter-skinned black-and-Native individuals (Montgomery, 2012). The celebration of mixed-race aesthetics, particularly those of an ambiguous or more Eurocentric appearance, thus come at the expense of perpetuating anti-blackness through the devaluation of a black aesthetic. As hooks (1992) portrays in her book *Black Looks*, the internalization of anti-blackness contributes to pressures to subscribe to Eurocentric standards of beauty:

Their little girl is just reaching that stage of preadolescent life where we become obsessed with our image, with how we look and how others see us. Her skin is dark. Her hair is chemically straightened. Not only is she fundamentally convinced that straightened hair is more beautiful than curly, kinky, natural hair, she believes that lighter skin makes one more worthy, more valuable in the eyes of others. Despite her parents' effort to raise their children in an affirming black context, she has internalized white supremacist values and aesthetics, a way of looking and seeing the world that negates her value (p. 3).

As hooks notes, the impact of anti-blackness pressures darker-skinned black mixed-race women and monoracial black women to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty through altering their hair and skin to perform beauty in a way that is aligned with whiteness and thus more socially acceptable in the U.S. Thus, the privilege afforded to light-skinned mixed-race women based on their aesthetics contributes to the erasure of monoracial black individuals in the community and perpetuates a narrative of postraciality through labelling them as the “products” of interracial sexual unions. This narrative contributes to the erasure of the expansive history of “the production of mixed-race categories and its regulative role in systems of racial domination,” which includes a history of interracial sexual violence used as a tool to “divide and manage conquered, enslaved, or colonized populations,” (“Mixed Race Looks,” 2009).

A crucial point of delineation that black mixed-race women with light-skin privilege experience from monoracial black women and other members of the black community is the opportunity to “pass” as racially white in order to disassociate themselves from their communities of belonging which occupy the furthest subordinated position within the racial hierarchy (Sundstrom, 2009). This can act as a movement towards whiteness in which they use their proximity to the white community as a means of occupying an “in-between” position which relegates them to a higher level of the racial hierarchy. This move can contribute to the erasure of the shared experiences of racialized sexual exploitation that the diverse population of black and black mixed-race women in the U.S. share by attempting to articulate a new position that embodies racial privilege and erases sexualized racial oppression.

For example, the declaration of a distinct mixed-race identity as a symbol of post-raciality can contribute to the erasure of the history of interracial sexual violence in which forced sexual relations between white men and black women was employed as a tool of domination and

control to perpetuate the subordination of black people (Sundstrom, 2009). The perceived “primitiveness” of black women invoked sexual fantasies of white men commodifying their bodies as objects to “taste” or access new means of experiencing the universe (hooks, 1992). By inscribing black women’s bodies with primitiveness, they have been framed as the white man’s “secret access to intense pleasure, particularly pleasures of the body,” and have come to represent bodies “to be watched, imitated, desired, possessed,” (hooks, 1992, p. 376). While these longings for a “piece of the other” can undergird white supremacy, a misconception has been perpetuated that sexual relationships between white men and black women can disrupt racial domination as a means to an end (hooks, 1992). However, black women continue to be framed as sexual objects that can be exploited at the hands of white men for personal gains.

According to bell hooks (1992):

To these young males and their buddies, fucking was a way to confront the Other, as well as a way to make themselves over, to leave behind white “innocence” and enter the world of “experience.” As is often the case in this society, they were confident that non-white people had more life experience, were more worldly, sensual, and sexual because they were different. Getting a bit of the Other, in this case engaging in sexual encounters with non-white females, was considered a ritual of transcendence, a movement out into a world of difference that would transform, an acceptable rite of passage. The direct objective was not simply to sexually possess the Other; it was to be changed in some way by the encounter. “Naturally,” the presence of the Other, the body of the Other, was seen as existing to serve the ends of white male desires (p. 368).

While historically, the “primitive,” “savage” body of the racial Other came to represent something needing to be conquered and possessed, contemporarily, the body of the racial Other comes to represent an attempt to publicly disassociate with white supremacy (hooks, 1992). The black woman’s body has been objectified and used as a political tool to publicly declare an anti-racist position and erase the “guilt of the past,” by having overt sexual relationships or equating themselves with the other (hooks, 1992, p. 371). Black mixed-race women who are monoracialized as black experience being commodified as sexual objects for white men who

perceive them as a “safer” route to assuage the guilts of racism and white supremacy and a means to “taste” the immense hypersexuality and perceived worldly experiences they have to offer. In addition to perceiving black mixed-race women as sexual objects and a means of accessing immense experiences, they have also been falsely conceptualized as post-racial objects that provide access to a post-racial society or a society in which racism no longer exists (Jeffries, 2013). As “products” of interracial sexual unions, mixed-race individuals are seen as symbols of combating racism and white supremacy.

Another form of what bell hooks (1992) deems “eating the other” is the commodification of mixed-race aesthetics as “a way for white supremacist society to appropriate and dominate that difference,” (“Mixed Race Looks,” 2009). Because of their physical ambiguity within a dualistic structure of white purity and nonwhite impurity, the consequential exoticism and fetishism of mixed-race individuals, mainstream media has commodified mixed-race identity and aesthetics as a method of marketing to a larger, more widely relatable demographic in order to increase viewership and consumerism (Sundstrom, 2009; Larson, 2016). In tandem with commodifying the physical appearances of mixed-race individuals, mainstream media portrays mixed-race individuals in stereotypical roles which uphold the mutually exclusive monoracial hierarchy and perpetuate racial oppression (Larson, 2016). For example, mixed-race identity has been used to promote postracial ideology in which racial tensions have been resolved through interracial sexual unions between fixed monoracial groups, thus reinforcing those fixed racial categories as naturally distinct and separate (Sundstrom, 2009). Mainstream images of mixed-race women draw on the historical social taboo of interracial sexual unions, positioning them within a hypersexualized stereotype that characterizes them as “exotic, permissive, and available,

as if they are permanently marked by, and are fated to reenact the social drama of racial forbidden fruit,” (“Mixed Race Looks,” 2009).

Additionally, mixed-race characters are used to “unrealistically transcend racial politics,” in order to perpetuate post-raciality by presenting race as no longer relevant (Larson, 2016, p. 6). One method of doing so is by monoracializing mixed-race actors and actresses in order to articulate that they are in close enough proximity to monoracial groups that it becomes unimportant to acknowledge or articulate racial categories (Larson, 2016). Consequently, this monoracializing of mixed-race people on television contributes to the use of inauthentic images of marginalized mono- and mixed-racial communities. For example, mixed-race stereotypes such as the “tragic mulatta” and genetically modified racial “superhuman” continue to show up in television perpetuating the myth of white racial purity. This limits representations of black mixed-race persons to black mixed-race women whose “racial impurity” and yearning for whiteness leads to their misfortune and ultimate death, and genetically modified “superhumans” who have transcended existing monoracial categories, moving towards eugenicists’ mission for a superior race, while promoting postraciality through miscegenation (Larson, 2016).

Variant Approach

During the mid-1980s-1990s, a new generation of researchers emerged that shifted their focus to conceptualizing mixed-race people as being distinct from any single pre-existing racial group. Instead, the variant approach recognizes the conscious construction of a mixed-race identity as a healthy integrated sense of their multiple racial ancestries, culture, and social location (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). Gibbs’ (1989) variant theory proposed two major challenges for mixed-race adolescents: they must integrate a dual racial and/or cultural identification while learning to develop a positive self-concept and sense of competence; and

they must develop the ability to conflate their earlier intersecting identifications into a coherent and stable sense of personal identity and a positive racial identity. While an improvement from previous mixed-race identity development models, this approach is problematic as it presupposes that a salient black racial identity is “over-identification with the black parent” and considered a dilemma in racial identity formation (Gibbs, 1989). Also following a linear model, it is assumed that mixed-race individuals are initially pressured to choose a monoracial identity, suffer feelings of guilt or disloyalty to their other racial groups causing a potential denial of both or all racial identities, followed by a new appreciation for their neglected racial groups and a movement towards the integration of their multiple racial identities (Poston, 1990; Kich, 1992; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). This approach erases the complexities of how black mixed-race women choose to identify by pathologizing any designation other than mixed-race.

The Construction of “Mixed-Race” Status in the 2000 U.S. Census

According to Naomi Mezey (2003), the U.S. Census’ racial classification system plays a dual role of both recognizing and ascribing racial identity onto individuals. In 2000, mixed-race individuals were able to identify as mixed-race on the U.S. Census for the first time providing them the opportunity to experience a sense of community or group membership amongst the mixed-race population (Jones & Smith, 2001). This shifting understanding of racial identity for mixed-race people became a controversial topic within the 2000 Census debate. Many activists, scholars, and pundits argued that the large increase in interracial marriages that created a “biracial baby boom” necessitated the addition of a mixed-race identification that best reflects how many of these people self-identify (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). Civil Rights activists, however, argued that existing racial categories should necessarily remain unchanged as they are utilized to monitor and track discrimination and inequalities based on historically-rooted racial

groups that outweigh “self-proclaimed identities,” (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). This historical moment was characterized by both an acknowledgement that race is a social construct but also that it has real and measurable consequences.

Despite the census providing mixed-race persons the opportunity for public recognition and a potential sense of group membership, the impacts of this new racial category present a paradox: attempting to be more inclusive with the addition of a mixed-race category perpetuates the myth of a biological basis for race as “mixed-race” acts as a signifier for the mixture of ‘pure’ and ‘distinct races,’ in which the fractional identities of mixed-race individuals makes up the whole (Omi, 1997; Mezey, 2003). Additionally, colorblindness became the dominant racial ideology in the post-Civil Rights era despite documented evidence of persistent racial inequalities due to the perception of mixed-race persons as products of postracial interracial unity (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). Despite conceptualizing mixed-race individuals as symbols of overcoming the racial divisions in the U.S., the construction of a mixed-race designation necessitates exclusive group membership boundaries which merely “creates new axes of visibility and power, and new erasures as well,” (Mezey, 2003, p. 1749). For example, by creating a singular “mixed-race” status, the differences in racial, ethnic, national, and cultural identities can become more easily subsumed and erased as the mixed-race population becomes homogenized as a monolithic community. Additionally, the mixed-race designation as a symbol of postraciality has been utilized in a push towards the erasure of all racial categories for a raceless, colorblind society (Mezey, 2003). Despite the 2000 Census marking the first opportunity for black biracial and multiracial persons to check multiple boxes for their racial identity, the information was consequently reorganized into the five major monoracial group categories for statistical data and research purposes (Williams, 2006).

Ecological Approach

This shift in the terrain of race relations, based on the incorporation of a mixed-race designation in the 2000 U.S. census, has been accompanied by an emerging cultural space where individuals that choose to identify as mixed-race have increased visibility in the media and a multicultural identity is increasingly being viewed as a legitimate racial identity in and of itself (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). A major factor of this shift is the existence of a generation of mixed-race people whose entire life experiences are occurring in post-Civil Rights America (Korgen, 1999). Furthermore, the experiences of these mixed-race individuals are characterized by changing messages in parental racial socialization, new racial identity options, and the shifting racial identification of mixed-race people as a population which forces our society to reconsider the mutual exclusivity of racial categories (Rockquemore et. al, 2009).

In *Racially Mixed People in America*, Maria Root (1992) contends that mixed-race people are a distinct group worthy of study in a way that does not pathologize their experiences and identity development process as the problem, equivalent, and variant approaches have. Root takes an ecological approach which allows for a full range of racial identities, focuses on social factors that influence racial identity development as opposed to stages of development, and allows for the contextual shifting of identities that focuses on the pathways to different racial identities, such as multiple simultaneous identities or no racial identity, rather than a predetermined end point (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). The ecological approach makes the following assumptions: mixed-race people construct different racial identities based on various contextually specific logics; there are no predictable stages of identity develop because the process is not linear and there is no single optimal endpoint; privileging any one type of racial identity over another only replicates the essentialist monoracial categories of previous models

with a different outcome; and it allows the possibility for mixed-race individuals to refuse to have to identify any racial identity whatsoever (Daniel, 2001). The ecological model is one of the most beneficial identity development models in understanding mixed-race identity development in that it accounts for inherited influences (parental identities, nativity, phenotype, extended family), traits (temperament, coping skills, social skills) and socialization agents (family, peers, community).

Using the ecological approach, Root contended that the status of having parents of different races in a society organized by a mutually exclusive racial structure creates a social location in the “borderlands” and that mixed-race individuals have access to a variety of methods of functioning in the five-race context and engage in “border crossing,” or navigating multiple racial or ethnic cultures. In this approach, Root takes into consideration regional and generational histories of race relations, sexual orientation, gender, class, community attitudes, racial socialization, family functioning, and individual’s personality traits and aptitudes. Thus, the ecological approach provides a more holistic lens in examining the identity development process of mixed-race individuals. In taking the ecological approach, five major themes emerged regarding mixed-race identity development: 1. Racial identity varies; 2. Racial identity often changes over the life course; 3. Racial identity development is not a predictable linear process with a single outcome; 4. Social, cultural, and spatial contexts are critical in identity development; and 5. Encounters of racism occur for mixed-race individuals monoracially and multiracially contributing to their understanding of race and self-identification (Rockquemore et. al, 2009; Miville et. al, 2005). These findings have disrupted the four previous identity development models that assume a single healthy endpoint in racial identity, assume a static racial identity, assume a linear process of identity development and fail to account for a

multitude of influential social, cultural, and spatial contexts that play a major role in the identity development of mixed-race individuals.

Major Themes from Scholarship on Mixed-Race Identity Development

In regards to choosing a racial identity as a reference group, mixed-race individuals identify in various ways. Some identify exclusively with one of their races, some identify as either biracial or multiracial, others shift between several different racial or ethnic identities depending on where they are located and whom they have interactions with, and still others refuse to self-identify racially at all (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). One of the best documented variations in racial identity has been black-and-white biracial individuals identifying as either: exclusively black; as an integrated biracial, multiracial or mixed identity; shifting between black, white, or integrated biracial or multiracial identities based on the racial composition of the group they are interacting with; and others refuse any racial designation whatsoever (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). While several mixed-race individuals recognize their multiracial identity as a meaningful label, many tend to identify monoracially. This monoracial identification may act as a result of a lack of a visible or accessible multiracial community which contributes to a more privatized multiracial identity. Furthermore, when choosing a monoracial identity, mixed-race persons identified with being a person of color in order to connect with others who identify similarly and to build a sense of community, a social support network, and a reference group orientation. Furthermore, for many mixed-race individuals, identifying monoracially as a person of color denoted feelings of pride and intimacy highlighting the emotional and cognitive engagement emerging from meaningful relationships with significant others (Miville et. al, 2005). This means of identifying as a person of color for communal benefits may be significant particularly for black mixed-race persons due to the historically communal nature of the black

community which stems back to the concept of fictive kin from times of slavery in which non-related persons would provide care and support for one another in various ways, such as assisting in childrearing the children of others.

A unique aspect of mixed-race identity development is the fluidity of racial identity. For mixed individuals, their racial identities change as they navigate their lives and the social, material, cultural, economic and institutional forces (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). Due to potential experiences of alienation, many mixed-race persons develop strategies to help them “fit in” with multiple groups that they are unlikely to be embraced by. These flexible social boundaries provide them with the ability to adapt to various cultural norms and respond to the specific contexts of the situations they navigate. Additionally, this flexibility allows for flexible social attitudes, accepting oneself without excluding others and valuing the similarities and differences among others, also known as universal-diverse orientation (Miville, Gelso, Liu, Pannu, Holloway & Fuertes, 1999). Fitting into multiple worlds can have additional benefits in the form of institutional rewards such as meeting identification requirements for multiple scholarships. A negative aspect of this fluidity for some mixed-race persons is fitting into multiple groups to some degree but never completely feeling like a member of any particular racial group (Miville et. al, 2005). Mixed-race individuals have the ability to navigate various social groups and have an increased awareness of social realities, such as racism which contributes to social group boundaries. This cognitive flexibility and openness denotes enhanced psychological functioning (Miville et. al, 2005). Due to the potential of not “fitting in” with particular social groups that mixed-race individuals belong to, it may be necessary to develop negotiations or other social skills to better navigate those racial groups. The social skills they develop in attempting to

navigate the racial and ethnic groups they belong to may assist them in navigating racial and ethnic groups that do not reflect their racial heritages.

Rather than identity development being a linear process, mixed-race youth are four times more likely to switch their racial identity than to report a consistent racial identity over different periods of time (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). Furthermore, in the research there is no evidence supporting notions of a single healthy, correct, and desirable endpoint in identity development (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). This disrupts the assumption that was made in previous mixed-race identity development models that pathologize those who do not identify with the “healthy” or “correct” fixed minority identity. While many mixed-race individuals identify monoracially as a person of color in public settings, it may be more common for them to identify as mixed-race privately based on the public acknowledgment and support of mixed-race heritage, as well as the availability of a mixed-race community within various settings (Miville et. al, 2005). Identifying generally as a person of color and mixed-race person specifically can prove beneficial for mixed-race individuals seeking a buffer from racism and a sense of community. Therefore, the lack of a visible mixed-race social network or community may be one of the greatest challenges mixed-race people face in negotiating their racial identities (Miville et. al, 2005).

Social, cultural, and spatial contexts have proven crucial in the identity development of mixed race individuals. Researchers have documented how mixed-race people self-identify, how parents identify their mixed-race children, how geographic patterns impact racial identity and identification, and the contextual nature of racial labeling (Rockquemore et. al, 2009). Renn (2004) examined the role of peer cultures in various identity trajectories that mixed-race college students take as they are influenced by the ecology of the college campus. Five identity patterns

were identified: monoracial, multiple monoracial, multiracial, extraracial, and situational. Mixed-race individuals therefore construct or deconstruct their identities and alter self-understandings within an ecological development model (Renn, 2004). Historical patterns account for variations in the construction of racial identity between pre and post-Civil Rights cohorts, multiracial processes that vary across institutional spheres, according to families' varying contexts of socialization, racial composition of social networks in varying settings, communities and geographies that provide differential resources for identity development and the parameters of identification (Brunnsma, 2006). At the macro level researchers have acknowledged the influential elements of nation-state, culture, and country on the development of racial identities within which mixed-race people must navigate (Davis, 1991).

The emotional connection that mixed-race individuals feel towards their racial identities are heavily influenced by their relationships with parents and family members, and the emotional availability of those family members to create connections within those cultures (Miville et. al, 2005). The physical and emotional availability of parents may be the single most influential social factor in the identity development of mixed-race individuals who typically adopt the racial identity of the parent they feel most emotionally connected to or identify as the more dominant parent (Miville et. al, 2005). Particularly, mixed-race persons with white racial heritage tend to identify more strongly with their parent of color which may be a result of monoracial racism, in which they are discriminated against for being identified as a person of color (Miville et. al, 2005). Additionally, identifying with the racial heritage of the parent of color may be beneficial in building social support connections and communities where they feel safer from monoracial racism.

The openness, acceptance, and racial or ethnic diversity of the setting play major roles in how mixed-race individuals feel about their mixed-race identity (Miville et. al, 2005). The most influential settings that influence identity development are areas where mixed-race individuals grew up and where they attended school (Miville et. al, 2005). For mixed-race individuals, awareness of their mixed-race identity and feelings of alienation or pride arise regarding positive or negative experiences they've had with others within spaces either marked by tensions or acceptance of a mixed-race identity (Miville et. al, 2005). For many participants in Miville et. al's (2005) study on mixed-race identity development, they gave up attempting to "fit in" with social groups that were unlikely to embrace them while still feeling a strong need for a sense of community that can positively mirror a mixed-race identity. Due to the influence of social context on identity development, mixed-race people may experience challenges in asserting their identities when facing pressures to choose a monoracial identity rather than a mixed-race identity which can result in lower levels of self-esteem and motivation (Townsend and Marcus, 2009). Furthermore, social validation of a mixed-race identity may be influenced by regions with higher concentrations of mixed-race people and a lack of a visible or accessible mixed-race community contribute to this inability to assert identity (Jones & Smith, 2001).

In a multiracial case study by Miville et. al (2005), it was discovered that all 10 self-identified multiracial individuals had experienced some form of racism, whether monoracial or multiracial. Furthermore, these experiences of racism centered on the mixed-race individuals' awareness of being multiracial in regards to being phenotypically "unique." Encounters with monoracial racism were experienced based on their identities as people of color in which members of their social world had made overtly racist remarks or acted in a racist manner regarding one or more of their racial identities. These experiences of monoracial racism caused

participants to experience feelings of hurt, anger, and shame, with some experiences seeming fresh in their minds, leading to an increased sociopolitical consciousness. Participants in the study also experienced multiracial racism based on their ambiguous or unidentifiable physical characteristics as they relate to racial group membership. This multiracial racism occurred most frequently in school settings, although it occurred on both institutional (i.e. applications not containing appropriate racial designations for mixed-race) and personal levels (i.e. questioning identity “what are you?”). Experiences of institutional racism that occur most frequently as the inability to have a racial designation has been a common experience for mixed-race individuals that has been characterized by feelings of frustration. However, some mixed-race individuals utilize adaptive strategies for dealing with this issue such as asking the institution representative to select a racial designation for them. Similar to experiences of monoracial racism, participants experience feelings of hurt and anger, although some learned to develop an appreciation for their unique physical appearance. The experiences of multiracial racism faced by mixed-race individuals denote how psychologically impactful a multiracial heritage can be while limited social support may be available to provide positive messages and strategies to resist this form of racism.

