

2020

## The Multiracial Undergraduate and Graduate Student Experience

Lauren N. Meaux

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

The Multiracial Undergraduate and Graduate Student Experience

by

Lauren N. Meaux

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2020

The Multiracial Undergraduate and Graduate Student Experience

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by

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This dissertation written by Lauren Meaux, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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## ABSTRACT

### The Multiracial Undergraduate and Graduate Student Experience

by

Lauren N. Meaux

Multiracial individuals have been largely overlooked by the government (Nagai, 2016) and in the education sector (Botts, 2016). The lack of social network and community resources (Miville et al., 2005) have contributed to the challenges that Multiracial individuals face when finding a sense of belonging and positive sense of identity. During the transition into college, unique opportunities are presented to Multiracial individuals as they experience detachment from one culture group and have the chance to begin interacting and affiliating with other cultural groups (Houston & Hogan, 2009). Most students have a natural desire to associate themselves with others (Beck & Malley, 1998), but Multiracial individuals struggle to find racially and culturally aligned groups. Campus involvement is important because it leads to higher rates of academic performance and growth, retention, and academic satisfaction (Gardner & Barnes, 2007).

This dissertation seeks to examine the phenomenon of the Multiracial student experience on a college campus situated in a diverse Californian city. Using a phenomenological qualitative methodology, this study explored the identity patterns that Multiracial individuals experienced from Renn's (2000) patterns among Multiracial college students. In addition to the most frequent

patterns that individuals experience, resources and networks that provided on campus support were also investigated.

*Keywords:* Multiracial, higher education, mixed-race, identity, Renn's patterns of identity

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As recorded by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2010, nine million people self-identified as Multiracial (Ginsberg, 2017), which was a 32% increase from the 2000 census data (Korgen, 2016). This increase in self-identified Multiracial individuals, coupled with the 28% increase in interracial marriages from 2000 to 2010, indicates a growing population (Korgen, 2016). While this population is growing, the fact that *Multiracial* is not recognized as an official racial category by the government of the United States is problematic (Botts, 2016). Individuals were not given the opportunity to identify as more than one race officially until the 2000 census (Korgen, 2016). Additionally, there are likely far more Multiracial children than the census reported, based on the number of interracial marriages with children who were identified as a single race on census documentation. Although one or both parents may choose to identify their child as being Monoracial, how these children choose to self-identify cannot be determined (Parker et al., 2015). Another obstacle in obtaining an accurate count of this population is Multiracial people are often recognized as such by society if they cross U.S. racial categories. The child of an African American parent and an Asian American parent would be considered Multiracial; however, the child of a Mexican American parent and an Italian American parent could be considered multiethnic as opposed to Multiracial because one of the latter racial identities is considered an ethnicity (Schoem, 2005). Similarly, an individual with a Japanese American parent and a Chinese American parent would face the same scenario of being labeled multiethnic because both ethnicities would be racially categorized as Asian American (Schoem, 2005). The inconsistent definition of Multiracial in society is problematic and prevents the ability

to determine the true size of the Multiracial population. Thus, the Multiracial population suffers from a lack of official recognition and inconsistent use of definitions for this population. These issues continue after a long and complicated history for this population.

### **History of Multiracial Individuals**

The term Multiracial refers to “people who are of two or more racial heritages. It is the most inclusive term to refer to people across all racial mixes” (Root, 1996, p. xi). One of the most common and largest subgroups of Multiracial individuals are those who are mixed with Black and White heritage (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). The term, however, technically refers to any combination of racial heritage and individuals with more than two racial heritages (Schwartz, 1998a). Because Multiracial individuals who identify as Black and White are the largest and the fastest growing Multiracial subgroup (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008), there has been more research on these Multiracial individuals than other Multiracial subgroups. Due to the racially charged history between these two groups, these individuals also face different discriminatory challenges than other Multiracial groupings (Root, 1996). Throughout history, there have been many Multiracial groups who have been referred by various derogatory terms (e.g., Mulatto, blended, Mixed). Regardless of heritage, Multiracial individuals share a difficult history in the United States—marked by racism, exclusion, and silence.

### **Multiracial History in America**

Multiracial individuals have been disenfranchised by different dominant populations since the colonization of the United States (Nagai, 2016). Different ideologies and concepts have contributed to their marginalization over time.

### ***Historical Multiracial Terminology***

When Multiracial individuals were first acknowledged in Colonial Virginia, they were referred to as *Mulatto*, which was any individual who was part Black and part White (Nagai, 2016; Root, 1996). Over the years, many different terms and accompanying definitions have been used to describe Multiracial individuals. These special categories became common in the 1800s and included terms such as *Quadroon*, which was an individual identified as one quarter Black; *Octoroon*, meaning someone who was one eighth Black; *Hexadecaroon*, meaning someone who was one sixteenth Black; and *Quintiroon*, meaning someone who was the child of an Octoroon and a White individual (Nagai, 2016; Root, 1996). In parts of the Southwestern United States, formerly known as New Spain, the term *Mestizo* was used to refer to an individual with “mixed Spanish, Native, and/or African ancestry” (Nagai, 2016, p. 17). Multiracial individuals refer to themselves in a number of terms, such as Rainbow, Brown, M $\acute{e}$ lange, Blended, Mixed, Mixed-race, Biracial, Interracial, and Multiracial (Wardle, 1987). These terms come from the integration of their racial heritages in an attempt to honor all parts of their backgrounds (Daniel, 2010).

### ***Hypodescent***

*Hypodescent* is the “idea that when two or more races mix, the offspring take on the characteristics and designation of the least desirable race” (Nichols & Webster, 2005, p. 214). This ideology led to the development of the one-drop rule, which classified any individual with even just one drop of African blood as Black (Nagai, 2016). These “racial categorizations were a key means for enforcing this racial hierarchy” (Nagai, 2016, p. 13). Circumstances leading to the development of the one-drop rule began in the early 17th century, when free, European White

men outnumbered free, European White women (Nagai, 2016). This disproportionate European population, coupled with the increasing African slave population in the colonies, led to interracial relations (often nonconsensual) and reproduction (Nagai, 2016). These interracial relations produced Multiracial children, which was a problem for the colonies because there were no existing laws pertaining to such individuals. The increase of Multiracial individuals prompted the implementation of the one-drop rule, which was created on the idea of hypodescent (Fernandez, 1996). In 1662, despite English common law typically awarding children the status of their fathers, the Virginia legislature determined all children born to slave mothers would also be slaves (Nagai, 2016). This law was reinforced in 1691 with anti-miscegenation laws that dictated any Mixed child born to a European mother would be required to work in servitude for 30 years (Nagai, 2016). The desired outcome of these laws was to maintain racial purity and increase the number of slaves by refusing Multiracial children any privileges of their White heritage (Daniel, 2010).

After the conclusion of the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery, Black and Multiracial Americans could live a life free of servitude. Unfortunately, the idea of racial segregation was easily accepted, and the power of White supremacy was maintained (Steinberg, 1989). Racial segregation between Black and White individuals was enforced through the creation of the Jim Crow laws in the late 19th century (Daniel, 2010). Most of the Multiracial population were as affected as the Black population by Jim Crow laws due to the idea of hypodescent, which still classified any individual with one drop of Black blood to be Black in the eyes of society.

Jim Crow segregation laws were further supported by separate-but-equal laws created after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) Supreme Court case. Homer Plessy, a Multiracial man who was one eighth Black and seven eighths White, was arrested and sent to jail for refusing to leave a railroad car designated for White passengers (Nagai, 2016). When the Plessy case reached the Supreme Court in 1896, the ruling confirmed the separate-but-equal treatment of White people and Black people was legal in public spaces (Nagai, 2016). Jim Crow laws and separate but equal laws were abolished by the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000 Det seq.; Botts, 2016).

Despite the eradication of the separate-but-equal era, hypodescent and the one-drop rule continued affecting U.S. lives well into the 20th century. In 1983, while applying for a passport, Susie Guillory Phipps was notified she was not White, as she had been raised to believe. She was 3/32 Black, and upon further investigation, she found her birth certificate listed her as being Black. To have her racial classification changed from Black to White, Phipps sued the Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records. The state of Louisiana recognized anyone with 1/32 Black ancestry or more to be categorized as Black (La. R. S. 42:267), so Phipps lost her case and her birth certificate remained unchanged (Nagai, 2016).

Until the late 1900s, when the Multiracial identification became socially recognized, the rule of hypodescent meant Multiracial individuals were forced to identify with their minority or non-White heritage (Garrod et al., 2017). In the cases of both Plessy and Phipps, the laws built around hypodescent mandated they be classified as Black, despite their Multiracial heritage (Nagai, 2016) and chosen self-identities. In a country where laws such as the one-drop rule and



hypodescent have deciphered individuals' racial identity, the "Multiracial identity is rendered nonsensical, and therefore legally unrecognizable" (Botts, 2016, p. 86).

Although the one-drop rule has predominantly been used to withhold equal services from Black individuals, it is the context of society that makes it so. If economic opportunities provided to individuals through affirmative action and equal employment acts used the one-drop rule, there would be questions about whether individuals qualified for such benefits (Hall, 1996). The Native American community faced this problem when a large number of individuals attempted to identify as Native American to receive tribal benefits. To address this problem, the federal government required each tribe to validate membership, which led to the Bureau of Indian Affairs tests for Indian blood quantum, or a minimum amount, to be considered eligible for federally sanctioned benefits (Ramirez, 1996). The blood quantum system was first used in 1705 in Colonial Virginia to define one's "tribal membership by meeting a certain threshold of tribal ancestry or blood" (Nagai, 2016, p. 16) and was required of all Native tribes through the *Indian Reorganization Act* of 1934 (25 U.S.C. ch. 14, subch. B sec. 461 et seq.; Spruhan, 2006).

### ***Eugenics***

The eugenics movement was built on the idea that the White race is pure, and to maintain that purity, interracial reproduction could not occur (Botts, 2016). In an effort to prevent the "pure blood" of superior races from being "weakened" through the "contamination" of "lesser" races, eugenicists worked to prevent interracial relationships (Botts, 2016). Sterilization, institutionalization, and other methods of prevention were promoted as desirable options to control the reproduction of "lesser," "weaker," and minority individuals (Glass & Wallace, 1996). In the late 19th century, eugenicists attempted to prove the superiority of one racial group

over others by measuring differences of volume in the human skull (Nagai, 2016). Individuals involved with the eugenics movement promoted the thought that the reproduction of weak individuals and misfits contributed to low-performing students entering the school system (Glass & Wallace, 1996). Just as supporters of eugenics believed the mixing of White blood with the blood of a racial minority weakened the White race, they also believed this mixing strengthened the minority race (Nagai, 2016). Anti-miscegenation supported the eugenics movement and contributed to the thinking that “members of minority racial groups were physically, mentally, and morally inferior to members of the White racial group, so the White race was thought to be corrupted, soiled, and degraded” (Botts, 2016, p. 84) through interracial reproduction.

### ***Early Multiracial Populations***

Although most early colonies shared the same views on Multiracial individuals, and hypodescent was widely accepted as the norm (Fernandez, 1996), there were several communities where the Multiracial identity was welcomed. In the Florida Everglades, the Seminole population often embraced slaves who fled south to escape servitude (Nagai, 2016). These former slaves found freedom and refuge with the Seminole population, and when interracial marriages occurred, the Multiracial African Seminole children were accepted and protected by the tribe (Claudio, 1998).

The Navajo nation had similar levels of acceptance. The purity of one’s blood was not the indicator of whether or not they would be considered part of the tribe (Nagai, 2016). The Navajo people incorporated other nationalities into their cultural beliefs and accepted individuals from other tribes or nationalities, including those who were Multiracial. In alignment with their high levels of acceptance, the Navajo tribe considered anyone who could speak Navajo, had a deep

cultural understanding of the tribe's belief system, and achieved clanship, to be a member (Lee, 2006).

In New Spain, there was a high population of Mestizos due to the number of Spanish soldiers and lack of Spanish women in the new colony (Garr, 1975). Much like the views in Colonial Virginia, these Multiracial individuals were seen as inferior to Europeans with “pure blood.” In the 1500s, Mestizos and Mulattos in New Spain were grouped with convicts, orphans, and vagabonds, to be sent to colonies with depleting populations (Nagai, 2016). Mestizos frequently claimed both sides of their racial heritage due to perks each community could offer. Spanish families could provide “social, economic, and political opportunities while connection to the indigenous side provided sanctuary when problems or tensions arose” (Nagai, 2016, p. 18). Mestizos proved their usefulness by using the duality of their identity as a communication mechanism between the Spanish and Indigenous people (Garr, 1975). Despite holding an important role in society, the increasing number of Mestizos and Mulattos in New Spain was seen as a problem by the government. To discourage the Multiracial population, King Charles III issued certificates of Whiteness called *ce'dulas de gracias al sacar*, which could be purchased (Daniel, 2010), and “enabled Mestizos to legally erase their Native and/or African origins” (Nagai, 2016, p. 18). The creation of these certificates further marginalized the Mestizo population who could not afford to purchase them.

The greatest level of acceptance an historic group of Multiracial individuals experienced was in Hawaii. As a result of Chinese workers being brought to Hawaii to meet the needs of the growing sugar cane plantations in the late 19th century, there were many marriages between Chinese men and Hawaiian women (Nagai, 2016). Chinese-Hawaiian children who came from

these relationships were widely accepted in Hawaii and China (Takaki, 1993). Many Chinese plantation workers who married and had children in Hawaii were already married with families in China. Because of this unique situation, it was not uncommon for Chinese-Hawaiian children to live in China with their stepfamilies or for Chinese-born individuals to live in Hawaii with their father's Hawaiian wife and children. In both cultures, the Multiracial children were welcomed and treated well by mothers and families (Nagai, 2016). These high levels of acceptance afforded Chinese-Hawaiian individuals with social and economic opportunities to which solely Hawaiian individuals may not have had access (Takaki, 1993).

### ***Anti-Miscegenation***

The first-time interracial relationships were recognized by the government was in 1691, when the Virginia Assembly created anti-miscegenation laws (Nagai, 2016). *Miscegenation*, which means the act of mixing “types or to mix families” (Botts, 2016, p. 84), was vehemently opposed in early colonies and was typically accompanied by severe punishment (Ransom, 2005). Anti-miscegenation laws prohibited any form of sexual relationships between Africans and Europeans, including the penalty of a 15-pound fine for any European mother with a Mixed-race child and 30 years of work in servitude for the Multiracial children (Takaki, 1993). These laws, aimed to disgrace Multiracial individuals and their mothers, spread to other colonies from Colonial Virginia, with heavy enforcement in the South (Nagai, 2016). It was not until 1967, with the *Loving v. Virginia* (388 US 1 (1967)) case, that the final 16 anti-miscegenation laws were overturned (Fernandez, 1996; Moran, 2001; Newbeck, 2008).

The Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia* (388 US 1 (1967)) was a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of Mildred and Richard Loving, after they were

arrested and sentenced to jail for engaging in an interracial marriage (Nagai, 2016; Newbeck, 2008). Richard, who was White, and Mildred, who was Black and Native American, were married in Washington, DC, in 1958, and the couple lived in Virginia. Due to Virginia's *Racial Integrity Act* of 1924 (Va.Code Ann. Sec 20-54 (1960 repl.vol.)), which banned marriages "between White and 'non-White' partners" (Nagai, 2016, p. 22), Mildred and Richard were arrested in 1959 and sentenced to 1 year in prison for living in Virginia after being interracially married out of state (Newbeck, 2008). The prison sentence was suspended by the state of Virginia on the condition they leave the state and not return together. After moving out of state with their three children, Mildred and Richard Loving sought legal action, which resulted in the elimination of all remaining anti-miscegenation laws (Moran, 2001; Nagai, 2016; Ransom, 2005).

Anti-miscegenation laws were created with the intent of keeping the White race pure because it was believed "members of minority racial groups were physically, mentally, and morally inferior to members of the majority White racial group" (Botts, 2016, p. 84). The racial segregation enforced by the creation of the Jim Crow laws and separate-but-equal treatment aided in the goal of anti-miscegenation laws by discouraging the mixing of races (Nagai, 2016). Laws such as these allowed eugenicists to strive toward the reproductive separation of races to avoid contamination of the "superior" race (Sandall, 2008).

As a result of anti-miscegenation laws being repealed, there was a *Biracial baby boom* in the 1960s (Root, 1996), and the Multiracial population has grown since (Mills, 2017). A large contribution to the growth of the Multiracial population has been society's acceptance of interracial marriages (Davis, 2009). After the *Loving v. Virginia* (388 US 1 (1967)) verdict,

interracial marriages increased, and mindsets changed. As the White population developed a favorable view of interracial marriages, the views of society were closely aligned (Root, 1996). The overall attitude of People of Color on interracial marriages was positive prior to this Supreme Court ruling and continues to be. Despite racial categorization, “approval of intermarriage, was associated with higher levels of education, living in large cities, higher incomes, living outside of the South, more liberal ideology, and being younger than 50” (Root, 1996, p. xvi). The outdated thought that interracial couples “muddy the dualistic view of race” (Thornton, 1996, p. 107) was slowly replaced by the belief that the increase in interracial marriages is a change for the better. In fact, 43% of Americans participating in a Pew research study indicated interracial marriages were a change for the better, which largely outweighed the 11% who felt this increase was a change for the worse (Parker et al., 2015).

This positive shift in mindset prompted interracial marriages to double each decade from 1970 through 1996 (Root, 1996), with the most recent data showing a 28% growth from 2000 to 2010 (Korgen, 2016, p. 3). As of 2010, approximately 15% of all new marriages in the United States were interracial or interethnic (Korgen, 2016), though most media reports tend to only include interracial marriages of Black/White couples. A contributing factor to this discriminatory practice is the attempt to differentiate between interethnic marriage and interracial marriage (Root, 1996). Interethnic marriages being those between individuals of the same racial descent but from different countries or nationalities, and interracial marriages being those between individuals from two distinctly different racial backgrounds. Due to the inaccuracy of these reports, it is believed the number of interracial marriages is much higher than reported (Root, 1996). Such trends indicate “Americans have become more open-minded about Multiracial

families and relationships” (Garrod et al., 2017, p. ix); however, the increasing number of interracial marriages and Multiracial individuals have complicated the government’s desire to use “single, mutually exclusive racial categories” (Nagai, 2016, p. 23).

### **Evolution of The Census**

Since the start of the decennial census in 1790, there have been many changes in how individuals are counted, how their racial identity is represented, and how much society’s perceptions has restricted official racial census status (Nagai, 2016).

### ***The Race Question***

The practice of conducting a census every 10 years is mandated in the U.S. constitution (Nagai, 2016) and was created with the intent to aid in the development of a national system of taxation based on population. The first census, conducted in 1790 by marshals on horseback, consisted of three racial identity categories: free Whites, all other free people, and slaves (Parker et al., 2015). These categories were amended by the inclusion of *free colored persons* in the 1820 census, which described 13% of Black people at the time (Parker et al., 2015). Although every census since 1790 included racial identity questions, the first recognition of Multiracial individuals on the census was in 1850 ,when categories such as Mulatto, Octoroon, and Quadroon were added and removed from the census at varying intervals through 1920 (Fernandez, 1996; Nagai, 2016; Parker et al., 2015). In 1900, the word *Negro* replaced the term Colored, and in 2000, the category was amended to include both Negro and African American. The Negro/African American category existed until 2013. It was not until 2013 that the term Negro was dropped for being offensive, and the category officially changed to African American, which is used today (Parker et al., 2015). Other changes to the racial categories on the

census included the options of Chinese, Korean, Hindu, East Indians, and Native Americans being added and removed over the years (Fernandez, 1996).

From 1790 to 1950, census data were collected by enumerators, who determined the race of the Americans they counted. In 1930, enumerators were instructed to count Multiracial individuals as the minority race, no matter how small the percentage of the minority heritage (Parker et al., 2015). Enumerators were federal marshals until 1880 when government appointed census supervisors replaced them (Parker et al., 2015). When selecting census supervisors, the emphasis was on finding individuals who lived in and knew every house and every family of the district they counted. Despite these measures, the quality of enumerators varied (Parker et al., 2015). For the first time, in 1960, the census was conducted through the postal service and individuals were given the chance to self-identify with the racial category they felt best described them (Parker et al., 2015). Although individuals were given opportunities to identify their racial categories, they were still only allowed to select one category. According to the former director of the census bureau, Kenneth Prewitt, individuals who selected more than one racial category prior to 2000 were classified as whichever mark was the darkest (Korgen, 2016).

In 1997, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget released updated standards for the upcoming 2000 census, which mandated individuals would be able to mark multiple races in response to their racial classification (Korgen, 2016). This change in policy “was the result of lobbying advocates for Multiracial people and families, who wanted recognition of their identity” (Parker et al., 2015 p. 21). The most recent census in 2010, had 63 possible race categories due to the allowance of Multiracial individuals to mark multiple races, which is vastly different from the three choices available when the census first began (Parker et al., 2015).



## *Opposition*

Although the addition of the Multiracial option on the census is progress toward the widespread recognition of Multiracial individuals, there is still debate about the implementation of this policy. Allowing for people to identify Multiracially attracted some critics, who fear the new category negatively affects the number of Americans identifying in the racial minority categories (Khanna, 2016). The solution for this concern was that the Multiracial option would not be a stand-alone category and would instead offer the option to mark more than one pre-existing racial category (Khanna, 2016). Collecting data about Multiracial individuals in this manner would allow for data to be re-aggregated and ensure racial minority groups were not adversely impacted (Khanna, 2016).

A group of individuals who have a problem with the race question on the census is a group known as *eliminativists*. Eliminativists do not necessarily have a problem with the inclusion of the Multiracial option but with the race question as a whole (Botts, 2016). The beliefs of eliminativists are that biological race does not exist, and the reason why racism exists is because of the social construction of race (Botts, 2016). Eliminativists suggest if the race question is eliminated, then discrimination would therefore be eliminated (Botts, 2016). The opposing argument to this belief is “eliminating racial classifications would only eliminate our ability to track discrimination” (Khanna, 2016, p. 74). The dominant belief that race does exist does not align with the beliefs of eliminativists, but the larger issue is most policies are being produced for the Multiracial population as opposed to with this population. A frequent oversight in policy work is the involvement of the often marginalized group for whom the policy is made.

## ***Impact***

Despite the recent increase in national recognition of Multiracial individuals, they “still tend to be ignored by nonprofit and community-based organizations working with communities of color” (Jolivette, 2016, p. 209) and do not have access to the same amount of resources. The increased acknowledgement of Multiracial individuals will likely have a positive impact on the state of California due to the region having the largest number of respondents who self-identified as Multiracial according to the 2010 census data (Jones & Bullock, 2012). This large number of individuals identifying as Multiracial will likely experience the benefits of having their identity validated on a national level. The impact of the census indicates the need for the government to acknowledge that by emphasizing race every 10 years, they also have the “power to slowly deconstruct race” (Root, 1996, p. 5).

## **Multiracial Discrimination**

One of the first acts of mass Multiracial discrimination was the order of King Philip II of Spain to send Multiracial individuals, known as Mestizos and Mulattos, to U.S. colonies with dwindling populations along with “convicts, vagabonds, and orphans” (Nagai, 2016, p. 17). This extradition of individuals solely because of their Multiracial identity was a discriminatory act further supported by the certificates of Whiteness issued in New Spain (Daniel, 2010).

For a large part of U.S. history, Multiracial individuals have been seen as an “abomination on society” (Strmic-Pawl & Brunsma, 2016, p. 193) because they were often the product of an unlawful union based on anti-miscegenation laws. In the late 19th century, though, during the era of Jim Crow laws and separate but equal laws, there was no mention of Multiracial individuals in laws or court rulings. People identifying as Multiracial were wholly overlooked

and throughout these cases, the court continually discussed “the two races” (Botts, 2016, p. 85)—referring to Black and White. The reason for this intended oversight was due to the use of hypodescent, which classified Multiracial individuals into their single, non-White, racial category (Botts, 2016).

The problem of Multiracial discrimination is prevalent in the prison system where “the prison administration does not allow prisoners to identify as Multiracial” (Furst & Korgen, 2016, p. 179). The need to identify Monoracially in prison stems from the guards’ desires to racially categorize prisoners and some race-based gang affiliations (Furst & Korgen, 2016). Researchers documented how a prisoner recalls marking *other* on his paperwork only to have it crossed out and changed by a guard (Furst & Korgen, 2016).

Discriminatory actions and events continue to happen; but there are still no laws or court rulings against the discrimination of Multiracial individuals (Botts, 2016; Fernandez, 1996). This is likely a symptom of the system where Multiracial people cannot file a claim of racial discrimination because Multiracial is not considered a legally established racial category (Botts, 2016; Furst & Korgen, 2016). In racial discrimination cases, the plaintiff must belong to one and only one legally constructed racial group or a suspect class (Botts, 2016). Although there are many definitions for what warrants a suspect class, it can be classified as “a group of people with a history of having been discriminated against in the U.S. . . . [or] a group in possession of an immutable characteristic” (Botts, 2016, p. 81). Recently, there has been the argument that Multiracial people are a suspect class because they “have experienced a history of discrimination based on the immutable characteristic of being Mixed-race” (Botts, 2016, p. 83).

