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MULTIRACIAL INDIVIDUALS, GENDER DYNAMICS, AND DATING

A Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

For the degree of Masters of Arts

In the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

University of Mississippi

By

Kayla Mildred Williams

August 2017

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the role gender and race play in multiracial men and women's experiences with dating. With the use of interviews, fourteen men and women shared their experiences with dating. There were two main themes that emerged. The first was the development of a multiracial identity. Participants labelled four factors that impact the development of their multiracial identity: family, friends, school, and religion. The other theme was dating approaches which included: finding a partner, family acceptance and non-acceptance, and challenges with dating. Influenced by the theoretical frames of intersectionality and colorism, I demonstrate how race and gender are intersecting power dynamics that influence multiracial experiences when it comes to dating.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to the woman that has always stood by my side: my mother. Thank you, Mama, for the love and encouragement you have showered me with over the years. I couldn't have made it this far without all that you do for me.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As a multiracial woman, being racially ambiguous in a society that does not look beyond the racial categories of black and white has been challenging. The question, “what are you?” is a constant reminder that I am different, and that my experiences are different from those around me. As an adolescent, I struggled with navigating through my racial ambiguity. The most common issues were figuring out a place where I fit in, how to racially identify myself, and most importantly, how to date in a region where people are taught “not to mix races.” I found myself reading articles and books to find answers to the questions to see if others like me have similar experiences. However, I noticed that my experiences did not match the material presented in the literature, and there was nothing that specifically addressed dating as a multiracial. Literature focused on the experiences of multiracial individuals but not on how these experiences differed between men and women. Also, dating literature focused on interracial dating between two monoracial individuals which did not apply to me or others like me because we are not considered to be a single race. Therefore, I decided to do a study that would allow me to look at the aspects of being multiracial that are not accounted for in the literature.

Since the implementation of the “check all that apply” or what is now called the “mark one or more” option created by the United States Census Bureau, there has been an increase in the amount of research done on multiracial individuals (Brunsma 2004:555). The increase in



research is a result of the “multiracial movement” which focuses on both classifying multiracial individuals accurately and questions relating to multiracial identity (Brunsma 2004:556). Therefore, most literature written on multiracial individuals has focused on how multiracials navigate issues involving their identity. However, there is a gap in the literature surrounding the impact gender has on multiracial experiences and the issues multiracial individuals encounter when it comes to dating.

For this study, I use an intersectional approach that includes the power dynamics of race and gender to examine if and how the experiences of multiracial individuals differ from those reported in prior literature that only uses a racial frame when studying multiracial individuals. Informed by Khanna’s (2010) concept of “reflective appraisals,” I explore how multiracial individuals develop a multiracial identity based on the shared interactions respondents have had with others. I also explore how multiracial individuals approach dating. These approaches to dating include: what it is like to find a partner, family acceptance and non-acceptance of partners, challenges that arise when dating, and positive dating experiences. I also explore how multiracial individuals feel about the “mark one or more” option and term “other” as a means for racial identification and what forms of resistance individuals use to combat the current racial identification options.

The study uses a demographic questionnaire and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with multiracial men and women who have a multiracial and or multi-ethnic identity. The data from the questionnaire were used as contextual evidence for describing the participants. The interviews help to gain an understanding of why and how experiences of multiracial men and women differ. The interviews also provide an understanding of how multiracial individuals in this study navigate the realm of dating.

I have three guiding research questions. First, how does gender affect the experiences of multiracial individuals? Second, what is it like to date as a multiracial person? Third, how do multiracial individuals feel about the “mark one or more” option and term “other” as a means for racial identification? I hypothesize that multiracial men and women will have different experiences because of the power gender holds within our society. I also believe that multiracial individuals may experience some difficulties when dating since racially ambiguous persons are treated as “other” in society which may extend to dating and forming relationships.