Third Space as a Potential Site for Mixed-Race Validation

As a method of renegotiating the rigid monoracial boundaries in the United States, mixed-race women have begun invoking Homi Bhabha’s (1991) concept of third space which acts as a site to translate and negotiate social differences, blurring the limitations of existing social boundaries (Bolatagici, 2004). Bhabha’s construction of third space is in direct response to the concept of hybridity employed in colonial discourse, which acts as a term of abuse for “products of miscegenation” or individuals of mixed-race heritage (Meredith, 1998, p. 2).

Additionally, however, the concept of hybridity is also celebrated and privileged in colonial discourse as “a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference,” (Hoogvelt, 1997, p. 158). The paradox here lies in the dominant group’s ability to appropriate from various cultures to create a privileged multicultural American identity without acknowledging or validating the identities of mixed-race individuals of multiracial heritage. Instead, the dominant group takes an essentialist approach, imposing fixed characteristics onto the five primary racial categories, invalidating mixed-race identities that are unable to align with these fixed categories (Fuss, 1991).

In order to disrupt the unitary, fixed monoracial categories and racial boundaries imposed on mixed-race individuals which distinguish them from white or other monoracial groups, Bhabha’s third space represents an indeterminate or unfixed space between the colonizer and colonized or oppressor and oppressed. Rather than conceptualizing mixed-race individuals as the “sum of their parts,” the third space transcends black-and-white and us-versus-them dichotomies (Bolatagici, 2004, p. 82). This in-between space disrupts hegemonic colonial narratives of hybridity or mixed-race identities by integrating elements of both positions of the oppressor and oppressed that challenge the validity of rigid monoracial social categories by acknowledging the complex historical and cultural heritages of mixed-race individuals (Lindsay, 1997). Rather than analyzing their mixed-race identity as being traceable to separate parts or “original moments from which the third emerges,” the third space enables other social positions to emerge (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). This represents a queering of the definition of hybridity which becomes an “ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no primordial unity or fixity,” (Bhabha, 1994; Meredith, 1998, p. 3). Thus, the third space disrupts dualistic

categories, binary thinking, and oppositional positioning through creating an inclusionary space that “initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation,” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1).

According to Bhabha (1994), “by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others as ourselves,” (p. 39). For mixed-race individuals, the third space acts as a location that transcends reduced definitions of racial identity and creates an opportunity to conceptualize mixed-race identity as a “whole ‘new’ entity that is not reducible to its components,” (Bolatagici, 2004, p. 78). Similarly, the third space is not defined as a sum of different cultures but rather a space where cultural translation occurs through articulating culture as an emancipatory and transformative act (Bhabha, 1994). The newly constructed hybrid identity is analyzed through its potential to “transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion,” through its knowledge of transculturation (Meredith, 1998, p. 3; Taylor, 1991). The third space represents a liberatory space where fluidity of identity is recognized, allowing individuals to “complicate borders” and move between social categories that best reflect their individual identities (Bolatagici, 2004, p. 79). The hybrid represents counterhegemonic agency for rearticulating negotiations over racial identity and group designation and redefining the meaning behind racial identity and group designation (Bhabha, 1996).

Borderlands: Transforming the Mixed Race Narrative

Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2012) *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* provides a more complex and intersectional method of conceptualizing identity development in black mixed-race women. In her project, Anzaldúa centers, deconstructs, and transforms her own

mestizaje “mixed” identity based on her social location at the interstices of various systems of privilege and oppression as a working class, gender-fluid, white, Mexican and Indigenous mixed Chicana lesbian. Transforming the discourse on mixed identities which previously pathologized the identity development process by imposing external singular-axis racial signifiers, Anzaldúa provided an intersectional analysis that not only accounts for the complexities of black mixed-race women’s racial identities, but also for the complexities of their social location where they inhabit an “in-between” space of both penalties and privileges in the various interlocking systems of oppression.

Furthermore, Anzaldúa conceptualized this “in-between” space as one where individuals simultaneously navigate belonging and lack of belonging within imagined communities, such as monoracial communities that black mixed-race women seek group membership with. One of the most beneficial aspects of her analysis is that she denoted her experiences navigating identity politics that are used by her various communities to both protect and contest whiteness in ways that upheld dualistic positions and maintained her racial oppression among the others forms of oppression she struggled against. For black mixed-race women negotiating their racial identities within their black and white or other racial communities, understanding the dualistic nature of the racial paradigm in the U.S. may help illuminate their own struggles in accessing group membership in monoracial communities. Anzaldúa outlined the stance-and-counterstance dualistic positions that she navigated in her segregated racial communities that left her without a sense of home or community in any of them.

Anzaldúa contended with being in the borderlands of multiple dualisms which fragmented her own identity along power lines such as women-and-men and dark-and-light skin complexion, white-and-racial other. Due to her inability to fit into rigid monoracial,

monocultural, or mononational identities, Anzaldúa articulated experiencing feeling unsafe in her inability to navigate segregated spaces where her race and womanhood made her feel hunted as prey by both the white and the Chicana communities within the U.S. (2012). For example, Anzaldúa's Chicana identity made her vulnerable to racism, sexism and homophobia by the white community which controls the discourse on societal norms including which identities are representative of the "norm." Due to the complexities of her identity at the interstices of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, etc., she was rejected and abused by the white community for both not being considered white due to her identity as a woman of color and also her inability to fit into an essentialized identity category that subsumes the complexities of her identity and simplifies it to a singular-axis such as race, and further into a singular monocultural identity. Rejecting the complexities of Anzaldúa's identity and using them as a basis to deny community access is representative of a stance position which is representative of the white racial class hegemony.

The counterstance position embodied by marginalized communities also enforces strict group membership rules in order to expel the complexities of multiply marginalized and privileged identities, perpetuating essentialized notions about who belongs within a given racial, ethnic, or cultural community. For example, within the Mexican community, Anzaldúa (2012) was expelled due to her proximity to whiteness which posed a cultural threat. She became caught between the spaces of the multiple communities and identities she occupied due to the impact of her cultural groups erasing or expelling complex individuals that did not fit into essentialized identities that mirror the cultural expectations of how she should perform race, culture, gender, sexuality, etc. For black mixed-race women navigating their own racial communities, a struggle may exist in performing monoraciality due to the legacy of hypodescent which positions them

automatically as black women. Furthermore, because essentialized categories are being used, other identity categories are unaccounted for, creating challenges in simultaneously addressing the gendered and sexual violence that women of color experience both in the dominant and marginalized racial communities.

As a method of survival and an initial move towards transcending the dualistic stance-and-counterstance positions, many individuals occupying the borderlands or “in-between” spaces of multiple oppressions develop “la facultad,” what Anzaldúa (2012) defines as the:

Capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities to see the deep structure below the surface...an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning...an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide (p. 60).

Through employing la facultad, Anzaldúa demarcates a crossroads in which she had to use this perception to develop a consciousness around her own subordination and privileges in order to contend with her identity in a way that embraces her complexities rather than erasing them for the sake of upholding an oppressed-versus-oppressor duality. This consciousness development process is marked by a continuous process of deconstructing one’s position in various interlocking systems of oppression, with each “increment of consciousness” disrupting the essentialist categories that create boundaries to accessing her group membership due to the complexities of her identity (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 99). Rather, for individuals occupying the borderlands, they move “towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes,” by embracing their complexities and contradictions, ambiguity, and multiple cultures to embrace their plurality, no longer excluding or fragmenting parts of their identities (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 99). This move to embrace the complexities of her intersectional identities and social location is representative of a disidentified position that disrupts dualisms by refuting a singular-

axis analysis of social location and social identities within interlocking systems of oppression which are utilized to create false separations along racial, gendered, sexual and class lines. In developing this consciousness around her social location and the complexities of her identity, she sought to reconstruct her mixed-racial and cultural identities to create a new mestiza (mixed) identity that would also create a new space of belonging:

What I want is an accounting with all three cultures-white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding white ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture-*una cultura mestiza*-with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 44).

The significance of Anzaldúa's project to reconstruct her identity is that it refuses to embrace essentialized monoracial categories and instead conceptualizes mixed-race identity as an inclusive new racial category that encompasses all of the primary monoracial groups. In assembling her identities, Anzaldúa was not piecing together severed parts of her identities but creating a new whole identity as a "third element greater than the sum of severed parts," demarcated by the refusal to identify in exclusionary terms (Hammad, 2010, p. 307).

Additionally, rather than enforcing exclusive group membership requirements, this new racial identity constructed from the borderlands allows for the racial fluidity of mixed-race persons. This fluidity in the borderlands allows for coalitions to be constructed across differences, which are typically erased through essentialized monoracial categories. By embracing the complexities and contradictions of one's social location and disrupting the dualities that reinforce oppressed-versus-oppressor power dynamics, Anzaldúa creates a new method of theorizing differences that contributes to creating unity across differences (Hammad, 2010). These coalitions contribute to the formation of a new inclusionary cultural community that embraces differences in order to

balance power relations and coalesce against interlocking systems of oppression (Fowlkes, 1997).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Employing grounded theory methodology and methods are beneficial as they employ iterative strategies that allow for flexibility in collecting and analyzing qualitative data as a continuous process of theory development. Utilizing grounded theory methods allows the researcher to shape and reshape their data collection, allowing them to refine the data and increase their knowledge (Charmaz, 2014). The following practices were utilized to construct grounded theory: data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and iteratively; actions and processes were analyzed rather than themes; comparative methods were used; and data was analyzed in the process of developing new conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014).

Data for this study was collected through focus group observations, individual interviews, and social media posts on social networks Twitter and Facebook. A constructivist approach to grounded theory allowed for an “inductive, comparative, emergent, open-ended approach,” that allowed for the continual analysis of new data and theory development as opposed to developing a hypothesis that focuses on a specific empirical topic (Charmaz, 2014, p. 12). This approach “places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data,” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 130). Further, a constructivist approach assumes multiple social realities that are processual and constructed and emphasizes self-reflexivity of the researcher’s “position, privileges, perspective, and interactions” as they may influence the analysis of data and facts identified within the study (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). A constructivist approach according to Charmaz (2014) is also consistent with other methodologies such as “feminist theory, narrative

analysis, cultural studies, critical realism, and critical inquiry” that seek to address social justice concerns and challenges (p. 184). The constructivist approach thus emphasizes the importance of interactions between researcher and research participants that compare and contrast constructs of reality with the goal of coalescing and changing knowledge to create a better informed “mutual reality” to find common meaning in the world and to improve the reality of the research participants (Wilson, 2008, p. 37). This approach is congruent with the overall goal of this feminist research project to explore potential healing practices that may be utilized as a method or protective factor for promoting positive self-conception in black mixed-race women.

Feminist Research Paradigm

Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods highlights the need to employ a research paradigm that operates outside of the dominant Western scientific approach as it focuses on negative aspects of marginalized individuals or communities while posing outsider solutions that do not take into account resources already available to the marginalized group or “object of research,” (Wilson, 2008, p. 16). Accordingly, a feminist research paradigm has been used to inform the research study.

Experience in Knowledge Production

One component of feminist research being employed in this study is the incorporation of experience into knowledge production. Illuminating the lives of racial, gender, and sexual “others,” and other subordinated groups helps to challenge dominant Eurocentric discourse that privileges the lives and perspectives of white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle to upper class, able-bodied men who provide incomplete or inaccurate historical representations (Scott, 1991). In addition to centering on marginalized individuals, an analysis of the historical processes that create and reinforce subordinate positions and produce their experiences must be conducted to

expose the inner logic of these systems of oppression (Scott, 1991). Therefore, experience must be conceptualized and communicated regarding how conceptions of self and one's identities are produced (Scott, 1991). In analyzing the construction of self and identities, it is crucial to, "examine relationships between discourse, cognition and reality, the relevance of the position or situatedness of subjects to the knowledge they produce, and the effects of difference on knowledge," (Scott, 1991, p. 275). Illuminating differences through analyzing experiences disrupts traditional western research's false claim to objectivity.

Furthermore, because identity and experience are interconnected, it becomes crucial to illuminate the "subject-positions" of the women in the study in order to try and understand "the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced and which processes themselves are unremarked, indeed achieve their effect because they aren't noticed," (Scott, 1991, p. 277-8). Because the meanings of identity categories are in flux, self-conception may also be in flux. Thus, it is imperative to deconstruct the role of experience in shaping the self-conceptions of black mixed-race women in order to explain the process of their racial identity development. In doing so, we are then able to ascribe new meanings to their histories and their roles in the process of knowledge production, creating new perspectives and ways of thinking (Scott, 1991).

Decolonizing the Mind

Healing from the split of dualism necessitates critically analyzing systems of power and privilege outside of a dualistic "us-versus-them" ideological framework. Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1993) proposed the concept of "decolonizing the mind" as a method of disrupting the oppressor-versus-oppressed duality which allows for individuals to ignore their complicity in upholding the subordination of others when they align with social marginality.

Whereas dualistic thinking can only address one social hierarchy or system of oppression at a time, thereby enforcing splits across oppressor-and-oppressed power relationships, decolonizing the mind involves recognizing one's simultaneous position in both oppressed and oppressor roles. This approach not only allows for recognition of an individual's multilayered identity across gender, race, sexuality, class, ability status, etc., but also allows us to analyze the "varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression" that impact our lives and experiences (Collins, 1993, p. 2).

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory was used as it acknowledges that our hierarchical society will produce various standpoints based on location or "vantage points" that can provide a more holistic perspective on particular issues or experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, p. 15). This feminist research approach emphasizes a "dual perspective" that marginalized individuals have that allows them to perceive experiences through a personal perspective and through the perspective of the oppressor which provides them a clearer, more developed understanding of certain aspects of the world. Further, where a traditional western epistemology would delegitimize the knowledge of a marginalized individual or group, a feminist standpoint research approach privileges the unique social location of marginalized peoples that allows them access to more holistic knowledge than an individual or group that belongs to the dominant group. Central to a feminist research paradigm is the notion that knowledge contains multiplicity and contradictions that should be embraced in order to bridge the gaps in various ways of constructing and identifying knowledge and who contributes to it (Sprague & Kobrynowicz, 2004). Additionally, a feminist research paradigm assumes that knowing is not relative, but rather partial in that an individual's knowledge can be specific to their location in a particular

space and time (Haraway, 1998). This approach asserts that the experiences of women and other marginalized individuals exist in various social locations therefore generating distinct insights about social institutions and their cultures and practices which detach themselves from the notion that there can be fixed universal knowledge (Harding, 2006). Further, it negates the possibility for any individual to speak objectively from a particular social or historical location (Harding, 2006). The “situated knowledges” or the partial views of members in the community are analyzed and paid credence in and of themselves rather than being incorporated into a “collective subject position” that generalizes the community and erases differences that contradict each other (Haraway, 1998, p. 350).

Researcher Positionality

Furthermore, this approach stresses self-reflexivity and emphasizes the role of colonizer and colonized, not as dichotomous roles, but as roles that we, as scholars, can participate in simultaneously (Collins, 1993). This acknowledgement of the colonizer role and how we as scholars are implicated ensures that as researchers, we will not ignore the roles we potentially play in perpetuating the oppression of marginalized individuals and communities (Collins, 1993). Furthermore, it helps to ensure that the motivations that drive the research stem from a desire to seek more knowledge to understand, appreciate, and validate the experiences of marginalized individuals and communities. Feminism emphasizes building coalitions and it is important as a researcher to work in tandem with the community as opposed to on behalf of the community which may create tensions and limit opportunities to create meaningful relationships between research participants and the researcher (Jaggar, 2014). As a researcher, it is my contention that this research project isn't “objective” or “value-neutral” because I sought to center the voices, experiences, and knowledge of black mixed-race women in the construction of theory with the

overall goal of their empowerment. Additionally, because this research project most closely analyzed the power structures of the racial and gender hierarchies in the U.S., any incidents of racism or sexism during research project interactions wouldn't be tolerated in the study.

Participatory Research: Co-Constructing Knowledge

Black mixed-race women in the study contributed to the production of knowledge in this study through not only discussing and analyzing their material realities but also seeking to radically change them through participatory research. The purpose of utilizing a participatory component in the research study is to work with the research participants to transform their realities through working towards goals such as “self-determination, emancipation, and personal and social transformation,” (Maguire, 2014, p. 417). Co-constructing knowledge with research participants in the study also disrupts the duality between knowing and doing that occurs in traditional western research by emphasizing concrete actions aimed at the following types of change: “development of critical consciousness of both researcher and participants; improvement of the lives of those involved in the research process; and transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships,” (Maguire, 2014, p. 417). The power structure between the researcher and participants is transformed through participatory research in a way that seeks to empower the oppressed in the research study by co-constructing knowledge to question and challenge the unjust social structures in society, specifically addressing labor and civil rights (Maguire, 2014).

One of the principle underlying assumptions of participatory research that is central to this research project is the notion that every decision and action we take has a political nature and therefore, “all of our work has implications for the distribution of power in society,”

(Maguire, 2014, p. 420). Therefore, this research study is not value-neutral or “unbiased” by the standards of traditional western research. Instead, this study seeks to acknowledge and denote the role black-mixed race women play in deconstructing and making sense of their own lives as valid knowledge producers. Because the women in the study may lack some “information, skills, and experience to critically understand and analyze the social structures and relations which shape their powerlessness,” balance must be created between the researcher and participants in the study (Maguire, 2014, p. 421). This is done by incorporating the knowledge and skills of the researcher and the participants in the study, embracing the fact that “we both know some things; neither of us knows everything. Working together we will both know more, and we will both learn more about how to know,” (Maguire, 2014, p. 421). Embracing this principle of shared power over a dominant-and-subordinate duality increases opportunities to create a more critical mutual understanding of their material realities:

Participatory research assumes that returning the power of knowledge production and use to ordinary and oppressed people will contribute to the creation of a more accurate and critical reflection of social reality, the liberation of human creative potential, and to the mobilization of human resources to solve social problems (Maguire, 2014, p. 422).

Sampling

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling involves the process of analyzing data to construct analytic definitions and explications of categories through a process of explicating and refining the properties of theoretical categories by checking their boundaries and relation to one another (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sampling allows the researcher to “collect, code, and analyze data and decide what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop theory as it emerges,” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Theoretical sampling was utilized during the study to employ a process of theorizing about how the identity development of black mixed-race

women can contribute to the development of potential healing practices that promote positive self-conception. Similar to purposeful or purposive sampling, the motivation to “discover, understand, and gain insight therefore selecting a sample from which the most can be learned,” was beneficial (Merriam, 2016, p. 96).

Furthermore, theoretical sampling is critical to utilizing grounded theory in that it is an evolving process that allows for data to influence what documents are analyzed and how individuals will be interviewed as the theory is being developed. This approach also helps the researcher acknowledge “exceptions” or “variants” in the emerging findings that help them to adjust accordingly (Merriam, 2016, p. 99). Additionally, theoretical sampling allows the researcher to “fill out your emergent theoretical categories and make them robust” in order to refine the tentative categories “until no new properties of your categories emerge,” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 4-10). Utilizing theoretical sampling thus allows the researcher to develop a conceptualized theoretical framework for understanding the development of self-identity in black mixed-race women as well as how potential healing practices can be used as a method or protective factor for promoting positive self-conception.

Convenience Sampling: Extant Documents

Convenience sampling is used to locate data sources that are most readily available and accessible to the researcher. Convenience sampling was used to locate extant documents in the form of social media posts on social networks Twitter and Facebook. Social media platforms were used because of their “relative availability, typically unobtrusive method of data collection, and seeming objectivity,” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 48). Because data from social media posts was being collected via the internet, convenience sampling was used to locate information to support

individual interview and focus group findings based on its availability and accessibility on social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. Because convenience sampling is not very credible, triangulation of methods was used to ensure the credibility of data collected by cross-checking data from the social media posts, individual interviews and focus groups (Merriam, 2016).

Unique Sampling: Individual Interview and Focus Group Participants

Because the research questions focus specifically on the material realities of black mixed-race women, unique sampling was used. A criterion-based selection was necessary to ensure the sample would be able to adequately address the material realities that have contributed to the self-identity development unique to black mixed-race women. The women in the study had to be of black racial background; had to be “mixed-race” or biracial or multiracial; and had to be between the ages of 18-30.

Snowball Sampling: Participant Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited initially from women studies and ethnic studies courses at Colorado State University. A recruitment flyer was developed, announced and distributed in several women studies and ethnic studies courses. Snowball style sampling was used from the initial recruitment to identify other black mixed-race women that may have also wanted to participate in this study. The research study consisted of nine black mixed-race women between the ages of 18-30. A majority of the participants were students, employees, or laboratory personnel at Colorado State University. Five black mixed-race women were self-selected to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. Due to the availability of research participants, two women in the study participated in follow-up interviews. These women were interviewed to further investigate the ways that black mixed-race women develop

self-conception based on their positions within various racial groups. Additionally, a focus group consisting of four black mixed-race women was used as a space to co-construct knowledge around black mixed-race identity development and healing practices that could promote positive self-conception for black-mixed race women.

