In Between, Not Really Anywhere: Narratives of Half Asian-Half White Young Adults Navigating a Monoracial Society

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IN BETWEEN, NOT REALLY ANYWHERE:
NARRATIVES OF HALF ASIAN-HALF WHITE YOUNG ADULTS NAVIGATING A MONORACIAL SOCIETY

Submitted to
Professor Phil Zuckerman and Professor Ellen Rentz

By Lena Proctor

For Senior Thesis
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Abstract:

This senior thesis examines half Asian-half white biracial identity development among young adults. While previous literature explores how this group identifies, this study examines why individuals racially identify in the way they do. Over the course of two months, in a series of 10 in-depth, open-ended interviews with half Asian-half white young adults, the paper asks the two questions: 1. How do half Asian-half white individuals develop their racial identity?, and 2. How do half Asian-half white individuals make sense of their biracial identity in a monoracial world?. Through the analysis of the data, I conclude that in racial identity development among half Asian-half white individuals, there are factors that push and pull individuals from their identities and ultimately uphold and reinforce monoracial ideals. Furthermore, I demonstrate that there are also factors that allow participants to exist in both/neither groups, challenging monoracial ideals. In turn, I suggest that American racial narratives are moving in a multiracial direction with the presence of more multiracial people, but that these multiracial individuals are being commodified through racial capitalism.

Key words:
MULTIRACIALITY, RACIAL CAPITALISM, SOCIOLOGY, HALF ASIAN-HALF WHITE, RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT
Introduction:

While race is frequently and widely talked about, it is a complex social construct that has developed for over centuries, and continues to evolve. The dark history and current reality of the United States has shown the significance of race in American society, from the first transportation of enslaved humans from the African continent in the 17th century, to the treatment of Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the majority of history, United States’ understanding of race has been one that it is monoracial, where individuals are mostly categorized under one racial category, rather than being allowed to hold multiple racial identities. Atkin and Jackson note that in a monoracial society such as the United States, “individuals are bound to exist within mutually exclusive monoracial categories and are marginalized if they violate these boundaries” (Atkin and Jackson 2020). People's understanding of race is often limited to a monoracial framework because it is the lens that many Americans have been taught to view race through¹. Although this is true for the United States, race is viewed differently in other places such as Brazil (Atkin and Jackson 2020). It is important to emphasize race as socially constructed, as it was created as a means of categorizing groups of people based on

¹ One tangible manifestation of a monoracial society is the “One-drop rule.” Also known as hypodescent, this was a rule used in the United States during times of chattel slavery and Jim Crow Segregation Era to dictate and identify who was considered Black. Under the one-drop rule, any person who contained a single drop of “Black blood” in their lineage was considered to be Black (Davis 1991). This dictated the treatment of a person, as well as the rights that they had in society. Some researchers, including Arnold K. Ho from Harvard University, argue that the “one-drop rule” still exists in America today. Their research shows that “individuals who were a 50-50 mix of two races, either Black-white or Asian-white, were almost never identified by study participants as white. Furthermore, on average, Black-white biracials had to be 68 percent white before they were perceived as white; the comparable figure for Asian-white biracials was 63 percent” (Bradt 2010).
perceived physical differences for exploitation and economic gain. Following this thought, maintaining monoracial categories is essential in preserving the power structures that privilege white people through race; without strict monoracial categories, it becomes harder to assert power over groups of people, because the groups themselves, as well as who belongs in what group, becomes less clear. This might explain why a monoracial view of race in the United States prevails, because the loss of strict racial categories poses a threat to the economic power system that is race.

For the growing population of mixed raced individuals in the United States, this poses an interesting challenge, as such individuals grow up having to navigate their multiple racial identities in a monoracial world. As a result, individuals who identify multiracially push against monoracial narratives and expand conceptions of race in America. In this paper, I explore the specific narratives and experiences of half Asian-half white adults. Asians in the United States have the current highest rate of people who interracially marry at 3 in 10, intermarrying most frequently with white people (Livingston and Brown 2017). In consequence, the group of half Asian-half white individuals has a growing presence within the United States, and unlike Black multiracial individuals, who are still often subjected to modern day applications of the One-drop Rule, half Asian-half white individuals are more likely to claim a biracial or multiracial identity than other groups (Bradt 2010).

Over the course of two months, I interviewed half Asian-half white adults in order to explore the following questions:

- How do half Asian-half white individuals develop their racial identity?
• How do half Asian-half white individuals make sense of their biracial identity in a monoracial world?

Through my analysis of the data, I conclude that in racial identity development among half Asian-half white individuals, there are factors that push and pull individuals from their identities and ultimately uphold and reinforce monoracial ideals. Furthermore, I demonstrate that there are also factors that allow participants to exist in both/neither groups, challenging monoracial ideals. In turn, I suggest that American racial narratives are moving in a multiracial direction with the presence of more multiracial people, but that these multiracial individuals are being commodified through racial capitalism.

As a half Asian-half white individual myself, I have personal reasons for being invested in this topic, as it is directly tied to my identity. Throughout my life, I have noticed the ways in which my relationship with my own race has transformed. In my senior year of high school, I created a short documentary on my biracial identity titled “Shades of Lena.” I see this paper as a continuation of my evolving understanding of myself as a racial being. That being said, I also believe that this paper and topic are relevant to our society because it helps us to understand the ways in which mixed raced individuals hold space for themselves in a monoracial world. It also allows us to understand the ways in which conceptions of race might be changing in the United States as mixed raced populations increase. More specifically in the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social-Psychology, there has not been extensive amounts of research centered the half Asian-half white population in the United States. The vast majority of existing literature instead pertains to the identity development of biracial children, as compared to biracial adults, among which half Black-half white individuals have been more heavily studied. This paper
will build off existing literature, while providing insight into why exactly multiracial individuals identify in many ways that they do, as opposed to other studies that look at how multiracial individuals identify.

Throughout the paper, I use the terms “pull” and “push” to describe the factors that affect biracial identity development. In previous papers, to which I relate many of my findings to, there is some discussion on variables that affect how a biracial person identifies (Townsend et al. 2012; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Rockquemore, 1999; AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006). Many of these studies are limited to a monoracial framework, showing how certain factors lead biracial individuals to identify with one racial group or another. To supplement these findings, I discuss patterns in my study that also show factors that draw individuals towards a certain identity. To fill in existing gaps, I also propose that there are factors that repel individuals from identifying with Asian and white identities, as well as factors that allow individuals to hold a multiracial identity. Furthermore, the findings of my study provide a unique lens by examining these factors as they show up in Asian-white biracial adults, as opposed to the ways in which Asian-white biracial children are racially identified.

I define a pull factor as a practice, experience, phenomena, or characteristic that brought a participant closer to either one of their racial identities. Pull factors were often seen to bring participants closer to one of their racial identities by connecting them with their culture. Some of these pull factors simultaneously resulted in the creation of distance from the other respective racial identity, highlighting the relationships between the pull and push factors. Similarly, I define a push factor as a practice, experience, phenomena, or characteristic that repelled a participant away from either one of their racial identities. Push
factors were often found to be rooted in feelings of exclusion from racial groups or wanting to distance oneself from one’s culture(s) to fit in to dominant (white) culture. Notably, some factors were found to be both push and pull factors, meaning that depending on the relationship of the participant with the factor, it could either lead a participant to be pulled towards a racial identity, or to push them away from a racial identity. To answer the question of who was doing the pushing and pulling, participants shared both instances of the pushing and pulling being done by themselves, and by other people, including family members, peers, and strangers.

The first chapter, "Factors of Magnetism," discusses data that indicated a draw towards either or both sides of a participant’s racial identities. This chapter is broken up into two sections. The first, Towards Asian Identity, describes food and language as factors that pulled participants towards their Asian identity. Food consumption and rituals relating to food were found to bring participants closer to their Asian identity by signifying a strong Asian cultural presence in a participant’s life, as well as being significant in their connection to friends and to their mothers. The ability to speak an Asian language was found to be a marker of validity of a participant’s Asian identity; it allowed participants to be legitimatized by others in their Asian racial group belonging. The second section, Towards White Identity, describes the ways in which participants were drawn towards their white identity as a result of distancing themselves from their Asian identity. One way this pull (and push) was seen was through a phenomenon I deem as Americanization; through a notion of becoming more American, participants alluded to understandings of being American as being synonymous to being White. Other ways this push-pull interaction was observed was through the context of language ability and feelings of wanting to be white.
The second chapter, "Factors of Repulsion," examines data that indicated a push away from either or both sides of a participant’s racial identities. Similar to Chapter 1, this chapter is broken into two sections. The first, *Away from Asian Identity*, describes language and perceived judgement by others to be factors that pushed participants away from their Asian identity. In contrast to language as a pull factor, the inability to speak an Asian language was found to lead to disconnection with one’s family and mother. The inability to speak a language also stood as a reason for others to invalidate one’s Asian identity. Participants also shared that in being perceived as half or fully white, they found that people would falsify their Asian group belonging. To avoid judgement or negative associations with their culture, participants were found to try and distance themselves from the culture. The second section of this chapter, *Away from White Identity*, describes feelings of being othered by white people and experiencing discomfort around groups of white people, as factors that pushed participants away from their white identity. Building off of Root’s description of biracial identity development, participants shared feelings of otherness resulting in a push away from whiteness (Root 1990). Participants also expressed feeling a lack of belonging and discomfort around white people within their intimate relationships and friendships. Additionally, within experiences of alienation having to do with sexual partners and food, the push away from white people resulted in a pull towards Asian individuals.

The third chapter, "Breaking Monoracial Narratives," analyzes the ways in which participants challenged the dominant view of race in the United States as monoracial and stagnant. This chapter is observed in three parts. First, in contrast to other experiences in which participants were confined to monoracial categories, *Being Recognized*
Multiracially describes how participants also shared experiences in which they were recognized as multiracial. The two contexts in which this occurred were while among other multiracial individuals, and while among teachers and students in a classroom setting. Second, in Being Used for Racial Capitalism, participants pointed to findings like Leong’s on half Asian-half white individuals being used by institutions for capitalistic gain (Leong 2013). Through experiences with college institutions, as well as through their intimate relationships and friendships, participants shared many ways in which others took advantage of their mixed raced identity in order to seem nonracist. Third and finally, in Fluidity and the Element of Choice, participants shared how their multiracial identity is one that is fluid, based on factors of environment, and their own autonomy. By being recognized by others and by themselves as multiracial, participants illustrated the ways in which race in America is perhaps shifting to include more multiracial realities.
**Literature Review:**

**Racial Identity Development Frameworks**

Among various identities that a person holds is an individual’s racial identity. Racial identity development has been studied by sociologists and social psychologists for decades, and continues to be understood differently through time. The formation of one's identity is widely understood to be a “social process that occurs in relation to various groups” (AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006). In 1971, Cross developed what is known today as the *Black Racial identity Model* (Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson 1994), which described various stages that African Americans go through while living in America. Under this model, African Americans develop from an individual unaware of themselves as a racial being, to one that is committed to the liberation of Black people (Owens, 2010). This model became a blueprint for many other identity development models, including various other racial identities and sexual identity models (O’Donoghue 2004; Phinney 1990; Helms 1990; Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson 1994).