## **Multiracial Popular Culture**

In May of 2013, General Mills aired a Cheerios commercial featuring an interracial family (Brunsma & Porow, 2017; Elliott, 2014), which sparked controversy throughout the nation. Although some found the family-focused message inclusive, there was a large racist backlash, which led to the comments section of the commercial being disabled on *YouTube* (Brunsma & Porow, 2017; Chilungu, 2016). The backlash sparked by this commercial came as a surprise to the General Mills corporation, but they did not abandon their message. The company aired a follow-up commercial using the same cast during the Superbowl in 2014 and ending the commercial with the same one-worded message: *Love* (Elliott, 2014). This progressive message about the diversity of families in the United States prompted a Tylenol advertisement from Johnson and Johnson to include interracial families, same-sex couples, and adoptive families to be released in 2015 (Brunsma & Porow, 2017).

As more Multiracial individuals have gained prominence in the public eye, an interracial family is no longer a new concept to most Americans. Celebrities such as Rashida Jones, Derek Jeter, Vin Diesel, Mariah Carey, Maya Rudolph, and Tiger Woods (Mills, 2017; Nagai, 2016) have recently amassed fame as Multiracial individuals. While there are popular Multiracial individuals, the troubling history of the United States rooted in racism and silent on Multiracial categorization suggests identity formation and finding a sense of belonging may be complex for this group of individuals.

## **Racial Identity Development**

Identity is the collection of conscious choices an individual makes in response to the question: Who am I? (Kasinath, 2013). Identity also involves the conscious sense of self people

develop through social interactions (Erikson, 1950) and the factors of one's surrounding environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). One's identity is impacted by their culture, education, orientation, values, and relationships. Researchers have indicated identity formation requires finding balance in one's self and the ability to maintain that identity in relationships with others (Hill et al., 2013). Although two different tasks, identity formation and personality trait development are intertwined, in that they overlap and reinforce one another (Klimstra, 2012). Personality trait development refers to the behaviors that one displays over a period of time (Hill et al., 2013); however, identity formation is a separate task that involves defining one's self through social interactions and experiences (Matthews et al., 2014). Taken together, these two tasks help individuals form a strong answer to the question of who am I? (Kasinath, 2013).

The importance of forming a strong sense of identity is demonstrated through the lifelong positive impact on psychological, health, and social implications for individuals (Galliher et al., 2017; Renn, 2008). Having a strong sense of identity is linked to better career outcomes, well-being, health, and educational attainment (Barber et al., 2001; Galliher et al., 2017). Additional benefits of a strong and positive sense of identity are the community ties individuals develop. These increased levels of involvement and belonging that stem from a strong sense of identity can further contribute to student success and persistence in higher education institutions (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Tinto, 1993). Identity holds such importance in society that "knowing who one is may be one of the most fundamental components of being human" (Galliher et al., 2017, p. 2011).

Historically, one's appearance has contributed to their identity formation (Renn, 2008), leading to a sense of community with others who share a similar physical resemblance. As such,

one's race is a major component of identity development. Many theorists have posited frameworks for racial identity formation (Cross, 1987; Du Bois, 1903; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007; Helms, 1993; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2000; Root, 1996; Sue & Sue, 2012), and researchers have established that a strong sense of racial identity also leads to positive outcomes such as “higher self-esteem and fewer emotional problems” (Kasinath, 2013, p. 4).

Individuals who identify as Mixed-race, Biracial, or Multiracial face challenges in their identity development. These terms describe individuals whose heritage comes from more than one race or ethnicity (Root, 1996; Schwartz, 1998a) and for this study, were referred to as Multiracial. Most frequently, Multiracial refers to individuals whose parents identify as racially different; however, “it also includes those who are aware of—and embrace—racial mixings in earlier generations” (Korgen, 2016, p. 3).

Similar to the line of research about racial identity development, scholars have also examined Multiracial identity development (Poston, 1990; Renn, 2000; Root, 1990) and mapped out various ways Multiracial individuals may navigate the identity formation process. Renn (2000) suggested the identity formation for Multiracial individuals fluctuates based on context. As such, Renn (2000) identified *patterns*, rather than stages of identity development for Multiracial individuals. Specifically, these patterns for Multiracial individuals range from identification with only one racial background, to rejecting the notion of race altogether, to viewing one's self as Multiracial without any specific Monoracial breakdown. Renn (2000) proposed Multiracial individuals may fluctuate between these various patterns, rather than progressing through them sequentially. It is clear the identity formation process for Multiracial individuals is complex.

Identity development for Multiracial individuals has been characterized as a challenging (Renn, 2008) and complicated experience (Schwartz, 1998a). While most individuals work to assemble their identity through different experiences and explorations, this can be a particularly arduous task for Multiracial individuals due to the multiple sets of cultural values they must interact and navigate (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013). Additionally, the physical appearance of Multiracial individuals “strongly influences identity” (Renn, 2008, p. 18) and sometimes affects their levels of popularity (Mickelson, 2000). Garrod et al. (2017) suggested, “How one looks, (skin color, hair texture, body type, etc.) will position an individual along the continuum of racial privilege” (p. 3). This can be difficult for Multiracial individuals who are racially ambiguous in appearance because they are more likely to experience racial microaggressions from others who do not believe they belong in a specific racial group (Touchstone, 2013). The lack of physical similarities is just one of many identity development challenges Multiracial individuals experience. Because of these challenges, it takes a Multiracial individual longer to solidify their identity compared to Monoracial individuals who identify with a single racial category (Kasinath, 2013).

Deciding how to identify can be a complicated and potentially life-altering decision for Multiracial individuals, which can be full of benefits or consequences depending on one’s situation. How one is labeled by “their families, and society in general . . . [is] a key factor in the lives of Multiracial children” (Schwartz, 1998b, p. 3) because this could influence how they choose to racially identify in the future, and existing societal racial tension contributes to the difficulty of this decision. Because Multiracial individuals navigate their identity development in the context of historical racial tension between groups, Root (1990) coined this time as a *period*

of turmoil for Multiracial individuals. The challenges that Multiracial individuals endure during their identity formation have also contributed to “the lack of a visible Multiracial community or social network” (Miville et al., 2005, p. 514). This absence of a racial social network is a continuing theme throughout the lives of most Multiracial individuals, which is problematic because scholars have advocated for a strong sense of community to assist with the development of a positive racial identity (Brewer, 1991; Matthews et al., 2014; Root, 1990) and reduce the “period of turmoil” (Renn, 2008, p. 15) that many Multiracial individuals experience.

Despite racial categories being a social construction (Haney-López, 1996), racial identity is something most people continually seek, especially Multiracial individuals. The ability to claim a racial identity provides one with a sense of belonging and allows individuals “to be naturally associated with something” (Beck & Malley, 1998, p. 1). According to Brewer (1991), seeking a group identity is a natural aspect of human behavior and contributes to an individual’s cognitive and emotional well-being. In addition to helping one feel connected to a group, a sense of belonging also assists in further developing an individual’s identity (Baskin et al., 2010). Opportunities for identity development via social interactions are often sought outside the family with the intention of solidifying an understanding of who one is as an individual in society (Matthews et al., 2014).

### **Schools and Identity**

As microcosms of society, schools play an important role in the formation of human identity by offering nonfamilial social interactions for individuals to navigate. Peer interactions, adult role models, and exposure to academic content are all developmental benefits provided by the school system (Mouratidis & Sideridis, 2009). It is important to consider the experiences of



Multiracial students in K-12 settings because this is where their identity formation journeys begin (Erikson, 1950). Additionally, schools are a place where students seek a sense of belonging. Mouratidis and Sideridis (2009) identified a positive association between the amount of belonging that K-12 students feel at school and their academic success, motivation, and well-being. This relationship indicates the importance of securing a sense of belonging in school and suggests similar benefits to the construction of a positive identity.

Renn (2008) suggested Multiracial students often feel pulled to identify in one way or another based on context, including parental relationships, physical resemblance, or friendships. These pressures naturally occur and are bound to happen; however, parents, friends, and educators can contribute to an individual's identity development by maintaining minimal expectations and remaining consistent. Educators can ensure successful identity formation by being "sensitive to the identity-congruent and incongruent messages that the school sends" (Kaplan & Flum, 2012, p. 173) and incorporating Multiracial experiences into the curriculum (Williams & Chilungu, 2016). Any inconsistent expectations from family or friends may hinder development and cause confusion or neuroticism for the individual (Hill et al., 2013).

### **Multiracial Individuals in K-12 Classrooms**

Achievement data for Multiracial students in the K-12 sector are limited, but there are data from the status and trends report of 2016 released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for K-12 students who identify as two or more races or Multiracial (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Findings from the report indicated 11% of Multiracial students received credit for completing calculus as their highest math course in high school, compared to the 45% of Asian students and 18% of White students who reached this same accomplishment (Musu-

Gillette et al., 2017). Although there is no direct correlation, these success rates seem to indicate greater success at obtaining an undergraduate degree.

While research is limited in terms of achievement data, there is a great deal of research highlighting the historical classroom experience of Multiracial students in relation to the race of the teacher, which continues to be a predominantly White female workforce (Williams & Chilungu, 2016). Multiracial individuals with a Monoracial teacher face many different challenges in the classroom, but some prominent problems stem from White teachers' racial perspectives (Tutwiler, 2016). White teachers typically prescribe to the belief of the "White-nonwhite construction of race" (Tutwiler, 2016, p. 164), which creates similar problems to what early Multiracial populations (e.g., Mulattos) faced in Colonial Virginia (Nagai, 2016). Another idea that further complicates this construction of race is the color-blind ideology, which is the belief all individuals should be treated equally despite their racial identity, and that there is no difference in their racial experiences (Tutwiler, 2016). By refusing to acknowledge the construct of race, the color-blind perspective is dismissive of students' personal experiences with race (Davis, 2009) and invalidates their racial journey. Furthermore, the color-blind ideology contributes to one's lack of understanding about the complexity of race, especially that of Multiracial individuals. Teachers who often subscribe to the White-nonwhite perception or the color-blind ideology also tend to be in denial about the existence of White privilege (Tutwiler, 2016). Teachers such as these struggle to identify racial problems in their classrooms or schools, which results in the avoidance and resistance of race-centered professional development programs and activities (Tutwiler, 2016).

Similar to the mindset of White teachers in the early 20th century, researchers have suggested most Black K-12 teachers also hold a binary construction of race; however, the role these teachers hold in their communities was very different to that of a White teacher (Tutwiler, 2016). During the era of separate but equal, Black educators were respected as community leaders who held the destiny of many individuals in their hands and inadvertently fought for the rights of Multiracial individuals for true equality and the elimination of Jim Crow laws (Tutwiler, 2016). The majority of Black teachers had a social-justice-oriented pedagogy and encouraged the teaching of racial tolerance for the benefit of all students. Although Black teachers generally had positive relationships with students of all races, they typically had different expectations of Black students. Overall, “teachers of color are expected to be more effective with culturally relevant teaching” (Tutwiler, 2016, p. 176).

### ***Educators’ Impact***

The widespread influence educators have in their communities plays a critical role in society’s work to “dismantle racism and to reconstruct the commonsense meaning of race” (Glass & Wallace, 1996, p. 343). Incorporating activities and spaces for teachers to develop their understanding about how race impacts students are critical for all teachers because this type of interaction breaks the silence about race (Tutwiler, 2016). When students are given opportunities to participate in educational conversations about race, they can learn to break the silence around racial issues. These types of experiences also provide students with an example of what positive communication in conversations addressing race looks like (Tutwiler, 2016).

Educators can also ensure the successful formation of a positive racial identity through the types of “identity-congruent and incongruent messages that the school sends” (Kaplan &

Flum, 2012, p. 173). The inclusion of Multiracial individuals in textbooks, educational posters, and academic settings would positively impact success rates (Kaplan & Flum, 2012) and aid Multiracial students in finding their identities in academic settings. This type of inclusion is beneficial for individuals from all levels of education from grade school through graduate school (Kaplan & Flum, 2012).

### **Multiracial Individuals in Higher Education**

While research on the impact of the educator has focused predominantly on the K-12 environment, Gardner and Barnes (2007) proposed college student success rates are positively influenced by one's sense of belonging to the campus community and interactions with their program or department. Tinto (1993) indicated a college student's persistence is largely determined by the academic and social connections they feel to their campus. With the underrepresentation of Multiracial students in higher education programs (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017), it is pertinent to ensure they find a sense of inclusivity and resources that aid in their overall success. Considering the number of Multiracial students in the U.S. education system continues to grow (Ginsberg, 2017; Renn, 2008), it is likely the Multiracial student population at universities will also increase, which suggests the need for institutions and educators to be better prepared. Millea et al. (2018) suggested student engagement and class attendance rates are increased by a strong sense of identity with the university, which then positively impacts student success. Tinto (1975) found it vitally important for students to have positive interactions with the University during their first year of college to increase retention rates, and Astin (1984) hinged his student development theory on the relationships individuals would forge to increase their development and learning.

While researchers have begun to document the experiences of Multiracial undergraduate students (King, 2008; Renn 2008), there is still very little literature about the graduate student experience. Scholars have noted the importance of building relationships with others who share the same racial or ethnic identity (Thelamour et al., 2019) on university campuses, but this can be difficult for Multiracial individuals who are faced with largely Monoracial cultural groups (King, 2008). The challenge of facing microaggressions and racism as a Multiracial student (Shang, 2008) may have a greater impact than assumed due to the lack of supports and resources available to these individuals; however, with the proper access to support and resources, Multiracial individuals could experience the same benefits as Monoracial students in terms of engagement, inclusivity, and academic success (Renn, 2008; Schoem 2005).

### **Problem Statement**

One of the areas with the greatest need for increased Multiracial resources is the field of education. As measured by the U.S. Department of Education, the percentage of students who identify as two or more races doubled from 2% in 2000 to 4% in 2013 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017), and the number of Multiracial students in the U.S. education system continues to increase, yet efforts to support this population remain underresourced (Ginsberg, 2017). With this growing population, it is increasingly important to ensure educators are equipped with successful strategies to understand, enhance, and include resources for Multiracial students. Unfortunately, “formal curriculums often exclude the Multiracial experience” (Williams & Chilungu, 2016, p. 131), and educators are untrained on how to be culturally inclusive with this population of students. If schools are ill-equipped to support Multiracial students, the cycle of marginalization will continue. The 2016 status and trends report released by the NCES through the U.S.

Department of Education indicated the dropout rates of 16- to 24-year-old Multiracial individuals are approximately 6% for males and 5% for females, which would contribute to a smaller Multiracial undergraduate and graduate student population.

When Multiracial individuals start at a new institution or begin a new program at the undergraduate or graduate level, they are often faced with the unique challenges of building networks and identifying allies in a new space (King, 2008). While there are often organized opportunities for individuals to create social networks and bonds during the start of new ventures such as these, the difficulty of navigating new relationships can contribute to negative experiences for Multiracial individuals who do not easily find a positive sense of community (King, 2008; Renn, 2000). For some, the thought of having to redefine one's self or justify their identity choices can induce anxiety (Renn, 2000). Unlike their Monoracial peers, Multiracial college and graduate students are often not met with support and on campus resources to aid in the solidification of their racial identity (Schoem, 2005). Along with the difficulty of working through others' perceptions of them, Multiracial individuals often encounter obstacles related to their physical appearance when seeking membership in Monoracial spaces (Hall, 1996). Overall, Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students are frequently underrepresented in programming, and very little else is known about their experiences in higher education (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

### **Purpose Statement**

This study provided a platform for Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students to share their experiences and identify resources or systems of support they accessed on university

campuses. This process contributed to the literature to better serve Multiracial students and increased awareness of the Multiracial population.

Although Multiracial individuals have been overlooked by society, by educators, and in curricula (Renn, 2000; Williams & Chilungu, 2016), I provided a space for these individuals to have their voices heard through acknowledging their presence as a marginalized population and breaking the *norms of silence* (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013) many Multiracial individuals have grown accustomed to experiencing. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students. Further, this study examined factors that contributed to the identity formation process of Multiracial individuals. Researchers have established identity formation begins in adolescence and continues into adulthood (Erikson, 1950). Furthermore, researchers have highlighted this process takes longer for Multiracial individuals due to challenges they face (Kasinath, 2013; Renn, 2000). This study had a focus on an early adulthood population of Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used for this study was Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students. This theory provided the lens for examining data from Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students, who were asked to self-identify with Renn's patterns of identity development. Renn created these patterns based on Poston's (1990) Biracial identity development model, which composed of five levels: (a) personal identity, (b) choice of group categorization, (c) enmeshment/denial, (d) appreciation, and (e) integration. Poston's model, coupled with Root's (1990) positive resolutions for the tensions of Biracial identity, contributed to the creation of Renn's (2000) patterns of identity for Multiracial college students.

The five patterns of identity Renn (2000) developed for Multiracial college students are not considered sequential stages, but rather common experiences emerged out of the grounded theory approach. The first pattern includes the option for Multiracial students to hold a Monoracial identity, which is when an individual chooses to identify with only one racial background. The second pattern of Multiracial identity occurs when an individual holds several Monoracial identities and shifts between them based on the context of the situation. The third Multiracial identity pattern occurs when the individual selects *Multiracial* as their identity without specifying any specific heritage. The fourth Multiracial identity occurs when a person rejects racial categories altogether and identifies as something larger than race. Finally, the fifth identity occurs when a Multiracial individual identifies differently based on different situations and contexts, potentially even bouncing between Monoracial and Multiracial identities. Renn's theoretical framework was appropriate for this study because it was tailored specifically for the Multiracial college student experience.

### **Research Question**

The growth in self-identified Multiracial individuals over the past 20 years (Ginsberg, 2017; Korgen, 2016) indicated an expanding presence of Multiracial students in the school system. This population of students is already vulnerable as a marginalized population (Jolivette, 2016; Korgen, 2016), which amplified the need for meaningful supports and resources to aid in academic success and positive identity experiences. The following research question was explored in this study: How do students experience their Multiracial identity during undergraduate and graduate programs of study?



## **Method and Design**

To address this research question, I used a qualitative approach with the aim of capturing and honoring missing voices and personal experiences of Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students (Creswell, 2016). Phenomenological interviews were conducted with each participant to obtain essential details about their Multiracial experience (Seidman, 2006). Given the gap in the literature about this population, semi structured interviews seemed the most appropriate way to contribute meaningful data through participant voices.

Participants were undergraduate and graduate students between the ages of 18–25, from a Jesuit university in California, who self-identified as Multiracial, and who volunteered to participate in two interviews. Semistructured interviews to illuminate students' experiences related to identity, accessibility of resources, and inclusivity on campus. Interviews provided students with the opportunity to break the norms of silence (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013) around their Multiracial identity through interviews.

In addition to the semistructured interviews, the researcher conducted a document analysis of the resources and organizations available to students on campus. The document analysis acted as a means of triangulation for the data collected during the interviews (Bowen, 2009). The list of resources created during the document analysis process was also shared with participants during their second interview to gauge their knowledge about the resources available to them.

## **Delimitations and Limitations**

While this study was limited in scope, it began to fill the gap in the literature about Multiracial students' experiences in higher education. One delimitation of this study was the

limited context of one university. The university selected for this study was a mid-sized, private, Jesuit institution located in California. The reason for selecting this university for the study was due to high levels of access and support. The university previously engaged in initiatives to understand experiences of Multiracial students at the undergraduate level and was supportive of this research to expand and include undergraduate and graduate populations. The university where the study took place will be referred to as the “University.” Another aspect of this delimitation was experiences of students captured in this study were context bound, which limited generalizability. An additional delimitation was only individuals who self-identified as being of two or more racial heritages (Root, 1996) were classified as Multiracial for the purpose of this study. To allow for the largest number of Multiracial students to participate, students were asked if they self-identified according to this definition. By conducting this research with undergraduate and graduate students, voices and experiences of Multiracial individuals not enrolled as students on this university campus will not be captured; however, given the very limited literature on the Multiracial student experience in higher education, this study shed light on a missing perspective.

As with all research, this study was subject to inherent design limitations. One limitation of this study was interviews relied on self-reported data. These interviews were audio recorded to improve accuracy. The researcher also encountered an historical threat limitation during the recruitment stage of this study due to the COVID-19 virus, which spread rapidly across the globe in March 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020), which caused the University to move to virtual instruction for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester.

## **Assumptions**

As a Multiracial individual, the researcher held several assumptions about the topic of Multiracial identity and inclusivity. The first assumption was most Multiracial individuals long for a sense of belonging to honor all aspects of their racial heritages. This assumption developed from the struggles the researcher personally faced, while solidifying their own racial identity. This assumption was also reinforced by the literature, albeit limited, which suggested belonging and identity are intertwined. Entering into this study, the researcher assumed other Multiracial individuals may have also felt overlooked and ignored by society, and schools are institutions that could provide a sense of belonging. Similarly, the researcher assumed the University would provide support and resources for Multiracial students that would contribute to their sense of belonging and positive identity development.

As a graduate student, the researcher believed in the power of education to transform lives and assumed other undergraduate and graduate students would be interested in bettering their futures by virtue of pursuing higher education. As such, the researcher assumed learning from undergraduate and graduate students about ways to improve an inclusive campus climate would in turn lead to better academic outcomes as suggested by the literature. Finally, the researcher assumed having two or more racial heritages (Root, 1996) often meant having to navigate two or more cultural worlds, which could be difficult. It was assumed students would be able to discuss their experiences navigating two worlds during interviews; however, the researcher was aware individuals are on their own journeys of identity formation and sharing could be difficult. To maintain trustworthiness and credibility during this study, the researcher practiced reflexivity (Gay et al., 2014) by analyzing their own assumptions and biases about the

topic and what others shared. Further, the researcher invited participants to review their transcripts in a process of member checking (Gay et al., 2014) to improve the accuracy of the findings. Taken together, the researcher believed these steps ensured the trustworthiness and credibility of the data, despite personal assumptions.

### **Definition of Terms**

The focus of this study relied heavily on topics with specific terms commonly misunderstood. To provide an understanding of these prevalent terms, definitions from the research have been included here. Given the numerous terms used to describe those from multiple racial backgrounds, this study will consistently use the term Multiracial. Additionally, this dissertation has intentionally capitalized the term Multiracial, and all other racial identifiers, despite the academic norm.

### **The Capitalization of Race**

When writing about race and ethnicity, it can be difficult to find the correct “conventions of grammar, punctuation, and mainstream journalistic style” (csudhbulletin, 2019, para. 2) to properly align with academic writing that is also culturally responsive. Although there is not a consistent rule for the capitalization of racial and ethnic groups in academic writing, such as Black, White, or Hispanic, it is grammatically correct to capitalize nationalities, proper races, and ethnicities or groups of people (Tharps, 2014). Despite the use of racial terms, such as Black and White, on official government forms, there is still a debate about whether or not it is proper to capitalize these words (Perlman, 2015). Journalism style guides (e.g., *New York Times*) put both black and white in all lowercase letters; however, some manuals (e.g., *Chicago Manual of Style*) leave the choice of capitalization to the author (Perlman, 2015). Some publications and

websites capitalize one racial group, while leaving others lowercase to emphasize the importance, or presumed superiority, of their group of choice (Tharps, 2014). The act of presenting some racial groups in all lowercase letters creates an implied inferiority of these groups and is often seen in White supremacy publications (Perlman, 2015). In the 1920s, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote to publishers, newspapers, and magazines requesting the term *Negro* be capitalized to show recognition and racial respect to individuals who belong to these groups. He was eventually successful, but the capitalization did not carry over when the recognized term shifted from *Negro* to *Black* (Tharps, 2014). Recently, more publications have been shifting toward capitalizing Black when “using the word to define a fundamental part of their identity, particularly in political, cultural, and historical terms” (csudhbulletin, 2019, para. 2).

While the movement of clarifying the capitalization of racial terms is well underway, the dialogue has neglected to consider terms such as Multiracial and Biracial. As an educational leader for social justice, the researcher believes the same arguments apply and the term Multiracial should be capitalized to encourage greater recognition of an entire group of people who choose to racially identify as Multiracial. Due to the focus of this research being on individuals who self-identify as Multiracial and the importance of recognizing these individuals as a valid racial group, I believe the term Multiracial, when referring to an individual of two or more racial heritages (Root, 1996), should be capitalized to prevent any further marginalization of this group. While not all Multiracial individuals have the same racial makeup, they share in common that they come from two or more racial heritages; therefore, they deserve the respect and recognition of that title being capitalized. To that end, the researcher decided to capitalize

the term Multiracial when referring to those who are of two or more racial heritages (Root, 1996) in this research, along with all other racial and ethnic categories.

### **Defining Important Terminology**

*Biracial* refers to:

A person whose parents are of two different designated racial groups, for example, socially Black mother, White father. In a less commonly used but perfectly accurate meaning, Biracial can also refer to someone who has parents of the same socially designated race, when one or both parents are Biracial or there is racial mixing in the family history that is important to the individual. This use of Biracial moves away from requiring equal fractions of blood to recognize the prevalence of racial blending throughout American history. However, the social and psychological experience of the person who uses the term this way may be different from someone who is a first-generation Biracial. (Root, 1996, p. ix-x)

*Mixed race* refers to Multiracial.