Identifying information was not collected such that the only place the participants were identified was in the consent letter. Instead of using a signed consent letter, this study did not collect signatures as it only serves to increase the risk of confidentiality. Furthermore, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to conducting the individual interviews and focus group to ensure that the study would be framed and conducted in an ethical manner to avoid causing harm to participants.

Methods

Qualitative methods were utilized as qualitative research allows the researcher to add new components to the research while collecting data, providing flexibility for the researcher to follow leads as they arise (Charmaz, 2014). Interviews and focus group methods were used in this study as well as extant document analysis. These three data categories provided triangulation of data collection. According to Merriam (2016) “using multiple sources of data means comparing and crosschecking data collected through observations at different times or different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow up with the same people,” (p. 216). Furthermore, triangulation ensures that the researcher is collecting similar themes from each of their data sources.

A semi-structured interview instrument was used for both individual interviews and the focus group to allow for flexibility within a grounded theory methodology. Seven individual interviews and a focus group of four black mixed-race women were conducted, allowing the

researcher to develop rapport with participants, identify visual cues, and ensure participants were able to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2016). Decolonizing interview techniques were used by privileging the research participants' ways of knowing, engaging them in a process of "decolonization, transformation, mobilization, and healing" (Merriam, 2016, p. 113). Centering on the knowledge of research participants may assist in bringing visibility to issues of power, privilege, and oppression and how they are reflected in the lived experiences of black mixed-race women and how they may influence self-conception. It was necessary to ask participants questions that specifically made references to the development of their racial identities and self-conceptions as well as their conceptions of healing. Open-ended questions were beneficial as they prevent the use of leading questions that may reflect researcher bias. Furthermore, probing questions were used in order to get more details, clarification, or examples of the information being provided by participants.

A focus group was chosen as it compliments feminist research by centering the voices of underrepresented and disadvantaged social groups through providing them an opportunity to engage in participatory research and consciousness-raising (Wilkinson, 2004). The focus group provided a space for black mixed-race women to interact with one another and with the researcher in order to derive more interactive data in contrast to individual interviews (Wilkinson, 2004). Conducting a focus group was appropriate for this research study because it provides a more "natural" setting to engage in and examine every day social interactions that reflect on the social lives of black mixed-race women in order to come to a collective or mutual understanding of the different individual experiences and identities being analyzed. According to Wilkinson (2004), "the social context of focus group provides an opportunity to examine how people engage in generating meaning, how opinions are formed, expressed, and (sometimes)

modified within the context of discussion and debate with others,” (p. 277). Therefore, focus groups provide the researcher with an opportunity to not only participate in, but to witness the co-construction of knowledge undertaken by the participants in the group as an outsider to the process.

This outsider perspective becomes possible through the research participants’ abilities to reduce the power and control the researcher has over the flow and direction of the conversation (Wilkinson, 2004). This is a crucial component of the research study as it shifts and emphasizes the point of view of the research participants, allowing them to describe and define their material realities, feelings, knowledge, and overall agenda in their own language (Wilkinson, 2004). Furthermore, it provides research participants with the opportunity to denote the themes most important to them, effectively controlling the direction of the data analysis and emerging findings (Wilkinson, 2004). Additionally, the central component of consciousness-raising in the study served to inform potential social and political action:

Feminist researchers using focus group work in this way hope that, through meeting together with others and sharing experience and through realizing group commonalities in what had previously been considered individual and personal problems, women will develop a clearer sense of the social and political processes through which their experiences are constructed and perhaps also a desire to organize against them (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 285).

This study also analyzed extant documents. Document data was collected from online social media posts on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter that contained information that acted as supporting evidence to the data that emerged from individual interviews and the focus group.

Data Analysis

The interviews and focus group were audio recorded on a laptop and transcribed verbatim to ensure the most accurate and concise collection of data and its preservation. Building rapport

is a crucial component of decreasing the uneasiness that may arise due to the use of recording which assists in ensuring the quality and accuracy of data being collected (Merriam, 2016). All data was preserved on a Microsoft Word document as well as a Google Docs document as backup data storage. Data analysis followed the two phases of grounded theory coding: initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz, 2014).

Initial coding involves the researcher “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111). Initial codes are used to assist the researcher in separating data into categories that allow them to examine processes. Coding with gerunds incorporates action in the analysis process and is used to explain how people respond to and derive meaning from actions or events and why these actions, events and meanings arise to better explicate the phenomena (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher conducted data analysis initially through line-by-line coding of the interview and focus group transcripts. The researcher engaged in memo-writing during the line-by-line coding process to assist in data analysis and the development of codes into categories to avoid taking comments made by participants at face value (Charmaz, 2014). The codes that arose from line-by-line initial coding are refined into more focused codes through conducting the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014). The comparative method allows the researcher to compare data and identify segments that address research questions and reveal information regarding themes, patterns, findings, and answers to research questions (Merriam, 2016). Furthermore, the constant comparative method ensures that the researcher is making connections between the interviews, focus group, and extant document data (Merriam, 2016).

In focused coding, the researcher tests the strength and adequacy of initial codes by comparing them to determine which codes fit tightly with the data collected. If there are codes

that do not fit well with the data, the researcher must ask different questions and gather further data to heighten the analytic level of the codes (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, the most frequent or most significant initial codes are used to analyze and organize larger amounts of data into more focused codes or categories that lead to making phenomena that people experience or witness explicit so that it may be conceptualized within the development of a grounded theory based on the themes and findings that emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2014).

To promote the trustworthiness of the study, a reflexive journal was also kept throughout the interview and coding processes to ensure the transferability and dependability of the study (Lynham, 2011). Furthermore, five researchers with varied experience assisted with coding the data to triangulate the data analysis, ensuring the credibility and reliability of the findings. Additionally, to ensure confirmability of the findings, black mixed-race women were invited to a public presentation of the research findings in order to provide feedback on the accuracy and reliability of the data analysis which was then incorporated into the discussions chapter (Lynham, 2011).

Limitations

There is a major gap in the scholarship on both mixed-race identity development and concepts of healing. Because the basis for creating healing practices relies on an accurate analysis of how black mixed-race women develop either a positive or negative self-conception, the gaps in the literature may hinder the possibility of developing useful healing practices that address negative self-conception. Additionally, due to the researcher's position in the "insider group" as a black mixed-race woman, researcher assumptions and biases about the material realities of black mixed-race women had the potential to shape the questions being asked and the data being utilized or privileged in the construction of theory. Furthermore, the accuracy of the

data collected from interviews and the focus group are subject to participants' biases, beliefs, values, judgments, and personal knowledge and may reflect their own personal agendas. The time constraints placed on the interview and focus group sessions may have limited opportunities to have further discussions that illuminate new pieces of data that may be beneficial in the construction of healing practices which would also promote the study's credibility (Lynham, 2011). Furthermore, time constraints may have negatively impacted the ability of the researcher and research participants to construct a more radical and critical analysis and vision for social and political action (Maguire, 2014).

In order to protect confidentiality and to avoid researcher bias, interview and focus group questions did not specifically address particular social identities, with the exception of race and/or ethnicity, which may have also placed limitations on gathering data that provides a more in-depth intersectional analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The themes that emerged from the data were collected and analyzed from semi-structured individual interviews, a semi-structured focus group, and posts on the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook that address the topic of mixed-race identity development. The following themes with incorporated sub-themes emerged from the data with an overarching theme of the borderlands: external oppression representative of a stance position; internal responses to oppression representative of a counterstance position; proximity to whiteness representative of both external oppression and internal responses to oppression; and creating a third space towards a position of disidentification.

External Oppression: Stance Position

The first major theme that arose from the data was that the identity development process of black mixed-race women was predominantly influenced by racial and class oppression they faced from external sources representative of the hegemonic or dominant “stance” position in U.S. society. Analyzing external sources of oppression denoted the way that U.S. hegemony marginalizes black mixed-race women of color through reinforcing monoraciality through a black-and-white dualistic lens. The following sub-themes explicate the disproportionate impact that external racial and class oppressions have had on the identity development of black mixed-race women: internalizing monoraciality; mixed-race invisibility; and *definitely can't claim white*: never white no matter what.

Sub-Theme: Internalizing Monoraciality

One of the major sub-themes identified by black mixed-race women in the study was the constant and pervasive pressure to perform external constructs of monoraciality rather than

publicly embracing and embodying a mixed-race identity. Performing monoraciality represents a de facto or unspoken rule in which “choosing one” racial designation to identify oneself with is normalized in U.S. culture. Furthermore, monoraciality is taught to black mixed-race women for varied purposes such as learning the cultures and histories of monoracial groups, reinforcing racial stereotypes, and as a method of survival in a society that classifies and assigns monoracial identities phenotypically.

Speaking to the external pressures to identify monoracially, one black mixed-race woman in the study identified how she has been socialized to accept external monoracial constructs:

I would think it could be because we are then forced to choose all our lives, you know? And it's never seemed, at least to me, it's never seemed like, like an issue, like 'how dare you make me choose if I'm black or white.' Like oh, I can pick one? Mmm, I'll go with this one. So maybe it's just kind of like it's okay with them so it's not in the forefront of anyone's mind like 'hey you know what? That's not okay.' You know? I do need to advocate that I'm, you know, mixed-race. I'm more than just one racial identity (Research Participant, 2017).

Despite acknowledging the external pressures that “force [them] to choose” a monoracial identity over the course of their lives, perceiving an opportunity to “pick one” dismisses any accountability for external others that perpetuate monoraciality. The process of monoracializing mixed-race persons is thus allowed to occur because it is normalized in society. Additionally, addressing a need to advocate for mixed-race identity attests to the lack of public recognition or discourse on mixed-race identity in the United States. Further delineating the influence of external monoracial constructs on the identity development process she further explicated, “what I've kind of learned is I have like had to only choose one but it's not even I get to choose,” (Research Participant, 2017). Through analyzing her own identity development process, she was able to deconstruct the initial process of identity development as an external monoracial projection being placed onto her. For one of the research participants in the study, this process of

assigning a monoracial identity occurs through an attempt to align one's physical features with those perceived phenotypes of particular monoracial groups. She stated, "externally, I feel that the authenticity comes from physical features... There would be times where I would go into the NACC and would psych myself out because I would say internally that I don't look Native American, (Research Participant, 2017). Several participants in the study discussed the "authenticity" of their racial identities being tied to their phenotypic appearances. If they did not feel that they had particular physical features that align with a particular monoracial group, their group membership in that monoracial community became inauthentic, causing them to position themselves as individuals outside of the community. Despite having Native American heritage, the aforementioned research participant didn't feel they had an "authentic" enough physical appearance to claim their Native American heritage or racial identity. Assigning mixed-race individuals to monoracial groups based on physical characteristics enforces false notions about what a monoracial group is expected to look like phenotypically, while being unable to account for the physical appearances of mixed-race individuals that may have more physically ambiguous appearances. Furthermore, assigning individuals to monoracial groups by phenotype dismisses those black mixed-race women that identify their racial identities based on other factors such as familial influences including upbringing and interpersonal relationships with parents.

In tandem with using physical appearances to assign black mixed-race individuals to monoracial groups, the acknowledgement of one's black heritage becomes a major signifier for externally assigning a monoracial black identity. For example, black mixed-race individuals in the mainstream media predominantly identify and represent a monoracial black identity, hindering opportunities for public validation and embodiment of black mixed-race identity. One

woman in the study expressed her frustrations in only having exposure to black monoracial representation from black mixed-race celebrities in the media:

Like, for me like Tia and Tamera, Shemar Moore... Colin Kaepernick like when I learn about mixed-race people in the media at least, I get really excited. I'm like 'okay, let me follow them, let me see what they're doing' cause it's like I don't want to be in media but at least there's someone that looks like me but then like the flip side is like in some of the shows they're on, they're just seen as like black, you know? So, it's like 'oh, you're mixed-race but you're not, your character isn't a biracial identity.' So, like I relate. At least you're in the profession but you're not portraying the character of your race. (Research Participant, 2017).

Reflecting on the lack of public recognition of mixed-race identity in the media denotes how extensively the influence and normalization of externally constructed monoracial identities permeates throughout our society. Many black mixed-race women in the study also addressed the role of discourse on black history that is taught in k-12 education that has failed to create meaningful opportunities to connect with their own black history and culture within the U.S. One participant reflected on the frustration of learning black history through an externally constructed monoracial lens stating:

The first time I learned about my history was in 9th grade, African American history with [teacher's name]. But with that, it was a very scripted narrative of African American history. So, from that experience I didn't understand who I was and it left me more confused about my identity than anything (Research Participant, 2017).

The "scripted narrative" of African American history provided through public education institutions in the U.S. may be utilized as a method of providing an incomplete or inaccurate perception of black history in the United States. Furthermore, for black mixed-race women, lacking opportunities to discuss the history of black mixed-race individuals within the discourse on black history may leave them feeling underrepresented, misrepresented, or disconnected from their black culture and history. Providing a possible explanation for the process of monoracializing black mixed-race persons as black, one participant drew from the history of the

one drop rule stating that “if you have a drop of black in you, they see you as black. So, there aren’t celebrations of you being mixed. They’re kind of like speed-bumps,” (Research Participant, 2017). While reiterating a lack of public recognition or validation of a mixed-race designation or identity, the participant also acknowledges the fact that being externally recognized and labelled as a black woman creates challenges based on her monoracial black designation. Another black mixed-race woman in the study reflected on being taught growing up how being externally monoracialized as a black woman would inform her treatment and lived experiences stating, “when you go in the real world, they’re gonna see like black. So, they’re not gonna to treat you like biracial. They’re gonna treat you black,” (Research Participant, 2017). Deconstructing their treatment as externally monoracialized black women denoted the negative connotations associated with blackness in the United States. One participant in the study addressed one of the negative impacts being assigned a black identity has had in her own life stating, “because of the color of my skin I still feel put into a lesser group so it does give me anxiety and makes me feel like the center of attention. Not an outcast, what’s it called? A pariah,” (Research Participant, 2017). Blackness becomes aligned with “otherness,” a subordinate position and a demarcation from what is perceived as the norm. Within the U.S. racial hierarchy, the othering and subordination of black people represents the racial oppression imbued on them by the dominant white racial class indicating a black-versus-white duality where blackness necessarily goes against what is perceived as normal and superior. Additionally, it delineates the centrality of racism in some of their experiences navigating an externally assigned monoracial black identity. As one participant reflected, being perceived as a black woman contributed to instances of facing overt outdated racism as she recalled an interaction with an

individual that identified her using racial slurs probing her with questions such as, “‘oh, you’re black?’ Or ‘oh, so you’re part Nigger?’” (Research Participant, 2017).

Based on the negative connotation associated with black people in the United States, many of the black mixed-race women in the study either grew up being taught by family members how to navigate and survive the anti-black racism in society or learned about it directly from exposure to incidents of racism. For some women, their experiences of monoracial anti-black racism caused them to identify more saliently with their black identities. For one woman in the study, discriminatory policing practices and increased visibility of incidents of police brutality became central to her mother teaching her about how to remain safe when navigating anti-black institutional racism:

That’s like something we’ve always talked about in my family like making sure we are aware of like our rights like I have this thing in my car my stepdad gave me for my birthday. It was the sweetest thing. It like has my name on it and it has like a list of like, like my rights and so like it’s right there on my dashboard. So if I get pulled over I’m like ‘you’re not allowed to do that, sir.’ Like you know, so like I feel like a lot more comfortable with it just the thought of it. You know, like I thought at first it was silly but then like I did get pulled over and I was like ‘oh my god.’ I was crying and I was like ‘can I call my dad please?’ like, and the officer he was so nice and I was like, I felt bad after for acting the way I did but then again like the fact that that is like what I feel when like they come around, that’s just like a natural response. Like, it’s not like I had to be taught. It’s like, when I bluntly have seen the way that they act towards minorities, it’s something that I’m, I do get worried cause like I, I mean I do like, I don’t mean to be but I feel like sometimes I say things with an attitude and I was like ‘girl, I would hate to say something the wrong way,’ and like something go wrong. Because like at the end of the day whenever I leave the house my mom is like ‘remember your only job is to come back,’ (Research Participant, 2017).

One participant in the study discussed growing up in a salient black household where her blackness was imbued with a strong sense of pride and lessons about how to behave, dress, and navigate society as a black woman reflecting:

We talked about being black and what you have to do, how you have to act, the things you can’t just do. So, we talked about being black. We didn’t really have discussions that needed to be had...I took pride in my heritage because my family put a lot of pride in our

identity because it's so hard being black. However, we did talk about how being black impacts ability to go to college but it wasn't heavy or in-depth conversation. It was like 'oh you're black so you have to be careful how you dress,' 'oh if you go to an interview make sure you don't wear your hair like that.' It wasn't a conversation about why those things occur and the effects those would have on me in my life to come. It was just 'oh don't do this' and because of that it caused me to dislike my hair and skin sometimes to the point I don't want to be black and that's a huge issue because even though we took pride in who we are, it backfired and kept us from talking about the big issues and why they're prevalent (Research Participant, 2017).

While engaging in discussions about how one must carry themselves in order to survive as a black person in the United States through altering their physical appearance to appear more “appropriate” in public and professional settings, for example, an in-depth analysis of systematic racism and the underlying causes of the system of racial oppression were not provided. The effect of only discussing methods of survival through altering one's appearance and behavior to distance themselves from the negative connotations associated with blackness contributed to internalized oppression which created a level of self-hate of one's own blackness which is devalued in society. The need to perform behaviors and physical appearance in order to survive attests to the need to disrupt particular stereotypes associated with black identity. One black mixed-race woman in the study addressed her inability to avoid being characterized within the “mad black woman” trope where it is assumed that black women are naturally aggressive, angry and need to have control over others or situations. She reminisced on an instance of racism she had recently faced by an employee at a local business who characterized her within this stereotype, becoming both verbally and physically aggressive towards her:

He just looks at me and says 'are you having a bad day?' and getting really hostile towards me and I just started ignoring it and he kept yelling, 'are you having a bad day?' And he started throwing trash into my car. That's the part I mostly remember. He threw trash into my car and I started throwing it back and asking what his problem is and he said a bunch of stuff that led up to saying 'I cannot wait until Trump is president' and it was completely out of left field, out of nowhere (Research Participant, 2017).

A crucial component of the intensified aggression and overt racism experienced by this black mixed-race woman was the influence of U.S. President Donald Trump who has infamously continued to spout racist rhetoric that has resulted in increased acts of overt racialized violence and aggression from his fan base against people of color and other marginalized communities. As another participant reflected on these perceptions against the black community, she explicated the impact these stereotypes have on hindering the upward socioeconomic mobility of black folks stating that “they start to have a perception about black people and it causes a bias which then affects how black people are viewed in the world and inhibits us from being successful in many aspects of our lives,” (Research Participant, 2017).

Sub-Theme: Mixed-Race Invisibility

As a result of the hegemonic monoracial discourse in the United States, there is a lack of public recognition of mixed-race individuals and mixed-race identity. This contributes to a lack of a readily available definitions or examples of how embodying a mixed-race identity manifests in mixed-race persons. This creates mixed-race invisibility or an inability to recognize or acknowledge mixed-race identity in the public sphere due to an over-emphasizing of monoraciality and monoracial identities. One black mixed-race woman in the study discussed the pressure to only discuss and identify with monoracial identities despite an increase in the mixed-race population stating, “It’s something that is thrown under the rug. It’s not talked about-mixed-race women because we are constantly thinking about people who identify with just one identity which doesn’t make sense because we are moving into a world that is going to be a lot more mixed-race people,” (Research Participant, 2017). Another participant in the study echoed her frustration about not having opportunities to discuss what it means to be mixed-race in the U.S. stating:

We never give space like, ‘what does it mean to be biracial in this society? What does it mean to be black and white? Black and, you know, Mexican? You know? Whatever you may be besides just black, you know? So, definitely just conversations about race, I would just talk about ‘yeah, this is what it means to be black and this and that,’ but never like what it means to be me (Research Participant, 2017).

The lack of public discourse on mixed-race identity overall suggests an inability for mixed-race individuals to identify as mixed-race due to an inability to locate a definition of mixed-race identity that they can embody and perform. Instead, mixed-race individuals are left with monoracial definitions of identity that don’t necessarily embody the complexities of their racial identities in their entireties. Their mixed-race invisibility in the public sphere thus may contribute to a lack of self-conception regarding what embodying or identifying with their own mixed-race identity looks like leaving them to ask questions such as “what does it mean to be me?” As one participant reflected, one effect of this lack of self-conception of mixed-race identity is that mixed-race individuals may not have a positive relationship with their mixed-race identity:

I feel like it’s just not that like that like I guess like not being able to like really like 100% truly love who you are because you don’t really necessarily know who you are. I feel like it’s harder for us like as mixed-race people to like really accept who we are because like even just like being like saying that I’m biracial, it’s like, okay? Like but what does that mean? (Research Participant, 2017).