One example that followed from Cross’s model was Helms’s *White Racial Identity Development* (WRID) Model in 1984 (O’Donoghue 2004). This model, like Cross’s, was developed under an oppression-adaptive model, one that assumes that a racial identity evolves as a response to an oppressive dominant society. Given the fact that a white racial identity is the dominant race in the oppressive American society, many scholars critiqued Helm’s use of the oppression-adaptive model on a racial identity development framework pertaining to the white racial group (Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson 1994). Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson wrote about these logical inconsistencies in Helms’s WRID model, pointing out that the model focuses “primarily on attitudes towards racial/ethnic outgroups, not on
White identity attitudes” (Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson 1994; for more, see: Stephan 1992). As a result, the authors then suggested an alternative framework, *White Racial Consciousness*, to understand white racial identity development. They described White Racial Consciousness “as one’s awareness of being White and what that implies in relation to those who do not share White group membership” (Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson 1994). Under this framework, unachieved White Racial Consciousness took stages of avoidant, dependent, and dissonant, while achieved White Racial Consciousness took stages of dominative, conflictive, reactive, and integrative (Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson 1994).

More recently, in 1990, Poston developed a “progressive, developmental model” for biracial identity development with five stages (Poston, 1990). First, before an individual becomes aware of themselves as a racial being, Poston states that a biracial person develops a *personal identity*. This includes feelings of self-worth, self-esteem, and other factors that are independent of an ethnic/racial background. The second stage, *Choice of Group Categorization*, can be one of crisis and alienation, as an individual is pushed into one ethnic/racial group to belong to. Social support, socioeconomic status, and personal factors all affect how and what group an individual will be pushed into. The third stage, Poston writes, is *Enmeshment/Denial*, in which individuals experience feelings of guilt, disloyalty, and lack of acceptance for “having to choose one identity that is not fully expressive of one’s background.” After time, an individual ideally comes to peace with these complex feelings and advances to the fourth stage of *Appreciation*. Finally, in the last stage, *Integration*, a person will experience wholeness despite being viewed in a society as otherwise. Individuals at this stage are able to equally value all of their identities and develop a secure racial and ethnic identity.
Multiple Dimensions of Race

In order to understand the various ways in which multiracial individuals have come to understand their racial identity, it is essential to acknowledge the multidimensionality and fluidity of race (Alba 1990; Hout & Goldstein 1994). Sociologist Wendy Roth illuminates “The Multiple Dimensions of Race” (Roth 2016), mapping out six different dimensions of race. The first dimension, a person’s racial identity, or a person’s “internal race,” is a subjective, self-elected identity. The second, a person’s racial self-classification, is the race that they might check off on a survey or official forms such as a census, doctors forms, financial aid forms, etc. (Roth 2016; Brunsma 2005). A person’s racial self-classification may not necessarily align with that of their racial identity, given the limited options. Third, a person’s observed race is the race that others might believe a person to be. A person’s observed race varies depending on who is observing, can be based on both appearance and interactions, and often affects how the observed person is treated. Other authors including DuBois discuss similar themes in their work (Mostern 1996). Fourthly, a person’s reflected race, is the race that a person believes others to see them as. Fifthly, a person’s phenotype, involves physical factors such as their skin color, among other features like hair texture/color and facial features. Finally, the sixth dimension of race that Roth describes is a person’s racial ancestry, both known, being what a person believes their ancestry to be based on family history, and genetic, being their ancestry indicated by genetic testing (Roth 2016).

Roth’s work challenges previous understandings of race as monolithic and stagnant through these six dimensions. Other authors including Hamilton, Omi and Winant, through
Racial Formation Theory have discussed this extensively (Hamilton, Omi and Winant 1988). Most notably for multiracial individuals, the multidimensionality of race can be observed through inconsistencies among these six different dimensions. Inconsistencies across an individual’s various dimensions of race can cause distress in their psychological wellbeing and health by “invalidating one’s self-image and identity, threatening social status, and de-legitimizing claims for membership in one’s community” (Roth 2016; Townsend, Markus, & Bergsicker, 2009). For multiracial individuals living in a monoracial society, their realities are often are delegitimized and/or gone unrecognized (Atkin and Jackson 2020). In fact, up until the early 2000s, less than 20 years ago, individuals did not have the ability to select for multiple races when completing the census (Bratter and Heard 2009).

Multiraciality

Unlike monoracial people, multiracial peoples have the choice to identify themselves in different ways. This challenges monoracial assumptions about race and ethnicity, mainly that race is constant throughout someone’s life, and that it is singular (AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006). In particular, Leong sheds light on the fluidity of mixed Asian identity as resistance to a monoracial society (Leong 2003):

I conclude that the malleability of mixed-Asian racial identity provides unique opportunities for destabilizing existing views about racial identity, reinvigorating stale conversations about race, and ultimately facilitating progress toward a racially egalitarian society.
Numerous sociocultural factors affect the way in which an individual racially identifies. For biracial individuals, physical appearance and the ways in which others perceive an individual has been found to have a large effect on their racial identity (AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006; Khanna 2004, 2010). Additionally, growing up in predominantly white environments, as well as being from a higher class\(^2\), has been found to make a biracial individual more likely to claim a multiracial identity as compared to a monoracial minority identity (Townsend et al. 2012; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Rockquemore, 1999). For children of immigrant parents living in America, females were more likely to be found adopting a bicultural or “hyphenated” identity, while males were more likely to take on an “unhyphenated” national identity (Chung 2016). Among multiracial individuals, Asian/White participants have been found to be significantly more likely to claim a biracial identity than Latinx/White participants, who claimed their minority, *Latinx*, identity (Townsend et al. 2012).

For individuals who are mixed with majority-minority group combinations, Saenz et al. created a model--inspired by sociologist Milton Gordon’s stages of assimilation of minority groups into majority groups--to illustrate the stages that biracial children go through to self identify (Saenz et al. 1995). The first in Gordon’s model, *Anglo-conformity*, describes minority group members becoming absorbed by and conforming to the dominant (white) culture. For mixed raced individuals, Saenz et al. suggest this stage represents those who identify as strictly white. The second stage in Gordon’s model, *Cultural-pluralist*,

\(^2\) In the study, Townsend et al. compared participants from middle class contexts and participants from working class contexts to deduce this (Townsend et al. 2012).
represents minority group members who hold their own culture while attempting to adjust to the majority group culture; Saenz et al. describe this stage among biracial individuals as those who exclusively define themselves as their minority group identity. Finally, the Melting-pot illustrates the emergence of a new, “third culture” from the interactions of both minority and majority groups. Saenz et al. paralleled this to individuals who identify with new identities that honor all of their ethnicities/cultures/races, such “Amerasian” (Saenz et al. 1995).³

Root has described identity development of biracial people as a development into awareness of otherness. From an early age of around three, a child is said to become aware of color, but has not yet formed a racial identity (Root 1990). As a child grows, questions and comments about the ambiguity of a biracial child’s looks and features may at first be flattering, as it gives a child attention. But eventually, these experiences begin to become paired with “disapproving comments and nonverbal communication to convey to the child that this otherness is ‘undesirable or wrong’” (Root 1990). With the awareness and continual experiences of being othered, children run the risk of developing embarrassment or confusion around their identity and familial belonging (Root 1990).

Atkin and Jackson point out that multiracial children in the United States are faced with two unique stressors. The first unique stressor, monoracism, includes the denial of others who belong to one or more of a person’s racial background, rejection from members of a monoracial group, and being pressured to identify with only one of a mixed raced

³ In Saenz et al.’s study, the authors found that Anglo-conformity most accurately illustrated the experience of individuals who had one white parent and one parent who is Asian Indian, Korean, Filipino, and Japanese. Cultural-pluralist was embodied most accurately by individuals who are half white-half Chinese. The Melting pot stage was most prevalent among Chinese, Vietnamese, or Japanese (Saenz et al. 1995).
individual’s background (Atkin and Jackson 2020). Monoracism is influenced by monocentric ideas of biological race, white supremacy, and the one-drop rule, and can result in the hypersexualization of features of mixed raced bodies, the unrecognition by a parent of a child’s race(s), among many other things. The second unique stressor that Atkin and Jackson discovered was that multiracial individuals often experience feelings of disconnect with their race(s), ethnicity(ies), and/or culture(s). This often results from lack of exposure or integration into one or more of one's racial heritages. Language, in particular, was a large factor that was found to indicate connectedness with culture in multiracial individuals. Root also adds that oppression towards biracial and multiracial peoples is oppression that is rooted in the United States society’s fear of “racial pollution”\(^4\) (Root 1990).

**Half Asian Identity: Existing Literature**

Despite the frequency at which Half Asian American mixed children are being born, with as many as one in three Asian Americans marrying and coparenting with someone of a different race, there is a limited amount of literature on this specific combination of mixed raced individuals (Leong 2013). Mixed Asian individuals present themselves in a multitude of ways, from “full Asian,” “full white,” “half,” “fully ambiguous,” “I don’t know,” “hapa,”

\(^4\) *Racial pollution*, defined by Henriques in 1975, describes a phenomenon of a ‘pure’ race being diluted or polluted by other races. This was an attitude that was reflected in Hitler’s Germany, where certain features and colors were deemed as pure, and all others were not (Root 1990).

\(^5\) The term *Hapa* is a Hawaiian word for “part,” that has been used by individuals beyond the Hawaiian islands, Japanese Americans in particular, describing someone who is part Asian or Pacific Islander. The history of this term has been disputed by many, as some say that its origins are racist, while others say that there is no evidence supporting the term ever being used derogatorily. Aside from these disputes, the term has been asked to be reserved strictly to those who are Native Hawaiians, as the use by non-Native Hawaiians is seen to “symbolically mirror
and more. Moreover, many mixed Asians change the way in which they racially identify based on their environment, who they are disclosing the information to, and context (Leong 2013).

In their research, Leong identifies the ways in which Half Asian, or mixed Asian individuals are targets of racial capitalism. In other words, predominantly white institutions often derive value from mixed Asian individuals unethically (Leong 2013). Because half Asians are often viewed and ‘counted’ by institutions as persons of color as opposed to white, their presence within an institution allows an institution to claim itself as racially inclusive with minimal effort. The reason that Leong states that minimal effort needed is because half Asian-half white individuals are often seen by institutions as more similar to white people, due to factors such as having more stereotypically anglophone last names, and thus are more welcomed into predominantly white institutions as opposed to other mixed raced individuals (Leong 2013). Because these half Asian-half white individuals are more comfortable in predominantly white spaces, institutions then have less of an incentive to make structural changes to the institution.

