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# The Social Negotiation of Ambiguous In-Between Stigmatized Identities: Investigating Identity Processes in Multiracial and Bisexual People

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THE SOCIAL NEGOTIATION OF AMBIGUOUS IN-BETWEEN STIGMATIZED  
IDENTITIES: INVESTIGATING IDENTITY PROCESSES IN MULTIRACIAL AND  
BISEXUAL PEOPLE

A Dissertation Presented

by

VALI SUSAN DAGMAR KAHN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,  
University of Massachusetts Boston,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2011

Clinical Psychology Program

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## ABSTRACT

# THE SOCIAL NEGOTIATION OF AMBIGUOUS IN-BETWEEN STIGMATIZED IDENTITIES: INVESTIGATING IDENTITY PROCESSES IN MULTIRACIAL AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE

December 2011

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To date, most bisexual and multiracial identity models in psychology capture a largely *internal* developmental process (Collins, 2000; Kich, 1992; Weinberg, Williams & Pryor, 1994). However, individuals learn to manage their socially stigmatized identities *in social interactions* (Goffman, 1963). While the demands to socially negotiate stigmatized identity affect all minority peoples, individuals with in-between ambiguous stigmatized identities, such as multiracial and bisexual people, must negotiate also being situated at the margins of their own reference groups (e.g. heterosexual *and* gay/lesbian). Using a comparative grounded theory approach, this study explored the question: *How do experiences of socially negotiating an in-between ambiguous stigmatized identity influence one's identity development?* And

the sub-question: *What are the similarities and differences in these processes for multiracial and bisexual people?*

Ten self-identified biracial/multiracial Asian-White, heterosexual individuals and ten bisexual White individuals between the ages of 20 and 36 years participated in semi-structured interviews addressing the following areas of inquiry: (1) Contextualizing current identifications and establishing shared understandings, (2) Experiences of social negotiations, and (3) Effects of these experiences on identities. Issues regarding the rigor and credibility of the study (Morrow, 2005) were addressed through peer debriefing; inquiry auditing; and member check discussions. Analysis followed a constant comparative method (Creswell, 2007) and a multi-step process resulting in a theory describing three negotiation cycles and associated identity effects common to both kinds of identities (multiracial and bisexual), with additional identity specific (multiracial or bisexual) variations: the first cycle was Catalyzing Experiences, the second was Active Negotiations, and the third Emerging Sense of Agency through New Understandings, Perspectives, and Positive Experiences. Cycles were described by multiracial and bisexual participants as fluid, iterative, and interacting. The model developed in this study offers a way of understanding stigma management strategies and their relation to influencing identities and stigmatizing processes. This deeper understanding can help clinicians and community organizers create inclusive environments and develop interventions to assist multiracial and bisexual individuals develop skills to deal with social stigmatizing processes, resolve initial questions, and develop a greater sense of agency in identity choice and

performance.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the people who have supported my emotional and intellectual development and encouraged me to be a creative thinker and to bring this creativity into my research and clinical work.



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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**Specific Aims**

Despite great strides made by the civil rights movements of the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's, there remains discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and race in this country (Yoshino, 2007). As a result, a system of social hierarchy remains where the White racial group and the heterosexual group are privileged, receiving social and legal benefits, while non-White and non-heterosexual groups are oppressed and denied many of these same benefits.

These inequalities are maintained and enacted not only structurally but also through social interactions. Systems of categorization help to maintain group boundaries and a mentality of "us" versus "them". Categorization of an out-group in conjunction with linked undesirable characteristics leads to loss of status and constitutes an "othering" process where those with less power are pushed out into the margins, ensuring the maintenance of status and power and privilege for the in-group. Thus, certain identities are not only marginalized and oppressed but also carry stigma, a mark or blemish signifying a social difference that is viewed as undesirable and carries social implications (Goffman, 1963). The categorization of people into in- and out- groups in the context of power produces dichotomous boundaries – you are either in or you are out- there is no in-

between option. Individuals learn to manage their socially stigmatized identities in social interactions through identity performances and strategies such as passing and covering (“toning down” stigmatized identities to fit in the mainstream; Goffman, 1963). These strategies are used as a means of controlling information and protecting personal identities in social situations. While the demands to socially negotiate stigmatized identity affect all minority peoples<sup>1</sup>, individuals with in-between socially ambiguous stigmatized identities have a different burden than those whose visible or invisible stigma relates to an established, if not valued, social category. Those with in-between socially ambiguous stigmatized identities, such as multiracial and bisexual individuals, must not only negotiate being situated at the margins of society more generally, they must also negotiate being situated at the margins of their own reference groups (e.g. racially Asian and White individuals may experience marginalization from both Asian *and* White referent groups; Root, 1990). Furthermore, they must negotiate possessing an in-between or ambiguous status in a social culture that categorizes individuals in a dichotomous or strictly categorical system (Miller, 2006a; Williams, 1999).

### **Overarching Research Question**

The proposed study will explore the ways that socially negotiating ambiguous in-between stigmatized identities influences identity development. Specifically, how do experiences of inaccurate assumptions and miscategorizations within a society that views identity schemas as fixed and dichotomous affect identity development of multiracial

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<sup>1</sup> Minority in this study does not reference a numerical value but rather is rooted in distinctions related to power and privilege where individuals are not of the dominant group (Wirth, 1945, as cited in Suyemoto, 1999). For example, women are a numerical majority but remain a minority group because of continued oppression and inequities in power (<http://science.jrank.org/pages/10247/Minority-Widening-Definition.html>).

Asian and European White people and bisexual people. The sections to follow will provide (1) a brief historical background of race and sexuality as categorical constructs; (2) introduce the concept of in-between ambiguous status and multiracial and bisexual identity as two examples of in-between ambiguous status and explore the links between these two statuses; (3) introduce the concept of identity as understood within the discipline of psychology, with overview of bisexual and multiracial models of identity formation; and (4) discuss the concept of social negotiation and briefly review strategies used for social negotiation that may affect identity.

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Social negotiations describe the process of moving between social contexts (e.g. family, friends, work, cultures, countries etc.) or defined group borders of inclusion and exclusion (e.g. racial groups, sexual orientation groups), as well as the balancing and negotiation of individual and group meanings of identities associated with groups that also represent hierarchies of power and privilege. Social negotiations involve responses to a social “demand” to fit into a prescribed system of categorization including, when this fit is not possible, the decision making process that ensues around whether or not to correct, come out, cover, or pass. This is an active, co-constructed process where groups and individuals within a social, historical, political context constitute and confer meanings, perpetuate and reinforce these socially defined meanings through discursive cycles, and in so doing constitute and simultaneously relate to categories of social status. Thus, social negotiations could also be defined as a co-constructed process occurring between self and other, individual and group, and the resulting border enactments and identity presentations that come into play when negotiating meanings of power and privilege that are related to stigmatized categorical identities. These experiences convey group criteria of belonging and exclusion and activate processes of group comparison self-reflexivity, and self-claiming, all of which affect the experience and development of group-referenced identities.

## **Historical Background, Definitions, and Categorical Constructions of Race and Sexuality as Stigmatized Statuses**

Stigma is defined as a discredited or discreditable status that is socially shared and personally relevant (Ainlay, 1986; Goffman, 1963). Discredited status refers to possessing a stigma where differentness is visible or perceivable in social interaction. Discreditable status refers to possessing a stigma where differentness is invisible or not perceivable. Stigma is socially and culturally bound because meanings change across time and context (Ainlay, 1986); it is not inherent or internal but rather externally imposed.

Link and Phelan (2001) define stigma as the convergence of 4 process components and the presence of power dynamics. The first component is the process of categorization and labeling, used to distinguish difference. This process is generally the application of gross oversimplification that operates to create group boundaries. However, these group labels cannot begin to represent the multifaceted complexity that actually exists within the defined “group.” The second component takes place when recognized individual difference is associated with a stereotype linking the individual with categorically undesirable characteristics. These processes are often preconscious, automatic, and operate as cognitive shortcuts. The third component suggests that the process of stigma occurs when labels create in-groups and out-groups. In conjunction with the belief that the out-group also possesses some sort of undesirable attribute, the divide between “us” and “them” increases and the stigma renders the individual as



something fundamentally different. This is a process of dehumanization (Goffman, 1963) that justifies unequal treatment by the dominant group.

The fourth component suggests that through this labeling or categorization process of linking a person with undesirable attributes, a person loses social status and experiences discrimination. This loss of status creates a defined hierarchy of social statuses with some afforded more power and privilege and others dominated and oppressed. The oppressive processes of stigmatization operate as a social means of maintaining group boundaries, pushing stigmatized persons outside of perceived group “norms” and into the marginal realm of the “other.” These socially enacted stigma processes of creating in- and out-groups and drawing clear and rigid boundaries between groups have operated throughout history as a means of maintaining social deviance and creating and maintaining social dominance and power (Herek, 2007; Omi & Winant, 1994). However, the lived experiences of individuals are not always congruent with distinct and exclusive categories. Some people have experiences or identities that exist in-between these distinct categories. These in-between experiences raise intrapsychic processes of not fitting into categories but also interpersonal processes of being ambiguous to others. Not only are these experiences not seen but they are not conceptualized by others in daily interactions to exist at all.

In-between identities in this study refer to identities that do not “fit” into socially defined generalized objective categories. Instead they are situated at the margins of multiple groups– neither/ nor rather than either/or. This positioning is related to processes of power and stigma that form the foundation of hierarchical social categories.

People with in-between identities experience external demands to fit into singular group categories (e.g. White or Asian, Gay or straight) *but* may see themselves as fitting into multiple singular group categories (White and Asian, Gay and straight) or may reject categorical approaches altogether (Ault, 1996; Renn, 2004). Individuals with in-between identities may simultaneously receive messages from the social cultural contexts that they are not part of these singular group categories and that belonging to multiple group categories simultaneously is not possible.

Ambiguous in this study means “open to more than one interpretation” socially and does not necessarily mean “unclear or doubtful” to the individuals themselves (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1985). Ambiguity is socially determined, related to the extent to which an identity or status is unclear or indeterminate to others. Ambiguous does not inherently refer to visible ambiguity but to the ambiguity that exists when one is not seen in one’s complexity because the dominant social conceptualization of status and identity is strictly categorical. In this way there is a linking of these two concepts - in-between and ambiguous. In social interactions of disorientation, ambiguous in-between individuals may be ascribed statuses that do not match how they may view themselves (see below) and must then decide whether or not to reveal or conceal their “true” selves. The inherent disorientation that in-between ambiguous identities present and the sometimes deliberate intentions of people with in-between ambiguous status to permeate and shift mono-categorical and binary group boundaries offer a challenge to the borders between groups themselves (Pollock, 2004; Däumer, 1992).

These concepts, stigma, categorization, in-between, and ambiguous, will now be applied to two categorical social constructs, race and sexual orientation, that affect people's intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences.

### *The Categorical Concept of Race*

The notion of difference does not relate to power inherently; it is the system and the processes related to dominance that place meanings onto particular kinds of differences and then perpetuate these meanings in order to support and maintain power structures. Race is an example of this process. Race is a categorical system that creates groups of people who are distinguished by themselves or others in social relationships and interactions by their visible physical characteristics such as hair, skin color, and facial features (Pinderhughes, 1989; Root, 1998). The categorical classification of race traces back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when scientists applied the Linnaen system of biological classification to human "races" (Omi & Winant, 1994). This application erroneously suggested that race was based in biology with no social bearings. Each race was believed to be a "distinct type" or subspecies with separate gene pools and unique physical features linked to race-specific biologies (Omi & Winant, 1994; Spickard, 1992; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). These distinct racial types were arranged hierarchically with Caucasian/Aryan (White) on the top and Negroid (Africans) on the bottom (de Gobineau 1853/2004; Spickard, 1992). The eugenics movement perpetuated the belief that a superior species of people could be produced through reproductive practices and warned that "racial mixing" would lead to the birth of individuals riddled with disease and sterility (de Gobineau 1853/2004; Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Tucker, 2004). These beliefs and

practices aimed to ensure the maintenance of White racial purity through strict classification of certain “types” of people, “fit” versus “less fit,” under the protection and power of science (Tucker, 2004). Although scientists began to challenge the notion of races as subspecies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they continued to believe that racial differences reflected differences in biology as they related to hereditary traits (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

The classification of humans into races, although purported to be biological, was actually in the service of justifying oppressive practices and creating hierarchies of power, privilege, and human rights (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). This is currently widely acknowledged in scientific circles, with broad agreement that race has no biological basis but is actually is a socially constructed concept that arbitrarily categorizes groups of people together on the basis of arbitrarily selected physical attributes in order to ascribe social meanings and justify unequal social relations (Marks, 1996; Spickard, 1992; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Historical boundaries drawn between the races are viewed as arbitrary social divisions supported by law and social practices (Marks, 1996; Spickard, 1992; Tucker, 2004) and unsupported by biological or genetic differences. For example, clinal patterns show that people may be genetically more similar to those geographically close than to those geographically far, but illuminate that racial divisions are arbitrary as there is greater variation within one group than across (Marks, 1996); there is no scientific backing for the belief that certain groups are morally or intellectually inferior to others (Tucker, 2004); and there is no science to support the belief that “racial mixing” results in disease and sterility (Marks, 1996; Tucker, 2004).

The acknowledgement that race was not biological but was socially constructed enabled the more recent analyses of race as a political construct (Omi & Winant, 1994). Boundaries drawn between the races have served political and social agendas, creating in and out groups between the races to protect White racial purity and the hierarchical structure of power and privilege (Marks, 1996; Nakashima, 1992; Omi & Winant, 1994; Spickard, 1992, Tucker, 2004). Examples include: the institution of the “One Drop Rule” which classified individuals with one drop of African blood as Black regardless of phenotype or genotype; the laws of hypodecent that ensured racial classification of mixed race people to the race with the least social status; and the institution of anti-miscegenation laws beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and continuing in some states until 1967 when they were repealed at the Federal level (Nakashima, 1992; Root, 1996; Tucker, 2004). Though these discriminatory laws have been repealed or have moved into the background, the social meanings attached to these laws have persisted, perpetuating social attitudes and beliefs of White superiority and non-White inferiority and the idea that race is singular, fixed, and natural (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Further, there continues to be classification on the basis of physical attributes into monoracial categories and attribution of inferior characteristics and lesser status ascribed to non-White groups of people. In sum, race is a social construct created to use categorical differences to create hierarchies of power; it is embedded within historical discourses of science and law, and maintained by social discourses that perpetuate these meanings and the associated hierarchy.

### *The Categorical Concept of Sexual Orientation*

Sexual orientation is a categorical system that creates groups of people who are distinguished by themselves or others in social relationships or interactions by the nature of their sexual or affectional attractions, fantasies, feelings/arousals, behaviors, and identities (in relation to another person) (<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx>). The categorical classification of sexuality can be traced back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the repression of sexuality during the Victorian era actually led to a proliferation of sexual discourse and sexualities (Foucault, 1978). This shift coincided with the rise of capitalism. Sexuality became a commodity, a “political economy of population” (Foucault, p.25), and something to be examined, counted, and controlled. Heterosexuality became established not only as the “norm” but also as primarily a means of reproduction within the context of the family. The “natural” pairing of female and male became justified by the biology of reproduction and led to the categorization of sexual orientation on the basis of sex and gender (Paul, 2000). The making of heterosexuality as “normal” simultaneously defined “homosexuality” as abnormal (Foucault, 1978; Herek, 1993). Homosexual individuals were perceived as pathological, sick, immoral, sinful and criminal (Silverstein, 1996). Like race, experiential differences were categorized into hierarchies of normative and deviant justifying differences in power, privilege, and human rights.

“Homosexuality” remained a mental disorder in the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM) until 1973 when it was declassified after growing political activism and increasing scientific evidence that showed no psychological

differences between heterosexual and homosexual people and that demonstrated that “normal” (modal) human sexuality was much broader than originally thought (Hooker, 1957; Kinsey, 1948; Kinsey, 1953). Understandings of homosexuality at this time moved from categorizations purportedly based on scientific beliefs to categorizations based on stigmatizing processes (Herek, 2007). While researchers have continued to demonstrate no innate differences between heterosexual and homosexual people (<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/guidelines.html>), the enacted categorization of normal and abnormal continues to this day in both social and legal/institutional interactions. Past and current laws such as Sodomy laws, the Defense of Marriage act (DOMA), and the “Don’t ask don’t tell” policy in the military sanction the belief of group inferiority and active discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. These laws serve to perpetuate stigmatizing processes and maintenance of boundaries between heterosexual and homosexual, constituting categories of normal and abnormal. Maintenance of this oppressive system preserves the privileged status of heterosexual people and either/or categories.

*In-Between Ambiguous Status in relation to Race and Sexual Orientation: Challenging the Categories*

Categories of race and sexual orientation have histories related to the maintenance of power and privilege; however, categorization processes also reflect a human tendency to simplify and organize information using cognitive templates to assist us to make sense of our environment. Attempts to fit experiences into interpretive schemas are efforts to create some predictability and “knowability” of our world that enables us to fit people,

experiences, and things into “*meaningful categories*” (Ainlay & Crosby, 1986), a process called “Typification.” While these cognitive strategies help us immensely they also limit us:

[O]ur encounters with human differences in social interactions do not always lead to ready typification. In some instances, difference may prompt a sort of intermediate stage that comes before either negative or positive evaluation. This intermediate stage has been characterized as “disorientation” (p.27)

In situations where one is disoriented, the disorientation eventually is trumped by a strong desire for order that then leads to attempts at categorization based on prior knowledge (Ainlay & Crosby, 1986). The need for categorization and resolution of disorientation can place particular demands on people who do not easily fit into strict categories, who have in-between ambiguous statuses.

#### *Multiraciality as an In-between Ambiguous Status*

Multiraciality represents a status of having two or more racial heritages (Root, 1996), and sometimes a political stance challenging the fixed nature of race and establishing a space outside of the typical dichotomies of mono-racial categories (Weisman, 1996). Multiracial status is often referred to as existing in the borderlands and claiming a space that is representative of the multiplicity, complexity, and ambiguity beyond the binary (Anzaldúa, 1987).

The production of in and out groups places multiracial individuals beyond the borders of monoracial categorizations. Multiracial people are frequently asked, “What are you?” questions and experience authenticity testing and “border patrolling” from multiple



groups (Dalmage, T.K. Williams, 1997; T.K. Williams, 1996). Suyemoto and Dimas (2003) identified multiple variables related to the different ways that diverse racial groups create group boundaries with implications for the inclusion or exclusion of people with multiracial heritage: the extent to which in-group meanings rely on “blood heritage,” shared physical features, cultural meanings or shared history of racial categorization for the group; the extent of a visible multiracial demographic; and the current social status of the group as well as the perceived effects of multiracial inclusion.

Both European American and Asian American groups place high value on racial purity (King, 1997; Root, 1997 Suyemoto & Dimas, 2003). For European Americans, maintenance of racial purity is associated with maintaining established power and privilege. For Asian Americans, there is a shared history of discrimination in the U.S. and a desire to retain culture and values, including racialization<sup>2</sup> practices from home countries. Asian Americans also do not share the history of miscegenation that characterizes African American, Latino, and Native American peoples in the United States (Suyemoto & Dimas, 2003). For someone who is multiracial White European American and Asian American, the experienced group boundaries from both sides are relatively rigid and marginalization is apt to be high from both groups situating them in-between (Spickard, 1997). This may be different from someone who is multiracial White European American and African American. While the European American White group has a rigid group boundary the African American group boundary is more permeable because of the history of the “one drop rule” (Suyemoto & Dimas, 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> Racialization is the processes by which contextual, social racial classifications are imposed on particular groups of people (Omi & Winant, 1994)

### *Bisexuality as an In-between Ambiguous Status*

Bisexuality represents a status, ability, or experience of loving beyond the socially expected love object dichotomy of same or other gender. In the context of borders and boundaries between in and out-groups, bisexuality represents a particular experience of being neither heterosexual nor gay/lesbian and can be perceived by these groups as a threat to their fixed and stable status (Bennett, 1992). Due to an absence of bisexual spaces between mono sexual categories and the inevitable negotiations of group boundaries that result, these negotiations become “a formative part of what it means to become bisexual (Hemmings, 2002; p.43).” Similar to multiraciality (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987), bisexuality is also conceptualized as transcending categorization, being neither heterosexual nor homosexual but rather representing instead a complexity of multiplicity (Hemmings, 2002; Däumer, 1992).

Categorizing and labeling are ways of demarcating differences (Fine, 2012; Hemmings, 2002). From this process follows the production of in-groups and out-groups and a system of “either-or” (Klein, 1993) categorization constraining sexual categories to heterosexual and gay/ lesbian where anyone falling outside of these mono-categorical boundaries are questioned or not seen at all. The maintenance of distinct group boundaries for heterosexual and gay/lesbian groups serve to maintain status hierarchy and hard fought social gains where bisexuality threatens to blur these lines.

The construction of heterosexuality is predicated on categories of sex and gender, masculinity and femininity, and the idea that the pairing of male and female for the purposes of heterosexual reproductivity is “natural;” the inclusion of bisexual people

within the boundary of “heterosexual,” challenges this notion (Herek, 1993). Reasons for resisting bisexual inclusion also include affiliation of bisexual people with gay/lesbian people and associations with homosexual abnormality. Gay and lesbian groups have also actively denied bisexual inclusion (Bower, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2002; Herek, 1993). Bisexuality is often seen to be “just a phase” or a developmental bridge to heterosexuality (Diamond, 2008). When a bisexual person partners with someone of the opposite sex they may be perceived as reinforcing this belief. Bisexual people are viewed to be confused, trying to gain access to the best of both worlds and unwilling to give up heterosexual privilege. Due to a history of violence and hate crimes against gay and lesbian people there has been an emphasis within the gay/lesbian movement to create “safe spaces.” Because they are hard to categorize, inclusion of bisexual people may be perceived as a threat to these safe spaces. In the context of fighting for civil rights a heterosexual partnership can be seen as working against a joint cause. Both heterosexual and gay/lesbian groups thus enact rigid boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

*Similarities within Ambiguous and In-between Statuses: Connections of Multiracial and Bisexual Experiences*

Somerville (1999) asserts “It was not merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between ‘black’ and ‘white’ bodies (p.3).” Using literary, scientific, and cinematic texts, Somerville challenges her readers to see the ways that race and sexuality are intersecting fields rather than separate or running parallel. Although race and sexual orientation are

clearly not analogous and differ in their visibility and other particularities, there are a number of similar experiences that these two statuses share, particularly in the realm of social negotiations for individuals who do not fit into the established categories within these marginalized statuses.

Given the categorical constructions described above, both multiracial and bisexual people experience pressure to choose one identity, erasing the other(s) (Kanuha, 1998; Miller, 2006b; Spickard, 1992). Multiracial and bisexual people may also experience messages from social reference groups that it is not okay to be “both” or something different than the separate categorical “parts” (Kanuha, 1998; Miller, 2006a; Tashiro, 2002).

While simultaneously experiencing demands to identify categorically, research suggests that multiracial and bisexual individuals also experience criticism, rejection, and questioning from multiple sides based on their identifications within the categorical system. If an individual is multiracial Asian and White, she may experience marginalization from both White and Asian racial reference groups related to identity claims of belonging to those groups (Cunningham, 1997; Leary, 1999; T. K. Williams, 1997), based on physical appearance (AhnAllen, 2006; Bradshaw, 1992), or authenticity testing related to other criteria of racial belonging and identity (Root 1998). Historically, the maintenance of clear racial boundaries has served to protect racial purity and hierarchies of power (Nakashima, 1992). Racialized minority communities feared that creating a multiracial category or allowing multiple boxes to be checked on the census would diminish hard-won civil rights gains and prevent future political empowerment

(Nash,1997). Similarly, if an individual is bisexual, he may experience marginalization and hostility from both the gay and heterosexual reference groups (Bower, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2002; George, 1993; Knous, 2005; Miller, 2006b; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994) for reasons described above. These experiences are referred to as “border patrolling.” The desire to maintain racial purity and the hetero/homo divide and to maintain hierarchies of power and political gains also influences processes by which individual and group identities are claimed (Suyemoto, 2002).

Not only do multiracial people and bisexual people experience demands to choose one identity over another and simultaneous marginalization from both sides, but they are also often faced with confusion from others who do not know how to categorize them. Multiracial people often experience their identity being questioned because of their perceived “racial ambiguity” (King and DaCosta, 1996; Williams, 1996). Although their race as White or person of color may be visible, their specific racial categorization may not be. People may try to guess what they are or make assumptions about their identity and may respond with disbelief when multiracial people claim their identities and referent groups (Bradshaw, 1992). Bisexual people are also frequently met with disbelief when asserting their identity (Ochs, 2007). This experienced invisibility within a dichotomous categorical system raises the question of whether to pass or not and accusations from outsiders of passing even if not doing so consciously. Multiracial and bisexual individuals face potential difficulty in social interactions due to the fact that if they cannot clearly represent their identities because of their multidimensional status, the perceiver cannot accurately read or interpret them.

Related to the experience of negotiating confusion or ascribed identities is the shared experience of moving between categories and negotiating different expectations and assumptions. For example, a bisexual woman in a group of heterosexuals may be more likely to be assumed to be heterosexual than lesbian or bisexual, particularly if she is accompanied by an opposite sex partner (Miller, 2006b). This assumption contributes to an expectation that she may act in particular ways. Similarly, she may be assumed to be lesbian in a group of lesbians especially if accompanied by a same sex partner. In this way, the social surroundings are used as referents for the meanings made by the perceivers and may be manipulated by the actor, for example, by choosing an opposite sex date to attend a primarily heterosexual event. Both multiracial and bisexual individuals share the ability to move between identity boundaries through the manipulation of identity and cultural symbols such as jewelry and clothing as well as behavior and speech, highlighting that identification does not rest solely on physical visible features and at times may be a response to what others seem to expect. Findings from Kaufman and Johnson's (2004) and T. K. Williams' studies (reviewed below) suggest that these decision-making processes and determined actions shape identity constructions.

### **Racial and Sexual Orientation Identities: Individuals' Meaning Making of Group Meanings and Social Negotiations**

This study draws together ideas from traditional models in Psychology, Critical queer theory/Critical race theory, Constructivism, and Symbolic Interactionism to explore the links between individual, interpersonal, and structural influences on identity

formation within the realm of race and sexual orientation. Identity is a complex meaning making system, a co-constructed process that negotiates between the internal self and the social world. Early conceptualizations of self and identity in the discipline of Psychology often reference identity as primarily internally driven as an individual self-reflexive meaning making process (Erikson, 1968, Marcia, 1994) and don't consider the presence and influence of power in social relations and institutions. In contrast, critical queer theory and postmodern theorists are far more attuned to the ways in which identity is constituted through social discourse and recursive cycles of omnipresent power (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978). More modern feminist and multicultural psychology have worked to bring these critical analyses into the psychological understanding of self and identity, conceptualizing identity as a co-constructed social relational process of meaning making between self and social other (Suyemoto, 2002; Baumeister, 1997). From a social constructivist lens, identity is an ongoing process that takes place in social context where meanings change as contexts change and where subjective reality constitutes a recursive process of constructing and reconstructing reality between self and other (Suyemoto, 2002) in which both the self and the other influence change and meanings made (McAdams, 1997). Here, lived experiences are explored within structures of power, are influenced by structures of power and the making sense of structures of power occurs through internal, interpersonal, and social experiences.

*Psychological Understandings of Identity: Individual Constructions*

Beginning in the 1800's the understanding of the self began to change from something that was deeply tied to family, spirituality and community (akin to the soul) to

something more individualistic, hidden within the inner depths of the individual that must be explored, nurtured, and languaged (Baumeister, 1997; Foucault, 1978). From this mindset arose models of identity development locating a process of self-discovery within the individual – a solitary process of introspection, self-reflexivity, and self making self.

The individual and reflexive self was the foundation of Erikson’s psychosocial model of human development in which he conceptualized the discovery of the self as a journey across 8 critical stages that unfolded over the course of a lifetime (Erikson, 1968). Adolescence marked the period of “identity crisis,” focusing on an internally driven process of identity development. While Erikson acknowledged the influence of external social demands, he described their influence as conditions outside of the individual that could either enhance or impede the already established developmental process. Marcia further developed Erikson’s model, emphasizing the dimensions of exploration and commitment in identity development (Marcia, 1994). Exploration described the extent to which a person explored differing beliefs and value systems and commitment described the extent to which a person *chose* to commit to a particular identity path. Neither Erikson nor Marcia spoke explicitly of the ways that power and privilege may play a role in these internal identity processes.

More recently, social psychologists, sociologists, and feminist and multicultural psychologists have attended more to influence of social groups and interactions in the development of self and identities. Using the language of “Me’s” and “We’s,” Thoits and Virshup (1997) distinguish between personal and social identities. Me’s describe the individual referenced identity whereas We’s describe the group referenced identity.



Group referenced identities arise out of processes of “social group comparison, group categorization, and group evaluation” (p.122). These identities provide individuals with a sense of group belonging and cultivate group cohesion for in-group members (Thoits & Virshup, 1997); however, by default they also create group exclusion, cultivating group marginalization and the creation of status hierarchies in relation to out-group members. Despite recognizing the individual dimensions of exploration and commitment and the processes of group referenced identities, traditional psychology has typically neglected the influence of power and privilege, stigma, and marginalization on identity formation processes and meanings made even though power plays a role in the lives of all peoples. This emphasis on the intrapsychic, rather than the social structural has continued even in the development of identity models related to stigmatized groups/statuses, where power and privilege are at the basis of the categorical distinctions.

Within psychology, many models of racial and sexual orientation identity have been developed (see review of racial identity models in Sue & Sue, 2003, see review of sexual orientation identity models in D’Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1988; and Eliason & Schope, 2007). Typically these models describe mono-racial and mono-sexual developmental processes with achievement of a mono categorical status, and place a relative emphasis on internal choices and processes rather than social negotiations, even while focusing on group referenced identities (“we’s”). Many of these models are characterized by linear stages of development that are based in biology and/or early life experiences, are stable and fixed throughout life. There is also an essentialist assumption of reality, that identity is something real that can be discovered. These models follow

from Erikson and Marcia's conceptualization of identity and generally describe a process of self-exploration and self-discovery. Typical stages move from an unexplored identity (Phinney, 1988) or identity confusion (Troiden, 1988), to a search for identity (Phinney, 1988) or identity acceptance (Troiden, 1988), and finally ending with an achieved identity (Phinney, 1988) or a commitment to identity (Troiden, 1988). Within the sexual orientation literature "coming out" is often an essential step toward achieving a stable identity (Eliason & Schope, 2007).

### *Critical Queer Theory, Power, and Identity*

In contrast to traditional psychology's emphasis on the individual's meanings and choices in the absence of power and privilege, Butler (1990) and Foucault (1978) argue that systems of power produce and maintain beliefs creating the *illusion* that categories (and identities) are natural rather than constituted through regulatory discourse. Through "regulatory practices" of languaging and relanguaging, meanings are created and shifted (Butler, 1990) and coherent identities generated. Butler (1990) writes that identity always reflects not what the person *is* but rather a "relative point of convergence" depending on context, and that a subject is represented by the parameters laid out *a priori*. Thus, she suggests that power and discourse and recursive cycles place constraints on identity processes and identity meanings for the individual. She raises the possibility of identity being a descriptor of an experience rather than a "normative ideal," governed by external rather than internal processes. She theorizes that perhaps the results of identity expressions are actually performances outlined by society. Identity as a performance relies on social others to recognize the performance as signifying meaning,

which reaffirms particular performances with particular categories and the maintenance of social hierarchies and categorizations. Based on this theory, identities are primarily copies of an illusion of a natural subject constituted through recursive practices and their expressions - a reflection of the system in which they constitute meaning (Butler, 1990). Within this frame agency comes from “troubling” performances, where individuals’ awareness of constraints contribute to the ability to make choices rather than perform reactively.