*Monoracial* refers to “people who claim a single racial heritage” (Root, 1996, p. x). As an example, this term includes people who identify as only White or as only Black, with only one racial heritage.

*Multiethnic* refers to having a sense of shared values and belonging to more than one ethnic group (Phinney, 1990).

*Multiheritage* refers to the same definition as Multiracial.

*Multiracial* refers to “people who are of two or more racial heritages. It is the most inclusive term to refer to people across all racial mixes. Thus, it also includes Biracial people” (Root, 1996, p. xi).

### **Significance**

This study has the potential to create lasting change for Multiracial individuals by increasing awareness of the Multiracial experience. This study begins to fill the gap in literature

about the Multiracial student experience, thus providing educators and institutions with a deeper understanding of how to create a supportive environment for Multiracial students. Findings from this study potentially contribute to the expanding knowledge of Multiracial identity development and illuminate opportunities for institutions to strive toward educational equity for Multiracial students by creating a platform where their voices and experiences can be shared.

In conclusion, this study provided Multiracial individuals opportunities to share their thoughts and express their needs related to campus resources. The findings benefit the Multiracial student population at the selected University and lay the groundwork for other universities to modify how they structure their resources. Building on previous research, this study will contribute to the conversation on the underserved and often marginalized Multiracial population with this study. From the findings in this study, organizations and universities have a starting point to provide better services and support to this ignored population. The findings may also assist in the development of future studies.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This dissertation has been organized into five chapters to meet the academic and doctoral guidelines. Chapter 1 served as an informative chapter to brief the reader on the struggles that Multiracial individuals face and the importance of Multiracial identity formation. This chapter addressed the growing Multiracial population in the context of education and the need for greater resources, while clarifying terminology and significance. Finally, Chapter 1 summarized the design of the research to take place and broadened the readers' understanding of the Multiracial population. The identity development process of Multiracial individuals is addressed in Chapter 2 including a review of different theories and frameworks that contribute to this field. Chapter 2

also covers the inclusion of Multiracial individuals in the education system, focusing on experiences in higher education. Chapter 3 provides details about the method and design of this study, describing the procedures used to contact participants and gather data. Example interview questions are also found in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the analysis of the qualitative data, including in-depth descriptions of the data. The fifth and final chapter of this dissertation offers a discussion about the findings and future recommendations.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand how Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students experienced their identities in higher education. To inform this study, literature on the importance of identity development for Multiracial individuals was reviewed, including a review of the historical theories established by Erikson (1950) and Bronfenbrenner (1979). This chapter serves as a review of racial identity development models (Cross, 1971; Du Bois, 1903; Poston, 1990; Root, 1990), which contributed to the identity development of Multiracial individuals. Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students is further discussed in conjunction with the types of identity formation challenges Multiracial individuals experienced. The final portion of this literature review confirmed the gap in literature on the Multiracial experience in education. In examining the connection between race, achievement, and the unique challenges Multiracial individuals face in postsecondary institutions, this chapter emphasized the need for this study in the context of the student population.

#### **Identity Development**

The identity development journey can be full of complex choices for people, and college is a time when individuals are presented with the opportunity to be solidifying those choices.

#### **Defining Identity**

While one's identity is often thought of as the answer to the question, "Who am I?" this complex construct is also influenced by society and social interactions. According to Woolfolk (2012), "[I]dentity includes people's general sense of themselves along with all their beliefs and attitudes" (p. 87). Interacting with others also contributes to identity development. According to

Turner and Tajfel (1986), contributing factors to identity formation may stem from comparisons with others. They asserted the notion of social categorization of the self. Researchers have also supported the idea that identity is formed in part by the perceptions of society (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Scholars have delineated identity into two categories: (a) self and (b) social identity. One's self-identity consists of drives, values, abilities, beliefs, and perceptions of the world (Woolfolk, 2012), but social identity mainly consists of how one is perceived by others (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). This constant interaction between self and others contributes to the formation of one's identity. The formation of identity is important because it determines how others interact with an individual or how an individual chooses to interact with others (Turner & Tajfel, 1986).

### **Early Identity Frameworks**

There are many human development theories, and Erikson's (1950) psychosocial development model laid much of the foundation for the field of identity development. Erikson's work had a focus on psychosocial health and development (Knight, 2017), which Erickson theorized unfolded across eight stages, corresponding to various timeframes in the life span (Knight, 2017). The first four stages of Erikson's work were theoretically influenced by Freud's (1958) psychosexual stages of development and focused on how one develops physically from breastfeeding and potty training through intimate relationships with others. Erikson (1950) moved the theory toward a relational focus of how one interacts with those around them.

Erikson (1950) established three aspects of identity: (a) ego identity, (b) personal identity, and (c) social identity. Ego identity and personal identity are internal aspects that pertain to an individual's innermost processes, values, and beliefs (Schwartz, 2005), while social identity

pertains to how other's view an individual or more external aspects of identity. Over the eight stages of Erikson's model, an individual progresses through the developmental phases of their life, but stages are not necessarily tied to age (Dunkel & Harbke, 2017). The first five stages of Erikson's identity development theory take place from birth through adolescence (Schwartz, 2005) and conclude with the fifth stage of identity versus role confusion, which has been touted as "the most important in Erikson's theory" (Dunkel & Harbke, 2017, p. 59). The stage of identity versus role confusion is important because the sense of self-understanding developed in this stage allows for one to know others (Dunkel & Harbke, 2017). According to Erikson's (1950) model, as individuals progress through stages in their lives, there are catalyzing events, the resolution of which usher them into the next stage of development (Knight, 2017).

Erikson (1950) theorized that identity formation began around adolescence. According to Erikson (1950), identity formation is a life-long task, but it is in adolescence when one begins to "consciously solidify their identity" (Kasinath, 2013, p. 1). During the identity formation stage of psychosocial development, individuals face the conflict of identity versus role confusion. This stage is often the first time many are faced with the question, "Who am I?" and individuals must make deliberate choices in all areas of their lives to answer it (Kasinath, 2013). Role confusion occurs in individuals unable to make concrete choices about who they are and fail to integrate all aspects of their identities (Erikson, 1950). According to Erikson's model, the inability to solidify one's identity may prevent them from forming close relationships, feeling a positive sense of contribution, and satisfaction with themselves in the future. In addition to providing one with the ability to positively advance developmentally, a sense of identity helps one to find their place in many settings (Kasinath, 2013).

Another model of human development is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model of human development, which encouraged thought about factors that could influence development. The ecological systems model is suitable for identity studies because of the aspects that contribute to one's experience that are taken into consideration (Tudge et al., 2016). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model consists of five layers that impact an individual's development (Shelton, 2019). In the middle of the ecological systems model is *the self*, which includes age, gender, and health. The layer immediately surrounding the individual is called the *microsystem*. The microsystem includes people, relationships, and factors that immediately impact an individual, such as family, school, work, and faith. The second closest system to the individual is called the *mesosystem*, which includes relationships between factors in one's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An example of the mesosystem would be how one's academic demands and demands of one's family interact or conflict and how the relationship between the two demands impact the individual (Shelton, 2019). The *exosystem* is the next level of the ecological system model and includes factors an individual has no control over, but still impact their life. Examples include how one's family's financial contribution may limit their ability to be involved on a university campus or how university policies effect the courses in which they can enroll. The exosystem includes how the individual is impacted by decisions over which they have no control. The outermost shell of the ecological system model is the *macrosystem*, which is the larger cultural context in which an individual lives. The macrosystem typically consists of one's religious groups, the political climate of the nation, their social environment, their culture, etc. The final aspect of the ecological system model is not an all-encompassing shell, rather it is a foundation or dissector of the previous four systems. The final system is called the *chronosystem*,

which pertains to how time impacts an individual; this can be the timing of events in their life or the epoch in which their development is situated (e.g., whether they attend college immediately after high school or later in life as an adult; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Shelton, 2019).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work is still used frequently across many fields of study, but there have been some questions about whether the model has been used correctly (Tudge et al., 2016). Inquiries such as these specifically spoke to the importance of time, context, and personal characteristics in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work and whether they are being given the appropriate amount of attention (Tudge et al., 2016).

Bronfenbrenner's later work had a focus on the process-person-context and time model. The *process* emphasizes the importance of the activity or task at hand; the *person* takes one's individual characteristics into consideration; the *context* is the environment the individual experiences; and *time* is considered in terms of longevity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Some researchers have used Bronfenbrenner's model as a framework to analyze discriminatory or acculturation experiences individuals face on their journeys to seeking belongingness (Baldwin-White et al., 2017). Identity studies that use Bronfenbrenner's framework often point to the importance of the chronosystem because identity experiences change through the stages of life (Baldwin-White et al., 2017).

In summary, although Erikson's (1950) work was structured as a stage model, not all development models followed this pattern. Bronfenbrenner (1979) took context and environment into consideration in the ecological systems model. Although both models were formative to the field of human development, neither address populations of color, such as the work of Du Bois (1903) and Cross (1971), who explored the journeys of Black individuals.

## **Racial Identity Theories**

While early theoretical frameworks about identity have gained attention, researchers interested in the development of people from nondominant culture have established their own racial identity development theories. For example, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) was one of the first to theorize how individuals who identify as minorities face different experiences than those in the dominant population. Years later, Cross (1971) developed the nigrescence model, which was created to address the racism individuals of color had been facing in society. Since these foundational works were developed, there have been several models of racial identity development. Racial development is important because of how it contributes to an individual's perceptions of themselves and others (Poston, 1990), and "defined as pride in one's racial and cultural identity" (Sue, 2010, p. 152).

The current researcher reviewed theories of Du Bois (1903) and Cross (1971) because of the historical circumstances of their investigations into the identity of people of color. Through their separate examinations of the Black identity development process, Du Bois (1903) and Cross (1971) were much like social scientists of their day. The events and racially charged politics surrounding the research conducted by Du Bois (1903) and Cross (1971) are what make their theories relevant in the Multiracial identity theories of today. The current researcher also reviewed Phinney's (1990) model of ethnic identity because of the number of Multiracial individuals who also identify as Multiethnic (Schoem, 2005). Furthermore, individuals who identify as Multiethnic may have similar experiences to Multiracial individuals due to how they are perceived by others (Schoem, 2005).

Du Bois (1903) developed the model of Black identity in the early 1900s to explore the two different identities Black Americans experienced at the time (Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005). One identity was how Black Americans saw themselves and the other identity was how the dominant population saw them (Du Bois, 1903). Although Du Bois's work was not widely accepted by the predominantly White academic community at the time, his concept spread across the country and gained notoriety over the years (Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005). The theory of *Double consciousness* (Du Bois, 1903) is how people of color navigated having an internal identity of how they chose to see themselves, while being aware of how others in the dominant population viewed them. Double consciousness was frequently rejected or depicted as a flaw that was experienced most commonly in communities of oppressed people forced to see themselves through the lens of others (Black, 2007). Contrary to the belief at the time, that possessing a double consciousness was a flaw, many psychologists believe claiming multiple identities in society is now widely accepted (Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005).

Following the theory of double consciousness and in response to systemic racism, Cross (1971) developed the nigrescence model, a theory for African American identity development. Much like the work of Erikson (1950), Cross's (1971) model is a stage model, starting with the *pre-encounter stage*, when individuals view the world through a Eurocentric lens. The second stage of Cross's model is the *encounter stage*, which is when an event challenges an individual's Eurocentric values. The third stage is the *immersion-emersion stage*, which is when an individual seeks to outwardly express their heritage. The fourth stage is the internalization stage, which is when the individual settles into their identity peacefully or develops a hatred and distrust toward White culture. The final stage of the nigrescence theory is the *commitment stage*, which ends

with internalized peace and a plan of action to “dismantle systems of oppression in society” (Endale, 2018, p. 515). Although this theory has been widely recognized by scholars, Cross (1991) later revised the original nigrescence model to consider the societal context of the time, similar to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems model. Cross’s (1991) theory revisions were aimed at creating a distinction between group identity and personal identity to shift the model to being asset based, as opposed to focusing on the deficits of certain group identities (Vandiver et al., 2002). The other notable change that occurred with the revisions to Cross’s (1991) theory was the removal of the internalization and commitment stages, which closely align to the idea of rejecting race. This change shifted the internalization stage to be the final stage of Cross’s nigrescence model, which was then meant to encompass a more Multicultural lens of acceptance (Vandiver et al., 2002).

Based on Erikson’s theory of development, Phinney (1990) developed the model of ethnic identity, which was intended for high school and college students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Phinney described ethnic identity as being acquired through social interactions with one’s culture. Even though Phinney considered Erikson’s (1950) model as a foundation for the work, Phinney (1990) also incorporated many of the same experiences as the nigrescence model and credited Cross’s (1971) work in the theory (Phinney, 1990). Phinney’s ethnic identity model is comprised of three stages of an identity formation process.

The first stage of Phinney’s (1990) model explored an *unexamined ethnic identity*, which closely resembles Cross’s (1971) first stage of accepting values of the dominant group. The second stage Phinney (1990) proposed was the *ethnic identity search*, often prompted by an event, encouraging the individual to question their values and form a new interpretation of their



identity. Finally, the third stage of Phinney's model was *ethnic identity achievement*, consisting of acceptance, understanding, and internalization of one's new identity.

Although Phinney (1990) used the term *ethnic identity* as opposed to *racial identity*, the overall model Phinney posited is applicable to racial identity and ethnic identity. Both terms are often misused in society and mistaken for the other, but ethnicity denotes one's cultural heritage, values, traditions, and nationality (Phinney, 1990), while race is a social construct based on phenotypical appearance (Haney-López, 1996). Phinney's work has been foundational to the understanding of identity development for people who identify outside of the dominant culture and was intended for high school and college students.

There are similarities between racial identity models of the nondominant population, and all models have contributed to the formation of Multiracial identity models in the late 20th century. Du Bois (1903), Cross (1971), and Phinney (1990) laid the foundation for the exploration of Multiracial identity by exploring the duality of how an oppressed population sees themselves in the eyes of the dominant culture alongside how they wish to be seen. Through stages of identity development, beginning with Eurocentric values and ending with the desire to overturn oppressive systems (Cross, 1971; Phinney, 1990), researchers have worked to define a model which describe their journey to self-actualization (Cross, 1971; Du Bois, 1903; Phinney, 1990).

Other racial identity models include the White racial consciousness model (WRCM), which is based on one's awareness of their White identity and how they interact with the privilege that accompanies their identity (Rowe et al., 1994). The WRCM was developed from Helms's (1993) two-phase, White identity development model. Helms's model was focused on

abandoning racism first, followed by working toward a nonracist identity to deconstruct racism in society. Gallegos and Ferdman (2007) developed the Latino identity development model, which has six orientations individuals can shift in and out of throughout their lives; the model ranges from Latino integrated all the way to White identified. Sue and Sue (2012) developed a general racial and cultural identity development model that is widely applicable to a range of individuals from different racial backgrounds, including Multiculturalism. Sue and Sue's model consisted of five stages: (a) conformity, (b) dissonance, (c) resistance, (d) introspection, and (e) integrative awareness .

### ***Multiracial Identity Theories***

Identity theories for Multiracial individuals have been a combination of the formative models of Erikson (1950) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) and models developed around racial minority populations, such as those by Du Bois (1903) and Cross (1987). Some of the first scholars to venture into the field of Multiracial identity were Poston (1990) and Root (1990), whose approaches to Multiracial identity were later refined by Renn (2000). The term *Multiracial* was introduced as a new identity group in 1990 by Maria Root, a researcher of the Multiracial experience, and the term is defined as individuals of two or more racial heritages. For the purposes of this study, the term Multiracial encompasses individuals who are *Biracial*, which is a term often used synonymously but refers to individuals who are of exactly two different racial backgrounds (Kenney, 1999). Because Biracial individuals fall under the category of Multiracial, they face very similar tribulations, but some subsets of Biracial individuals endure even greater challenges.

Poston (1990) proposed the Biracial identity development model, one of the first Multiracial theories of identity development. This model addressed how Biracial individuals, whose parents identify as two different racial groups (Root, 1996), develop identity. The five stages of the Biracial identity model include (a) personal identity, (b) choice of group categorization, (c) enmeshment/denial, (d) appreciation, and (e) integration (Poston, 1990). This model accounts for personal identity, which is a stage of innocence most children experience prior to school attendance, when identity is not related to race. Stages of choice of group categorization and enmeshment/denial are when individuals begin having interactions with others, who force them to classify themselves; this is when the search for belongingness becomes a priority (Poston, 1990). Finally, the stages of appreciation and integration are when individuals have opportunities to explore their multiple heritages and develop identities that represents all of their racial backgrounds. Though the stages encompass many emotions and experiences Multiracial individuals face during their identity formation, this model does not account for all potential identities of Biracial or Multiracial adults (Renn, 2008).

### ***The Development of Renn's Multiracial Identity Model***

Early Monoracial identity development theories were constructed as stage theories, which suggested a linear progression through stages. Like Erikson's (1950) model, many of the foundational, early identity development models were created for dominant populations; but there were a few theorists, such as Cross (1987) and Du Bois (1903), who addressed identity development for people of color. While differing from Erikson's work, these racial identity theorists focused on Monoracial populations. Poston (1990) and Root (1990) were among the first scholars who developed identity theories for Multiracial individuals. Although the models

Root and Poston developed moved away from traditional linear models, they worked to replace deficit approaches that framed Multiracial individuals as being confused or unresolved (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Poston's (1990) Biracial identity development model has a progression of stages, with the final stage of feeling whole and having the ability to integrate one's multiple identities. The idea one can only feel complete once they have accepted the integration of their multiple identities is a deficit model because it implies a Multiracial individual cannot find peace with any other identity pattern (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

Root (1990) developed a Multiracial identity development model, consisting of four resolutions: (a) acceptance of the identity society assigns, (b) identification with both racial groups, (c) identification with a single racial group, and (d) identification as a new racial group. When developing this theory, Root considered discrimination toward Multiracial individuals and their experiences as minorities. This theory was grounded in an ecological perspective and included consideration of how environment and context have an impact on identity. The ecological model also allowed for Multiracial individuals to shift from one pattern of identity to another throughout their lives, depending on the context of the situation in which they found themselves. Root's identity development model contributed most to the development of Renn's (2000) patterns of identity development for Multiracial college students.

In Renn's (2000) patterns of development for Multiracial college students, students can identify with a pattern, while also allowing for continuous development over time. Much like in Root's (1990) identity development theory, Renn (2000) felt it was necessary for patterns to be structured so that students could move fluidly among them. In the construction of patterns of development for Multiracial college students, Renn (2000) considered the impact peer culture,

public spaces, and social context have on development and perception of self. Renn (2003) understood the college setting creates different ecological experiences for students, which is why there is a focus on settings with the potential to influence an individual's identity choices. The four settings Renn (2003) focused on were (a) microsystems, such as student organizations; (b) the mesosystem, which is the overall campus culture; (c) the exosystem of racial identity policies on campus; and (d) the macrosystem, which is how students situate their racial values and beliefs.

The five patterns of identity among Multiracial college students were developed from the idea college provides unique opportunities for identity exploration because of the contextual settings and situations college students experience (Renn, 2000). Renn's (2003) model supports the development of Multiracial identity ecologically and includes consideration of the time necessary for Multiracial individuals to sort through their multiple racial heritages. The five patterns of identity Renn (2000) developed for Multiracial college students are not considered sequential stages; rather, they describe common experiences and emerged out of the grounded theory approach. These patterns include that Multiracial students can hold a Monoracial identity, which is when an individual chooses to identify with only one racial background. The second pattern of Multiracial identity is when an individual holds several Monoracial identities and shifts between them based on the context of the situation. The third Multiracial identity is when the individual selects *Multiracial* as their identity without specifying any specific heritage. The fourth Multiracial identity rejects racial categories altogether and describes when an individual identifies as something larger than race. Finally, the fifth identity is when a Multiracial individual identifies differently based on different situations and contexts, potentially bouncing

between Monoracial and Multiracial identities. Renn's (2000) theoretical framework was appropriate for the current study because the framework was tailored for the Multiracial college student experience.

### **Experiences of Multiracial Individuals**

Identity formation for Multiracial individuals is a difficult task because they have multiple sets of cultural values to navigate, and they typically assemble their identities through different experiences and explorations (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013). Researchers have suggested it takes a Multiracial adolescent longer to establish a firm sense identity than it would for a Monoracial adolescent (Kasinath, 2013). An additional difficulty Multiracial individuals encounter during identity formation is interactions with others. Researchers have indicated a supportive role of close individuals is critical during adolescence to contribute to positive identity (Hill et al., 2013). Furthermore, theories of identity development for Multiracial individuals suggest context matters (Renn, 2008). Multiracial individuals may feel pressured to identify in one way or another based on parental relationships, physical resemblance, or friendships (Hill et al., 2013). Pressures occur naturally, which is why it is imperative parents, friends, teachers, and family members remain mindful of the individual's choice for their own identity and do not exhibit favoritism. To reduce pressures, expectations of Multiracial individuals should not depict a specific culture or be racially aligned. Multiracial individuals could be negatively impacted by "inconsistent expectations [that] would hinder development of both personal and environmental sameness" (Hill et al., 2013, p. 415) and cause great confusion for the individual.

Inconsistent expectations or pressures about cultural values can cause a Multiracial individual to struggle with *borderlands*, which is when an individual maintains an identity in one social group and has the ability to “cross the border” and hold a different identity with another social group, while respecting multiple perspectives simultaneously (Root, 1996). Because border crossing can be complex, there are times when individuals face identity struggles and question their true selves (Root, 1996). Borderlands are often developed via cultural norms and differences; they can create academic divisions for individuals, which lead to lower academic performance (Darder, 2015).

The multiple challenges Multiracial individuals face during identity formation contribute to “the lack of a visible Multiracial community or social network” (Miville et al., 2005, p. 514). According to Renn (2008), Biracial individuals of Black and White heritages often face a “period of turmoil” (p. 15) during their journeys of identity formation because of historical racial tensions between groups, which can cause them to denounce parts of their heritages (Pugh & Garcia, 1992).

Deciding how to identify is a complex and individual decision. How one is labeled by “themselves, their families, and society in general . . . [is] a key factor in the lives of Multiracial children” (Schwartz, 1998a, p. 3). Some Multiracial individuals choose to identify as one of their races (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013), which may shield them from people who “have no understanding of children who belong to more than one race” (Wardle, 2000, p. 3). With similar intentions, some parents of Multiracial children with any amount of African ancestry choose to “raise them as Black in order to prepare them for the treatment by society” (Schwartz, 1998a, p. 3). Researchers have suggested a problem Multiracial individuals face when choosing to identify

Monoracially is the “guilt about having to develop an identity that may not incorporate all aspects of their heritage” (Schwartz, 1998a, p. 3). Alternatively, Multiracial families may choose to emphasize a Multiracial or Biracial identity, and, in these instances, parents often “believe that it is important for the children to take equal pride in all their heritages” (Schwartz, 1998a, p. 4). Finally, some Multiracial families “oppose the concept of racial labeling altogether, classifying their members solely as human” (Schwartz, 1998a, p. 4). The rationale behind the desire to be labeled as human is based on the thought that any label other than White is considered “lesser,” so reverting to the most basic identity shared by all will deprive systemic racism of its fuel (Schwartz, 1998a).

Regardless of which identity path a Multiracial individual chooses, they often face similar challenges. Aside from challenges faced, there is very little overlap between Multiracial individuals: “Considering all Multiracial people as part of one group overlooks important differences that result from specific identity markers that people have” (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013, p. 1311). It would be unfair to say all Multiracial individuals share a culture. Multiracial individuals typically have unique racial configurations, especially if one of their parents is Multiracial. It would even be wrong to say all Multiracial individuals with Black and White heritages share a culture because the percentages each individual claims from each heritage vary. This argument was further demonstrated in a study conducted by Drouin (2015), in which 11th-grade students were asked to fill a container with items that reflected their cultural identity. One Multiracial student filled her box with corresponding items from her Asian identity and her U.S. identity, such as chopsticks and a fork, jasmine rice and Rice-a-Roni to share both parts of her identity. After sharing with her peers, the items she included were questioned by a



friend. This led the student to admit her items were not a fair representation of her because she is “not perfectly evenly divided” (Drouin, 2015, p. 60), like her artifacts may have suggested. This is the case with most Multiracial individuals.

The majority of Multiracial individuals do not feel evenly divided, and their internal division may change based on the circumstance (Drouin, 2015). Due to historical racial tensions and the existence of race-based funding, Multiracial individuals receive the message that certain parts of their identities are more valuable than others (Schwartz, 1998b). This is “evidence of their exclusion from American society, a forced rejection of a part of their heritage, and a powerful negative influence on their self-concept” (Schwartz, 1998b, p. 5). Root (1996) proposed positive resolutions to tensions of Biracial identity, including the idea that individuals “may move fluidly among racial groups” (Renn, 2008, p. 15). This thought was supported by Chang (2016), who explained Multiracial individuals are always on a “casting call,” and they must know which identities to turn on and which to turn off based on how safe they feel (Ginsberg, 2017).