In 2006, AhnAllen, Suyemoto, and Carter conducted a study to examine the relationships between “Physical Appearance, Sense Of Belonging And Exclusion, And Racial/Ethnic Self-Identification Among Multiracial Japanese European Americans” by examining the responses of 57 respondents of a questionnaire (AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006). The results of the study challenged preceding theories that stated that

the way Native Hawaiian land was first taken by European Americans, and is now owned by European Americans, Japanese and Japanese Americans and other Asian American ethnic groups that numerically and economically dominate Native Hawaiians in their own land.” Many non-Native Hawaiians are making the decision to remove the term from their vocabulary (Johnson 2021).
physical appearance affects racial identity by influencing the ways in which others treat mixed raced individuals (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Stephan and Stephan 1989), thus affecting the individual’s experiences of both belonging and exclusion. The 2006 study supported the authors’ hypothesis that physical appearance has an independent contribution to the formation of racial identity outside of influence of others (AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006). In addition, AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter’s study also challenged previous notions that multiracial identity development is solely one that follows an oppression-adaptive model, being developed from a response to feelings of exclusion from the monoracial (dominant) groups (AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006). While identity development is affected by exclusion from a desired group, the authors found that eventually a multiracial identity evolves to be an identity that is less socially dependent and more independent.

An older study by Xie and Goyote used data from the 1990 census to study the ways in which biracial children with one Asian parent are racially identified by parents or caretakers (Xie and Goyette, 1997). This study stands out, as it records data from the census on mixed raced children before people could be identified as multiple races on the census at all. The authors found that 38.8% of the biracial children had been identified in the census as Asian. In addition, they found that first generation children were “significantly more likely to be identified as Asian than third-generation children,” but that children with a more highly educated Asian parent are more likely to be identified as Asian than children with a less educated parent (Xie and Goyette, 1997). The first finding, on generational status, spoke to the authors’ hypothesis on assimilation, while the second finding on Asian parent’s education level spoke to the authors’ hypothesis on awareness. While the paper
was transformative for its time, there are shortcomings to this research for the purposes of my paper topic. It is more based on quantitative than qualitative data, showing how children of mixed raced families are identified by others, but not personal narratives on why they identify how they do. Furthermore, Xie and Goyette’s work does not show how mixed raced individuals identify themselves, but by the ways in which someone else chose to identify them.

*Parental Involvement in Identity Development*⁶

Among countless factors, much research shows the significance of parents and parental involvement in a child's life on the identity development of an individual. For example, Bratter and Heard examined the relationship between parent-child interactions and the racial identity of a child using nationally representative data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Bratter and Heard, 2009). More specifically, they explored the frequency at which adolescents’ racial classification reflected that of solely the mother’s or father’s race, the relationship between these frequencies and the parental involvement, and the degree at which parent-child relationships explain the tendencies of various genders identifying with one parent more than another (Bratter and Heard, 2009). The results of the study showed that among Black-white households, children had a more of a tendency to match the race of the father over the race of the mother.

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⁶ I originally added this section to my literature review when my thesis topic was taking a different angle, looking more specifically at the role of parents’ race on a biracial child’s racial identity development. But once I began to conduct the interviews (and participants had much less to say about that question in particular), I adjusted my topic to be a broader view of racial identity development. Even though the focus of my thesis topic changed, I still wanted to include this section in the literature review because it ended up informing a lot of the findings of my research.
if the father was white, as compared to Black (43% v 7.5%). In all other combinations of white with Asian, Native American, or other non-white racial groups, there was a significant tendency for the child to match with the race of the mother regardless of the mother’s race. In addition, the authors discovered that only certain factors within parental involvement had an influence on the race of a child. Father closeness, father/mother school communication, and father/mother school involvement were found to predict matching with a father’s race, while mother’s educational aspirations and social closure were found to predict matching with a mother’s race. In conclusion, parental involvement had more of an effect on the likeliness of identifying with fathers than mothers (Bratter and Heard, 2009).

Literature before Bratter and Heard’s 2009 study receding literature has shown that children of two or more differently-raced parents have most often been classified as the race of the child’s father (Brunsma, 2005; Qian, 2004; Xie and Goyette, 1997), but this data has since been questioned (Bratter and Heard, 2009). There are many societal and logistical factors- including who, whether parent, child, or other, is choosing and labeling the race of a child, and how paternal status has historically dictated other information such as the last name of a child- that may have influenced these results (Bratter and Heard, 2009). Other studies on half white- half nonwhite children have shown varied results pertaining to the child’s relationship with the race of both parents (see: Demo and Hughes 1990; Peterson and Hann 1999). Root notes that parents of different races’ treatment of one another may also affect the ways in which a child develops a relationship to their race. In other words, prejudice and oppression in relation to race may also be present within familial ties, sending messages to children about their own races (Root 1990).
In their study using secondary data analysis on qualitative data from an earlier study, Atkin and Jackson identify three different sites of support strategies that multiracial youth can obtain from their parents (Atkin and Jackson 2020). In the first observed support strategy, *connection support*, parents affirm their children’s’ differences as positive. Within this strategy, parents might not necessarily name and discuss what these perceived differences are, but express pride in connection to their children despite racial or physical differences (Atkin and Jackson 2020). The second strategy that Atkin and Jackson discuss is *Racial discrimination support*; when children experience discrimination and tell these experiences to parents, having their experiences validated, related to or empathized with, and being given advice on how to respond to such experiences provides support to children. Finally, *multiracial identity expression support* describes support from parents in allowing children to identify fluidly and freely, and by emphasizing the importance of all of their children’s heritages (Atkin and Jackson 2020).
Methods/Data Collection:

The data from this study was conducted through 10 open-ended, in-depth interviews over the course of two months from February 9th to March 23rd, 2021. Participants were contacted through snowball sampling methods from personal contacts, one social media post (through Facebook), and an email sent to a Senior thesis class for Sociology majors at Pitzer College. I offered no compensation for the interview but expressed gratitude for all who were willing and able to participate. All participants were required to be a consenting adult, at least 18 years of age, and a person who associates with being half Asian-half white. Given the variety of ways in which multiracial people identify, as discussed in the literature review, it was not required that participants personally identify as “half Asian-half white”, rather, that they felt as if they fit under the category of being white and Asian. The median age for the final participant sample was 22 (ranging from 20-26), with 50% (n=5) of participants identifying as male, and 50% (n=5) of participants identifying as female. All participants were either currently enrolled in a college to receive a bachelor’s degree or has already received one. Information on other socioeconomic factors and identities was not uniformly collected from participants during interviews. Table 1 lays out some information on each participant, and lists numbers by which participants will be referred to in the paper.

Given such a small sample size, nonprobability sampling techniques were used to find interview participants. As the interviewer and researcher, I did my best to represent a diverse array of perspectives; this was based on a mixture of my knowledge of individuals’ ethnic backgrounds, as well as life experiences. As a result, among the people that reached
out to me to volunteer to participate, I chose the 10 that I felt would have the widest range of representation of experiences. Among participants’ Asian side, there were 5 different ethnicities, and among participants’ white side, there were 8 different ethnicities. That all being said, the lack of ranges in age, gender identity, and socioeconomic status must have affected the outcome of the study. Further research with controlled groups of variables would provide a better understanding of the ways in which each factor individually affects racial identity development.

For the purposes of confidentiality, participant names have been omitted from the paper. Although names will not be included, other information that participants disclose--such as stories, personal narratives or descriptions of their relationships with others--will be included as data in the paper. To ensure that the participant’s identity remains anonymous, much attention and care was be taken to omit all potentially identifiable information, by keeping stories broad and summarized when needed. When in doubt, the participant who is being quoted was consulted regarding the sensitivity of the content, and their level of comfort regarding its inclusion in the paper. Further, to ensure that the voices of each of the participants was properly represented, each participant was given a copy of their transcribed interview and asked if there was any portion they would like to omit, and/or if there is there was any portion that they wished to clarify or reiterate. Each participant had different levels of comfortability with regards to the level of detail they were okay with me including in the paper. In some instances, this resulted in my omitting of ethnic group or language names, to keep data broad. To make quotes more digestible for readers, I also edited quotes slightly by omitting repeated phrases, or the word “like.”
After deciding on an appropriate time to conduct the interviews, communicating through text or Facebook messenger, interviews were conducted over Zoom and FaceTime. Before beginning each interview, participants signed a consent form, and were given a general overview on what to expect from the interview. Interview times ranged from 37 minutes to 1 hour and 16 minutes, with an average of 52 minutes per interview. Before beginning the interview, participants were asked a second time for consent to voice record the interview, for purposes of transcribing the interviews for data collection and analysis later. To record the conversation, I used the ‘Voice Memos’ app for the iPhone, and recorded from start to finish, leaving my phone where sound could be best picked up. While each interview took a different course, each interview discussed general topics of childhood, familial relationships, cultural influences, racial identity formation over time, and feelings about race currently. Although I had questions to refer to help structure the interviews, the interviews were open-ended in order to allow for a wide array of experiences to be shared. In addition, the non-rigidly structured nature of the interviews allowed me to use my best judgement to gauge what topics participants were comfortable and uncomfortable discussing, as well as what topics participants were most excited to discuss.

To compile data from interviews, each voice memo was uploaded to otter.ai, an online transcribing tool. Next, each interview was thoroughly reviewed and edited to ensure that the audio properly matched with the transcription. After completing this stage, the transcribed interviews were exported into separate documents and read through twice. To analyze data the first time, no notes were taken, but common themes were mentally noted. Upon the second read through, an issue focused analysis was conducted, which can
be broken down into four analytic processes: coding, sorting, local integration and inclusive integration (Weiss, 1994). Through this analysis, seven main themes arose from the data across three chapters: *Towards Asian Identity* and *Towards White Identity* fell under the first chapter “Factors of Magnetism,” *Away from Asian Identity* and *Away from White Identity* fell under the second chapter “Factors Repulsion,” and *Being Recognized by Others as Mixed, Being Used for Racial Capitalism* and *Fluidity and the Element of Choice* fell under the third and final chapter “Breaking Monoracial Narratives.” Each of the seven themes arose as I read through the interviews a second time. After the themes were collected, I sorted them by chapter based on the ways the themes affected racial identity development.

**Table 1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender/Pronouns</th>
<th>Race of Mother (Identified by participant)</th>
<th>Race of Father (Identified by participant)</th>
<th>Race of Participant (Self-identified)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female, She/Her</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Half Chinese-half white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female, She/Her</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>&quot;Bunch of different European things&quot;</td>
<td>Half Asian-Half white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male, He/Him</td>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Middle-Eastern, South Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female, She/Her</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Asian and White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male, He/Him</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Half Asian-Half white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male, He/Him</td>
<td>Half Asian-Half white</td>
<td>Central Asian</td>
<td>Quarter white quarter Chinese half Kazak, Wasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male, He/Him</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Halfie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female, She/Her</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Half Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female, She/Her</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male, He/Him</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Korean-white, Halfie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that all of the interviews occurred virtually, rather than in person. This was a result of the global pandemic COVID-19 and social distancing protocols. While this style of interview is inherently different from an interview that is conducted in person, as Jessica Sullivan suggests, virtual interviews “have the potential to mirror face-to-face interactions for those that are geographically dispersed” (Sullivan, 2012). Video calls offer a more authentic experience than a phone call without video because researchers are still able to attend to nonverbal cues such as body language, and facial expression. This form of an interview also poses some advantages over in person interview because respondents may be more comfortable in their environments (Sullivan, 2012).