In this chapter, I review literature on how multiracial individuals have historically been studied. Along with historical context of racial categorization of multiracials in the United States, this chapter also explains the theoretical frameworks used in this study and why they are helpful when studying multiracial individuals. In the second chapter, I explain the methodology I used to complete this study. This includes: the sample, the recruitment process and challenges, the interview process, coding, and limitations of the study. The third and fourth chapters display my findings. The first findings chapter describes how multiracial individuals develop a multiracial identity, and the second findings chapter describes how multiracials in this study approach dating. The concluding chapter discusses the meaning of my findings and discusses the further research needed in relation to my study. Following my chapters, I provide an appendix that includes the participant demographics for this study, the information flyer that was provided to participants, the demographic survey given to the participants, and interview guide used when completing this study.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIRACIAL RACE OPTIONS

To understand the “multiracial boom” which focuses on accurate classification options for multiracials and multiracial identity, it is important to understand the historical role that race has had on multiracials. According to DaCosta’s 2007 overview on multiracial categories, the Census Bureau implemented the “check all that apply” option on the 2000 census. However, this was not the first time there was an option available for multiracial individuals. White and black people have been identified in every census since 1790, but the census started acknowledging multiracial people as Mulattos with the Seventh Census in 1850. To count multiracial people in the 1850 census, the census was redesigned to collect individual-level data (Hickman 1997:11). Enumerators were required to differentiate between Mulatto and black. However, the definition of Mulatto included: quadroons (people that were one-fourth black), octoroons (people that were one-eighth black), and any person that had a perceptible trace of African blood (Hickman 1997:12).

In 1890, the Census had a Mulatto category for those that were not considered to be Black or African American (DaCosta 2007:24). Enumerators used visual inspection to distinguish if someone was to be categorized as black or Mulatto (Hickman 1997:12). However, the Mulatto option was short lived. The 1890 Census results were deemed unreliable based on the visual inspections (DaCosta 2007: 24). The Mulatto category was dropped from the Census after the implementation of the one-drop rule in the 1920s (DaCosta 2007:25).

Because of the implementation of the one-drop rule, multiracial individuals were labeled with the hypodescent status or racial classification of their minority parent (DaCosta 2007:24). Therefore, multiracial people of black and white racial ancestry were considered black (Khanna and Johnson 2010: 380). This hypodescent classification conveyed a complex ideology that

supported racial subordination. It placed on emphasis on white superiority and supported subordination from those recognized as being “contaminated” by African blood (Hickman 1997:15-16).

While multiracial activists argued for a multiracial category, “civil rights organizations focused on the possible harm such a change in the system of racial classification would have on the monitoring of compliance with civil rights legislation” (DaCosta 2007:31). The civil rights organizations argued that the change would diminish the size of established ethno-racial group populations and the ability to use racial statistics to show evidence of discrimination (DaCosta 2007:31, Bratter 2007:821). The civil rights organizations justified their opposition by challenging the notion that multiracial individuals shared enough commonalities as a group to need a “protected status” (DaCosta 2007: 31). However, multiracial activists argued single-race options denied multiracial individuals to be publicly recognized as a racially distinctive community (Bratter 2007, 31). As a result, in 1977 the option “other” was created to standardize racial categories used by federal agencies (DaCosta 2007:31).

### *The One-Drop Rule*

The first significant interracial relationships between blacks and whites in America occurred in Virginia and Maryland during the 17th and 18th centuries between African slaves and European indentured servants (Khanna 2010:98). In the 1660s, both Maryland and Virginia passed anti-miscegenation laws because of the fear that interracial relationships would “taint” the purity of the white race (Khanna 2010:98). Although similar statutes were passed throughout the country, interracial relationships persisted voluntarily and through force of the Southern patriarchal system of slavery (Khanna 2010:98). During the slavery era, whites rationalized rape of black women as a rite of passage, and therefore, the sexual exploitation and rape of African

American women were not seen as punishable offenses (King 2014: 174). Therefore, most multiracial children born during this era were the result of rape and brute force (Khanna 2010:98). Multiracial or “mulatto” children posed a problem to the strict color line created in America to separate blacks and whites. It made it possible for multiracial children of enslaved mothers to be classified as black and remain as slaves.