Creating a safe environment where Multiracial students feel they will be accepted is important because “positive Multiracial identity is linked to good psychological health” (Renn, 2008, p. 19). This positive sense of self increases self-efficacy (Matthews et al., 2014) and student performance, but there are several factors that must be in place to ensure successful identity affirmation. First, there is the need for exposure to positive Multiracial experiences and role models. The lack of exposure to positive role models can make a Multiracial individual feel like an “imposter” due to the inadequate resources in terms of “language, cultural experiences, or cultural knowledge” (King, 2008, p. 38). Second, it is necessary for Multiracial individuals to

convene in a group setting because of the support and belongingness that occurs among similar others (King, 2008). Such an experience provides Multiracial individuals with senses of validation, and experiences like these are important throughout the identity development process. A lack of opportunities for Multiracial individuals at young ages can lead to academic struggles and reduce the likelihood Multiracial individuals will achieve success in higher education (King, 2008). Finally, the implementation of systems to ensure educators understand “the beliefs, attitudes, and concerns of interracial families is crucial. Such knowledge will enable them to help Multiracial students to develop a positive self-concept and succeed in school” from young ages (Schwartz, 1998b, p. 7). A Multiracially inclusive educational curriculum would help to prevent the paradox of racially confirmed individuals inquiring and pushing Multiracial individuals to justify their identities and classify breakdowns of their heritages.

The oppressive squeeze created by the mechanics of racism has historically relegated Multiracial people to deviant status or “mistakes,” has minimized their contributions to society (despite the evidence), and has ignored their existence (Root, 1996). Subsequently, the human rights of a growing segment of the U.S. population have been compromised by imaginary borders between social races (Root, 1996).

### **Identity and Success in Higher Education**

Having a strong sense of identity is linked to success in higher education (Millea et al., 2018). For instance, researchers on college student retention have indicated a positive sense of on-campus identity promotes involvement and engagement, which directly contributes to student success (Millea et al., 2018). Increased campus involvement has led to higher rates of academic performance and growth, retention, and academic satisfaction (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Tinto,

1993). Tinto (1993) suggested institutional factors (e.g., campus organizations and resources) contribute to student persistence, likely due to the positive sense of community and engagement these factors add to the student experience. A strong sense of identity in the campus environment also increases class attendance rates, which directly contribute to student success (Millea et al., 2018). Although retention rates of students from all racial backgrounds and ethnicities are affected by their sense of belonging, a sense of belonging seems to be a larger problem for students who identify as racial minorities, due to difficulties in finding positive identities on college campuses (Gershenfeld et al., 2015).

Race and socioeconomic status are factors that contribute to college retention rates; yet belonging to a minoritized racial group can increase the likelihood of students experiencing microaggressions, racism, or feeling unwelcome on college campuses (Gershenfeld et al., 2015). Such experiences can create strain in a college student's social life and negatively impact their overall success. Students of color face a dramatic culture shift, as they transition into the university environment, so it is crucial for them to find a sense of belonging on campus (Landry, 2003). As is true with many racial minority populations, if students of color do not find where they belong on campus, they are likely to be overlooked, which can decrease the retention rates for these populations (Landry, 2003). These trends are not only true for racial minority students who attend predominately White institutions but also for students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Landry, 2003).

Sands and Schuh (2004) indicated graduation rates for Biracial individuals were likely linked to student fit at their institution. The data indicated the importance of individuals finding a sense of belonging in their universities. Finding a sense of belonging is a critical component of

positive self-identity and success at school, from elementary school through college (Beck & Malley, 1998; Sands & Schuh, 2004). Although focused on elementary and secondary education, Beck and Malley (1998) proposed to belong is simply “to have a proper, appropriate, or suitable place. To be naturally associated with something. To fit into a group naturally” (p. 1). The same is likely true in higher education, where belongingness plays a role in creating a positive self-identity (Sands & Schuh, 2004). There is a deeper sense of belonging called *belongingness*, which is when an individual believes “a dyad, a group, or community is not complete without them, and they are not complete without the dyad, group, or community” (Baskin et al., 2010, p. 629). The importance of belongingness is that individuals find a place where they can belong and feel this belongingness become a part of them, without which they would be incomplete (Baskin et al., 2010). Belongingness can have positive or negative impacts, contingent on the degree to which one feels they belong. One’s level of belonging and involvement is a key to student success because students who feel connected have a greater chance at success (Millea et al., 2018). Data have shown students who considered leaving college were not socially involved and experienced dissatisfaction with their college connection experiences (DeWitz et al., 2009).

In a study conducted in a K-12 setting, Beck and Malley (1998) found “when students felt they belonged, they had an enhanced sense of worth and increased self-confidence. On the other hand, if they did not feel they belonged, they felt helpless and had no sense of control over their environment” (p. 2). Feelings of helplessness and rejection lead to poor performance in school and a sense of disconnection from teachers and other students (Beck & Malley, 1998). Astin (1984) researched the phenomenon of belonging with college students in developing his

student involvement theory, and Tinto (1975) investigated the impact a sense of belonging had on retention and success rates.

Tinto (1975) contributed that it is important for students to find a sense of belonging through positive interactions in their first years of college. An increased sense of self-efficacy contributes to a positive sense of self and success in college (DeWitz et al., 2009). The importance of building relationships starts early in life and continues into the realm of higher education, as emphasized in Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. Developing social networks and seeking involvement on a college campus are important because of connections one can develop with their peers, potentially improving student success through the integration of one's self into the university community (Millea et al., 2018). In the college setting, students seek identity development opportunities and interactions, with the intention of solidifying their understanding of who they are in society, as they did in K-12 education (Matthews et al., 2014), and increased levels of involvement benefit their personal development and learning (Astin, 1984). Positive experiences like these contribute to higher retention rates for undergraduate students (Tinto, 1975).

According to Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, the higher a student's level of involvement is on campus, the greater their personal development and learning will be. There are parameters of types of involvement applicable; the quantity and quality of involvement matter. Involvement can be a physical or psychological investment of energy; involvement must occur along a continuum; and student learning in a program is proportional to their involvement in that program (Astin, 1984). In addition to increased involvement, embracing the structure, social and academic life of a university can increase the likelihood of graduation for students (Tinto, 1975),

but this can be difficult for students who were not successful in balancing social and academic demands in high school (DeWitz et al., 2009).

One of Astin's (1984) (as cited in Richmond, 1986) goals with the development of the student involvement theory was to understand student retention, often inaccurately represented by colleges and universities across the country. Through the student involvement theory, Astin addressed three pedagogical theories: (a) subject matter theory, which is the thought that one with the highest knowledge holds the most value; (b) resource theory, which predicts the greater amount of resources available to students, the more likely learning will occur; and (c) individualized theory, which suggests all students need different types of resources, styles of teaching, and amounts of support (Astin, 1984). All three pedagogical theories are supported by Astin's (1997) work in calculating university retention rates through factors, such as GPA, admissions test scores, gender, and race. Astin's (1984) student involvement theory is not as applicable to commuter students and adult learners because of unique challenges they face with relating to peers and authority figures (Richmond, 1986).

Researchers of graduate student success suggested 50% of all graduate students in the United States do not complete their degrees (Crede & Borrego, 2014). Although Crede and Borrego's (2004) results varied across student nationalities, there was a trend suggesting students who had connections with their cultures and accurate expectations of their programs were more successful than other students. Graduate students also benefited from opportunities, such as peer mentoring and professional development opportunities, because of the increased departmental involvement it afforded them (Gardner & Barnes, 2007).

## **Students of Color in Higher Education**

The landscape of higher education can be difficult for students of color to maneuver, as higher education was a field previously dominated by the dominant, White population (Garibaldi, 2014). Students of color may feel as if they are out of place on college campuses and face challenges in accessing higher education because of the achievement gap in education (Garibaldi, 2014). Garibaldi's (2014) research indicated, despite having the lowest SAT and ACT scores of all racial categories, some Black students started college and then left due to discomfort. Other scholars have reported feeling a sense of racial tension on campus, which can lead to higher attrition rates for students of color (Thelamour et al., 2019). One factor Thelamour et al. (2019) believed has assisted students of color with a positive sense of self on campus is the development of relationships with others who share their racial or ethnic identities. This sense of community helps students feel they belong on campus and contributes to their overall success as a college student.

Garibaldi (2014) asserted Black students are more likely to face struggles in college due to the racial gap between Black and White students in higher education, which can lead to lower graduation rates. This problem was further analyzed in a study by Gayles (2012) at Georgia State University, where Black students had the lowest retention rate, while students who identified as White were measured with the highest retention rate across the remaining racial categories included in the study: Asian, Black, and Hispanic.

One struggle students of color face on college campuses is microaggressions (Harwood et al., 2012). Despite the growing diversity of higher education, predominately White institutions can be intimidating for students of color to navigate (Harwood et al., 2012). Even if there is no

outward microaggression that students can pinpoint from an interaction, a student's perception of discrimination can be equally as harmful to their academic success (Gomez et al., 2011).

Increasing opportunities for interactions between students from all different racial backgrounds and addressing or enhancing the racial climate on campus was among the strategies identified to make a difference in how students of color succeed at predominantly White institutions (Gomez et al., 2011).

Students of color have experienced racial microaggressions in residence halls (Harwood et al., 2012). Although residence halls have traditionally been an important location for socializing, building friendships, and developing a sense of belonging with peers, they do not always provide these same benefits for students of color (Harwood et al., 2012). Harwood et al. (2012) suggested while White students increase the number of diverse relationships they have when moving from high school to a college residence hall setting, students of color maintain or decrease the number of diverse friendships they have during this transition. Residence halls offer a new dynamic for students of color, instead of finding opportunities to create new friendships with others from diverse backgrounds they are frequently met with insensitivity and microaggressions (Harwood et al., 2012). From racial microaggressions to racist slurs, there are many challenges students of color face in residence halls. Such difficult situations exist at all levels of education for students of color, which is why it is important for all institutions to address the racial climate and encourage an institutionally positive attitude toward diversity.

### **Multiracial Students in Higher Education**

Although fitting in on a college campus as a Multiracial individual means frequently redefining one's self (Renn, 2004), opportunities to experience new ways of identifying and



navigating spaces in college is a welcome prospect for many individuals. These opportunities often generate excitement or relief for Multiracial individuals, who get the chance to explore their identities in different environments, though others experience a crippling sense of anxiety and loneliness when grappling with their identities (Renn, 2000). Creating new social circles, forging new relationships, and identifying allies in a new space can negatively contribute to the identity solidification process in college (King, 2008). Navigating new social and physical spaces are experiences often guided by others' perceptions of a person, which can be impacted by physical appearance, cultural knowledge, and displays of conformity (Hall, 1996).

For students attending college in a post-affirmative-action era, there are still many racially charged policies and segregated education experiences (Shang, 2008). These experiences can make it difficult for Multiracial individuals to maneuver through identity experiences because they are often perceived poorly as whichever heritage has the lowest reputation (Shang, 2008). The cultural acceptance of interracial marriages and Multiracial individuals has been increasing, which should create an accepting college environment for the Multiracial population in the future (Renn, 2008; Shang, 2008).

This experience of navigating new spaces while facing others' perceptions is coupled with the challenge of being provided mostly Monoracial cultural groups and resources on the university campus (King, 2008). In Monoracial groupings, Multiracial individuals must decipher if and where they belong, while often feeling scrutinized by other group members (King, 2008). For some Multiracial individuals, choosing to fit in with a Monoracial group can feel as if they are rejecting other parts of their identities (Renn, 2008). In a study done by King (2008), several Multiracial students who situated themselves in Monoracial spaces reported feeling pressured to

act more like the group by whom they were surrounded. Such occurrences resulted in students feeling invisible and unable to properly interact in social spaces.

While many frustrations Multiracial students face in college pertain to how others perceive them, there are instances where students have felt fully accepted for their chosen identities; some students have said they never felt the need to use identity support resources because they were so supported by individuals in the campus community (King, 2008). To create positive experiences, student affairs professionals and institutions should identify how they can contribute to the development of these areas, where Multiracial students can find peace with their identities (Renn, 2003).

Most college students benefit from having strong networks of support (Schoem, 2005); Schoem (2005) reported witnessing a spike in Multiracial students' confidence when they had high levels of support. Grosfoguel (2012) suggested while ethnic studies courses have appeared more frequently on university campuses, the goal of such courses is "to produce a pluriversal decolonial social science" (p. 84). Despite the recent growth in the Multiracial population (Jones & Bullock, 2012), little is known about their "development and interactions in the college environment" (Root, 2000, p. 399). Schoem (2005) identified one trend: As the number of Multiracial students on a campus increased, so did their levels of social identity through being able to identify with larger groups of individuals like themselves. Multiracial students are often at a disadvantage upon entering college, due to the absence of formal education addressing their experiences. Unlike Monoracial students, Multiracial students typically do not have opportunities in K-12 education to study their social identities (Schoem, 2005). The experience gap between Monoracial students and Multiracial students is exacerbated by educators' expectations (Schoem,

2005). This is an issue for Multiracial individuals whose racial identities are often incorrectly perceived by others (Downing & Webster, 2005; Renn, 2008). While the way Multiracial individuals look typically have a strong influence on how they identify (Renn, 2008), many Multiracial individuals “do not physically conform to a stereotypical idea of a standard phenotype” (Downing & Webster, 2005, p. 23).

Students on college campuses face feeling their authenticity is questioned on a regular basis; as an underrepresented minority, Multiracial students are more likely to experience this through discrimination and bias (Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015). The transition from high school to college can be a difficult, sometimes traumatic, experience for individuals of all racial backgrounds; however, this tends to be a critical time for Multiracial individuals and their families, as their identity formations are at the forefront of their college experiences (Castro-Atwater & Huynh-Hohnbaum, 2018). Being involved with organizations and services on campus increases the likelihood of success for individuals (Gardner & Barnes, 2007).

There is limited research pertaining to the retention, graduation, and success rates of Multiracial individuals, but researchers have suggested minority populations face greater challenges than Monoracial individuals in higher education settings (Landry, 2003). The *Digest of Education Statistics Report* as released by the National Center for Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019) indicated 3.9% of students at degree-granting postsecondary institutions identified as Multiracial in 2018, which has more than doubled since the racial category was initially implemented in 2010. Sands and Schuh (2004) investigated how the diversity of campuses and positive relationships contribute to the success of Biracial college students. These factors were used to provide recommendations for other colleges

to create welcoming spaces for Multiracial individuals, such as developing additional programs and services (Sands & Schuh, 2004). Additionally, university professionals should be well equipped to address the needs of Multiracial students by providing them with safe and culturally inclusive environments (Houston & Hogan, 2009; Williams & Chilungu, 2016). Multiracial college students should have a wide range of supporters (e.g., counselors, advisors, housing staff, faculty) who are familiar with and understand the Multiracial identity development process (Castro-Atwater & Huynh-Hohnbaum, 2018). These allies should be well versed in the available on-campus resources and be able to encourage Multiracial students to participate in the clubs, groups, and services that will help them navigate their Multiracial identity experiences successfully (Castro-Atwater & Huynh-Hohnbaum, 2018).

Opportunities for departmental involvement, connection with other students on campuses, and participation in student organizations play an important role in student success (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). For graduate students, researchers have indicated it is important connections occur soon after entering the university because this is when students experience detachment from one culture group and begin to affiliate themselves with other groups (Houston & Hogan, 2009). Researchers have suggested Multiracial individuals need spaces where their identities are honored on campus because this contributes to identity formation and impacts “the extent to which they identify with their mixed heritages” (Houston & Hogan, 2009, p. 53). If opportunities are provided, it is more likely students will experience a greater sense of belonging in academic settings.

The purpose of the current study was to speak with Multiracial students to learn how their identities intersected with their experiences in college and graduate school. Students were asked

about their levels of campus involvement and if they felt they had strong networks of support, which Schoem (2005) suggested is important. Students were also given opportunities to share their experiences engaging with campus resources and whether they felt their identities fit into the existing fabric of the university culture (Millea et al., 2018). After they were invited to share, participants experiences were analyzed through the lens of Renn's (2000) patterns of Multiracial identity among college students: (a) Monoracial identity, (b) multiple Monoracial identities, (c) Multiracial identity, (d) extraracial identity, and (e) situational identity. Similar to the work of Sands and Schuh (2004), this researcher aimed to identify trends in belongingness among undergraduate and graduate students. Furthermore, qualitative data highlighted the supports Multiracial students need to improve their sense of belonging.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

Building on previous research that established positive racial identities and sense of belonging contribute to academic achievement in K-12 (Beck & Malley, 1998) and college settings (Astin, 1984), this researcher examined Multiracial undergraduate and graduate student identities and experiences. Additionally, this researcher extended the line of study that indicates inclusive campus communities contribute to persistence, retention, validation, and success (Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015) by examining Multiracial student identity. This study identified factors that supported and contributed to an inclusive campus environment through experiences of Multiracial students. The objective of analyzing experiences of Multiracial students was to find common trends among challenges faced and systems of support identified as pivotal to the inclusivity of their Multiracial identity. To increase the presence and sense of belonging for Multiracial individuals in society, it is important educational institutions provide opportunities for these individuals to participate in positive experiences. This researcher identified experiences, resources, and advocates available to Multiracial students.

This researcher shed light on shared experiences of Multiracial individuals by bringing them into the conversation about supports and services that have added value to their lived experiences, while also analyzing levels of access and inclusivity that students in the college population experienced. This researcher provided Multiracial individuals with safe spaces to share experiences and have their voices heard after years of schooling in systems where institutions, curriculum, and educators had overlooked them (Renn, 2000; Williams & Chilungu, 2016). By providing participants with opportunities to participate in this study, the researcher

broke the “norms of silence” (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013, p. 1317) many Multiracial individuals had experienced.

While recent researchers have examined Multiracial undergraduate experiences (Renn, 2008; Tutwiler, 2016), this researcher expanded the scope to consider experiences of undergraduate and graduate students to fill the gap in literature. Although graduate students were often underrepresented in higher education research, they were present on most college campuses (Tutwiler, 2016). Much like their undergraduate counterparts, graduate students who have a positive sense of belonging on campus and positive interactions with their program department have experienced higher success rates (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). The number of academic and social connections a student feels to campus aids in determining levels of persistence (Tinto, 1993). There was little literature about the graduate student experience, which left unanswered questions about how the campus climate that Multiracial students experienced was carried in a graduate context.

### **Research Question**

The growth in the population of self-identified Multiracial individuals over the past 20 years (Ginsberg, 2017; Korgen, 2016) indicated an expanding presence of Multiracial students in the education system. This population of students was vulnerable as a marginalized population (Jolivette, 2016; Korgen, 2016), amplifying the need for positive supports to aid in developing a sense of belonging. The prevalence of identity formation and inclusivity struggles among Multiracial individuals, along with the absence of literature about the Multiracial experience, led this researcher to the following research question: How do students experience their Multiracial identity during undergraduate and graduate programs of study?

For this study, a Multiracial individual was classified as one who self-identified as having two or more racial heritages. The identity formation process or identity development, while a life-long task, begins with a period of time when one “consciously solidif[ies] their identity” (Kasinath, 2013, p. 1) through experiences and explorations (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013). This process is thought to occur during adolescence (Erikson, 1950). As such, college students were an appropriate age to examine this topic of identity (Renn, 2000). Graduate students were also included in the study because researchers have suggested identity formation can take longer for Multiracial individuals (Kasinath, 2013), and there was little information about the Multiracial graduate student population. Identity was discussed with participants using Renn’s (2008) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students. Applying Renn’s (2008) framework, participants were asked to explain situations in which they most frequently identified as (a) Monoracial, (b) with multiple Monoracial identities, (c) as Multiracial, (d) as a nonracial identity, or (e) if they identified differently in different circumstances. By asking how participants most frequently identified when interacting with different parts of the campus environment, the researcher was able to describe their identity patterns. Resources and services were explored by asking students to identify what had most contributed to a positive Multiracial experience on campus.

## **Method**

### **Context**

This research study took place at a private, Jesuit university located in a diverse, urban environment in California. In 2019, the University served approximately 6,638 undergraduate students, 1,926 graduate students, and 1,118 law school students. Of the total student population



the University served, 6.8% were African American, 9.7% were Asian, 22.7% were Hispanic/Latino, 43% were White/NonHispanic, and 6.9% Multiracial. Although the number of Multiracial individuals on the campus seemed small in comparison to the other racial categories, the inconsistent definition of Multiracial likely affected these data (Schoem, 2005). Additionally, there was the theory individuals identified as the race they believed would benefit them most when being considered for college admission (Williams & Chilungu, 2016). Despite the small percentage of Multiracial individuals, the Multiracial population at the university grew from 4.7% in the 2018–2019 school year to 6.9% in the 2019–2020 school year. The University also had a diverse faculty, with 51.6% of faculty members identified as White, 20.3% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 9.3% identified as Black or African American, and 9.2% identified as Asian.

The University's mission had a focus on the encouragement of learning, the education of the whole person, the service of faith, and the promotion of justice. With many courses on social justice ideology, the University was committed to local and global justice for all. The University honored the Jesuit heritage through religious courses, faith-specific programs, and worship opportunities. The encouragement of learning occurred on the University campus through the creation of an intercultural community and promotion of critical thinking. The campus also had an Office of Intercultural Affairs that worked toward inclusive excellence for the campus community. The Office of Intercultural Affairs worked with students, faculty, and staff to implement programs and initiatives that would increase diversity, inclusion, and equity. With the support of the University president, this office also worked to combat social injustices and reduce the impact on underrepresented groups. For example, approximately four years prior to the study, this office created a Multiethnic taskforce and sent surveys to undergraduate students

to better inform practices on the University campus. The survey was created after a thorough review of the literature and distributed to undergraduate Multiracial students to gain knowledge about experiences of Mixed-race individuals at the university. Thus, the current study built on that work with the use of themes from the undergraduate survey (e.g., belongingness and inclusivity) to inform the qualitative interview protocol with undergraduate and graduate students.

### **Design**

This qualitative study used phenomenological interviews to investigate experiences of Multiracial college students (Seidman, 2006). A phenomenological study provided opportunities for the researcher to understand the shared experiences of Multiracial students—drilling to the “essence” of what it means to be Multiracial on a college campus. Participants were interviewed two times; both interviews consisted of open-ended questions and were semistructured, so participants could share their true experiences, instead of being led by the researcher. The first interview was focused on the participants’ higher education experiences and lasted approximately an hour and a half. The second interview, conducted after the preliminary analysis of the participant’s first interview, offered the researcher opportunities to ask follow-up questions, request additional details, and review emergent themes (Seidman, 2006). The second interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes (Seidman, 2006).

In addition to interviews with students, the researcher conducted a document analysis of organizations and resources that supported the Multiracial population at the University. The document analysis began with a list of supporting organizations available on the campus, accessed via the University’s website. The list of supporting organizations on campus was

reviewed for quality and accessibility to the Multiracial population of students on campus. Using a list during interviews allowed participants to speak about their experiences with these resources, highlight resources not on the list, and document how Multiracial students experience their identities across aspects of university life. The document review helped to triangulate data and support the narratives Multiracial students shared about their on-campus experiences.

### ***Rationale for Qualitative Research***

The qualitative research method used for this study captured data not previously accessible through the quantitative, survey-based study the University had conducted with Mixed-race individuals in 2014. Qualitative data provided a detail-rich narrative of individuals' experiences and a larger sample of participants through inclusion of undergraduate and graduate students.

Qualitative research allowed for the researcher to be the data collection instrument and connect with participants during interviews (Creswell, 2009). With the researcher having opportunities to interpret data in a manner relevant to participants' Multiracial experiences (Creswell, 2016) and having intimate, in-person interactions with each interview participant, a qualitative design provided the most benefits for the overall study. The face-to-face conversations that occurred in interviews ensured all participants had opportunities to accurately express and explain how the phenomenon of being Multiracial impacted them as a student.

### **Participants**

At the start of the study, the researcher sought to have approximately eight participants; however, recruitment was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020), when the University closed the physical campus and moved all instruction online in 2020.

Due to these circumstances, recruitment ended with four self-identified Multiracial undergraduate students and two self-identified Multiracial graduate students agreeing to participate in this study. The researcher aimed to recruit four students at each level to gather perspectives of the different types of students on campus but faced difficulty in identifying Multiracial graduate students under the age of 25. According to University data, there were approximately 660 students who self-identified as Multiracial; however, the researcher anticipated the data may be under representative of the actual Multiracial population due to measurement error, as the University required all individuals to classify as Hispanic or non-Hispanic before selecting one of five additional races or the option of two or more races. For the purpose of this study, snowball sampling (Gay et al., 2014) and convenience sampling (Gay et al., 2014) were used to identify participants who identified as Multiracial, regardless of how they were racially classified on any University documentation.