While Sullivan also proposes disadvantages to conducting interviews over video calls, neither point is likely to have affected my interviews; during our interview, no technical problems were experienced, and it is highly unlikely that our call was being hacked (Sullivan, 2012). Benefits and drawbacks aside, another factor to consider is that the state of the world when conducting interviews with my participants was likely to have affected the outcome of interviews. Since the pandemic’s outbreak in March of 2020, 8 of the 10 participants mentioned having spent an unexpectedly significant amount of time with their parents and other family members. On many occasions, participants brought up the ways in which being home throughout the pandemic, during which limited social interactions were possible outside of the home, had affected their relationships with family members, both positively and negatively. In this way, data from this study gives a unique perspective into the topic, as individuals recalled taking more time to reflect inward, and spending more time with family.
As a half Asian-half white individual myself, as the data collector (interviewer) and author of this paper, I served as both an insider and outsider to my research participants and to the data as a whole. In my research, this meant that while I tried to be as ‘objective’ as possible, it goes without saying that my own experiences, biases, assumptions, and interpretations have all influenced and led me to my findings. My positionality is inseparable from my writing; I am a 21-year-old Japanese American woman. I come from an upper-class family, was raised predominantly in a suburb of New York in Westchester County, and in addition have spent significant amounts of time throughout my life in both Tokyo and London. While I held similarities to my research participants as half Asian-half white, the intersections of my other identities are equally significant. That being said, my proximity to my interview participants, some closer to me than others, also served as a great strength, as interviewees were likely to feel more comfortable sharing their truth. This may have allowed students to speak on experiences without fear of being judged, and by using descriptive language that would not as likely be understood by others who the participants do not share identities with.
Findings
I. Factors of Magnetism

Towards Asian Identity

One subject that was almost universally brought up by participants during interviews was the Asian cultural and racial significance of food. Food was seen as a marker of the presence of Asian culture in a participant’s life, as well as a significant factor in a participant’s relationships. To many of the participants, sharing and consuming Asian food served as a marker of their Asian culture(s). When discussing the characteristics that they attribute to being Asian, food was never far from first on the list. For example, Participant 4 shared that she associates herself more with her Asian culture because “that kind of food is regularly in our household…” Participant 5 shared that “there's a huge Japanese influence on me. Like, I value the culture of Japan, like so much. Just through my mom, like, just whether it's through food, like, I mean, we eat Japanese style food, like all the time…” Even for participant 7, who described his Chinese mother as fairly “American,” he still brought up the fact that “we [my family] still eat Chinese food all the time.” There is an implication that although in other ways his family might not uphold Chinese culture in his household, the fact that Chinese food is still consumed shows that there is still some element of Chinese culture present. Both participants suggest that the Asian food that they eat and their cultural practices involving food demonstrate the strength of presence of Asian culture in their home. In particular, Participant 4 and 7 both use the phrase “we eat,” signifying the ritual of eating as a collective practice, one that brings them closer to their family, even if only physically. In other words, because the food that was eaten at home
was from their Asian side of the family, they feel as if there is a strong presence of their Asian culture in their life.

The second way in which participants related food to their Asian identity was through their relationships. Participant 1 brought up the significance of food in her friendships by comparing her experiences eating out with a friend who is half Asian, to her experiences eating out with a friend who is fully white. With the friend who is half Asian, the participant felt comfortable going out to a Chinese restaurant and ordering ethnic dishes. In contrast, when ordering the same foods with her white friend, the (white) friend seemed to be “weirded out” by the dishes. When reflecting back on these experiences, Participant 1 expressed how food made clear the ways in which she differed from her white friends:

… I feel like it is so strange to say, but I just feel like it's so apparent when it comes to food... It was just like always about food, because it's like, I was raised eating chicken feet and there are people who don't even want to look at it.

Unlike her experiences with her white friend, in which she was left feeling othered and discomforted, with a friend of similar cultural background, there was an unspoken understanding about the foods that she ate. In experiencing the contrasting levels of comfort, the participant became aware of cultural differences between herself and others who don’t hold the same culture. While Participant 1’s experiences with food did bring her closer to other individuals who shared similar identities, food also repelled people such as her white friend. In this way, food was found to be divisive, both drawing people in and pushing people away. Ultimately, by distinguishing herself from fully white peers who don’t understand her cultural practices surrounding food, Participant 1 was further drawn towards her Asian identity.
For the 8 of 10 participants who have an Asian mother, it was also common for
participants to discuss the role that food played in their communication with their mother.
When verbal communication was not as present due to emotional absence or language
barriers (to be addressed in Chapter II), food became an alternative way for an Asian
mother to demonstrate their love for a child. Participant 2 shared about her mother:

So, she doesn't really communicate verbally, but… I think it's an Asian thing,
or a Chinese thing to show food as love. And I think that's like almost
completely taken the place of… any kind of emotional reassurance, verbal
emotional reassurance. So I know like how to read her. But it's taken a while
to figure it out. Yeah.

As described, food served as a form of nonverbal communication between the participant
and her mother. Although she had previously described her relationship with her mother as
not being particularly close, she still knew that she was cared for by her mother. Food
allowed for communication, even if not through words, which allowed her to connect with
her Asian mother in ways she otherwise might not have been able to.

After learning about love languages\textsuperscript{7} in a class, Participant 1 was able to identify
her mother’s use of food as an expression of love. While her mother never showed
physical intimacy or said “I love you” with words, Participant 1 was able to see that food
was her mother’s way of expressing the same message. This finding paralleled a common
narrative that I have seen in the popular Facebook group Subtle Asian Traits (SAT).

\textsuperscript{7} Created by Dr. Gary Chapman, the 5 Love languages are commonly known among teens and
young adults today as five different ways in which people give love and receive love. The five
love languages include: Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Acts of Service, Gifts, and Physical
Touch (Nguyen 2020). A person’s most prominent love language(s) varies from person to person,
and almost anyone can find out their primary love languages through curated quizzes and
infographics online. In the context of Participant 1’s discovery, cooking and preparing food for
someone would most likely be categorized under the Acts of Service love language.
Currently at 1.9 million members, in the article “A Bowl of Cut Fruits is How Asian Moms Say: I Love You,” Loh describes the SAT as “a meme-centric forum highlighting the joys and struggles of second- and third-generation immigrants.” For example, **figure 1** puts a bittersweet spin on the common understandings of Participant 1’s description of her mother preparing food for her as a love language. While the act of preparing food, most notably by cutting up fruit, is often seen as an *Act of Service*, Winnie Woo proposes each fruit is a *Word of Affirmation*. They illustrate the complexity to love, and that there is no one way to ever convey feelings. In **Figure 2**, Betty Hou further demonstrates this unique experience as an act of love, as they highlight an element of sacrifice in a mother preparing all of the so-called “good” parts of the fruit for a child, and only taking the scraps for themselves. Both posts have thousands of interactions, showing the frequency and relatability of this seemingly particular experience.

**Figure 1**
Image [right] taken from Subtle Asian Traits Facebook; post made by user/group member Winnie Woo in February of 2021.

**Figure 2**
Image [below] taken from Subtle Asian Traits Facebook; post made by user/group member Betty Hou in April of 2019.
Throughout the interviews, another factor that seemed to pull participants towards their Asian identity was the ability to speak an Asian language. Participants mentioned the ways in which language was perceived by outsiders, both Asian and non-Asian individuals, as validation or proof of participants’ Asian racial and ethnic identity. This finding added to Atkin and Jackson’s findings that learning one’s culture and language was important for identity development and for building relationships with parents (Atkin and Jackson 2020). I propose a third factor, that language functions as a marker of cultural/racial validity in multiracial individuals. For example, participant 4 shared the ways in which speaking Mandarin has caused others to see her Asian identity as valid:

Yeah, I always thought that, like, knowing so many languages has been a really big part of my identity. And like, it has definitely helped me out just like, when people don't think I'm Asian, I can speak Mandarin. And as a result, they're like “Oh, never mind, you are Asian.”

In this participant’s experience, knowing Mandarin in some way proved to others that she was, in fact, Asian. It is noteworthy that others’ perception of the participants race, what Roth would classify as the participants observed race, was judged independently of the participant’s appearance. In this case, language was one variable that validated the participants belonging to the Asian racial group in other people’s eyes. Participant 4 later went on to explain similar phenomena occurring with her Swiss identity, as speaking

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8 For participants who do not speak their family’s Asian language, this factor was also found to push participants away from their Asian identity (to be discussed in Chapter II). In this way, language was seen to be a polarizing factor: if participants were able to speak their family’s Asian language, it pulled them towards their Asian identity, and if they were not able to speak their family’s Asian language, it pushed them away from their Asian identity.
French validated that part of her ethnicity. In the case of speaking Mandarin, the participant experienced judgement around racial belonging, and in the case of speaking French, the participant experience judgement around their ethnic belonging. This difference, whether intentional or not, demonstrates the ways in which Asian ethnic groups are grouped together, while European ethnic groups are held independently. Given that these were both single instances that the participant experienced, whether this was a significant difference, or simply a matter of semantic differences is not clear.  

Towards White Identity

The most prevalent narrative that arose in the data pertaining to a pull towards white identity was the idea of becoming and being “American.” When asked about their relationship to whiteness, many participants shared ways in which they believed themselves to be American, in comparison to their Asian ethnicity. For example, when describing the way others perceive her, Participant 2 said that culturally, she embodied “American tendencies,” such as her style, the way that she speaks, and the way that she acts. Additionally, she shared: “I guess I just wouldn't, I don't attribute a lot of my characteristics as a human to being Asian.” Although Participant 2 never stated that she viewed American as synonymous with being white, there is an implication that her American-ness makes her less Asian, and furthermore that outsiders perceive her as more

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9 Further research is needed to understand this difference in this use of language between ethnicity and race. As the researcher of this study, I propose that the difference was noteworthy, from the perspective that language holds the power to send explicit, as well as implicit messages of our understandings of concepts. That being said, it is important to acknowledge that these were two singular experiences that the participant shared. It would be interesting to see if this finding is common in the United States.
white because she presents as more culturally American than Asian. This point spoke to a finding in O’Donoghue’s 2004 study on white women raising biracial children, which showed the ways in which white ethnic groups in the United States assimilate into a “mainstream American culture” (O’Donoghue 2004). By describing the factors that make an individual white to be factors that are American, Participant 2 speaks to this same “mainstream American culture” as the view of whiteness as it presents itself in America. In Participant 2’s case, this view of white culture as American culture is illustrated by the way that she puts her American characteristics in comparison to Asian characteristics, as though the two cannot exist simultaneously; from this perspective, to be American is to be white, and not Asian. In this way, Participant 2 presents an inverse relationship between American culture and Asian cultural as they show up in an individual’s (cultural) presentation.