Seeking out public definitions of mixed-race identity in order to identify with and have a positive self-conception of one’s mixed-race identity seems to denote the necessity of having publicly available, externally constructed definitions of mixed-race identity to align with. In order to contend with the need for an external definition of mixed-race identity, one black mixed-race woman in the study suggested an increase in mixed-race discourse denoting:

I’m not sure because I don’t know if there is a lot of readings or research on the subject. If there is I don’t know if the general public knows. I just feel like it doesn’t exist. Maybe I’m wrong, but to me it’s just not there. It’s something that nobody wants to acknowledge. If there is more information on it I would feel more validation and I would feel like I would belong more (Research Participant, 2017).

Seeking out a public definition of mixed-race identity for validation delineates the importance of externally constructed racial identities for external validation, displaying the pervasiveness and centrality of external perceptions and constructions of race. Furthermore, it highlights a lack of internalization of the process of identity development in mixed-race individuals.

For another black mixed-race woman in the study, the lack of visibility and external validation of her mixed-race identity made her feel othered in a dehumanizing way which left her feeling unseen:

At [university] when I first got there it was like a zoo and I was like the zoo animal and everyone was there to see it. Like, walking on campus people would smile at each other but they wouldn't smile at me. That's when I needed to join the multicultural groups because that's the biggest negative I've ever felt and I wanted to disappear. Like I felt invisible because people would look past me and not at me...campus could have been like black and white and nobody would tell (Research Participant, 2017).

The effect of her mixed-race identity not being acknowledged created a dehumanizing effect where her humanity was measured and acknowledged by her ability to fit into monoracial categories such as black or white. This dehumanizing effect on mixed-race individuals has been reiterated by one Twitter user who stated, "when I have to talk to blacks or mixed race women, I am so distracted by the sense that they are not really human that I can't concentrate on the conversation. Black men affect me a little differently because all men have authenticity," (Twitter, 2017). This comment by a Twitter user denotes the way that the invisibility of black mixed-race women and black women stems from both their racial and gender identities as multiply marginalized women of color. For people of color, their invisibility may stem from the inability for their own humanity to be acknowledged and validated by members of dominant monoracial white and male racial and gendered categories. This statement may suggest that black mixed-race women face disproportionately higher struggles in asserting their multiply marginalized identities in comparison to black mixed-race men who have access to male

privilege within a patriarchal society that allows their humanity to be recognized and seen through their masculinity.

Sub-Theme: “Definitely Can’t Claim White:” Never Really White No Matter What

For the black mixed-race participants in the study who were also white, they identified an inability to publicly identify with their white racial identities due to external invalidation of their whiteness. Because they were externally perceived and identified as women of color due to their black racial identities, many of the women felt pressured into “defaulting” to blackness in order for their racial identities to be validated. For the black mixed-race women in the study who aligned or identified more with their white identities, particularly those raised by single white mothers, this contributed to an inability for their racial self-conceptions to be validated. As one participant in the study explicated, “you could be raised by white parents but the rest of the world still sees you as black,” (Research Participant, 2017). This external perception reinforces the one-drop rule in which having black heritage automatically aligns black mixed-race individuals with salient monoracial black identities. Furthermore, the incredulity around their membership in the white community as racially white individuals highlights the use of a black-and-white dualistic lens in which black and white racial identities are positioned as mutually exclusive, invalidating their simultaneous belonging in both racial groups. One participant in the study discussed an experience in which her own whiteness was invalidated based on her membership in the black community:

I was I think a senior in high school and my teacher was like doing attendance and so she clicks on my name or whatever and says like [participant’s name] come over here, you know? So, I come over and she’s like laughing and she’s like ‘did you know that they like labelled you as white on here?’ And I was like ‘what why’d they do that?’ you know as if like I couldn’t be white, you know? So, what I’ve kind of learned is I have like had to only choose one but it’s not even I get to choose (Research Participant, 2017).

The external invalidation of her white racial identity and her perceived inability to choose her own racial identity further supports the centrality of external constructs of monoracial identities in the identity development process. Additionally, her experience reiterates the perceived mutual exclusivity of black and white racial identities, positioning them dualistically as opposing racial identities that necessarily cannot or should not “mix.” This suggests a possible disdain for black-and-white racial mixing within the public sphere.

For the black mixed-race women who were raised by single white mothers, the inability to identify or align with their white racial identities had the most significant impact on their racial self-conceptions. One black mixed-race woman in the study identified her struggle with her white identity being invalidated because of her lack of connection or self-conception with her black identity:

I think for me it's like really hard to identify like with the black community. I was raised by my mom; my dad left my mom so I was just raised by my mom as well. And then she went to Denver and I was raised in Littleton, Colorado and there were maybe like three people that were black in my high school out of like a couple hundred people in my grade. So, I like never like had any black culture or anything like I've always kind of like seen myself more as like in the white community but you know the white community, they're always like 'honestly like I'm not white.' So, it's like I can never really be and I'm always kind of like the voice for the black community like I remember in my class like a teacher asking me like how they should refer to black people like I just like I wouldn't know but yeah (Research Participant, 2017).

Because she was raised by her white mother in a predominantly white community, she felt a stronger connection to her white identity and a lack of connectivity with her black identity, making it difficult to be externally positioned as a black woman. However, because she is a black mixed-race woman, she was automatically externally identified and treated as a monoracial black woman, seeming to prohibit her from aligning publicly with her white identity or community with which she felt a stronger connection. Another woman in the study addressed her frustration in not being able to receive public validation of her white identity stating, “I don't really navigate

them. I just pick black. I can't say I'm any kind of white and get away with it so I just pick black. I also ignored both my whole life. I never really claimed one, I just claimed [participant's name],” (Research Participant, 2017). Her inability to “get away with” claiming her white identity again suggests the centrality of external constructions and projections of monoracial identity and the use of a black-and-white dualistic lens when assigning monoracial identities to mixed-race persons. Additionally, her choice to “ignore both” and “never really claim one” displays a mapping out of colorblind ideology, an ideology of whiteness in which whiteness is normalized as a deracialized identity. This highlights the way that black mixed-race women are automatically positioned against whiteness or the “norm” due to their marginalized positions as women of color, again reinforcing a duality of the “normal” dominant identity and marginalized people of color identities across color lines. The participant further discusses the incredulity that disallows her from aligning with her whiteness stating, “I guess black because I definitely can't claim white. People would look at me funny. It would be like the woman working for the NAACP,” (Research Participant, 2017). The pervasiveness of the black-and-white racial duality within the public sphere contributed to a lack of racial authenticity despite her membership within both the black and white communities she belongs to. Because of the external invalidation and incredulity around her white identity, she feels that claiming her white identity is the equivalent of a white woman performing blackness through blackface and other methods of performativity as if she was not really white, despite being raised by her single white mother.

In tandem with external invalidation of their white identities, black mixed-race women in the study also identified their experiences as black women facing anti-black racism and additional experiences as black women that have further distanced them from their white identities. For example, one participant in the study reflected on her white mother teaching her

that her blackness would play a defining role in her external identification and treatment navigating U.S. society:

Well like my mom, it was very apparent that she's white and I'm black and she would always tell me, 'you're black. People will look at you differently when you go here.' That's why I don't identify with white. I always just felt like I'm human. I don't really put a kind of label but if I have to, I check the African-American box (Research Participant, 2017).

Because of the external perception of her black identity, she conceded to identifying as a black woman in situations that required her to publicly identify her race. For another woman in the study who grew up in a black mixed-race household with a salient black identity, she distanced herself from her whiteness as she identified the nuances of socioeconomic experiences, opportunities and struggles that white people and black people navigate in the United States overall:

The main things I see is in my own communities, kids who think they can't go to school because they're poor and that's a result of the opportunities not given to them and people feeding into 'you're not going to do anything because you're black' and people not willing to help youth of color. People of color tend to struggle more. You see it especially here at school; you see white people complain about cancelled vacations or no phone. People of color are worried about tuition or sending money home or someone they know were shot but they can't leave school. The world was set up to ostracize people of color (Research Participant, 2017).

While reiterating a black-and-white racial duality, she takes into consideration varying class positions and opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility that are largely determined by racial positions. Choosing to distance herself from her own white identity stemmed from the recognition of a racial hierarchy that places whiteness in a position of dominance through disproportionate access to socioeconomic resources and opportunities. Her inability to identify with a position of racial dominance through access to institutional resources because of her status as a woman of color contributed to her conscious decision to disidentify with her whiteness.

Internal Responses to Oppression: Counterstance Position

The second major theme that arose from the data was that the internalization of the identity development process of black mixed-race women was influenced by racial and cultural oppression they faced from external sources representative of the hegemonic or dominant “stance” position in U.S. society. Despite their attempts to internalize and claim autonomy over their identity development processes, many black mixed-race women in the study continued to rely on externally constructed monoracial identities representative of a dominant stance position to construct their own racial identities. This approach to internalizing the racial identity process is representative of a counterstance position. The counterstance position is demarcated by their attempts to oppose the externally constructed monoracial identities being mapped out onto them by the stance position, while still using the externally constructed monoracial identities of that position to construct new racial identities. This represents a counterstance approach because in utilizing the same tools of the stance position, black mixed-race women are unable to disrupt the racial hierarchy that classifies and assigns them positions monoracially. The following sub-theme: *you can't rep that culture cause you know nothing about it*, will be analyzed in order further explicate this counterstance position.

Sub-Theme: “You Can't Rep that Culture Cause You Know Nothing About It”

In order to contend with the racial dissonance experienced around their racial identities, some black mixed-race women in the study attempted to connect with their racial and ethnic cultures as a method of embracing and embodying their mixed-race identities. Many women in the study perceived cultural connectivity as a crucial component of racial authenticity and sought to combine components of their various racial and cultural heritages in order to both gain membership into their monoracial communities and to claim their mixed-race identities. For

many black mixed-race women in the study, culture became central to being able to stake their claim in particular racial or ethnic groups. One black-and-Mexican mixed woman in the study discussed the impact her lack of cultural connectivity has had on her ability to claim all components of her identity stating, “I’ve always gone through like this emotional trauma like ‘am I allowed to say like I’m Mexican?’ in that sense because I don’t really know the story of me like all I know is my grandma is Mexican but does that make me Mexican?” (Research Participant, 2017). Another mixed-race identified woman in the study discussed her dissonance around claiming her black and white racial identities due her lack of cultural participation in the black community and the German ethnic community:

I know for like my mom, she’s white and her ancestors are from Germany. So, something I try to do is like learn a little more about German culture and the food and stuff just to like cause I wanna have kids. So, I at least want to have an idea of that side. So that’s the only way I try to identify with my white side. With my black side, my dad’s side of the family, they’re African American. We don’t really do, I mean culturally, like we don’t do anything like culturally. It’s just like ‘oh hey, family.’ Good to know. Yeah and maybe that’s why, part of the reason why I feel this kind of disconnection with my black side and my white side too. But it’s like, I’m not really sure how to be in the culture (Research Participation, 2017).

The racial dissonance of being unable to publicly identify with her white racial identity created a desire to connect with the white racial community through her German ethnic culture. Utilizing culture as a means of contending with racial dissonance may also signal an attempt to distance oneself from their monoracial group designation that acts as an externally oppressive force. For example, one participant in the study aligned with her ethnic group in order to dismiss accountability for and distance herself from the role her white family members play in perpetuating racial oppression and benefitting from white privilege currently in the U.S. stating, “we were talking about slavery and I was like ‘oh my God, my mom’s white and my dad’s black. Why did my mom’s people enslave my dad’s people? But my mom’s side of the family is from

Germany so then I was like, well, nevermind,” (Research Participant, 2017). It is crucial to note that while there isn’t necessarily a white racial culture, the black community has its own cultural practices that stem from a history of coping with slavery and other manifestations of racial oppression. Because she was raised by a single white mother, lacking a connection with the black culture further contributed to her inability to identify with her black racial identity. However, the desire to pass on culture to her own family, a role predominantly taken on by women within our patriarchal society, connecting with her cultures became central to embracing her own mixed identity.

Another effect the lack of cultural connectivity has had on some black mixed-race women in the study is a lack of self-conception. Thus, cultural connectivity becomes an integral component of knowing the self and being able to embrace one’s own mixed-race identity. Another black identified participant in the study reflected on her dissonance around publicly embracing her Native American and Puerto Rican heritages due to her lack of cultural knowledge and participation in either racial or ethnic culture:

It’s been an up and down battle especially for me as I don’t know about who I am or my mixed-race heritage. I always identified as black. That’s what I grew up around and what I knew about. Not knowing who I am has been a battle. Not experiencing that culture and growing up with it was a battle because people were like ‘you can’t rep that culture cause you know nothing about it.’ So, it’s like I can’t be who I am because I don’t know who I am and they still don’t accept who I am (Research Participant, 2017).

Her lack of cultural connectivity with groups outside of the black community created a sense of inauthenticity around claiming her other racial and ethnic identities. Furthermore, she demarcates cultural connectivity as a necessary component of receiving external validation of her mixed-race identity, reiterating the centrality of external forces on the identity development process. For another black identified participant navigating what it means to identify outside of external

constructions of race, the influence of external sources of validation of her cultural identity contributed to a sense of not knowing how to embody or represent her mixed-race identity:

First time, I thought I was wrong. I went home and I cried about it. I ended up having different thoughts come to me saying ‘I could have said it differently. There’s a better way I could have communicated that. That constant back and forth of not feeling like I represented myself or people like me the right way (Research Participant, 2017).

In looking to cultural definitions of what it means to show up in her different cultures, she felt inauthentic in her own mixed-race identity. This suggests a continuous need to seek out external definitions of not only racial but cultural identity groups in order to piece together a mixed-race identity which hinders them from successfully opposing external influences on their identity development processes. She further explicated the purpose of enforcing a cultural connectivity requirement in order to embrace her mixed-race identity and gain group membership access into her monoracial and cultural communities stating:

It’s a way to not only push us out of our bodies but chopping us into pieces, scattering those pieces all over to where you may find one piece but know that you’re still incomplete because all these other pieces are still out there, still not having access to where you could find those pieces, living in this illusion that you’re never whole, never fully complete, you’re never fully authentic enough. You’re just never enough (Research Participant, 2017).

While the stance position required internalizing externally constructed monoracial identities for authenticity and validation, the counterstance position requires internalizing externally constructed cultural identities for authenticity and validation. In both instances, despite turning to culture to distance themselves from external racial constructs, some of the mixed-race women in the study continue to seek out external validation and are still being externally assigned to particular racial and cultural groups. The impact of this approach is a sense of inauthenticity and dissonance around their mixed-race identity which leaves them feeling incomplete, contributing to a negative self-conception around their mixed-race status. In order to address and improve this

negative self-conception, many black mixed-race women in the study felt it necessary to teach themselves more about their cultural groups through engaging them in order to identify authentically with their various racial and ethnic groups:

I have multiple different-Native American and Puerto Rican backgrounds-and if I were to be asked I would tell people 'yeah that's who I am,' but at the same time I wouldn't throw it in peoples' face like 'oh I'm Native,' 'oh I'm Puerto Rican' because I don't know-I don't know the culture. I had to teach myself about the culture so within my Native American and Puerto Rican heritage; I identify with them but don't connect with them if that makes sense. I don't say that I am necessarily but if I had to fill out an application for example I would refrain from sharing that information (Research Participation, 2017).

In order to claim their position in the various racial and ethnic groups they belong to, learning about and participating in the culture became necessary, especially when claiming their mixed-race identities. For one black-and-white mixed race woman in the study, she felt participation in cultural events and celebrations were necessary to connect with her black racial identity which she had felt predominantly disconnected from:

Part of the reason why I feel this kind of disconnection with my black side and my white side too but it's like I'm not really sure how to be in the culture or to kind of like celebrate like Juneteenth, I've always wanted to go to that. I still haven't but I feel like if I were to go to a Juneteenth celebration that would help me better understand my black culture (Research Participation, 2017).

In order to claim a mixed-race identity, many of the women in the study felt it necessary to engage in the work necessary to integrate both of their cultures together into a mixed- identity:

That was basically like the biggest impact of black love in my life that my mom, even though she had these ill feelings for my father during this time, she had enough love for me as a black child to raise me to know like 'you're not just me. You're your dad too. So, you need to have your dad's culture. And so, as a woman whose Mexican went out of her way to teach her biracial kid about black customs knowing nothing about it and learning a lot from it herself. I'm like, I like thank her so much for it like even like back then I didn't appreciate it as much but now I definitely do. But it's like sadder too just because I don't really feel I guess like a cultural connection in the sense of like knowing where I come from type of thing and that's always hard because when it's, when you're being black it's like 'where are you from?' Like, that's one thing like it's like 'I don't know.' I would love to know. I think default I always go with black but I've got a lot of love for

my Mexican side and that's why like I feel like it's like my goal, it's like my job to just to like want to learn more because it's not fair for me to just be like 'oh, yeah. I'm black' like naw I should be like able to like immense both and be like living the life like that rather than just being like 'oh I'm black' but my mom is Mexican. That's makes no sense, like I'm biracial. That's like what I'm working toward (Research Participant, 2017).

While participating in her black culture has been an integral component of her positive self-conception regarding her black identity, her lack of connectivity with her Mexican culture became an area of importance in being able to embrace both identities simultaneously. One component of connecting with her Mexican culture was learning the Spanish language as she reflected, "for me it's like I've got to get out of my comfort zone and be like 'okay I'm learning Spanish' and also I'm gonna do this and this and this and I'm like feel like I'm kind of going out of my way to be more Mexican and that like, that kind of makes me feel weird," (Research Participant, 2017). Despite seeking out cultural knowledge and practices as a method of reconstructing their own mixed-race identities, working to teach themselves about their different racial and ethnic cultures continued to contribute to a sense of inauthenticity and a lack of self-conception or positive self-conception around their mixed-race identities. Although they were working to internalize the identity development process, the influence of external sources of validation continued to impact their own self-conceptions and identity development process through a false sense of requirement to engage on a cultural level with their various racial and ethnic groups.

Proximity to Whiteness: External Oppression and Internal Responses to Oppression

The third major theme that arose from the data was that the black mixed-race women's perceived proximity to whiteness, whether belonging to the white community or not, contributed to external racial, gendered, and sexual oppression and violence and internal responses to those forms of oppression and violence by aligning oneself with whiteness and ideologies of

whiteness. The significance of the proximity to whiteness is that this position enforces the duality of stance-and-counterstance positions. This particular position acts as a crossroads and demarcates the stage where the black mixed-race women either get stuck within the stance-counterstance duality in which they reinforce the counterstance position by utilizing external monoracial constructs or they begin moving outside of those positions. Moving towards a position of disidentification occurs through consciousness development of the various forms of oppression they face based on their proximity to whiteness, the dominant group within the racial hierarchy. Within this stage, rejecting whiteness and its external constructions of racial identity become critical in breaking with the stance-counterstance duality. The following sub-themes will map out both the external forms of oppression and violence and internal responses that result from the black mixed-race women's perceived proximity to whiteness: performing belonging in white spaces; *you're not one of them*: always outcast no matter what; mixed-race women as an extension of white longing and desire; and the seduction of whiteness.

Sub-Theme: Performing Belonging in White Spaces

Several participants in the study identified the impact that navigating and inhabiting white spaces has had on the external pressure they face to perform monoraciality for community access and membership. These racial performances stem from the pressure in white spaces to align with monoracial communities as a method of survival. In order to meet particular cultural and racial group expectations for group membership access, black mixed-race women perform race by altering their public racial identities, physical appearances and language. As one black mixed-race woman in the study reflected, "I think it means feeling like you have to conform to certain expectations and cultures because that's what you're used to. It's like a survival mechanism and for me that's something that I am good at. Adapting to different cultures, speech,

different ways people talk,” (Research Participant, 2017). Despite this attempt to align with their monoracial communities, a negative effect of performing race in white spaces is the internalization of racial oppression, predominantly around their physical appearances.

In juxtaposition to navigating more diverse and integrated racial communities, white spaces create pressure to pledge allegiance to one’s monoracial communities in order to prove their belonging for access to group membership. One participant in the study contrasted her experiences of navigating diverse spaces versus white spaces reflecting:

Where I’m from in Texas like the black community and the like Latino community there are very like incorporated. So, it’s almost like one in the same. So, like I never really felt like until I came into a space where there was white people that I had to choose whether I’m black or Mexican. And it’s funny too because like I don’t want to just choose at the end of the day because I’m both (Research Participant, 2017).

The impact of being forced to choose one community over the other illuminates the influence white spaces have over enforcing stringent group membership requirements such as choosing to perform monoraciality at the expense of embracing one’s mixed-race status. Further outlining the strict group membership requirements in monoracial communities, one black-and-white mixed-race participant in the study discussed the pressure to not only align with one group over another, but to be in an opposing position to her other racial community:

Coming to a predominantly white campus from being like in a very diverse place, it was just kind of like ‘well, what is this?’ And kind of like amplifying like ‘okay, this is what it means to be black’ and instead of like, you know moving away from blackness I kind of clung onto it even more and even started forming like a hatred for like what white is. Cause I know like for myself on campus, white people be acting disrespectful and I’m like ‘aw, here they go again acting a fool, acting crazy, you know, just very ignorant’ is how I feel. But you know that’s something I know that’s internal with me, you know? Just growing up I identified with black and so in order to identify as black, I don’t know why but it’s like ‘oh, I have to dislike white,’ (Research Participant, 2017).