Participants were adults between the ages of 18–25 years old (see Table 1 for a list of participants). While there were many graduate students over the age of 25 interested in participating, this study limited the participant age range to be between 18 and 25 to keep participants in the beginning stages of adulthood and identity development. Based on the most recent climate study conducted at the University, it was anticipated approximately 30% of respondents would identify as male and 70% of respondents as female, but there was only one male respondent (12.5%). Although gender was not the focus of this study, this factor was used to describe respondents and analyze data.

Table 1  
*List of Study Participants*

Participant	Level of Study	Age	Gender
Adalynn	Undergraduate	19	Female
Cecilia	Undergraduate	20	Female
Jovie	Undergraduate	19	Female
Landon	Undergraduate	20	Male
Amanda	Graduate	25	Female
Gianna	Graduate	23	Female

## **Procedures**

The data collection procedures for this study included a document analysis, pre-interview demographic questionnaire, and semistructured interviews. All procedures involving human subjects occurred after receiving institutional review board (IRB) approval.

### ***Document Analysis***

Prior to interviews, the researcher conducted a document analysis of resources and organizations available to students at the University. The document analysis resulted in a list of resources gathered from the University website and was used as a means of triangulation for the experiences participants shared during their interviews (Bowen, 2009). The list of resources available on campus was also provided to individuals during their second interviews to provide opportunities to identify organizations or departments they felt supported by or participated in.

### ***Pre-Interview Questionnaire***

The pre-interview demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) collected basic demographic and educational information about all participants prior to their first interview. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: (a) demographic information, which asked for age, gender, marital and family status, employment status, and choice of racial identity, and (b) educational information, which asked about student status, GPA, major, and campus involvement. The pre-interview demographic questionnaire was provided to students upon

confirmation of scheduling interviews, with the instruction to complete and return the questionnaire prior to the interview date.

### ***Interviews***

Each participant partook in two interviews (see Appendices B and C for interview protocol). Interviews were semistructured (Gay et al., 2014) and included prompts to encourage individuals to discuss their unique experiences as Multiracial students on campus, without feeling confined to a list of sequenced questions. Interviews allowed participants to describe their experiences, types of resources they had accessed, if they found the resources to be helpful, and how frequently they accessed resources.

Following the first interview, all participants were scheduled for a shorter, follow-up interview to elaborate on their initial responses (Seidman, 2006). During the second interview, participants were provided with a list of on-campus organizations. The list was not shared until the second interview to allow participants to recall any organizations they found beneficial on their own, without feeling led by the researcher. When the list of organizations was shared with participants, the researcher asked about any interactions participants had with the organizations and how frequently they engaged with them. All interviews took place either on campus or via Zoom meeting.

**Recruitment.** Interview participants for this study were recruited through a purposeful and convenient sampling method by tapping into the researcher's graduate student and professional networks. Emails were sent to potential participants to seek Multiracial individuals interested in sharing their experiences. Once initial participants were identified, the researcher asked them to refer other students who fit the study requirements. This snowball sampling

approach was used to identify additional participants until the desired number was reached (Gay et al., 2014). The promotion of this research study was predominantly by word of mouth, so most participants were either notified by another participant or via a direct invitation from the researcher. Other participants learned of the study via an email their department or program shared on behalf of the researcher. Six participants from the pool of volunteers met the requirements and were selected to be interviewed.

After initial approval from the IRB, the researcher contacted several departments such as the Graduate Student Association, the Psychology department, the credentialing program, and faculty members from the School of Education, the School of Business, and others. In the initial communication, the researcher requested names of students from offices and departments who would fit the parameters of the study. After receiving the names of several students, the researcher sent the candidates the IRB-approved email. Other departments and organizations requested the email be sent to them directly for dissemination to students. Once students responded to the researcher showing interest in the study, the researcher confirmed the student met the requirements for the study and confirmed a date and time for an interview.

At the end of the first interview, the researcher scheduled the follow-up interview to decrease attrition in participants. All participants received emails confirming their second interview dates and times. At the end of the second interview, participants were asked to recommend other students who fit the study requirements. Although no participants were able to provide the contact information of other students in the moment, the researcher followed up with emails requesting contact information for other potential candidates. Candidates were then sent the IRB-approved email.

After approximately two weeks of recruiting, the researcher reached out to departments and organizations to see if they would resend the email. This second round of recruitment coincided with emails the researcher sent to potential candidates who were recommended by previous participants.

**Data collection.** When participants confirmed dates and times of their first interviews, the researcher sent them the consent form for their review and the demographic questionnaire for completion. Consent was obtained at the start of all initial interviews; each interview took approximately an hour and a half. Interviews were all audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy. By conducting semistructured interviews, participants had opportunities to share experiences about which they were not explicitly asked (see Appendices B and C for interview protocol).

During the second interview, the researcher asked about organizations reviewed during the document analysis process. As opposed to using the three-interview, phenomenological model (Seidman, 2006), all participants engaged in two interviews to create a deep, contextual understanding of the experiences Multiracial individuals faced (Seidman, 2006). The second interview also allowed participants to construct detail-rich narratives that would benefit the data set.

### **Analysis**

Qualitative data gathered through semistructured interviews were analyzed using deductive and inductive coding (Gay et al., 2014) to identify patterns among the results. Deductive codes were drawn from Renn's (2008) identity development patterns for Multiracial individuals. The deductive coding process helped the researcher identify trends across qualitative



interview data. The inductive coding emerged, as the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts. Inductive coding was used to identify common experiences among participants that the researcher had not anticipated when creating the deductive codes through Renn's (2008) patterns of identity among Multiracial individuals.

During the first round of coding, deductive codes, such as Renn's (2008) patterns of identity, academics, and university experiences, were used. These deductive codes were chosen due to the theoretical framework in which the research was grounded and the semistructured interview questions the researcher developed. Though the deductive coding process aided in the understanding of the participants' racial identities, it also led to underlying themes present in their experiences. The emerging patterns the researcher uncovered became the inductive codes used for the second round of coding. The inductive codes contributed to an understanding of campus resources with which participants interacted and participants' overall university experiences. During a third round of coding, several subthemes appeared across interview transcripts and helped the researcher to group the deductive and inductive codes into three themes: (a) Racial Identity, (b) Campus Resources, and (c) University Experiences. All three themes presented in the findings consist of both deductive and inductive codes.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The delimitations of this study began with the fact all invited participants of this study attended the same private, Jesuit university in California, which limited the generalizability of the findings because most students shared some contextual experiences. Qualitative studies are less concerned with generalizing findings; instead, a rich description of the phenomenon may contribute insights for similar institutions and individuals with similar experiences. Another

delimitation of this study was it only included students who identified as Multiracial, which was necessary for the purpose of the study; however, narrowing the sample pool limited the number of unique voices and experiences gathered. There are likely Multiracial students on other campuses with valuable opinions who were not given the chance to share through this research.

This study was subject to design limitations, as is the case with all research. For interviews, participants self-reported their lived experiences. Requiring participants to self-report their experiences created accuracy issues. Interviews were in person and recorded, so the researcher had opportunities to conduct member checks (Gay et al., 2014). By asking participants to elaborate on their experiences and conducting a document analysis, the researcher had opportunities to improve accuracy by triangulating data. An additional limitation the researcher encountered with this study was a historical threat posed by the COVID-19 virus, which caused a global pandemic in 2020 (Liu et al., 2020). As a result of the rapidly spreading virus, the University closed the physical campus and moved all instruction online to support students in social distancing guidelines encouraged in most states (Liu et al., 2020). With school closures across the country and shelter-in-place orders coming from local governments (Liu et al., 2020), candidates faced new challenges that likely prevented their abilities to participate in this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students and the resources and systems of support that contributed to their racial identities on the University campus. Through extensive qualitative data collection, the researcher sought to find trends of challenges faced and factors contributing to inclusivity of the Multiracial identity. All data collection aimed to answer the following research question: How do students experience their Multiracial identity during undergraduate and graduate programs of study?

Data collection was successfully executed with six study participants. All participants were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling and participated in two separate interviews. Over the course of two semistructured interviews, participants shared their experiences on campus as Multiracial students, how their identities have been addressed in academic spaces, and factors that have contributed to their levels of on-campus inclusivity. During participants' second interviews, they were presented with a list of resources the researcher developed through a document analysis.

Interview data were analyzed using Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students as a lens. Renn's identity theory consists of five identity patterns, within which Multiracial individuals can fluctuate: (a) holding a single Monoracial identity, (b) shifting between multiple Monoracial identities, (c) holding a Multiracial identity, (d) identifying extraracially, and (e) holding a situational identity where one can shift between the other patterns. Qualitative data were initially analyzed using deductive coding through the lens of

Renn's theory, and the data analysis process unveiled several emerging patterns across participants' experiences through inductive coding.

The emerging patterns in conjunction with Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students contributed to the formation of the following themes: (a) Racial Identity, (b) Campus Resources, and (c) University Experiences. The theme of Racial Identity included how each participant understood their racial identity and how their collegiate experiences impacted their identity choices. Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students: Monoracial identity, multiple Monoracial identities, Multiracial identity, extraracial identity, or situational identity, were also covered in the theme of racial identity. The Campus Resources theme included organizations, departments, and services participants felt contributed to their university experiences as Multiracial individuals. This theme also included data about participant inclusivity and experiences with seeking and developing a sense of belonging. University Experiences as a theme included data gathered on participants' academic endeavors with faculty, staff, and other students, and relevant experiences in residence halls. The variance in experiences between undergraduate and graduate students was highlighted in this theme. The theme of University Experiences also included participants' perceptions of how well they believed the University made them feel accepted, acknowledge, honored, and represented. While all experiences shared did not take place at the University, they occurred during the participants' times as students or contributed to the participants' understanding of their Multiracial identities and therefore impacted their experiences at the University.

The findings of this study have been organized by the previously described themes. Themes discussed in this chapter are preceded by brief bios of each participant. This chapter

concludes with a summary of what the phenomenon of being Multiracial looked like at the chosen University.

### Participant Biographies

Based on the data provided via the demographic questionnaire and during the semistructured interviews, the researcher constructed a brief biography about each study participant (see Table 2).

Table 1  
*Study Participants Academic Data*

Participant	Preferred Identity Terms	Level of Study	Program of Study	GPA
Adalynn	Half Filipino & Half White Hapa	Undergraduate	Sociology	4.0
Cecilia	Half Black & Half Filipino Mixed	Undergraduate	Marketing	3.59
Jovie	Filipino & White	Undergraduate	Communication Studies	3.25
Landon	Multiracial	Undergraduate	Journalism	3.78
Amanda	Half Black & Half White Biracial	Graduate	Counseling	4.0
Gianna	Black & White Multiracial Mexican American	Graduate	Urban Studies	3.71

*Note.* GPA = grade point average.

#### Adalynn, 19

During her college years, Adalynn self-identified as half Filipino and half White, or *Hapa*. Growing up, she identified more strongly as White because her Filipino father is fourth generation and her family does not speak the language, Tagalog, or practice the Filipino culture at home. After an experience in high school when she was exiled by a significant other and a group of racial minority friends for being “only” half Filipino, Adalynn reported, “There was just this complete invalidation of like, my entire identity, my racial identity.” This experience led Adalynn to feel like her identity was not enough for her Filipino or Hapa friends. Her feelings of

discomfort and estrangement were compounded when she attempted to join the Filipino cultural club at the University. Toward the end of her first year at the University, having lived on campus for almost a year and working in the children's center on campus, Adalynn felt more confident identifying as a person of color because she believed that is how others perceived her.

Additionally, Adalynn felt "more understood by people of color in a lot of situations, rather than my White peers." Adalynn's experiences may have also been impacted by her family members—her older sister who graduated the same University the previous year and accepted a position to work on campus and her mother who held a faculty position on the campus. Adalynn was recruited to the study via snowball sampling from Jovie, whom she met during her first year on campus.

### **Jovie, 19**

Jovie grew up in a small town in Maine, where she often experienced racism and microaggressions from others. At the time of the interview, Jovie identified as Filipino and White and rejected the notion of being half Filipino and half White. Jovie's philosophy on her Multiracial identity was "it doesn't have to be something that is a fraction or, like, a percentage. There is a little bit more fluidity to it." When discussing her identity prior to starting at the University, Jovie described, "I was around so many White people I really didn't see other Filipinos or other ethnicities or races at all really that I . . . kind of just forgot about that side of me." To address her fears of missing her older siblings, Jovie joined the Filipino cultural club on campus, which was where she felt most accepted. After years of feeling "too White" for her Filipino family members, and "too Filipino" for her "White surroundings," Jovie found a stable identity through her University experiences and recalled: "I identify a lot more as Filipino

because I've met a lot of Filipino friends through the Filipino cultural club." Jovie was very involved on campus, as she lived in University housing and worked with a program providing off-campus tutoring. Jovie was recruited to participate in this study via snowball sampling from Landon, whom she met during a Multiracial voices class.

### **Landon, 20**

Landon was a first-year student at the chosen University, but this was the second university he attended after completing two semesters at a small, private college in the Midwest. Landon identified himself as "Multiracial: half Black and half White," which he began solidifying in high school after attending a student diversity leadership conference. Reflecting on his experiences, Landon shared, "When I came back from the conference, myself and one of my advisors started the Multiracial affinity group." In Landon's first semester on campus, he took a Multiracial voices class, which furthered his understanding of his Multiracial identity; he reflected that his identity had "definitely gotten more sophisticated in a way and my understanding of it has developed." Landon worked with the Athletics Department for broadcasting media and was a part of the Transfer Learning Community. Landon also mentioned having a sense of familiarity and comfort with the campus due to having lived nearby and attending University summer camps as a child, and his father had been a faculty member at the University for over 10 years.

### **Cecilia, 20**

Cecilia was approaching her graduation date in May of 2020, despite being in her third year at the University. Cecilia thanked her parents for encouraging her to participate in dual enrollment during high school, which allowed her to start the University with existing credits. At

the time of her interview, Cecilia most frequently identified as half Black and half Filipino or Mixed, but having grown up in a predominantly White neighborhood, she recounted, “I really wished I wasn’t Black until I was about, like, 14.” In starting her studies at the University, Cecilia joined a learning community for students who identified as Black or African American, which lasted the duration of her first year and provided her with opportunities to “get more in touch” with her Blackness. It was during Cecilia’s first week on campus when she decided she did not want to join the Filipino cultural club, stating “I didn’t think that it would be, like, a cohesive fit for me and the culture of the club.” All of Cecilia’s interactions on campus led her to describe her experience as “a Black experience and not so much a Multiracial one.” Cecilia valued her experience of having lived on campus during her first year, but she was living at home during her final year and working in the student housing services office.

### **Amanda, 25**

As a second-year graduate student in the counseling program at the University, Amanda had many experiences to contribute to this study. Amanda self-identified as Biracial, Black and White, most frequently, but also found comfort with the identity label of Multiracial. Although she grew up in a neighborhood with other Biracial children, she recalled a different situation at school: “I was one of, like, four other Black kids at my school,” which led to her identifying as Black in other settings outside of her neighborhood. It was not until she applied to colleges in her senior year of high school that she identified as Biracial. As a graduate student, Amanda worked as a counseling intern at local schools and a research assistant on campus. Amanda felt her experiences working with the student population gave her more confidence in her racial identity: “I feel like I’m actually more likely to say my race and be, like, ‘I’m Biracial, I’m Black and



White' with the students because I think it makes them feel more at ease." Amanda also belonged to the Counseling Graduate Student Association on campus and was working toward completing her master's degree in May 2020.

### **Gianna, 23**

Gianna was a participant in a specialized graduate program at the University, where she taught full-time at a local school and attended classes on the weekends. Gianna's program was cohort based and aimed to provide students with teaching credentials and master's degrees in education upon completion. Gianna was working toward finishing the course requirements for her master's degree in May 2020 and felt discussing her Multiracial identity with her peers and students was important, even though she faced criticism from some peers who did not believe she was truly Multiracial. Although both of Gianna's parents identified as Mexican American, Gianna acknowledged her Multiracial ancestors and identified as Multiracial or Mexican American. When discussing the study with some of her fellow cohort mates, some individuals questioned her identity, which prompted Gianna to ask for clarification on the definition of Multiracial to be sure she qualified for the study. Despite feeling secure in her identity, conversations with her peers contributed to a saying with which Gianna had identified with since her teenage years: *ni de aquí, ni de allá*, which means "from neither here nor there." In sharing about the difficult conversation she had with her cohort members, Gianna recalled thinking "I have every right to claim who I am as what I want to be."

### **Theme 1: Racial Identity**

Though all participants in the study comfortably self-identified as Multiracial, they also had identity terms they preferred or used regularly in reference to themselves. Some participants

had consistently used the same terms to self identify since early childhood, and others changed the terms they chose to identify as over the years. Identity shifts were experienced as a result of college development experiences, interactions with others, and societal perceptions.

All participants identified across Renn's (2000) patterns of identity for Multiracial college students: (a) holding a Monoracial identity, (b) multiple Monoracial identities, (c) a Multiracial identity, (d) an extraracial identity, or (e) a situational identity, and they shared experiences they had when identifying in the patterns. Experiences shared by participants highlighted the fluctuation between Renn's (2000) patterns and the identity patterns individuals experienced most frequently. Participants' definitions of race and understanding of the Multiracial identity impacted how they situated themselves in Renn's patterns. Other factors that contributed to their identities were shame, pride, familial expectations, and challenges.

### **Understanding the Multiracial Identity**

With the intention of being inclusive of the range of Multiracial identities, the researcher used a broad definition for the term Multiracial and only required the participants self-identified as being of two or more racial heritages. All participants fit this definition, but several participants held a different understanding of what it meant to be Multiracial. To define what Multiracial meant to them, participants first described their understanding of race. Amanda, for example, believed race was closely tied to family:

I feel like race is mostly, like, your family culture kind of wrapped into, like, yeah, I think, like, your family culture, family history. I think, I mean I don't really think, like, colorism is necessarily part of it because I know so many people who, like, range on the spectrum so I'm more, I think it's more just, like, your family history, your family culture wrapped into an individual identity.

Amanda did not feel skin color played a part in one's racial identity, but other participants felt phenotypical looks played a large part in defining race. During her first interview, Adalynn described "race would be the outer, physical attributes of groups of people. And it's manmade. It's a construct." Landon shared a similar belief that race is often perceived as just the color of one's skin:

I think a lot of people have this understanding of the color of your skin. And that's it, like, I think that's, like, as far as they go. And then when I think about it, I'm like, it's just the color of your skin? That makes no sense. . . . No one's the exact same color of skin, yet we're grouping all these people kind of just based on where they are on the color spectrum or what not.

This concept was one that was often discussed in the Multiracial voices class Landon and Jovie took in their first semester of their first year; they recalled often discussing the concept of race but never coming to a final agreement. Jovie added:

I feel like we discussed this a lot as a problem in my Multiracial voices class. And I think it could mean a lot of different things to different people. Um, I feel like race is a little bit different than ethnicity or like culture, I feel like when people talk about race it's mostly based on, like, physical aspects or color honestly.

Despite each participant's different understanding of race, they all felt levels of confusion and uncertainty about their understandings. Gianna summed up her experiences of trying to understand race: "Race is very perceptive toward what you believe as race." It is important to acknowledge how each individual understood the concept of race prior to their Multiracial experiences because many of their Multiracial experiences stemmed from their understandings of race. Describing how others perceived his racial identity, Landon explained:

It's mainly based on how you look in a sense, which I think is what's confusing about being Multiracial. I look like I could be a very tan White person, and I look like I could be a light skinned Black person, or I look like a Latino.

Landon's sentiments of often being mistaken for a different race were echoed by Adalynn, Gianna, and Amanda. When discussing their identity choices, participants shared how their identities were impacted by others' perceptions of them.

### **Renn's Patterns of Identity Among Multiracial College Students**

The researcher anticipated hearing stories and experiences from participants that aligned to all five of Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among college students. Experiences participants shared, however, only aligned in three of Renn's patterns of identity among Multiracial college students: (a) holding a situational identity, (b) holding a monoracial identity, and (c) identifying Multiracially.

#### ***Situational Identity Patterns***

Many participants held a pattern of Multiracial identity that was situational during their time in college. Jovie felt her identity was always the same, but she experienced shifts between patterns of identity that were common. She added, "I don't think I've identified differently, but I feel myself definitely kind of shifting from like group to group. And I think that's kind of natural for humans to do with anything." Similarly, in discussing situational identities, Gianna recounted an experience she had while at a conference for her graduate program. After realizing she was one of few people of color at the conference, she felt she had to make a choice about how to identify and behave among her peers. Gianna, who identified as Mexican American, recalled:

I just felt that if I wanted to identify only as a person of color, only as a Mexican, that I was going to miss out. And that I was going to cut myself short of making new friends and making the most of my experience.

Gianna explained how she chose to identify to have the best experience and avoid missing out on opportunities to bond with her colleagues. Despite having a cohort member from the same

university who chose to sit off to the side with their graduate program director, Gianna chose to mingle with other attendees from schools across the country. When asked about how she identified at the conference, Gianna noted “I felt like I was definitely American while I was there.” Gianna described how her choice to identify as American aligned with others who were there from different schools but also set her apart from her cohortmate, who identified solely as Mexican.

Although Renn’s (2000) description of a situational identity can appear in different ways, participants reported a common occurrence when identifying situationally. The common identity pattern participants discussed experiencing situationally was that of multiple Monoracial identities. Experiences that encouraged participants to situationally identify Monoracially were often triggered by others’ perceptions of them or desires to fit into a group identity. While Renn (2000) described the situational identity pattern as being applicable to all four of the other identity patterns (i.e., holding a Monoracial identity, multiple Monoracial identities, a Multiracial identity, an extraracial identity), participants’ experiences pointed to overlap between multiple Monoracial identities and the situational identity.

**A situational multiple monoracial identity pattern.** According to Renn (2000), the multiple Monoracial identity pattern includes instances when individuals claim or reside in multiple Monoracial categories. While participants shared identifying Monoracially at times, those instances were based on the situation, not to reject other parts of their identities. Cecilia explained she would claim one identity in groups or highlight a specific aspect of her identity but said it was never done to intentionally “omit the other side.” Instead, her reason for identifying Monoracially was often ease and to avoid the need to explain her identity to others. She added:

Especially when I'm in Black spaces. I just kind of, I just say I'm Black, like, you know? I don't always like to make that Mixed distinction because how do I explain it? It's like I don't think it matters in a lot of senses because, like, to the rest of Americans, Black is Black, you know? So in those spaces, we all kind of experience generally the same thing when it comes to like outside forces.

Cecilia described how even in instances where she was perceived as being Monoracially Black or spoke up on behalf of her Black identity, she would claim her Filipino identity if the discussion shifted toward race. It was because of this distinction participants made that these identity choices can be classified as multiple Monoracial identities as opposed to a single Monoracial identity.

Jovie shared similar experiences of identifying in the Monoracial manner of the people she was surrounded by at the time; however, she felt she was often perceived differently than she would have chosen to identify:

In the Philippines I tried to act more Filipino, whatever that means, and then here [in California] is in the middle, and then in Maine I find myself acting, like, sometimes forgetting that I'm Filipino. Just because of how much of the population is White, um, but then the way I'm perceived is actually the opposite.

Another participant who chose to identify Monoracially in certain situations was Landon, who shared he felt his opinion was more honored in his African-American studies class when he would leave out one part of his identity. Landon explained the only times he felt confident and safe making contributions in class was when he identified Monoracially: "Sharing my experience kind of feels like I have to leave one side out, I guess, from the conversation and separate it, which is weird to me now. And harder to do than it was before." Landon referred to this as *code switching* and, much like Jovie, recalled doing so when surrounded by individuals of a different race.

Reasons participants shared for identifying Monoracially in different situations varied, but one commonality across their experiences was they more frequently identified with their race of color. Cecilia shared her reason for identifying in this manner more frequently was because she had more shared experiences with others of that race:

I've just always felt way more at home with, like, people who I can share experiences in terms of, like, Blackness, probably just because I think being part Black has, like, affected me more than being part Asian has. And I assure you personally, I attribute that a lot to just American culture. It's obvious that there are tons of influences for being both Asian and Black, like separate influences, but I just have always felt the influence of being Black more throughout my life. And I think that has definitely affected the level of comfort I feel.

When discussing the different patterns of identity, Amanda mentioned feeling constraints around the shifts she made based on her phenotypical looks:

I think I never identified as White just because people would be confused if I said that. So I was always either Black or Multiracial, and usually the situation would be, like, if I was in a more Black community, then I would identify more as Black than White, or if it was, like, scholarships and stuff, if they pertain to racial identity I'd be like, "I identify as Black." Um, so yeah I think kind of like either scholarly opportunities, or, or kind of the community I was in.

In addition to shifting her identity situationally, Amanda also recalled code switching between her home interactions and those at school because of the people by whom she was surrounded. Amanda recalled learning about the racial theory by Sue and Sue (2012) in her counseling courses and found herself thinking about her own progression. Sue and Sue suggested individuals progress through five stages of a racial and cultural identity development model: (a) conformity, (b) dissonance, (c) resistance and immersion, (d) introspection, and (e) integrative awareness. When thinking about how she progressed through Sue and Sue's identity theory, Amanda added, "I think I definitely kind of go like back and forth between stages depending on like, what phase of my life I'm in like, like what institution I'm at, kind of things like that."