Participant 4 also shared similar sentiments, as she described the phenomenon of being “whitewashed” when moving from an almost entirely Asian school district to one that is predominantly white. She described whitewashing as a process of adopting more American customs, and in turn gradually moving away from being as Asian:

But as I went through the [removed name] school systems, I definitely feel like I got more “whitewashed,” as they said. Just because the area here is so different from the area that I grew up in… But in terms of whitewashing… prior to that I didn't really eat burgers, French fries, fast food, like, my whitewashing is so basic… But it's more so like American eating habits, American styles, American culture, American holidays, really understanding what those meant, and through social studies, understanding the history behind that. And like, being more aware of kind of, my white background, as you can say.

Similar to Participant 2’s description of being perceived in certain contexts as white due to
her Americanness, Participant 4’s idea of whitewashing is directly tied to the adoption of American culture in the form of food, styles, and historical knowledge. Under Milton Gordon’s framework, it can be suggested that at the time of the participants’ stories took place, they were in the Anglo Conformity Stage of identity development for biracial individuals (Saenz et al. 1995). Within this stage, individuals can be seen to become absorbed in the dominant culture, which in this case for Participant 2 and 4 represented whiteness through American culture. By connecting whitewashing to the consumption of American culture, both participants highlight their perceptions of whiteness as something that is American. In the literal sense, according to the Oxford dictionary, to whitewash is to deliberately conceal someone’s mistakes or faults; from this we see symbolic parallels, conveying Asian characteristics as something that is concealed by whiteness. Again, an inverse relationship can be observed between Americanization and being Asian: a pull towards whiteness and Americanization also happened for participant 4 in conjunction with a push away from Asian culture.

This pull towards whiteness coinciding with a push away from Asian identity was found in other ways, including through language. Similar to the way that language was a factor pulling people towards Asian identity, the choice of parents not to teach an Asian language to participants pulled some participants closer to white identity by limiting their language and communication abilities. Participant 1 spoke about the reasons her mother stopped teaching her Cantonese:

And I just couldn't keep up with it. Apparently, when I was younger, I started mixing up English and Cantonese when my mom was trying to teach me and then my mom was like, this is going to stunt her English. So we stopped and I just focused on English and I kind of like, now regret it highly. I wish I knew Cantonese.
As the participant shared, her mother’s decision to stop her Cantonese learning was in direct relationship with her English speaking. Because her mother feared that the participant’s English was going to be stunted, she discontinued her Cantonese education. In this way, the fact that the participant became an English speaker, and exclusively an English speaker, was the result of her parent’s choice to not teach her Cantonese. In this situation, Participant 1 did not have agency over the languages she was taught, yet her mother’s decision greatly affected her racial identity development, as it dictated who she could communicate with, and limited her connection to her Asian culture.

Rather than a passive way of becoming closer to whiteness through whitewashing, some individuals discussed instances or time periods in their life which they actively desired to be closer to whiteness. As a result, they distanced themselves from their non-white side. For example, participant 6 shared experiences of wanting to have the name “Gabe,” what he considered to be a “white” name, compared to his own, when he moved from Eastern Asia to a predominantly white school in the United States:

I feel like there… the main theme of being in Indiana was not being white, like really wishing I was white in Indiana, so I can remember, there was a period where I really… wanted to be “Gabe”… I was like: “damn why can't my name be Gabe?”

Through wanting to change his name from a regionally atypical name to a more typical Anglo-Saxon sounding name, his draw towards whiteness resulted in him not wanting to be called by his birth name. Similar to the way that it was not a choice for Participant 1 not to have learned her family’s language, Participant 6 didn’t have the option to choose his birth name. Still, his name, and the fact that it didn’t sound “white,” had a large effect on
his experience in Indiana. Given that someone’s name is often the first thing people learn about them, and is what and how people refer to them, it can be inferred a name has a significant connection to identity. The fact that Participant 6 wanted to change his name speaks volumes to his relationship at the time with whiteness, and with nonwhiteness. This demonstrates an active pull towards whiteness, as he wished he could be called something more “white” sounding. His desire to be named “Gabe” coming about at the same time as the move to Indiana does not seem to be coincidental; this signals that in an attempt to fit in to the dominant culture. Like Participant 2 and 4, Participant 6 was in what Gordon would call the *Anglo Conformity Stage* (Saenz et al. 1995). The participant later shared that he has grown to like his name, given that it is “easier to stand out in 2021 than the past.” Perhaps this suggests that he moved into a different stage of Gordon’s model.

Participant 3, who does not identify personally as white, offered a nuanced perspective due to the difference in his racial and ethnic composition as compared to other participants. Despite having two parents who he would identify as people of color, the participant shared that on paper, through surveys and forms, Middle Eastern individuals as most often classified as white. Still, the participant spoke about trying to leverage his racial ambiguity to avoid the negative associations that came with one of his ethnic identities, paralleling the way that participant 6 attempted to distance himself from his nonwhite identity by desiring a stereotypically anglophone name. In participant 3’s case, he described how he attempted to divert attention away from his Muslim identity in a post-911 world: “so yeah, I mean, for a while, I would kind of try to logic it out in my head when people... because people couldn't really tell, especially when I was a bit younger, where I was from. Same thing with my siblings. The like, the light eyes would throw them
off.” Even though he would not consider either of his parents to be white, he still attempted at times to play into the features that were closest to those people deem as white (i.e., having light eyes and light hair). He even noted how he would internally try to create this distance, as he described using “logic” to try and seem less Muslim.

II. Factors of Repulsion

Away from Asian Identity

As mentioned previously, language was found to be a pull, as well as push factor for participants in the study. Similar to the way that knowing a language was seen as validating marker to outsiders, participants spoke about being invalidated in their Asian racial identity because they do not speak their family’s Asian language. For example, participant 8 shared an experience that occurred her college years of being characterized as less Asian than white by another half Asian individual. When the participant tried to correct the other individual by stating that she is equally white and Asian, the individual rebutted by stating that she doesn’t speak Chinese. Even though the two individuals carried the same ethnic composition, the participant’s racial identity was perceived to be different than the individual who was judging her, solely due to the fact that she did not speak her Asian language. Participant 10 also described the same notions of being interrogated or being assumed that he wasn’t aware of his “true nature” as a Korean because he didn’t speak Korean. Again, the inability to speak an Asian language seemed to signify to outsiders that a person was “less” Asian. This speaks to Roth’s multiple dimensions of race, by showing the ways in which a person’s Interaction-Based
Observed Race, which includes a person’s accent or ability to speak a language (Roth, 2020), can affect how a person is perceived by outsiders.

Several participants with Asian mothers also spoke about the barrier that was created between themselves and their Asian side of the family as a result of not speaking the same language. As a result, they experienced feelings of disconnect, distance, or alienation from their Asian side of the family. Participant 5 spoke about how his lack of fluency in Japanese in combination with his mother’s difficulty with English made communication difficult between the two of them. When having more personal conversations, he explained that their language/communication difficulties become more prominent, “And that frustrates her and, like, I don't know, it doesn't mean to frustrate me. But it frustrates me sometimes, that like, we can't communicate that well.” This finding of language barriers affecting relationships was also expressed by Participant 2, who has a complicated relationship with her mother:

And I think that's just because, like communication with my mom is so tough. One, because like it's just the tough love, Asian-Chinese thing. That's one part of it. But it's also because she didn't teach me Chinese growing up. So I don't know how to communicate with her in language that she can speak best in, and she's already a bad communicator.

Although it is not the only factor that she attributes to their strained relationship, she notes the way that her lack of Chinese speaking ability contributed to their interpersonal conflict. Both Participant 5 and Participant 2 voiced the ways in which the lack of ability to communicate effectively with their mothers created distance between themselves and their Asian cultures by way of (dis)connection to their mothers.
Furthermore, Participant 5 also spoke about having feelings of disconnection with his extended family due to his lack of language ability, among other culturally significant factors when he shared his experience of visiting his mother’s side of the family in Japan:

And I’d be like, you know, a weird alien kid that's eating with a fork and a spoon and chicken noodle soup, while everyone is eating, you know, culturally Japanese stuff and talking in Japanese. And I was just sitting there having a hard time to listen and… that in particular is a feeling… or a story that happened quite often when I was growing up. So like, it just made me feel really distant. And mean, I don't know, kind of like, just made me feel a little more insecure, and vulnerable at most times.

Unable to fluently participate in the sharing of a meal, the participant expressed feeling “distant” from his family. Building upon previous sections that discuss the importance of food in Asian identity development, the participant shared once again how a lack of comfortability with the cultural practices associated with food led to disconnection with his Asian identity. While other family members shared their meal enjoying “culturally Japanese stuff” and using chopsticks, Participant 5 resorted to chicken noodle soup, a very American dish, with a fork and spoon. Additionally, through his inability to speak Japanese, his communication with family members was inhibited. As Atkin and Jackson shared, “the structure and language provided by parents are crucial for helping multiracial youth make sense of their experiences and develop their self-concept and self-esteem” (Atkin and Jackson 2020). In Participant 5’s case, the repeated experiences of feeling outcasted by family members affected this self-concept and esteem, leaving him feelings “insecure” and “vulnerable” many times. In this way, his lack of cultural competency pushed him away from his Asian identity, as he was not able to connect with family members.
Apart from language, another factor that pushed people away from their Asian identity was the judgement placed by others on participants’ Asian identity. For example, one finding pointed to the ways in which people invalidated participants’ Asian group belonging based on the participants’ perceived whiteness. Participant 9, who on multiple occasions discussed being “white-passing,”\(^\text{10}\) shared having repeated experiences of going unrecognized at her Asian side of the family’s gatherings because of her whiteness: “I have walked into a family reunion and nobody has recognized me because I'm the white girl in the corner. So that's something I had to deal with growing up.” Although her family members might not have explicitly said that the reason she was not noticed was because of her whiteness, the participant made it clear that she perceived this lack of recognition to be race based. Additionally, she shared that this treatment by her family members was drastically different from that experienced by her brother, who she described as looking more Asian than herself\(^\text{11}\). Through her white-passing appearance, the participant believed that her family members rejected her belonging as a member of their family. Further, Participant 9 believed that this rejection extended from a rejection of familial belonging to a rejection of racial group belonging.

\(^{10}\) To be white passing is when someone who is nonwhite can be and is perceived by others as though they are white. Some people have argued that to be white passing is to be white, and that the two are essentially equivalent. But this participant clearly sees otherwise, as she identifies as white and Asian, while also acknowledging that she is white-passing.