The formal adoption of the one-drop rule occurred in Virginia with the “Preservation of Racial Integrity Act.” This act defined a white person as a person without any trace of any blood other than Caucasian blood (Hickman 1997: 13). The one-drop rule was used to justify discrimination against multiracial and black individuals. Because the one-drop rule reinforced the rigid racial hierarchy and defended the ideology of racial purity, more states started to adopt the one-drop rule, and racial tensions in the United States continued to increase (Payne 1998:161).

After the end of slavery in 1865, the one-drop rule persisted. The once informal rule was used by white southerners to create a system of legally sanctioned racial separation known as Jim Crow segregation (Khanna 2010:98). Jim Crow laws were used to define who was considered to be black and white. Although some black-white multiracial individuals were able to “pass” as white and enjoy the privileges afforded to white individuals, a majority of black-white multiracials who could not pass as white were labeled as black. Therefore, most multiracial individuals experienced the same forms of discrimination that black people experienced (Khanna 2010:98).

### *Current Racial Options*

Beginning in the 2000s, the “check all that apply” option as well as the option “other” have become the most common racial identification options available to multiracials today. However, there is still a debate surrounding these options because neither allows for multiracials to separate themselves from the monoracial background of their parents (Bratter 2007:821). Multiracial individuals are still being tracked into the existing rigid racial categories instead of forming a new racial category or breaking down the current racial boundaries. My study questions these racial identification options to see if multiracial men and women see them as beneficial or problematic.

### MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY

While some scholarship does not recognize the multiple ways that multiracials can identify, Brunnsma is useful in his work to identify the ways that multiracials are choosing to identify themselves. Through Brunnsma’s analysis on multiracial identity, he found that there are currently four ways that multiracials choose to identify (Brunnsma 2006:558). The first form of identification is a singular race option meaning the racially ambiguous person chooses to adopt only one race identity: white or black. The second form of the multiracial identity is one in which the person accepts and identifies with both of their parents’ races. Then there is the changing multiracial or “Protean” identity. The individuals that develop this type of identity sees their racial identification as a constant negotiation and strategy for fitting in among their social networks (Brunnsma 2006:558). The last racial identification option employed by multiracial individuals is the “human category” in which the person does not recognize the existing systems of public racial categorization (Brunnsma 2006:558).

These four options are not widely accepted by society (Bratter 2009:659). The experiences of multiracials have been depicted in research as marginality or “between-ness” (Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2002:335). Although multiracial individuals can self-identify in four different ways, society only presents two racial options for multiracial individuals. This binary includes the minority and multiracial identification option. The absence of choice given to multiracial community has been associated with negativity and marginality (Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2002:335).

### *Marginality Equals Stigma*

The marginality associated with being multiracial can be understood as a form of stigma (Storrs 1999:187). Stigma is best analyzed through Goffman’s 1963 theory which discusses the many ways that stigmatized people try to cope with the stigma placed on them (Khanna and Johnson 2010:383). Stigma is a socially constructed attribute that devalues one’s identity (Khanna and Johnson 2019:383). Before birth, multiracial individuals are already stigmatized. For example, many monoracial individuals have negative thoughts regarding interracial marriage because of the possibility that the couple will have children. It is believed that the children will grow up being treated negatively based on their ambiguous racial background (Bonilla-Silva 2003:63). Because of the ambiguous racial background of multiracial individuals, multiracials are socially placed between racial group hierarchies (Rollins and Hunter 2013:141). Multiracials also experience racial exclusion, racism, and other types of discrimination (Rollins and Hunter 2013:142).