### ***Multiracial Identity Pattern***

The final and most prevalent pattern of identity participants reported experiencing during their undergraduate and graduate years was that of holding a Multiracial identity. Of experiences participants shared, there was a range in the amount of pride each individual had in the label of Multiracial. Adalynn shared while she often felt comfortable identifying as Multiracial, the label proved to be an insufficient amount of information for some people, adding “I’ll either say Multiracial or Hapa. And then it’s like, well, what’s that? And then I’ll explain.” Adalynn mentioned developing comfort and pride with her Multiracial identity in junior high when one of her teachers identified as Multiracial. Adalynn shared:

My eighth-grade teacher was half Black, half White. And so she definitely shared a lot of that with us and like her experiences as identifying with that and tried to help us understand what that meant.

Adalynn added interactions with this teacher were formative and helped her to navigate her Multiracial identity in social situations. Amanda, on the other hand, mentioned never actually having the chance to share her identity in a K-12 school setting because everyone already knew how her older siblings identified. Being the youngest of three, Amanda recalled:

Everyone knew who I was coming in. . . . So, I think it was less of, like, I had to, like, define myself because everyone already knew based on my siblings. They were just like, “Oh, those kids are Black and White.”

At the time of the interview, Amanda confidently identified as Multiracial or Biracial with ease and pride, even claiming “other, depending on how many boxes there are.”

Gianna did not experience the same amount of ease in choosing to identify as Multiracial. Gianna mentioned, “I just feel like you really have to work hard to have this presence of showing your true Multiracial identity.” Gianna compared her experiences with being Multiracial to



experiences some have faced with gender fluidity. Gianna's hope was that society was moving away from forcing people to identify in boxes and moving toward an open-minded understanding. Gianna explained:

There was this whole two gender idea, just like there was the three-race idea. We just want to put these people in these groups based on their phenotypical looks, and that's how we're going to move on because that's easier. We're going to compartmentalize them. And really, it's just not a reality. And so, that was just something I kind of struggle with.

The pain in Gianna's voice was apparent as she explained experiences of feeling ostracized by others for her Multiracial identity. Although she identified as Mexican American, which she was often reminded was Multicultural, she also had Multiracial heritage:

I identify as Mexican American. And with that, I understand that I do have underlying heritage that come from places like Argentina and Spain. And so, I think that's where I get this interesting mix of features because I also have indigenous ancestry as well.

Gianna commented on her looks several times during the interviews and felt they played a large part in how others perceived her in different situations.

Another participant who believed their looks played into their Multiracial identity was Cecilia, who added, though she shared a lot of experiences with Black people, there was a difference for her:

There is kind of, like, an asterisk to my experience because one, I'm lighter skin. So there's that, and I do think that influences my experience a lot. And two, people don't see me as completely Black. Because they kind of recognize that I have, like, some other influence in me.

When Landon recalled early memories of identifying as Multiracial, he attributed much to his parents, who always reminded him of his full identity: "They never let it just be, you know me saying, 'Oh, I'm White or I'm Black.' It's always been like both or nothing I guess." Landon pointed out his positive experiences at the student leadership conference in high school and in his

Multiracial voices class during his first semester at the University, both which helped him embrace and take pride in his Multiracial identity. Landon shared a large part of taking pride in his Multiracial identity in college began when he was in the Multiracial voices class with several international students who were not familiar with the Multiracial identity. Landon explained:

That moment challenged me to want to inform and more outwardly share that identity more than I had been. To be able to get people to understand, you know, this is not just a person split in half type of thing. Like, it's an experience. It's a group of its own.

Adalynn shared feeling a sense of pride in her identity upon starting the University. She attributed this to the additional opportunities available:

There have been a lot of events that have allowed me to kind of express more and have more pride in being a person of color. Just comparatively to my high school, we weren't allowed to have race related organizations.

Adalynn explained her increased pride was as a person of color because she did not feel there were many opportunities to engage with the University as a Multiracial individual. Amanda also commented on how her experiences at the University impacted her racial pride. Although Amanda was a full-time student in the graduate counseling program, her experiences interning at a local school also contributed to her identity:

And so, I feel like I'm very, like, proud and authentic in my, like, identity at the school [where I work]. Whereas, like, at [the University], my, like, main identity is, like, as a student. And I think as a student at any university, one tends to have more of a, like, a White background and more of, like, White mannerisms.

Amanda's perspective may have developed from her formative years as a student in a predominantly White K-12 system, but her perspective could also be indicative of the culture she had experienced at the University. Amanda explained difficulties she faced with holding a Multiracial identity in her graduate program:

It can be difficult, trying to navigate grad school without a Monoracial identity because so much of the theory and so much of, like, the topics are about Monoracial identity and so I think trying to, like, contribute to the conversation feels really difficult, because I don't have one identity, I have multiple.

Each participant's interactions in class, with organizations, and on the University campus contributed to the different factors of pride, shame, and inclusivity they felt, and therefore influencing the patterns they identified with most frequently.

### ***Unclaimed Patterns of Identity***

Throughout all experiences shared, there were two of Renn's (2000) patterns with which no participants identified during their college experiences. The first pattern participants denied experiencing in college was that of the extraracial identity. Adalynn felt this identity was not an option for her because race was always an important factor in her life:

In my personal opinion and experience, race is something that determines a lot within our society. It's, it has a huge impact on almost every interaction. And so, I think it would be silly of me to deny that for myself and my experiences.

Amanda shared similar sentiments, adding if she ever chose to identify extraracially, others would not have allowed for it. Amanda added these feelings might have stemmed from attending a predominately White school as a child and recalled, if she did not bring up her race, someone else would. When other participants were asked about identifying extraracially, they responded with vigor, as if to ensure there were no doubts about their racial pride.

The other identity pattern described by Renn (2000) that participants denied experiencing was the Monoracial identity. Although some participants did identify Monoracially in certain situations, they claimed all their racial identities at different times, which is the pattern of holding a shifting Monoracial identity.

## Multiracial Challenges

During the interview process, individuals shared challenges they faced with their Multiracial identities at the University, in classes, and with faculty members or organizations. The impact of each challenge varied based on the people involved and the frequency the challenge was faced. One of the most frequent challenges Multiracial individuals reported experiencing was that of shame. As a Filipino and White individual, Jovie shared experiences of shame for acting “too Americanized” for her Filipino family members. Jovie shared she felt this may be a commonality in other interracial households if there is a parent of Asian descent. Jovie recalled:

Americanized was a word they use to, like, shame me, or, like, criticize me of something if I was acting too spoiled or being disrespectful, or what they perceived as being disrespectful to elders, or just doing something a little bit differently. . . . It’s a weird concept to think that someone, or your parent, your own family can use your nationality, to kind of, like, insult you even though that’s a part of you.

Jovie did not recall experiencing shame from her White family members for her Filipino identity; however, Adalynn had the opposite experience. Adalynn shared one recurring experience of shame she felt from a very young age was in the way her mother would refer to her and her siblings. Referencing her White mother, Adalynn shared:

In public spaces, or, like, family gatherings, she’ll refer to her kids as “the Brown kids.” Because in those spaces, that’s how we can be identifiable because we’re the only, like, people of color in those spaces. Which always made me uncomfortable because my mom is White and her saying that was, like—It was just an icky feeling because she was diluting us to, like, being Brown.

Adalynn explained instances when she experienced “uncomfyness” on campus due to racial differences between her and her mother. She recounted instances of going out to lunch with her mother and sister at the University, and people would give them looks of confusion as if trying to

figure out the relationship. Adalynn also experienced moments of discomfort when telling other students her mother was a faculty member on campus. She admitted part of the discomfort stemmed from others knowing she was receiving a discounted tuition.

A different type of shame several participants reported experiencing was the shame of not speaking Spanish. Only one participant who reported experiencing this shame was of Hispanic descent, but all participants reported feeling guilty telling others they could not speak Spanish when it was assumed because of their phenotypical looks. Amanda reported an occurrence of this during an international study abroad trip to Ecuador in the beginning of her graduate program, which opened her eyes to a larger problem she would face with working in the field of education:

Everyone was trying to speak to me in Spanish, like, all of the, like, local people. And I was very aware of how I was perceived and I was like, I need to be more upfront about my identity because that happens in the US all the time where people are like “oh, like, she looks like she’s Latina x.” Like, when I’m working at schools, people try and speak Spanish to me and that’s my greatest downfall as an educator, is that I don’t know Spanish. . . . Especially in California, like, speaking Spanish is, like, the strongest thing you can carry into like the classroom in a school setting.

Amanda explained the guilt she experienced as an educator when she had been unable to communicate with and advocate for the Spanish-speaking families she encountered. Also working in the field of education, Gianna felt a sense of shame when interacting with other Spanish speakers and having to explain her parents did not teach her Spanish because of the era of assimilation in which they were raised. Gianna shared she had been working on acquiring the language and encouraged her students also learning to share their progress with her.

Another challenge Multiracial individuals faced that stemmed from others’ perceptions was when people made assumptions about their racial identities. Amanda recalled parameters she felt society had placed around the identity choices she had because of her looks: “I don’t even

look like a tan White person. . . . With my color it's, like, there's just no way." Amanda explained how people's perceptions of her altered how she interacted with her own identity:

I feel like I wanted to just be my personality versus just my race, but I feel like I was so aware of it or, like, made aware of it, that I would sometimes just be, like, "Okay, like, I need to play this up more." So at least I'm in control of the, like, jokes and perceptions.

Cecilia and Landon, who identified as being part Black, shared similar experiences of people making assumptions about their identities based on their looks. Cecilia shared it was often assumed she was Black, even though people could tell she had other racial heritages as well. Cecilia did not take offense to this because she felt comfortable identifying as Black situationally; however, it was also important to her not to deny any part of her identity. Landon also referenced his skin color when explaining why he felt people made assumptions about his race. Landon mentioned not feeling the need to explain his identity as much on the University campus as he had previously in life. He stated, "I don't feel like I have to try and promote my identity. It's just like, it is my identity. It doesn't feel like a chore to me to try and keep up."

Jovie faced similar issues of people determining her racial identity for her. These situations had such an impact on her, she forgot about part of her racial heritage at times. Having grown up in a predominantly White town, Jovie recalled, "I guess a lot of the time people kind of just told me" how she should identify. Jovie felt her surroundings contributed to how she perceived herself:

I was around so many White people I really didn't see other Filipinos or other, like, ethnicities or races at all. I just kind of didn't think about it, there were a lot of times where I kind of just forgot about that side of me.

Adalynn shared the way she identified outwardly was at times different than the way she felt inside. Having grown up with predominantly White peers, Adalynn initially understood her

identity as White because she did not have a lot of Filipino culture in her home. Around age 12, things changed. She recalled, “Around sixth or seventh grade, I realized that that’s not how the world sees, not how the world perceives me.” Adalynn explained her reasoning for identifying in the manner she does:

A big part of why I identify as Biracial, Multiracial, Hapa is because I know that outwardly I’m not viewed as the way I identify on the inside. So it’s more, like, “I know you know I’m not just White.” But I think in terms of what that looks like in my own experiences, I can’t say I identify with Filipino culture as much.

Similar to Cecilia’s experience of having shared experiences with people of color, Adalynn described she could communicate with and relate to people of color better because she is perceived by the world as a woman of color and has faced similar microaggressions.

A slightly different challenge Multiracial individuals have faced is one where Monoracial individuals have little trouble with: demographic questions. Being forced into selecting one’s identity from a finite collection of racial boxes can feel dehumanizing to Multiracial individuals who are not always represented. Jovie shared how such questionnaires have made her feel:

You don’t really fit into societal norms, or you don’t fit into one certain box and that might bother some people. I think we like to categorize things a lot, and when it’s something as fluid as your racial identity or cultural identity, it’s really hard to fit into one place, with Multiracial opposed to Monoracial. . . . And some people face the inner conflict of having to be a part of two, possibly very different things, and meet somewhere in the middle.

Several participants lauded the University for including a Multiracial option on the admissions application because it made them feel as if their identity would be honored. Landon appreciated the inclusion of his identity on the application, but he mentioned this practice has become more of a norm on demographic questionnaires, as opposed to experiences of his formative years that made him feel as if “Multiracial couldn’t be an identifier because we didn’t

see it on the testing, demographic questionnaires.” Amanda, being a slightly older participant, recalled not always having Multiracial as an option for the majority of her schooling experiences: “Whenever I have to check a box, the box is always other depending on how many boxes there are.” Gianna was another participant who was pleased with the option to identify as Multiracial on the application for this University, as she remembered recent incidents where her identity was not honored on a questionnaire:

I would not always be able to express my identity, because there was always this either you’re Hispanic or Latino, or you’re Black or you’re White or you’re Asian, and it was not often that I was able to identify on paper as being Multiracial.

One participant who felt the University was not doing enough to make Multiracial individuals feel honored was Adalynn, who thought the University should allow for Multiracial individuals to disclose their racial make-up on questionnaires. Adalynn shared what she thought would improve the process:

Allowing for people to identify as Multiracial, but also specify what that looks like when giving surveys, because I think it would allow for more accuracy. Because if there’s only one checkbox for being Multiracial, that’s like putting in a bunch of different experiences into one category, even though those experiences may look entirely different. And I think that Multiracial or Biracial doesn’t just look one way.

Though the way individuals were permitted to identify on the University application provided an initially positive experience with their racial identity, several participants reported experiencing *tokenism* on campus. Amanda shared a frequently recurring experience she faced in her counseling program when a theory from Sue and Sue (2012) was brought up in class:

The Biracial identity theory that Sue and Sue have . . . I’m, like, the spokesperson about this theory and I’m, like, okay, there has to be other people. I can’t be the only one who’s experienced or has some experience in this. So yeah, that’s been dumped on me. It reminds me of high school whenever you talk about, like, slavery and everyone would look at you.



Amanda admitted even though there were times when other classmates or professors encouraged her to share due to her Multiracial identity, she often felt responsible for the education of others because many of them did not understand the Multiracial experience. Landon's experience was similar in terms of the origins of pressures, but he was more frequently asked about his perspective in a specific manner, such as "What would your Black side think about this? Like, don't let the White side think, as if it was like two separate things."

Adalynn experienced tokenism in some classes where she was one of few students of color. Adalynn recalled, "Being asked to speak for all people of color in those spaces has always been uncomfortable." Such experiences reminded Adalynn of the tokenizing experiences she had at family parties and events, where she and her siblings represented the entire population of color. Adalynn explained her experiences at the University:

There have definitely been instances where myself and other people of color have been tokenized when we have these conversations about people of color. This implication that we know what that's like and we know the answers to all of these problems and we can speak for everybody.

The assumption any individual can speak for an entire collection of people is harmful, and not including one's voice or opinion can cause equal amounts of harm.

An experience Landon had adjacent to tokenism was the feeling of not having a proper space or platform to share his experience. He explained:

I think I fall into the cracks in the way of, like, people don't know. And so they don't want to make that assumption, they don't have the guts to be, like, "as a Black person." Worried they're going to get it wrong. They just kind of leave me out unless I outwardly volunteer.

Landon explained he had a fear that if he spoke up and shared his opinion, people would give him pushback and question his identity. Being left out of classroom conversations and

discussions due to others' uncertainty of one's race can feel exclusive and leave a lasting impression about how accepted one's identity choices are in the setting. Other participants shared experiences when they felt their identity was not enough for others. Amanda explained how much of an impact feeling like "not enough" had on her internally:

A big part of it is that feeling of, "Oh, I don't really belong in either." And that's true for, like, anyone with, like, dual identities, but, um, that feeling of, like, "oh, I'm, like, not Black enough, I'm not White enough." I would say that all throughout my life I feel like I was never, like, enough of either race. But I think particularly in grad school, I just felt, like, I wasn't, like, enough of one of the races.

Gianna shared experiences of feeling the need to prove herself racially for fear of not being enough. She shared these feelings were exacerbated when people questioned her Multiracial identity or her lack of proficiency in Spanish. Though Cecilia faced some circumstances where others questioned whether she was enough, her most recent memories were of choosing to be around people who accepted her identity. Although Cecilia was in a learning community for Black students, she never felt her identity was any less than that of Monoracial participants. Cecilia recalled the intentionality of choosing that affiliation for herself because of how they accepted and honored her identity.

## **Theme 2: Campus Resources**

During interviews, participants shared details about their use of campus resources. This theme includes all shared details pertaining to the University organizations of which participants were a part, services they used, and levels of involvement with their departments or programs. Some participants shared their reasoning for seeking membership in specific organizations and others shared why they chose not to be involved. Also included in this theme are data participants shared about seeking a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

It should be noted the experiences of the graduate students involved in this study and those of the undergraduate students varied immensely in this theme. Both graduate students, Gianna and Amanda, worked 32 to 40 hours each week at off-campus jobs and only took classes on nights or weekends. Due to the nature of their programs, both graduate students were on campus less than undergraduate participants (see Table 3), and, therefore, they sought fewer involvement opportunities.

Table 3  
*Study Participants Time on Campus*

Participant	Hours on Campus Weekly	Live on Campus
Adalynn	All hours	Yes
Cecilia	22-30 hours	No
Jovie	140 hours	Yes
Landon	115-120 hours	Yes
Amanda	20 hours	No
Gianna	6-8 hours	No*

*Note.* \*Though Gianna did not live on campus, she lived in off-campus housing provided by her program with other members of her cohort.

### **Campus Services**

Several participants were involved with campus services or departments that catered to a more specific subset of students. Landon was a part of the Ignatian Leadership Institute, which was a requirement for his involvement in the Transfer Learning Community, and Cecilia was a part of a learning community specifically for Black and African American students. Each cohort had approximately 20 to 30 members and lasted for the duration of their first year at the University. Both programs required the students to live on campus to enrich their experience. Although both programs were similar in structure and both participants were first-year students at the University, they had different experiences in the programs.

Landon, who was actively involved in the Transfer Learning Community during the time of his interviews, did not have a positive experience with his program. Landon felt there was not

a strong sense of community with his cohortmates: “I anticipated being much more involved, but there isn’t much to be involved with outside of class. . . . None of us know each other. It’s not much of a community.” Landon explained a difficult situation he had with his roommate and that he was more inclined to sleep at his parents’ house than his residence hall room to avoid uncomfortable interactions. Even though Landon’s roommate was also a Multiracial transfer student in the same program, they had little in common, which led to a difficult living situation. Landon added the difficulty with his roommate led to him feeling like a commuter student and created a different university experience than he had hoped.

Cecilia had a very different experience in The Learning Community for Black and African-American students. Cecilia shared her reason for joining The Learning Community: “I just wanted to be more in touch with, like, who I was becoming.” In the learning community, Cecilia shared she felt equally as accepted and honored as the Black Monoracial students and recalled, “Nobody has ever really, like, diminished my perspective as a Black woman because I’m only half Black.” Cecilia felt The Learning Community was accepting and gave her the space to be her true self:

Even though it’s not a space for Multiracial students, there are definitely plenty of students who have done [The Learning Community] who were Multiracial other than me. It’s a very inclusive space . . . where you just feel, like, fully yourself.

Cecilia explained how grateful she was for the development of The Learning Community of which she was a part because of benefits it provided to her. Cecilia explained:

I definitely feel more secure in my racial identity just because of the communities that I’ve been exposed to at the University. . . . The Learning Community was definitely something that changed the way that I viewed myself.

As evidenced in the previous statement, Cecilia felt her time with The Learning Community was pivotal to her overall positive experience at the University. Even though she was only officially a part of The Learning Community for her first year, she maintained relationships she had built throughout her time at the University.

### **Campus Organizations**

The amount of involvement the different participants had with University organizations varied, but most participants mentioned the need for there to be more inclusion of the Multiracial identity in the organizations offered. Landon shared:

I definitely think that it's the one identity group missing from all the cultural experiences on campus. . . . I remember going to the student EXP festival at the beginning of the year, and I walked up and down the cultural club row maybe four times and went back thinking that I missed it. And I didn't find a Multiracial, Mixed kids' group, and I was like, "What?" I just expected it coming in. And I was pretty surprised that it wasn't there. . . . And I think that's the one area that I find kind of lacking and think would be beneficial mainly for students who do identify as Multiracial.

Despite his desire for a Multiracial group, Landon shared he felt supported by the University as a whole: "I feel supported by the community but not necessarily understood."

One participant heavily involved with an on-campus organization was Jovie, who joined the Filipino cultural club on campus. She shared:

I was really excited to be in a place with more diversity than my hometown and I was interested in meeting other Filipinos because I did have a small Filipino community at home, and I wanted to have the same thing here.

Jovie explained the racial and identity benefits gained from the Filipino cultural club: "I identify a lot more as Filipino now because I've met a lot of Filipino friends through the Filipino cultural club . . . and it's really nice to know other people you can relate to." Jovie added it was in the Filipino cultural club where she felt most accepted, and the club provided her with the feeling of

having family on campus. Jovie was also a member of the Surf Club for fun and an organization called Empower Her, which was a pen pal program with teenage girls in Costa Rica. Jovie mentioned, “I was a student ambassador for the first semester, but I dropped out because I just felt like I didn’t have enough time.” Time played a large part in the decisions of other participants about the organizations they joined as well.

Although there were two other participants who identified as part Filipino, neither felt comfortable joining the Filipino cultural club. Cecilia felt the club was not a good fit for her, as she was satisfied with the level of belonging she had in The Learning Community. Cecilia explained, “That’s like the biggest example of me being more comfortable with the Black students on campus than with the Asian students.” Cecilia added the subtext she understood from her interaction with the Filipino cultural club was she was not entirely welcome because she was not fully Filipino. She continued, “I wish I actually went to a club meeting or two, to see if that was really the case, but I think that is definitely a pretext that people have going in.” Cecilia joined the business fraternity, Delta Sigma Pi, during her first year at the University and attempted to join the Surf Club but dropped out shortly thereafter. Cecilia was a first-year senator through the Associated Student Association. Since her first year at the University, Cecilia admitted her involvement had declined, which she attributed partially to having lived on campus during her first year.

Adalynn was the other participant who identified as partially Filipino and chose not to join the Filipino cultural club. Adalynn explained, “I did think about applying for and joining it, but I didn’t really feel like there was space for me, not being full Filipino. And my sister had a similar experience.” Adalynn admitted she felt her experience was likely colored by her sister’s

previous experience with the club and not feeling as though her Multiracial identity was enough. Referencing her own experience, Adalynn continued, “There was just that feeling of not being Filipino enough, so I didn’t end up joining.” The organizations with which Adalynn was actively involved were the Sign Language Club, College Democrats of America, the Gay Straight Alliance, the Queer Film Club, and the Black Student Union (BSU). Adalynn shared of the organizations with which she was involved, the Gay Straight Alliance was where she felt her Multiracial identity was most accepted and honored. When asked about her involvement with the BSU, Adalynn mentioned, “The BSU is also for allies, and I consider myself that, and I feel like they were accepting of anybody who wanted to support them.” Adalynn described how she felt comfortable joining the BSU, as opposed to the Filipino cultural club, because she felt the latter was not open and accepting to allies. Explaining her reasoning for not joining the Filipino cultural club, Adalynn continued:

It was more personal and it kind of forced me to have hesitations within myself. Whereas with the BSU, it wasn’t about me. And it wasn’t about my own identity. It was about being an ally to people. And it didn’t have to do with my own experiences. My own personal experiences with that identity because I don’t identify as that.

Adalynn shared when she attended the student expo in the beginning of the year, she visited the Filipino cultural club and “like, their table was all full of Filipino people,” but when visiting the Black Student Union table, she recalled, “It wasn’t just Black students that were there. And so, I think that was immediately an explicit message of maybe I don’t belong in one of these places.” Adalynn did not comment on her reduction of others’ racial identities down to how they were perceived based on their phenotypical features.

The fact Jovie’s experience with the Filipino cultural club was so vastly different from the experiences of Cecilia and Adalynn could be a result of many factors. One reason could be

the demographics of the towns where the participants grew up or connections they felt to their Filipino identities prior to starting at the University. Jovie specifically recalled seeking a connection to her Filipino roots upon entering the University, whereas the other two participants did not share that same need. When explaining how she perceived the members of the Filipino cultural club, Jovie recalled, “It’s not just one race. Even within the club, there are Multiracial Filipinos, and there are also non-Filipinos in the club too.” The different perspectives Cecilia and Adalynn had may have stemmed from their more diverse experiences growing up.

Landon chose not to participate in any cultural or racially aligned organizations because he felt his identity would not have fit based on his prior experiences in high school:

I just don’t think I would feel like I fit in with the identity that I have based on seeing those groups and seeing, especially in high school how it went with joining those groups. I always felt, like, kind of that odd person out. It could be different here, so I kind of gave [the University] the short end of the stick, but I still wouldn’t feel completely comfortable just going and joining those groups.

Despite his lack of desire to join cultural organizations at the University, Landon credited the overall environment of the University with being very inclusive: “I always felt like everyone felt included, no matter who or what you are.” In addition to the Transfer Learning Community, Landon was also involved in the Athletics Broadcast Media group on campus, where Landon felt most honored and accepted: “That’s certainly a tight group that’s made me feel included and not excluded for any sort of reasons racially or whatever it may be.” Landon also participated in the University’s theatre department and was involved with several productions on campus.