\(^{11}\) Although in other people’s eyes, the perception of the Participants whiteness caused them to invalidate her whiteness, this experience also pushed her to be more outspoken about her Korean identity: “I think one of the reasons why I identify so strongly is because I don't look it [Korean]… I've had to keep saying it louder and louder for people to hear it… the older I got, and the more white passing I became, it became clear that I was going to be [white passing] my entire life. Like, I just kind of had to keep saying it louder and firmer, which is why I think I hold my Korean identity so strongly.”
Another participant, Participant 10, shared being invalidated as an Asian individual because of his biracial status. This finding offers an illustration of Atkin and Jackson’s point of *monoracism* as a unique stressor for multiracial children in the United States (Atkin and Jackson 2020). When asked when he first became aware of himself as a racial being, he shared the ways in which he was racialized in high school:

> And there was some moments in high school where I have been the “halfie,” not the Asian, so I don't count in some way. You know, counting like the Asians on the track team, for example. And that was… that really was the identity, I guess, because of my very limited cultural contact I had with mom's side of the family, my appearance is only just enough to be in between not actually one or the other… It’s also just my interests and my behavior. They're very Western as opposed to being very Korean…

Due to his Western cultural influence, including interests and behaviors, and just by virtue of being half Asian, his Asian racial identity was rejected altogether. In other words, his formation of racial identity was directly intertwined with the idea of not being Asian “enough,” pushing him away from Asian side. Others categorized him as an in-between racial category, rather than both Asian and white. In this way, he experienced monoracism as his perceived whiteness led him to not be counted as an Asian individual. When Atkin and Jackson described monoracism as experienced by multiracial individuals, they referred to white supremacy and the *one-drop rule*; in the context of Black and white biracial individuals, their study pointed to individuals being racialized as solely Black (Atkin and Jackson 2020). In contrast, participant 10 and 9’s experiences both pointed to the contrary, that half Asian-half white individuals are often racialized as white, or other, but not Asian. Rather than their Asian identity trumping their white identity and being racialized as their minority group identity, they were both rejected from their minority group identity because
of their white identity. This finding in my research expands on Atkin and Jackson’s finding by recognizing the differences of the ways multiracial individuals are racialized depending on what mix of races they are.

In addition to their Asian racial identity being invalidated, some participants shared ways in which they tried to distance themselves from their Asian ethnic identity due to judgement of others. This differed from previously discussed findings, in that participants were doing the distancing themselves, rather than an experience of being racialized in a way that pushed away from Asian racial identity. As AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter shared, the ways in which others perceive a biracial individual has a large effect on their racial identity (AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006). This study built upon this finding, as participants discussed experiences of adjusting themselves in reaction to negative judgement placed upon them. For example, Participant 1 shared that once she got to middle school, she stopped wanting to wear clothes that were more ethnic:

My mom would be like, why don't you wear stuff that we would buy in Hong Kong or something like that. And then for Halloween, I used to dress up as a Chinese princess with, I forgot what they're called, you know, like the silk button up dress with like, sometimes I'd wear [a] headpiece, and that's all I wore in elementary school. And then I just was like, "I don't want to wear that in middle school. Like people are gonna think it's weird." So I stopped.

In fear of being seen as “weird” by her peers, she decided against wearing a costume that was closely tied to her ethnicity. It’s interesting to note that this was a decision made for what to wear on Halloween, where children most often feel empowered or excited to wear what they normally wouldn’t on a regular school day. Perhaps for children who wear costumes that are not tied to their identity, this holiday would feel less limiting, as they
don’t run the risk of something so personal being seen as only a costume. Even though she had been wearing the dress and headpiece for several years during elementary school, she decided to stop when she moved schools. Notably, Participant 1 shared that during this change of schools, she also transitioned from a mostly Asian (Japanese) group of friends, to a group of friends that was more filled with white individuals.

In the case of Participant 3’s upbringing, he spoke about the shame that he experienced in being a Muslim individual in a predominantly white and American school system. From receiving racist comments about his appearance, to being discriminated against from the time he was in first grade, he had internalized much of the hate being dispelled from his peers. As a result, he often attempted to distance himself from his Middle Eastern heritage, and pointed people towards his South Asian heritage instead:

And, you know, I didn't want to say… because that's what my mom would mainly identify as because of that relationship with Islamic terrorism. So, you know… when people figured out my first name… I was super ashamed of it, because of the political connotations at the time. Again, now that I've matured, and things have simmered down. I don't feel that way anymore. But that was a really defining part of my childhood growing up. I mean, I did not dare say I was Muslim…

In the effort to conceal his full identity to others, he would withdraw details about his ethnic background, and emphasize the part of his background that he believed would be less damaging to his personal image. In addition, he also spoke of leveraging the ambiguity of

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12 Although his Muslim identity is the same identity that he has explained is perceived as white, I thought to include this story because it spoke to a similar finding as other participants. In this case, Participant 3 was pushed away from his Muslim identity because of the negative messages associated to the identity. Growing up in a very white environment, he mentioned that his Muslim identity was perceived by his peers as nonwhite, and further, that he was not perceived as white. This paralleled the findings of other participants who distanced themselves from their nonwhite ethnicity.
his looks, with features such as his light eyes, to distance himself from the stereotypes associated with al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden post-9/11.

**Away from White identity**

A theme that arose from the data pertaining to a push away from white racial group identity was the common experience of feeling alienated around white people. By being around groups of fully white individuals, participants felt as though they did not fit into such groups despite being half white. For many participants, including Participant 8, this push away from white groups was complimented by a pull towards Asian groups: “But I kind of realized now that I haven't really been that comfortable being in a setting where it's only white people... And then I think that I've become a lot more comfortable being around Asian people.” Similar to her friendships, Participant 8 also shared the same phenomena happening in her intimate relationships as she got to college:

And then I think that when I got to college… I started learning more about race, I kind of started becoming more uncomfortable with white guys. And I kind of felt like I didn't have much in common with them, in some ways where they didn't really understand me. You know, and then I suddenly started, you know, seeing a lot of Asian guys and feeling much more comfortable.

For this participant, her shift towards her community was a result of developing more awareness around herself and her identities. In coming to understand herself as a racial being, she began to question who she felt most comfortable with. Before understanding her own racial identity, she wasn’t able to see how her race came into conflict with the people she shared her time and energy with. More specifically, with this new found awareness,
she was able to understand relationships between her intersecting identities of gender, race, and sexuality.

Many participants shared stories of experiences with their white side of the family, or in groups of white people, in which they felt as though they did not belong. Participant 2, spoke about the experience of being around her boyfriend’s family members, who are all white. When asked about her relationship with her boyfriend, and how race plays into their relationship, if at all, the participant responded:

But I think the way that race plays into it [her relationship with her boyfriend] is more of me feeling kind of alienated or just outcasted by his family, and they don't do like they don't do that on purpose. And I never feel like they're intentionally trying to make me feel that way. It's definitely a feeling that I have because I'm the only person of color I'm the only even non-white person that they're around consistently.

She shares that although her boyfriend’s family does not intentionally make her feel uncomfortable, just by showing up in their presence as a person of color, she feels “alienated.” Although she is half white, and expressed that “I feel very white,” she noted that it is clear that in groups of white people and around white people, she is not viewed that way. In other words, dissonance is created between her observed race and self-identified race (Roth 2016). It is also interesting to note that Participant 2 only spoke about disconnection with her Asian mother and grandmother due to language barriers, but disconnection around white identity was signaled by appearance. Participant 5 also shared experiencing similar feelings, as though he did not fit in with his own white father’s side of the family.

As shared earlier in discussing the significance of food in a pull towards the Asian identity group, Participant 1’s experiences with food in her friendships also resulted in
befriending more Asian people. While eating Asian food around white people would often lead to the white people questioning “why is it so stinky?” or being curious to try such perceived exotic foods, with other Asian peers, they “would just get it… it was just like, more cohesive.” Similar to Participant 8’s words, Participant 1 noticed that she “felt more comfortable” with Asian people, and as in turn “started like getting in touch with my Asian side, because I started like, befriending more and more of” her Asian peers. In both examples, both Participant 1 and Participant 8 experienced a push away from white people in their inter-personal relationships that happened in conjunction with becoming closer with Asian people.

Another way in which participants were repelled from their white was in moments in which they became acutely aware of being other than white. This finding built upon Root’s description of biracial identity development as a development of awareness of otherness (Root 1990). One way in which this awareness arose in participants was through comparing themselves to fully white, or fully Asian peers. For example, one participant expressed having these thoughts of comparison experiences in elementary through middle school:

And I will just remember myself comparing myself to other white people in the class because I mean, I went to, I went to a predominantly white K-8. And so I was just like, comparing myself to all these other white girls. And I was like, "What is going on here? Like? Who are these people?" And so that's when I like started to understand my identity… And also, that's also a time when I started playing sports. And there weren't a lot of people of color in sports in my town. And I remember, this is like, when I realized that I was not white like the other kids.
This comparison to “these people” shows a clear distinction by the participant in separating themselves from their white peers. This paralleled Goodman’s finding that children become conscious of racial difference in early grade school years (Root, 1990). In realizing that they were not “white like the other kids,” the participant began to develop an identity that is independent of that (white) group. In noting that the participant currently identifies as half Asian-half hite, relation, AhnAllen, Suyemoto, and Carter discuss that feelings of exclusion or difference from monoracial groups are possibly rooted in multiracial identity (AhnAllen, Suyemoto and Carter 2006).

Another participant, Participant 9, shared having repeated experiences of being identified as other than white. In school, she said that in her first classes of the year, she would receive comments and questions such as "you're not quite white, or we're not quite sure exactly. What are you?" Interestingly, this participant had also spoken about not being recognized as Asian at all by family members (see I. Pull Towards a Side: Towards White Identity). This goes to show how malleable the race(s) of mixed raced Asians is/are (Leong 2013). Depending on who a mixed raced person is being observed by, the ways in which they are identified and racialized changes. This is important because the ways in which a

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13 Suyemoto and Dimas describe and analyze this frequent occurrence very eloquently: “The first question many people of mixed descent are asked is ‘What are you?’ The importance of the question for the speaker is “How do I classify you?” and it implies that only one classification will be allowed. Although it is part of our cognitive make-up to categorize and classify, the inability to accept multiple and fluid categorizations and the social meanings imposed on the categorizations themselves are embedded in our history and related power. Racial categorization becomes relevant when two or more distinct groups are in contact and are in conflict over power and resources…” (Suyemoto and Dimas 2003).
person is perceived can dictate the ways in which they are treated due to prejudice, bias, and racist attitudes.