Stigma placed on multiracials is also gendered, especially when it comes to racial labelling and appearance. Multiracial women and men go through different forms of racial labelling, with women being less likely to be associated with the minority status than multiracial

men (Davenport 2016: 61). However, since multiracial men are more likely to be categorized with the minority status, they are more susceptible to acts of discrimination and the stereotypes associated with criminality (Davenport 2016:62). Physical appearance can be seen as a social resource for multiracial women, but multiracial men report that appearance has little to no effect for them as a resource (Davenport 2016:62). Although we are aware of these gendered forms of stigma, they are not collectively looked at by most researchers and are not presented in the literature in a way to showcase the impact this stigma has on multiracial individuals. My study provides insight on how stigma may shape or affect the experiences had by multiracial men and women in their dating lives.

## MULTIRACIAL DATING

Miscegenation laws associated with Jim Crow segregation prohibited interracial marriages between blacks and whites. Because of the fear that any black blood would taint white blood, state legislators carefully defined who was considered black (Khanna 2010:98). In this context, these partnerships contradicted the assumptions about race by drawing attention to similarities between people of different racial backgrounds (Payne 1998:154). After the legalization of interracial marriage in 1967, interracial marriages gradually became more accepted. The Pew Research Center reported that in 2013 37% of Americans were in favor of interracial relationships and marriages. This was a 24% increase from 2009 (Foster 2016). Interracial marriage and relationships play a role in creating racial harmony (Payne 1998:156). From 1970 to 2013, the percentage of interracial marriages in the United States has increased from less than 1% to 12%, and continues to increase (Wang 2015).

Although researchers have looked at the dimensions of interracial relationships, there is still little research that focuses directly on multiracial dating or dating between multiracial



individuals and their partners. Tubbs and Rosenblatt (2003) associated multiracial coupling and interracial coupling with relationships that consisted of two people of opposite races (Tubbs and Rosenblatt 2003:116). This suggests that multiracial dating and interracial dating have been used synonymously within past literature. The studies that are available on this topic focus on the comfort level of multiracial individuals have with forming a relationship with someone of a different race (Bonam and Shih 2009:87). Bonam and Shih found that 6.2% of multiracial individuals were comfortable with dating someone of another race, compared to the 5.29% of whites and 5.96 % of minority respondents (Bonam and Shih 2009:93). There is almost no research on what it is like for multiracials to date, the difficulties and/or positive aspects associated with multiracial dating, or how multiracials navigate the realm of dating. This reinforces the “othered” position that multiracial individuals have been placed into because their experiences are not accounted for. I focus on these issues to expand the literature on multiracial dating.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

### *Former Theoretical Frames used in Research*

According to Brunnsma and Rockquemore’s 2009 meta-analysis of theoretical approaches used to study multiracials, there are four theoretical approaches that have been used by researchers. These approaches include: the problem approach, the equivalent approach, the variant approach, and the ecological approach (Brunnsma and Rockquemore 2009:16). The most widely used approach is the problem approach, which focuses on the dilemmas and negative experiences associated with being multiracial in a racially-segregated society. This approach was started during the Jim Crow era when the one-drop rule was considered to be a social norm as well as the law (Brunnsma and Rockquemore 2009:16). Brunnsma and Rockquemore argue that the

problem approach encompasses the use of the marginal man theory. For the marginal man theory, there are three stages a multiracial person experiences: introduction, crisis, and adjustment. Essentially, from this perspective, multiracials are trapped in “a permanent state of crisis with the mental turmoil of racist and eugenic epistemology” (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:16).

The marginal man theory is defined as the event where an individual is shaped by one culture or race but is permanently immersed with a different culture or race. It also refers to a person who is born with two different cultures or races which have different traditions, languages, moral codes, and/or religions. Because of the multiple races or cultures, the person is marginal in both, but does not feel like a member of either culture or race (Goldberg 1941:52). From a sociological approach, the marginalized person has the ability to join social groups within the cultural or racial groups that he/she is a part of. However, the marginalized person is easily distinguished from members that have the dominant cultural or racial background (Goldberg 1941:57). The marginal man theory recognizes the dominant race as preferable. Therefore, the dominant race is given privileges not afforded to marginalized individuals (Cheng and Lively 2009:65). This often leads to the marginalized person feeling as if he/she does not fit in. The result of this marginalization is mixed emotions about the dominant cultural or racial group (Cheng and Lively 2009:65). The most common example of marginal man given by scholars is Jewish individuals. Jewish people are on the margin of two cultures and two societies. Society forces them to alter traditions and cultural values to fit dominant ideals of tradition and culture. This can go as far as religious conversions (Park 1928: 892). This creates the conflict of a “divided self,” in which the person must navigate their “old” self that is

informed by the ideals passed down by their family and the “new” self that is informed by non-Jewish societal views (Park 1928: 892).