The two graduate students were less involved and sought out campus resources less frequently than the undergraduate participants. Amanda shared she was uncertain if any organizations would welcome her as a graduate student, and the time most meetings were held



made Amanda feel as if they were aiming to only include the undergraduate population. Despite Amanda's potential interest in the BSU, she shared:

I knew about the BSU, but I wasn't, like, sure how open they were to grad students. And most of their stuff was during the day and most grad students work during the day, so I didn't really go to their activities. So, I think I stayed mostly in the grad student realm.

Amanda added if there were an organization for Multiracial individuals on campus, she would have wanted to participate as a graduate student. Gianna shared she did not seek out involvement with resources or organizations because she knew she would not have time due to the high level of commitment required by her program. Gianna added even if she had wanted to be involved in an organization, the first time she received communication from any racial or cultural organization was in the middle of her final semester, regarding the cultural graduation ceremony.

### **Graduate Student Participation**

Although the graduate student participants were less involved with on-campus organizations, they reported being more involved and connected with their graduate programs, compared to the undergraduates who never spoke of feeling connected to their programs of study, focusing instead on connections with the broader University. Both programs to which graduate participants belonged were cohort based, which may have contributed to their greater sense of belonging. Amanda offered another reason for her comfort level in her program:

I think that's, like, the most interaction I have with the University. I don't participate that much outside of the counseling program; I do a lot within it. I would say my counseling cohort is where I feel the most included and, like, the most seen. . . . They're very upfront with racial identity and all the identities, and so because we're able to talk about it so often and, like, in a very inclusive, like, open way, I just feel, like, at ease about it.

Because of Amanda's positive interactions in her program, she joined the Counseling Graduate Student Association, which was exclusive to graduate students and racially inclusive, according

to Amanda. Gianna shared similar sentiments about her program and explained her reason for not seeking membership elsewhere: “I didn’t reach out because I felt connected to my peers. I feel like if I wouldn’t have had that, then I would have definitely reached out just for the sake of friendship resources.” Gianna mentioned living with her cohort mates and participating in regularly scheduled community building activities helped her develop meaningful relationships.

### ***Multiracial Inclusivity***

Of the organizations with which participants were involved, there were some they felt were above average in including the Multiracial identity. Adalynn addressed the inclusion of her Multiracial identity with the Gay Straight Alliance:

I know it sounds kind of backwards because it doesn’t have to do with race, but I think in that space, acknowledging race is a really big thing. Just to have a better understanding of the experiences of queer people. And being a queer person of color, being able to be, like, represented in that way. . . . It feels like what everybody else experiences in everyday life.

Adalynn explained how she took her Multiracial identity into account with every decision she made at the University. Explaining her desire to pursue a position as a resident advisor in the following school year, she added, “Seeing myself as a means of representation for other Multiracial people or people of color at the University was really big for me.” Adalynn felt an increased level of Multiracial inclusion was important because she felt most cultural organizations on campus were strictly for Monoracial individuals. She explained:

I don’t think it’s necessarily on purpose, I don’t think they’re going out of their way to only represent one particular group of people. I think it’s rather, there might be an idea that those communities can include Multiracial people, and there’s not that person in the room saying, “We have these, these organizations for Monoracial people. We should also have organizations for people that don’t identify as that.”

Commenting on the exclusivity of organizations for Monoracial individuals, Landon shared he did not feel it was the intention when most student organizations began, but it is the way they ended up. Landon shared what he felt the experience would have been like had he attempted to join the BSU:

It's not like they would turn me away at the door, but I definitely do feel like there'd be a different kind of experience for someone like me coming into this Monoracial group, and so it's almost like it would be an unconscious bias in a way, where it's like, "oh, there's a White guy invading our space." So definitely, indirectly, I'd say it's only for Monoracial individuals just based on my experience.

Landon shared although he felt included as an individual on campus, he did not feel the same about his Multiracial identity: "I feel like my Multiracial identity is in me, but it doesn't have a place on the campus." Though Amanda felt her graduate program was very inclusive of all identities, she added how she felt the University responded to her Multiracial identity: "I feel like no one was, like, exclusive, no one was like, 'You can't be in this,' but I don't think anyone was, like, super inclusive about it either."

### **Sense of Belonging**

Most participants shared having found a sense of belonging in a group or organization during their time at the University (i.e., some in an organization where their Multiracial identity was honored and others where their Multiracial identity was not a factor of their membership). Despite memberships they held, several participants spoke about desires to find a place where their Multiracial identities would be celebrated. Landon spoke about struggling to find a place where his Multiracial identity was accepted because he struggled with feeling like he was not enough. Landon explained:

I wanted to go to the African American Association meetings, but I would have people be like, “Oh, well, you’re not Black enough to go to that.” And know, like, when I walk in the room, it’s kind of like, “Why is he here?”

Landon added this was even more of a struggle when he did not feel accepted by White students due to his darker skin and curly hair. Such experiences left Landon searching for a sense of belonging at the University. Landon shared:

It’s like there’s not, like, a lunch table for me in a way, like all the Black kids are together, the White kids are together and . . . I can’t, like, necessarily sit at both separately, but I want to sit at them, like, both at the same time.

Jovie expected to struggle with the “challenge of having a sense of belonging” on a new university campus across the country from her home; however, she rejoiced in the strong sense of identity she found with the Filipino cultural club. Jovie explained her choice of identifying with part of her Multiracial identity: “When you’re not constrained to a certain category . . . you have a lot more freedom to flow within, so I think that I embraced the individuality of my Multiracial identity.”

Adalynn found a sense of belonging with the group of individuals with whom she worked, who were almost all women of color. Adalynn mentioned the factor that helped her to feel most included with this group was her ability to speak Spanish: “Them accepting me in that way and being able to be connected with them despite how I racially identify was really big for me.” Adalynn also mentioned her ease of holding a Multiracial identity in this space because she worked with three- and four-year-olds who “have no idea about race.”

Gianna shared she did not seek out membership in clubs or organizations upon her start at the University because she felt content with relationships she had in her program: “I didn’t reach out because I felt connected to my peers.” Amanda, on the other hand, did not hold a sense of

belonging with any specific group, but she did talk about feeling the pressure to be perfect 100% of the time. Amanda stated, “I wish I could just chill for a second and not feel like I had to try so hard.” Although Amanda admitted she had not yet found a space where she could let down her guard and be her authentic self, she talked about an increased sense of comfort and ease with her classmates as each semester passed.

Cecilia shared some details about her fulfilled search for a sense of belonging, recalling her desires when starting at the University: “I wanted Black friends. Like, I’ve never had, like, a close Black friend, ever.” Her search was rooted in a quest for additional knowledge about her race as she realized the impact her Black identity had on her as an individual. After being accepted into The Learning Community, Cecilia felt satisfied with her support group and the level of belonging she had, so she did not seek out membership in any other cultural organizations:

I already had my people, like, I didn’t feel so inclined to, like, look for certain communities because I just felt so comfortable knowing that I already had. . . . Which is, like, it’s hard to hear that out loud. But it’s definitely why I wasn’t incentivized to, like, really set out for those communities.

Although inclusivity was one of the topics discussed in interviews, no participants were explicitly asked about their sense of belonging. The information participants offered points to the importance of group identity for each of those involved. The importance of group identity may have fluctuated based on how strong their group was at the time of the interview, but for the most part, all participants noted the need for a place to belong.

### **Theme 3: University Experiences**

The third theme in this study was the overall university experience, including all interactions with faculty members, experiences in classrooms and with other students, and general on-campus experiences participants shared with the researcher.

#### **Classes**

Two participants shared experiences about a Multiracial voices class they took in the fall semester of their first year. Both participants shared favorable memories about interactions with the coursework, the students, and the professor. Jovie shared the impact the class had on her: “[I]t was probably the most pivotal role in my understanding of my racial identity.” She explained how much she enjoyed the readings and hearing stories of other Multiracial students’ experiences. Jovie explained how grateful she was to the Multiracial class for making her feel seen and recognized, as she felt overlooked as a Multiracial individual in her hometown. In addition to the readings and conversations, Jovie enjoyed the amount of reflection about her own racial identity that the class prompted. Finally, Jovie discussed a specific book, which was her most memorable assignment of the class: “It was the first time I had read anything from someone who I felt, specifically represented who I am.” Jovie’s largest takeaway from the class was “the fluidity of identity.”

Landon, who was in the same class as Jovie, mentioned being shocked the class was 75% Monoracial individuals but delighted they were eager to learn about the Multiracial experience. In Landon’s opinion, the inclusion of this class in the course catalogue was a step in the right direction for the University because it was their way of honoring the Multiracial identity and recognizing their experiences. In addition to feeling recognized, Landon learned to use his

identity as a leadership tactic from the course. He explained, “I was not only able to understand it for myself but be able to show other people and teach them what it means to be Multiracial.”

Landon described his identity growth as “more sophisticated” after completing the class.

Although he did not credit his relationship with the professor for his success in the class, Landon spoke about the ease of creating a positive relationship with a Multiracial faculty member and recalled, “It gave me a better connection to him, a natural connection.” During Landon’s second semester at the University, he was enrolled in an African American studies class, and he recalled it being a very different experience than his Multiracial voices class.

After talking about the level of inclusion and recognition Landon felt in his Multiracial voices class, he spoke about feeling that his Multiracial identity was rejected in his African American studies class “because that’s where I feel like I have to pick one side or the other.”

Recalling scenarios when the professor posed questions to the class, Landon recalled how he felt:

I definitely think I fall into the cracks in the way of, people don’t know. And so they don’t want to make that assumption. They don’t have the guts to be like, “You know, as a Black person,” worried they’re going to get it wrong. They just kind of leave me out unless I outwardly volunteer.

Landon felt the only way his identity would have been honored in his African-American studies class were if he rejected the White side of his identity and identified solely as a Black student.

Other participants felt their Multiracial identity benefitted them in their classes, such as Adalynn who mentioned:

I feel as though it positively impacted my experiences, because it gave me . . . two perspectives, two experiences, instead of one. So being able to relate to different groups of people and bring those two perspectives together. I think that’s been able to help me a lot in these settings.

Adalynn recalled her multiple perspectives benefitting her in class conversations on social justice, the political climate, or social change.

Another participant who recalled benefitting from multiple perspectives of their personality was Jovie, who recounted:

I kind of grew up with two different perspectives of the world and using those perspectives or just having that wider range of view, helps me with my understanding of the world . . . but also in general like an understanding of where two people may be coming from.

As a graduate student, Amanda had a slightly different experience with her Multiracial identity in class. Although she did not feel her Multiracial identity negatively or positively impacted her academic success, she did feel she was unable to speak about her cultures as clearly and confidently as her Monoracial classmates: “I don’t necessarily like fit into both cultures. . . . I feel very hesitant to talk about like one or the other or both.” The hesitance to speak about her identity in class affected Amanda’s confidence, but she explained the benefits of her Multiracial identity:

I’m really good at code switching and reading a room and reading people. And that comes up, obviously with different experiences, but I think, I know how to act with different groups because of the Biracial identity.

Amanda explained how these skills helped her to build rapport with professors, which made it easier for her to create meaningful relationships and ask for help when necessary. Another benefit of her Multiracial identity that Amanda referenced was how it would “bring a unique perspective to classes.”

## **Faculty**

Though the intention of this study was to evaluate faculty effectiveness when working with Multiracial students, there were several faculty members and interactions with faculty that



were brought up by participants during the interviews. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of all parties involved.

As several participants spoke about in their interviews, the University offered a Multiracial voices class taught by a Multiracial professor once a year to satisfy the graduation requirement of the first-year seminar class. Both students who took the class with Dr. Daniels were pleased with his teaching style and the way he connected with students. Landon shared Dr. Daniels encouraged him to share more about his experiences as a Multiracial individual, and their shared identity allowed them bond on a deeper level. Landon added he felt more comfortable sharing with Dr. Daniels than he would have if Dr. Daniels were Monoracial. Jovie did not seem to have as close of a relationship with Dr. Daniels as Landon did; however, she reported being appreciative of his teaching style and the support he offered in class.

Cecilia shared having a negative experience during her third year at the University with a faculty member who made an offensive statement in class. Referring to Professor Chu, Cecilia recalled:

She was talking about taxation . . . and so she said, “Is taxation not slavery?” And that wasn’t a direct attack on me, but as the only Black person in that class you often feel obligated to say something. . . . So, I raised my hand and I think I said, “I think it’s very harmful to be using the word *slavery*, like, in an American context and conflating it to anything else.”

Although Cecilia’s experience with Professor Chu was not because of her Multiracial identity, Cecilia faced the experience as a Multiracial individual and then felt the obligation to identify herself as a Black student to speak up for what she believed was right. Although Professor Chu apologized in the following class, Cecilia remembered, “That was one of the most jarring experiences I’ve ever had in a classroom.” When describing her emotions around the incident,

Cecilia shared had she been faced with the same situation during her first year that she would not have had the confidence to say anything: “I was still coming into my confidence as a Black person. I still was figuring out how to be unapologetically Black . . . and having the confidence to say things that I’m not happy with.” Cecilia did not feel this instance affected her grade in the class because she still received an A, but she thought Professor Chu was more cautious with the things she said following that interaction.

Adalynn did not mention any specific incident or faculty member, but she shared she felt more included by faculty as a person of color than she did as a Multiracial individual. Noting the support and communication most frequently came from faculty of color, Adalynn explained:

When there are conversations about racism and conversations about disparities within the country and things like that, there’s that understanding of checking in, it’s like, “How are you doing with this conversation? Are we doing okay or do any of you find any of this offensive or triggering?”

Adalynn added she appreciated this type of support from faculty members, and it made her feel as if they were honoring her identity as a person of color.

### **General University Experiences**

Some experiences and interactions participants shared pertained to their Multiracial identities as students at the University on a broader level, such as the actions they felt the University took to honor their Multiracial identities or if they felt the University represented them well as Multiracial individuals.

Several participants who moved to Southern California for the first time to attend the University spoke about the shift in culture they experienced. Amanda mentioned, “I feel more at ease with being a person of color and being Biracial because there’s so many different diversities here.” Jovie had a similar experience, adding she felt her Multiracial identity was more widely

accepted in Southern California than it was at home in Maine; however, when Jovie was asked if she felt the University acknowledged her Multiracial identity, she responded:

I'm not sure. I don't know if I know of anything besides, like, the class. I don't know if there are any clubs or organizations or events. I know there are a lot of, like, cultural events and a lot of cultural clubs, but I don't think there are any specifically that are Multiracial.

Participants commented on how they felt the University embraced their identities.

Adalynn shared, "I think that there are a lot of efforts made by the institution to represent my experiences and give me opportunities to express my identity." She said she felt students of color were underrepresented at the University. Landon felt strongly the University did not do enough to "promote or celebrate" his Multiracial identity, aside from offering the Multiracial voices class and allowing students to identify as Multiracial on the University admissions application. When referencing how he felt the University engaged with his Multiracial identity, Landon added, "I wouldn't say they honor it, but I also, again, wouldn't say they disown or disrespect it." Gianna felt some aspects of the University were doing a great job at including her identity as a Multiracial individual, but she also felt "there could be more ways to celebrate those people, people like myself, but I'm not sure if the University does that." When Cecilia was asked if she felt the University acknowledged her Multiracial identity, her response was, "Multiracial? No, not at all." One of the only times Cecilia could recall feeling as if her Multiracial identity was included was when she encountered a student run exhibition at the library honoring Hapa individuals. Jovie also recalled interacting with a project focused on Hapa individuals in her Multiracial voices class: "I think it's the Hapa project, and it was these photographs of all these Multiracial Asians. I just remember that specifically."

In terms of representation on campus, participants shared varied responses, ranging from Cecilia and Jovie who were uncertain if the University represented their Multiracial identity well to Amanda and Landon who felt well represented as Multiracial individuals. Adalynn was also uncertain about being represented as a Multiracial person and added, “I don’t know if I’d say they represent me well as Multiracial, but I think as a person of color. Yes.” Gianna also had comments on the University’s level of representation:

I think I was lucky with the program director I have as being someone who is representative of my identity. But I don’t think [the University] as a whole has enough Multiracial or Biracial leaders. I think that a lot of the staff are predominantly White . . . And I would say that it is very unrepresentative of my identity.

Overall, participants were pleased with their experiences at the University but would find more inclusion and resources for the Multiracial identity beneficial. Landon felt grateful for the comfort he felt in his identity at the University: “I feel like I’m not going to be rejected. And even if there is conversation, it’s conversation. It’s not degrading.” He explained his identity did not feel like a chore or a hassle to him at the University: “I don’t feel like I have to try and promote my identity. It’s just, like, it is my identity.” Landon also shared the desire for a Multiracial organization on campus to aid in the identity development process of other Multiracial individuals. Amanda felt similarly: “I’m free to be who I am as a Biracial student. I feel like race is less of one or the other, it’s more like that’s one aspect of your identity, but you’re a holistic person.” The recommendation Amanda had for creating a more inclusive environment for the Multiracial identity was to host a panel of speakers who could address challenges faced in the Multiracial community. These experiences and recommendations were echoed by Gianna, who felt her Multiracial identity was validated at the University through

participation in her program, but she also felt there was the need for additional resources to be available to the Multiracial community.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate the phenomenon of being a Multiracial undergraduate or graduate student at this University included common experiences, such as the pressure to solidify one's understanding of one's Multiracial identity. Participants handled this challenge in different ways, as they all situated their Multiracial identity in different organizations and departments across campus. Participants shared common experiences of challenges they faced as Multiracial individuals at a predominantly White institution and how their experiences outside of the University impacted their identity choices (e.g., the need to defend one's Multiracial identity among peers or with family). The researcher worked to gauge the experiences of Multiracial students on the University campus; however, as participants shared their experiences, it became apparent some off-campus experiences contributed to how they perceived their identities and interacted with others. Though these occurrences were not the focus of the study, they were pivotal to understanding the Multiracial student experience. Descriptions of previous experiences contributed to a deeper understanding of the resources and services participants sought on the University campus. There were fewer commonalities among the academic experiences individuals shared; however, this is likely due to the variation of class structures from one department to another.

Examining the phenomenon of the Multiracial student experience through Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the identity choices Multiracial individuals made. While there were some

differences among participant experiences, how they chose to situate their identities in Renn's patterns most frequently was apparent in choices they made and experiences they shared. When sharing identity experiences, there was one pattern participants consistently avoided, as if they would have been ashamed to identify extraracially. The avoidance of the extraracial pattern points to the importance of incorporating some off-campus experiences, which is likely where the sense of shame was developed. Overall, participants agreed there was a need for the University to increase the support systems and resources available to Multiracial students. These findings along with recommendations for future research are presented in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine experiences of Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students in a university setting and to identify resources that aided or supported the development of racial identity on campus. This researcher sought to identify common challenges faced by the Multiracial participants. To obtain the necessary data, four undergraduate students and two graduate students participated in the phenomenological study. Each participant partook in two semistructured interviews, during which they shared their experiences as Multiracial individuals at the selected University. The researcher also conducted a document analysis of the organizations and resources available to students on campus to triangulate the data. After coding and analyzing all data from the interviews, findings were reported in Chapter 4. This chapter includes a summary of the findings, suggestions for future research, and recommendations for improvements in practice.

#### Discussion of Findings

In examining experiences of Multiracial individuals in a university setting, there were several trends that led to the major findings of the study. The findings have been divided into four sections for further review: (a) lived experiences of Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students, (b) adaptation to available resources, (c) different needs for undergraduate and graduate students, and (d) the need for increased Multiracial representation.

#### **Lived Experiences of Renn's Patterns of Identity Among Multiracial College Students**

Renn (2000) suggested five patterns of identity Multiracial individuals most commonly experience during their college years: (a) holding a Monoracial identity, (b) holding multiple

Monoracial identities, (c) holding a Multiracial identity, (d) holding an extraracial identity, and (e) holding a situational identity. Additionally, the ecological nature of Renn's model is that the individual shifts throughout the patterns fluidly with different aspects of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem contributing to their identity shifts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Having interviewed six different participants, the researcher anticipated hearing about the fluctuation between all five of Renn's patterns, but this was not the case. All six participants reported identifying as Multiracial, holding multiple Monoracial identities, and having a situational identity with varying levels of frequency. The most frequently claimed identity pattern in participants' experiences was the identity of Multiracial, which aligned with Renn's (2004) data in a study examining students from six different institutions.

The identity pattern of Multiracial was not one with which most participants were familiar at a young age; they grew into their ownership of the Multiracial identity as they faced challenges in society. The shift in identity patterns is likely due to the microsystems they experienced while growing up. As individuals progressed from a time when their family was their only realm of understanding their identity to having new identity opportunities in college, their mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems changed. With the changing microsystems individuals experienced as they transitioned from elementary school through college, there were many different interpretations of their Multiracial identities. The way society perceives and the way individuals situate themselves in their identities impact their macrosystems or their attitudes toward the culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem—being the largest encompassing system—shifts and changes, as individuals face challenges and experiences with their Multiracial identities.



Another factor that likely had a large impact on the identity of the individuals involved in this study was the chronosystem. With the impending 2020 election approaching, interviews for this study were conducted during a politically charged epoch.

Other identity labels individuals claimed in the Multiracial pattern were Biracial, Mixed, Hapa, and Blasian (i.e., Black and Asian). Identifying through these other Multiracial identity terms held similar implications for individuals as when they identified as Multiracial. Over time, participants also developed a sense of pride in their Multiracial identities. University procedures, such as offering the Multiracial option on University demographic questionnaires, prompted participants to feel accepted and as if their Multiracial identity was being seen.

Developing a stronger sense of Multiracial identity upon entering college could be attributed to the new identity opportunities individuals were presented. According to Houston and Hogan (2009), Multiracial individuals experience detachment from their families and previous cultural groups during their transition to college and have opportunities to interact and affiliate with other groups. Although there have been limited resources and organizations to aid Multiracial individuals during this time of transition, it is often the first time they can choose an identity free of familial input (Houston & Hogan, 2009).

When identifying as Multiracial, there were times when participants were met with further questions about their racial make-up. Though no participants could speak to why they were questioned, there were likely different reasons based on the identity of the individual doing the questioning (Khanna, 2004). Root (1996) suggested the process of questioning is an opportunity to educate others on the Multiracial identity; however, in this instance, the responsibility falls on the Multiracial individual to educate others. Such experiences led

participants to feel the need to explain their identity, such as Landon's response when people asked about his racial identity: "I'm Multiracial, half Black and half White." Other participants shared similar experiences, causing them to feel as if the identity of Multiracial was insufficient.

The second most frequent identity pattern participants experienced was that of holding multiple Monoracial identities. Participants shared experiencing multiple Monoracial identity patterns situationally, indicating a fair amount of overlap between the multiple Monoracial and situational identity patterns. The multiple Monoracial identity pattern was often prompted by others' perceptions and the surrounding environment. Because of the large overlap, a situational identity was the third most frequently experienced identity pattern due to participants fluctuating between holding a Multiracial identity and a Monoracial identity at times. The situational identity was not one participants consciously chose; however, it was about their actions of shifting identities. Gianna reported delight in her ability to showcase different aspects of her identity in different situations, and Amanda shared memories of her multiple identities benefiting her academically when she was able to share different perspectives.

All participants who spoke about holding a Monoracial identity described identifying with their race of color. While there were several participants with a parent who identified themselves as White, no participants felt they could identify solely as White. Amanda explained she felt people would not ever look at her and think she was White. This is indicative of the impact others' perceptions have on an individual's identity. As Renn (2008) suggested, an individual's looks play into their identity; however, participants in this study shared how they were perceived by others contributed to their understanding of their racial options. Garrod et al. (2017) proposed one's looks situate them along the racial privilege scale, due to the perceptions

of others. The findings from this research indicated similar interactions may also contribute to a Multiracial individuals' identity choices in society.

Most participants felt they did not look like one specific race, such as Landon who felt his ambiguity often confused people, when they could not easily put him in a box. Not fitting into one racial category phenotypically is supported by Downing and Webster's (2005) research, but it did not prevent others from attempting to classify the participants into Monoracial categories. Khanna (2004) investigated this phenomenon and found "physical characteristics often dictate acceptance into ethnic/racial groups" (p. 125). Although Khanna's (2004) research was conducted solely with Asian-White Multiracial individuals, the findings indicated Multiracial individuals who attempted to align themselves with an identity different than the one others saw would often be challenged. Additionally, Multiracial individuals who had a strong understanding of their racial culture were more likely to be accepted by Monoracial individuals in that culture (Khanna, 2004). This researcher further indicated Multiracial individuals are perceived differently by individuals of different racial backgrounds. Cecilia shared experiences of how she was often perceived as a lighter skinned Black woman, which had different connotations in different social circles.