Yet again, Participant 6 shared an experience of not being perceived as white, and therefore being assumed to not speak English despite being proficient. When moving to Indiana in elementary school he was put into ESL (English as a Second Language) a program to teach non-native English speakers the language:

And then in the end, it wasn't like, “you're not Asian.” It was like, “you're not white.” Like, “where did you learn to speak English so well?” like they put me in ESL? Yeah, so when I was like, totally chilling, like, I was fine. And they put me in ESL with like, these two boys who couldn't speak English. And they like, there was like a wall of diversity. I remember in Indiana, and it was like a globe. And you like put points of where everyone was from the world. And there was only three people at it, like two boys from Mexico and then myself from Kazakhstan, like a whole globe with just three pins in it.

This quote demonstrates in several points about how others perceived Participant 6, including their perception of him as not white. Firstly and more obviously, the participant shared that people would quite literally say that he is “not white.” More subtly though, because they perceived him as non-American (perhaps because of his nonwhite appearance), they wrongly assumed that he was not able to speak English. By inappropriately placing Participant 6 into ESL classes, and simultaneously including him on the “Wall of Diversity,” it is hard to imagine that there wasn’t a link that existed between the school’s conception of nationality, race, and language ability. In addition, the fact that the participant brought these things up at the same time even further points to a correlation between each factor.
III. Breaking Monoracial Narratives

Being Recognized Multiracially

Between the 10 participants in my study, 8 have a white father and an Asian mother. In all 10 cases, participants had been assigned the surname of their white father at birth. Through this intersection of gender and race arose a theme surrounding participants’ relationship to their last name. For the 8 participants with white fathers, this meant that they had more stereotypically anglophone sounding, or “white” last names. As a result, several participants expressed that their “white” last names, in comparison to their physical appearance, helped others to understand their identity as one that is mixed:

But the reason why I was bringing up my last name is because if they were to see me on a report card, or like, attendance card, like, then everyone knew that I was half or like, they knew that I wasn't like, one or the other… Like, if I think if they saw my name, they would look at my face and like, take a second back. Or like if they saw my face, and then they look at my name.

For this participant, the teachers’ perception of a dissonance between appearance and name allowed her multiple identities to be recognized. In fact, later she mentioned that in elementary school, her last name “helped” others to identify her as white, implying that just by looks, this might not have been the case (i.e. that they would have identified her as exclusively Asian). This phenomenon clearly illustrates Roth’s multiple dimensions of race by highlighting the differences in racialization based on dimension (Roth 2016). In one instance, Roth even brings up the subject of a person’s last name being a racial cue “with research showing that the same Asian-European multiracial faces are seen as looking significantly more European when associated with European names than with Asian” (Roth 2016). The participants teachers had viewed their observed race- their physical appearance
to be Asian, and their *assumed racial ancestry*—signified by a “white” last name—to be white. It is interesting to note that despite the participant’s observed race and assumed racial ancestry being identified differently, a monoracial label is still assumed within each of the two dimensions.

One participant shared similarly shared that having a last name that sounded stereotypically anglophone “had more people asking me what ethnicity I am when they meet me, especially if they can tell I’m not fully white.” And again, another participant noted the difference in other’s attitudes and perceptions of them when their middle name, which is stereotypically Asian sounding, is withdrawn or included. When their middle name is included, the participant stated that others assume that they are Asian, but when their middle name is not included, that “oh, this is a white person.” In analyzing these quotes, it becomes apparent that when outsiders see a person’s "white" last name, there is an assumption that the observed individual will look exclusively white. And further, when there is a conflict between the assumed race of the individual and their observed race, curiosity is trigged in the observer. To settle their curiosity/confusion, the observer asks the infamous questions of "what are you? or like, what are your parents?," as another participant highlighted. In doing so, it is also important to note that once a “white” last name is seen, observers rarely question the whiteness of the observed individual; rather, they inquire to figure out what makes them look "exotic" or different from their notions of what a white person looks like. Additionally, by asking the questions beginning with “what,” as compared to “who,” the observer dehumanizes the recipient of the question. Regardless of the harm that it may cause to the observed person to be questioned and inquired about
in such a way, this inquiry allows the observer to understand the observed individual's mixed raced identity.

Other than being identified by last name, another way in which participants shared their mixed raced identity being affirmed was by finding community through other half Asian individuals. Participant 5 spoke about the ways in which growing up in Hawaii, where there is a large population of mixed Asian individuals, helped him to build a healthy relationship with his biracial/mixed identity:

I feel like Hawaii has allowed me to see like a happy medium, as there, you know, like the majority of my friends are mixed. And that's not just that's not by choice, you know? It just so happens that there's so many mixed kids that like, I'm able to like sort of relate to them in that way, like growing up, all of my friends had some sort of cultural influence in their household whether it was like Filipino, Chinese, Japanese… So it's been, it's honestly been like, nice, because I feel like I can share my multicultural experience with a lot of different people in Hawaii, especially.

Being around others who held similar identities helped the participant to find a happy medium between his two racial identities. He expressed that being in Hawaii contrasted his experiences in Japan and in Florida and Georgia, where his family members lived. This demonstrated how context also affects the way mixed raced individuals are racialized. When in Hawaii, when being mixed is the norm, his full identity was much more often recognized as compared to being in Florida and Georgia, surrounded by fully white people. While being around family members, who were either fully white or fully Asian, he seldom felt like himself, but around other mixed raced individuals in Hawaii, he could see a “happy medium.”
Participant 1 also shared similar notions of finding community among half Asians, as she spoke about one of her friends. She attributed both of their “half and half” racial identity to the reason that they connected as friends, especially within a predominately white school system. For both participant 1 and 5, they expressed a sort of freedom granted by being around others who share a mixed raced identity, especially one that is mixed with Asian and white. This allowed them to fully embrace themselves as multiracial being, in contrast to the ways in which they were made to fit into monoracial groups, or feel uncomfortable when around monoracial groups.

**Being Used for Racial Capitalism**

Building from Leong’s work on Asian-white biracial individuals, the data pointed to a theme that many participants found themselves being used by white people and institutions through what I interpret as racial capitalism\(^\text{14}\). As presented earlier in the literature review, Leong stated that individuals of this mixed Asian racial group are targets of racial capitalism by individuals and larger, predominantly white institutions such as colleges, universities, and companies (Leong 2013). One way in which this was brought up was through participants’ interpersonal relationships. Participant 8 shared that she felt as though she was tokenized by her white peers in college, and that her proximity to whiteness allowed them to claim having Asian friends while masking their racist attitudes:

\(^{14}\) I added the phrase “what I interpret” to emphasize that none of the participants labeled their experiences with the term “racial capitalism.” My analytical discussion in this section of findings considers what participants share in light of Leong’s framework on racial capitalism (Leong 2013). Much of her work and what she describes in *Half/Full* closely resembles what I share from interviews with participants which is why I felt it was appropriate to conclude that participants had been taken advantage of—perhaps without knowing—through racial capitalism.
I do recall, like kind of feeling not like an Asian or anything but this like middle person were like, I felt white people who weren't my friends but wanted to be my friends… they wanted like more token friends type of deal, but I wasn't like too Asian for them. And by that, I mean, I saw how like, when I brought my Asian friends in, how they didn't really like regard them or pay too much attention to them. They weren't considered like important to their social status, in a sense.

Under Leong’s model, this showed how white people “can and do derive value from mixed-Asian racial identity” (Leong 2013). By being considered a person of color by her white peers, befriending the participant presented her white peers with an opportunity to appear not racist. In the way that diversity has become a “point of pride” for institutions, for interpersonal relationships, being friends with non-white people presents white people with the opportunity to try and present themselves as trustworthy and reputable to other nonwhite people (Leong 2013; Bonilla-Silva 2010). By comparing the ways white people treated fully Asian people and herself, the participant makes clear the particular advantages of befriending someone who can be considered a person of color, but who is also part white.

In this case, the participant believed that the white people she had interacted with treated her fully Asian friends with disregard because they saw no benefit in being friends with people the deemed as having a lower social status; the fully Asian individuals’ racial identity posed no incentive for the white people to initiate a friendship. In turn, white people can claim to have a racially diverse group of friends while still being in proximity to whiteness and not having to associate oneself to someone they deem to be of lower social status.

15 It is ironic that such white individuals befriend half white individuals to seem nonracist, yet in staying purposefully closer to whiteness and avoiding fully Asian individuals, they act upon extremely racist values of seeing Asian individuals as lower in social status.
Another participant, Participant 6 shared how he had faced similar racial-social exploitation from white people within his intimate sexual partners as well as friendships. When discussing the ways in which he perceived himself to have been exoticized by his sexual partners, he shared:

Yeah, yeah. So I feel like historically, like white girls that I've gotten with, definitely, there's like, an element of it [exoticization] at play. And I feel like the thing about Wasians \(^\text{16}\) too- this goes beyond like intimate relationships and also goes into friendships. I feel like, oh, Wasian is a safe choice, right? Because it's like, we're not, you're not like a BIPOC, right? So you don't have to have difficult conversations with this person about like, you know, or like they just, like, plenty say plenty of abrasive things, right? But it's like, it's harder to say something abrasive to Asians, but you're still checking off like some elements of diversity

By mentioning the notion that a Wasian is a “safe” option for white people to be friends with, Participant 6 speaks to Leong’s point about mixed Asian individuals providing white people a sense of comfort by being part white, and part Asian as opposed to other groups of color. By being part Asian, a mixed Asian-white person may not trigger the “same feelings of guilt and anxiety as members of other races might”\(^\text{17}\) (Leong 2013). Participant

\(^{16}\) The term Wasian, a combination of the words “white” and “Asian,” has been used by many white and Asian mixed raced individuals. This term describes what Saenz et al. would call a Melting pot identity in which mixed raced individuals derive a third culture from their two independent racial identities (Saenz et all 1995). Participant 6 described why he chooses to use the term Wasian as opposed to other ways he could identify: “Like, I don't know. I feel like I don't, I don't get enough of the benefits of being just white to be like, claiming whiteness. But also, it just seems it seems weird to be like, you know, I'm not white when I'm definitely a quarter white. So it's like, I don't know. That's why to be like, I'm Wasian, and people just get it now, it's so nice.”

\(^{17}\) One reason for this may be the Model Minority myth about Asian Americans, that highlights their “apparent success across academic, economic, and cultural domains” (Harvard Law School 2018). This myth has been used to compare successes among Asians in America to other minority groups. Janelle Wong from the University of Maryland, College Park, among others, describes the Model Minority Myth being a white supremacist tool that involves "1) ignoring the role that selective recruitment of highly educated Asian immigrants has played in Asian American success followed by 2) making a flawed comparison between Asian Americans and other groups,"
6 specifies that white people feel comfortable saying “abrasive things” that they cannot say to BIPOC (Black and Indigenous People of Color\(^{18}\)). Furthermore, a mixed Asian-white person’s proximity to whiteness also may allow white people to think the mixed individual will be complicit.