The marginal man theory has been used to describe those with a multiracial background. Because the multiracial person is of multiple racial and/or ethnic backgrounds, he/she is seen as a stranger within each of the racial and/or ethnic backgrounds that are a part of their identity (Park 1928: 893). Multiracials that have a “divided self” are considered to have a “Border Identity” (Brunsma 2006: 558). With a Border Identity, a multiracial person does not see themselves as black or as white (in the case of a black/white identity). Instead, the multiracial person uses interactional validation to validate their multiracial identity (Brunsma 2006:558). Factors such as gender, religion, and socioeconomic status, which are related to multiracial identification, need to be accounted for when discussing multiracial identity formation and validation (Davenport 2016:58-59). However, the marginal man theory does not account for how multiracial individuals use interactions with others to influence validation of their racial and/or ethnic identity. This would be relative in determining if multiracial individuals feel marginalized or if marginalization is a stigma that is associated with being multiracial.

Starting in the 1960s, researchers began to employ a new method for studying multiracial individuals, which was the equivalent approach. With this approach, mixed-race individuals are seen as equivalent to African Americans (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:17). Erikson’s 1968 work on development is the framework from which the equivalent approach stems. Researchers using this method associate the black identity as being healthy and the negative mental health of multiracials is from internalizing racist views about “blackness” or black identity ((Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:17).

The variant approach became the new framework during the mid-1980s until the 1990s. This is the first approach that labeled multiracial individuals as a distinct group which stemmed from Maria Root's 1992 collection *Racially Mixed People in America* (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:18). However, with it, multiracials were seen as having a two-fold challenge (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:18). Not only did multiracials have to navigate through two or more racial and/or cultural identifications, they also had to develop the ability to accept the identifications that were given to them by society and integrate those identifications into their personal and racial identity (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:18). This approach uses the Biracial Identity Development Model or BIDM, which addresses the flaws of the problem approach by allowing the integration of multiple racial identities. This differs from the marginal man theory, which places emphasis on multiracials accepting the marginalized identity that has been given to them by society (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:18). As part of the variant approach, the BIDM lists six stages of identity development: personal identity, choice of group, categorization, denial, appreciation, and integration (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:19).

A more recent approach used to study multiracials is the ecological approach. It assumes that mixed people construct different racial identities based on various logics, and there are no predictable stages when it comes to identity development. Also, it is assumed that privileging any type of race over another replicates essential flaws from the previous models, which focus on challenges that multiracials have due to having multiple racial identities (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:19). The ecological approach is the only approach that allows multiracials to refuse racial identification. It also uses applications from the prior models while having fundamental breaks as well (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:19). This approach is the only one that allows for the multiple racial identities that multiracial individuals choose. It also focuses on

social factors that can influence identification development while disregarding the developmental stages that are seen in the prior models. Lastly, it allows for the shifting of identities, no racial identification, and multiple racial identifications (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2009:23).

A very recent approach used to study multiracial individuals is “reflected appraisals” which is a concept associated with symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism has been used by scholars to explore the racial identity of multiracial individuals. It’s described as a process in which identity is a negotiation between an individual and larger society (Khanna 2010: 97). Reflected appraisals, how individuals think they appear to others, is an aspect of symbolic interactionism that is seen as influential for studying how multiracial individuals shape their racial identity (Khanna 2010: 97). Using Cooley’s concept of the “looking-glass” self, self-conceptions of self are formed by reflections of the responses and evaluations of others (Khanna 2010:101). Khanna 2010, describes the three stages of the “looking-glass” self: first, the individuals imagines how they appear to others. Then, they think about the judgment of that appearance. Finally, they develop a self-feeling or self-concept based on those imagined perceptions (Khanna 2010:101). The concept of reflected appraisals can be used to develop an understanding of how multiracial individuals form their racial identity. Khanna uses reflected appraisals along with intersectionality to study interactions under multiple power structures (Khanna 2010:101).