A component of embracing and aligning oneself with their blackness seemed to necessitate taking an “anti-white” position despite also being racially white. This counterstance perpetuates

the black-and-white racial duality that automatically treats black and white communities as mutually exclusive and as necessary opponents. Additionally, because white spaces seem to increase experiences of anti-black racism, black mixed-race women may feel more inclined to identify with their black identities or other racially marginalized as women of color rather than feeling comfortable aligning with whiteness. Additionally, another impact of navigating white spaces is internalizing self-hate because of dominant perceptions that align black mixed-race women with racialized and gendered stereotypes. In discussing the ways that black mixed-race women are stereotyped as “mad black women” within the white gaze, one woman in the study addressed the internalization and influence of the white gaze on her ability to navigate her monoracial communities:

I think growing up in a white space it's almost like our brains have been molded to white washing in a sense...like I think white society tries to make that out to be like it's something wrong like being ourselves in a sense is being wrong and it's a stereotype and I feel like that's something critical that the black community does with a lot of like light-skinned women and like mixed women too (Research Participant, 2017).

While the dominant white racial group has mapped out racialized and gendered stereotypes onto black mixed-race women that aim to portray them as angry, aggressive, emotionally unstable, etc., utilizing racialized and gendered stereotypes become mirrored within the black community as well. In the black community, black mixed-race women are analyzed within tropes that mischaracterize black mixed-race women, such as the tragic mulatta trope. In these black communities within white spaces, they are being measured by inaccurate racial and gendered stereotypes that disallow them from being seen within all of their complexities. Instead, they are being placed into essentialized images of what it means to either be a black woman or a black mixed-race woman. Despite having a level of consciousness around these stereotypes and fixed characteristics that are being projected onto them, many black mixed-race women perform racial

belonging in their monoracial communities in order to receive external validation and acceptance. While not feeling that these fixed characteristics embody her own identity, one woman in the study spoke to why she feels pressure to perform racial belonging:

I think that society has projected this identity onto me that I'm this black, African American woman and when I'm in public, that's what I become...It's hard to fully align myself even in terms of if I would even be able to show up in that space. I know I carry multiple identities. I struggle to even define myself even through that language. I know those consequences if I don't define myself with any language, I wouldn't be seen...for me it represents the physical exterior. It doesn't necessarily represent my internal being. I think that's where I keep coming up against these walls and there's so much friction in terms of how I identify and use certain language...I feel like it's these projections of what society truly sees me as...I think this trying to materialize my identity into something for someone else, which I think is already problematic that I even try to do it for someone else. For me my ambiguity and my feelings of going back and forth, living in the 'borderlands,' comes from this constant tug and pull, trying to materialize for the external world and living outside myself as a result (Research Participant, 2017).

While aligning with the perceived fixed characteristics of monoracial communities did not embody her multiple identities, performing racial belonging becomes important for visibility within that space. In order to be seen within the community, performing through language and physical appearance become central to their ability to navigate monoracial spaces. However, the impact of this racial performance is a sense of inauthenticity and a negative self-conception as the performed racial identity does not encompass the complexities of the mixed-race woman's multiple identities. The pressure to perform fixed racial characteristics also denotes that society views individuals through a singular-axis lens in which their other identities such as gender identity, sexuality, able-bodied status, and class are not taken into account. This contributes to utilizing stereotypes that enforce essentialized notions of how individuals are expected to behave and thus impacts their treatment in which various forms of oppression are perpetuated.

One aspect of performing race is linguistic. Because white spaces enforce more stringent community membership requirements, language becomes a critical component of proving one's

belonging to their monoracial community. Speaking to the impact language has had on her membership in the Mexican community within Colorado, one participant stated “So, one thing I’ve noticed is even like the Latino like culture here is very different than like where I’m from. And so, like it’s hard for me to even like want to connect with them. It’s almost like if you don’t speak Spanish, you can’t chill with us type of thing,” (Research Participant, 2017). For several of the other black mixed-race women in the study, they engaged in code-switching in which they altered the way they spoke when addressing one monoracial community as opposed to another. While they were still speaking English while navigating their monoracial communities, the way they engaged was very different. For example, many of the women chose to engage in ebonics, a cultural and colloquial or informal conversational method of speech, while communicating with other members of the black community:

The way I talk with my black and white friends is different. Certain slang or what we call ebonics, I’m not going to say that to my white friends. With my white friends, I can’t sound as aggressive because black women are put on this angry black woman spectrum and I would unconsciously, I would change it up because I don’t want to give in to the stereotype but deep down I’m still angry about the stereotype (Research Participant, 2017).

While engaging in ebonics within the black community, many women in the study were adamant about their decision to alter their speech when speaking with white people in order to avoid being characterized within racialized and gendered stereotypes such as the “angry black woman” trope. When interacting with white people, performance became more about trying not to be placed into essentialized categories that negatively mischaracterize who they are.

Another aspect of performing race is through altering one’s physical appearance to align with perceived physical characteristics of monoracial communities. One participant in the study identified with trying to align herself with a black aesthetic through altering her hair which was perceived as having a more ambiguous look. She reflected, “my hair, my crown, my glory, it’s

definitely been a part of my experience because I have a very mixed texture. Growing up, I was trying to fit in as a black African American woman and I would dye my hair different colors and try different styles,” (Research Participant, 2017). The pressure of needing to alter ambiguous physical appearances speaks to public racial dissonance around not being able to assign individuals into fixed monoracial categories based on physical appearance. Furthermore, this attests to the use of imagined racial communities that rely on the use of essentialized understandings and physical appearances in order to better assign individuals to the major monoracial categories that may not fully encompass their identities. One mixed-race woman in the study provided insight as to where the pressures to perform race predominantly stemmed from:

I’m the only black person there and of course in that space I have to identify as ‘I’m the black person in this sorority’ and of course like talking to those girls is like I have to talk a certain way, look a certain way, wear certain things. ‘Oh, we can’t wear tight dresses because your butt’s too big.’ You know? Like those types of things. So, definitely depending on who I’m with, sometimes I feel like I have to switch it up (Research Participant, 2017).

The majority of women in the study felt pressured into performing belonging in white spaces by altering their physical appearances for the comfort of their white peers which involved mirroring a more eurocentric appearance. For this participant, she was pressured into wearing loose-fitted clothes that covered up her natural curves for the comfort of her sorority sisters. As a woman of color, her natural figure was being policed through a eurocentric lens that hypersexualizes women of color’s bodies because they tend to be more naturally curvy and full-figured. Another method of altering appearance for the comfort of white people is through straightening one’s hair to mirror a eurocentric model of beauty. Many women in the study identified straightening their hair because of pressure from their parents, especially white mothers, their peers, and society overall which displays images that predominantly position white individuals and white

appearances as the norm while people of color lack representation regarding their own aesthetics in the beauty industry and mainstream media. One mixed-race woman in the study reflected on the disdain she was met with when her hair became a topic of discussion stating, “I remember I went to [school name] for a long time and that’s like a really white space and like asking one of the girls to do my hair and she’s like ‘oh no, like I don’t even wanna touch your hair.’ Like my hair’s like not even that curly,” (Research Participant, 2017). Despite having loose curls, her hair was addressed as being “too curly” and too difficult to manage which is indicative of some of the other women’s experiences navigating public perceptions of their hair. Women with curlier or kinkier hair textures are often seen as having unruly, unkept, unprofessional or inappropriate hairstyles and may face discrimination through racialized and gendered policies that do not allow for them to wear their hair in natural or cultural styles that are more manageable and attractive to them, outside of eurocentric beauty standards. The impact of this perception of natural hair for women of color can be internalized self-hate due to an inability to align with eurocentric beauty standards, often glorified as the “norm” and more attractive physical appearance. The pressure to align with eurocentric beauty standards which glorify European appearances of lighter skin tones and fairer hair textures can have large negative impacts of women of color within white spaces that lack representation in the beauty industry and their communities:

And so now when I come here they’re like ‘man I wish I was your skin color. I’m like bro like the self-hate like it’s on every spectrum it’s just terrible. I’m like and it’s one thing I’ve noticed being here because Texas like dark-skinned women love like being dark-skinned like but it’s not like that here which is like weird because this is a whiter space so it is understandable in that sense (Research Participant, 2017).

Sub-Theme: “You’re Not One of Them:” Always Outcast No Matter What

While many of the black mixed-race women in the study struggled to perform monoraciality for group membership, many of them faced being consistently othered from the

communities they belong to based on a constant alignment with the other in the black-and-white racial duality. Despite not all of the women belonging to the white community, the misconception that “mixed” necessitates a black-and-white racial mixing caused some of them to be misaligned with whiteness. In tandem with enforcing a duality across racial lines, the duality of the oppressed-versus-oppressor power dynamic was also being enforced, contributing to the constant othering. The idea that belonging in one monoracial group automatically denies individuals membership in another group enforces the idea of “sticking to your own” monoracial community thus leaving black mixed-race women without a sense of community belonging within those monoracial groups. The idea of sticking to your own people reinforces monoracial divisions that treat monoracial groups as mutually exclusive. This created conflict among some of the parents of the black mixed-race women who questioned whether or not they were allowed to address issues that affected their children of color when it reflected their other racial identities:

My mom is like very reserved about it like sometimes she doesn't feel like she can speak on certain things much. I'm like, you know like, 'you kind of like, mom, you have like three whole black kids. Like, I think you're allowed to say something about black issues.' You know what I'm saying? Like, you know if something's, if someone's being shot you, you should be able to be like 'I'm pissed too,' (Research Participation, 2017).

A few of the mothers, both Mexican and white, struggled with contending with the anti-black racism their children experienced because they questioned their right to engage with those other racial identities. The impact of this engagement may include a sense of isolation in not feeling supported when it comes to issues that affect them based on particular monoracial or mixed-race identities they embody. Furthermore, because the black mixed-race women were seeking belonging in monoracial communities, they were constantly navigating messages that they were never enough of one racial or ethnic identity to belong, furthering a sense of isolation:

So again, those challenges are self-identification and knowing how to cope with the backlash you're going to get from everything. Whether it be, you know, trying to identify

as black, you get people who say you're not black enough and then if you tried to identify with the other side they say you're not Latino enough, you're not Asian enough, you're not white enough. You feel like you have nowhere to go or nobody to trust because everybody treats you as if you're not one of them (Research Participant, 2017).

The idea that mixed-race women are never enough to belong in monoracial communities suggests that there isn't a space for belonging for individuals who are not monoracial. As one black mixed-race woman on Twitter (2017) expressed, "I have been told I'm not black enough or not white enough but fuck ignorant people. I'm biracial/mixed whether people like it or not. We as mixed race women should be proud of each half of our heritage #MixedGirlMagic." These constructions of monoracial communities suggest that mixed-race individuals must find their own mixed-race communities to find belonging and community membership. One participant reiterated this idea stating:

I think there is no set place for like mixed-race people. Like, in like you are like a completely small like community like you don't like you can't grow up around other people who identify like the same as me. And so like for me being like mixed-race is like not really knowing where to like fit exactly (Research Participant, 2017).

Because of the lack of visible mixed-race communities, the sense of lacking a place of belonging creates a need for the creation of spaces for mixed-race community and belonging. However, the lack of public acknowledgement of mixed-race identity perpetuates the cycle of constant othering between monoracial communities due to mixed-race status:

Wherever I'm at, they kind of choose it for me. Like, if I'm around white people, I'm the black girl. If I'm in the black community, 'oh, you're the white girl because you're not black enough.' So, it's kind of other people choosing who I am but it's never, you know, 'oh, you're biracial, you're mixed (Research Participant, 2017).

The most critical factor of this lack of community space for mixed-race women is a constant othering through a black-and-white dualistic lens which treat black and white racial groups as mutually exclusive. One of the participants in the study outlined this phenomenon when discussing her visit to hear a black author speak on her lived experiences:

She's an author and she did like this book signing and she was like wrote a really strong book about the black experience of the black woman and everything and she was like 'I'd like to thank my husband' and it was like this like little nerdy white man stands up and everyone is like 'what? Man she's not for the cause' (Research Participant, 2017).

As one woman in the study reflected, because of this mutual exclusivity, she always felt that she was "too much" one of racial identity to align herself with the other monoracial group:

And I think it's like hard to like be in a place for me because like what you said like everybody's like oh one's too white in like a black space and like one's too black in a white space like never me like I've never like gone and you know like I mentioned like the [black student org.] here but it's like am I black enough to like join this organization? Like, maybe like I wanna be around other people that are like me but will they accept me? Because like maybe I'm too white like for this space? It's hard to fit in like exactly somewhere (Research Participant, 2017).

Blackness and whiteness are being pitted against each other as natural oppositions. Being black therefore becomes being anti-white and being white therefore necessitates being anti-black, denying black-and-white mixed-race women, and others misidentified within this mixed identity, membership into both the monoracial black and white communities as well as other monoracial communities.

Despite not finding a sense of belonging in the white community, being in proximity to whiteness grants black mixed-race women light-skin privilege that provides them with greater opportunities to upward socioeconomic mobility than other members of the black community:

Me and a very close friend of mine, she's a dark-skinned woman, we both went into the dining hall at CSU to apply for jobs there freshman year, so two years ago. Our schedules-very similar. We both go in there, talk to someone there like 'oh yeah, we'd like to work. I know you guys are looking for people.' 'Okay, well send in your schedules and we'll see what we can do for you.' I get emailed back for an interview and she doesn't and their reply to her was 'oh, your schedule just isn't lining up with what we have available,' when our schedules were very similar and so that's the first time I kind of thought like 'is that because like I look differently than her?' you know? And there's no like proof behind that, that you know that's still like a very real thing that like I have to deal with as a light-skinned woman. I might be more easily accepted than other people that identify as being part of that community (Research Participant, 2017).

Furthermore, because of their light-skin privilege, lighter-skinned black mixed-race women are represented as the most attractive women in the black community, reinforcing eurocentric beauty standards and colorism that position lighter skin and fairer hair as more beautiful:

Definitely being sexualized and being like ‘oh, you’re the pretty one in the black community,’ like, you’re the ideal black woman, you know? ‘We don’t wanna go any darker than you but you know you’re beautiful for a black woman’ ‘oh, you have the ‘good hair,’” ‘oh, your hair’s so pretty,’ and I hate that even from like black women that’s who I hate it from the most it’s like ‘you know what, love your hair.’ You can like mine, you know? But love your hair. Your kinky curls are just as beautiful as my looser curls, you know? So, it definitely like feeling, you know? You’re being put on a pedestal but while you’re up there you feel like, ‘I just don’t want to be up here. I want to be with everybody else,’ (Research Participant, 2017).

The impact of light-skin privilege is not only holding a position of privilege within the black community but the potential of reinforcing eurocentric beauty standards that position European aesthetics as more attractive, potentially contributing to internalized self-hate for women with dark skin tones and kinkier hair textures. One black mixed-race Twitter user internalized the negative perception of black women’s appearances stating, “All black women are bald. Obviously. Thank God for mixed race relationships so some of us can grow edges passed the ear. Yay,” (Twitter, 2017).

Furthermore, darker-skinned women lack representation as lighter-skinned women in the black community, such as mixed-race women, are placed on a “pedestal” where their appearances grant them greater access to resources and opportunities. As one black mixed-race woman on Twitter expressed, “I’m a light skinned, mixed race Black Woman, and honestly, only seeing women with my skin tone or lighter in the media is EXHAUSTING,” (Twitter, 2017). Another black woman on Twitter echoed her frustrations with the lack of representation of dark-skinned black women in the media stating, “Light-skinned/mixed race women are not the ones being devalued in the entertainment industry. Dark-skinned Black women are the ones constantly

being devalued and underappreciated! So [Twitter user] and anyone else can spare me their salty biracial/light-skinned tears!” (Twitter, 2017). Another Twitter user addressed the differences in character development between darker-skinned black women and lighter-skinned black and black mixed-race women stating, “I don’t like the message it’s sending to black girls that only lightskin mixed race black women can be love interests. And dark skin women are always villains or cops,” (Twitter, 2017). Light-skinned women are portrayed as more desirable romantic interests while dark-skinned black women are either vilified or placed into roles that don’t necessarily position them as romantically desirable women, contributing to the eurocentric narrative that darker skin equates with unattractiveness while lighter skin equates with attractiveness. Unfortunately, in some instances these frustrations were communicated in ways that demeaned and invalidated the black identities of black mixed-race women such as one Twitter user who wrote, “Girl, it’s a lost cause. The internalized anti-blackness is strong among some black Americans. They would rather champion and live vicariously through mixed race women who act ‘black’ then fully support fully monoracial black women with more talent,” (Twitter, 2017). For some black mixed-race women, because of the differences in experiences and privilege between themselves and darker-skinned women in the black community, they felt stuck navigating a light-skin-versus-dark-skin conflict. Because of the oppressed-versus-oppressor duality across black-and-white racial lines, black mixed-race women were constantly being aligned with whiteness through their light-skin privilege, sometimes contributing to demeaning messages that demarcated black mixed-race women from “black women with actual achievements,” (Twitter, 2017). This contributed to the greatest conflict among darker-skinned black women, enforcing a light-skin-versus-dark-skin dynamic within the black community:

It was a constant battle of whose better: Is light skin better? Is dark skin better? Is curly hair better? Is nappy hair better? It’s like ‘oh she’s got to fight that light-skinned battle’

or ‘she has to fight that dark-skinned battle’ and they say you’ll never know what it’s like to be a dark-skinned woman and at the same time they don’t understand what it’s like to be a light skinned woman and that’s true. However, you attacking me for being light-skinned is the same as me attacking you for being dark-skinned; it gets us nowhere (Research Participant, 2017).

Because of their light-skin privilege and proximity to whiteness, many black mixed-race women were positioned within the black community as not truly sharing in some the same struggles and fighting for the same causes as the rest of the black community:

At the end of the day, like, I’m for the same cause. Like just because I’m lighter-skinned like doesn’t mean that I’m not for the same cause as you like. I’m not like ‘shit that sucks,’ you know? Like, I’m with that like I understand that that stuff sucks. Like I’m right there with you but like it just seems like they almost just don’t give us the platform that we like kind of need like because I feel like left in the waste side when it comes to the black community and we’re just as black as anyone in the community. So, that’s something I feel like is hard to like talk about with other black people (Research Participant, 2017).

Although they do not entirely share in all of the same struggles due to their proximity to whiteness and level of racial privilege, several of the black mixed-race women in the study desired connectivity with other black women in the community and an opportunity to gain membership into the black community. However, in many cases, their mixed-race status barred them from gaining membership into the monoracial black community. For example, many Twitter users have invalidated black mixed-race actress Meghan Markle’s black identity in light of her recent engagement to Prince Harry in which she has been identified as a black woman. Some of those comments include: “Markle is NOT black she is mixed race, it is sad to see black women claiming a lady who is NOT black;” “SHE IS NOT BLACK SHE IS MIXED RACE....SO STOP FUCKING WITH REAL BLACK WOMEN AND THEIR BEAUTY YOU MUST HAVE 2 BLACK PARENTS;” “Yes her mum is black but she isn’t. Definitely isn’t. I am just in awe how black women are now all of a sudden counting her as black yet she should be counted as mixed race not black;” and “Apparently her ‘black mom’ is actually half black

herself, making this woman 25% black AT MOST. This is a white woman,” (Twitter, 2017). The reason these comments are problematic is the invalidation of her black identity due to the fact that she is black mixed-race which acts as a counterstance position. Treating monoracial black identity and mixed-race black identity as mutually exclusive reinforces stringent community membership requirements that reinforce monoraciality as a boundary for imagined communities. Furthermore, it invalidates her blackness as if belonging to multiple racial groups denies black mixed-race women access to any monoracial community, reinforcing the false external constructions of monoraciality representative of the stance position. In response to these comments, one Twitter user addressed this invalidation as an extension of the internalized oppression that darker-skinned black women navigate due to colorism which positions them negatively physically and behaviorally in public perceptions. She tweeted, “She is a mixed race black woman, and looks like it. What is wrong with some black women, always claiming a mixed woman isn’t black or isn’t black enough. Get over whatever deep seeded internal issues you have, and stop projecting them on other women. Damn,” (Twitter, 2017). Another Twitter user reflected on the impact of the one-drop rule and how many black mixed-race women may share similar experiences based on being publicly identified as black women writing, “Fr [for real] I need other black woman to stop belittling other mixed race women. If this was a little while back they would be black and going through the same shit you do, so just stop,” (Twitter, 2017). For several of the black mixed-race women in the study, the most negatively impactful experiences of othering came from being invalidated by the black community which they identified more closely with. One woman in the study explained the negative impact being othered from the black community has had on her sharing, “that's all I've ever known and that's the people I consider to be closest to and when they seem to not care about you that's when it

really hurts and so I got no better and this is a hard, cold world to feel like you don't have anybody,” (Research Participation, 2017). It is critical to note that this experience of being invalidated and othered from the black community was both racialized and gendered. While the black mixed-race women had to contend with being invalidated as black in the monoracial community, men do not undergo the same level of scrutiny. A couple Twitter users addressed the lack of scrutiny black mixed-race men in the community face writing posts such as: “What people need to remember is this: Bob Marley was not a black man exclusively. He had a white father and it was obvious he was mixed race,” and “Y'all weren't calling Obama mixed race. Y'all were calling him black. So that women is black too,” (Twitter, 2017).