This theory purports that identity formation occurs primarily through external forces involving power and social discourse. Unlike identity theory in traditional psychology, the recognition that power is always present (Foucault, 1978) is at the core of this theorizing. Personal choices are de-emphasized, and identity is seen as performances of cyclic social processes, a constitution of the outside world embedded in social structural power relations rather than individual internal processes of claiming influenced by interpersonal but not social structural relations as described above.

However, psychological theory and research suggests that individuals do believe that they are making active choices, and that identity is not only performance, but a subjectively meaningful and personally chosen (or constructed) schema that serves intrapsychic functions such as continuity and personal integrity (Baumeister, 1997; McAdams, 1997; Suyemoto, 2002).

#### *Social Constructionist Identity Conceptualization within Psychology*

An integration of the foci of psychological identity theory with critical postmodern theory is needed. This study takes a social constructionist approach to

identity, integrating psychological and critical emancipatory theory understandings, and defining identity as arising *through* co-constructed processes *between* self and other. Further this approach brings the critical queer/critical race theory awareness of the role of power in these processes and the ways that power can constrain meanings but simultaneously acknowledges the traditional psychological view of the individual lived experience of agency and intrapsychic functions of identity. Rather than describe identity development as a process that follows linear stages as identity is discovered, a social constructionist approach views identity as contingent instead on context, time and place, the social and historical circumstances of a period (including power relations), and as flexible and variable throughout life (Rust, 1993). Identity is something constructed and reconstructed *between* self and other, thus there is no one reality to be discovered but instead multiple realities. Thus, identity is a social referencing and social comparison process, *and* a self-referencing and self-claiming process, both processes situated within a context of influencing power dynamics. Individuals within this formulation may claim identities in opposition to group exclusion, in reference to group exclusion, in opposition to group inclusion, and in reference to group exclusion (Suyemoto, 2002). Individual and group meanings and identity boundaries can change as a function of “downward influence,” where society affects the group and the group affects the individual *and* “upward influence,” where the individual can affect the group and the group can affect the society through reciprocal processes (Suyemoto, 2002). Individuals can also exert influence using their knowledge of how the boundaries are constructed to actually subvert boundaries through their actions and behaviors (Butler, 1990).

Eliason and Schope (2007), in their review article, suggest that there is a need for broad models such as these that are more inclusive and take into account an interactionist perspective as well as “Biological, psychological, historical, and sociocultural factors.” This follows from the work of Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) and the theory of Symbolic Interactionism (described below). Some models of racial and sexual orientation identities, particularly those concerned with ambiguous in-between identities, reflect more of this social construction understanding. Typical description within these models include developmental processes that are ongoing across the life span where change occurs in response to new encounters and interactions between self and other and where attempts to create continuity between the old and new self constitute identity formations (D’Augelli, 1994; Suyemoto, 2002). This is a reflexive process, co-constructed and re-constructed, where the process of identity changes are necessary in order to continually capture identity and self in a changing social context (Rust, 1993).

*Identity Models exploring In-between identities*

*Multiracial models.*

Models of multiracial development initially arose out of the recognition that monoracial models of identity development did not capture multiracial experiences (Poston, 1990), particularly because of the unique social experiences that multiracial individuals experience with diverse racialized groups. Poston (1990) identified several issues with monoracial models related to social interactions and negotiations, including: (1) individuals are expected to choose one culture/race over another at different stages, (2) individuals are assumed to experience acceptance into the minority group, which does

not take into account the fact that many biracial/multiracial individuals do not experience acceptance from any one referent group. Multiracial researchers began to develop models of multiracial identity to address these issues.

Kich (1992) described a biracial and bicultural identity model based on an interview study with 15 adult participants identifying as biracial White and Japanese. He found evidence from his participants for an identity development model with 3 stages:

1. Initial Awareness of differentness and dissonance: the experience of comparing oneself with others or the experience of reflected appraisals from others remarking on a particular difference. Dissonance marks the experience of differentness with negative social valuation.
2. A struggle for acceptance from others: the experience of searching for acceptance outside of the home. Often this period is marked by exploration of parental ethnic and racial heritages, moving between these contexts, self exploration, attempts at integrating them and a search for others with similar experiences.
3. Acceptance of themselves as people with biracial, bicultural identity: the experience of coming to see oneself based on individual definitions rather than the definitions of others. This period is also marked by an ability to see the confusion of others as a reflection of society not a reflection of oneself.

Similarly, Collins (2000) developed a 4 phase model of biracial identity development based on 15 qualitative interviews with participants who identified as biracial Japanese

American (i.e. one parent identified as Japanese and the other as non-Japanese): (1) Questioning and Confusion, (2) Refusal and Suppression, (3) Infusion and Exploration, (4) Resolution and Acceptance. Both Kich and Collins assert that multiracial identity is a process influenced by social, cultural, political, and historical changes and contexts, that is, an interactive process between the individuals and external social forces. While Collins illuminated the ways that individuals assert and claim new identity labels in reaction to socially available labels he did not describe the processes by which this occurs. Though both Kich and Collins describe a process of biracial development as one that comes out of influences of self and other, their models both reflect a relative emphasis on a self-defining process, rather than focusing primarily on the social negotiation process.

Root (1990) described what she called a “schematic metamodel” of identity development in biracial individuals where social environmental factors in conjunction with individual self-conflicts move through spirals of development rather than linearly. While exploring the social influences on identity choices and development, her model described 4 possible “resolutions” for biracial identity: (1) Acceptance of the identity society assigns, (2) Identification with both racial groups, (3) Identification with a single racial group, (4) Identification as a new racial group. The description of these identities as “resolutions” implies some finished status, rather than an ongoing process of social interactions and negotiating group boundaries over the course of a lifetime.

Tashiro (2002) and King and DaCosta (1996) reflect a greater emphasis on the influences of social negotiations and co-constructions in their models. Tashiro (2002) offers a

dimensional approach to understanding mixed-race identity development based on findings from a qualitative interview study with 20 mixed race individuals. Tashiro situated her study theoretically using symbolic interactionism and structural power and privilege and recognized the role of the social “other” as not only having influence but actually playing a significant role in constituting identity. Her findings suggest that racial identity is comprised of a number of dimensions, including cultural identity, ascribed identity, racial identification to others, racial self-identification, and situational racialization of feeling. She actively recognizes how these dimensions are constrained by sociocultural factors.

Finally, King and DaCosta (1996) describe a theoretical model exploring the social construction of race. Their proposed framework describes “4 faces of race” calling attention to the interactional nature of race categories and the ways that people will shift presentations to match social boundaries or acceptance and the ways that these interactions are occurring both on an individual level as well as a community or group level:

1. Race is something that people “Do” within and between individuals.  
Individuals can self-reflect and choose their identities but these reflections and choices are shaped by what is available to them socially.
2. Race is presented and constituted in interaction with others. This is similar to Goffman’s (1963) idea of the self-object, constituted in the interaction between self and other. The self-object becomes fully authenticated in the eyes of others.



3. Race is constructed not only individually but by groups as well. Individuals within groups are drawing boundaries of what it means to belong and not to belong.
4. “Racial groups are relational and hierarchical (p. 231)” and one can move up and down the hierarchy.

These four faces of race present a model of identity formation situated outside of the individual developmental stage realm and instead within the social interactional realm.

*Bisexual models.*

Models of bisexual development are few and far between. Those that do exist attempt to describe the experience of bisexual individuals’ identity development as unique and different from models describing gay/lesbian/or straight identity development taking into account experiences of not fitting into just one dichotomous category.

However, these models continue to emphasize categorization processes rather than continuous social negotiation processes. Weinberg, Pryor, and Williams’s (1994) research resulted in the first and most frequently cited model of bisexual identity development. Based on findings from an interview study with 100 bisexually identified men and women they identified 4 stages described by their participants:

1. Initial Confusion: the experience of sexual feelings for both sexes and confusion and discomfort around this realization.
2. Finding and applying the label: the experience of discovering the term “bisexual” through reading or hearing about it. This discovery was described as a momentous occasion helping people to make sense of

their feelings and situating them within a context of social others. This was often described as a “turning point.”

3. Settling into the identity: the experience of coming to self-label with greater self acceptance and less concern about other people’s negative attitudes.
4. Continued uncertainty: the experience of continuing to question or feel confused about one’s identity. Participants talked about the difficulty of maintaining a bisexual identity without community support and validation and about the social pressure they experienced from others to define themselves as either straight or gay or lesbian. These experiences resulted in intermittent periods of uncertainty.

Bradford’s (2004) model, based on interviews with 20 self-identified bisexual people, had three initial stages similar to those of Weinberg, Pryor, and Williams (1994). Bradford then described a different fourth stage “Transforming adversity,” which describes a motivation to change the social climate and advocate for social justice. Similarly, Knous (2005) also identified a stage which she called “Tertiary Deviance,” a period when individuals began to rebel against being labeled as “other” and worked to gain acceptance through fighting against discrimination and making bisexuality visible. Knous identified this stage as a time when stigma management strategies (awareness of judgments from others when making decisions to reveal or conceal identity) became important. This recognition suggests an awareness of “social prejudice” and the need for continuous negotiation strategies in the context of stigma and social categorization.

*Brief Critique of Bisexual and Multiracial Models.*

To date, most multiracial identity models and bisexual identity models in psychology capture a largely internal developmental process in which individuals, on a journey, come to a resolved identity (Bradford, 2004; Collins, 2000; Kich, 1992; Root, 1990) with (in some cases) intermittent uncertainty (Weinberg, Pryor, & Williams, 1994). This process is primarily talked about as a process in which individuals independently claim an identity or multiple identities through self-reflective processes. While social, cultural, political, and historical factors are recognized as having influences they are generally not discussed as actively constituting identity through group processes. With the exception of Tashiro (2002) and King and DaCosta, (1996), neither bisexual nor multiracial models of identity development or formulation describe the processes by which negotiating between group boundaries impact identity. While they do recognize the role of community in providing support and the changes in identity that take place as a result of the challenges from others, they fail to do describe the processes by which these experiences shape the individual. There continues to be a relative focus on the ways the individual independently and introspectively come to identify as they do through self-reflection, and internal processes. What is not described is the active role/effect of the social “other” in shaping these processes. We know that stigma processes are interactional processes between the self and other but we don’t know how these processes shape the construction of bisexual and multiracial identity. Similarly, while we know that individuals with stigmatized identities employ social negotiation

strategies, we know much less about how these continuous social negotiation processes influence identity formation.

### **Processes of Social Negotiations for Stigmatized Identities**

Symbolic interactionism focuses on the study of social *interaction* between individuals, the power of symbols, and the development of the self arising out of these interactions and symbolizing processes (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1985; Cooley, 1902; Fine, 2012). In social interactions, how we make sense of people's roles, how we act towards things, and how we relate to others is determined not by the things/people but by the meanings we attribute to them. These meanings are shaped by personal experiences and by shared social discourses, which are embedded in power relations. In this way, the roles people carry and the social privileges they have been afforded convey meaning and arise out of social and interactional processes. Identity and self are shaped through these processes of social interactions and conferred symbols of meaning making (Fine, 2011).

Within this framework the self is believed to be an object, referred to as the self object, which can be viewed by both self (actor) and other (audience). Cooley (1902) believed that one comes to know oneself through the eyes of others. He referred to this idea as "The looking glass self." Thus, the self is not only *communicated* through these social interactions but also self *developed* through the course of these interactions. Applied to a social situation, the theory of symbolic interactionism comes alive with both actors and audiences conveying and receiving information concurrently, bringing with them and reading into individual histories, perspectives, symbols, and stereotypes. Meanings are shifted and made within these symbolic interactions, including meanings

about selves and identities (Blumer, 1986; Charon, 1985). This theory calls attention to the role of social others and interactional processes in the formation of self and identity.

In the context of stigma and hierarchies of power and privilege, these interactions between self and other, though reciprocal, are rarely equal. Seeing oneself through the eyes of another especially in a social context of power and privilege where stigma is involved will have an effect on how one constructs a self object and how one chooses to act out this self object, to perform and protect social identities, and to make choices about one's understandings of one's own identities (Tashiro, 2002). Once labeling by self or other occurs, stigma management strategies become essential for the stigmatized individual in order to balance this new identity with external social pressures (Knous, 2005). Three strategies commonly used to negotiate these experiences and stigmatized identities, are passing, covering, and coming out. Although there has been little research explicitly examining the influence of these strategies and negotiations on the development of identities and there are no known studies that look at the impact of these experiences on identity formation processes in people with in-between ambiguous identities, studies have explored how these strategies are enacted and function.

Passing is currently understood as a discontinuous process where individuals may choose to perform or take on a new identity in some, but not all, domains of their lives (Bradshaw, 1992; Daniel, 1992; Kanuha, 1998; Miller, 2006a). Passing can be either intentional (e.g. a proactive conscious choice to become an identity viewed as socially more acceptable) or unintentional, (e.g. a reactive process whereby individuals are miscategorized or mislabeled by others; Bradshaw, 1992; Daniel, 1992; Goffman, 1963;

Miller, 2006; Renfrow, 2004). In contrast, covering is defined as toning down or downplaying a stigmatized identity in social interaction (Goffman, 1963; Yoshino, 2007). Covering differs from passing in that it does not involve actually giving up or denying a stigmatized identity for a new identity but rather is the erasure or dulling of signifying stigmatizing *markers*. Like passing, covering is usually discontinuous and can be intentional or unintentional. Coming out is defined as individuals fully revealing their “true” identity, correcting inaccurate labels or identity categorizations by another in social interaction, and not toning down display of that identity (Land & Kitzinger, 2005; Yoshino, 2007). Coming out is also usually discontinuous, where individuals may choose to come out in some situations or contexts and to pass or cover in others. Unlike passing or covering, it is rarely unintentional. The act of coming out and claiming identity may represent a choice for self-empowerment and social justice, claiming new identity boundaries where existing in group and out group boundaries have been previously drawn more narrowly. While typically passing, covering and coming are conceptualized as one time strategies or single events, these are in fact constantly repeated decision making processes as decisions from one context or time do not necessarily carry over to another (Rust, 1993; Yoshino, 2007).

Researchers from the field of Psychology typically focus on describing how stigma management strategies are felt and enacted, examining the psychological and social functions of various strategies (why people choose to use them), and the possible costs or psychological implications. Several studies have explored how stigma management strategies are felt and enacted. Findings from Miller’s (2006b) qualitative

study with bisexual participants showed that it is not just how the bisexual individual visually presents him or herself but also how the perceiver sees this presentation within a system of heteronormativity. Her participants described their experiences of prejudice, influences on decisions to correct misidentifications, and actual concealing and revealing strategies used. Biracial participants from T. K. Williams' (1996) qualitative interviews described learning about their racial selves from the environment and in social interactions with others. From these experiences they described moving between group identity lines and "doing race," through actually "manipulating" outward appearances and "projecting different selves (p.207)." Other researchers also describe a wide array of different concealing and revealing strategies used to negotiate stigmatized identities in social interactions (Cain's; 1991; Kanuha, 1998; Miller, 2006b; Renfrow, 2004; Spradlin, 1998).

Research has also focused on the psychological and social benefits and functions of these strategies and why people might choose to use them. Based on results from in-depth interviews, Cain's (1991) 38 gay male participants described the use of several social negotiation strategies some of which were used as a way to feel better and improve relationships with other people, and as a way to resolve situations and avoid anticipated interpersonal problems. In a personal account, Spradlin (1998) described the ways social negotiation strategies functioned for her in the workplace, such as a means of deflecting and avoiding self talk, compartmentalizing different parts of herself, confusing a perceiver to give a particular impression, and protecting her lesbian identity. Kanuha's (1998) 29 gay and lesbian participants of color participated in qualitative semi-structured

interviews and described recognizing the demand to hide or conceal non-dominant identities, including both racial and sexual orientation. They described how these strategies acted as protection against and avoidance of discrimination and acts of hate in a socially oppressive context. They also described stigma management strategies as acts of resistance and a way to resist “a predominant social structure of whiteness and heterosexuality” (p.154).

A subset of the literature also looked at the psychological implications and social costs of stigma management strategies (Barretto, Ellemers, & Banal; 2006; Claire et al., 2005; Pachankis, 2007; Ragins, 2007; Spradlin, 1998). Spradlin (1998) described what she called “The Price of Passing,” how social negotiation strategies not only serve particular functions, as described above, but also lead to things such as isolation, feelings of inauthenticity, and an erosion of self esteem. Similarly, in an experimental study using a computer mediated interaction, Barretto, Ellemers, and Banal (2006) created a prescribed situation to motivate individuals to hide a contextually devalued identity, but not a socially stigmatized identity. Findings showed that passing or concealing a devalued identity in this context resulted in self directed emotions such as shame and guilt, as well as decreased self-confidence. Renfrow (2004) performed a content analysis of written narratives from a racially diverse sample of 123 male and female undergraduate students. Findings showed that passing led to participants feeling badly or uncomfortable. Furthermore, passing exposed people at times to negative attitudes about their hidden identities (Renfrow, 2004).



Pachankis (2007) developed what he referred to as a cognitive-affective-behavior process model based on theoretical and empirical works to further understand the psychological implications of concealing an invisible stigmatized identity. In this model the cognitive and affective recognition of stigma is described as leading to behaviors such as impression management strategies and in turn self-evaluations. Consequences of concealing stigmatized identities in a discriminatory and prejudiced society included things such as uncertainty or inconsistency of the self object, isolation from similar others or group based protective factors, and negative sense of self-efficacy. Self-evaluations then looped back to the beginning of the cycle, affecting the recognition of stigma and influencing the ways these experiences played out in the future. This model suggests that at some point, interpersonal experiences *between* self and other are integrated into the self and influence how one positions oneself in relation to others in future interactions.

Past research calls attention to the interactional processes between self and other. Moreover several studies indicate a balancing of psychological costs with psychological benefits connected to decision making processes around the use of stigma management strategies. Pachankis's (2007) model suggests that these processes may actually reflect a feedback cycle where the social negotiation of stigmatized identities may actually be contributing to identity change processes. Overall, while Psychological researchers are increasingly exploring the social demands and related responses associated with both oppressed status and marginalized, invisible and in-between identities through examining the enactments, functions and costs of social negotiation strategies, they rarely make the leap towards understanding these strategies as interactions where the strategies

*themselves* may have influence on identity formation processes and who one chooses to become (Cain, 1991; Herek, 1993; Kanuha, 1998; Miller, 2006; Renfrow, 2004; Schneider & Conrad, 1980; Spradlin, 1998). One exception to this is Kaufman and Johnson (2004).

Kaufman and Johnson (2004) theoretically ground their qualitative interview study in symbolic interactionism. Their 20 gay and lesbian participants described a realization that they could *actively* construct their identities in the face of systemic prejudice and social stigmatization through the use of stigma management strategies such as passing, covering, and coming out. Their participants employed these strategies in order to find a supportive community, come out to selective others, and to shift their social context, all in the service of aligning their personal identities with the reflected appraisals of others. There is a need for more research like Kaufman and Johnson's in order to increase our understanding of the ways that social negotiation strategies impact identity formation, specifically in the context of in-between ambiguous identities. Illumination of these lived experiences and their effects offer an opportunity to increase our understanding of the integration of multiple boundaries and the formation of identities.

#### *Social Negotiations and Socially Constructed Group Referenced Identities*

It is unlikely that individuals would develop these elaborate social negotiation strategies if systems of privilege and oppression and in-group and out-group boundaries were not there to demand them (Yoshino, 2007). Similarly, these strategies would not be so essential if individuals as “audiences” in social interactions could shift their cognitive

templates of identity to include in-between dichotomous categorizations. Models of identity development, such as those described by Erikson and Marcia, describe individual constructions of identity arising through processes of discovering an internal, hidden essence that has always been there and then claiming an individual conception of the self from that discovery. However, examination of racial and sexual identities as categorical social constructions suggests that social others and systems of hierarchy also influence identity development, particularly for group-referenced identities. Being ascribed characteristics marking difference through stigmatizing processes results in being oppressed and pushed to the margins (Link & Phelan, 2001), necessitating negotiation strategies. The use of social negotiation strategies may on the one hand perpetuate the potentially oppressive illusion of “normal” and may on the other hand give an individual a means of control in a social system where they are afforded very little power (Butler, 1990). Identity formations are impacted by these negotiations between self, other, and society because identity is constituted in interaction (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) and enacted in the context of power (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978). Thus, identity formation itself becomes some integration of social negotiation and personal agency.

Belonging to more than one group and frequently being excluded from more than one group, multiracial and bisexual people are faced with particular challenges about how to present their selves and perform their identities according to or in contrast with meanings made by others and in the context of stigma. In interactions with others, it is not uncommon for a multiracial or a bisexual person to be directly met with inaccurate assumptions of what others presume them to be. Based on what we know about the

making of identities discussed above there is reason to believe that these experiences generate social referencing and comparison processes between self and other and related social negotiation processes that interact with individual self reflexive processes to co-construct and re-construct identities in context and across time. According to symbolic interactionism, these are experiences common to all people in interaction. However, the context of power and privilege associated with the social stigma and the nature of these identities as ambiguous and in-between in a categorical system makes the identity process for multiracial and bisexual individuals particularly unique, with the potential to deepen our understanding of the continuous interaction of social negotiation and individual agency in identity formation. This study seeks to understand these interactional processes in the lives of multiracial and bisexual people and the ways these experiences influence identity formation in these two groups.

Although analogizing race and sexuality can create divides and polarize groups of people when they fail to recognize the differences *and* intersections between communities, drawing together two groups around a shared experience has the potential to create change and illuminate differences for the purposes of working towards social justice. Scholars such as Kich (1996) and Collins (2000) have theorized the benefits of drawing together around the common experiences of those in the margins of the margins as opposed to drawing together around the central marginal experiences in reference to a perceived dominant norm. These benefits include mobilizing groups of people and creating alliances for social justice (Lee, Murphy, North, & Ucelli, 1996). Yoshino (2007) writes that the demand to cover “...provides an issue around which we can make a

common cause....We must build a new civil rights paradigm on what draws us together rather than on what drives us apart” (p.xii).

It is also important to note that communities of color and LGB communities are not mutually exclusive. There are many LGB people of color and many people of color who also identify as LGB. People with “bi-bi” identities remind us that polarizing *across* communities actually creates polarity *within* communities (Thompson, 2000). June Jordan (1991), an activist and writer, draws analogies to bring communities together: “I do believe that the analogy [for bisexuality] is interracial or multiracial identity. I do believe that the analogy for bisexuality is a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multiracial worldview. Bisexuality follows from such a perspective and leads to it, as well” (p.13). In describing the experience of being invited to speak at one rally against racism and the next day speaking at a different rally for bisexual, gay, and lesbian rights, Jordan commented, “That was disgraceful! There should have been just one rally. One rally: Freedom is indivisible” (p.13).

Kich (1996) agrees, suggesting that we should further connect the experiences of negotiating in-between identities to experiences of negotiating multiple identities, an experience that all people share. In this way, we can work together to move the margins and marginal experiences of many into the center and to dissolve the deleterious processes of “othering.” Finally, as Audre Lorde Writes “There is no hierarchy of oppression...I have learned that sexism (a belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over all others and thereby its right to dominance) and heterosexism (a belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving over all others and thereby its right to

dominance) both arise from the same source as racism—a belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby its right to dominance...I simply do not believe that one aspect of myself can possibly profit from the oppression of any other part of my identity” (Lorde, 2009).

The cultural demand of dichotomous categorical assumptions necessitates the use of social negotiation strategies for people with ambiguous in-between identities that do not fit neatly into singular identity categories. Experiences of group belonging and group exclusion, power dynamics, and individual reflexivity and self-claiming processes related to these social negotiations likely influence identity formation. However, no known studies have looked directly at how these processes unfold in multiracial and bisexual people or explored the relative similarities and differences in these processes between these two groups.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore the processes by which socially negotiating in-between ambiguous stigmatized identities affect identity formation and meaning.

Specifically the following questions were addressed:

- How do experiences of socially negotiating an in-between ambiguous stigmatized identity influence identity development?
- And the sub-question: What are the similarities and differences in these processes for multiracial and bisexual people?

The primary question was addressed specifically in the interviews themselves while the sub-question was addressed through comparative data analysis. This study utilized a qualitative grounded theory design guided by a constructivist paradigm and critical ideology.

#### **Philosophy of Science and Research Design**

Constructivism describes an ontological belief that there are multiple unique individual or group realities varying as a result of differing experiences, statuses, and

contexts. It also describes an epistemological belief that reality is co-constructed, and reconstructed through social processes between self, other, and society (Charmaz, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). Critical theory situates these multiple realities and experiences in the context of power dynamics between people and groups. A constructivistic approach with a critical-ideological framework meant that it was important for the researcher to take active measures to be aware of the role of power dynamics on multiple levels throughout the research process.

Throughout this project I sought to empower and to encourage dialogue, reflection, and interaction within socially marginalized groups in line with constructivism and critical ideology. I also attempted to language the results in a manner that was a personalized reflection of this co-constructed process with attention towards the ways that systemic hierarchies of power and privilege may be challenged rather than reproduced through rhetorical structure.

A comparative grounded theory approach was used to develop an inductive, data driven theory. This method allowed for theory to emerge from the data up (rather than from the hypothesis down), for multiple voices to be heard and to be considered, for biases to be made explicit, and for the complexity of identities and the ways that identity shapes and is shaped by social interactions to be explored (Morse & Richards, 2002; Ponterotto, 2005). Thus, this method was chosen in order to privilege the unique voices and personalized experiences of multiracial and bisexual people in context, through face-to-face interviews, to further our understanding of these complex and interactional processes.



Drawing together the grounded theory method in conjunction with the constructivistic, critical ideological philosophy of science aims to embody a methodology that integrates (a) traditional psychology's valuing of individual experience, empowerment and voice; (b) the attention to power dynamics that is reflected in queer theory; (c) the recognition of co-construction and reconstruction of identity between self and other and multiple realities as seen in social constructionism; and (d) the premise that identities arise out of interactions and symbolizing processes as seen in symbolic interactionism. The link between the qualitative method and these theoretical foundations allowed the interviewer and interviewees to participate in a process of generating knowledge that strove to not only examine the development of empowerment but to embody the process of empowerment within the method.

### *Reflexivity*

In order to ensure "trustworthiness" (Morrow, 2005), active measures were taken to bring to consciousness (Creswell, 2007) my own theories, beliefs, values, thoughts, preconceived notions, and personal experiences and to use this awareness responsibly. In this way the researcher's subjectivity consciously became a part of the data (Finlay, 2002). I engaged in this reflexive process through multiple means:

1. Journaling presented a space for me to make explicit, through writing, the implicit beliefs, reactions and assumptions that arose throughout the research process (Morrow, 2005). Through self-reflection and self-awareness and active acknowledgment of potential biases, I examined these ideas and consciously

integrated them into or actively bracketed from the data analysis and research process.

2. Memoing presented a space for me to make note of emerging theories, data connections and interpretations on interview transcripts as they arose during data collection and analysis and consider how these were affected by my own experiences (Creswell, 2007). Like journaling, this process allowed me to consciously set aside ideas or integrate them into emerging findings as they arose.
3. Consulting a research team and regular individual meetings with my dissertation advisor, Karen Suyemoto, allowed me to engage in reflexive dialogue and discussion with a group of peers actively engaged in research within the area of identity (Morrow, 2005).

Reflexivity also offered a means for the researcher to bring awareness of the power dynamics that existed between interviewer and interviewee and the relative areas of privilege and oppression that each individual brought to the interaction. This was a particularly important process as I am a White European American bisexual identified woman and was the primary interviewer for this project. This presented different considerations depending on the group that I was interviewing. For the bisexual identified group I had a shared experience of negotiating a bisexual identity and needed to be aware of what I brought to the dialogue and how this entered the dialogue. For the multiracial identified group I am a member of the socially privileged group – White—and needed to build an alliance with multiracial interviewees across this difference.

Conscious of these dynamics, I took time to develop rapport with the interviewees as well as to bracket biases and assumptions that could influence the dynamic. This reflexive awareness was also important during analysis, because my own experiences and context shaped my perspective and interpretation through my observations. I had to be open to seeing other worldviews that challenged my own. An example of this reflexive process is as follows:

In my second multiracial interview during the debriefing I asked the individual what it was like for her to talk with me given that I am White:

Q: I think I'm aware that I'm read as White, and I am White, so I don't know what it's like to talk with me about these things.

A: Yeah, I don't know. Yeah, I didn't think like whether or not you were.

Q: Yeah, like you said, you're not -- you don't -- I mean you said earlier, you don't seem.

A: Because I have a brother who looks White and if he's alone he looks White, but if he's with us he looks like our brother.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I can't, I just can't assume and I've like, I've watched -- like I remember watching this documentary about being biracial, half Black and half White, and one of my mixed friends and I in college, we were sitting watching it and we're like oh my God, she looks so White. So there's just never -- you can never know. I mean yeah, it's just not that simple.

After this interview I was concerned that I imposed my agenda to talk about race and our racial dynamic during the debriefing portion of the interview, when it did not appear to be something that the interviewee was thinking about. I found myself wondering about the best way to make space for these kinds of conversations in the interview debriefing without imposing them. As a person in a socially privileged group - White - I did not want to use my social privilege to talk about something that my participants did not want to talk about. However, I also wanted to acknowledge the differences in our experiences and open up the opportunity to talk about this if the participant wanted to. I also grappled with whether it was my responsibility to make it clear that I am not multiracial ---full disclosure -- to avoid misunderstandings. I journaled about these questions and brought these questions to my research team to engage in peer debriefing, where I was able to share my thoughts and questions with my multiracial colleagues, who also conduct research in this area. After these discussions, I decided that I would answer questions addressed to me candidly. Rather than ask these types of direct questions, as I did with the second multiracial person that I interviewed, I would instead continue to work to create an environment where participants would feel comfortable sharing these issues with me if they felt they were contributing to the interview process.

Additionally, I also recognized that there were likely things that I was not aware of that came up throughout the research process and that it was impossible to reflect upon things that are not yet conscious. In an attempt to address these unconscious or preconscious factors I also Incorporated recommended verification techniques into the method (see Verification section).

## *Participants*

### *Recruitment*

Participants were recruited through flyers posted on college campuses, sent to student groups on college campuses, on-line (e.g. facebook, or webpages), on-line listings and chat groups, community organizations, referrals from personal contacts and snowballing (recruiting from recommendations from individuals who have already participated in the study; see Appendix A – Recruitment Materials). Challenges related to recruitment of male participants particularly in the bisexual group, led to purposeful sampling, with efforts made to recruit from a bisexual men’s group, and the Male Center in Boston.

In this study I interviewed multiracial or bisexual participants between the ages of 20 and 36 who were willing to discuss their social negotiation experiences. The lower age for this study was chosen to capture a period of life when initial identity formations typically experienced during adolescence have settled. The ceiling age for this study was chosen to capture a generation of people growing up post 1967 and post 1973 when anti-miscegenation laws were repealed and the American Psychiatric Association declassified “Homosexuality” as a mental disorder respectively.