Another way that participants spoke about being commodified for their nonwhite identities was within the college admissions process. Of the 8 participants with white fathers, 2 had white fathers who are ethnically Hispanic. This created another dimension for both participants to be perceived as white and Hispanic, neither of who grew up with the respective Hispanic culture present in their upbringing. They each noted feelings of disconnect when filling out application forms—most notably when applying for college. Throughout the interviews, this came up with regards to the idea of “checking boxes,” what Roth would categorize as an individual’s racial self-classification. For example, one participant shared that when filling out their college application, that “I was always like, kind of like, felt like an Asian, but my college application made me look Hispanic, because my last name…” this idea that the individual “looked” Hispanic simply because of their last name demonstrates the power in language and a person’s name as a signifier of their ancestry, race, and ethnicity; so much so, that an individual might not have any personal connections with said ancestry, race, ethnicity, and still be identified and associated as such… “In the eyes of my college, I am Hispanic… [but] I’ve never looked [or] identified

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\(^{18}\) Some people have also said that BIPOC stands for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color,” which includes all other non-white racial groups, but in the participant’s case, he refers to the stricter definition describing Black and Indigenous peoples only, seen by the way he defines himself as nonwhite but differentiates himself from BIPOC.
Hispanic, I truly know nothing about like, like that race, culture…” This echoes Leong’s example of employers counting white/Asian in a minority group “even if that person does not personally consider herself a minority” (Leong 2013). In keeping with Leon, participants reported being labeled and grouped into categories without choosing to opt into such groups. In consequence, the institutions (colleges that participants attended) were able to use them for their perceived Hispanic identity, for diversity purposes. It is noteworthy that in these cases, where an individual is Asian, White, and ethnically Hispanic, that the institution chose to consider the individual as Hispanic, and not Asian. This suggests that there is more to gain from a person’s Hispanic ethnicity than Asian racial identity19.

One participant, Participant 7, noted that this experience of being recognized as Hispanic afforded him privileges when applying for college, despite not feeling connected with the term himself:

But that box the Hispanic box was checked, I got this thing called National Hispanic recognition program from college board for being at least one quarter Hispanic and having like a GPA and SAT above a certain level. So it's kind of just like, whenever I fill applications I'm like, are they gonna, like, be like, "Whoa, Hispanic diversity, let's get this person". When like, that's definitely not the whole story. I'm not really complaining, because I feel like that helps me. And so like, I feel like it would be a lot different if I if like, you know, the perceptions… didn't work to my advantage. But I feel like, you know, people perceive me as being more Hispanic than I feel I am myself. I feel like that helps me. So like, I'm okay with it…

Although it was not his intention- that the school labeled him as Hispanic, rather than he having done so himself- he still received the benefits of support into acceptance into college.

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19 See previous note (16) on Model Minority Myth.
In turn, the school was able to afford the participant such privileges and claim diversity, while the participant was most likely more welcomed into the predominantly white space than other minorities might have been (such as a Hispanic individual who is Latinx or Black) (Leong 2013). To understand why this might happen, we can consider the fact that a racially diverse student body “has become a point of pride among colleges and universities, as well as a prerequisite to remaining competitive in the enrollment competition” (Leong 2013). Being able to compete with other schools through a diverse student body translates to economic gain for schools, by way of attracting more applicants and donors. In this way, individuals like Participant 7 serve as a means of social and economic value for the college he was accepted into through racial capitalism (Leong 2013).

**Fluidity and the Element of Choice**

The third and final theme that came up throughout the interviews was the fluidity of racial identity. One common thread among participants’ discussion on fluidity was the effect of the environment that a person was in. Most notably, the group of people that a person is around can affect the way in which they feel they are perceived. Participant 2 shared that “I identify as half. Just because, like, if I'm in a group full of white people, I'm an Asian person. And if I’m in a room full of Asians, Asian people like think I'm white. I'm not, I mean, I'm not white, but they know that I'm not entirely Asian.” When they are in monoracial groups, it seems as though the race that is different from the race of the monoracial group stands out. In other words, people notice and identify the participant with whatever race makes her different from them. In doing so, the participant’s observed race changes based on who is observing her.
Participant 5, who shared similar experiences within the different sides of his family, described the effect that the differing observed race(s) had on his own perception of himself:

I think I really, like knew I was biracial when I went to visit my family in Florida and Georgia… I felt like I was able to jump from one side to the other, like in Hawaii whenever I wanted pretty fluidly. But like when I went to visit them on the mainland, like the south, and then when I went to visit my Japanese family, in like Tokyo, like I really kind of felt out of place in both of those places, you know, I never really felt totally like myself, I like would look in the mirror, like I said before, and just see, like, my Asian features stand out a lot more, or like, I would look in the mirror in Japan and see my skin like a lot whiter

While he was able to be more fluid on his own terms in Hawaii, an environment in which he was surrounded by many other mixed raced individuals, when around monoracial groups on the mainland, he felt limited. In the same way that Participant 2 described her experiences among monoracial groups, Participant 5 demonstrated how his differences, in this case his physical features, stood out to him. Being in an environment with monoracial group members made him hyper aware of his differences, and in turn felt as though he were out of place, and that he wasn’t his (full) self.

Another way in which participants spoke about fluidity in their racial identity was the element of choice. For example, Participant 9 explained that she understood her biracial identity as “picking and choosing the traits I want from both cultures, and kind of pushing them together and seeing what works. That's what it means to me.” In this quote, the participant illustrated the ways in which fluidity was a personal choice, as opposed to how Participant 5 and 2 describe fluidity in biracialism as contingent on their environment. Participant 9 draws upon an idea of empowerment, that despite the ways in which she has been pulled and pushed to and from parts of her identity, she now feels as though she has
chooses how she identifies across her cultures. This development through time was also discussed in Poston’s Biracial Identity development model. As discussed in the literature review, the model goes through five steps of biracial identity development. Participant 9’s case most closely resembles the fifth and final stage *Integration* in which individuals “tend to recognize and value all their ethnic identities” (Poston 1990).

Participant 5 also showed fluidity of biracial identity as a development over time, and as coming into the ability to choose, moving from stages of *Choice of group Categorization* (when an individual believes themselves to be pushed into one of their racial identities, leaving no room for multiraciality), and *Enmeshment/Denial* (when an individual feels guilt, disloyalty, and a lack of acceptance for having chosen an identity that doesn’t express their multiple racial identities) (Poston 1990), to *Integration*, as participant 9 did:

I guess one thing is that, like, I feel like growing up, I really was craving to be a part of both of the communities that represent my, like, ethnic identity. And now I sort of, am able to, like, sort of step back. And like, through meditative practices, or I guess, just through maturing… [realizing] those things about me don't really make up me. I mean, they're a part of me if I let them be a part of me... I guess in short I just don't let like those kind of thoughts control me anymore I guess… I try not to let myself feel like an outcast anymore. Just because I sort of like, am appreciative of the way I am. And like, you know… if I'm not that Japanese, or I'm not that white… according to my family, then like that doesn't matter… frankly, I don't care anymore… I could see myself as a unique person.

The participant makes clear the ways in which he has developed overtime, from “craving” affirmation from both sides of his family, to simply not caring for their affirmation at all “frankly, I don’t care anymore.” Unlike himself as a child, Participant 5 is now able to see himself as whole, and has developed an identity that is “secure,” as Poston describes...
individuals in the *Integration* stage (Poston 1990). Additionally, this participant takes Poston’s model a step further, in seeing himself as whole and unique outside of a racial framework altogether.
Conclusion/Discussion

Given the above data from my research, there are many ways to answer my two overarching research questions. To answer the first, “How do half Asian-half white individuals develop their racial identity?”, I would say that half Asian-half white individuals come to develop their sense of racial identity through experiences of being included and excluded from monoracial groups. This inclusion and exclusion was found to be done even by participants to themselves, as well as by others outside of their communities. Each participant shared, in one way or another, experiences of being pulled towards at least one racial group, as well as experiences of being pushed away from at least one racial group. In the end, although they may not all use the same terms to describe their racial identity, all 10 participants navigate a multiracial identity despite these experiences of being pushed and pulled from the different monoracial racial groups that they belong to. More specifically, these pull and push factors that influence racial identity development were also found relate to one another; for example, in some instances, a push away from one racial group was found to be associated with a pull towards the other group. In other instances, a pull towards one group was associated with a push from the other group. This illustrates the inner tension that often forms within half Asian-half white individuals during racial identity development, as they are often pulled and pushed from their racial identities, rather than to be allowed to exist outside monoracial categories.

To answer my second research question, “How do half Asian-half white individuals make sense of their biracial identity in a monoracial world?”, in the data I saw that participants had experiences of validation, as well as exploitation in their multiraciality. Participants shared being validated as a multiracial individual through recognition by
others and themselves. This challenged previous notions of America's understanding of race as monoracial, as participants found communities and ways in which they could exist in a so-called monoracial society as a multiracial individual. This may be due to the fact that the multiracial individuals that I studied were half Asian-half white; perhaps results would be different if the multiraciality was among differently mixed individuals, such as half Black-half white people. Even through this validation of multiracial identity, however, individuals experienced having their multiraciality taken advantage of by institutions and individuals. While living in a monoracial society, even while breaking monoracial stereotypes, capitalism prevail by extracting value from the identities of half Asian-half white individuals. In summary, identity development among half Asian-half white individuals is a result of the mix of breaking and upholding monoracial conceptions of race in America. On the one hand, there are factors in racial identity development that push and pull individuals from their monoracial identities, reinforcing monoracial ideals. And on the other hand, that there are factors that allow participants to exist in both/neither groups-challenging monoracial categories. In turn, I suggest that American racial narratives are moving in a multiracial direction with the presence of more multiracial people, but that these multiracial individuals are being commodified through racial capitalism.

One way that future research can support for this topic is by examining individual factors that I identify in chapters I and II Independently. For example, looking at the ways in which language alone affects biracial identity development could support or refute findings of this study. Additionally, by looking at a more controlled group of participants, it would be interesting to look at isolated socioeconomic factors such as gender, sexual orientation, social class, and racial composition of environment that a person grew up in,
and how these factors intersect with the factors I propose that impact racial identity development. Finally, it would be interesting to look at parental involvement in biracial identity development, as I did not get to research this as I originally intended to. Due to limitations on time and access to participants, I was not able to look as deeply into socioeconomic and social variables, especially considering such a small sample size.

Beyond being an affirming experience to hear the stories of people who share similar identities to myself, I have experienced tremendous growth through the process of reading, interviewing, analyzing, and writing this paper. I wish that I would have inquired more deeply into participants thoughts around what I was discussing regards to my discussion on racial capitalism. For example, I would like to know how aware they were of this phenomena in their lives, or their general thoughts on racial capitalism. Overall, this thesis project answered many questions that I had, but left me with even more: how do half Asian-half white individuals make sense of their proximity to whiteness? How can half Asian-half white individuals use their privileges to support other racial groups? How will multiraciality look in future generations? Will race ever become obsolete? Perhaps I will explore these questions in a future personal or research project.
Bibliography