Sub-Theme: Mixed-Race Women as an Extension of White Longing and Desire

Several participants in the study identified the ways that they were being utilized as extensions of whiteness. This occurred through attempts by external others to pressure black mixed-race women into centering whiteness in their own identities and ideologies, fetishizing and exoticizing them as the other to be consumed and dominated by whiteness, and by positioning them as extensions of whiteness’ desire to commodify the romanticized culture of the other.

The black mixed-race women in the study who were raised by single parents were predominantly raised by single white mothers. For the majority of these women, being raised by white parents contributed to aligning disproportionately with their white racial identities or ideologies of whiteness such as colorblindness in which whiteness does not have to interrogate its own level of privilege within the racial hierarchy. However, for the women that did not feel connected with their white identities and thus chose to identify in other ways, they felt pressured particularly from their white mothers to identify publicly with their whiteness. For some of the

women who experienced this pressure, they perceived the pain they were causing their white mothers as a motivation to align with their whiteness as a means of pleasing them and easing their sense of neglect. As one black identified participant in the study recalled, her mother pressured her into identifying with her white identity despite her lack of connection with it stating, “even to my mom, I remember telling her ‘I’m black,’ and she’s like ‘well what about me? I’m white. You’re white and black,’” (Research Participant, 2017). While her mother was attempting to convince her to embrace both of her racial identities, she was invalidating her daughter’s choice to identify racially as she saw herself: as a black woman. Her plea “what about me?” speaks to a pervasive desire for whiteness to constantly center itself, even when it is not being welcomed or embraced by the mixed-race woman whose experiences of anti-black racism may create a desire to distance oneself from identifying with whiteness. Because whiteness is normalized and deracialized in U.S. society, experiences of anti-black racism may contribute to a stronger identification with one’s identity as a woman of color. Furthermore, because whiteness is normalized, for some of the women navigating racism, communicating or relating their experiences to white family members or peers may contribute to a greater distancing from whiteness and its ideologies. One black identified woman reflected on her struggles trying to communicate her experiences of anti-black racism and conflict around colorism in the black community to white people:

I think society at large should stop trying to silence experiences of people who have been oppressed. I don’t think that-I believe personally that being oppressed isn’t a physical thing at all times and people act like it is. So, when it comes to me saying ‘hey I’m oppressed for being light-skinned by my own people’ and they say ‘oh, that’s not a thing’ but it is. It’s become an issue of people not being so accepting and then it also is-for me with white people-they tell you ‘oh slavery is over, get over it’ and it’s not something that can be gotten over especially considering the oppressive activities continually happen (Research Participant, 2017).

The incredulity around her experiences of racism inhibited her ability to connect and receive empathy from white people who did not understand her experiences of racism because they did not manifest as overt, outdated racism but in more covert manifestations such as microaggressions. Another woman in the study expressed her struggles in trying to communicate her experiences of racism to her white family members who also perpetuated colorblind racism to invalidate and dismiss her experiences as a woman of color:

When I was 16 or 17 I realized that I would walk into different spaces and I'm treated differently than her. My dad is out of the picture and my step dad is white, my sister is white. There are still issues that I would have with my family about the validation of my race... There have been some severed relationships due to the discussions of race and them not understanding where I came from. Especially with my sister because they think I'm just being overly dramatic (Research Participant, 2017).

Because of their colorblindness, their inability to acknowledge and address racism adequately contributed to a rift in her familial relationships which may have potentially contributed to a sense of isolation, being the only person of color navigating her white nuclear family. The dismissiveness of her experiences of racism additionally contributed to a lack of understanding of her lived experiences which may also make it difficult to understand or connect with her own racial identity and self-conception as a woman of color. Navigating colorblind racism in white families may further limit opportunities for connectivity, understanding and empathy for family members of color, such as the black mixed-race woman trying to communicate her own experiences of racism.

One of the most pervasive manifestations of centering whiteness was through positioning black mixed-race women as an extension of whiteness' desire to commodify and consume the other sexually. Several women in the study identified being dehumanized, objectified and hypersexualized based on their ambiguous physical characteristics:

When the topic comes up of, ‘oh, what are you?’ I tell them and they’re like ‘oh, what are your experiences like?’ And usually they point more to like physicalities like, ‘oh, you’re pretty. You’re all pretty, I like your hair,’ and like that kind of stuff. So, when I do-or when the comment comes up about me being biracial it’s drawn more onto my physical look rather than just how I identify. So, it’s not about me, it’s about my body like as a biracial person (Research Participant, 2017).

The emphasis on their bodies and physical appearance contributes to their dehumanization and a greater emphasis on their bodies as sexual objects. The scope of this objectification of black mixed-race women as sexual objects was so pervasive that white male family members also objectified and distanced themselves from acknowledging and respecting the humanity of their black mixed-race relatives:

I know for me, based on my experience like being sexualized by white men like my grandfather and his friends like I always hated going to see them. Because they would sexualize me a lot when I’m around them so it makes me very uncomfortable and part of it is because I am mixed and they’ve said that before (Research Participant, 2017).

Many black mixed-race women in the study identified being fetishized and exoticized by white men who perceived them as safer avenues for the sexual exploration and conquest of black women’s bodies, attesting to the way that women of color are sexualized and racialized simultaneously:

It’s just harder for me like being here especially like in Colorado, where like it’s almost like fetishized like being biracial as well. And that’s like something I’ve noticed like it’s almost like white guys like us a little bit more cause we’re not too ethnic but we’re ethnic enough. And so, it’s like, that’s just so ignorant. So, I’m like bro, I’m not a fetish, I’m not about to be in that category at all (Research Participation, 2017).

By analyzing black mixed-race women by their perceived ethnicities, they are being othered in a way that exoticizes them as foreigners. Furthermore, viewing them as “not too ethnic but...ethnic enough,” attests to the perceived social taboo of white men engaging in sexual relationships with black women, further perpetuating the mutual exclusivity of white and black racial groups. One Twitter user addressed the different ways that white women and women of color are positioned

in relation to men writing, “Fetishization is a REAL problem people of color face. When men tell me, “I prefer Black women/Native women/mixed race women,” I wonder WHAT exactly it is about these attributes that some how make me different from a white woman?” (Twitter, 2017). As one Twitter user posted, “‘Branca para se casar, mulata para fornicar, preta para cozinhar’ (white women for marriage, mixed-race for fornication and black women to cook) - Brazilian saying from colonial times,” (Twitter, 2017). This statement attests to the way that women of color are commodified and sexualized in order to serve the needs of men. While white women are positioned as the ideal woman for a romantic partnership, mixed-race women are objectified as sexual objects to serve the sexual desires of men while black women are commodified and objectified as house servants or property, expected to perform traditional gender roles in a way that mimics slave labour. Furthermore, colorism which positions blackness with unattractiveness and whiteness with attractiveness contributes to the narrative of black mixed-race women with lighter-skin as the “ideal black woman” further fetishizing them as black women while perpetuating violence against darker-skinned black and black mixed-race women.

The second manifestation of utilizing black mixed-race women as an extension of white longing and desire happened through fetishizing their access to the black community and culture which was romanticized as being “cool,” while they simultaneously disregarded the material realities and implications of being black in America:

There was a girl in this hall, in my hallway and she was like ‘that’s just so cool that you get to like be both’ like ‘that’s just so cool’ like ‘you can just go anywhere and you could be like this and then you could be like this.’ I’m like ‘that’s not how it works.’ That’s mental illness. That’s called schizophrenia, okay? You change it up from place to place? That’s not, no. I’m the same person when I walk into a white space as I am the same person when I walk into a black space. And like that’s another thing I noticed, just white people almost like, it’s like, ‘wow I wish I was you.’ Like, you know? Kind of thing. Like, and like, there was this same girl, she was like ‘I’d love to like know what it’s like to be black for a little bit’ or something like that. I was like ‘what the Heck? What are you talking?’ I’m like ‘I guess.’ I’m like, you know what I’m saying? I’m like ‘okay?’

I'm like, 'it's cool I guess. You know like not being equal in our country, that's kind of cool. You know? Not really having, like, you know the same rights and getting shot at, I guess that's cool (Research Participant, 2017).

Seeing black mixed-race women as an extension of their desire to engage in black culture highlights a desire to commodify and consume the culture of the other in an appropriative way, treating blackness as something that could be put on “for a little bit” and taken off at one’s leisure or convenience. While white people have expressed envy over black mixed-race women’s access to the black community and their own romanticized perception of the culture, they simultaneously dismissed the anti-black racism attached to being a member of the community in the U.S. such as experiencing racial discrimination and police brutality. Furthermore, their romanticized notions about black culture and mixed-race identity contributed to a lack of understanding and confronting their own white privilege and the unilateral benefits that come with it such as representation and access to community belonging:

It's funny how I guess like with the white community, they almost like think of us like, as being like them in a sense but like cooler, like cooler versions of them, which is like weird to me cause I mean, I can't, I-and like, even being like, even just being a little bit white like I can't relate to anyone whose white like in that sense just because like you don't really walk in the same shoes as me. You know, you don't really know what it's like to not fit into a group. You don't really know what it's like to be in a community where you're not really in the community but you're kind of in the community cause you're black, you know? So, it's like you don't really know, like everywhere y'all go y'all see each other. Y'all see your own people (Research Participation, 2017).

Sub-Theme: The Seduction of Whiteness

While a majority of the black mixed-race women in the study didn't identify as or chose not to align themselves with whiteness, the perceived benefits of doing so created an allure for some to align with whiteness. Some of the pressure to identify with whiteness stemmed from the desire to be perceived as “normal” and deracialized rather than othered as a person of color, reinforcing the dualistic white-versus-other color lines. For one black mixed-race woman who

does not identify as white, the pressure to perform whiteness stemmed from the desire to fit into a white space:

I went to a really white high school freshman and sophomore year...but I really like thought in my head I was white. Like, if anyone asked me I was like 'naw, I'm white. I'm just like y'all.' Like, cause those are like your friends you grew up with. I was like bro it's already, like I'm already weird. I'm not fitting in with these people. I'm like, I don't need there to be something else. So, I'm like let me just like fit in? Let me go to like shop at Hollister even though their stuff sucks. Like, let me, I'm not trying to stand out you know it's like I was like 'yeah no, no, I'm just like y'all.' And so, like being or feeling like I was isolated from my culture and things like that-it really made me feel like I was, like well, I have to conform to another one and so like that's what my default was like being white (Research Participation, 2017).

For some women in the study who are also racially white, claiming their white identities was utilized to secure the benefits of white or light-skin privilege. As one participant reflected on her decision to publicly embrace her white identity in the workplace:

I was at for example a career event at [university]. I definitely made it apparent 'I'm mixed. My mom is white and I'm mixed-more than just African American.' Even at work cause [employer] is so corporate I'm like 'definitely, my mom is white...' White people get further in corporate America. They can slide by easier and get up the corporate ladder faster... I've had pretty privilege and I guess that can go back to being mixed cause it's all on the outside (Research Participant, 2017).

Not only was her proximity to whiteness understood as a tool for greater access to socioeconomic mobility, by denoting her privilege as "pretty privilege," she reinforced eurocentric beauty standards that place individuals in proximity to whiteness as being more attractive than that of darker-skinned black women. Furthermore, emphasizing that she was "more than just African American," positioned blackness as a having naturally negative connotation. In juxtaposition, whiteness is positioned as a vast benefit in the corporate world, providing potentially unearned socioeconomic advantages which attest to the role white supremacy plays on an institutional level in maintaining the racial hierarchy that gives white people unilateral power, control and benefits in society. The perceived benefits of aligning with

whiteness extend beyond the black mixed-race women who are racially white. For a few of the women in the study, their non-white family members also aligned themselves with whiteness in order to receive the perceived benefits. In one instance, one of the women's grandfathers aligned with whiteness in order to assimilate to American culture, rather than acculturating and being othered. This decision to assimilate contributed to a loss of their Mexican culture throughout the succeeding generations and pressure to continue aligning with whiteness:

Her growing up too was white washed because like her father was more white than he was Mexican so like he defaulted to white and just like that's what I am and so like he, for my mom growing up they weren't allowed to speak Spanish in the house so my mom didn't learn Spanish until she was like 19 and it was like on her own time...and she still like grew up with those ideologies (Research Participant, 2017).

Furthermore, for parents of color who aligned with whiteness, engaging dialogue over instances of racism became difficult due to the internalization of colorblind ideology in which postraciality, the notion that we no longer live in a racist society, is promoted while instances of racism are dismissed contributing to the continuation of racial oppression. In some other cases, in an attempt for people of color to align themselves with whiteness, they perpetuate overt racism against other racially marginalized groups despite also facing racial oppression themselves. For example, one black-and-Mexican identified participant found it difficult to connect with her black father due to his internalization of discrimination against Mexicans:

I feel like I have that disconnect with my dad like I can't talk to him about race because for one he's a republican, and like he voted for Trump...and like it's funny because my dad is also very racist when it comes to me being Mexican like there's been a couple of times when he's been like 'oh, I don't want you going to your mom's cousins' house' or whatever 'I don't want you hanging out with all those Mexicans' I'm like 'what? Like you were with, like your child is half Mexican,' (Research Participant, 2017).

For mixed-race women who are already struggling to navigate their mixed-race status and community membership in monoracial communities, experiencing discrimination from their own

parents may create more challenges in having a positive self-conception of their racial identities. Furthermore, it can contribute to the potential damaging or loss of relationships between mixed-race women and their monoracially identified parents. Additionally, depending on how closely they relate with particular family members, it is also possible that the mixed-race child will also internalize ideologies of whiteness resulting in their own perpetuation of racist or discriminatory behaviors or attitudes against their family members of color.

Gestures Towards Disidentification: Spaces in Between

In order to move towards a disidentified position, disrupting the duality of black-and-white and oppressed-and-oppressor which reinforce stance and counterstance positions must be undertaken through achieving a level of consciousness around whiteness and white supremacy. Understanding how whiteness operates is a necessary component of avoiding reinforcing tools of white supremacy which maintain a stance-and-counterstance duality. A critical component of reaching a position of disidentification thus occurs through denouncing whiteness and white supremacy and maintaining an anti-racist position. In this stage, the mixed-race women acknowledge their in-between position of navigating those dualities and communities and use that in-between space to transform their identities in a way that is empowering and allows for them to build greater connections with individuals across differences. For several of the black mixed-race women in the study, moving towards disidentified positions was characterized by embracing a feminist politics and praxis which will be outlined in the following two sub-themes: borderlands consciousness and *bridging the gap*.

Sub-Theme: Borderlands Consciousness

A critical component of moving towards a disidentified position is developing a particular level of consciousness around the multiple systems of oppression and one's own positionality within those systems. Several of the women in the study expressed their desire to seek out knowledge in order to develop a consciousness around their own oppression which left some feeling isolated in their experiences:

If something hurt me or something I didn't like, I would remove myself from the situation and would seek a little outside forces like internet sources, articles, and stories and apply it. Like, 'how can I do this or help myself in this way?' a lot of people do a lot of different things but I never wanted to involve my issues with somebody else. It's not their problem (Research Participant, 2017).

Another black mixed-race woman in the study emphasized her desire to study her various identities stating, "I love taking classes on the intersectionality because it's looking at multiple identities on top of each other. I feel like that's all I am especially my racial identity. It's like you just can't look at one, you have to look at both at the same time," (Research Participant, 2017).

Several participants in the study identified the necessity of studying their own histories in order to develop the consciousness necessary to contend with their own oppression:

There's power in remembering where you come from and having those memories passed down to you. For me, it's soul food and you can only go so long where you can be deprived of food before symptoms come up like having mood swings or outbursts. So, these stories are my comfort and they become guidance and pathways for me to dig deeper into myself and without them I feel lost (Research Participation, 2017).

The significance of studying their histories of oppression stemmed from the need to better understand the position of the oppressor in order to understand their own isolated positions in navigating the borderlands of their multiple identities and communities:

I was reading this thing about how back in the slave days the slave-masters would put in the mind of the slaves that one was better than the other and so that causes sense of separation to keep them from fighting together to rebel. So, because of that, that's just been passed down from generation to generation like 'hey these people are better,' or 'I'm

better than them,' or 'you're not better than them.' So, that does happen. I think that separatism is so prevalent today because we're focused on being better than each other instead of helping one another (Research Participant, 2017).

Participants in the study deconstructed the central role that the dominant racial class has had on perpetuating racial oppression. As one participant stated, "I feel like it's the societal norms that hurt rather than us hurting ourselves with ideas. It's what like they put on us that are very problematic and detrimental that I feel like made us really like hurt inside like you know?" (Research Participant, 2017). A major idea that developed from the participants engaging dialogues around their mixed-race identities was that placing black mixed-race women into an essentialized category of blackness operated as a method of invalidation through internalized racial oppression:

One thing when it comes to authenticity like it's harder for me to be like 'what is blackness?' because there's no one black experience that's true. You know like at the end of the day like you're just as black as like this person who has two black parents. Like at the end of the day, you're black. There's no level about it. Because at the end of the day, when you walk into a room and they're still going to see you as a Negro (Research Participant, 2017).

Another black mixed-race woman in the study outlined the impact this racial oppression has had on her emotions stating:

For me I'm identifying the symptom as internalized colonization that manifests itself as acts of violence in terms of how I speak to myself internally, how I see myself and how I negotiate myself physically and in the spiritual world. The symptoms are me going home and crying to the point where I feel lethargic and even after I've cried, I still don't understand what I'm crying about. I can just feel this deep sense of confusion and guilt of not knowing who I am or having stories to materialize who I am...to push us out of our bodies, to control our psyches. Really, it's a form of domination and social control (Research Participant, 2017).

Analyzing the power dynamics that played a role in maintaining their racial oppression was central to their ability to disidentify with, and attempt to disrupt, the racial hierarchy. Within the spaces deemed the 'borderlands,' marginalized individuals must navigate and deconstruct the

narratives and social locations of both the dominant and marginalized groups in order to understand and restructure their own social locations within those in-between spaces:

There's so much between those spaces where you know that you're onto something. You know you can feel who you are but at the same time, you have everything in between telling you 'no that's not who you are. That's not right. That can't be.' So, all those things and voices are in those spaces that are trying to keep you separated (Research Participant, 2017).

Furthermore, in the borderlands marginalized individuals develop an awareness of their social positions at the intersections of both privilege and oppression and have a critical understanding of both positions through having a dual oppressor-and-oppressed perspective. Being able to understand both perspectives simultaneously and not just as an either/or proposition of dualistic thinking contributes to a greater understanding of both the stance and counterstance positions locked in an oppressor-versus-oppressed duality. This consciousness provides marginalized individuals an opportunity to break from the dualistic positions that undergird rather than challenge the various systems of oppression. One participant in the study addressed the necessity of disrupting external monoracial categories in order to disrupt the black-and-white dualistic racial hierarchy stating:

I think racial constructions are here for a reason, I think mixed people represent a division that isn't here anymore. Like genders people who are intergender don't really like to talk about it anymore. Because it challenges the system. It makes a statement about two races collectively making something together is a challenge to the system (Research Participant, 2017).

A component of mixed-race women developing a borderlands consciousness is contending with their positions of privilege, even when they intersect with oppression. For example, while some mixed-race women may have understood their proximity to whiteness as a benefit allowing them to capitalize on their light-skin privilege, other women in the study recognized the implications their privilege would have on other members of the black community:

And even like with that there's this like I feel like I have a privilege in a way being light-skinned and being mixed because I honestly, I don't face the same oppressions as like dark-skinned people or black people do. So I feel like I've had a little more opportunities than someone who may be black and sometimes I question some of the opportunities I've even had here because it's like is it because I'm mixed and lighter-skinned? (Research Participant, 2017).

Several of the women in the study refused to align themselves with the ideologies of whiteness or perceived benefits and privileges of being in proximity to it. Instead, many of the black mixed-race women in the study chose to utilize their positions of privilege in an attempt to disrupt the racial hierarchy which positions them as inferior to white people while superior to black people due to their proximity to whiteness. One woman in the study discussed her responsibility to use her privilege to call out placing black women into negative essentialized categories in juxtaposition to light-skinned and black mixed-race women:

I feel like it is kind of like our duty as like having that privilege and going into those spaces where like maybe darker-skinned people like who are black aren't necessarily accepted, I feel like it's our job to call out that like BS right off the bat. Like, 'oh yeah we like mulatto women and mixed women,' like 'naw, cut that out,' like right off the bat. Cause like they're gonna like, it's easier for like them to like be put in their place by us rather than like someone who is darker-skinned because they have these negative connotations about them like 'oh, they're gonna pop off. Oh, they're gonna say this' and I feel like as like having this lighter complexion, it's like kind of our job to be like 'naw, that's not right' cause at the end of the day like that's still my people, you know? At the end of the day those are still my people and I'm not gonna let you like rag on them like they're not like humans. Like they like they are entitled to their personalities and that's who they are (Research Participant, 2017).