In addition to the age criteria for all participants, biracial/multiracial participants met the following inclusion criteria: (1) identified themselves as biracial/multiracial, mixed, or any other signifier to suggest a multiracial identity to themselves *and* to others, (2) had one biological parent who they identified as having mono racial Asian heritage and a second biological parent who they identified as having monoracial White heritage,

and (3) identified as heterosexual and had not been in a non-heterosexual romantic relationship within the past 5 years. Bisexual/bi participants met the following inclusion criteria: (1) identified themselves as bisexual, bi, or any other signifier to suggest a bi identity to themselves and to others, (2) identified as racially White, meaning that they perceived both biological parents as having mono racial White European American heritage.

Participant sampling was purposeful. Choosing participants that were in the in-between status on one variable of interest (*either* race or sexual orientation) and in the dominant group on the other variable of interest, rather than including participants who may be both, aimed to more clearly illuminate the influences of negotiations of social meanings related to a single in-between ambiguous status, rather than introducing questions of intersecting power dynamics from multiple in-between ambiguous statuses. While I recognize that the lived experience is always one of intersectionality and that the study of one particular status is always intertwined with the experiences of other statuses, the sampling choices made in this study reflected an attempt to consciously attend to power dynamics with the expectation that themes reflecting the negotiation of marginalized *and* privileged spaces would also emerge within the data.

A total of 22 interviews were conducted, evenly split between multiracial and bisexual individuals. One individual from each group was excluded: a multiracial woman was excluded due to being older than inclusion criteria would permit. One bisexual man was excluded because it became clear during the interview that he did not identify as bi, and instead was looking to connect with others open to exploring

alternative sexual practices (i.e. kink, swinging, etc.). Final participants included 3 males and 7 females who identified as multiracial and 1 male and 9 females who identified as bisexual. Themes raised by both men and women within the two groups were similar. Experiences specific to the differentiations of gender categories (e.g. male experiences rather than female experiences) and the research question were not raised. However, participants did reference aspects of gender during their interviews (see Discussion below). Targeted analysis of explicit content did not indicate that men and women experienced central themes differently because of their gender or that there were central themes particular to only one gender. All participants were living in Massachusetts at the time of their interviews. Additional participant details are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Multiracial Participant Background Information

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>General Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>
Uma	Early 30's	Okinawan, Irish American	Masters Degree
Shelly	Late 20's	Filipino-Chinese White American	Bachelors Degree
Paul	Early 30's	Japanese American and Ashkenazi Jewish	Masters Degree
Marina	Mid 20's	Japanese Irish Italian	Masters Degree
Joyce	Mid 20's	Japanese/ White American	Bachelors Degree
Avery	Early 20's	Chinese, English, Italian	Bachelors Degree
Frank	Early 20's	Korean	Bachelors Degree
Mona	Early 20's	Chinese White American	1-3 years of College
Kevin	Late 20's	Chinese White	Masters Degree
Helena	Early 20's	Indonesian, Chinese, Polish	Bachelors Degree



Table 2

Bisexual Participant Background Information

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>General Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>
Charles	Early 30's	Irish Lebanese	High School Diploma
Zoe	Late 20's	Italian, Jewish	Bachelors Degree
Jolie	Late 20's	Jewish	Masters Degree
Hannah	Early 30's	Jewish Eastern European	College Degree
Alex	Mid 20's	White American	Bachelors Degree
Kate	Early 30's	Italian American	Professional Degree
Janna	Early 30's	German	College Degree
Jessie	Early 30's	Polish	Professional Degree
Hazel	Mid 20's	Irish American	Masters Degree
Frances	Early 20's	American, Italian, French, Ukranian, and Norwegian	College Degree

## **Procedure**

### *Initial contact and interviewing*

Potential participants expressed interest in the study by email or phone. Referred participants were contacted email to establish interest. All who expressed interest were then contacted by phone or e-mail by the principle researcher of this study, who described the study, answered questions, and pre-screened individuals according to inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Appendix B -Prescreening Questions). Each potential participant was told that this was a study exploring the ways that socially negotiating either being bisexual or multiracial influences how they think and feel about themselves. The status was tailored to participants' own status. Participants were not told that both groups were being interviewed to ensure that individual interviews focused on exploration of the specific research question "How do experiences of socially negotiating an in-between ambiguous stigmatized identity influence one's identity development?" and not the sub-question, "what are the similarities and differences in these processes for multiracial and bisexual people?" Participants were informed that they would receive a \$15 gratuity for their participation in an individual interview and would be entered into a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate.

Individuals who met criteria and were interested in participating in the study were scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participant. Interviews were conducted in the participant homes or work-space, an office in Cambridge, or a meeting space in Boston. Individual interviews were audio recorded. Prior to the interview, participants were given an opportunity to review the consent form and ask questions

about the study, their participation, and the audio recording (see Appendix C – Informed Consent and Consent for Audio Recording of Interview). The participants were also informed that they could choose to withdraw from the study or halt the interview at any time without penalty and that they would still receive the \$15 gratuity for their time.

### *Sources of Data*

Sources of data included a demographics questionnaire from each participant (see Appendix D); one qualitative in-depth semi-structured open-ended interview for each participant lasting between 60-120 minutes, and a short debriefing from each participant after their interview. Demographic questionnaires inquired about information such as race, ethnicity, date of birth, sexual orientation, etc. This information acted as a second screen for inclusion and exclusion criteria as well as provided information that was useful for developing a context for each interviewee. Data collection was discontinued when themes arising from the data were well saturated, (i.e. current themes were well described and no new themes were arising in the data; Creswell, 2007).

Individual interviews were “conversations with a purpose” (Morrow, 2005) and were semi-structured, open-ended and flexible, following an emergent and inductive design. Aiming to gain depth of understanding of the unique and complex experiences of each participant, no two interviews were exactly the same but rather were guided by domains of inquiry to allow for rich in-depth description of the complexity of individual experiences, as well as for new meanings to be made (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005

Interviews began with broad questions that then funneled into more specific questions. Throughout each interview the interviewer asked additional questions to further explore or clarify participant experiences. Domains of inquiry included:

1) *Contextualizing current identifications and establishing a shared understanding:*

This part of the interview explored how the participant currently identified with regards to their in-between ambiguous status (multiracial or bisexual) and explored the meaning of that status for the individual. Questions addressed how participants understood and experienced their current identities with a focus on their in-between ambiguous identity and meanings of identity over time and in different contexts.

2) *Experiences of social negotiations* -The second domain of inquiry focused on participants' experiences of socially negotiating identity. Participants were invited to explore their perceptions of how others saw them and how others interacted with them in relation to their race or sexual orientation. They were asked to describe the choices they had made in these social experiences, as well as the influences on these choices.

3) *Effects of these experiences on identities* –The third domain of inquiry focused on exploring the effects that socially negotiating identity had on identity development. Participants were asked to explore and share from past, current, and anticipated future experiences the impacts social negotiation experiences had on identity choices, on the process of identity development, and on claiming identities internally and socially.

### *Debriefing*

At the completion of each interview, participants were asked to share any additional/relevant information or feedback and to reflect on their experience of participating in the study. Participants were also asked to share their experiences of having an interviewer who was either similar to them or different from them with relevance to the areas of inquiry being explored. Very few multiracial participants asked about my racial background and those who did indicated curiosity, rather than raising it as a problem or concern. When asked if it affected their comfort level in sharing their stories with me their responses across the board were “no”, and that they were happy I was interested in the topic either way. No bisexual participants asked about my sexual orientation.

Because participants may have felt more comfortable sharing their reflections in writing and/or may have thoughts about the experience over time, participants were given a card at the end of interview that included contact information for the study, welcomed additional thoughts, and thanked them again for their participation (see Appendix E – Debriefing Card). None of the participants contacted the interviewer after the interviews to share additional thoughts. Participants were also asked if they would be open to being contacted by e-mail or phone to potentially participate in future aspects of the study; for example member checks for reviewing the results. All participants agreed.

### *Confidentiality*

Interviews were transcribed and de-identified by the principle investigator and professional transcribers. Participants were assigned an ID number that was used to

identify demographic forms and interview transcriptions so that names were not linked with data. Consent forms were kept in a locked file cabinet separate from all other data collected. All hard copies of transcripts and demographic forms were stored in a locked file cabinet separate from the consent forms. Audio files were stored in a password protected file on a computer that was also password protected and were deleted after transcription. Transcriptions were also stored in a password protected file on a computer that was also password protected. Professional transcribers were bound by their code of ethics to confidentiality. Only members of the research team and professional transcribers had access to the data.

### *Verification*

In accordance with Morrow's (2005) recommendations for ensuring "trustworthiness" in qualitative research, several steps were taken to address issues of verification, (i.e. issues regarding the rigor and credibility of the study). Throughout the project, and particularly during axial coding, the researcher met with her dissertation advisor weekly. Additionally, peer debriefing and inquiry auditing served to monitor the trustworthiness of the project (Fassinger, 2005). Through internal peer debriefing I sought feedback and opinions of my mentor, the chair of my committee on this project. External peer debriefing came from feedback and opinions of the research team, a group of peers who are knowledgeable in related subject areas. Both external and internal peer debriefing were used in order to check and interrogate codes and emerging theory. This process of "auditing" also presented checks on the data collection and analyses through discussions that presented challenges to emerging theories, generation of greater depth,

complexity, and meaning to emerging themes. External auditing came from committee members: a clinical psychologist and a political scientist who were not actively engaged in the project but engaged in discussion and reviewed the project at different points in order to ensure the overall strength of the method and findings in relation to the field of Psychology. This process assisted the researcher in suspending or challenging her own beliefs in order to see what themes were emerging from the data itself. These verification techniques not only allowed the researcher to privilege participant voices but also served to help the researcher to become aware of biases that may be playing a role. Additional verification came from the participants themselves through member check discussions as described below. Feedback from the peer debriefing, auditing, and member checks were integrated into the analysis and final model.

#### *Member Checks*

Participants were invited by email to participate in an in-person group specific (multiracial or bisexual) member check to provide feedback on preliminary finding (see Appendix F). Due to participant travel and work schedules, an in person group member check was not possible. Instead, participants provided their feedback through email (5-multiracial; 5-bisexual), phone (1-multiracial), or in person (1-bisexual). Two multiracial participants and one bisexual participant did not respond to outreach asking if they would be interested in providing feedback on the preliminary results. One multiracial participant was traveling out of the country and was interested but could not respond due to electronic constraints and one multiracial participant had just returned from a trip abroad and though she/he expressed interest, he/she was not able to find time to provide

feedback. Three bisexual participants expressed interest but did not send feedback despite outreach. An email was sent out that included the research question, an overview of the findings accompanied by a visual model that described the process and emerging theory, and four questions. Questions included: (1) In what ways do you see your experience represented here? (2) What aspects of your experiences are represented here? (3) Are there things in this model that directly contradict your experiences? (4) Are there aspects of your experiences related to the research question (e.g. related to socially negotiating identity and the influences on in-between identity processes) that you feel are important and are not represented here? (5) Other Thoughts?

Overall, feedback was positive indicating from both groups that the emerging model depicting the process of social negotiation of socially ambiguous, in-between, stigmatized identity and influences on identity formation reflected their experiences. Participants from both groups described seeing their experiences in each of the three cycles with greater emphasis on one or two of the cycles in most cases. For example,

I strongly identified with the description of discrepant moments. I can relate to the feelings of frustration and increased identity salience. I also really relate to the use of signifiers to assert my identity (i.e. mentioning membership in a student organization or something about my family). ~Mona

I can't think of anything that was not represented in direct response to the research question. You very accurately represented my experiences in your response to your research question. Thanks for doing so! ~Jessie



While some participants shared that particular aspects of the model were not central to their personal experiences, no participants felt that any aspect of the model contradicted their experience. More general feedback was related to the relationship between the cycles and how people move through the cycles.

Participants from both groups had questions and comments about the relationship between the three cycles that emerged and movement between and across these cycles, believing initially that it was describing a linear process. This feedback helped the researcher to more clearly articulate the iterative and cyclical nature of these three cycles particularly in the write-up and the visual model.

## Data Analysis

### *Analysis- A Multi-Step Process*

Analysis approached the individual interviews as a whole, combining multiracial and bisexual group experiences, in order to develop a general model that described the processes by which socially negotiating in-between visibly ambiguous stigmatized identity influenced identity development (i.e. how a person thinks, feels, performs identity). Secondly, in order to address the sub-question: “What are the similarities and differences in these processes for multiracial and bisexual people?” codes, memos, and journaling were analyzed to explore identity specific themes. Data analysis followed a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2005; Creswell, 2007) where the researcher constantly compared themes as they arose across people and within individuals, while also moving back and forth between the data, coding, theorizing, and reflection, always staying close to, and being led by the data. In this way, analysis began the moment the

interviews began. After interviews the researcher recorded brief memos reflecting on the interview and initial observations and themes that came up in the interview at times, making connections to previous interviews and other times making note of her reactions and responses. The researcher conducted interviews throughout the beginning and middle stages of analysis making sure that themes were saturated before finalizing data collection. Throughout the data collection and analysis the researcher alternated between the two groups as she conducted interviews, read interviews, and analyzed interviews, always moving back and forth between the two groups to ensure that the emerging theory stayed close to the experiences of both multiracial people and bisexual people.

Analysis followed a multi-step process:

- Step one: Two to four interviews from each group were read to start the formal analysis and to allow the researcher to begin to become familiar with the participant stories from each group, to make note of emerging themes, and to memo preliminary thoughts, ideas, or concepts.
- Step two: Open coding began with a more formal coding process using the computer program NVivo, in which interviews were read line by line for emerging themes (Creswell, 2007). Initial open codes represented a combination of categories, (i.e. different types of contexts) and more conceptual codes, (i.e. social demands for identity categorization). As the number of codes increased the researcher took a step back to cluster similar codes under tree nodes (initial axial or categorical coding), a broader heading

that could encompass multiple types of codes, for example, the researcher created a tree node called context and then placed different types of context, family, friends, school, work under that node. The researcher also merged existing codes, pulling similar concepts into one code, for example moving a code such as, “perceived to be White” into the broader code “demands for categorization.” As themes continued to emerge and re-emerge, new codes were created and codes were refined.

- Step three: Axial coding began as codes increased and themes became more conceptually complex. Axial coding allowed for the conceptual organization of emerging codes that described the complexity of a larger phenomenon, making connections between categories and subcategories (Charmaz, 2000; Creswell, 2007). At this point the organization and relation of codes and themes into a visual model also began. As the emerging model was modified, so too did the Axial coding structure and so at several points during the data analysis the researcher stepped back to revise and rework and check the axial coding system to reflect the emerging model and ensure that the model was fully data grounded.
- Step four: Codes and themes were organized into a model to describe the experience of the process by which socially negotiating in-between ambiguous stigmatized identity influences identity development. An initial model was described looking across groups at the data as a whole.

- Step five: Throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the study the researcher documented (i.e. memoing and journaling) group specific themes and variations as they arose. After the initial model was described looking across the groups as a whole the researcher went back and analyzed those memos and journals. Additionally, she reviewed all codes developed from the shared data for, group imbalances and variations in the types of processes being described. For example, the researcher found that bisexual participants talked about romantic relationship as playing a central role in their social negotiation and performance processes whereas multiracial participants did not describe their romantic relationships as frequently or in the same ways. These group specific themes and variations were described in the final write up as the data indicated.

These steps were repeated until no new themes or insights emerged and “theoretical saturation” was reached (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). Themes or codes that did not appear to be central to the phenomenon being described were set aside temporarily. As themes and codes were constantly compared, codes that were set aside were constantly considered and reconsidered for integration into the emerging model. For example, themes related to gender did emerge within some of the interviews but through constant comparison, considering and reconsidering it became clear that the themes did not emerge as spontaneously central to the themes related to my research question, which suggested that these possible differences across gender would be a

different research question with a different interview focus (see discussion); therefore these themes are not represented in the model.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The present study explored how experiences of socially negotiating an in-between socially ambiguous stigmatized identity influences one's identity formation. A sub-question aimed at exploring variation related to specific identity referent: What are the similarities and differences in these processes for multiracial and bisexual people? In this study, social negotiations refer to responses to a social "demand" to fit into the socially dominant prescribed system of categorization *and* the decision making processes that ensue around these demands. Socially ambiguous identities refer to identities that are confusing or open to different interpretations by others, but not to the individuals themselves. Because current theoretical literature suggests that there is a shared social negotiation that multiracial and bisexual people experience due to their in-between status (Collins, 2000), both groups were included in hopes of deepening our understanding. However, it is important to also recognize that there are differences and variations in these processes that are specific to each group, which is the purpose of asking the sub-question.

This study focused on processes of social negotiation and identity processes post adolescence, during a developmental period of continued self-definition. This is a time not only when identity continues to be salient, but also when major role transitions occur as social worlds expand. The multiracial and bisexual participants in this study were between the ages of 20 and 36. All of them were either in college living in dorms or working and living in their own apartments either with roommates or partners. In this late adolescence/early adult developmental period, individuals begin to locate themselves socially and personally outside of their family environments and build new social contexts. Exposed to alternate worldviews, they apply acquired cognitive perspective taking skills and the ability to empathize, and find themselves working to integrate these new meanings and perspectives into their identities and sense of selves. This is a developmental period of “leaving the nest” and creating a sense of self, purpose, and relationships outside the family.

Findings from this study indicated that there are common central experiences related to social demands to negotiate stigmatized ambiguous identities and to fit into strict either/or categories. Findings also suggested that some of these experiences were unique within identities and communities related specifically to race and sexual orientation. Data analysis resulted in a theory describing three negotiation cycles and associated identity effects common to both kinds of identities, with additional identity specific (multiracial or bisexual) variations. Each cycle is influenced by, and influences, the others; Cycles were described by multiracial and bisexual participants as fluid, iterative, and interacting.

The model depicted in figure 1 describes the processes by which multiracial and bisexual participants socially negotiated in-between socially ambiguous stigmatized identities and the influences these negotiations had on identity formation. The first negotiation cycle is “Catalyzing Experiences.” In this cycle, multiracial and bisexual people were confronted with discrepant moments that catalyzed emotional and cognitive reactions of surprise and recognition of the need to address both the social demand for categorization and the questions about identity that these raise. The second negotiation cycle is “Active Negotiations,” where multiracial and bisexual people engaged in a process of reading their environments, seeking relevant social information and then entering into a decision making process around identity performances. They weighed their options related to claiming or performing identities (i.e. pass, cover, correct, or come out) recognizing the demand for social negotiations and motivations and goals related to identity performance. The third cycle is, “Emerging Sense of Agency through New Understandings, Perspectives, and Positive Experiences,” where multiracial and bisexual people began to search for new understandings through dialoguing, education etc. in order to gain new perspectives while simultaneously recognizing the greater social context influencing these demands for categorization and social negotiation. In this cycle, participants recognized that they had identity agency and choice, even within these social demands. All of these negotiation cycles influenced internal meaning making and experience of identity processes, which are depicted as circles in the center of each cycle. The boxes on the top of the model represent the relationship between internal and external influences. As participants moved through these different cycles the relationship



between external and internal influences on identity and the negotiation process itself underwent changes.

These social negotiation processes are recurrent and cyclical influenced by aspects of time, opportunities to practice, gained experience, and developmental aspects of getting older. Movement across and between these cycles is not linear, but is instead a cycling back and forth between, within, and across the different cycles. Responses to these discrepant social encounters may vary in type and magnitude depending on the novelty or familiarity of the discrepant social encounter. Similarly, negotiations and identity effects also vary with each new iteration. For example, discrepant social encounters that have been repeatedly experienced led to less intense reactions and/or reactions that “jump” to later cycles, illustrating the non-linear nature of the process. The arrows between the cycles and spiraling dashed circles attempt to capture this fluidity and cyclical nature.

### **Cycle 1: Catalyzing Experiences**

It was in my freshman year of college. Um, this Korean girl, um, thought I was completely white... I was just -- was shocked. I was just like, wondering if there were other Asian people who really thought I was just like, another white person.

~Joyce

But I think no matter where I go, I'm going to be assumed to be straight until I say otherwise. ~Hazel

The “Catalyzing Experiences,” cycle describes the demands external environments place on internal processes and the responses that ensue. Multiracial and

bisexual participants described a common initial social experience of misalignment between how they saw themselves and how others perceived them, referred to here as discrepant social encounters. Participant responses indicated an initial affective and cognitive response to these encounters, followed by a meaning making process and realization that they needed to respond in these exchanges. Identity effects and processes in this cycle were characterized by internal identity salience, questioning and uncertainty, and a desire to bring back identity equilibrium and alignment between self and other, represented by the identity effects circle in the middle. In this cycle, multiracial and bisexual individuals' identity negotiations were influenced more strongly by external demands that required an internal response and negotiation, illustrated in the model by the direction of the arrow in the top box from E (external) to I (internal).

#### *Discrepant Social Encounters*

Discrepant social encounters are times when other people interacting with multiracial and bisexual participants tried to (mis)categorize them, were confused, expressed disbelief, or made assumptions about them. Multiracial and bisexual participants described not initially thinking about their identities in the moment, but being called upon to respond to other people's confusion, thus making their identities suddenly salient. Multiracial and bisexual participants described discrepant social encounters happening most often with relative strangers such as store clerks, new social acquaintances, and fellow students. The nature of discrepant moments described by participants varied, and included confusion/questioning with others' acceptance once a category was claimed, continued challenging by others of either/or categorization, or

others' assumption of similarity which led participants to feel boxed in. The stories below from Avery, Zoe, Kate, and Mona provide examples.

Avery, a multiracial Chinese and White European American college student described going to the corner store to buy some alcohol and being met with confusion and questions by the store clerk.

He was carding me, he's looking at my license, he was like [Avery's last name]. Chinese? This is Chinese? Like he didn't even try to hide his confusion. He was like really confused. He looked at me, he looked down [at my name on my license], he looked at me, he was like, "you're Chinese?" I was like "yep."  
~Avery

In going to the store, Avery was not thinking about her racial identity, but it became salient because of the clerk's need to make sense of his confusion. Avery and her friends referred to these moments when someone was surprised and confused as "mixed moments." All participants, both bisexual and multiracial, described similar types of experiences, where others questioned their identities and became confused when their assumptions were challenged.

Sometimes, as in Avery story, these social encounters were simply questions or expressed surprise and ended once participants asserted their claimed identities. This was most common if the encounter involved a direct question. But discrepant social encounters also included experiences of inaccurate categorizations, where social others attempted to sort and organize participants according to simple either/or categories. For example, Zoe, a bisexual participant shared a story of going out on a date with a woman

only to find that the woman thought she was straight. Zoe was particularly surprised because she met this woman at a queer event.

Inaccurate assumptions may be categorizations into the dominant group category (as with Zoe and Avery above) or into the minority group category. Kate shared her experience from when she first started her graduate program of going to a social mixer where she was assumed to be lesbian.

Somebody asked me um what I missed most about [place] where I'd just moved from and my saying my girlfriend. And some woman like basically immediately claiming me as a friend essentially because, I mean she's a really nice person so I think she wanted to extend her friendship. But it was based on what I had just said. You know she made some comment like how I was a sister. And the assumption she was making was that I was a lesbian based on what I had said.

~Kate

Assumptions rather than questions, placed a demand on participants to decide what to do: correct or pass? Even when participants chose to correct and assert an identity that was different from the assumption, others sometimes reacted in ways that continued to challenge or discount participants' identity claims. For example, Mona shared a common experience of going to a party and meeting new people who questioned her identity; however, in this encounter she found herself pulling out a picture to show proof of her identity status.

I'll see somebody from my Chinese class and we'll like start talking Chinese and people will be like "oh, like you can speak Chinese?" And I'll say something

about “oh yeah, my mom’s family is from China” and they think that I’m just joking around. I’m like “no, no, she really is” and um the screensaver on my phone used to be me and my two parents. So I’d be like “oh look, see, you can see them” and I guess I’d like prove it that way. ~Mona

The kinds of discrepant experiences described above are experienced by participants as challenging their identities because they impose assumptions or draw boundaries around identities that feel foreign to the participant. But some discrepant experiences also included more explicit othering or the direct imposition of stigma upon either the chosen identity or the identity that was assumed. Jessie described an exchange where her friend applied explicit stereotypes to Jessie:

I was talking about dating women or having sex with women or something, and he was like, he called me an “experimentalist.” He said something like, "You experimentalists," blah blah blah. And it was so offensive, I was so offended. ~Jessie

In making this comment, Jessie’s friend suggested that she was somehow different from a “sexual norm” and marked her with stigma. At an extreme, participants described discrepant moments in which they experienced being a target of active discrimination, usually aimed at a status with which the participant did not identify or that highlighted the ambiguity. Shelly, who described that she was often perceived by others to be Asian or a person of color and not necessarily multiracial, shared her story:

I worked in a grocery store in [Southern U.S.A. state], and my dad came through my line.... And he [the boss] told my white father that he didn’t have to go

through the um the “nigger’s line.” And um and he [my dad] was like “you mean my daughter”? ~Shelly

Participants described discrepant social encounters not only with individuals, but also with groups. In these encounters, group members together established boundaries and status of belonging based on markers or cues, such as a particular style of dress or language, without directly addressing an individual. The establishment of group “norms” in a social context conveyed a clear message of where the group saw others, including the participant, relative to these boundaries. The discrepant aspect of this experience was being situated as either in or out by the group in ways that did not align with the participants’ own perceptions of where they saw themselves in relation to the group. For example, Zoe described her experience of feeling positioned outside of the group by her girlfriend’s lesbian friends:

And they were all sitting around talking about like, oh I wouldn’t be caught dead in a dress and da-da-da-da, and I would -- I was wearing a dress like when they were having this conversation. ~Zoe

Although Zoe described these friends as “butch,” she felt that they were drawing boundaries around the lesbian group that were meant to apply to her also. Zoe went on to say in the interview that this experience made her feel angry and frustrated and it made her question her desire to be connected with the lesbian community. Her perception of the enacted social and cultural biases made her question how she dressed and whether she would need to change her style of dress in order to feel included in this community and identity.

While most participants described discrepant social encounters with people, these moments also occurred in more structural and less interpersonal encounters, such as an interaction with forms that must be filled out or the experience of engaging in a workshop or diversity class exercise that did or could not take into account complex both/and identity statuses. Paul, a multiracial participant referred to his experiences with diversity workshops and the ways these workshops in general “were not working well for mixed participants.” Joyce, also multiracial remarked:

It's kinda weird to have to think about it, I guess. In general. And just like, when you're asked or you're given a form, and you actually have to think about it. Like, other people can just (snaps fingers) put something down, you know? And you actually have to think about it. ~Joyce

There were many different types of discrepant experiences that multiracial and bisexual people described. Regardless of the type of discrepant experience, participants described how the challenge to identity and demand for categorization instigated similar affective and cognitive responses. These responses are described in the next section of the catalyzing experiences cycle.

#### *Affective and Cognitive Response*

Multiracial and bisexual participants responded to discrepant social encounters with unprocessed emotional responses such as shock, surprise, or frustration. This was quickly followed by a series of internal questions and thoughts to try to make sense of the experience, for example “What just happened? Why did that happen? What do I do

now?” Although these were quick responses they also represented the surface of a complex interacting system with layers of meaning (see next section).

Paul described his response to attending a discussion among Japanese Americans that was about third generation Japanese American community issues only to find that the topic of discussion was about “the problem of outmarriage, and what was going to happen to the community”:

So, my friend and I were both kind of shocked, and I of course was taking it personally. Because they were talking about, you know, my father, my parents, my existence. ~ Paul

Paul quickly left this discussion, making a choice—whether conscious or not—to avoid the need to immediately and directly negotiate identity with these members of the Japanese American community. However, this did not enable Paul to avoid the internal negotiation and later negotiations with his parents when he told them about the experience and they questioned his choice to leave the discussion.

Jolie described her emotional response of general resentment to others’ misperceptions during her first experience dating a woman. Other people continued to perceive her to be in a straight relationship, due to her partner being mistaken for a man, and did not validate her internal experience of coming out:

I wanted people to know that she was a woman, because it was kind of this um, it was kind of like a coming out for me, because it was the first woman I had dated and um, and so I kind of resented the fact that people just, it was almost perceived as the same as my other relationships. ~Jolie



Others' views erroneously relegated Jolie, at least socially, into a dominant social status, which caused her to feel frustrated and not fully seen. If others had perceived her to be in a same sex relationship, it would still have been in error, but Jolie felt she would have been able to signal more fully her sexual orientation in this case, especially to those who knew her in relationships with men previously.

The kinds of responses that participants had to these discrepant social encounters varied depending on the context, others, and power dynamics involved. Frances, a bisexual woman, suggested that the sexual orientation of the person making a comment makes a difference in terms of how she experienced the comment. She described her surprise in response to an encounter she had with a friend of hers who identified as gay and was trying to convince her that she was "straight." She stated, "I was like, you're supposed to be more understanding than most people, why are you trying to convince me?" Similarly, Marina described that her response to others' contesting her identity varied depending on the race of the person with whom she was interacting. When it was an Asian person she said "I feel like I know where it's coming from," but when it was a White person making a comment she felt differently:

I was really surprised this time when a White student was saying like "oh no, you don't look Asian." Part of me wanted to be like "you don't know what the hell Asian people look like!" ~Marina

While new social experiences often brought new discrepant social encounters, multiracial and bisexual people also described experiencing the same type of discrepant social encounter over and over again. Depending on the context and the number of times

a type of discrepant moment was experienced, emotional reactions to these social encounters changed; thus responses were iterative and adjustments were made as people and their contexts changed. As individuals reacted to these experiences with emotion and questions they evoked a wish to make meaning of these experiences. This brings us to the next point in the cycle, in which multiracial and bisexual people began to make sense of these interactions.

### *Meaning making*

Meaning making was the process by which multiracial and bisexual participants took a step back and reflected on how others perceived them. They realized that there was a demand for identity negotiation and categorization, even when categories did not fit.

Sometimes taking a step back literally meant taking some time to process what happened, Zoe described being with a group of heterosexual friends who were talking about their relationship problems and making assumptions about her. She found herself reflecting on this experience:

When I first started dating my girlfriend, she has friends who are straight that are living with men, with male partners, right? And for most of my life, like that was me, I was girl dating a guy, living with a guy, and that's a big part of my experience, [but] it was assumed that I just couldn't relate to like, their relationship problems, or to -- you know what I mean? ...It felt like "oh, you don't really know because you're a lesbian, you don't know what it's like to live with a guy" and it's like "no, but I did that!" ...I think at the time it didn't seem

strange to me, and then I think it was through like, later on thinking about the conversation and thinking you know, that's not a fair reason to discount my experience. ~Zoe

Both multiracial and bisexual participants described reflecting on their experiences and responses. It was through this process that they started to become consciously aware of how others perceived them, the difficulty others had fitting them into categories and, ultimately, of the existence of the categorical structure itself.

That was starting to make me more aware of how people -- when I walk into a room, they're not seeing me as someone that's part of their group --for White people. Do you know what I mean? Well, when people of color were commenting on it, I'm like, "I wonder, then, how -- how White people have been perceiving me for all these years." You know? So that it started a conversation in my own head about it. ~Uma

Um, it's hard when, when I don't feel like I necessarily fit a stereotype for people, so they don't necessarily put me in that category just from seeing me or um, even knowing me a little bit. ~Jolie

It just reminds that like, you know? That some people look at me and wonder what I am, I guess. I don't, you know, I forget 'cause I just do my thing. And people know me who know me, and whatever. And strangers don't normally ask things. So, it kind of does remind me that I'm not like, clearly this or that.