Reflecting back on times when they identified Monoracially in a situational instance, Cecilia recalled others asking her to share her opinion as a Black individual; Amanda shared stories of her friends perceiving her as Black because of her skin tone; and Jovie shared instances where she was perceived as being Filipino because of her looks. In each of these instances, participants did not omit the other part of their identity, as would be the case if they were identifying in a single Monoracial manner. Cecilia explained "I don't always like to make that

Mixed distinction,” adding she felt there was a level of complexity with describing her full identity. Other participants felt there was not always a need to disclose their Multiracial identity because they had shared experiences with Monoracial individuals and could represent the Monoracial perspective accurately. Some participants’ experiences of being identified based on their phenotypical features supported Renn’s (2008) claim that physical appearance is one of the top three most influential ecological factors for Multiracial college students. Another influential ecological factor was that of peer culture (Renn, 2008). Participants in this study experienced peer culture via the racially and culturally aligned resources the University offered. Most participants felt the organizations and services at the University were created for and targeted at Monoracial individuals. This belief encouraged the Multiracial participants to identify in a Monoracial manner or made them feel the resources were not for them.

The two identity patterns no participants reported were that of the single Monoracial identity and the extraracial identity. Although all participants described experiences when they would identify Monoracially, they always maintained their other racial identities as well. When discussing the Monoracial identity, no participants wanted to distance themselves from this pattern or felt shame in it, but several participants emphasized they never had the intent of making others believe they were Monoracial. Participants’ tones shifted, however, when talking about the extraracial identity pattern. All participants denied holding any type of extraracial identity; several participants explained how important race was to them and how their racial identity had impacted many of their life experiences. When participants denied holding an extraracial identity, it was as if they would have been ashamed to hold that identity. In Renn’s

(2004) study, the extraracial identity was the least used pattern among the participants from six different institutions.

The absence of these two patterns may have been due to the recruitment method used by the researcher. In the email sent to potential participants, the researcher asked for participants who identified as Multiracial. While this study was focused on Multiracial individuals, the term Multiracial does not encompass all identity patterns Renn (2000) identified for Multiracial college students. By using the term Multiracial in recruitment efforts, individuals who identified extraracially or Monoracially may not have felt their identity would be included, even if they had parents of different racial heritages.

### **Adaptation to Available Resources**

All individuals involved in this study participated in some form of on-campus program, organization, or activity, but their levels of engagement varied. Participants' high levels of involvement on campus likely contributed to their academic success and high GPAs (Astin, 1984), which aligned with Gardner and Barnes's (2007) research about college success rates being positively influenced by one's sense of belonging to their campus community. Two participants reported participating in a Multiracially aligned group prior to starting at the University; however, due to the lack of Multiracial organizations on university campuses (King, 2008), they did not find a racially or culturally aligned organization in which to participate. Gianna and Amanda found senses of identity and belonging in their graduate programs. Amanda joined the Counseling Graduate Student Association to further bond with departmental colleagues. Gianna, who lived in University housing with her cohort, felt such a strong sense of support and camaraderie that she did not seek out any other University resources.

Other participants sought a group identity in different aspects of the University community. Similar to Gianna and Amanda, Landon was involved with the Athletics Department for broadcasting media, which was related to his major and a paid job. Adalynn felt most included by the Gay Straight Alliance and had a strong sense of identity with her coworkers at the Children's Center on campus. Landon and Adalynn shared an initial desire to belong to a culturally or racially aligned organization on campus; however, they were unable to find a student organization that would accept their Multiracial identity. After investigating organizations offered on campus and having conversations with members involved, Landon and Adalynn adapted to the resources available they felt would be most inclusive of their identities. The choices made by these two participants slightly shifted their University focus away from racial identity.

Cecilia and Jovie chose to participate in racially or culturally aligned organizations in their first semester at the University. Although both participants held a Multiracial identity prior to starting at the University, they sought relationships with others who held similar identities to themselves. The importance of building relationships with others who shared racial or ethnic identities (Thelamour et al., 2019) was so important to Cecilia and Jovie that they found camaraderie with others who shared a portion of their Multiracial identities and immersed themselves in those communities. Cecilia joined The Learning Community for Black or African-American students, and Jovie joined the Filipino culture club. Being involved in a Monoracial organization on campus prompted Cecilia and Jovie to shift in the multiple Monoracial identities pattern more frequently than other participants, but they both maintained pride in their Multiracial identities. All participants showed interest in participating in a Multiracial

organization or Multiracial events at the University if they had existed; Landon even shared his desire to start the organization himself.

The desire for a Multiracial organization or network on campus was shared by all participants; however, the only participant who spoke about starting such an organization was Landon. To start a student organization on campus, a faculty or staff member would need to agree to be the designated advisor. With parents who work on campus as faculty members, Landon and Adalynn had access to individuals who could have been club advisors, but neither of them had moved forward with the process. Whether these individuals felt apprehensive about asking their Monoracial parent to advise a Multiracial student organization was not discussed, but it could have been a factor for why these students did not start the organization themselves. For participants who were first-year students, there was the added uncertainty of campus norms and politics that could have contributed to the difficulty of starting an organization. The amount of time, effort, and commitment that goes into starting a club can be intimidating for any student, even more so for ones who face identity challenges while acclimating to a new environment.

### **Differing Needs for Undergraduate and Graduate Students**

During this study, data pointed to several differences between the needs of undergraduate students and graduate students. Graduate students found a sense of identity in their programs and had closer relationships to their classmates, whereas no undergraduate participants mentioned a sense of belonging or identity to their department of study. This could have been due to the cohort-based programs in which graduate participants were enrolled or the smaller department size graduate students experienced, as opposed to the undergraduate departments. Graduate participants also reported feeling as if they did not have the time available to participate in

organizations or events hosted by the University. With her limited availability, Amanda explained she was only interested in participating in activities that would benefit her academically or professionally.

Undergraduate participants were involved with organizations and events beyond the scope of their departments. One factor that may have contributed to this finding was all undergraduate participants lived on campus for some duration of their time at the University, providing them with greater access to the services available. Undergraduate students also had access to a Multiracial voices course, which two undergraduate participants took during their first semesters at the University. The two participants who took the class reported benefiting from the content and shared they would have taken the course even if it did not cover their first-year seminar requirement for the University. The graduate student participants did not show interest in a Multiracial voices class and were focused on taking courses that would contribute to their progress in their programs. Desires undergraduate students had to be involved aligned with Tinto's (1975) theory that involvement in the first year of college is important.

While there was not a big age gap between participants, participants in graduate programs appeared more mature than the undergraduate participants, based solely on descriptions of educational experiences they had. Being older and having more experiences may have resolved identity questions Gianna and Amanda had. Having more experiences could be another explanation for why the graduate students were not as involved with University organizations. Amanda made a statement about only seeking participation in organizations and activities that would help her develop personally and professionally, which was supported by Gardner and Barnes's (2007) research that graduate students have already acquired most of their necessary



social skills and knowledge to successfully transition into the professional workplace. Because undergraduate students and graduate students are at different places developmentally (Gardner & Barnes, 2007), they seek different types of interactions.

### **Increased Multiracial Representation**

Although there was a difference between the needs of undergraduate student participants and graduate student participants, and most participants adapted to the resources available, all participants showed interest in an increased Multiracial presence on campus. Two participants interacted with a project focused on Multiracial individuals during their time on campus and reported feeling it honored their Multiracial identity. Participants made recommendations for how the University could honor their Multiracial identities. When asked if they would participate in Multiracial organizations or events, all participants agreed they would. Landon spoke about the importance of including the Multiracial identity more on campus, and Gianna shared her desire for a Multiracial mass at the University chapel. Amanda added she would participate in Multiracial activities if they were scheduled at a time that was appropriate for graduate students. The need for greater Multiracial representation on campus is further discussed in the recommendations section.

### **Limitations**

Over the course of this study, the researcher encountered several unexpected limitations. In addition to the limitation of participants self-reporting their experiences, which is expected in an interview-based study, there were also the limitations of a less than ideal sample size and the historical threat of the COVID-19 virus. To combat the effects of participants self-reporting, the researcher recoded all interviews and conducted member checks to ensure the correct data were

recorded. This study also suffered from a less than ideal sample size due to the historical threat posed by the COVID-19 virus. Initially, the researcher sought to identify eight to 10 participants for the study; however, when campus was closed and all instruction was moved to a virtual format, it became increasingly difficult to recruit participants willing to engage in a research study.

A delimitation the researcher may have unintentionally set was the identity of individuals who participated in the study. When recruiting for participants, the researcher used the term Multiracial. Though the study was on Multiracial individuals, this term was not inclusive of the single Monoracial identity or the extraracial identity present in Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students. This delimitation may have resulted in a narrow sample of participants who only identified across some of Renn's (2000) patterns of identity, as opposed to all five of them. A different sample of participants, or participants from another university may have led to different findings, which is why alternate recruitment methods are recommended for future research. A broader recruitment strategy focused on identity and grounded in theory would likely provide participants with a wider range of experiences across all of Renn's (2000) identity patterns.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Experiences communicated by participants in this study highlighted the need for additional research in the field of Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students. While any additional research would be beneficial in filling the literature gap on Multiracial individuals, quantitative research would provide a much-needed empirical perspective on the Multiracial experience. Conducting research on Multiracial individuals in public institutions and at the

community college level would also add some much-needed depth to the field of Multiracial literature. In a similar manner, expanding the research to institutions in different parts of the country would provide an understanding of how Multiracial individuals are perceived in different regions. This recommendation was prompted by Jovie's experience of moving from Maine to California and experiencing culture shock with how differently her Multiracial identity was perceived. Five participants attended high school in California, and Jovie grew up in a small town in Maine, where her Multiracial identity was often misunderstood. Living in a predominantly White town provided complications of always being identified as a minority. Upon moving to a diverse, urban city in California, Jovie felt as if her Multiracial identity was accepted and honored. Considering, Jovie's experience, individuals from different parts of the country may have different perceptions of campus inclusivity and resources available. Also inspired by Jovie's experience is the recommendation of analyzing the differences between participants who grew up in diverse areas and those who grew up with less diverse experiences.

Another suggestion for future research is the need for more clarification around the distinction between Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students. The overlap between participants' Monoracial and situational identity experiences points to the need for further investigation into contributing factors and parameters around the two patterns.

An additional research recommendation would be a longitudinal study with participants to see if their identity patterns change as they progress through their college experiences. A longitudinal study would also provide the opportunity to track student utilization of University services and resources from the start of their first year through graduation.

Finally, additional recommendations for future research pertain to the replication of this study. To provide a clearer understanding of the Multiracial experiences of college students, it would be beneficial to include a gender balance of participants in future studies. Additionally, the researcher would recommend reducing the number of Greek organizations and honor societies in the list of organizations, as participants seemed to pay an inordinate amount of attention to those organizations and their reasons for not joining them.

### **Implications**

The findings from this study have a range of implications for Multiracial individuals in a higher education setting. Implications have been separated into theoretical implications and practical implications.

#### **Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical implications from this study relate to Multiracial college experiences and Renn's (2000) patterns of identity among Multiracial college students. According to Gardner and Barnes (2007), increased campus involvement leads to greater academic success, retention, and satisfaction. These factors are important in the overall experience of college students but can be difficult to achieve if the student does not achieve a positive sense of identity with their university. Multiracial students face the challenge of forming a connection to their university due to the few resources targeted at the population. The lack of organizations and resources available to Multiracial individuals at a university may also affect their levels of persistence (Tinto, 1993). The reduced likelihood of persistence is compounded by minority students struggling to find where they belong on campus and being overlooked (Landry, 2003). The findings from this study indicated Multiracial individuals did not feel there was enough representation or resources

for their identities. Fortunately, these individuals adapted to the resources available; however, the absence of such supports puts Multiracial individuals at greater risk of facing challenges.

The findings from this study indicated Multiracial individuals did not fluctuate between all of Renn's (2000) patterns of identity equally. Although participants shared experiences of shifting between a Multiracial identity and multiple Monoracial identities (the situational identity pattern), no participants had experiences with an extraracial identity or a single Monoracial identity. While this finding may be a byproduct of the recruitment method used by the researcher, the option of holding an extraracial identity was rejected by most participants. Participants' responses to the extraracial identity indicated not all patterns of identity among Multiracial college students were interpreted as equally honorable patterns, and there may be some shame or discrimination against individuals who identify in that manner from within the Multiracial population.

Another theoretical implication is there was not a clear distinction between the five identity patterns Renn (2000) suggested. The findings indicated the Multiracial participants only experienced situational identity Monoracially. Experiences participants shared were so intertwined it became difficult to decipher which identity pattern was most present. Due to levels of uncertainty around identity patterns, it seemed as though the situational identity was an overarching theme within which participants tended to identify Monoracially. Other researchers (Loudd, 2011; Roque, 2013, Steele, 2012) also struggled to make the distinction between Renn's (2000) patterns of identity, contributing to the need for further research on the overlap of these patterns. Loudd's (2011) study consisted of five study participants who self-identified as Multiracial and focused on their interactions with European American faculty, staff, and peers. In

Loudd's (2011) study, participants identified across all five of Renn's patterns of identity with subthemes such as being racially ambiguous in the extraracial pattern. Roque (2013) did not work with participants but reviewed literature pertaining to Multiracial individuals and added not all possible Multiracial identities were covered by Renn's patterns.

### **Implications for Practice**

Implications for practice derived from this research largely speak to the lack of resources and supports Multiracial individuals experienced at the University. Though all participants were involved with organizations or departments at the University, they also pointed out the need for Multiracial resources. College is a time for Multiracial individuals to solidify their sense of identity separate from their family; however, if there are no organizations or supports that align with their chosen identities, individuals may suffer from identity crises. Because one's level of belonging to an institution can be indicative of one's overall success (Millea et al., 2018), it is important all individuals have opportunities to connect with meaningful resources. The resources at the chosen University did not feel inclusive to the Multiracial participants, and participants often did not feel welcomed by the Monoracial services.

### **Recommendations**

In this section, the researcher discusses recommendations for higher education practitioners to create better experiences for Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students. The recommendations have been derived from the suggestions of interview participants and the findings of this study.

The first group of recommendations relate to how the existing campus services and organizations can be more inclusive of the Multiracial identity. Participants spoke about feeling

as though racial and cultural organizations were exclusive to Monoracial individuals. This feeling of exclusivity could be addressed through explicit invitations from these organizations to individuals of cultural groups and allies. By noting allies are welcome in the organization, Multiracial individuals may feel more comfortable entering those spaces, even though they may not phenotypically look as if they belong. It is also important for cultural and racial organizations to be aware of implicit messages they send at club fairs when there are not diverse groups of students representing the organization. Selecting diverse members to represent an organization at campus-wide events helps individuals who may not phenotypically align with others to feel welcome. One final recommendation for these organizations is cohosting events to honor the Multiracial experience. Bringing two cultural organizations together to host an event allows for individuals to interact with aspects of both cultures at the same time and can create an educational opportunity for many students who may not have understood the Multiracial experience previously. Such cohosted events could build bridges between students with different heritages on campus and hopefully expand their scopes of understanding.

Additional recommendations are services or events that do not currently exist at the University but would benefit Multiracial individuals. While discussing organizations and services available on campus, several participants spoke about their desire to have a Multiracial affinity organization on campus. Such an organization would provide Multiracial individuals with a sense of belonging on campus and would provide them with a better sense of representation. Event recommendations for the Multiracial organization include panels of Multiracial alumni who could speak about systemic issues and challenges Multiracial individuals face and how they overcame said challenges. The Multiracial organization could also host a

mixer night for Multiracial individuals on campus to learn more about each other's backgrounds and experiences. One final recommendation for the Multiracial organization would be to host a prospective student overnight for Multiracial individuals, with the support of the University. One participant commented on the benefits the Black student overnight provided to their peers and wished they could have participated in a similar opportunity. By incorporating a prospective student overnight for Multiracial individuals, these students would be able to see their identity is honored and represented at the University, which could potentially lead to an increase of Multiracial students.

The final few recommendations are general campus recommendations such as altering the University's demographic questionnaire to allow Multiracial students to select the racial categories they identify with instead of offering the option of two or more races. Multiracial individuals would also benefit from faculty and staff members who shared their racial identities, so diverse hiring practices are important to the success of Multiracial individuals. Additionally, an advisor or advising group would provide Multiracial individuals with support to better navigate the University.

### **Conclusion**

It is anticipated the findings from this study will increase awareness of the Multiracial experience in higher education settings and provide institutions with a better understanding of how to support Multiracial students. The researcher is optimistic Multiracial students across the University will benefit from the "norms of silence" (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013, p. 1317), which Multiracial individuals typically experience around their racial identity, being broken. Several participants shared the positive impact of feeling their identity was included in



educational materials, studies, or course assignments, and, hopefully, this body of research can provide that same feeling of inclusivity for others.

In addition to providing insight into the experiences and identity challenges of Multiracial undergraduate and graduate students at a private university, this study should inspire further research on how to better serve marginalized populations in a higher education setting. Through examination of the University resources individuals most frequently interacted with and their unrequited needs for Multiracial specific services, the researcher identified areas for improvement and areas of high inclusivity. By conducting this study with both undergraduate and graduate students, the findings indicated different needs for the two populations. The differing needs of undergraduate and graduate students should be addressed by higher education institutions to provide a more inclusive experience for students at all levels. As a result of this study, Multiracial individuals should receive intentionally tailored support and services to meet their needs in a higher education setting.

In 2020, the third U.S. census allowing for individuals to identify as more than one race will be collected. While allowing for individuals to identify in this manner on the census is a step toward legitimizing the Multiracial population, the fact remains: Multiracial individuals are still not recognized as an official racial category by the U.S. government. The challenges Multiracial individuals face in the United States have changed over the years as the zeitgeist and political climate are ever evolving. Multiracial slurs such as octoroon and mestizo are hardly heard, and the general population is far less concerned with interracial marriages (Korgen, 2016), but Multiracial individuals have experienced polarizing events over the past several years, such as the Black Lives Matters movement and the election of the 45th president, Donald Trump.

Although these events did not revolve around the Multiracial population, Multiracial individuals were directly impacted. The Black Lives Matter movement left some Multiracial individuals with Black heritage feeling disenfranchised or shamed due to the narrative of the movement (Buggs, 2017). The election of Donald Trump as the 45th president also caused the discomfort of some Multiracial individuals since he began the “birther movement,” demanding President Obama’s birth certificate. After taking such an aggressive approach to the first Multiracial president of the United States, many Multiracial individuals may have developed complicated feelings toward President Trump (Thomsen, 2017). Additionally, some of the policy changes implemented by President Trump have been criticized for targeting minority populations. Fortunately, movements such as hypodescent and eugenics have been losing traction in recent years.

## APPENDIX A

### Demographic Questionnaire

#### Demographic Information

1. Please indicate your age.
2. Please indicate your gender.
3. Please indicate your marital status.
4. Please indicate if you have children.
5. Please indicate your employment status and whether it is on or off campus.
  - a. How many hours a week do you work?
6. How do you racially identify?

#### Educational Information

7. Are you a graduate or undergraduate student?
8. In what year did you start at this University?
9. Is this the first higher education institution that you have attended?
10. Have you lived in University housing during any part of your enrollment?
11. What is your cumulative GPA?
12. What is your expected graduation date?
13. What clubs or organizations are you a part of on campus?
14. Are you attending the University full-time or part-time?
15. How many credits are you taking this semester?
16. What is your major or anticipated major?
17. Approximately how many hours a week do you spend on campus?
18. Do you commute one hour or more to campus?

## APPENDIX B

### Semistructured Interview Protocol (Initial Interview)

**Preamble:** Today, I want to talk with you about your experience as a student, and particularly how your identity as a Multiracial student has impacted your experience. The information you share with me today will be used for the purpose of writing my dissertation, which is on the Multiracial student experience in undergraduate and graduate programs at this University. Before we begin with the interview questions, I would like to review the consent form with you. *READ CONSENT FORM. READ BILL OF RIGHTS.* Do you have any questions about this? How does this feel to you? *I collect a signed consent form, the participant receives a blank consent form.* Do I have your permission to record today's interview? The purpose of the audio-recording will be for accuracy. I am going to take notes, but I don't want to miss anything you say. *If they say yes, this is when I turn on the recorder.* Great. Thank you so much. Let's get started. Did you have an opportunity to complete the demographic questionnaire? *Collect questionnaire. If they have not completed the questionnaire, provide them time to complete it.*

First, I want to know more about you and how you understand your Multiracial identity and then I'll ask you some questions about what it's like to be a student on this campus.

1. How do you racially identify?

PROMPTS:

- a. Tell me about your racial identity. How do you describe yourself?
- b. Have you always identified in this way?
- c. Do you racially identify in different ways based on the situation?
- d. How do members of your family identify?
- e. Do you talk about racial identity with your family? Is racial identity important in your family?
- f. Is this how you racially identified prior to starting at the University?
- g. Do you ever choose to identify in a manner that does not denote a specific race?
- h. Tell me about your friend groups. Do you have a lot of Multiracial friends?
- i. When did you come to understand your identity as Multiracial? How? What helped you to do this? Are you still working on it? Has it changed over time?

Now I would like to ask you about your experiences at this University.

2. Do you feel that your identity is accepted and honored at this University?

PROMPTS:

- a. Do you feel that the University represents you well as a Multiracial individual?

- b. What experiences have you had while at the university that have helped you think about your Multiracial identity in new ways? Or that have challenged the way you understand your identity?
    - c. In what ways does the university acknowledge students' Multiracial identities? How could they do better?
3. Do you identify differently in your off-campus interactions than you do in your on-campus interactions?
  - a. Has this changed since you began at this University?
  - b. Did your on-campus experience alter or affect how you identify off- campus?
4. When reflecting on your academic experiences in class and with faculty members, do you feel that your Multiracial identity negatively or positively impacted you?
5. When thinking about your experience at this University as a Multiracial student, where have you felt most included?
  - a. Are there specific people, groups or organizations that helped you to feel more included?
  - b. Were there specific actions or experiences that you can note?
6. Upon starting your degree program at this University did you seek out membership in any clubs or organizations? Which ones? Why? (or why not?)
7. Do you belong to any on campus organizations that you feel honor your Multiracial identity?
  - a. Of the departments and organizations that you have interacted with during your time at this University, which ones felt most inclusive of your identity?
  - b. How do you think campus organizations/ departments can honor Multiracial identity?
  - c. What do they do well? What needs to change?

## APPENDIX C

### Semistructured Interview Protocol (Follow-Up Interview)

**Preamble:** *I will summarize what I heard in the first interview. Ask the participant: Does that sound accurate to you? For this interview, we want to focus on your identity and experiences at the university to inform recommendations.*

1. Reflecting back on your experiences since you started at this University, how do you feel that your identity has changed if at all?
  - a. What do you feel prompted the identity shifts that you experienced?
2. Ok, so now I want to transition to talk about your recommendations. Do you have any general recommendations that would benefit Multiracial students at this university?
3. I have a document of resources available here at the University. Were you aware of these resources?

#### PROMPTS:

- a. Did you feel that you had access to these?
  - b. What would have contributed to you joining these or not joining these?
  - c. Do you have any recommendations?
  - d. Did you ever get the sense that these are only available to Monoracial individuals?
4. Do you have anything else that you would like to share about being a Multiracial individual at this University?
5. Do you have any questions for me?

#### List of Resources at University – Use as needed during interview

- Asian Pacific Student Services
- Black Student Services
- Chicano/ Latino Student Services
- Jewish Student Life
- LGBT Student Services
- Muslim Student Life
- The Learning Community (TLC)
- ACE
- Alpha Chi Omega (AXΩ)
- Alpha Phi (AΦ)
- Delta Delta Delta (ΔΔΔ)

- Delta Gamma ( $\Delta\Gamma$ )
- Delta Zeta Sorority ( $\Delta Z$ )
- Kappa Alpha Theta ( $\text{KA}\Theta$ )
- Pi Beta Phi ( $\text{PiB}\Phi$ )
- Alpha Delta Gamma ( $\text{A}\Delta\Gamma$ )
- Beta Theta Pi ( $\text{B}\Theta\text{Pi}$ )
- Delta Sigma Phi ( $\Delta\Sigma\Phi$ )
- Delta Upsilon ( $\Delta Y$ )
- Lambda Chi Alpha ( $\Lambda X A$ )
- Phi Delta Theta ( $\Phi\Delta\Theta$ )
- Sigma Chi ( $\Sigma X$ )
- Sigma Phi Epsilon ( $\Sigma\Phi E$ )
- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. ( $\text{AKA}$ )
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. ( $\Delta\Sigma\Theta$ )
- Gamma Alpha Omega Sorority, Inc. ( $\Gamma A\Omega$ )
- Gamma Zeta Alpha Fraternity, Inc. ( $\Gamma Z A$ )
- Lambda Theta Nu Sorority, Inc. ( $\Lambda\Theta N$ )
- Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. ( $\text{KA}\Psi$ )
- Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. ( $\Phi B\Sigma$ )
- Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. ( $\Sigma\Gamma\rho$ )
- Sigma Lambda Beta Fraternity, Inc. ( $\Sigma\Lambda B$ )
- Sigma Lambda Gamma Sorority, Inc. ( $\Sigma\Lambda\Gamma$ )
- Associated Student Assembly/ Graduate student Assembly
- Ignatian Leadership Institute
- African Student Association

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