Recognizing the dehumanization of black women and the stereotyping they experience in comparison to the positive connotations and privileged treatment of black mixed-race women with light-skin created a responsibility to disrupt the colorism that is used to perpetuate internalized racial oppression against black women. Furthermore, as a member of the black community, she desired to contribute to uplifting members of the community through disrupting those forms of violence that make darker-skinned women feel unwelcome in those spaces.

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Gap

A major outcome of some of the black mixed-race women developing a borderlands perspective was a heightened desire to create spaces to connect with, and provide representation for, others across their varying social locations. As several participants in the study suggested, having a borderlands perspective allows them the opportunity to coalesce with others across social differences:

I feel like my perspective is different from someone who's completely white or someone who's black since my foot is kind of in both worlds a little bit. I just kind of have a little better understanding of where like certain white people are coming from when they say something or what black people-where black people are coming from when they say something. And then sometimes when I try to communicate that to a white person or a black person I say 'well, I mean it's not me personally but coming from this culture I can understand what they mean by this.' So, kind of like bridging the gap and trying to sort of being like a middle man I guess (Research Participant, 2017).

For several women in the study, connecting with other mixed-race women was central to their consciousness development process around their mixed-race identities:

At the end of the day, it's us, you know? Like, this is like, it's weird that we're not able to like necessarily like talk like this in all spaces. Like it's like weird cause people don't necessarily understand it but does that mean like that we're not allowed to talk about it? And I feel like we default to 'yeah, no we just don't say nothing.' And so like I feel like it's just nice coming to this space where like, you know like, 'snap I understand that.' Like 'oh I totally get that.' Like those are the things that I definitely think we 100% agree on that's like the best part. That's why I think I wanted to do this most (Research Participant, 2017).

Additionally, many women in the study also emphasized a desire to connect with other women of color in order to engage in dialogues to deconstruct their experiences and identities around navigating multiple forms of oppression and privilege:

When college came around, the mentors who were instructors and women of color had helped me overcome the hardships of my identity and they've been instrumental in helping me with creating and decolonizing my identities which was something I never had growing up... When I'm in an intimate setting with other women of color, I'm able to have these conversations about race and we have these "ah-ha" moments when we're

able to see each other beyond what we were racialized to be. I don't have these moments in a public spectrum (Research Participant, 2017).

Furthermore, some participants in the study also expressed a desire to engage dialogues with individuals who perpetuated racial oppression against them, in an attempt to create understanding and connectivity across their racial differences:

I stopped running from it and started to tell them 'hey, this is me. You're oppressing me. Let me educate you on my experience,' and at the same time listening to theirs and finding a medium... I think it would be a bigger effect if people are learning together because it opens our eyes and gives people the opportunity as long as they come in open-minded to actually learn something and look at different perspectives (Research Participant, 2017).

For some black mixed-race women in the study, embracing differences was a critical component of dismantling the racial hierarchy that provided disproportionate opportunities and resources to the dominant white racial class:

We should coexist with each other and say 'hey, she's different. They're different. There's beauty in our differences, our flaws, and we can use that to better the community.' There's so many different issues in the community such as poverty and who has access to what and so instead of focusing on whose better, we can focus on how we can help each other to be better, giving each other financial assistance to better their financial future is a crucial thing because so many people aren't willing to give you a loan based on financial status, race, so many things and it can really set someone up to succeed (Research Participant, 2017).

Another significant motivating factor of coalescing across differences was to provide opportunities for representation, uplift and love to other individuals who may also struggle from internalized oppression:

The kids who grew up without representation, they don't know that there's beauty in who they are or beauty in other people, other cultures, other races, ethnicities. That representation being there is important because it makes people say, 'hey! I am represented, there's other people like me. I know I'm not the only one. I'm not by myself.' And so that creates a sense of love in somebody which I think is really important. As to where there's a lack of it, then that sense of self hate starts to grow and increase as time goes on without that representation (Research Participation, 2017).

This approach to connecting across differences to promote positive self-conceptions is representative of a feminist politics which incorporates love into their engagements with others. The outcome of the black mixed-race women in the focus group being able to engage across their differences was the creation of a positive and uplifting space and further opportunities for community connectivity, engagement, uplift and representation. As one woman shared with the group:

I think one thing like I don't think we tell each other enough is like y'all are beautiful I just want to let y'all know first and foremost and like if you never feel like you have like a group or somewhere you can go, I want to let you know like right now like even though it might not be maybe you've been or you haven't gone but [student group name] I feel like for me was a community where like, it's not even just black people and that's the thing that made it so much more like, I wanna go a little bit more like there's a ton of like mixed girls there that do things and it's just like a sisterhood. Like, it's like being in a sorority but like everybody is like you and like we like to like dance and eat food. And that's like all we do. And like we just love each other and I just I feel like there's not too many communities like that here and so like don't ever feel hesitant to come. It's the best thing that's ever happened to me. I feel like this really helped me want to be a more critical voice for myself and also just because I met y'all like dang we really like, this isn't just me, this is a lot of other people and we should have a space. So, please come. You deserve it and y'all are beautiful and I'm glad that I got to meet you guys and have a conversation because it was definitely meaningful to me (Research Participant, 2017).

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices. (Lorde, 1979, p. 113)

Grounded Theory

This research illuminates the way that U.S. society continues to utilize a dualistic black-and-white monoracial paradigm in order to enforce rigid mutually exclusive categories which ensure the erasure of mixed-race and other non-black monoracial people of color. The dualistic nature of the racial hierarchy in the U.S. positions monoracial groups as mutually exclusive, perpetuating the false narrative of natural, biological differences and divisions amongst the five primary racial groups. This racial duality effectively upholds an oppressed-versus-oppressor relationship that maintains the racial hierarchy of white supremacy by relying on biological determinism to promote the myth of white racial purity and supremacy. Under the assumption that “mixed-race” necessitates a black-and-white racial mixing, black mixed-race women are perceived as a threat to white supremacy through their assumed proximity to whiteness which would allow them greater access to benefits, resources, and privileges in the U.S. which contribute to either their erasure or their commodification as false symbols of postraciality. This chapter will further elucidate how the system of white supremacy impacts black mixed-race women's access to monoracial, and other, social communities and their potential to develop identities that disrupt the racial hierarchy of white supremacy through embracing a disidentified position. In order to accomplish this, this chapter will: deconstruct the stance position of using of

monoraciality and colorblindness as tools of white supremacy; deconstruct the counterstance position of embracing monoracial separatist identity politics in communities of color as a response to white supremacy; and will deconstruct the potential of mixed-race women and other multiply marginalized individuals to embrace a disidentified position through disrupting essentialist identities and communities and restructuring them to embrace the complexities and contradictions of their differences and similarities. Subsequent sub-themes will also be analyzed in order to further explicate how these positions are embodied to either support or contest the structure of the racial hierarchy and of white supremacy.

Stance Position: Dualistic Black-and-White Monoraciality as a Tool of White Supremacy

Identity construction must be understood as “inseparable from the production of power,” thus necessitating a critical analysis of the historical social and political ramifications of identity construction within the formation of hierarchies of oppression (Gonzales et. al, 2007, p. 54). For example, racialization occurs within a nation defining itself politically and economically as an empire, and racialization, domestically and abroad become a way of managing natives and/or subalterns by placing them within racial hierarchies of power (Rodríguez Domínguez, 2005). In the United States identity is inscribed through “an exclusionary mode of being,” thus identifying oneself by what one is not, reinforcing the mutual exclusivity within and between various social identity categories that enforce oppressor-versus-oppressed relationships marked by dominance of one group over others (“Against Erasure,” 2004). Monoraciality, the dominant racial paradigm in the United States enforces five essentialized racial categories: white; black; Asian; Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander; and Native American/Native Alaskan that emphasize their mutual exclusivity through a dualistic black-and-white lens (Rodríguez Domínguez, 2005; Omi & Takagi, 1996; Lipsitz, 1995; Walker, 1995; Park, 2015; Olson, 2001). According to Harris

(1997) “white supremacy, with its obsessions, exploitations, and cruelty over the past two and a half centuries, has made us into a people really divided by those imaginary lines,” (p. 212).

Sub-Theme: Relationships and Ideologies of White Supremacist Heteropatriarchy

In tandem with the racialized nature of relationships within the structure of white supremacy, relationships of domination are also gendered and sexualized. According to Aida Hurtado (1989), “each oppressed group in the United States is positioned in a particular and distinct relationship to white men, and each form of subordination is shaped by this relational position,” (p. 833). Illuminating white supremacist heteropatriarchy more adequately positions black mixed-race women and the ideologies of whiteness they navigate particularly from their white mothers, and the sexual violence they experience predominantly from white men.

According to Audre Lorde (1984), “white women face the pitfall of being seduced into joining the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power...there is a wider range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools,” (p. 844). For example, white women may benefit from the “economic and social benefits attached to” their relationships with white men as their role in white supremacy is to serve as “the biological bearers of those members of the next generation who will inherit positions of power in society,” (Hurtado, 1989, p.837-842). White women are socialized to navigate romantic, familial, and other interpersonal relationships with other white people, explicating the potential investment and perpetuation of ideologies of whiteness, such as colorblindness, onto their black mixed-race daughters who are pressured into performing or aligning with whiteness. In juxtaposition, their daughters of color are socialized to navigate relationships with other people of color and to predominantly contribute to the economic survival of their families, making it easier for them to align with their marginalized racial communities. Because white men rely on white women to produce “racially

pure offspring,” there is immense pressure placed on white women to align with ideologies of whiteness and patriarchal ideology which keep them in a subordinated relationship of dependency with white men regardless of the intimacy of their relationship (Hurtado, 1989, p. 847).

While white men can utilize their shared position of power and their social control to oppress and force allegiance and docility from white women, sex is used as a method of control and oppression against black and black mixed-race women and other women of color who cannot be as easily seduced by the power of whiteness and are in further proximity from it. For example, according to Hurtado (1989):

White men perceive women of Color primarily as workers and as objects of sexual power and aggression. Their sexual objectification of women of Color allows white men to express power and aggression sexually, without the emotional entanglements of, and the rituals that are required in, relationships with women of their own group (p. 846).

Because of the gendered and sexual nature of power within the white supremacist heteropatriarchal structure, white men who engage in sexual relationships with black mixed-race women and other women of color do not risk giving up any of their inherited power afforded them from their whiteness. However, these sexual relationships operate at the expense of dehumanizing and objectifying black mixed-race women. This distinction makes it more difficult for black mixed-race women to be seduced by whiteness in comparison to their white mothers. However, for black mixed-race women with white phenotypical features or black mixed-race women who can more easily “pass” into whiteness, they experience greater opportunities to “negotiate within the white realms of privilege” that provide them unilateral benefits that are typically hindered by their blackness (Montgomery, 2012, p. 16). Black mixed-race women positioned to be more readily seduced by whiteness must then denounce and reject whiteness and its benefits lest they escape subordination and oppression through reifying “the condition where

whiter and more European looking and sounding bodies are assigned higher value,” that is economic, social and political (Ginsberg, 1996; Montgomery, 2012, p. 20).

Sub-Theme: Colorblind Racism

White women’s subordination and the subordination of black mixed-race and other women of color hinges on the use of colorblind ideology. Colorblind ideology is used to mask the seduction of whiteness utilized against white women to keep them subordinated from men and separated from other women in a way that perpetuates racism and white supremacy.

Colorblind ideology, which has become deeply embedded into our society, contributes to the erasure of people of color and the historical construction, meanings and uses of racial categories through dismissing experiences of racism under the misconception that racism no longer exists post-Civil War and that we live in a post-racial society (Omi & Winant, 1986). Rather, under the conception of post-raciality, it becomes assumed that discussions about race are no longer relevant and that addressing race is problematic and incites racial tensions or “race wars” (Gotanda, 1991; Guinier & Torres, 2002). While colorblind ideology perpetuates white supremacy by rendering invisible systemic and systematic racism, people of color may also internalize and reinforce colorblind racism, removing any meaningful opportunities to deconstruct the way that racism operates to maintain the racial hierarchy.

In contrast to the more overt expressions of racism within the context of slavery and de jure or legalized segregation, racism has become embedded in more insidious and covert ways through its institutionalization (Mueller, 2017). Because racism has become highly institutionalized, it provides white people with an opportunity to discreetly maintain white supremacy and white privilege that acts as a “merit” for their superior positions in the racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Jaminson, 2017). Colorblind ideology thus reinforces an

“epistemology of ignorance” in which a dual process of knowing and not knowing are operationalized to dismiss the structure of white supremacy, the privilege that white people benefit from within this racial hierarchy, and their own complicity in maintaining the system (Mills, 1997; 2007; Mueller, 2017). Despite the contradictory nature of colorblindness, the covert nature of racial dominance imbued into legal, political, educational and media institutions distorts the capabilities of white people to have a solidified understanding of racism and white supremacy, instead socializing them into a “comfortable complicity,” (Mueller, 2017, p. 222). In creating this complicit relationship with racism and white supremacy, whiteness is rendered invisible through its normalization in U.S. society which deflects from the social, economic and political contexts that have produced whiteness and structural racism (Gallagher & Twine, 2017):

White power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular. As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 369).

Furthermore, utilizing colorblind ideology can help ease “the tension of endorsing racial equality in a social structure still designed to preserve white advantage,” (Mueller, 2017, p. 221). This contradictory claim to ignorance illuminates a willful colorblindness in which the language of white privilege is implied but deflected through colorblind frameworks that shift the focus off of white peoples’ roles in sustaining the hierarchy of white supremacy. There is a simultaneous acknowledgement of the unilateral benefits or privileges imbued in the system of white supremacy which allows white people to ignore their own complicity in racism regardless of how “well-meaning” they may be in “intending to be non-racist,” (Mueller, 2017, p. 221). Consequently, white individuals may feel more compelled and comfortable expressing racial

hostility against people of color under the conditions that they can avoid accountability for their actions (Mueller, 2017).

One of the most prominent forms of colorblind racism that black mixed-race women have experienced is abstract liberalism which asserts that society is structured along a horizontal social plane in which every individual has equal access to opportunities, especially economic resources (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Mueller, 2017; Gallagher & Twine; 2017; Hockschild, 1995). Liberal individualism, the notion that failures and successes are the result of an individual's own character traits, skills, ambitions and hard work or lack thereof, gets employed to deflect from the role of institutionalized racism in perpetuating racial oppression (Itagaki, 2016). By positing individual merit as the predominant factor of social mobility, the role of institutionalized racism becomes more covert as race and racism are reconceptualized along a duality of overt outdated racist ideologies and covert colorblind racism (Gallagher & Twine, 2017). Positioning racism as a phenomenon of the past by associating it with overt manifestations contributes to the narrative that because slavery and legal segregation no longer exist, structural disadvantages and the generational trauma stemming from them are irrational arguments set forth by people of color who are trying to perpetuate "reverse-racism" or gain "undeserved" advantages (Garner, 2017; Lipsitz, 1995). Invoking the narrative of liberal individualism not only deflects from the fact that particular social groups have greater access to socioeconomic mobility and resources than others but enforces a narrative about the "deserving" few in which people of color are demonized and blamed for their lower positions within the racial hierarchy for not taking the mythical equal opportunities society has graciously bestowed upon them (Itagaki, 2016; Lipsitz, 1995).

Consequently, colorblind ideology becomes internalized, perpetuating a sense of self-blame for one's position in society:

Recognizing that racism even exists remains a challenge for most white Americans, and increasingly for African-Americans as well. They believe that the passage of civil rights legislation eliminated racially discriminatory practices and that any problems that blacks may experience are now of their own doing (Collins, 2004, p. 5).

Black mixed-race women's experiences are associated then with irrationality, one's own shortcomings, or an attempt to invert the system of white supremacy for disproportionate access to societal resources at the expense of white people. The effect of employing colorblind racism against their experiences of racism contribute to the erasure and invalidation of their material realities. In their attempts to articulate their racial oppression, black mixed-race women become rendered invisible and their material realities are unseen and unheard, representing a form of their own erasure from U.S. society. In tandem with censoring their voices and prohibiting accurate representation, this form of disappearance due to colorblind racism may also create another threat of exile from dominant society, further hindering their opportunities to access visibility. While colorblindness predominantly relies on rendering invisible racial categories to obscure the racial hierarchy, mixed-race identity can be acknowledged as a symbol of postraciality in order to justify the movement towards a raceless society which would further maintain and obscure the racial hierarchy and white supremacy (Mezey, 2003). For example, positioning mixed-race bodies as symbols of postraciality can work to "erase the less appealing history of sexual violence," that has been used as a tool of maintaining white men in positions of power over racially marginalized communities (Larson, 2016, p. 4). Thus, in attempting to gain visibility, black mixed-race women must be reflexive to avoid contributing to their own racial and gender oppression and the oppression of black and other women of color who are similarly situated in experiencing sexual and other forms of violence by white men.

Sub-Theme: The Biological Myth of (Mono)Racial Purity

A core element of perpetuating monoraciality is through embracing the fiction of a biological basis of race. Contemporary cries of “blood and soil” by white supremacists and neo-Nazis at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August of 2017 attest to the internalization of false notions of biological determinism. Perpetuating the notion of biologically distinct and measurable monoracial groups contributes to the erasure of mixed-race persons from the U.S. population. Other monoracial groups of color that do not fit into the black-and-white racial paradigm are also erased, perpetuating the false duality which has historically informed U.S. white supremacy which has “hinged on the oppression of people of African descent,” who occupy the lowest position on the racial hierarchy (Makalani, 2001, p. 83).

The concept of white racial purity and superiority serves as the ideological foundation of white supremacy, serving as the justification for racial separation on the basis of “protecting” the “purity” of white blood from being denigrated by “inferior” black blood. Maintaining the myth of mutually exclusive monoracial categories and white racial purity thus precludes recognition of mixed-race persons who challenge white monoracial privilege. The erasure of black mixed-race persons occurs through their monoracialization and assignment to the perceived inferior monoracial black category, operating as an extension of the legacy of hypodescent which falsely argues for biological determinism to maintain a dualistic black-and-white racial hierarchy.

Hypodescent is conceptualized as:

the lynchpin of U.S. constructions of whiteness, including notions of white racial purity, which have been critical to maintaining white racial privilege. It is also the basis of monoraciality and its associated advantages that accrue to European Americans ... Consequently, monoraciality has been internalized as the normative pattern of identification... itself reflective of a broader “monological” paradigm premised on an “either.or” mentation, which seeks to erase complexity, multiplicity, and ambiguity. Singularity is the norm in terms of the construction of all categories of difference

encompassing race, gender, sexuality, and a host of others including one's stance on critical social issues relating to morality and politics (Daniel & Williams, 2013, p. 14).

Maintaining the myth of white racial purity thus necessitates the erasure of black mixed-race individuals whose perceived proximity to whiteness poses a threat to their white racial privilege. This explicates the underlying principle of policies and social norms utilized to preclude black mixed-race persons from claiming their white racial heritages. For example, the primary function of hypodescent was "to ensure that *any* Sub-Saharan African ancestry (no matter how remote) disqualifies the person (no matter her phenotype) from being able to successfully stake a claim to a white identity," (Spencer, 2004, p. 362). Consequently, hypodescent provided unilateral economic and social resources to the white racial class who supported American slavery and white supremacy and used legislation to monoracialize black mixed-race persons as black, making them "ineligible for participation in the benefits of whiteness," (Spencer, 2004, p. 362). This type of legislation attests to the way that othering and erasing the experiences and identities of mixed-race individuals perpetuates the privileging of monoraciality and Whiteness in the United States undergirding white supremacy. Black-and-white dualistic monoraciality effectively upholds a dualistic oppressed-versus-oppressor relationship that maintains the racial hierarchy of white supremacy by unilaterally distributing disproportionate economic and political resources to white Americans while erasing other racially marginalized groups. This also explicates the racial discomfort around black mixed-race women "passing" as white as it represents a movement towards freedom and privilege that contests the racial hierarchy and white supremacy by challenging essentialized racial categories used as the foundation of exclusionary racial identity politics (Ginsberg, 1996). Under hypodescent, black mixed-race persons are perceived as monoracially black and thus "traitorous" by white society if they stake a claim to their white identities which would disrupt preservation of "race-based social injustices and privileges" and

“conservation of the white-dominated state,” fueled by the biological myth of monoracial white purity (“Mixed Race Looks,” 2009).

One component of this racial dissonance comes from the sociohistorical construct of the hegemonic American family which embraces dominant social identities such as monoracial whiteness and cisheterosexuality. Speaking to the relationship between racial dissonance around mixed-race identity and white supremacy, scholar Jenna L. Matsumura (2017) states:

In my experience within the White, monoracist, dominant context, it is not the individual, but the external, monoracial population that cannot reconcile the existences, validity, and truth of multiracial people. Intolerance of multiracial individuals is known as *monoracism*, whereby the erasure of multiracial experiences is undertaken to preserve monoraciality, and in turn perpetuates White supremacist discourse (p. 106).