Yeah.~Joyce

Multiracial and bisexual participants also described coming to recognize the social demand for negotiation. Jessie described her internal process in reaction to being called an “experimentalist,” (mentioned above):

I reacted so strongly internally. I had so many feelings and thoughts about it. It was so tumultuous for me, or um, it was so offensive and it rocked me, completely shook me ---- and so I thought about it a lot and had the internal dialogue of, what does this mean to me? Why is this affecting me so much? Why am I so upset by this? Um, is -- like, I recognize that's a stereotype. Am I upset because, um, because he -- exposed a stereotype or because -- do I think I fit a stereotype, or um, do I know that I don't fit a stereotype and that's why I don't like stereotypes? Um, do I agree with that stereotype, and if I do, what does that mean about me? I know I'm not an experimentalist, how -- so I know that about myself and -- so I know I don't -- that that's not a stereotype about -- that -- you know, that is right for me, but by putting that out there, is there something inherent in who I am that people will make those judgments? Uh, what do I do about all this?

~ Jessie

Participants were also able to begin to complicate their own understanding of the discrepant social encounters, acknowledging that others were not recognizing the complexity.

But it was more just like, like don't people realize what it means to be Asian, is way more complicated than like what they are looking for. And I just think it's interesting that like two people can look at me and like see different things um,

which I guess is why I always joke about being like ethnically ambiguous.

~Marina

*Variations in Catalyzing Experiences between Multiracial and Bisexual Participants*

While the experiences described above as the Catalyzing Experiences cycle were common to both multiracial and bisexual participants, some variations in specific types of experiences emerged. These differences were primarily related to the issue of visibility/invisible physical social ambiguity and to the multiple vs binary dominant categorization schema of race vs sexual orientation (respectively).

Shelly, who is Filipino, Chinese, and White, and identified as more culturally American, described the ways that her visible social ambiguity presented not only a challenge to others, but also a challenge to her because of the assumptions that others made. She was caught trying to explain why she looked the way she does but simultaneously found herself trying to also explain her group affiliation, which was not completely congruent with the explanation of her looks. There was not necessarily alignment between how others perceived her, how she described her identity in relation to her looks, and how she actually self identified.

I have to mention my (pause) my ethnic background, my Asian-Americanness because of the way I look. It's not like something um -- not like religion. Where you can (pause) if once it's out of the picture, like no one -- you know, I won't ask you what your religion is. Um because it's [religion] not something you could *see*. It's not a descriptive quality of you. Whereas being -- like I always have to say I'm Filipino Chinese no matter how not Filipino Chinese I am.....

Like I said, always have to, it always comes up, and it's not going to ever stop because as long as I look the way I do. ~Shelly

Bisexual participants, on the other hand, talked about the ways that sexuality can be very hidden. This is especially so in a culture such as the U.S. where sexuality is thought of as being a private aspect of one's personal life that in some cases should not be talked about. As a result, bisexual participants talked about feeling "invisible" especially when "straight appearing" because this relegated them into a dominant space where their sexuality was assumed to be in the dominant space.

Differences in visibility affected some of the types of discrepant moments that each group described. When multiracial participants talked about discrepant social encounters that involved assumptions, categorizations, and confusion based on their appearances these encounters were often not subtle and were more direct "what are you?" experiences. On the other hand, bisexual participants talked more frequently about discrepant social encounters that involved more subtle and less direct assumptions, categorizations, and confusions. For example, a social other assuming that because Zoe was dating a woman, she must be lesbian and conveying this in an indirect statement or action rather than asking her overtly.

The second area of major variation related to how socially dominant categories for sexual orientation are binary—either lesbian/gay or straight—while there are multiple categories of race. Bisexual participants had to be assumed to be either lesbian/gay or straight. Assumptions of one or the other left them having to choose to correct or to pass, negotiating the margins of the groups where they did feel some affinity or connection.

In contrast, multiracial participants were assumed to be White or minority, but not always Asian. Those who were assumed to be minorities also experienced being ascribed tertiary identities, such as Latina/o. Not only did they then have to negotiate being at the margins of their own reference groups but they were also negotiating being at the margins of groups to which they had no affinity. For example, Paul described navigating belonging and exclusion and ascribed identity to a group to which he had no affiliation but not to groups where he did have affiliation.

Some interesting experiences of people, particularly Latinos, um claiming me in a way that, I know a number of my friends have had this experience also, of being told you know, “you should be proud of your heritage, you should speak Spanish, you should—“ you know, and I’ll be like “I don’t speak much Spanish.” But that’s not because I’m Mexican and I’m ashamed of my heritage. It’s because I only took a few classes in Spanish, and I’m, you know, and then having these messages where people are like, you know, “you don’t have to lie to me.” Like “you could be proud to be--.” And having to-- so having people really be so disbelieving that I’m not a member of their group that they really kind of want to claim me and. And not having that happen in Japanese American spaces. ~ Paul

Most multiracial participants talked about these experiences of being assumed to be Latina/o or other tertiary racial identities. For example, Avery talked about assumptions others made that she was Hawaiian and the difficulty she faced when having to break this assumed connection:

Um, I sort of feel like I'm letting down -- , because when people come up to me like really excited, and they're -- they -- it's obvious they're from Hawaii, or Hawaiian themselves, and they want to, you know, be able to talk to someone about a home, or something, I don't know what it is, but, um, and so they ask me if I'm Hawaiian, expecting me to say yes, and then I have to say no, and I sort of feel sad. {laughter} I'm sort of letting them down. ~Avery

Although these group specific variations influenced some aspects of discrepant social encounters, responses to these encounters and the process of making meaning, the effects of the overall cycle on identities were similar: Multiracial and bisexual participants started to question themselves and feel uncertain about where they belonged (“other people don't see me as bi, so am I bi?” “Am I really Asian?”).

*Experiences of Identity: External and Internal Forces in Catalyzing Experiences*

In this first cycle, external forces affected internal processes through the demands for categorization and social negotiation brought on by the discrepant social encounters. These catalyzing experiences created identity salience and influenced participants' sense of themselves, frequently raising uncertainty and questioning of one's internal sense of felt identity.

Uma and Joyce, both multiracial women, articulated the ways that social interactions placed demands for categorization and in turn called for identity salience. For Uma, this was a reminder that she is not White. For Joyce it was a reminder that she is “other.”

Uh, there's a lot of curious people, that'll just blatantly ask like, “What are you?”



Uh, and then we'll go from there. But m-- I know my identity's not white any more. ~Uma

That's kind of, uh, an interest -- like, I don't know. 'Cause then it is, every time you have to identify as something, it's just a reminder that, "Oh, you're other."

You know, you're something other. ~ Joyce

In response to these external demands, participants started to question themselves and feel uncertain about where they belonged.

I mean it's not like, it's not like violent, it's not like huge, but it just like makes you -- for me it makes me question, like maybe I'm not bi, because maybe I am always looking for that external validation. ~Zoe

Zoe described the push, pull and shifting of balance between internal and external forces that characterized movement towards the second negotiation cycle of Active Negotiations. Similarly, Helena's experience showed how external categories could be limiting and exerted influence on the ways people identified themselves:

My high school was predominantly white and like maybe 30% Asian so there were two dominant racial groups in my high school and it would be difficult, you know, you're encouraged to fit in with someone in high school and I guess most of my friends were either white or Asian and I felt that I couldn't really be both since you're coded as something if you look a certain way and I identified as Asian. ~Helena

Both Avery and Frances also talked about the ways that socially negotiating demands for categorization made them start to question themselves and devalue their own

identities. They both found themselves trying to make sense of what it was about them that influenced these social discrepant moments.

Um, I get the impression that people don't see me as mixed, or bi-racial, as I identify. I think because people -- so I usually get -- if people try and guess what I am, I get like Hispanic, or, um, Polynesian, Hawaiian, or like Filipino. And, yeah, people are usually really surprised to hear that my dad's Chinese, or people will ask me like why is your skin so dark. Um, and, um, yeah, they're usually not likely to think that I'm like bi-racial, or anything like half-Asian. Um, and then some people just -- I think a lot of people just don't really think about it, and think I'm White. Because besides my looks and my skin tone, I don't really -- I feel like, like the way I dress or the way I act doesn't really shout a culture any more than like upper middle class American culture, you know? ~Avery

Avery went on to talk about feeling like her identity was not that interesting and wishing she *was* Hawaiian because "it's sort of more exotic more unique I think." Frances, a bisexual woman, found that she was often assumed to be lesbian and she then questioned what people were seeing in her.

Yeah, I got a couple people telling me that, and I'm really starting to wonder, what does that mean? I have yet to figure it out. Because I know that people that have said that, their general idea of a lesbian is like, a very butch girl, and I'm just like, I'm not that girl. ~Frances

In sum, in the Catalyzing Experiences cycle, multiracial and bisexual people come to recognize that other people have difficulty fitting them into categories and that

how they see themselves does not always align with how they are perceived by others. They emotionally react to these social encounters and begin to attempt making meaning of these experiences. A desire to bring back a sense of equilibrium between the external and internal pushes individuals into active negotiation.

### **Cycle 2: Active Negotiations**

So it's like, it's like I'm describing myself to someone and like choosing certain words in order to like communicate myself as best as possible. But it's like in choosing those words, I'm gonna make assumptions about the person that I'm talking to, in order that they will make the correct assumptions about me. ~Alex  
These are daily occurrences that I'm -- I'm taking in, processing, manipulating, and putting back out, as to what is OK for me -- you know what I mean  
(*interviewer: Yeah*), like I'm OK with the output. ~Uma

The "Active Negotiations" cycle focuses on the active push and pull between internal and external demands described by multiracial and bisexual participants. Participants spoke about reading their environments and then making choices about identity performances to either align their identities or challenge assumptions of social others; these processes are represented in the model by the circling arrows. After choices were made and the interactions were over participants described continuous negotiations returning to the first cycle, where they experienced affective/cognitive reactions and meaning making. Or they might find themselves entering into the third cycle, beginning to make sense of their experiences through learning and perspective taking through dialoguing and seeking new understandings and then entering back into active

negotiations. Actively negotiating choices around identity performances contributed to continuing identity salience, shown in the circles in the middle. Other identity effects included questioning belonging and sometimes resisting demands. Though identity negotiations are influenced by demands for categorization and assumptions from others in this cycle, participants' identity negotiations are also influencing these processes reciprocally through active choices around identity performance, illustrated in the model by the direction of the arrow in the top boxes from E (external) to I (internal) *and* I to E.

### *Reading the Environment*

Reading the environment was a process through which participants gathered social information about context, tried to determine what the social expectations were, and anticipated what kinds of responses they might encounter from the specific others in these contexts. Both bisexual and multiracial participants described an awareness of being very socially conscious and actively reading social cues such as tone of voice, how questions were phrased, what was *not* said, and who was doing the asking.

Who I'm talking to, whether they're just curious why I look the way I do, or whether they just want to know what, like culture I come from, like, you know, what my home is like, or, you know, differently. You can sort of tell why -- whether people are just curious, just for the sake of being curious, or whether they like actually want to know what my past is like or something. ~Avery

So it wasn't anything like blatant or anyone saying anything, but it just kind of felt like I wanted to be able to bring that part of myself, and it wasn't -- no one

asked, no one wanted to -- you know what I mean? ~Zoe

Sometimes the cues were messages embedded in the content or context, subtle remarks, or even the absence of remarks that, to the multiracial or bisexual person, conveyed a very clear message. For example, Paul described attending a Japanese American event with his uncle and cousin where he felt, “there was very much kind of a sense of what it meant to be Japanese American” to the event and speeches that seemed to “lay out a very centralized sense of what it means to be a member of the group.” The sense conveyed did not feel inclusive of his experience as a multiracial, Japanese American and White European American person. He described this as “upsetting” and found himself censoring himself when talking to the couple next to him because of his perceptions of the context. Similarly, Kate, a bisexual woman, also described a particular awareness of her surroundings:

I’m also always thinking unconsciously but you know, nevertheless that, or not always unconsciously but, you know, that I can reveal certain parts of my sexuality in certain situations and I can’t in others. And the rules aren’t standardized. I’m kind of constantly reading other people and situations just to like try to read the level of acceptability of queer stuff you know – ~Kate

Another component of reading environment was evaluating what kind of people were present, particularly in relation to whether there was a shared experience of the salient identity on the oppressed “side” of the ambiguous identity and whether there was a potential for enacted stigmatizing or discrimination.

I just remember being like, you know, I don't know you, I'm not going to have this conversation with you [the tattoo artist] or something....I just felt like I was in this tattoo parlor with like, all these straight dudes who were going to put like a needle on me. So I was just kind of like ---Yeah, so it was just like eh, I'm just not going talk about how gay I am. ~Charles

Charles questioned his decision during the interview but also acknowledged the reasons for the choice he did make. He shared that he did not feel safe being vulnerable and sharing the complexity of his identity in this situation not knowing the identities of the people involved. Had he known that the tattoo artist was gay, which he later found out, he suggested he might have made a different decision. We can see here the ways that one can return to past decisions to make meaning and to gain perspective.

Through reading their environments multiracial and bisexual individuals gathered important information about their social encounters and their contexts. Furthermore, reading environment involved not only tapping into observation skills but also tuning into nuanced aspects of the direction and flow of the conversation in order to anticipate responses. Anticipating responses was the process by which multiracial and bisexual participants inferred and predicted possible social outcomes based on their read of environmental cues, knowledge of social and cultural variables, and past experiences.

Like, I'm already anticipating (*inaudible ??waiting for them to??*) say it out loud.

I know it's coming, and it always does. Like "are you Chinese? You Filipino?

What are you,?"~ Shelly

And it makes a certain, like, it, situations, a little bit easier, to know exactly how everybody else feels about things, or, you know, how they react in certain situations, so it [analyzing the situation] would make it easier for me to react, and adjust what I say, or whatnot. ~Frances

I answer the question “What are you?” biracial, multiracial. But I think people usually -- that ask me in person, I think they really want to know like, more than biracial and multiracial. So I also tell them what, 'cause I'm sure that'll be the next question. ~Joyce

Reading the environment and anticipating responses helped participants make choices about how they wanted to respond or perform their identity in social interactions given their goals.

#### *Identity Performances: Making Active Choices to Meet Goals*

After reading the environment, multiracial and bisexual participants described making and enacting conscious choices about how they presented themselves and their identities in different interpersonal contexts. For example, participants described adjusting hair, dress, ways of presenting affiliation, language, etc., as conscious choices with attention to context and awareness of the expectations of others. Some examples include:

When I was in Japan in January, I straightened my hair a lot more, just because it feels easier. Because I will fit in more than if I have curly hair, because somehow that makes me look more Asian, ~Marina

I've been wearing blazers, I think that makes me look a little gay. ~Zoe

I was for a little while being a little bit girlier, just to counteract any stereotypes, to like, avoid them, just not have them happen. ~Frances

Being involved in [multiracial student organization], obviously, is one way for me to kind of work that [my multiracial identity] into a conversation because people are always like, “Oh, what have you been up to?” I’m like, “Oh, I’m at a Hapa thing.” “What’s that?” “Oh it’s Half Asian People’s Association.” ~Avery

If she [her Asian mother] will bring me and then like I’m attached to her, I’ll go. And people are like, “Oh, OK. She is Asian. She’s -- she’s bona fide Asian.” Because I’m attached to her. Um, I wouldn’t show up by myself, though -- at this point. ~Uma

In relation to influences on identity development, what was most striking about participants’ descriptions of performing identity was their conscious awareness of the process through which they made active choices and their awareness of the choices they were making. These active choices were informed by their readings of the environment, and shaped by a process of initial internal reflection focused on figuring out what was the best course of action and engaging in a risk- benefits analysis in order to make a decision. The answer to the question “what do I want to do?” was evaluated in light of the questions “what is the context?” and “what kind of response will this action get from others in this context?”

For example, Paul was attending a Japanese American event with his uncle and



cousin as described above and realized that he was in a context that may not welcome or be aware of multiracial experiences. In this context, he described his process of making decisions about his actions:

And so I got to talking with um --pause) with the Japanese American couple that was sitting next to us about some of the work that I do [related to multiracial experiences], and really noticed that I was trying to figure out how do I broach the subject with someone who probably has these prejudices? So how do I kind of say, like, "I'm studying the fact that you're prejudiced"? ~Paul

Similarly, Charles shared his decision process about disclosing that he had a girlfriend and the social effects this could have in different social situations.

And so I really have to gauge who I'm talking to and then like what kind of interaction I want to have with them, and if my interactions -- like if I say that I have a girlfriend, how it's going to affect what kind of relationship I'm going to have with that person. Then I have to gauge when it's worth it. ~ Charles

Some participants described choosing very different performances related to different contexts and variables that would, in their view, affect others' responses. For example Zoe chose to adjust her style of dress according to whether she was with her girlfriend, who acted as a signifier, or not.

when I'm going out with her, like I do tend to like, such a stereotype but like wear lipstick, or wear heels. And part of it's like, I want her to be attracted to me, right, and I know she's attracted to me when I wear those things, or whatever. But I

think also being with her makes me feel more confident that I can be really like stereotypical feminine. Because like, I have this like clearly lesbian on my arm, you know, and so I don't lose any of my identity by wearing heels. Whereas if I'm going out just with my friends, or like by myself -- I do tend to wear like sneakers and flannels and (laughter) which is so silly but it's like a little bit like, I don't have her as my like gay indicator, so I need to do something else. ~Zoe

Thus, participants' choices were shaped not only by their goals, but also by the context and situations they were in and how others would be likely to view their actions. Zoe, for example, talked earlier about lesbian friends who were talking about wearing a dress as a symbol of not belonging and how uncomfortable she felt in that situation. Given this experience, being with her girlfriend might not always mean that Zoe would dress more stereotypically feminine or that she wouldn't question what she wears because there were always other contextual factors to consider.

While initial performances may not be fully thought out, the repetitive nature of discrepant social encounters provided ample opportunity to ponder, question, and plan; to negotiate and renegotiate identities and performances. Thus, some performances were described as more raw and immediate, somewhat "trial and error" while others were enacted with greater forethought and choice, especially when encountering a familiar discrepant moment. Over time, some participants came to accept that their performance of their identities would always be contextual, even if their self-identification and felt identity was more integrative and consistent. Hannah, a bisexual participant, referred to herself as a social chameleon and said "I think it [identity performances], um, it will tend

to vary depending on the setting I'm in." Frank, a multiracial participant talked about choices related to "putting on different" hats depending on where he was and where he was going.

And now I think eventually through those experiences, it -- it really -- I take it almost case by case basis. Like, you know, if I'm going to meet, I guess, you know, my Korean friends and their parents for dinner, whatever, [my] Korean hat goes on by far. But if it's just my friend and I hanging out, you know, it's, whatever, you know? *[Interviewer: Yeah].* Throw on my American hat. ~Frank

### *Motivations*

The other major question affecting multiracial and bisexual participants' choice process and performance of identity was "What is my goal?" Participants' descriptions made it clear that this question always interacted with their observations, and understanding of the social context and related to the different types of responses that might ensue. Participants were aware that different performances would elicit different responses from others, given the social understandings of identity categories. They described their performance choices related to motivations to align internal and external experiences of self, to confuse or muddle or disrupt the anticipated assumptions, to protect the individual or other, and/or to connect or disconnect from a group or individuals.

*Identity Assertion: Being seen as I want to be seen.*

In addition to affective reactions, discrepant moments led to multiracial and bisexual participants' understanding that they were often not perceived or categorized in

ways that were consistent with how they would categorize themselves. As a result there was a motivation to assert identities through their performances in order to be seen how they wanted to be seen. For example, Jessie recognized that she was perceived to be straight by others, which motivated a desire to find ways to counteract this perception. Because she was not sure how to do this in different contexts, she played out a couple scenarios in her mind.

And, it's interesting now that I think about it, I think a big part of my solidification of my identity-- my identity was being in a long-term relationship when I was 20 with a man and realizing that I was perceived to be straight --and really not enjoying that --but also not knowing how to counteract that. Like I wanted to scream out, like wear a sign or something, just so you know, "I'm not straight." I'm in a monogamous heterosexual relationship, but I'm not straight. ~  
Jessie

Zoe, described earlier, continued to talk about the ways her girlfriend can be a signifier for her and described the relationship between perceptions of self and other. Her described performance and social negotiations were an effort to align internal and external experiences of self and perceptions of self from others.

I think it's because I feel like most people perceive me as straight and so, if I'm not with -- you know, not like holding hands with a girl, then most people just assume I'm straight and so I feel like I constantly have to be saying things or sort of dropping hints, you know what I mean? Um, otherwise I won't be seen how I want to be seen. If that makes sense. ~Zoe

Similarly, in Mona's interview she described dropping hints and making references to her Chinese mother when she was in Asian spaces in order to signal her Chinese heritage. Like Zoe she attempted to assert her identity more fully than others might initially perceive.

I'm like psychoanalyzing myself -- but I don't know if it's a subconscious thing that you know I want to assert that I'm not just a random white person interested in China. Like I have this family connection to it and this significance that's more than just "oh it's a cool place." ~Mona

Uma, whose father is White and looks very different from her, found it particularly upsetting when she was assumed to be his wife or girlfriend rather than his daughter, illustrating the multiple contextual variables that can contribute to the complexity of being seen. She talked about being very conscious to refer to him as "Dad" in a loud voice when out at restaurants. Sometimes, in other contexts she was more blatant:

When I went to buy a car. I brought my father to look at the car. I -- Uh, they're like, "Oh, so --" The guy said something. Um, I don't remember, um, the words he used. But it was like, "Are you guys buying this together as, uh, --?" so-- referring to as a couple. And I looked at him and I was like, "You know, you probably, in this line of business, shouldn't make assumptions like that." I'm like, "That's my father. So that's why we have the same last name!" ~Uma

One of the major ways to address the motivation of being seen as one wanted to be seen was through negotiating and choosing identity labels. Multiracial and bisexual participants all described making active choices about labels and language. They

described trying out different labels to evoke different responses as a means of performing and communicating identity. In social contexts this always took into account definitions likely to be held by the social other. Labels represented an interface between external and internal understandings of identity as well as a way for participants to communicate and align meanings. Adjusting labels to match shifting understandings and meanings became a strategy used by both multiracial and bisexual individuals both in reaction to and in anticipation of social interactions.

Alex described the ways that label choice was not necessarily about finding a label that best defined her but instead finding a label where the meanings and understandings for that label would be understood by the social other in a way that would matched more closely her perception of herself.

It's not necessarily always about what word best describes me. It's more or like in part about what word best is going to like elicit the appropriate reaction in whoever I'm talking to. So it's like, you know like the goal, the aim for me is to like be able to describe myself in a way that the other person is gonna know what I'm saying, and is going to like have an accurate picture. And so, like, what picture of, like, what I'm describing. Like if I'm, you know, picture of my sexual identity in this case. Um, so to some extent, you know like that's gonna change depending on who you're talking to. If the goal is to like communicate something, who you're communicating with is gonna change like what words you're gonna use and how you're gonna say it and stuff. ~Alex

Paul described choosing different labels in different contexts to describe his identity and that his choices to elaborate or increase complexity related to his level of perceived acceptance in a situation. He went further to suggest that these were not just adjustments related to trying to belong but also active decisions related to with whom he wanted to demonstrate affiliation.

Um... yeah, and in some cases, I think it's more or less important for me to put forward certain things like if I'm in (pause) an Asian American group, and I feel like I can kind of (pause) I feel like it's kind of being accepted that I'm Asian. Then I can come and specify oh, you know, I'm Japanese American. Or other cases like I may just kind of just specify like I'm Asian American. Um... yeah. So depending on kind of with whom I'm identifying and, you know-- who I want to identify with me. ~Paul

Zoe discussed how anticipating responses affected her choice of labels in social interactions as a way of actively negotiating internal and external meanings. She went on to detail why she didn't like the label "bisexual," a sentiment shared by many bisexual participants:

I just hear so many people [say] that like, bisexual's not a real thing. Bisexual's either like a stepping stone to being actually gay and you're just not ready to make that leap yet, or for women I think, especially like women that don't look gay, it's just like you're experimenting. And I really don't want to be thought of that way, so I think that's why I don't use it. ~Zoe

*Rejecting assumed categorization and diffusing responsibility for negotiating assumptions.*

Multiracial and bisexual participants also described choices around identity performance motivated by a desire to confuse or muddle or disrupt anticipated assumptions. They described pushing boundaries, not wanting to just follow the “norm” or what was going to create an alignment with others’ assumptions and perceptions. For example, Jolie described making choices about identity performances in order to disrupt the social order of things, sometimes pushing people to think outside of their boxes. In this way, she shifted the social responsibility of negotiating the weight of assumed categories that don’t fit from resting solely on her, choosing instead to share this social negotiation with those making assumptions rather than manage it on her own.

I used to waitress, in North Carolina, and there was this just big table I was waiting on and it was this family. And the dad was trying to like set me up with his son and it was really awkward. Um, and like at one point I just said something like, and they were like this southern family, and I said something like you know, "What makes you think I'm interested in men?" And he was like, I mean the whole family like erupted in laughter. They were just so like thrown off. But, I don't know, just stuff like that, I feel like I like to sometimes mess with people, just get them to think outside the box a little bit more. ~Jolie

Similarly, after Uma’s experience with the car salesman described above she explained her motivation to her father, “I’m not comfortable. I’m going to make them uncomfortable. This -- this is not appropriate!” She recognized that making a choice to



assert her identity functioned as a way to shift the discomfort off of her and onto someone else, while also challenging the social assumptions made.

Uma also talked about adjusting identity performances through her behavior and affect in order to affect how others categorized her and to reject and challenge assumptions they made about her. She talked about knowing how to “be extremely White,” when she wanted to be or when it would serve her, for example when trying to make a group of White people comfortable at a work meeting.

And I can be extremely White. Um, I can, you know, bamboozle anyone into thinking that I’m just a very exotic Italian. ~Uma

*Self-Protection.*

Choices around identity performances were also motivated by a goal of self-protection. Participants recognized that there were times when they did not want to be known, or when they did not want to deal with questions or challenges from others and so they would do things, or sometimes do nothing, in order to minimize these types of interactions.

Marina, talked above about making decisions about whether to wear her hair curly or straight depending on the day and the context. She went on to describe how these choices were motivated by a desire to avoid questions and to protect herself.

I think because it [wearing my hair straight] felt more casual and comfortable, it felt like I could just kind of push back a little, or I felt like I could insert myself in the conversation, versus someone being like “oh, well you don't look that way,” and like really dissecting you. I don't feel like I can like jump into that

conversation and like be comfortable. I feel like I have to like protect myself or defend myself, whereas like I think if someone's like "oh, I thought you looked like you're from here, I thought you [were]"-- then I feel like that's like a conversation I can have. ~ Marina

Sometimes multiracial and bisexual participants chose a particular strategy simply because it was less effortful and avoided questions and "isms". For example, Mona, a multiracial participant stated in her member check: "I have found it is sometimes easier to just not protest and let others define me as they are inclined to." Similarly, Frances, reflected that she sometimes chose to say that she's straight even though that was not how she identified.

It makes for a quick answer. And less questions, no funny looks, no nothing. No one's going to look at you weird if you say you're straight. People's opinions of you can change if you say something else. ~Frances

For other participants, the choice to perform identity by passing or covering--toning down one's identity--was a means of managing the perceptions of others in order to maintain a needed sense of identity stability:

Right, right. And that it might be -- that might be part -- another part of the reasons why I don't go to all of these like queer advocacy groups and stuff, and I'm not really like loud and out about that, because, like, would that mean, to people that I'm -- I'm trying to take on too much of the new identity. ~Hazel

Hazel described throughout her interview her determination not to have others perceive her as being changed or different from who she was before being in a queer-gendered

relationship. She was constantly thinking about identity performance choices as ways to signal that she was the same person in order to help her to manage the effect of other peoples' responses. She stated that if other people saw her as different, this might mean that she *was* different when she did not want to see herself that way.

*Creating belonging and avoiding exclusion.*

Multiracial and bisexual participants also talked about desires to belong to the larger communities or groups, particularly of their marginalized statuses (gay/lesbian/queer or Asian/person of color), and the challenges presented due to visible appearance and fears of not being perceived to be legitimate members. They also talked about desires to avoid group exclusion. Motivations for belonging and avoiding exclusion thus coincided with motivations for self-protection. As a result, multiracial and bisexual participants chose to perform identity in order to be seen, known, and accepted into these groups rather than contested, to convey their position relative to group margins and centers, *and* to do this in a way that also balanced motivations related to preserving one's sense of self. They navigated boundaries by sometimes staying within the margins but sometimes making choices to more actively create affiliation or distance. For example, Marina, a multiracial participant, talked above about wearing her hair straight rather than curly particularly in Asian spaces, not only to avoid negative responses and questions about not being Asian with curly hair, but also because she desired to be considered an "insider." She said "I feel more comfortable and I can just like, I'm less likely to look like an outsider."

But for some participants having a physical appearance that signaled group membership was uncomfortable because it conveyed a status closer to the center of what it means to be a part of the group than what felt genuinely comfortable to the individual. Shelly described that she was often assumed to be Asian but that she did not possess cultural knowledge of her Asian heritage. She anticipated that once this was discovered she would be pushed out to the margins, no longer accepted as an insider. As a result she often used humor to convey her position in relation to a group boundary of inclusion or exclusion, using that to convey a partial claim and to position herself before being pushed out. But she was also using humor to protect herself from embarrassment or criticism for not possessing the knowledge she felt went along with their assumptions.

But um (pause) that was (pause) it -- I think mostly because of the food and the language that we didn't know. Um and now um (pause) I feel like I always have to be, like, jokingly owning it, that I'm not Asian, to um (pause) to negotiate through these experiences. So what -- so I'm not you know, feeling alone or sad in a room with the -- a bunch of Asian people. ~Shelly

Shelly chose to define herself rather than let the group define her. This was a defensive self-protective action in reaction to an anticipated encounter with border patrolling by the members of the group rather than a proactive assertion of where she sees herself relative to that boundary.

Sometimes participants made choices not to join or take part in certain opportunities because they did not want to face the possibility of not belonging and

having to perform, perhaps in vain, for inclusion. These choices also coincided with desires to self protect from embarrassment or having to explain oneself:

But at the same time, I knew that I was Japanese American, I knew I was Asian American, and part of the concern was not wanting to be in a space where I would again, be-- have to kind of authenticate myself and um (pause) and argue for my inclusion. Um, and part of it was feeling inauthentic. Would I be Asian American enough? Would I be conversant in issues? If it was about, you know, my group do I know enough about my group for it not to be embarrassing for me? ~Paul  
I don't always feel totally comfortable going into the situation [queer spaces], um, because I, because of like I said before, just the perception of me [that she appears straight and is dating a man], and I almost feel like I have to explain myself a little bit more. So um, and I think there is a perception of like you know, that doesn't see bisexuality as a legitimate identity. ~Jolie

*Interacting Motivations.*

Sometimes participants experienced conflicting motivations that would then need to be balanced against each other and decisions made to honor both or prioritize one over another. Frequently participants weighed motivations for belonging against motivations to be fully seen or to perform the entirety of one's in-between identity. Zoe, a bisexual participant, considered her choices about performing identity, choosing relationships, and the intersection of these in terms of the gender of the person she chose to date. She concluded that having a sense of belonging and a connection to the community would likely be more important to her than dating a man. She therefore self-constrained her

relationships and performance to lesbian relationships, even as she maintained an identity as bisexual.

I think it would be maybe make it even feel like it's not worth it to date a man, even if I really liked him because I wouldn't be able to be a part of a community that I've really come to feel included, you know, and feel a part of, I guess. ~Zoe

On the other hand Kevin, a multiracial participant, balanced belonging against being seen or performing as he saw himself, and prioritized the latter. He recognized that his choice to perform according to how he saw himself meant that he might not be included in the Asian or multiracial group and this was a loss he was willing to take:

I mean, uh, there's no doubt that it -- it [not following group norms] will hurt my chances to join the established group, and things like that, and, uh, that -- that -- that's certainly a cost that you bear. But I think that there are other doors that open. ~Kevin

Similarly, Hannah described not feeling included in a queer community because of her more “straight” appearance:

I felt like it was, you were supposed to be androgynous or butch, you know. And yeah. [Interviewer: *And if you weren't --?*] You weren't queer.