Racial dissonance around contending with multiracial family structures, particularly when addressing phenotypically ambiguous mixed-race persons, can contribute to heightened surveillance in response to a failure to align with monoracial and other dominant family norms in the U.S. (Jacobson, 2009). As articulated by D. Wendy Greene (2013), surveillance and policing of the interracial family reinforces notions of mutual exclusivity amongst racial groups which operates to uphold the racial hierarchy of white supremacy:

Black-white ancestry derives from the nearly 500 years of American legal, social, and political inventions erected to actively maintain the fictions that whites and Blacks were not intended to procreate and were not capable of establishing families together-fictions to which many Americans continue to adhere in the twenty-first century (p. 179).

One of the most pervasive forms of surveillance utilized against mixed-race individuals in cases of racial identification in legal institutions was the “forced exhibition and inspection of women of color’s undressed bodies,” providing insight to the justifications used to perpetrate sexual violence against black and black mixed-race women’s bodies (Greene, 2013, p. 181).

While white supremacy utilizes the biological myth of monoraciality to maintain the existing racial hierarchy, U.S. society has normalized and internalized monoracial categories “for

specific ideological and sociopolitical purposes, as mutually exclusive and wholly determinant,” (Rabin, 2012, p. 121). As scholar D. Wendy Greene (2013) further explicates:

In the United States, massive social, political, and legal efforts have been devoted to constructing and reproducing a socio-legal fiction of monoraciality in the midst of multiraciality. Before and after the founding of the United States, numerous campaigns were mounted with the express purpose of obliterating the social, personal, and intimate encounters between races—namely between whites and Blacks—which very much constituted a norm. Though multiracial liaisons and families were not an anomaly, colonial and post-colonial lawmakers (namely white males) manufactured countless racial fictions to evoke a counter-reality to interracial intimacy—racial separation—primarily to preserve a legal, social, and political infrastructure built upon notions of white supremacy, privilege, and racial purity (p. 181-2).

Monoraciality thus becomes utilized as a boundary which contributes to the construction of imagined monoracial communities. As denoted by Benedict Anderson (1991), imagined communities necessarily enforce boundaries in order to demarcate outsider others from the insider community members, thus embracing separatist positions.

Subscribing to a dualistic black-and-white monoracial paradigm obfuscates the system of white supremacy by erasing multiracial and other non-black and non-white monoracial groups from the hegemonic monoracial discourse and discourses on white supremacy and racism. This obscures the experiences of racism faced by non-black monoracial groups and multiracial groups and limits our understandings of racism to the legacy of African enslavement. This contributes to the erasure of the differences in “oppressive political, social, economic and cultural systems” that other non-black monoracial groups or multiracial groups experience which “are important for recognizing our individual humanity and important for effective organizing to dismantle white supremacy,” (“The Black White Binary,” 2010). Embracing the nuances in experiences of racism across various communities of color contributes to a more holistic understanding of the system of racial oppression, such as an understanding of the common ground shared in relation to white

supremacy, which can provide greater insight into constructing systemic solutions to combatting and dismantling it (“The Black White Binary,” 2010).

Counterstance Position: Using the Master’s Tools: Separatism in Communities of Color

Despite the myth of biologically distinct racial groups, communities of color may also utilize racial measurements of the “white power structure,” such as the U.S. census and false biological measurements such as hypodescent and blood quantum, to determine group membership and reinforce essentialized monoracial categories and white supremacy (Montgomery, 2012, p. 3). For example, Michel Foucault (1977) asserted that unilateral access to wealth and economic growth of the dominant white racial class is perpetuated by maintaining systems of racial classification as the U.S. Census enforces as a “technique of power and a procedure of knowledge,” (p. 148). Accordingly, “while traditionally it has been used to monitor, discipline, and symbolically erase minorities, for racial and ethnic minorities in the late twentieth century, their engagement with the politics of enumeration has been largely voluntary and aspirational” (Mezey, 2003, p. 1744). Embracing a counterstance position that utilizes tools of white supremacy, communities of color that are not members of the “culture of power” must follow the rules of that culture as it “makes acquiring power easier” for the community (Delpit, 1995, p. 25).

In an attempt to combat racism and white supremacy, communities of color may rigidly reinforce the black-and-white dualistic monoracial paradigm, which undergirds white supremacy by using discriminatory group membership requirements that solidify divisions within communities of color under the false notion of biologically distinctive differences (Montgomery, 2012). For example, the rule of hypodescent was carried forward after the Civil Rights Movement and used to classify individuals in an attempt to monitor and fight against racial

oppression which contributed to pressures for mixed-race persons to identify themselves monoracially as black (Fernandez, 1996). For communities of color, the hegemonic monoracial black-and-white dualistic paradigm in the U.S. may potentially contribute to “an effective divide and conquer strategy and a toxic internalized oppression dynamic,” in which the counterstance position is undertaken through embracing a separatist approach to seeking racial justice (“The Black White Binary,” 2010). For monoracial communities of color, embracing an essentialized monoracial black identity may be utilized as a protective factor from the following perceived threats from both monoracial white and black mixed-race “outsiders.” According to Mezey (2013), “From within, they have to confront the dissent or exit of those likely to identify as multiracial, and from without they have to fight against deracialization by those who see a multiracial category as a step toward colorblindness,” (p. 1755).

In both instances, mixed-race individuals are constantly positioned as a threat to perpetuating colorblindness or shifting dialogues on race at the expense of decentering blackness and anti-black racism and oppression. While the erasure of racial categories and movements towards colorblindness work to obscure and perpetuate the racial hierarchy and white supremacy, erasing mixed-race persons from the monoracial communities of color undergirds it by reinforcing its existing essentialized monoracial categories rather than contesting them. A method of reinforcing exclusivity of community membership thus occurs through homogenizing the group through use of a singular-axis framework, effectively subsuming and suppressing differences which may be representative of various additional struggles and movements for liberation that extend across race, gender, class, sexuality, abled-bodied status, nationality, ethnicity, and citizenship status simultaneously (Medina, 2003). For black mixed-race women, their racial identities must be subsumed into a monoracial category of blackness to access group

membership in the black community. This process of monoracializing black mixed-race women posits not only motivations for performing monoraciality but denotes the counterstance position of continuing to use false biological markers that align with a monoracial black identity.

Accordingly:

recognition claims were often made on the basis of color, but as often served as a proxy for culture...identities are always dialogical, forged through interactions and relationships with others, and in that sense they rely on recognition by others (and conversely, can be harmed by misrecognition by others). In this way, identity politics emphasized the need to be affirmed by others and the overriding value of recognition by the state, itself symbolic of national inclusion (Mezey, 2003, p. 1747).

By utilizing this approach, the counterstance position taken up by some communities of color reifies essentialized monoracial categories that stigmatize black mixed-race women as a threat to the purity of both racial groups, thus upholding the myth of racial purity that contributes to racial separatism (Thompson, 2005). Furthermore, this approach to validating racial identity and group membership contributes to “fractionalizing the identity of a multiracial person,” which “contributes to the exoticism of mixed race people, as they are perpetually on the outskirts of racial categorization and marked as racial outsiders,” (Larson, 2016, p. 4).

This is not to purport that all communities of color or other marginalized communities necessarily enforce stringent community membership requirements that undergird white supremacy, racism, and other interlocking systems of oppression. However, in some instances, attempts to create unity and solidarity amongst community members can contribute to the erasure of differences, particularly erasing the different experiences of community members who inhabit a social location at the intersections of various forms of marginalization (Medina, 2003). For example, communities of color enforcing the counterstance position “police the boundaries of racial identity in effort to keep those who might identify themselves as multiracial from defecting,” through “cultural dissent” which may threaten to redefine their racial identities

(Mezey, 2003, p. 1752-1756). For mixed-race individuals who inhabit the borderlands or “in-between” spaces of their communities, rather than protesting for visibility within the marginalized monoracial community, some may choose to embrace monoraciality for the sake of participating in a community centered around a shared singular identity (Medina, 2003).

Denoting the nature of the counterstance position taken on by marginalized communities, Jose Medina (2003) articulates why problematizing and subsuming differences is problematic to the goal of liberation from white supremacy, racism, and other interlocking systems of oppression:

The problem of difference gives rise to a paradox, the Paradox of Identity, that undermines the very foundations of identity politics: any political movement for the liberation and empowerment of a group requires that the identity of the group be fixed, for such movement is predicated on the interests of the identity shared by all the members of the group; but by forcing people into fixed molds of group identity, these movements end up repressing and oppressing the very identities that they set out to liberate (p. 657).

Placing individuals into “fixed molds of group identity” that rely on singular-axis frameworks reinforces the notion that identity is composed of separate and stable components that are not interrelated in complex ways that impact identity, lived experiences, and political and ideological perspectives simultaneously. Rather, it erases the pluralistic nature of identity which distorts the fact that individuals may share similar positions of marginality, allowing for them to coalesce across their differences to combat the interlocking systems of oppression as a unified front that refuses to erase the experiences of multiply marginalized individuals. Furthermore, it contributes to the rejection of particular members from the community who do not meet the membership requirements of fixed singular identity characteristics, such as monoraciality in imagined racial communities. The same rules of community group membership apply for ethnic and national groups that also embrace essentialist understandings of collective identity. For example, Jorge Gracia outlines the attempt to embrace a collective Hispanic identity as problematic as it does not embrace the cultural nuances of various Hispanic groups that do not necessarily share the

same cultural aspects as one another including: clothing; language or dialect; art; music; religion and food (Gracia, 2003).

In tandem with the erasure of differences, the counterstance position can be embodied by communities of color opposing white supremacy and racism through identifying group membership by negation, or articulating their identities in opposition to what or who they are not (Medina, 2003). This approach is problematic in that it reinforces dualism through use of an us-versus-them paradigm and leaves black mixed-race women to rely on external validation of their black racial identity from the community. For example, a monoracial black community may identify themselves in opposition to whiteness, therefore positioning black-and-white mixed race individuals as community outsiders due to their membership in the white community. This may explicate the pressure placed on mixed-race women to perform monoraciality in order to be acknowledged and validated in their communities of color. The pressure to perform monoraciality from all communities of belonging is primarily external, attesting to the external nature of mixed-race identity development and the use of monoraciality as a tool of white supremacy as it reinforces hierarchical essentialized monoracial categories. While the use of monoracializing mixed-race individuals may be undertaken as a means of contesting white supremacy in communities of color, the position is “limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against,” which maintains dualisms that keep communities separated under the notion of false biologically-based racial and other social differences (Céspedes, 2007).

Towards a Disidentified Position: Rejecting Monoraciality and Mixed-Race Recognition

Based on the lack of recognition of visible mixed-race identity, movement towards claiming a public mixed identity would seem to be the most beneficial next step for black mixed-race women lacking a sense of community or racial validation. Because the stance and

counterstance positions create limitations that only allow black mixed-race women to choose monoracial identities, embracing a mixed-race category is positioned as a more validating and empowering means of identifying racially. Complimenting this method of identification, scholar José Esteban Muñoz (1999) provides the following definition for disidentification:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture (p. 31).

Provided with his definition of disidentification, black mixed-race women would necessarily utilize existing monoracial categories and restructure them into subsumed "mixed-race" identities for the sake of visibility and validation. It is critical to note that while many black mixed-race women in the study sought to embrace their mixed-race statuses as a method of opposing monoracial designations and creating new communities, the move for public recognition of mixed-race status is representative of an oppositional or counterstance position. Because mixed-race identity is "as a response to and a product of the rigidity and mutual exclusivity of traditional categorization: multiracial identity presupposes monoracial identities," thus reinforcing essentialized monoracial categories which subsume and erase differences at the expense of rejecting complex identities from accessing group membership (Nobles, 2000, p. 133). As Judith Butler stated, "norms are precisely what binds individuals together," providing them "the basis for the possibility of community," (Butler, 1990, p. 220). Utilizing the identities mixed-race, multiracial and other similar designations for non-monoracial individuals risks reifying the notion of distinct racial differences as the construction of a mixed-race identity wouldn't be possible "without the American racial paradigm and hypodescent providing the

necessary superstructure,” (Spencer, 2004, p. 374). Furthermore, mixed-race identity as a category contributes to the same erasure of differences that mixed-race individuals face in their monoracial communities and other communities which use singular-axis lenses that only account for one component of their social identities and locations at a time.

Additionally problematic, by utilizing monoracial hegemony, the mixed-race identity becomes fixed, creating limitations on their own racial identities, thus perpetuating racial hierarchy which relies on fixed, exclusive racial classifications (Rabin, 2012). This occurs through merely creating and inserting a new racial category into the racial hierarchy, undergirding the hierarchical structure of white supremacy and presenting new concerns for the black community and other communities of color struggling for liberation against racial and other forms of oppression (Makalani, 2001; Rabin, 2012). Enforcing a mixed-race classification maintains white supremacy by merely adding a new racial category between the dualistic black-and-white poles which restructure, rather than contest them. Furthermore, as scholar Rainier Spencer (2011) argues, mixed-race individuals must be reflexive in seeking recognition of mixed-race status as it can act as a move towards “honorary whiteness” in which mixed-race status becomes a demarcation from the monoracial group occupying the lowest position on the racial caste, thus perpetuating white supremacy.

Furthermore, while embracing mixed-race, and other similar racial designations, acts as a sense of visibility, recognition and the potential for community building, it relies on monoracial hegemonic discourse which perpetuates the false narrative of a biological basis for race that is measurable and distinct (Rabin, 2012). For example, the term “mixed-race” invokes false biological notions of a mixture of blood which can be racially distinguished through measuring their perceived biological differences. This reinforces the notion that mixed-race individuals are

made up of a fraction of distinct biological racial parts, rather than embracing a whole identity that adequately embraces their complexities and contradictions, such as some of them being located at both racial poles despite their perceived mutual exclusivity (Rabin, 2012).

As mixed-race scholar Nicole Myoshi Rabin (2012) suggests, mixed-race individuals must work to “move away from traditional understandings of multi- and mono-racial identity by seeking out an alternative form of recognition,” (p. 127). Supporting this move towards disidentification, scholar Kristen A. Renn (2003) proposes mixed-race individuals “opt out of racial identities altogether by deconstructing them,” (p. 385). It is significant to understand this project as one that necessitates recognizing race as fluid and constantly in flux while also producing real material consequences based on how individuals are racialized and treated by society (Mezey, 2003).

The process of becoming disidentified is thus a challenging process that entails continuously identifying with one’s communities of belonging while embracing their differences and identifying as an outsider to other communities while embracing their shared similarities with those groups as a means of “disrupting established relations of similarity and difference and the unifications and divisions they create,” (Medina, 2003, p. 665). This process necessitates a transformation of identity so that it ceases to enforce essentialized, stable identity categories that position individuals as a sum of distinctive, easily measured parts. Furthermore, the act of disidentifying represents a “disloyalty against identity” and necessarily against the singular-axis “imagined community” which forces community members, such as mixed-race women, to pledge allegiance to the community through performing essentialized racial identities and other social identities (Butler, 1993, p. 220). Because communities are not monolithic, differences must be embraced both within the communities and identities of its members in order to

challenge multiple forms of oppression simultaneously as they do not exist independently but rather as interlocking, interdependent structures. Thus, the identity development process must move away from “a finite list of external social identities,” that fractionalize and pigeonhole individuals into classifications that erase the complexities of their identities and experiences (Céspedes, 2007, p. 101; Jeffries, 2013).

As Anzaldúa (2012) emphasized in *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, embracing the complexities and contradictions of all of one’s social identities and social location acts as an initial move towards a disidentified position that disrupts the piecing apart of one’s own intersecting social identities:

This assembly is not one where severed or separate pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers...the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness-a *mestiza* consciousness-and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm (p. 102).

Rather than falling into the dualistic us-versus-them relationship of the stance and counterstance positions, Anzaldúa rejects moving towards gaining access to power as a means of contesting white supremacy which enforces a counterstance position. She instead created a new mode of identifying her social location that was not based on singular-axis modes of identification which enforce essentialized understandings of social identity and experiences, such as monoracializing black mixed-race women in a way that erases their experiences of racialized, gendered, sexualized, and class-based oppressions among experiences of privileges and additional aspects of their identities.

Embracing the unique consciousness developed in the “in-between” spaces of the borderlands, other feminist theorists of color attest to the “double vision” of marginalized people, such as black mixed-race women, that provide them a unique insight into the perspectives of

both the oppressed and oppressor positions, allowing them greater opportunities to deconstruct and dismantle the system of interlocking oppressions and privileges they navigate (Collins, 1986, 1990, Anzaldúa, 2012). Deconstructing one's own experiences and social position within the borderlands of simultaneous oppressions and privileges is a crucial component of being able to understand and articulate their experiences of oppression as a counterhegemonic perspective or disidentified position to the hegemonic narrative of separatist groups necessarily embracing oppositional positions for survival (Jaggar, 1998)

Embracing an intersectional approach to analyzing social location at the interstices of race, class, gender, etc. can help illuminate how social hierarchies are informed and shaped to enforce exclusivity and inequality (Jeffries, 2013; Collins, 1990, 1993). Employing an intersectional analysis not only provides black mixed-race women to construct a language to navigate between multiple forms of identity more effectively, but also provides individuals within marginalized positions tools to dismantle the racial hierarchy of white supremacy (Jeffries, 2013; Lorde, 1979; Collins, 1993).

Employing an intersectional analysis of power disrupts the dualistic power relationships within social hierarchies by placing everyone on a horizontal plane of marginality where they can analyze their dual locations as oppressed and oppressor in order to coalesce across differences in social identities and ideologies (Sandoval, 1991; Collins, 1993; Anzaldúa, 2012). Furthermore, an intersectional analysis of power helps disrupt essentialist notions of fixed racial characteristics and the judgments attached to them (Collins, 1993). Chela Sandoval (1991) asserted that this form of "oppositional consciousness" assists with "creating a structure, theory, and method for reading and constructing identity, aesthetics and coalitional politics that are vital to decolonizing postmodern politics and aesthetics," across varying ideological frameworks (p.

45). By decolonizing dualistic positions, black mixed-race women are better able to intensify, embrace and connect across racial, class, gender, cultural, and other social and political differences in order to create a new social order imbued with equality and a better informed mutual understanding of social identities and relations (Sandoval, 1991). By functioning outside of a dualistic racial hierarchy, for example, black mixed-race women can create spaces to recognize and validate their identities (Sandoval, 1991).

Another component of developing a politically intersectional identity to contest the dominant racial hierarchy of white supremacy is to build coalitions across differences through creating inclusive contested spaces that not only resist the dualistic ideologies of monoracial groups but provide marginalized individuals with spaces for validation and empowerment of their identities (Collins, 1993, Rodríguez Domínguez, 2005; Anzaldúa, 2012). Practicing self-reflexivity of one's own social location at the intersections of both oppression and privileges is a critical component of working towards the goal of liberating all persons from the interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, 1993). Incorporating an intersectional analysis of power may compel individuals with particular privileges to utilize those privileges to take an allyship position through restructuring those power dynamics, such as black mixed-race women using their light-skin privilege to address colorism against dark-skinned black women (Collins, 1993; Sandoval, 1991).

Furthermore, members of various social locations and social communities have the opportunity to also connect across similarities opening opportunities to create relationships through empathy and compassion for one another (Collins, 1993). Additionally, in unifying to address social inequality, differences can be embraced through an "ethics of caring" as unique skills or tools that different individuals and communities contribute to the overall goal of

dismantling systems of oppression such as the racial hierarchy of white supremacy (Collins, 1993). Furthermore, differences can be embraced and validated in order to create a new mutually informed understanding of reality that provides validation, emancipation, and empowerment in one's own internally constructed identity (Jaggar, 1998).

In creating these political coalitions across differences, black mixed-race women have the opportunity to begin constructing their social and political activism around qualities and practices of compassion, love, and humility for all persons regardless of whether they occupy positions of power and perpetuate various forms oppression (Fernandes, 2003). This involves creating a holistic identity that encompasses both a social and political component. Therefore, these practices of love must necessarily occur in everyday interactions and within various social contexts in order to break from the duality between one's political and social life (Fernandes, 2003). While the identity development process may leave some black mixed-race women feeling invalidated, invisible, and inadequate in particular spaces, this internalized pain and deconstruction of experiences of oppression and privilege can be utilized and transformed into a guide for the construction of identities and politics that transcend using singular-axis frameworks to enforce essentialized racial categories and uphold white supremacy (Anzaldúa, 2012).

Future Areas of Research

Due to the extensive scope of this research study, an immense amount of data had to be set aside for future use. A multitude of different themes arose that could have been explored in greater depth. However, due to the limitations of completing a thesis project, I had to privilege data that most directly addressed the research questions and honored the knowledge construction process of the research participants and myself. An area of research that I would like to further develop that arose from this study is the pathology of white men's sexual violence and

perversions that become internalized by men of color as well as in ways that uphold white supremacist heteropatriarchy in the U.S. Due to the limitations of navigating a black-and-white racial duality, I would also like to extend this project to reflect a greater diversity of mixed-race identities that may further lack visibility. Furthermore, I plan to continue analyzing the relationships between white supremacy and the interlocking hierarchies of power that contribute to the erasure of marginalized individuals and the undergirding of interlocking power structures and white supremacy in the United States.

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