In choosing how to perform, Hannah described that she actively chose not to change her hair or style of dress despite this observation because it would have been changing who she was. Like Kevin, she initially chose to prioritize performing her identity in the way that felt most congruent to her self, rather than meeting the criteria set by the group for belonging. However, she eventually met both goals, by moving and finding a more

inclusive queer community that felt more welcoming of her as she saw and experienced herself.

Kevin also found a way to honor his desire to belong and to present himself as he saw himself. He alluded to finding ways to perform in social contexts that did not fully conform to group norms but did not completely challenge or reject them either.

I have a fairly rebellious personality, some --- to some extent, and, um, um, I just -- I don't know, I don't -- I don't know, I kind of -- I kind of enjoy the -- the -- the -- the rebellion, I think, in some ways, to those things. To just be appealing enough, but at the same time, also do my own thing, my way. I k-- I kind of relish that. ~Kevin

#### *Continuous Negotiations and Effort*

Participants described how performing identity by making and evaluating active choices to meet various goals in relation to demands for categorization is a constant and effortful process. This process appeared to become a part of what it means to be multiracial or bisexual whether it was conscious or not:

And so yeah, I think it -- it leaves me -- I feel like I'm always constantly negotiating what I can say to people and how I say it to them and what kind of relationship I want to have with them, and so what I'm saying in relation to them. ~ Charles

Related to the continuous nature of these experiences, participants also talked about how exhausting it is to be “on” in this way all the time. Marina (a multiracial

participant), like many other participants in this study, shared her wish not to have to always be so consciously aware of her surroundings and interactions.

Yeah. Yeah I -- yeah it's -- I defini -- like I, sometimes I wish I didn't have to be conscious about it, but I -- I'm not like every moment conscious about it, but I am conscious. Like today I'm wearing my hair curly. I know that means, you know, that means I'll be perceived differently um, or and if I wear my hair straight.

~Marina

Part of seeing the emotional drain and constancy of these experiences was contrasting these experiences to being in spaces where they did not have to be “on.” Both multiracial and bisexual participants talked about spaces in their lives where they can “just be” and how important these spaces are for them. For some it was a positive and inclusive experience in a particular city, or spending time with friends when you don’t feel you have to perform. Janna, a bisexual woman, talked about finding a community in the past couple of years where she could “breathe,” being accepted for all of whom she was. While for others, like Marina, it was the comfort of a relationship and being known rather than questioned that enabled her to feel relaxed and accepted.

Right. I think it's really like malleable, depending on my situation and depending who. Right, it's like I'm responding to wherever I am, whereas like if I'm in the comfort of my home or with my boyfriend it's just not there. I think that's just kind of like yeah, and that's kind of why I think I feel so comfortable that my boyfriend never engages me in it. I just -- he just like -- I'm not forced to define it,



based off what he's like projecting. It's like when you go into a place and you assess, and then I don't feel that way with him. ~Marina

These continuous and effortful negotiation processes are also iterative.

Participants described moving through this cycle of active choice and then moving between cycles, at times reflecting and making meaning and at other times connecting and gain perspective. Participants described that, as they established communities and places of belonging, their worlds became more predictable. Demands for identity performances and social negotiation processes seemed to lessen because individuals were known in their communities. However, with any life change—a move to a new city, a change of job, graduation from college—participants described how they once again found themselves confronted with social demands and situations that called for identity negotiations. With experience, however, these negotiations may become easier because, as Hazel suggested, the iterative cycles built off of previous experiences.

Hmm. Figuring out what has worked best in the past? {laughter} Like, figuring out what felt more comfortable in the past, and I don't know if I have words to further define it than that, just kind of like, I think it's, again, like a lived experience. Like, the more I kind of talk about things, the more I can be comfortable with them, the more I can feel like I can be more succinct about it. Um, in ways that I didn't know before. Um, so I just think that practice -- practice. ~Hazel

*Variations in negotiation processes specific to each group in Active Negotiations*

Both multiracial and bisexual participants made active decisions about identity performances, with similar goals. However, while there was a shared experience in these decisions and negotiation processes, there were also variations and unique factors that emerged. These variations were related to: (1) the ways in which race is visible and constructed as essential within the person versus sexual orientation which is invisible and constructed as a choice or as defined by the nature of the intimate relationship; (2) differences in what are seen as valid claims or “proof” of one’s identity related to these different constructions; and (3) stigma specifically applied to the in-between ambiguous identity differentially applied due to these different constructions.

Because race is usually visible and is colloquially defined as immutable in relation to one’s (biological) parents, multiracial participants described negotiating social demands related to visible markers reactively from very early ages. They did not necessarily look like either of their parents and social others called attention to this in various ways. Uma talked about times when her father picked her up at school and was asked for his identification to verify if she was really his daughter. Shelly talked about going through the drive through at a restaurant and someone asking if she and her brother were her parent’s children, others talked about being asked why they were so tan or if they were adopted.

In contrast, sexual orientation is not defined as inherently visible and is often constructed as a choice or matter of choice or defined by the dichotomous gender assigned to one’s intimate partner. Bisexual participants described negotiating social demands more proactively later in life when faced with decisions to “come out” related to

challenging the assumption of heterosexuality that was enabled by the invisibility. In this cycle, the invisibility characteristic of bisexuality related to participants' fear about what would happen if others found out, relating to questions such as "will I be treated differently?" For bisexual participants, these fears and questions were a part of the active negotiation process, influencing how environments were read and how choices were made about performing identity. For example, Hazel described the challenge of using pronouns to describe her relationship with her partner who identified as queer-gendered.

Even at work, um, like I say he. I use the word partner, but now, the word partner, also, you know, could mean anything. [*Interviewer: Right*]. Um, and I say he. So to people that don't know, kind of, my story, or know a little bit of background about my relationship, or about [partner's name], I think [they] just automatically assume it's a straight relationship. And I have this huge fear all the time of what it would mean [if they knew]. So it feels hidden, in a way, um, of what it would mean for them to just see [partner's name] at a work party or something like that, and what would go through their heads.~Hazel

Furthermore, because bisexual identities are believed to be mutable rather than constructed as immutable and a part of ones (biological) essence, when participants "came out" or were "found out" they described how they were then perceived by others to be different or changed from who they once were:

I'm self-conscious about it now in a way that I wasn't before, because now it's like I'll do things, and I'll be like oh, everyone thinks I'm doing it because I'm

dating a woman now. Um, but I feel like I would have done it if I was dating a man, too, you know? ~Zoe

This experience, or the anticipation that it might happen, affected the process of making choices about and performing identity, as illustrated by Hazel's story of choosing not to be "loud" about her involvement with queer groups.

The construction of race as visible and immutable versus sexual orientation as invisible and related to choice or relationship status creates differences related to the criteria for "valid" membership in the overarching minority referent groups (LGBT/queer, Asian or People of Color). Bisexual participants described how the validity of their identity was frequently assumed or ascribed by social others in relation to the people with whom they were having intimate relationships. In contrast, multiracial people did not discuss direct challenges to the validity of their identity claims based on race, but there were challenges experienced related to the confounding of race and ethnicity.

Bisexual participants described often being assumed to be heterosexual or lesbian based on the gender of their love object or past love objects. The awareness of this assumption interacted with choices about performing identity and appearing "straight" or not, as Alex described:

If I'm straight appearing, and at the time, don't have any kind of lived experience to validate this identity, or this -- these labels that might fit with me, or jive with me. [*Interviewer: Yeah.*] Then why am I there? And that's the fear that was kind

of, you know what I mean? [*Interviewer: Yeah.*] Like, this person doesn't appear queer, and doesn't have any like lived experiences. Why is she here? ~Alex

Kate shared that she would feel more comfortable entering queer spaces accompanied by a woman, because others would be more likely to accept the validity of her identity.

Um it also gives that sense of proof that I don't really think you should have to have. But like you know it's proof that you're sort of putting your money where your mouth is in a sense like --that you're living your uh identity I guess. Yeah so you know I've definitely felt more confident in those moments yeah. ~Kate

Relationships were perceived to be markers of performance whether they were meant to be or not. Kate who was dating a man and a woman at the same time and although she remarked that she did not believe she should have to have proof, she realized during the interview that she was using the gender of her partners to describe her sexual orientation.

It's interesting that I'm using, like, the gender of other people to describe my own sexual preference. You know, I mean that's not I guess an intrinsically bad thing but it does feel a little odd to, you know, have other people um that responsible for my self identity.~Kate

Bisexual participants sometimes made active choices about how they would perform their identities through their relationships or relationship choices. Zoe described above her feeling that she would choose not to date a man because she would no longer be accepted in the LGBT community. Alex talked about the choice to be in an "open" relationship (not monogamous) as a way of understanding and performing her sexual orientation because she was more actively enacting her attractions:

I think that that [being in an open or non-monogamous relationship] has changed to some extent, or like deepened the way I think about bisexuality, because it's like for the first time, I am actively like in the same moment attracted to both a man and a woman. ~Alex

Jolie, on the other hand found herself wondering how to perform being both bisexual and monogamous at the same time, given the perception that bisexual identity related to relationship behaviors.

Because I'd like to be in a long-term relationship ultimately, and I went through a lot of um, back and forth about, well how could I be monogamous if I'm interested in both men and women.

Furthermore, bisexual participants' described not feeling fully seen in some social contexts because others only saw the gender of their current relationships. For example, Zoe, who was dating a woman at the time of the interview shared what she thought would happen if she brought a man home to her family:

They'd be like oh, thank god that's over, you know? And like to me, it's not over, it's still a part of me, I might date a woman again, and they -- like I'd have to do this again, you know? *[Interviewer: Go through this all over again.]* Right.

And it would be like, you're still not seeing me, like you, you know? ~Zoe

Other participants also described understandings that they were seen as essentially changed based on the people whom they love. Hazel described feeling like her relationship acted as a marker for her identity but in reality, "I don't feel changed at all. But other people are going to think I'm changed." Charles similarly described, "I feel

like what the world is seeing or like my outside actions [in a long-term relationship with a woman] are different, but I don't think I'm like a different [person]." Thus, bisexual participants' choices about and performances of their bisexual identities were frequently intertwined with their choices about and performances of their intimate relationships.

In contrast, multiracial people did not spontaneously discuss relationships in these ways. Although multiracial people may also be affected by the status of their partners, the lack of spontaneous discussion of the role of partners in these interviews focused on social negotiations suggested that the influence of partners was not as central multiracial participants as it was for bisexual people in their interactions with others about their identity for. Furthermore, multiracial participants can (and did) point to their parent's as visible or tangible proof of their status, whereas bisexual people do not have this tangible evidence.

However, while multiracial participants did not talk about validity and proof in the context of relationships the topic of validity did come up in the context of knowing particular cultural markers or language and group belonging. This represented another variation that raised identity salience and the need for performance choice. While bisexual participants did make occasional references to assumptions related to cultural knowledge—for example, being assumed to know how to use a strap-on because of having had sex with men—the knowledge was attributed to known experiences, rather than related to status assumption. In addition, the rarity of these comments suggests that cultural knowledge was not central to their experiences in the same way that multiracial participants described. Multiracial participants talked about intersections between their

Asian heritage, their nationality, identity performances and other people's assumptions.

Frank, for example, shared during the member check:

When my employer sees my overseas Korean status on my visa, which makes them obligated to automatically assume that I will do everything 100% in a Korean manner. This is not the case. ~Frank

He also talked about confronting expectations in his interview that because he was perceived to be Asian and specifically Korean, members of his Korean family imposed expectations that he should possess certain cultural knowledge. He also shared his internalization of this expectation.

And, you know, my aunt's, like, "Oh, are you gonna start studying Korean some more?" I was, like, "Yes, Auntie. I'll study it." And, you know, it's, uh -- For me, it's almost like a little embarrassing that I don't speak Korean well. ~ Frank

Even when cultural assumptions were not made explicit participants, having internalized these expectations, described active internal negotiations. Joyce, for example, described her hesitation when asked by her boss to start an Asian staff and faculty group:

I was a little hesitant, too, because I don't feel like -- I didn't grow up in a whole, like a fully Asian household. Or I didn't come from like, an Asian country, and whatever. So, and I didn't speak an Asian language, and all those other things.

~Joyce

Avery described the way that context and language affected her sense of feeling Chinese compounded by not looking Chinese.



Well, when I'm with people who are really Chinese, like straight from China, I don't feel Chinese, because I don't speak the language, um, and because they sort of look at me and are like, you don't look Chinese. ~Avery

Avery went on to suggest that possessing culture and language could validate her Chinese identity to others.

Um, my brother -- because he studied -- he studied for a semester in Beijing, and he spoke -- he was almost, not fluent, but he could get around, like, you know, he could read, and write, and speak Chinese, which is way more than I can do, um, I sort of envy him of that. I sort of wish that I had that experience, and I could claim that too. Um, and because of that, I sort of feel like I'm less Chinese than he is in some way. ~Avery

Multiracial participants talked about cultural knowledge as a factor that could either draw greater connections or highlight existing disconnections from others. In this way possessing cultural knowledge and language sometimes acted as a way to perform identity. Kevin described using his cultural knowledge and language skills to perform his Asian identity and negotiate these boundaries of belonging.

So, for me, I -- you know, um, I don't really have much of a problem with the Asian American community that I think has more of that connection, who can respect that the race dimension isn't anywhere near as important as the sort of cultural fluency and -- and the ability to, um, communicate and understand (inaudible).~ Kevin

Kevin attributed his cultural knowledge and language abilities as a reason why others in the Asian American community were more accepting. Shelly's experience was less positive. She stated that her mother, who was Filipino Chinese, did not share or teach her Filipino Chinese culture or language. Shelly wished that her mother had taught her these things because when she was with other Asians "I get treated as if I'm not in [a part of the Filipino or Chinese group]. These experiences of being treated this way resulted in her feeling disconnected from the Filipino and Chinese communities.

And we -- me and my brother grew up wanting to know, but never being -- knowing enough about how to be the right kind of Filipino or Chinese. Um (pause) so eventually, we've come to -- like we've really identified with Hapa. That's something we very much feel -- feel like that's something we have to be because we're not anything enough.~Shelly

These negotiations and performances also intersected with assumptions related to nationality, related to how race, rather than sexual orientation, is constructed. Joyce described meeting the wife of a monoracial Japanese friend from Japan and finding herself unable to perform identity in a way that would convince the other person of the validity of her Japanese identity:

This woman, she was excited to meet me. And you know, um, and we were good friends at the time. But she was like, over, you know, over -- there were multiple times when she would like, start talking about like, a food or something. And like, my mom never taught me names of things...I think she was just a little -- I think

she (laughs) had obvious -- [name] had expectations... I think she just forgets that I'm Amer -- I'm American, you know? ~Joyce

A final variation in the Active Negotiations cycle is related to the social negotiation of labels. This variation also, seemed related to the ways in which sexual orientation versus racial identity are constructed. Both multiracial and bisexual participants described making active choices about identity labels in order to assert a chosen identity, challenge assumptions, or address issues of belonging or exclusion. For example, Shelly described choosing labels such as “Filipino Chinese and White” versus “Hapa,” depending on how well she knew a person and depending on how the person she was talking to identified. Both also described choosing identity labels at different times to protect themselves from rejection or general discrimination based on race or sexual orientation.

However, bisexual participants described specific stigma related to the label “bisexual” from both the dominant straight community and the gay and lesbian community. Therefore, bisexual participants described rejecting or distancing themselves from labels like “bisexual” because of social interactions that demonstrated that this in-between ambiguous identity label was associated with specific negative stereotypes and stigma such as experimentalist, just a phase, or just wanting to “fuck everyone.”

In contrast, multiracial participants acknowledged that there were stereotypes related to multiracial identities but they did not describe experiencing these multiracial-specific stereotypes in their social encounters, nor did they seem to actively carry the

legacy of them into these interactions. They did not describe actively rejecting or distancing themselves from the general label “multiracial.”

*Experiences of Identity: External and Internal Forces in Active Negotiations*

In this cycle, participants experienced their in-between identities as salient because of external social demands, responding to or anticipating these demands, and continuous attention necessary to actively negotiate these demands through identity performance choices. Constantly being conscious of one’s surroundings and adjusting according to different contexts affected participants’ individual identity experiences. Rather than feeling whole and cohesive they found themselves feeling caught in-between their own and group meanings, trying to navigate group boundaries that seemed to demand leaving parts of their identities hidden in different contexts. For example, Kate, a bisexual participant, described:

And you know all of my groups since have been fairly well mixed. But --I don’t know. I do feel sort of halved in a way um like pulled in two directions. Um maybe it’s because I feel like I’m always censoring one half of myself in a way.  
~Kate

While Mona, a multiracial participant, described:

And I think that, I don’t know if in the future I will be more like, just like the amalgamation instead of like the two halves, but for now at least I am mostly -- like sometimes I think about that, but I pretty much just identify as like the two separate pieces, but I do recognize that they’re never separate. ~Mona

Navigating group boundaries and experiencing demands from one's own reference groups led participants to try to find other ways of belonging to categorical groups or feeling positively about their position within the group. For example, by using one's cultural knowledge as we saw in Kevin's case:

But, you know, you live and you learn, and, you know, uh, yeah. Certainly I don't, you know, I feel that sometimes being mixed, you take it from both sides, you know, the sort of Asians, you know, kind of don't really include you as much, and then the White kids don't necessarily include you as much. But then, I look at, you know, some of the Asian Americans, and they don't really have the cultural connection. A lot of them don't really speak their own home language; their mother language, let's say. And then there's, like, a one-upsmanship, you know?

~Kevin

Other participants described attempting to create new reference group or shape their identities in ways that were not primarily in response to group assumptions or categorical demands. Shelly described that this negotiation experience and not belonging to either the White or Filipino or Chinese group pushed her and her brother to identify as Hapa. "like we've really identified with Hapa. That's something we very much feel -- feel like that's something we have to be because we're not anything enough." Similarly, Hazel described:

Yes, exactly, I'm trying to hold on to both [straight and queer identities], and I'm constantly feeling like it doesn't matter what [identity] choice I make, like, because the outside world is going to pit me on one or the other, and I don't want

to -- I don't want to feel that way. I don't want to feel like I'm part of the queer community or the straight community. I want to just be me, and find language that feels like it's OK to fit with that, you know. So what does it mean? What -- what would I need to do, or how would I have to identify to still be me, and still be both? ~Hazel

Hazel went on to talk about her choice to identify as fluid instead of queer, gay, or bi in order to describe an experience rather than be part of a binary system of categorization.

For some multiracial and bisexual participants, having to respond and socially negotiate demands from others actually strengthened and solidified their sense of their own identities. Jessie, a bisexual participant, described above, her desire to find ways to contradict perceptions of others and talked about her wish to wear a sign or holler "I'm not straight!" She felt these experiences made her identity both more salient and more central: "I think that helped me become stronger, I think-- in my identity and want to even, um, I don't know, do more to bring it out." Marina had a similar experience where her desire not to be defined by others led her to define herself and assert her position in the group.

I guess just this like OK fine, you think I look this way, you think I look this way, like, just, like, I don't think it's -- I just think it's not that simple. Not that it's like a complex thing we have to like -- I don't want to like get into the like the complexities of it, but I just think that it's -- you can't define. Like I don't want to be defined um, necessarily. I just want people, like I'm part Japanese, so this is

what it looks like. There is no question that it doesn't look like, this is what it looks like.~Marina

Frank, on the other hand, appeared determined to accept that his identity was defined by the experience of being in-between, recognizing that he will always be negotiating his identities.

I think I've just kind of grown to accept the fact that, you know, there's always gonna be an identity struggle -- whether I label myself as a Asian or a human being or a Korean. And it's gonna be dependent on the situation, you know? And I think my state of mental gridlock right now is just being able to accept that fact and not try to be one thing all the time. ~ Frank

As participants engaged in the cycle of active negotiations, they continued to encounter new discrepant social interactions and Catalyzing Experiences as in Cycle 1. However, they also began to build a foundation of experiences, reflections, and relationships that, cumulatively, contributed to including in their negotiation processes a third cycle of new understandings, perspectives, and positive experiences.

### **Cycle 3: Emerging Sense of Agency through New Understandings, Perspectives, and Positive Experiences**

I feel like there are other people who may have shared a similar experience to me in some way, maybe even if not all of them in the [multiracial] club, at least some of them had a similar path to identity that I have and it's just nice to have people that you can share something with in common. ~Helena

I feel like the theme is that I've been really protective of the space that I keep with people, um, in order to maintain a healthy like self-confidence and that I've internalized it enough where it [narrow mindedness, heterosexism] doesn't really affect me when I'm in other spaces, unless I'm there too long. (laughter) ~Hannah

In this cycle, multiracial and bisexual participants talked about moving from a period of active negotiation to a cycle characterized more by consolidating new understandings and perspectives. They began to shape their identities more from who they felt themselves to be and who they wanted to be, while also recognizing the influence and effects of external demands. New understandings and perspectives increased identity agency, represented by the central circle. Multiracial and bisexual participants began to recognize that identity negotiations were not a one-way street, where they were the passive targets of demands. They began to realize that through identity negotiations they had the power to change or influence the discrepant social encounters, and had choice about how they internalized and negotiated identity salience and integration. Thus, in this cycle, participants' identity negotiations more actively influenced the external demands that required an internal response and negotiation, illustrated in the model by the direction of the arrow in the bottom boxes from I (internal) to E (external).

#### *Gaining New Understanding*

In this cycle, multiracial and bisexual participants actively sought new conceptual understandings about their experiences outside of social interactions. They described seeking out friends with whom to talk and critically examine experiences; finding or



creating inclusive communities; and a variety of formal and informal educational strategies for understanding, including taking classes, reading, or actively choosing related research projects in their studies. New understandings helped multiracial and bisexual participants to step out and examine their personal experiences in relation to broader social meanings.

Having others to talk to, whether those others identified similarly or differently, appeared to allow multiracial and bisexual participants a space to not only vent about their experiences but also to make connections with others and to take a step back and locate these experiences outside of themselves. For example, Marina, who is multiracial and described her roommates and friends as coming from varied backgrounds, shared that having space where there was a level of comfort and knowability was helpful.

I do rehash it with people I feel comfortable with, like friends, or maybe I'll come home with my roommates and be like "ahh, Blabla and Blablabla were like debating the way I looked in my face today" and you know, my roommates will be sympathetic. They'll be like "oh that's so dumb." ~Marina

Multiracial and bisexual participants also described the particular importance of reflecting on their negotiation experiences and identities with people who had similar experiences and identities. For example, Joyce, who identified as multiracial, said:

It's just nice to hear other people share similar stories. And knowing that you -- other people have kinda -- are going through the same thing that I'm experiencing now, and stuff.~Joyce

These opportunities provided validation as well as insights into unique aspects of negotiating in-between identities, as Zoe explained:

I had just recently come out, and she was like the first person I had talked to that identified as bisexual, not as a lesbian, not as a gay man, but bisexual. And it was just like, things that I had been experiencing with my girlfriend having, like, a little bit of, like she had some biphobia and was saying some things that didn't feel very good, and my friends were maybe questioning whether or not I was actually bi, or gay, or straight, or what was going on with me, and my family -- you know so it was just like really nice to have someone that was also bisexual and was like talking about experiences that felt really similar to the experiences that I had been going through in the recent months. ~Zoe

For some individuals, finding like others (e.g. other bisexual or multiracial people) was something that was wished for but difficult to achieve.

I sort of wished there was some kind of bi community maybe or something or more solidarity within (laughs) our community, just because um, it almost seems like we're just sort of isolated in different places, and there isn't as much working together, you know issues....and I think it would be really, it would be really positive if there was some community in some way to kind of bring together all of the different um, yeah, just bring people together who identify as bi. So that um, we don't feel marginalized within both (laughs) communities. There's someplace for us. Yeah, yeah, and I know there are, there are groups, and there you know I think places in the queer community for us. But maybe not enough. ~Jolie

Participants also recognized that dialoguing in spaces where multiracial and bisexual identities may be contested was also important and an active strategy for creating more inclusive spaces. In this way, participants recognized the role of actively working to shape new understandings at the group level and form secure bases. Paul suggested that the task is not just finding, but also *creating* comfortable spaces as an active and proactive process.

I think that that ability to have a conversation about things is part of what makes it feel safer, and more comfortable, and more like I could be belonging there. Cause even if-- even if we disagree about things, part of it was that it was contested, and then it could be talked about... And-- and to kind of-- through talking about them-- define the shape of things. Um, and part of the shape of things has to do with the shape of what it means to be kind of a member of the [Asian] group. ~Paul

Having experiences of being accepted by and feeling known to others and building and being a part of inclusive communities contributed to multiracial and bisexual participants' feelings of validation and stability. Having this solid base from which to navigate allowed them the emotional space to pursue new understandings and to gain new perspectives. Mona and Janna described the ways they carried their felt acceptance and belonging with them across contexts.

I think that now, even if the group of Asian people that I'm with, if they don't know me and they don't know that I'm half Asian, I think that I usually now definitely feel a lot more comfortable about it than I did awhile ago and I think that part of that is because now I have a group of half Asian friends and Asian

friends and I know that they know I'm Asian and they accept me and sort of that solidarity kind of stays with me, even when they're not physically there. ~Mona  
I just -- it's like, having enough experience of being accepted, and I carry that with me.~Hannah

Another strategy for gaining new understandings was through education.

Multiracial and bisexual participants described activities such as participating in a study, reading, participating in workshops, and taking classes. Participants described engaging in these strategies both to learn about others and to connect with one's own experiences through other sources. For example, Uma shared her experience of being assumed to be "Eskimo" or to come from other indigenous cultures. Her response to these experiences was to start reading and to "research it further" trying to "find out why people think it" and why people perceived her in the ways they did. She came to understand the history of colonization in the Asian country where her mother's family was from and as a result was able to situate the discrepant social encounters she was experiencing as related to social history. She stated in her interview after describing this realization, "So it makes sense that I would look indigenous."

A number of multiracial and bisexual participants also actively chose to study topics related to multiraciality or bisexuality in their undergraduate and graduate education. As Kate suggested, this was not only a way to increase understanding of a particular topic but also a good way for her to see her own experience reflected and validated:

Um well it's always, I think, reassuring to find out that other people feel the same

way that you do about things. Um and I mean maybe that has some -- to some degree driven my choice to study bisexuality because I wanted to, you know read accounts of it that resonated with me personally. ~Kate

Hazel reflected on how her past educational exposure to concepts related to her identity helped her to make sense of herself in her current context, also illustrating the effects of seeking out knowledge and gaining understanding.

So those -- having those -- exposure to those ideas -- Like, if I'm given a certain concept to make sense of how I'm feeling, that makes me feel better, and my education has allowed me exposure to these concepts in a way that I don't think I would have before. ~Hazel

Like Uma, Kate, and Hazel, Avery articulated the ways that new understandings contributed to change and her own growth in terms of how she viewed her own identity. Her education in sociology at school and being involved in the multiracial student group on campus expanded her understanding of herself as situated in a larger racial social context.

Um, I guess [thinking about] it sort of does make me realize how much I've changed, and how my perspective has changed. Um, and yeah, I guess now just putting words to it, I sort of see what the difference is. It's before, I was Hapa, and I was half-Chinese, but it wasn't a race -- you know, it wasn't a thing. I keep saying a thing, you know, it wasn't a big deal, I guess, to me before. ~Avery

Avery's reflection also illustrated the ways that acquiring new understandings played a key role in applying perspective taking.

### *Perspective Taking*

The ability to take and to understand different perspectives came from acquired new understandings from social interactions and education. Multiracial and bisexual individuals started to look outside of themselves at the larger social context that surrounded the discrepant social encounters and active negotiation processes they experienced. There were several factors that contributed to participants expanding worldviews, including empathy, opportunities to gain experience and to draw from this experience. Multiracial and bisexual participants came to recognize that other's views were less important, and they came to be able to understand where others were coming from.

The passing of time provided more experience and therefore more information to draw from when trying to make meaning of experiences and integrate experiences of active negotiations into identity. Participants stated that the views of others felt less important as they got older. Kevin, a multiracial participant and Janna, a bisexual participant, articulated the theme common to many participants: the more time that passed, the more experiences they had that helped them make sense of their identities independently of others' imposed assumptions.

The older I get, I think the more comfortable I am in having a more, you know, unfixed, nuanced type of [multiracial] identity. ~Kevin

Um, and I think, in general, just as I got more, um, life under my belt, like, it became less important to project the image to people that they were expecting.

~Janna

Both Kevin and Janna later went on to talk about coming to claim their identities as a choice that was theirs to make rather than something imposed or demanded. Similarly, Jessie described settling into herself, shifting her focus to reflecting on who she wanted to be, rather than responding so intensely to what others wanted her to be.

Partly just, um, like me coming into being comfortable with who I am. And I think when I was younger I was, um, provocative and reactionary and, um, would want to say things or put things out that would be, I don't know, sensational or something. Or put things out in a sensational way, whereas now -- so I had kind of a fuck it attitude then is how I thought about it in my head, and now my fuck it attitude is just, well, this is who I am. ~Jessie

Perspective taking also appeared to be influenced by growing awareness of other people's intentions as multiracial and bisexual participants described an increasing ability to see social interactions as the result of other people's limitations, rather than their own. Participants like Jolie, and Hannah described coming to recognize that people responded and behaved differently depending on their experiences. They came to have greater empathy for the people they came into contact with.

I think I was a little bit disappointed in, in some of the people in my life, just because I, I guess for me it was so obvious. It was um, it wasn't that now I wasn't interested in men, it was just that I could be interested in a whole number of different people. And I guess it just seemed so obvious to me, because that's just how I felt. And so sort of a shock when I realized, OK, the people in my life don't understand that. And I think now, looking back, I mean it's been several years and

I think now I can understand a little bit more that people have a narrower perspective and they may not, may not have had these experiences. I've always been attracted to both men and women, so to me I guess I kind of take it for granted. But most people have a hard time just being in that gray -- or not gray, but not sort of the norm of just being interested in one gender, so. It was hard, yeah. ~Jolie

There's been a lot of strides in my lifetime alone, so...You know, I can always just look at it in that way, and you know, it's often like a generation older than me, lesbians who are just like -- who don't know what to do with bi and trans and stuff. ~Hannah

Jolie and Hannah began to see that their experiences were not the only experiences and that their worldviews were not necessarily shared worldviews. The recognition that there were other worldviews awakened a sense of issues being greater than the individual, encompassing a history and a society.

In addition, perspective taking and recognizing other people's worldviews also involved developing empathy. As participants learned more about experiences of multiracial and bisexual people from sources other than their own social negotiations, they also learned more about the viewpoints of others similar to the people in their own lives who were imposing categorization demands. Helena described coming to see pieces of her mother's experience through talking with her multiracial friends who also had White mothers, and through learning more about race in her college classes. As a result, she described developing increased perspective surrounding their relationship, which



enabled her to access empathy for her mother's experience of being White and having a multiracial child who looked different from her.

Yeah, especially my mom because she is white. And I understand it's difficult [for my mother]. I mean, speaking to other biracial students, a lot of my friends here are biracial or multiracial, it's hard especially for White mothers to understand the multiracial experience if their children look so different from them. ~Helena

Participants' descriptions indicated that previous cycles of negotiation contributed to the ability to gain perspective about how and why others make categorical demands, and about the shared experiences of negotiating these demands. This greater perspective enabled multiracial and bisexual participants to locate their experiences contextually, socially, and historically, which allowed greater distance and perspective on their own experiences, as well as empathy for the experiences of and others. These broadening perspectives increased identity agency and helped to consolidate identities.

*Variations in negotiation processes specific to each group in Emerging Sense of Agency*

*New Understandings, Perspectives and Positive Experiences*

In this cycle multiracial and bisexual participants described processes of gaining knowledge and perspective-taking that influenced identity choice. Both multiracial and bisexual participants described coming to a point of consolidating identity based on their own volition rather than following the dictates of society. While these processes were similar in that they involved seeking new understandings and perspective taking there were also variations in the negotiation processes in this cycle, as there were in the earlier cycles, related to relationships and associated visibility.

Bisexual participants talked about questioning identity and the ways that identity consolidation changed with relationships. One aspect was wondering whether they would change or give up what were now consolidated identities if their relationships changed. For example, Hannah wondered if she would abandon her lesbian relationship and her bisexual identity if the stakes were high enough, for example she referenced “repression” and “the death penalty” in other countries.

I feel like queer women's spaces or LBT spaces is my community and yet I walk around the world and am perceived as straight, so -- and there's -- like, there is a real privilege to that and I just sometimes think, like, if um, that's the point that I would -- (cough) -- like, politically if it got really heated or something, you know, would I -- would I abandon? You know, queerness? Mhm. Yeah. Yeah, and I just -- (sigh) -- I think sometimes being bisexual I think of myself as an ally to lesbia-- you know, like I'm in solidarity and I am in a relationship with a woman, in a serious relationship with a woman, you know, and I just -- I don't know. There's -- there's a way that it feels different because I do have that choice, you know?

~Hannah

Jolie also raised questions related to choice and questions related to whether she abandoned the gay community by choosing to be with a man.

But I have felt it over the years, like I'm kind of abandoning that community or like you know, I know there's resentment from um, you know the gay and lesbian -- there are some parts of the gay and lesbian community who like have some resentment towards bisexual people, because they think we have the ability to

pick and choose, and you know be oppressed or not be oppressed, depending on our mood or whatever... So I'm kind of stuck, you know, I mean I think I've sort of come to terms with it a little bit, that I'm happy in this relationship and that I um, I don't really need to question it as much. So I think maybe it's a little hard to talk about it, because it's like bringing up some of that stuff. But I mean I still feel, I feel good about the decision to be with him. But, but there is always that question about, I mean there's always a question, is it the right person. Doesn't matter if there man or woman. But then there is that other element of you know did I give it enough of a try. Maybe I would've been happier with a woman. Who knows?

Jolie appeared sad as she talked in her interview and wondered if she had given up a part of herself by being with a man. In contrast, multiracial participants did not question their identities in these ways, nor did they raise the issue of choice related to abandoning identity in this way.

Multiracial participants, on the other hand, talked about wanting to recognize and claim both “halves” of their identities equally. Uma described the challenges of consolidating identity when trying to honor or recognize equally her rich heritage from each parent.

My mother's in a box. My father's in a box. So everything they've done, they could use as an identifier. So my mother's done something. This is an Asian-American woman. My father's done something. This is a white male. So, uh, I never wanted to negate either one of them. So that's a struggle that I have with the

identity. [Interviewer: Yeah.] Like which --? It's not that one's more important than the other. It's just that what -- Uh, I'm only half of each, so I don't have that box. ~Uma

Avery described working to consciously emphasize her White side as well as her Asian side.

And also actually, I've become more aware about how I talk about my mom's side, because I used to sort of just say, and I still do, like you probably heard that I just say sort of half-Chinese, and I never really say the other half. And I think a lot of my mixed and bi-racial friends have sort of taught me that like, her half matters too, and, um, I should say like, what both halves [Interviewer: Yeah.] And not just sort of throw away the other half. ~Avery

These consolidating identity choices and experiences that multiracial and bisexual participants described will be further explored below.

*Experiences of Identity and External and Internal Forces in Emerging Sense of Agency*

*New Understandings, Perspectives and Positive Experiences*

Gaining new understandings and perspectives allowed multiracial and bisexual participants to begin to see themselves, others, and their experiences through new lenses and to consider their identities within a broader social framework. This expanding perspective, accompanied by finding one's places (e.g. time with like others and inclusive communities), increased participant identity agency. Multiracial and bisexual participants began to effect change in their own lives and in the lives of others.

Identity agency was the primary characteristic of identity development in this cycle. Identity agency encompasses how multiracial and bisexual participants described an increased sense of power to claim and create their own identities and to be agents of change on external factors influencing their own identities, the identities of others, and the greater social context. For example, Mona a multiracial participant, described her recognition of the power she held to affect how others see her. Part of this process involved putting herself in the shoes of the other in order to understand the other's perspective of her, harkening back to the Active Negotiations cycle, but with a new perspective and associated motivation of affecting the perceptions and constructions of others.

I mean I think that sometimes if I want to exert a certain influence on how other people perceive me, I guess that has to be based on how I perceive them to be perceiving me. ~Mona

Participants in this cycle were no longer just reacting to social demands but started to consider how to respond *and* affect others. New understandings provided a broad base of knowledge to draw from, enabling multiracial and bisexual participants to step out of their own affective reactions to make sense of their experiences contextually. They acquired new perspectives seeing the social roles of the different players. They recognized that these are social demands situated within hierarchies of power where dominant groups attempted to push out or "other" non-dominant groups. Having experienced these dynamics first hand they began to make choices in order to consolidate their identities and take actions in order to keep themselves and others from having to

engage these negative experiences. Uma described increasing identity agency and these cycling processes:

And where I am now and how much it's out like floodgates is an indicator to me that I'm starting to get actively ready to move to the next step, to continue to work on it [identity]. Because it needs to come out, so I can own it and to con-- not control it but that I can embody it and use it again. Because every t-- I think what I also heard too, and a theme coming out of what I said, is a lot of these experience that I didn't even think of, individually, as doing anything, collectively over time has been -- Uh, I've taken one experience, then I'll react differently the next time, and no--I wasn't know-- I wasn't so cognizant of that, that, you know, one thing would happen three years earlier but, the next time something happened, my voice got a little stronger because of that experience before that.

~Uma

Participants described two aspects of identity agency: choosing and consolidating identity and identity agency to affect greater personal and social change. These aspects involve being proactive rather than reactive, as in earlier cycles.

*Identity Agency: Self-Definition and Choice.*

Identity choice was the process by which multiracial and bisexual participants consolidated identities based on internal self-claims rather than being dictated by outside forces. This was a cumulative building process developed as participants cycled in and out of each of the three cycles. At this point in the process, identity choice unfolded with participants beginning to recognize that there were positive aspects to their in-between

statuses. Affirming experiences with community and others also aided these processes. Multiracial and bisexual participants chose identities for personal and political reasons recognizing the power they had to influence how others perceived them, that choosing identities could be acts of resistance, and that in-between identities were a part but did not necessarily define all of who they are.

As multiracial and bisexual participants talked about stepping back and seeing the world through other people's eyes they also described beginning to see the benefits and strengths of their statuses. For example, participants talked about being able to move between social groups not constrained by meanings and understandings of one culture or another. They also recognized their abilities to make connections across group boundaries.

I feel like that you [reference to herself] have a lot of diverse knowledge of so many different kinds of races and cultures because I -- like again, cause I'm not included in one.~ Shelly

I kinda like being (laughs) in this middle. The ability to kinda shift to different things, and not just being one thing or another. ~Joyce

And I'm just like oh, if I was like this straight dude I wouldn't know as many people as I know, I wouldn't be doing as many -- I wouldn't be like introduced to different cultures and stuff? And so I guess my fear -- yeah, I don't know. Like I feel like if, if I blend too much into the straight world then I'll like lose this piece of myself. ~Charles

Participants talked about the strength of having communities and being accepted by others as facilitating the process of identity consolidation. For example, Helena described a memorable moment with her father:

It was cool because I remember the last time that I filled out the census, it was with my dad and he told me to check off white and Asian and I was like “oh, that's interesting” (laughter) that he would encourage me to do that, which was nice. And I think that was one of the first times that I like felt officially that I could be both things. ~Helena

Janna, a bisexual participant, described the importance of having an accepting community (see above) and went on to relate this experience to feeling that she had choice about identity and identity performance:

“Yeah. I think ultimately if I had to put a finger on one of the things that has been a huge positive in my life about identifying as bi and identifying as poly and identifying as, you know, a woman is that my, increasing my level of comfort with these labels to the point where I feel like it's my choice to be, to be explicit about them in a way that I'm comfortable with and I'm in a community that is accepting of me as these labels makes me a happier person.” ~Janna

Multiracial and bisexual participants described coming to see that their identities were choices that they made, not solely imposed categories from others. Avery talked about her experience speaking up in a mostly black student gospel choir and how this experience reaffirmed for her how she wanted others to know and see her. Prior to



speaking up she felt like others in this community saw her as a non-black or White person.

I didn't realize it would have any effect, and then when it did have an effect, it sort of made me go back and say like, reaffirm, like yes, this is who I am [multiracial], and this is what I want people to know about me, and this is -- this does influence my place in [name of gospel group on campus]. ~Avery

Sometimes participants described choosing identity for political and personal reasons. They recognized through workshops and other forms of education that exposed them to these issues, that social demands may be unfair or discriminatory, and that identity negotiations and claims can be acts of resistance. Hannah described the moment she realized that it was important for her to claim her bi identity:

Um, and so I just felt like I had to be in solidarity, you know, and not use bisexual privilege or, when I -- even though in the world I mainly pass as straight or people don't question my sexuality most of the time, I think, so I still have that privilege but, um, yeah, and then I think just like, doing work around diversity. There was kind of this aha moment at a workshop where I was like, you know what? I should be all of who I am. Like, this is actually complex, and this is actually me, and -- (laughter) -- you know. And just like, learning to kind of step out and be OK with that. ~Hannah

Paul talked about his choice at times to claim his identity as a person of color to connect with a broader community and collective experience. This choice related to his understanding of hierarchies of power and privilege and where he wanted to situate

himself relative to others and what kind of message he wanted to convey in this social context.

Part of that is kind of harkening to my analysis about White supremacy, and an indication about you know, this is not just about (pause) that I'm affiliating with a broader, kind of collective of other groups of people that are targeted by White supremacy. Um (pause) so claiming that kind of as a-- as a very broad umbrella identity. [*Interviewer: Yeah.*] Um (pause) and also, in some ways, as a way of saying, you know, I'm a person of color too. That when people look at me, they should understand that that's how I see myself, and that's how I want them to see me. ~Paul

Other participants described contesting categories all together. Realizing that they did not have to be defined by others, they chose instead to exist in the in-between space enjoying the latitude and flexibility it brought. This stance allowed bisexual and multiracial participants to define themselves outside of socially defined categories in a way that would reflect how they experienced themselves.

And for a lot of people, putting you where they want to put you is -- physically or racially or, uh, personality-wise, even like, or whatever they think they're taking from me, uh, they want to box it ---- and then be able to file it in their brain. And that's what I'm trying to fight against. Because whatever good or bad assumptions that are made of me ---- uh, they're assumptions, at that point. You know? So. That's what -- uh, that's the identity part of it.~ Uma

Hazel described choosing an identity label that allowed her to be situated between binary categories gay or straight and a recognition that she did not have to categorize herself at all.

Um, but, I think now, it's like what I feel like I have to choose from. I mean, that's why I say fluidity fits better, but I don't think it's a very common term. So that's why I use it, because I don't think it's really restrictive in that way, and doesn't really feel like I have to categorize myself at all, or a certain experience has to kind of like validate that, in a way that I used to think bi would. ~Hazel

Identity choices also reflected desires by multiracial and bisexual participants to integrate their identities more fully, having their in-between identities integrated with other parts of themselves instead of being more salient than other parts. In this way, participants made the choice not to let others dictate the salience of their identities, as the discrepant social encounters so often tried to do.

But to just understand, like, if somebody perceives me that way, that that doesn't mean that that's necessarily how I am, or that that defines me. But it might be a small piece of me, or a side of me, and a piece of who I am totally. But not that that is who I am, do you know what I mean? Yeah. You know? So, and I think that that's how I feel about my current identification of sexuality, is that it's a piece of me, and that it doesn't define me. ~Hazel

*Identity Agency: Making a Difference.*

A second feature of identity agency was a desire to make a difference in one's own life and the lives of others. Developing new understandings and recognizing that

other people hold different worldviews and perspectives, multiracial and bisexual participants maintained *self* defined identity salience in order to *use* their in-between identities as tools for change. Both Avery and Jessie recognized a certain power to being “out” and keeping or making their identities salient to themselves and others. Avery talked about actively maintaining her identity as motivation for social action:

Like, recently, I'm talking like the past two months, it's been sort of really just coming into my sense of identity. And yes, I do think I would like to continue to make it part of my identity. So even though I don't walk down the street, and people immediately see me as bi-racial, I think part of my realizing that Hapa is bi-racial, that sort of theme is, um, is feeling like I want to remember that Hapa is bi-racial, and I want to, um, yeah, continue to spread awareness, and make it a part of my identity. Because it takes being proactive about it, otherwise it could just fall by the wayside, and sort of, yes, be still part of my identity, but not something like a cause, or, you know, something that motivates me, or colors what I do or how I act. ~ Avery

Jessie described how she came to understand the need to socially claim her identity by coming out as bisexual to her boyfriend, not only for her own sense of integrity, but also because of her awareness of the meaning of not doing so “in the greater scope of things”:

I thought that I wouldn't be doing myself justice and ignore -- do I think it's OK for somebody to be saying those things while I'm thinking those things about anybody, so I thought, in the greater scope of things, nor would I be doing anybody else any justice, him included. Um, so taking all of those things into

consideration, but especially my relationship with him, I decided to take the risks...I think that it [coming out as bisexual to her boyfriend] helped solidify even further that I can state who I am and stand by who I am and explain myself to someone else and, um, I was going to say, be a resource? Because, you know, he has a lot of questions about, well, what does it mean, and what is gay, and kind of, I don't know, a small scale form of activism or something. So I feel, um -- how does that make me feel? It makes me feel purposeful. ~Jessie

Agency was related to participants' tapping into processes of empathy and the recognition developed through relationships and education that claiming identity had power to benefit others, even in the face of risk. Some participants, like Uma, who was multiracial, also talked about making choices to actively shift discrepant moments. This, too, is similar to the Active Negotiations cycle, highlighting the interactive nature of the negotiation cycles. However, challenging assumptions in the Active Negotiations cycle was characterized more by being reactive to demands, emotional responses to these demands, and creating responses in others. In this cycle, challenging assumptions seems to be more related to an integrated sense of who they chose to be built on the experiences of before and who they want to be today, with an awareness of the dominant social constructions of categorizations. A further distinction was the motivation in this cycle of changing the climate so that others did not have to experience marginalization. Uma recognized that she could use her understanding of marginalization to make room for others to find their voices.

How do I utilize this [multiracial identity] to be a good -- how do I make this good? And how do I make this something that either helps other people -- which is why, uh, being mar-- working with marginalized populations -- Like, uh, where -- Again, I never experienced being voiceless. So how can I use what I've learned in my experiences to make -- help someone realize that they don't have to be either. ~ Uma

Similarly, Hazel a bisexual participant, described that recognizing her own experiences of feeling othered helped her to actively work not to re-enact these othering processes.

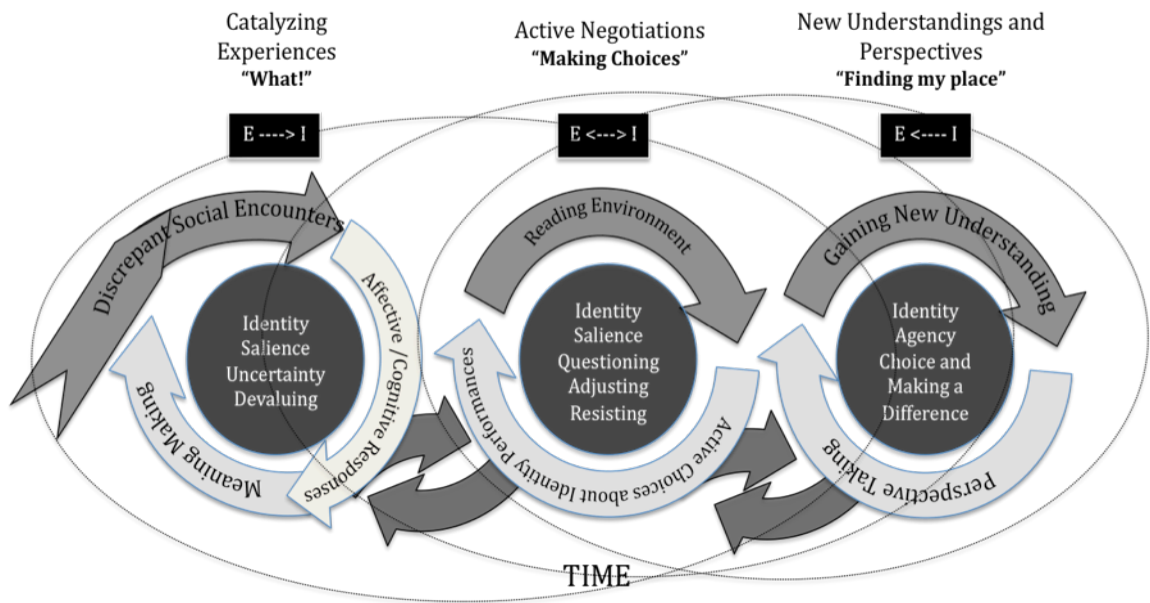
I like to believe that I like to give people choice in terms of how they identify before asking are you one or the other, but giving them choice to answer, and choose the language they want, for their gender, for their ethnicity, for -- you know what I mean? Like, their sexuality. And this just gives me even more reason, you know what I mean, to do that, because I have lived experiences that don't fit into certain things too.~ Hazel

Throughout her interview, Hannah talked about the importance of having community and the role that community played in her own life. Recognizing what was so important to her in her own process of identity consolidation, she worked to create these spaces for other people. She believed her "role" in the social justice movement was to build inclusive communities and be the keeper of these safe spaces (i.e. working to not only create inclusive environments but also bring people into these spaces).

And, um, you know, and I understand everything's a process. I just think we have -- we all have different roles, and like, mine is like a keeper of this -- that space, you know? ~Hannah

These processes of identity agency and creating change for others, were accompanied by growing identity choice and choice related to how one wanted to interact with others' demands. This cycle described how multiracial and bisexual people came to actualize their identity agency and the ways this agency was facilitated by supportive communities, new understandings and broadening perspectives. These processes also developed in conjunction with demands for continuous negotiation cycles related to active choices around identity performances and social demands for categorization. Access to supportive others and books and education provided the power to fuel this agency. Without these things people might not have the support to develop a sense of agency. While these demands for categorization and social negotiation did not create identity agency they did create fuel for the fight. With access to elements in this third cycle to build new understandings and to see other perspectives, multiracial and bisexual people were able to consolidate self-claimed identities and take action to make a difference at the personal, interpersonal, and social levels.

Figure 1: The Process Through Which Socially Negotiating a Socially Ambiguous In-between Stigmatized Identity Influences Identity Formation in Multiracial and Bisexual People





## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the ways that social demands for identity categorization influence identity processes in multiracial and bisexual people and to address the sub question exploring the ways these processes are similar or different across these two statuses. Participants in this study experienced continuous discrepant social encounters, which placed demands for categorization and identity negotiation. Recognizing the demand to fit into categories and assumptions of others that didn't necessarily match their self-concepts, multiracial and bisexual participants actively negotiated and made choices about identity performances. Through acquiring knowledge, connecting with supportive and like others, and developing the ability to see other perspectives, participants came to recognize that they were not at the whim of external forces and others' imposed definitions. Multiracial and bisexual participants developed greater agency to choose their identities. Identity agency also described a reverse flow of force where individuals began to see the power they had to exert influences on their environment.

These processes were described as iterative, cyclical, and recurrent. The amount

of time spent in each cycle varied depending on the familiarity of the discrepant social encounters and the contextual variables. For example, if the same experience occurred repeatedly, participants described spending less time in the first two cycles and more in the third cycle. Conversely, if this was the first encounter with a new or different discrepant social encounter, participants described spending more time in the initial cycles. Movement through these cycles was non-linear; people cycled back and forth, within, between, and across the different cycles.

Within the field of Psychology, identity is generally described as developing through largely internal processes (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1994), with relatively little attention to the influence of external forces in constraining or co-constructing identity. In contrast, critical queer theory and postmodern constructions of identity place greater emphasis on how external forces involving power and social discourse influence identity (Butler 1990, Foucault, 1978). The model emerging from this study offers a perspective of identity formation as influenced by internal unfolding processes of self-discovery and choice (Baumeister, 1997; Marcia, 1994) *and* external processes embedded in power hierarchies conferring meaning, which functioned together in interaction through social negotiation processes and influenced identity changes. Findings reflect more recent theory in feminist and multicultural psychology that understands identity as developing as a co-constructed process between self and others/groups (Baumeister, 1997; Suyemoto, 2002; Wilkinson, 1996). The results elucidate the complex interaction of individual processes with social processes where identities arise out of and are formed

through social interaction while simultaneously influencing social interactions. These reciprocal processes influenced identity salience and choices related to identity centrality.

### **Connections to Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical framework for how the co-construction of identity occurs, emphasizing the role of social interactions in the formation of self and identity (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism has at its center the belief that social meanings for the individual are created through social interactions, that how we act towards things depends on the meanings we bring to them, which are influenced by our past interactions and our learning about socially agreed upon meanings and constraints of possibility (Fine, 2011). The cyclical process between self, other, and the creation of meaning in the development of identity described in this study is congruent with the theory of symbolic interactionism. Participant descriptions of reading the environment, anticipating social responses and making adjustments and choices about identity performances represented ways in which they were engaging actively in a social meaning making process between self and other. Multiracial and bisexual participants described a back and forth meaning making process: social others made inaccurate assumptions and mis-categorizations related to dominant social meanings, causing discrepant social moments within the bisexual or multiracial individual. These discrepant social moments conveyed symbolized social beliefs to the multiracial or bisexual individual that felt foreign, catalyzing emotional and cognitive reactions that led to an understanding that how they saw themselves did not fit with how they were seen in the dominant symbolic structure. The learned social meanings associated with discrepant

social experiences were then translated into information that was interpreted and used to make decisions about how to respond. Multiracial and bisexual people engaged in these symbolic interactions over and over again.

Some symbolic interactionist theorists believe that identities are ordered, with some identities experienced as more central and salient depending on emphases in the social or external world (Fine, 2011). This contextual salience is similar to what multiracial and bisexual participants described occurred as a result of the discrepant social encounters and active negotiations in the first two cycles. Participants found that these types of interactions highlighted their in-between identities as more salient because they were actively being called to negotiate around them. However, this did not necessarily mean that their identities were simultaneously more central. Initially, participants seemed to describe their bisexual and multiracial identities as central because they were so salient. However, salience and centrality were not solely dependent on the social or external demands. The model emerging here from participants' descriptions indicated that the relation of salience to centrality changed as participants acquired new understandings and perspectives and supportive communities in the third cycle. For example, in the third cycle participants described making choices about centrality and salience. For some people, experiencing a sense of newfound agency led to claimed identity centrality. For others, agency led to a choice to integrate identities rather than keeping one more central than the others. Instead of centrality coming from social demands, participants applied greater choice around what identities to keep central, even if social demands for salience continued.

Multiracial and bisexual participants described beginning to see the ways that cultural beliefs and meanings entered into their interactions through the iterative nature of these processes and the processes described in cycle 3 where individuals actively sought knowledge and dialogue. This realization affected how they engaged in their social interactions having developed new perspectives. Through this process of increased understanding and new perspectives, participants described a form of empowerment where it became possible for personal agency to interact with social demands. Rather than being shaped by these experiences only they began to more consciously shape these experiences themselves, engaging in a meaning making process. Recognizing how meanings are created became an important part of this process for multiracial and bisexual individuals, enabling them to more actively and consciously participate in this meaning making process.

### **Connections to Identity Models in Psychology**

This study supported previous theoretical work that suggested that there are similarities between multiracial and bisexual identity development (Collins, 2000; Kich, 1996). Kich and Collins theorized that bisexual and biracial individuals share similar experiences related to: (a) perceptions by others of being different, (b) being othered, (c) experiencing marginalization from both dominant and oppressed groups, (d) being both outsider and insider in multiple spaces, and (e) negotiating ambiguity (i.e. the confusion that others experience in relation to the multiracial or bisexual identity.) The current study suggests that there are indeed similar identity processes that are shared by multiracial and bisexual people related to these experiences. Participants from both

groups described experiencing difference, marginalization from multiple sides, negotiating ambiguity, and negotiating insider and outsider positions. Participants also described ways of using their identities as tools for social change, building inclusive communities across areas of difference, and described the importance of finding support and acceptance even from those who were different from them. Participants described the ways their own experiences of marginalization and assumptions increased empathy for others and a desire to work for social change to protect others from marginalization and being othered. These findings support suggestions from Kich and Collins that drawing together around these parallel processes may contribute to moving marginalized experiences towards the center of discourse.

In addition to supporting past theory related to similar processes in identity development for bisexual and multiracial peoples together, the findings of this study also support aspects of previous research and models of identity developed for multiracial or bisexual peoples specifically. Previous psychological research exploring identity development in multiracial and bisexual people frequently described linear stage models that focused primarily on the internal felt experience of individuals and the stages of psychological development, including the thoughts and feelings that individuals have about their identity and the identity claims they make. While this study expanded beyond that focus by exploring the interactional social processes of influence, the findings of this study related to identity effects, rather than social processes, were frequently similar to this past research.

For example, the findings of this study are similar to Kich's (1992) model of biracial, bicultural identity. Kich's first stage describes how biracial participants experience a stage of recognizing "differentness," similar to the social processes described in this study as discrepant social encounters and the associated identity effects of both the first and second cycles here of uncertainty and questioning. Kich's second stage was characterized by struggling for acceptance, seeking knowledge not only about themselves, their families, and their personal contexts but also about the larger historical and social cultural contexts. Kich's biracial participants described developing empathy for others through these explorations and began to see that their difference was not a "personal problem or stigma" but rather a social one related to categories of race. In the third stage of his model Kich referenced self-acceptance and how participants took a more active self-expression of identity. Kich's findings in his second and third stages are similar to what participants in the current study described primarily in the third cycle of New Understandings and Perspectives.

Findings from the current study were also similar to previous research exploring bisexual identity models of identity development. For example, Weinberg, Pryor, and Williams's (1994) model of bisexual development described 4 stages: initial confusion, coming to apply a label, settling into identity and then a final stage where bisexual people experience "continued uncertainty." Bradford's 4-stage model is similar, with the first three stages comparable to Weinberg et al.: initial questioning as bisexual people come to see their differentness and experience pressures to define themselves as either heterosexual or homosexual, coming to terms with who they are, and "maintaining

identity.” Bradford’s fourth stage “transforming diversity” is relatively rare, with only some people achieving this stage. Both of these models of the intrapsychic nature of bisexual identity connect to themes raised in the current model, especially in cycles 1 and 3. For example, initial stages of Bradford and Weinberg, Pryor, and Williams’ models were supported by themes raised in cycle 1 of the current study, such as discrepant social encounters and the ways these encounters created identity salience and raised questions about identity categorization and belonging. Furthermore, themes from the current model findings in cycle 3, which showed that multiracial and bisexual participants seek and use education, knowledge and support from others to develop greater understanding and perspective related to their experiences relate to Weinberg, Pryor, and Williams’ “settling into identity” and to Bradford’s second and third stages. Weinberg, Pryor and Williams’s last stage, “continued uncertainty,” was also supported by the current model in that multiracial and bisexual participants described discrepant social encounters as on-going and their experiences iterative. In this way, recognizing the process related to these experiences participants suggested that they could be catalyzed into identity questions and uncertainty at any point across the lifetime. Bradford’s fourth stage, “transforming diversity” was also supported in the current research; however it was described as a more central experience and rather than representing a more evolved stage which only some people achieve, it was related to identity agency and often a choice that participants described engaging in as part of a cycle, rather than an end point of linear identity development.



While this research supported findings from past models, results from this study expand beyond these models by focusing on the interpersonal processes that contributed to the intrapsychic effects described by these stage models and to the processes that catalyzed movement within and between the stages established in previous research. The Active Negotiations cycle connects the experiences of difference and confusion characteristic of the first stages in these models with the later stages, identifying the interactive social and psychological processes through which bisexual and multiracial individuals struggle for acceptance and develop motivation for greater learning and perspective taking that relates to greater identity agency.

This emphasis on what happens “between” stages relates to past research that focuses more on the social demands imposed on bisexual and multiracial people, and to research and theory that focuses more on identity as performance. This study supported past scholarship indicating that multiracial and bisexual people experience demands to identify categorically according to either/or categories and are often faced with confusion and inaccurate assumptions from others who do not know how to categorize them (King and DaCosta, 1996, Miller, 2006b; Ochs, 2007; Williams, 1996). Findings from these past studies suggested that multiracial and bisexual people experienced feelings of invisibility in an either/or categorical system that does not recognize intersecting multiple identities. For example, Williams’s participants described how social others called attention to their difference through experiences such as “what are you?” questions, highlighting the lack of recognition of multiraciality and demands of categorization. Similarly, in Miller’s qualitative study exploring bisexual identity, her participants found

that their identities were socially invisible because people categorized them as either gay or straight in social interactions. Participants in the current study also described feeling invisible and caught between categories, which lead them to make choices about identity performances in social contexts.

Goffman (1963) described these types of performances as strategies related to stigma management. Past research has focused on these strategies and how they are experienced and enacted (Cain, 1991; Kanuha, 1998; Miller, 2006; Renfrow, 2004; T.K, Williams, 1996, Yoshino, 2007). The model developed in the current study offers a way of understanding stigma management strategies and their relationship to altering identities and stigmatizing processes themselves. In the context of the current study, discrepant social encounters catalyzed these stigmatizing processes and participants in this study worked hard to interrupt these stigmatizing processes through their identity performances from the point a discrepant social encounter was experienced. The findings here support past research and theory indicating that people do make choices about performing identity to manage stigma related to sexual orientation and race. For example, Yoshino (2007) drew from Goffman's work to describe one kind of stigma management strategy, covering, which includes how much one asserts or does not assert or enact their stigmatized identity while simultaneously not denying that identity (passing). Findings from this study support that bisexual and multiracial people do use covering strategies in some contexts, depending on social demands.

The model developed in the current study also supports and expands upon a model described by Pachankis (2007), which explored implications of concealing

stigmatized identities generally (e.g. sexual orientation, mental illness, infertility, etc.). Pachankis' model indicated that interpersonal experiences between self and other influence self-understandings and that these self-understandings in turn affect how individuals position themselves in future interactions. The findings described in the current study expand upon this model suggesting that not only do self-understandings shift future interactions but also awareness of social responses and particular motivations and goals for these interactions shape the interacting nature of interactional processes and identity development.

While categorization frequently serves to preserve power as described by past theory on stigmatizing, there are also categorization processes that reflect a basic human tendency to organize information (Bruner, 1957). The findings from this study suggests that understanding both of these motivations for categorization from others can be helpful, and may be negotiated differently once differentiated. Participants referred to both of these when making sense of their experiences in social interactions. Being able to situate their experiences within social contexts and structures of power and privilege assisted them to see that the stigmatizing processes they experienced were not a result of something inherent to them but rather a symptom of the society.

#### *Variations between Multiracial and Bisexual Identity Negotiations*

This study looked at identity processes across two distinct groups, multiracial and bisexual people. Both race and sexual orientation are contextual, socially constructed, systems of power relationships consisting of both macro (social structural) and micro (social psychological and intrapsychic) aspects (Weber, 1998). They are both constructed

as consisting of differentiated, mutually exclusive categories with one dominant group and one or more minority groups (Tucker, 2004; Ault, 1996). These similarities—as noted in the Background and Significance section and in prior theorists such as Kich, Collins, and Yoshino—contributed to the rationale for exploring both multiracial and bisexual identities as in-between, ambiguous identities. Findings provided an empirical basis for the connections that other scholars have described theoretically (Collins 2000, Kich 1996, and Yoshino, 2007). However, while there were many shared processes, there were also variations in the ways these processes were experienced. The findings from this study indicate that the primary variations between multiracial and bisexual experiences in social interactions related to identity development are experiences related to the perception of mutability of identity, visibility, the influence of relationship status, and the relation to culture. Symbolic interactionism’s focus on the meanings we apply to social interactions highlights the importance of understanding how these two statuses are socially constructed more generally in order understand these differences in social negotiation processes.

Despite widespread scientific agreement that race is a social construction with no biological or genetic basis, in the dominant colloquial discourse, race continues to be essentialized as a collection of physical attributes that are related to biological heritage (Markus, 2008; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Tucker, 2004). Race is seen as inherited from and determined by biological parentage. The assumed biological and inherent basis relates to race then being seen as immutable and internal or inherent to the individual. Because race is essentialized, it is colloquially believed that race categories are “real” and

cannot change. Furthermore, the physical characteristics of race have been consistently associated with cultural characteristics of ethnicity, as the confound of ethnicity with race has been used to obscure the power basis of race (Markus, 2008; Omi & Winant, 1994; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Furthermore, although constructed as exclusively differentiated (mutually exclusive) categories (Tucker, 2004), race is a system of categorization made up of multiple categories rather than being binary.

In contrast, sexual orientation is constructed in colloquial discourse as non-essentialistic, related to the gender of the object of one's attractions, feelings, and behaviors. Sexual orientation is not something that others immediately understand about another person by simply looking at them and it was not necessarily something participants could immediately attribute to tangible heritage or something seen as biological. Because sexual orientation is defined as related to one's intimate partner and because it is not seen as inherently an essentialized part of a person, it is often believed to be a choice and easily changed. Although sexual orientation is not confounded with gender in its basic meaning, it is colloquially confounded with gender in the expected performance, with gender bending associated with minority sexual orientation. In this way bisexuality is believed to be both invisible desires and sometimes visible behaviors related to relationship status or gender performance (Fox, 1996). Sexual orientation is also not defined as inherently visible and is constructed as binary, although also mutually exclusive.

These dominant constructions of race and of sexual orientation are brought by social others into participants' symbolic interactions that focus on their identities, which

account for variations in the negotiation processes experienced by multiracial and bisexual participants. The essentialistic, biological understanding of race contributed to unique social interactions of multiracial participants in this study. For example, multiracial participants experienced discrepant social encounters that were based on others assuming that because they looked a certain way, this automatically correlated with how they identified themselves. However, visible characteristics did not necessarily align with how multiracial participants in this study self identified. Multiracial participants also described interactions as direct questions such as “what are you?” and explicit confusion directed towards them, based on the visibility of their in-between identities. While multiracial individuals in this study described facing questions about their identities, the fact that they were multiracial, once asserted, was never in question, as they could trace their status to their parents as validation and proof. For example, Mona’s example in the catalyzing experiences cycle, where she responded to her peers’ questions and disbelief with a picture of her parents to prove that she was half Asian.

Multiracial participants in this study also described facing assumptions that because they looked Asian or possessed Asian heritage they should know certain languages and possesses certain cultural knowledge. These experiences were external demands representing the confounding of race and ethnicity that also became internalized. Because race is constructed as multiple categories rather than being binary, multiracial participants in this study described being assumed to be Hispanic or Hawaiian. These types of mis-categorizations and assumptions resulted in multiracial people having to negotiate the margins of groups to which they had no belonging.

In contrast, experiences unique to bisexual participants related to the dominant construction of sexual orientation as partner-related, changeable, and visible only through relationships or through imposed associations with performing gender. Because sexual orientation is not visible and is related to partner status, bisexual participants described experiences of being assumed to be either gay or straight based on what others knew or assumed about the gender of their intimate partner. These assumptions were conveyed in the form of subtle comments rather than direct questions, putting them into a position of having to choose whether or not to correct or pass, rather than the position of asserting identity directly as was more typical of multiracial participants. Fears of being “found out” accompanied this invisible position and informed the associated performance of identity.

Bisexual participants also referenced the ways that others responded to them in social interactions based on how visibly gender conforming or non-conforming they were. Being “straight” appearing meant being more gender conforming and often led to being assumed to *be* straight while appearing less gender conforming led to being assumed to be gay. This confounding of one’s performance of gender with one’s sexual orientation led to assumptions by others based on visible symbols but also opened up opportunities for identity performance to play with the meanings behind the symbols.

Furthermore, because sexual orientation is not seen as an essentialized part of a person and is seen as related to gender performance or relationship status, the binary construction was maintained by invalidating the possibility of an in-between identity. Bisexual participants in this study described assumptions that bisexuality is just a phase

or experimentalization rather than it's own valid status. They experienced a lack of felt legitimacy, especially in queer communities.

Bisexual participants in this study also described the ways their relationships became symbols of their identities to others. Because relationships change and are not essentialized as internal to the individual, bisexual participants described experiences when social others believed they had a choice regarding whether or not to be in same gender relationships. This question of choice was also internalized. For example, Hannah wondered whether she would give up her bisexual identity in the face of extreme discrimination. Bisexual participants also described confronting assumptions from others that their identities were changed if the gender of their intimate partners changed; however they were very clear that they did not actually experience themselves as being any different.

The primary distinctions described above also relate back to Goffman's distinction between discredited versus discreditable stigmatized statuses, where a discredited status is one where the stigma is visible and discreditable is one where the stigma is invisible. While in many ways both multiracial and bisexual people possess discreditable statuses there are also visible components and beliefs that differently mark these statuses.

### **Methodology Strengths and Limitations**

This study had several methodological strengths. First, this study offered an in-depth look at how social negotiation processes influence identity development and experience in multiracial and bisexual individuals; to date no studies have looked at these



questions or these identity processes specifically in either multiracial or bisexual people or in both. Choosing to explore these processes in two different groups allowed the opportunity to establish whether or not there is a shared connection between these two groups as previous theory (Collins, 2000; Kich, 1996) has suggested. Further, it enabled the opportunity to look at the variations and differences related to these processes across these two groups and, through contrast, deepen the understanding of how race and sexual orientation are constructed.

Second, the approach to qualitative grounded theory methodology enabled the exploration of processes that are highly contextualized and interactive. Furthermore, this kind of methodology prioritized an ethics of care for participants (Charmaz, 2005; Fassinger, 2005), which combined with the critical ideological philosophy of science and constructivistic epistemological foundation to have a positive impact on participants' identity development process and empowerment. The in-person, in-depth, interviews created a context in which interviewer and interviewees actively engaged in the processes of socially negotiating identity that were being explored. Thus, results described are a co-construction between interviewer and interviewee. Many participants shared how grateful they were to have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences through these interviews and to think about the ways their social interactions across different contexts have shaped them, suggesting that the experience was empowering and a part of resisting silence and marginalization, which is consistent with a critical ideological philosophy.

The inclusion of a member check was also a methodological strength, in relation to validity of the findings and also in relation to the realization of the benefits of a co-

constructed process, addressing the critical ideological goal of sharing epistemological power. It provided an opportunity to “check” the findings and to stay true to the experiences of those in the study. The member check process also appeared to be validating for most of those who responded. Multiracial and bisexual participants talked about being able to see their experiences described in the model and that this gave voice to their experiences and connected them with the experiences of others. One participant commented on how empowered he felt to be involved in the construction of the model, to have the opportunity to share his opinion of the preliminary findings, and to see that his experience mattered. Another participant thanked the researcher for helping her (the participant) make connections between and make sense of her experiences through the interview and also through the model.

There were also limitations related to the methodology. First, the choice to look at these processes in two different groups is a strength but also a possible limitation. The researcher needed to balance attention to the combined general experience across these two statuses while simultaneously taking into account and attending to the unique aspects of experiences for each group. It is possible that attention to the combined general experience may have contributed to a lesser emphasis on group-specific processes or interactions of other statuses (e.g. gender—see below in Future Directions) that would be differentially experienced in each group. Furthermore, while this study actively attempted not to analogize the experiences across these two statuses, some researchers may feel that the choice to include both statuses in this study creates a method in which analogizing is inevitable. However, it is well established that race and sexual orientation share some

characteristics as “master statuses” of oppression (Weber, 1998) and this study attempted to explore shared experiences while also acknowledging variations and unique experiences. While this study did find that there are common processes as well as variations related to the research questions, the participants themselves did not explicitly consider or reflect on the connections, similarities and differences between multiracial and bisexual identities.

While a qualitative method aims to describe the full range of experiences of a phenomenon and does not aim to generalize results to a larger population, some researchers may feel that it is difficult to apply the model beyond this particular sample given the specificity of the questions and groups studied. The limitations related to geographic context likely influenced the study findings. At the time of their interviews, participants for this study were all living in Massachusetts. Massachusetts is a relatively socially progressive state. Same-sex marriage is legal in Massachusetts and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is not legal (<http://www.glad.org/rights/massachusetts/c/anti-discrimination-law-in-massachusetts/>). However, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation remains legal at the federal level and in other states in this country. Massachusetts is also an area where there is a relatively small Asian American multiracial population in contrast to some areas of California or to Hawaii. It is possible that processes explored in this study would be different in different geographical contexts or that the geographical context affected the extent to which experiences across bisexual and multiracial statuses were shared rather than differentiated.

Additionally, there may be interviewer effects. As stated in the method section there was one interviewer interviewing participants in both groups who identified as White and bisexual. While the interviewer took utilized reflexivity and verification techniques to attend to power dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee and the relative areas of privilege and oppression that each brought into the interaction, given that all meanings are socially constructed and that the method used here recognizes that research findings are, themselves, co-constructions of the participants and the researchers, I recognize the inevitable influence of the interviewer's identity status as White and bisexual on the interviews and or the analyses. Research suggests that matching clients with therapists of the same race or ethnicity effects the therapeutic alliance (Cabral & Smith, 2011; Sue et. al., 1991). It is possible that perceived similarities between the interviewer and the bisexual and White interviewees and the perceived and real differences between the interviewer and the multiracial and heterosexual interviewees may have influenced the content and experience of comfort during the interviews in similar ways. It is also possible that effects were different than those identified by therapists, or that participants themselves perceived little effect.

Finally, issues related to sample biases and participant self-selection must also be considered a study limitation. All participants in this study came from educated backgrounds and many described active, pre-existing interest in the topics being explored, having in some cases explored these issues through their classes and organizational affiliations. This factor raises the question of whether the flyers and emails specifically appealed to participants who have thought about issues of identity,

been exposed to theory, or been involved in social justice activities either through their work or affiliations. Given that flyers solicited participants who identified in particular ways, it is likely that those who were less aware of their identity or less interested in these issues would have responded. This is, of course, a widespread limitation of all research involving self-selection. Although care was taken to choose language that would reflect openness to an experience rather than a narrow subset of people with specific identity labels there is still the possibility that individuals did not respond to the call for participants because of the limitations of the language used. Further, recruitment through flyers, e-mails or web based social networking, assumes access to written language and technology. With this in mind it is quite possible that we would see very different experiences and processes or perhaps a greater range of experiences with a broader sample that included participants from a greater range of backgrounds.

### **Implications for Clinical and Community Interventions**

This model offers a tool or resource for understanding multiracial and bisexual identities as influenced by social interactions. Results indicate that clinicians and community organizers should be aware that being multiracial or bisexual does not mean being confused. However, multiracial and bisexual individuals do confront demands for categorization and assumptions all the time, which can create stress and raise questions related to identity and relations with others, at least initially. Understanding the model presented here of social negotiation cycles and identity effects can help clinicians and community organizers create inclusive environments and develop interventions to assist multiracial and bisexual individuals develop skills to deal with these demands, resolve

initial questions, and develop a greater sense of agency in identity choice and performance.

### *Community Implications and Interventions*

At the community level, findings of this study raise the question of how racial minority, queer, White, and straight communities can become more inclusive. Multiracial and bisexual participants pointed to the importance of feeling validated, having like others to talk to, and being in diverse communities where they felt supported and accepted as whole people. Community organizations and groups that seek to be explicitly inclusive of members with in-between ambiguous identities will need to examine embedded meaning structures and related assumptions and internalizations of dominant discourses. Organization staff and community leaders need to understand and be aware of the ways that stigma is enacted in both dominant *and* marginalized communities and the ways that multiracial and bisexual people experience marginalization in both spaces.

Such groups might begin with an initial community assessment, taking time to evaluate their values about who should be included in the community, how boundaries are defined and “patrolled” both explicitly and subtly (Dalmage, 2003), and to what extent demands for categorization and assumptions are being enacted. Organizations should evaluate the degree to which they may be centralizing certain experiences (i.e. people who are born to parents of the same race or people who are involved in same sex relationships) and implicitly contesting identities that are different than what is believed to be central to what it means to be a part of the group. They should be aware as they

embark on an assessment of this sort that these biases are often subtle and deeply embedded and will require careful consideration.

Mission statements should be evaluated and revised as necessary to be inclusive of the multiplicity of identities like multiracial identities and bisexual identities and to highlight goals of being inclusive to the diversity within communities. These sorts of documents set an overarching tone for the community to build upon. Assessments could also look at concrete issues such as how questions on forms are asked (e.g. Are there options for multiple boxes to be checked? Can individuals self-define in their own language?) and whether questions demanding self-categorization are truly necessary. This last question is especially important as participants in this study suggested that identity categories were often in the service of others needing to clarify their own confusion and had nothing to do with personal goals or interpersonal connections.

One way to assess/evaluate a community organization is through a focus group study that would enable deeper exploration of the experiences of members within the community from both dominant spaces and members of the community who are either multiracial or bisexual. Often, communities may think that they are being inclusive and do not realize that they are enacting oppressive processes. A focus group study is a proactive way to better understand the actual experiences within a community. A focus group can be empowering for participants, giving them the opportunity to voice their experiences and can also empower the community to make changes based on real experiences of members in the community.

Part of an assessment may also be an evaluation of whether there are groups, such as student organizations for multiracial students or bisexual students, and if not whether the student organizations that do exist, for example students of color, Asian American, queer, LGBT are inclusive of a broad range of experiences including the experiences of those who fit into multiple categories at once. Creating such subgroups if they do not exist may be one approach to increasing inclusivity. Communities may also consider creating explicit opportunities for diverse perspectives within the community to be heard and shared. For example, invited guest speakers that can speak to experiences of the ways that identity meanings and experiences can change across contexts, developing workshops that do not require individuals to choose between their identities, offering trainings to raise awareness of the history of categorization as related to race and sexual orientation and maintenance of power, and opportunities to collaborate across disciplines and across various demographic differences to enable community members to know each other and to learn from each other.

### *Clinical Implications and Interventions*

To support multiracial and bisexual clients, clinicians can begin by empathizing with the exhausting and continuous experience of categorical demands and assumptions. These findings also suggest that clinicians can promote self-acceptance by helping clients recognize the identity performance choices they are making in their daily lives and bring to consciousness the motivations and contextual variables that play a role in their decisions. Through this reflecting process, clinicians can assist their clients to deepen their understandings of their actions as influenced by a negotiation process, helping their



clients recognize that their identity experiences and dilemmas are embedded within social contexts related to systems of structural power rather than related to a deficiency within themselves. This can assist clients to recognize the power and agency they do have to make choices about their identities and their performances, and to evaluate to what degree they want to engage in social justice action.

In working with multiracial and bisexual clients, clinicians need to be aware of the ways in which they are performing their own identities and attitudes about race and sexual orientation. Results from this study indicate that multiracial and bisexual people are reading their environments very carefully. The experience of being in-between and repeated discrepant social encounters relates to an anticipation of responses from others. If clinicians would encourage clients to explore their own choices about identities and identity performance, they should be aware of the ways in which they may be constraining those choices and performance through their own social assumptions or demands. It matters what words are chosen, what questions are asked, what pictures are on the wall, and what books on the shelves. Clinicians should be aware that materials that relate to monoracial or gay/lesbian statuses may not be read by bisexual and multiracial peoples as inclusive. For example, a clinician with “bi triangles” in their office in addition to “rainbow rings” may send a clearer message of awareness and acceptance.

Clinicians also need to be aware of the assumptions they bring into the therapy room in terms of meanings related to appearance or relationships. For example, a client might identify as multiracial and be very connected to their Asian roots but look “white.” Similarly, someone that is bisexual may not have had sexual experiences with someone

of the same gender or may be dating someone of the opposite gender and be in a monogamous long term relationship and identify as bisexual. Questions about experiences and identities should be framed in ways that enable full exploration and the opportunity for explicit discussion, rather than assumptions from appearance, family background, or current/past relationships.

Multiracial and bisexual participants in this study talked about the importance of finding communities and being accepted and how this helped them to not only feel settled in themselves but also to shift perspective to see the greater context and to develop and access empathy for themselves and others. Clinicians may be able to help clients find and create spaces where they can explore their identities away from discrepant social encounters, for example the therapy office, a student organization, or a community organization. However, the findings from this study offer a reminder to clinicians that negotiating in-between ambiguous identities—multiracial and bisexual—is different from experiences of negotiating single statuses. Asian, White, Gay, straight or larger minority spaces such as people of color or LGBT/Queer groups may not be affirming, inclusive or supportive. Clinicians should be aware of these social group dynamics and the attitudes and assumptions in their specific contexts so as to avoid referral to one of these groups that could actually reify negative experiences of marginalization in spaces where multiracial and bisexual people may feel they “should” experience belonging.

### **Future Directions**

Findings from this study described experiences of negotiating, in-between, ambiguous stigmatized identities as experienced by multiracial and bisexual participants.

Future studies could explore the validity of this model as it applies to other stigmatized, in-between, ambiguous statuses, such as bicultural identities or trans identities. Results from this study also suggest that future studies exploring identity processes for individuals with in-between ambiguous identities should consider the ways that identity is a fluid process influenced by social interactions. Identity models within the field of Psychology are frequently framed as stages culminating in identity that is “resolved” or achieved (Phinney, 1988; Troiden, 1988). Although individuals may consolidate identities, this does not mean that identities will not shift and change. Furthermore, results from this current study indicate that even when an internal sense of identity seems firm, choices around identity performances will change due to the constant nature of social interactions. These choices may then affect the internal sense of identity.

Additionally, this study suggests that identity is shaped and formed through interactions themselves, which means that the research itself is a form of interaction that is shaping and being shaped by the individuals in the study. Researchers should attend to the meanings they are creating in relation to the identity processes they are interested in learning more about. Furthermore, research should acknowledge that identity cannot be fully operationalized by behavior, as behavior is so contextual. Results indicate that individuals make *active choices* about identity performances (including language and labels) across contexts and people. Thus, research questions should be framed to acknowledge that language used to describe identities may be imprecise and that identity performances and/or labels may be different across contexts and with different people. For example, multiracial Asian and White American participants may describe different

processes or identity claims in White contexts, Asian contexts, Asian American contexts, multiracial contexts, or broader people of color contexts. Similarly, bisexual participants may describe different processes or identity claims in lesbian/gay contexts, queer contexts, straight contexts, or bisexual contexts. Both operationalization of identity and interpretation of findings should consider the influence of context. Particularly in research exploring identity through the use of surveys or self-report measures, researchers should consider how participants' answers will be influenced by the context and the motivations of the participant.

There are several areas for future research that could address issues in the identity development of ambiguous, in-between identities upon which this study did not focus. As described earlier, participants in this study were not directly involved in the consideration of connections between multiracial and bisexual in-between identities, nor the connections with other in-between identities. It would be interesting to explore whether bisexual and multiracial participants see areas of similarity and difference across these two statuses through a focus group study including participants from both identity statuses. This would allow participants to directly contribute to this theoretical question. Furthermore, while the choice to study these processes in individuals possessing an in-between identity in one area of interest (either race or sexual orientation) and dominant identity (either white or straight) in the other area of interest was made to in order to first understand the experiences of socially negotiating one in-between status before introducing multiple intersecting in-between statuses, this did not allow for opportunities to understand these processes in individuals with bi-bi identities, bisexual people of color,

or multiracial people with queer identities. Future studies could explore these intersections of statuses in order to enhance our understanding of these identity processes as experiences related to intersectionality.

Additionally, while it was beyond the scope of this study to fully explore the intersection of gender, findings from this study indicate that a fuller exploration of the intersection of gender with bisexual and multiracial identity processes is needed. Participants in this study did not spontaneously discuss differentiated gender categories as specifically related to processes connected to the research question. However, they did make connections to gender in their interviews suggesting certain intersections, indicating that gender clearly plays a role in the lives of multiracial and bisexual people and their identity experiences. For example, a male bisexual participant described himself using a term that carries gender specific social meanings. Bisexual women talked about being gender conforming. Multiracial participants made fewer references to gender but prior research suggests that intersections between race and gender are important and should be explored (Han, 2006).

The findings from this study showed that monolithic and exclusive categories don't work for multiracial and bisexual individual. Categories are used to make sense and fit people into boxes but this does not promote connections between people, particularly if the categories are related to hierarchies of power and privilege and, therefore, to stigma and maintaining deviance (Fine, 2012, Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, Goffman, 1963). The multiracial and bisexual participants used labels, which were outgrowths of categories, to attempt to convey meaning or to change meanings made in social interactions as part of

their performances. But people do not understand themselves as categories. In fact, participants from this study resisted labels, or chose labels/categories as a negotiation tool, making choices in relation to what would be understood by the other. The findings from this study encourage a deeper understanding and recognition that categories are only useful for these impersonal descriptive purposes and not so useful in the “real” world of social interaction and relationship building.

One question that this study raises is “who is determining the boundaries and maintenance of power structures within and between groups?” Certainly, the categorizations of race and sexual orientation in the past have served to maintain the structure of power (Foucault, 1978; Omi & Winant, 1994). But neither identity nor categories of stigma reflecting hierarchies of power are static. Along the lines of symbolic interactionism, they are constructed and therefore can be deconstructed or reconstructed. Borders are symbols representing meanings that have evolved as a result of interactions. They are not immutable; they are not how things are meant to be and so they can be affected and changed. The stories from participants in this study show not only how current borders and border patrolling are affecting living in the “borderlands” (Anzaldúa (1987), but also how change is possible.

## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

#### **Sample recruitment e-mail/letter to community organizations and community leaders for bisexual participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (referred person's name),

My name is Vali Kahn and I am a Doctoral Student at the University of Massachusetts - Boston. I am currently working on a project that focuses on exploring the ways that social interactions with individuals and groups shapes identity formation and meaning for bisexual individuals.

I would greatly appreciate your help in recruiting participants for my project. Could you please forward/post the attached announcement to individuals or other organizations you know who might be interested? If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 617- 844-1600 ext. 301 or email me at [bi.identities@gmail.com](mailto:bi.identities@gmail.com) . Thank you for your assistance.

#### **SEEKING BISEXUAL WOMEN AND MEN: EXAMINING INFLUENCES OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS ON IDENTITY**

My name is Vali Kahn and I am a graduate student in the Psychology Department at the University of Massachusetts – Boston.

I am currently seeking bisexually identified women and men who would be interested in sharing their experiences related to how social interactions with individual and groups have affected their identities. Interviews will be informal, lasting between 90 minutes and 2 hours, and will be audio-recorded. You must be between the ages of 20 and 36 years old, of White European American heritage, and identify as bisexual to yourself and others in order to participate. Your participation will contribute to our understanding of the lives and experiences of bisexual people and our ability to provide sensitive services and contribute to social justice and advocacy.

If you are interested in participating in the study or would like more information please contact me at [bi.identities@gmail.com](mailto:bi.identities@gmail.com). I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Vali Kahn

**Sample recruitment e-mail/letter to community organizations and community leaders for multiracial participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (referred person's name),

My name is Vali Kahn and I am a Doctoral Student at the University of Massachusetts - Boston. I am currently working on a project that focuses on exploring the ways that social interactions with individuals and groups shape identity formation and meaning for multiracial individuals with Asian and White heritage.

I would greatly appreciate your help in recruiting participants for my project. Could you please forward/post the attached announcement to individuals or other organizations you know who might be interested? If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 617- 844-1600 ext. 301 or email me at [multiracial.experiences@gmail.com](mailto:multiracial.experiences@gmail.com) . Thank you for your assistance.

**SEEKING MULTIRACIAL ASIAN-WHITE WOMEN AND MEN: EXAMINING INFLUENCES OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS ON IDENTITY**

My name is Vali Kahn and I am a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology Department at the University of Massachusetts – Boston.

I am currently seeking multiracial Asian and White identified women and men who would be interested in sharing their experiences of how social interactions with individual and groups have affected their identities. Interviews will be informal, lasting between 90 minutes and 2 hours, and will be audio-recorded. You must be between the ages of 20 and 36 years old, identify as heterosexual, and identify as multiracial, mixed, or biracial with Asian and White heritage in order to participate. Your participation will contribute to our understanding of the lives and experiences of multiracial people and our ability to provide sensitive services and contribute to social justice and advocacy.

If you are interested in participating in the study or would like more information please contact me at [multiracial.experiences@gmail.com](mailto:multiracial.experiences@gmail.com) . I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Vali Kahn



### **Sample recruitment e-mail for contacting referred bisexual participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (referred person's name),  
My name is Vali Kahn and I am a graduate student in the Psychology department at the University of Massachusetts – Boston. I was referred to you by \_\_\_\_\_ (referrer's name), who thought you might be interested in participating in an interview about your experiences and the ways that social interactions with individuals and groups have shaped your identity.

The interview will be relatively informal and will focus on your experiences. The interview will be audio-recorded and should last about 90 minutes to 2 hours. To participate in the study you must be between the ages of 20 and 36 years of age, of White European American heritage, and identify as bisexual or any other label to suggest a bi identity, to yourself and others in order to participate.

If you are interested in participating in the study or would like more information please feel free to email me at [bi.identities@gmail.com](mailto:bi.identities@gmail.com). I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Vali Dagmar Kahn

### **Sample recruitment e-mail for contacting referred multiracial participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (referred person's name),  
My name is Vali Kahn and I am a graduate student in the Psychology department at the University of Massachusetts – Boston. I was referred to you by \_\_\_\_\_ (referrer's name), who thought you might be interested in participating in an interview about your experiences and the ways that social interactions with individuals and groups have shaped your identity.

The interview will be relatively informal and will focus on your experiences. The interview will be audio-recorded and should last about 90 minutes to 2 hours. To participate in the study you must be between the ages of 20 and 36 years of age, identify as heterosexual, and identify as multiracial, mixed, or biracial with Asian and White heritage to yourself and others in order to participate.

If you are interested in participating in the study or would like more information please feel free to email me at [multiracial.experiences@gmail.com](mailto:multiracial.experiences@gmail.com). I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Vali Dagmar Kahn

**BISEXUAL?**

**BI?**

**QUEER?**

**SAME AND OTHER**

**GENDER LOVING?**

**Do you identify as bi, bisexual, or any other label to suggest a bi identity?**

**Would you be interested in sharing your experiences about how others see you?**

Researchers at UMass Boston want to talk to you!

We are seeking bisexual individuals who are White European American and between the ages of 20 and 36 who would be interested in participating in 60-120 minute interviews about social experiences. Please call 617- 844-1600 ext. 301 (leave a message) or email [bi.identities@gmail.com](mailto:bi.identities@gmail.com). You will be thanked for your help with **\$15 dollars** and will be entered into a drawing for a **\$50 gift certificate**. Your participation will contribute to social justice and help us to provide sensitive services.

## Flyer 2– Multiracial Recruitment



**Are you biracial, hapa, multiracial, mixed?**

**Have you ever been asked, “What are you?”**

**Would you be interested in sharing your experiences about social interactions?**

If you are multiracial Asian and White, between the ages of 20 and 36, and heterosexual, I would be interested in interviewing you about your interactions with others. Interviews will take about 1 to 2 hours. Your participation in this research will contribute to raising awareness of marginalization within the field of Psychology. Please call 617- 844-1600 ext. 301 (leave a message) or email [multiracial.experiences@gmail.com](mailto:multiracial.experiences@gmail.com) for more information and to see if you qualify.

- As a token of appreciation, **you will receive \$15 and be entered in a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate.**

### **Recruitment Source List:**

All flyers and internet recruitment strategies will be posted or distributed with prior approval from the respective institution, organization, conference or group, or in approved areas (e.g. community billboards). Below please find a list of recruitment sources.

Flyers/ posted on General College Campuses listed below. I will also contact Multiracial, Asian, Bisexual, Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, diversity, social justice student groups at the following campuses for posting on their website, listserv, and or social networking organizations/groups (e.g. Facebook). Additionally, I will contact the women's studies departments, Asian/Asian American Studies departments, Queer studies department at the following campuses for posting/emailing recruitment materials.

- University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB)
- Harvard University
- Tufts University
- Brandeis University
- NorthEastern University
- Boston University
- College of the Holy Cross
- Yale University
- New York University
- Columbia University/and teachers college
- University of New Hampshire
- Wheelock College

I will contact the following Community Organizations to request posting on site, and or on their website, and or on their listserv, and or on their social networking groups (e.g. Facebook).

- Cambridge Women's Center  
<http://www.cambridgewomenscenter.org/>
- Male Center in the South End [http://www.aac.org/site/PageServer?pagename=malecenter\\_home](http://www.aac.org/site/PageServer?pagename=malecenter_home)
- AIDS Action Committee  
<http://www.aac.org/site/PageServer>
- Bisexual resource center  
<http://biresource.net/>
- GLAD Gay and lesbian advocates and defenders  
<http://www.glad.org/>
- SwirlInc  
<http://swirlinc.wordpress.com/>
- MAVIN  
<http://www.mavinfoundation.org/about/contact.html>
- Asian American Psychological Association  
<http://biwomenboston.org/>
- Bisexual resource center – has a number of Boston area listserves  
<http://biresource.net/>
- Women's studies listserv
- Queer studies listserv
- INCITE! listserv
- Biversity Boston
- Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN)
- Bisexual and Bi-Curious Men's Group
- East Coast Asian American Student Unions  
<http://www.ecaasu.org/site/>
- BiNetUSA

- Asian American Resource Workshop
- <http://aarw.org/>
- The National Association of Asian American Professionals  
<http://www.naaapboston.org/>
- New England Japanese American Citizens League  
<http://www.nejacl.org/>
- Asian Sisters Participating in Reaching Excellence  
[http://www.girlsaspire.org/about\\_aspire.html](http://www.girlsaspire.org/about_aspire.html)
- Chinese-English Newspaper in New England  
<http://sampan.org/>
- Asian Boston Magazine  
<http://www.asianboston.com/>
- Asian Sisters in Action  
<http://www.asiasisters.org/about.html>
- Massachusetts Asians and Pacific Islanders for Health  
<http://www.mapforhealth.org/site/maapp2/>
- MultiRacial Network (ACPA)  
[http://www.myacpa.org/sc/scma/mrn\\_home.cfm](http://www.myacpa.org/sc/scma/mrn_home.cfm)
- Chiltern Mountain Club  
<http://www.chiltern.org/>
- Fenway Community Health Center

Additionally, I will contact the 2010 organization committee for the annual “So...What are you, Anyway?” Conference on Multiraciality to obtain permission to post/distribute flyers at their conference. This conference is Co-Sponsored by Harvard Hapa, Harvard Remixed, and Swirl Boston at Harvard University.

## APPENDIX B

### PRE-SCREEN QUESTIONS

**These questions will be asked by phone or e-mail. In the event that the answers are unclear, potential participants initially contacted by email will be contacted by phone for clarification.**

In these interviews I will be asking you to describe your experiences of interactions with individual and groups and how these experiences have affected you. Please take a moment to answer the following questions. Your answers will help us to determine whether or not you are eligible in this study.

**Are you between the ages of 20 and 36?**

**How do you identify racially?**

**Do you ever identify as biracial/multiracial/mixed?**

**What are the racial backgrounds of your biological parents?**

**How do you identify your sexual orientation?**

**Do you ever identify as bisexual/bi or any other bisexual signifier?**

**(for multiracial participants only) Are you currently in a non-heterosexual relationship or have you had romantic relations with someone of the same gender, in the past 5 years?**

**In the event that we have additional questions we would like to be able to contact you by phone. Is there a number that we could reach you?**

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are some good times to reach you?**

## APPENDIX C

### INFORMED CONSENT AND CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING OF INTERVIEW

#### **Bisexual Form**

#### UMASS BOSTON INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

#### **Project Title: The Social Negotiation of Ambiguous In-between Stigmatized Identities: Influences on Identity Development**

#### **Introduction and Contact Information**

You are asked to take part in a research project that seeks to examine the ways that socially negotiating a bisexual identity influences the ways one thinks and feels about one's self. The researcher is Vali Kahn, clinical doctoral student in the department of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact Vali Kahn at 617- 844-1600 ext. 301 or by e-mail at [bi.identities@gmail.com](mailto:bi.identities@gmail.com). If you would like to speak with a faculty advisor affiliated with this research you can contact Karen Suyemoto, a professor in the department of Psychology at 617-287-6370 or by e-mail at [karen.suyemoto@umb.edu](mailto:karen.suyemoto@umb.edu).

#### **Description of the Project:**

In this study we are interested in the process by which socially negotiating bisexual identity shapes the ways one thinks and feels about one's self. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to engage in an interview about your experiences, thoughts, feelings and awarenesses that have contributed to your identity as bisexual. You will be asked to fill out a short form about who you are. Your participation will take approximately 90 minutes to 2 hours.

Following the interview, you may be contacted by e-mail or phone to be invited to participate in one or more follow-up interviews.

#### **Risks or Discomforts:**

You understand that there is minimal risk associated with this study. The primary risk may be the emergence of uncomfortable feelings when participating in the interview. You are encouraged to speak with the interviewer, Vali Kahn, or with the faculty advisor, Karen Suyemoto, to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation.

#### **Voluntary Participation:**

In addition, the decision whether or not to take part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you can decide to stop participation at any time. If you wish to stop participating you should tell the interviewer. Or, if you decide that you want to withdraw your participation after the interview, you should contact Vali Kahn. Whatever you decide will not result in any penalty to you.

### **Recording the Interview**

In addition to deciding to participate in the interview, you are also deciding to agree to being recorded. The interview will be recorded electronically. Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study.

If you do agree to participate in this study and to being audio taped, the recording will be transcribed (written down word for word) and erased once the transcription is checked for accuracy. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the recording or the transcript. Only the research team, research assistant(s) under the supervision of the researcher, or professional transcriber will be able to listen to the recordings. The recording of your interview will be destroyed no later than a year from today.

The written words of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or your picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

### **Confidentiality:**

Your part in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Only the research team, research assistant(s) under the supervision of the researcher, or professional transcriber will be able to listen to the tapes. After transcribing and checking for accuracy, the tape will be erased and there will be no way of linking your identity to the data collected. Information gathered for this project will be stored in a locked file cabinet and/or password protected on a private computer and only the research team will have access to the data.

### **Rights:**

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach Vali Kahn at 617- 844-1600 ext. 301 or by email at [bi.identities@gmail.com](mailto:bi.identities@gmail.com). If you would like to contact the research advisor on this project you can reach Dr. Karen Suyemoto at 617-287-6370 or email her at [karen.suyemoto@umb.edu](mailto:karen.suyemoto@umb.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following



address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5370 or at [human.subjects@umb.edu](mailto:human.subjects@umb.edu).

**Signatures**

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM INDICATES THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

---

Typed/Printed Name of Participant

---

Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

## Multiracial Form

### UMASS BOSTON INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

#### **Project Title: The Social Negotiation of Ambiguous In-between Stigmatized Identities: Influences on Identity Development**

##### **Introduction and Contact Information**

You are asked to take part in a research project that seeks to examine the ways that socially negotiating a multiracial identity influences the ways one thinks and feels about one's self. The researcher is Vali Kahn, clinical doctoral student in the department of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact Vali Kahn at 617- 844-1600 ext. 301 or by e-mail at [multiracial.experiences@gmail.com](mailto:multiracial.experiences@gmail.com). If you would like to speak with a faculty advisor affiliated with this research you can contact Karen Suyemoto, a professor in the department of Psychology at 617-287-6370 or by e-mail at [karen.suyemoto@umb.edu](mailto:karen.suyemoto@umb.edu).

##### **Description of the Project:**

In this study we are interested in the process by which socially negotiating multiracial identity shapes the ways one thinks and feels about one's self. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to engage in an interview about your experiences, thoughts, feelings and awarenesses that have contributed to your identity as multiracial. You will be asked to fill out a short form about who you are. Your participation will take approximately 90 minutes to 2 hours.

Following the interview, you may be contacted by e-mail or phone to be invited to participate in one or more follow-up interviews.

##### **Risks or Discomforts:**

You understand that there is minimal risk associated with this study. The primary risk may be the emergence of uncomfortable feelings when participating in the interview. You are encouraged to speak with the interviewer, Vali Kahn, or with the faculty advisor, Karen Suyemoto, to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation.

##### **Voluntary Participation:**

In addition, the decision whether or not to take part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you can decide to stop participation at any time. If you wish to stop participating you should tell the interviewer. Or, if you decide that you want to withdraw your participation after the interview, you should contact Vali Kahn. Whatever you decide will not result in any penalty to you.

### **Recording the Interview**

In addition to deciding to participate in the interview, you are also deciding to agree to being recorded. The interview will be recorded electronically. Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study.

If you do agree to participate in this study and to being audio taped, the recording will be transcribed (written down word for word) and erased once the transcription is checked for accuracy. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the recording or the transcript. Only the research team, research assistant(s) under the supervision of the researcher, or professional transcriber will be able to listen to the recordings. The recording of your interview will be destroyed no later than a year from today.

The written words of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or your picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

### **Confidentiality:**

Your part in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Only the research team, research assistant(s) under the supervision of the researcher, or professional transcriber will be able to listen to the tapes. After transcribing and checking for accuracy, the tape will be erased and there will be no way of linking your identity to the data collected. Information gathered for this project will be stored in a locked file cabinet and/or password protected on a private computer and only the research team will have access to the data.

### **Rights:**

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach Vali Kahn at 617- 844-1600 ext. 301 or by email at [multiracial.experiences@gmail.com](mailto:multiracial.experiences@gmail.com). If you would like to contact the research advisor on this project you can reach Dr. Karen Suyemoto at 617-287-6370 or email her at [karen.suyemoto@umb.edu](mailto:karen.suyemoto@umb.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5370 or at [human.subjects@umb.edu](mailto:human.subjects@umb.edu).

**Signatures**

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM INDICATES THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

---

Typed/Printed Name of Participant

---

Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

**Demographic Questionnaire for bisexual participants**

The following questions are to help us get a better sense of who is participating in this study. Some of the questions may be related to the things we ask about in the interviews, but many may seem unrelated. Please remember that:

- We just want to be able to describe the people who participated in this study.
- We know that many of these categories do not fully capture the complexities of each individual's experience; however they are an attempt to reflect the diversity of people's identities.
- Remember that you are free to choose not to respond to any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

1. What is your current age? *(please write in answer):*

---

2. How do you identify your sex? *(please write in your answer):*

---

3. How do you identify your gender? *(please write in your answer):*

---

**Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation is an umbrella term that describes one's attractions, behaviors, and identity within a social context. Because this information can be so complex, we are going to ask you several questions about your sexual orientation in order to get as complete a picture as possible.

4. In your own words, to which sexual orientation group or groups do you currently belong?

---

5. Has your sexual orientation changed? If so, please indicate in your own words, to which sexual orientation group or groups you belonged to in the past?

---

6. How important is your sexual orientation identity to you? *(Please circle one)*

*not very  
important to  
who I am*

1

2

*somewhat  
important to  
who I am*

3

4

*very important  
to who I am*

5

7. Which group label most accurately describes your sexual orientation?

Bisexual

Gay/Lesbian

Heterosexual

Other (e.g., Questioning, Queer)

Specify if you choose \_\_\_\_\_

8. Marital status: *(check one)*:

Single

Married

Cohabiting

Separated

Divorced

Widowed

### **Racial and Ethnic Background**

We're interested in getting a complete picture of your racial and ethnic background. Because this information can be so complex, we are going to ask you several questions about your race and ethnicity in order to get as complete a picture as possible.

9. Racial categories are based on visible attributes (often skin or eye color and certain facial and bodily features) and self-identification. **In your own words, to which racial group or groups do you belong?**

---

10. Ethnicity typically emphasizes the common history, nationality, geographic distribution, language, cuisine or dress of groups of people rather than their racial background (such as Korean, Bengali, Hmong, Italian, Irish, Thai, etc.). **In your own words, with which ethnic group or groups do you identify?**

---

11. In what country were you born?

---

12. If you were not born in the United States, in what year did you first move to the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

13. What was the first language you learned to speak?

English

Other (please specify)

---

14. If English is not your first language, how long have you been speaking English?

---

15. How important is your racial identity to you? (*Please circle one*)

*not very  
important to  
who I am*  
1

2

*somewhat  
important to  
who I am*  
3

4

*very important  
to who I am*  
5

16. Which group label below most accurately describes your racial background? (check all that apply)

Alaskan  
Native/Native/American/Indigenous

Latino(a)/Hispanic

Asian

Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian

Black

White

Multiracial (*please  
specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

Other (*please specify*):  
\_\_\_\_\_

17. What is the highest grade in school, year in college, or post-college degree work you've completed?

- 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less
- 1-3 years of high school
- 12<sup>th</sup> grade, high school diploma
- Vocational school/other non-college
- 1-3 years of college
- College degree (B.A., B.S.)
- Master's degree (e.g. MA, MBA, MS)
- Professional degree (e.g. MD, JD, PhD)

18. What is your current occupation (*please write in*):

---

19. In what sort of community were you primarily raised?

- Farm/rural
- Small town
- Medium-sized town/Suburb

city/Large suburb

Small

Urban

20. How did you hear about this study?

---



Demographics Form Cont-Re-contact Inquiry Form.

Would you be willing to be re-contacted via e-mail or phone to be invited to participate in one or more follow-up interviews as a part of this study?

If so, could you please provide your contact information down below and the primary researcher will re-contact you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## Demographics Questionnaire for multiracial participants

The following questions are to help us get a better sense of who is participating in this study. Some of the questions may be related to the things we ask about in the interviews, but many may seem unrelated. Please remember that:

- We just want to be able to describe the people who participated in this study.
- We know that many of these categories do not fully capture the complexities of each individual's experience; however they are an attempt to reflect the diversity of people's identities.
- Remember that you are free to choose not to respond to any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

1. What is your current age? *(please write in answer):*

---

2. How do you identify your sex? *(please write in your answer):*

---

3. How do you identify your gender? *(please write in your answer):*

---

### **Racial and Ethnic Background**

We're interested in getting a complete picture of your racial and ethnic background. Because this information can be so complex, we are going to ask you several questions about your race and ethnicity in order to get as complete a picture as possible.

4. Racial categories are based on visible attributes (often skin or eye color and certain facial and bodily features) and self-identification. **In your own words, to which racial group or groups do you belong?**

---

5. Ethnicity typically emphasizes the common history, nationality, geographic distribution, language, cuisine or dress of groups of people rather than their racial background (such as Korean, Bengali, Hmong, Italian, Irish, Thai, etc.). **In your own words, with which ethnic group or groups do you identify?**

---

6. In what country were you born?

---

7. If you were not born in the United States, in what year did you first move to the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What was the first language you learned to speak?

English                       Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

9. If English is not your first language, how long have you been speaking English?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. How important is your racial identity to you? (*Please circle one*)

*not very  
important to  
who I am*

1

2

*somewhat  
important to  
who I am*

3

4

*very important  
to who I am*

5

11. Which group label below most accurately describes your racial background? (check all that apply)

Alaskan  
Native/Native/American/Indigenous

Latino(a)/Hispanic

Asian

Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian

Black

White

Multiracial (*please  
specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

Other (*please specify*):  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation is an umbrella term that describes one's attractions, behaviors, and identity within a social context. Because this information can be so complex, we are going to ask you several questions about your sexual orientation in order to get as complete a picture as possible.

12. In your own words, to which sexual orientation group or groups do you currently belong?

\_\_\_\_\_

13. Has your sexual orientation changed? If so, please indicate in your own words, to which sexual orientation group or groups you belonged to in the past?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. How important is your sexual orientation identity to you? (*Please circle one*)

*not very  
important to  
who I am*

1

2

*somewhat  
important to  
who I am*

3

4

*very important  
to who I am*

5

15. Which group label most accurately describes your sexual orientation?

Bisexual

Gay/Lesbian

Heterosexual

Other (e.g., Questioning, Queer)

Specify if you choose \_\_\_\_\_

16. Marital status: (*check one*):

Single

Married

Cohabiting

Separated

Divorced

Widowed

17. What is the highest grade in school, year in college, or post-college degree work you've completed?

8<sup>th</sup> grade or less

1-3 years of high school

12<sup>th</sup> grade, high school diploma

Vocational school/other non-college

1-3 years of college

College degree (B.A., B.S.)

Master's degree (e.g. MA, MBA, MS)

Professional degree (e.g. MD, JD, PhD)

18. What is your current occupation (*please write in*):

19. In what sort of community were you primarily raised?

Farm/rural

Small town

Medium-sized town/Suburb

Small

city/Large suburb

Urban

20. How did you hear about this study? \_\_\_\_\_

Demographics Form Cont-Re-contact Inquiry Form.

Would you be willing to be re-contacted via e-mail or phone to be invited to participate in one or more follow-up interviews as a part of this study?

If so, could you please provide your contact information down below and the primary researcher will re-contact you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### DEBRIEFING CARD

#### **Debriefing Card—bisexual participants**

Thank you for participating in this study! Given that bisexual experiences are not well understood, your willingness to participate in this study will help us to not only better understand bisexual experiences but also provide better services for bisexual individuals. If you have any additional thoughts about the interview or what it was like to talk with me about these experiences, please feel free to share these in an email or to contact me to set up a time to talk ([bi.identities@gmail.com](mailto:bi.identities@gmail.com)). We greatly appreciate your contributions and welcome any additional thoughts you might want to share with us.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Vali Kahn, M.A.

#### **Debriefing Card—multiracial participants**

Thank you for participating in this study! Given that multiracial experiences are not well understood, your willingness to participate in this study will help us to not only better understand multiracial experiences but also provide better services for multiracial individuals. If you have any additional thoughts about the interview or what it was like to talk with me about these experiences, please feel free to share these in an email or to contact me to set up a time to talk ([multiracial.experiences@gmail.com](mailto:multiracial.experiences@gmail.com)). We greatly appreciate your contributions and welcome any additional thoughts you might want to share with us.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Vali Kahn, M.A.

## APPENDIX F

### MEMBER CHECK MATERIALS

#### **Sample Member Check Email**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Sometime within the last year or so I interviewed you as part of my dissertation study exploring how social interactions with individual and groups have affected your identities as someone that identifies as \_\_\_\_\_ (insert group specific identity status). At the time of our individual interview I mentioned to you that I would likely be contacting you to get your feedback on the findings of the study. Well, I am finally at that point! I am organizing group interviews with people who interviewed with me individually and I would love to get your feedback on my findings in a group interview.

I have two possible dates \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . The group interview will be held at one of two locations depending on what is most convenient.

Please let me know by (one week from today) if you would be interested in participating in this group interview and if so your preferred dates and times from the list above. Please also let me know which location would work better for you and I will do my best to try to accommodate as best I can.

I also want to recognize that some of you may not be comfortable in a group setting or you may no longer live in the Boston area making this option impossible. If you would like to give me feedback over the phone or via e-mail we can arrange that, just let me know!

Thank you again for all of your help! Your voices are so important.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

I hope you are enjoying your summer!

## **Member Check Overview of Preliminary Findings Sent to Participants:**

Hi,

Thank you again for participating in my study. I am excited to share with you my preliminary results. Please remember that this is a qualitative study, which means that my findings are based on your collective voiced experiences.

I am asking you to review these findings and to share with me whether you see your experience represented here. Please keep in mind that there may be things here that you personally do not identify with or have experienced, as I am attempting to represent the *full range* of the phenomenon and to encompass the diversity of experiences.

I am most interested in your feedback about (a) whether you see your experience within this model, (b) whether there are things in the model that contradict your experience—while there may be things that you have not experienced that others have, I would want to make changes if there are things here that are in direct contrast to your experience, and (c) learning if there are things that I have missed and that you feel are not represented.

Below you will find 1) my research question, 2) an overview of the findings accompanied by a visual model that describes the process and emerging theory, and 3) some questions for you to consider.

If you have any questions for me please do not hesitate to email me. I greatly appreciate your willingness to share your experiences and to review these findings now so that I may best describe the complex experiences of identity development. Thank you!

1) Research Question:

*—How do experiences of socially negotiating an in-between socially ambiguous stigmatized identity influence one's identity development?*

By social negotiations I mean responses to a social “demand” from others to fit into a prescribed system of categorization, for example gay/lesbian or straight rather than gay/lesbian and straight. By social negotiations I also mean what happens when this fit is not possible *and* the decision making process that ensues around these demands—whether or not to correct, come out, cover, or pass.

By socially ambiguous I am referring to being ambiguous to others not to the participants themselves



## **Findings**

### **Discrepant Moments:**

“Discrepant moments” are those times when participants interacted with others who tried to categorize them, were confused, expressed disbelief, or made assumptions about them. These moments led to a need to make sense of what was going on, and what this meant for one’s own sense of self and identity. These moments were not always the same, were iterative, and carried different meaning across different contexts.

Initially in the moment, participants were not necessarily thinking about their identities, but were called to respond to other people’s confusion in these discrepant moments, making their identities salient.

The magnitude of responses to the different social encounters varied depending on the moment in time and surrounding context and variables. The negotiation cycles are fluid and interactive, meaning they are not linear and one can move fluidly within and across the different cycles. These negotiations led to increased understandings and perspectives that enabled participants to begin to make more active choices about their identities and how/when they wanted their identities to be salient.

As participants moved within, across and through these different cycles the relationship between external and internal influence on identity also changed.

### First Cycle: Catalyzing experiences “what?!?”

A discrepant moment launched participants into a response process, with associated effects on one’s bisexual identity. In this cycle, external forces were exerting more force on the internal, because the process was primarily a reactive process.

Participants responded to this discrepant moment with an automatic unprocessed emotional response, such as shock, surprise, frustration, etc. This was quickly followed by a series of thoughts and internal questions to try to make sense of the experience, such as “what is going on here?” .

This process led to multiple effects on identity, including an increased identity salience. They started to question themselves and feel uncertain about where they belonged (“other people don’t see me as bi am I bi?”). They realize that there is a demand for identity negotiation.

This cycle was uncomfortable, pushing participants out of a safer space where their identity had been less salient either because it was unquestioned or socially accepted. There was a desire to bring back a sense of equilibrium and greater comfort.

### Second Cycle: Active Negotiations “weighing my options”

In this cycle there was a back and forth negotiation between internal and external forces, between who I see myself to be and who I want to be versus how others see me and what

or who they will “allow” me to be. Participants talked about “weighing their options” and making decisions about identity performances to either align or misalign with assumptions of social others.

One part of this cycle was starting to actively “read” the environment, anticipating possible outcomes, considering power and privilege and goals for belonging and or affiliation. Reading the environment and being conscious of one’s surroundings provided information that was weighed into a decision making process around whether to correct, come out, pass or cover.

Participants then described starting to make active decisions about how they wanted to present themselves and their identity. They tried out different approaches to different environment, such as adjusting language, behavior, dress, or finding affiliations that could act as signifiers. This included things like choosing a particular hair style, wearing pants versus a skirt, or referring to membership to a particular student organization.

Participants tried out these choices in different interactions with individuals and groups. Afterwards, participants evaluated and reflected on the experience, considering how their choices affected others’ responses and their own feelings and thoughts. Depending on the social exchange, participants described feeling frustrated that they responded in a particular way or happy that they were able to make a connection or to be seen by others more fully. Evaluations allowed participants to learn from their experiences and make adjustments in future encounters but participants also continued to question themselves and the external demands and began to question these negotiations themselves.

Participants described finding themselves in-between no matter what they did assumed to be something they were not or part of a group they were not fully a part, the challenge of either or categorizations and possessing an identity that is much more complex. Participants experienced their in-between identities as salient as the result of actively negotiating choices to perform identity and inherent external demands to label identities.

### Third Cycle: New Understandings and Perspectives “finding my place”

In this third cycle, participants began to gain new understandings and perspectives that enabled them to make more active choices, to shape their identities more from who they are and who they want to be, while also recognizing the influence and effects of external demands. Participants talked about seeking out information through taking classes, dialoguing with others who have similar identities, and finding communities where they are accepted, etc. Through these experiences and the previous cycles of negotiation they gained perspective about how and why others made categorical demands, and about the shared experiences of negotiating these demands. They began to locate their experiences contextually, socially, historically.

The combination of having strong communities, time with like social others, support and increased knowledge increased participant identity agency. This sense of identity agency

was also accompanied by growing identity choice, as well as by choices related to how they wanted to interact with others' demands. They were no longer just reacting to these demands but considering how to affect others. For example, some participants talked about making choices to actively shift discrepant moments, to change the climate so that others didn't have to experience marginalization. Others talked about choosing to keep their in-between identities salient and to use their identity as a tool for change while still others talked about choosing to integrate their identities and to not to have their in-between status more salient than other parts of themselves. Some participants described their active choice to disconnect and not engage the discrepant moments or to literally avoid these experiences by living in inclusive communities.

Overall, participants in this study recognized that they were not at the whim of external forces and being defined by others, identity agency described a reverse flow of force where individuals began to see the power they have to resist categorization and exert influences on their environment.

These processes are iterative, cyclical, and recurrent. Over time the amount of time spent in each cycle may vary depending on the familiarity of the discrepant social encounter and the contextual variables (i.e. if the same experience occurs over and over again participants may spend less time in the first two cycles while the third cycle may become larger representing more time spent in this cycle. Similarly, if this is the first encounter with a new or different discrepant social encounter, participants may spend more time in the initial cycles and may not get to the later cycle.) Additionally, people don't necessarily move through these cycles in a linear fashion but may cycle back and forth, within, between and across the different cycles.

Other factors that influence one's experiences within and navigating these different cycles are social, cultural, political, and contextual variables. For example participant experiences would likely be different if this were an era where consciousness around bisexual issues was not a part of social discourse. Similarly, developmental factors, such as perspective taking, can influence the negotiation and movement within and across these cycles. In these ways both historical and developmental factors play a role in these iterative processes.

Contextual factors may also related to the social encounter itself, such as who the exchange is with (i.e. individual or group, Lesbian/Gay, Straight, Bi), and where it is taking place, (i.e. work, family, friends, school etc...). These variations make a difference in how the moment is experienced and negotiated.

## Questions

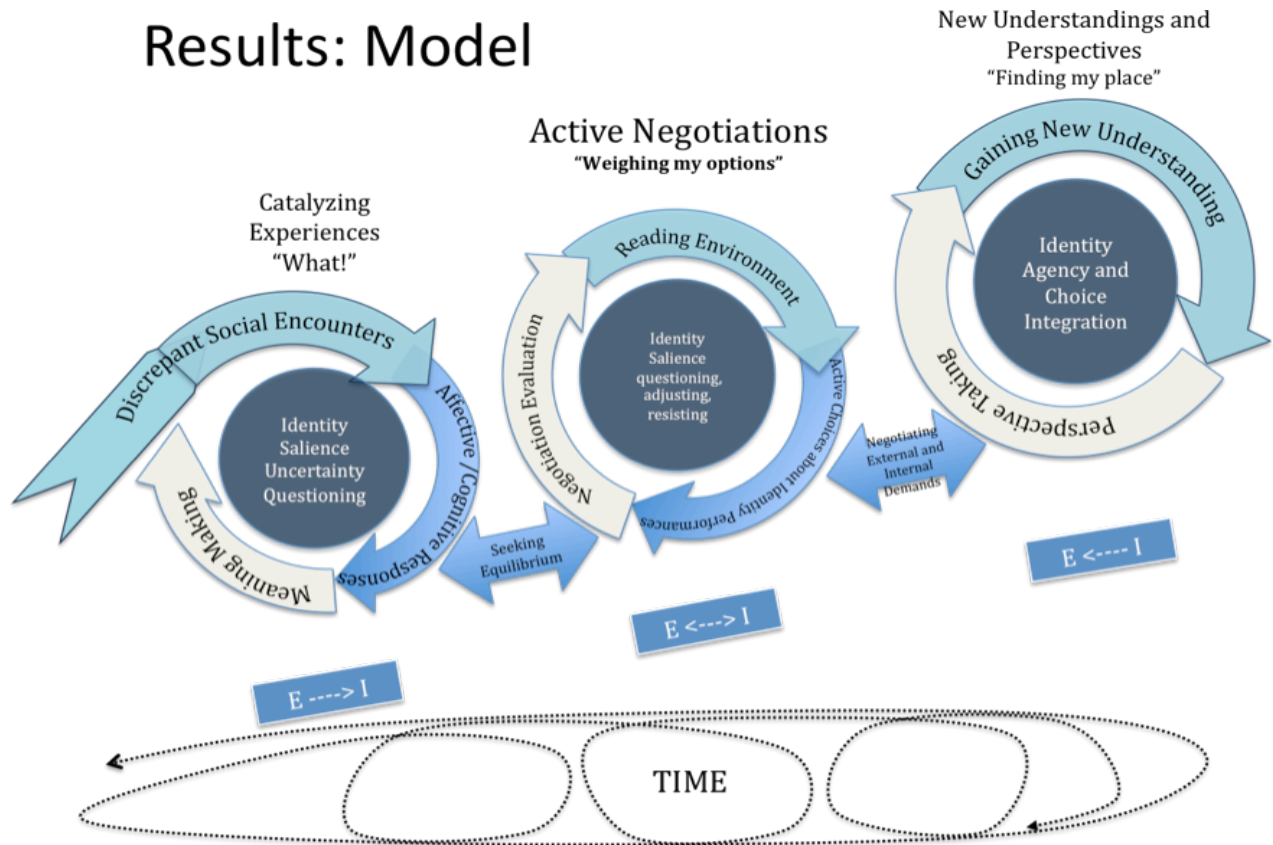
- 1. In what ways do you see your experience represented here? What aspects of your experiences are represented here?**

**2. Are there things in this model that directly contradict your experiences?**

**3. Are there aspects of your experiences related to the research question (e.g. related to socially negotiating identity and the influences on in-between identity processes) that you feel are important and are not represented here?**

**4. Other Thoughts?**

# Results: Model



## APPENDIX G

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Do you have any questions before we start?*

*First it I think it would be helpful for us to talk a little bit about how you currently identify your sexuality [race] and what this means to you so that I can understand how you currently identify and how you personally understand this identity.*

- 1. How do you personally identify your sexuality [race]?*
- 2. How do you tend to identify in social situations?*
- 3. Across different contexts, how do you see other people seeing you?*
- 4. Can you describe an experience where you felt that others thought you should identify differently?*
- 5. What did you do in this situation?*
- 6. How have other people or people who are close to you influenced your identity?*
- 7. How, if at all, have you shaped the ways other people see or identify you/ your group?*
- 8. Referring back to an experience described earlier – if presented with the same situation 5 or 10 years ago can you describe how you think you would have felt? similarly/differently?*

*Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. Is there anything we have missed or anything you would like to share before we finish up?*

## APPENDIX H

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES

#### **Bisexual Social/Community Resources**

##### **University of Massachusetts Boston - Counseling Center**

For UMass Boston students only, located in 2<sup>nd</sup> fl of Quinn, call 617-287-5690 or drop in to make an appointment to see a counselor. Health insurance is not involved. The first 3 visits are free.

##### **Fenway Health Center**

“The mission of **Fenway Health** is to enhance the physical and mental health of its community, which includes those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), the people who live and work in our neighborhood, and beyond. Fenway provides high quality, comprehensive health care in a welcoming environment and seeks to improve the overall health of the larger community, locally and nationally, through education and training, policy and advocacy, and research and evaluation.”

Fenway Health is located at 1340 Boylston Street, Boston MA

Phone: 617-267-0900

[http://www.fenwayhealth.org/site/PageServer?pagename=FCHC\\_abt\\_about\\_home](http://www.fenwayhealth.org/site/PageServer?pagename=FCHC_abt_about_home)

**The Bisexual Resource Center** “envisions a world where love is celebrated, regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression. Because bisexuals today are still misunderstood, marginalized and discriminated against, the BRC is committed to providing support to the bisexual community and raising public awareness about bisexuality and bisexual people. The BRC uses bisexual as an umbrella term for people who recognize and honor their potential for sexual and emotional attraction to more than one gender (pansexual, fluid, omnisexual, queer, and all other free-identifiers). We celebrate and affirm the diversity of identity and expression regardless of labels.”

<http://biresource.net/biresources.shtml>

<http://biresource.net/bostongroups.shtml>

## **Multiracial Social/Community Resources**

### **University of Massachusetts Boston - Counseling Center**

For UMass Boston students only, located in 2<sup>nd</sup> fl of Quinn, call 617-287-5690 or drop in to make an appointment to see a counselor. Health insurance is not involved. The first 3 visits are free.

### **South Cove Community Health Center**

Specializing in serving the Asian American community, South Cove offers health care and counseling services in three locations in the Boston area.

885 Washington St., Boston, MA 02111-1415 (617) 482-7555

145 South St., Boston, MA 02111-2826 (617) 521-6700

275 Hancock St., Quincy, MA 02171 (617) 745-0280

### **Swirl Inc -- <http://www.swirlinc.org/>**

“MISSION - Swirl is a national multi-ethnic organization that challenges society’s notions of race through community building, education, and action.

Swirl chapters currently exist in 10 cities across the US (including Boston!) (<http://swirlinc.wordpress.com/where-is-swirl/>). Monthly events consist of dine-outs, book club meets, film screenings, discussions, advocacy-related events, and more! Even if you are not in the vicinity of any of these chapters, this list is here for everyone to discuss issues relevant to race and identity, to exchange information, and to offer ideas to one another!  
~please visit us at [www.swirlinc.org!](http://www.swirlinc.org/)”

### **MAVIN -- <http://www.mavinfoundation.org/index.html>**

#### **Mission:**

MAVIN builds pathways to healthier communities by celebrating the mixed heritage experience and providing awareness and educational resources through:

- Innovative Programs;
- Cutting edge technologies;
- Collaboration with other mixed-heritage organizations; and
- Evidence-based program development & research

### **Mixed Heritage Web Resources including Community Organizations, Web sites, Higher Ed Organizations, and more! Go to:**

<http://www.mixedstudentresources.com/web-resources/>



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