For the purposes of this study, the ecological approach and the concept of reflected appraisals are most beneficial. These are the only approaches that focus on the social factors related to why multiracial individuals identify a certain way. The other approaches neglect to move beyond the psychological issues that are faced by multiracial people. Although the ecological method and reflected appraisals are the best for this study, each may overlook some of

the assumptions from the older models which could also be important. While, it is important to allow for the multiple identifications that multiracial individuals relate best with. It is also important to understand the marginality that is faced by multiracial individuals because of the historical priming that the one-drop rule has created (Schacter and Buckner 1998:185). This is one aspect of the problem approach that could also be useful when using the ecological approach. Also, it is important to understand the duality of racial and cultural identifications that multiracial individuals encompass which is highlighted with the variant approach. It is a possibility that these internalizations could explain some of the trends on how and why multiracial people choose to identify themselves and how that plays a role in their dating experiences.

### *Intersectionality*

For this study, it is important to use intersectionality to show the complexity of how race and gender inequalities can affect a multiracial individuals' life experiences within a patriarchal society focused on rigid racial binaries. Intersectionality is known as a methodological and theoretical approach used for investigating the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, and other social inequalities (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013:788). In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins explains the prior listed social inequalities as part of the "matrix of domination", in which an individual's actions are based on his/her subjectivity and the structural institutions that yield power over him/her. The matrix of domination is a way to approach power "as an intangible entity that circulates and to which individuals stand in varying relationships" (Collins 2000:274). This means that oppression is constantly changing, and people are oppressed by different magnitudes of power. The structural domain of power is encompassed on a large-scale by the interlocking social institutions of race, class, gender,

sexuality and nation (Collins 2000:203). These institutions rely on multiple ways to keep minorities in a subordinate state (Collins 2000:277).

Former theoretical frameworks used to study multiracials demonstrates race as a system of power displaying the racial hierarchies in society and how multiracials fit into the hierarchies. However, the research fails to focus on gender as a power dynamic. Taking an intersectional approach allows for gaining knowledge about the intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Collins 2000:8).

Intersectionality is beneficial in providing insight that race, gender, class, and sexuality do not operate as mutually exclusive entities and help to shape complex social inequalities (Collins 2015:2). It is also useful in conceptualizing the power relations within social inequalities (Collins 2015:2). For example, examining identity in relation to social inequalities has not received a considerable amount of scholarly attention (Collins 2015:12). "Because groups occupying different positions display varying expressions of power, they have distinctive patterns of participation in shaping domination and resistance" (Collins 2000: 245). Looking at gender as a form of power and source of domination, one can show the position gender plays in the experiences that multiracials have and the effects it has when it comes to relationships involving multiracial individuals. It is suggested that gender is experienced at the most intimate levels of social interaction by multiracial women. Gender is also useful in differentiating the ways in which men and women view the validation of their racial identity (Strmic-Pawl 2016:119).

Strmic-Pawl (2016) suggests that multiracial identity is an outcome of a matrix of experiences. Therefore, to understand multiracial identity, the main forms of stratification such as class, gender, and sexual orientation must be examined along with the power structure of race

(Strmic-Pawl 2016: 119). I use intersectionality as a tool to understand the experiences of multiracial men and multiracial women.

### *“Doing Gender”*

In this analysis of studying multiracials, I was also influenced by the concept of “doing gender”. “Doing gender” is “the complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures”” (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). In other words, “doing gender” is the way people display features associated with masculinity and femininity (and sexuality) through their actions and behavior and continuously act “at the risk of gender assessment.” The meaning of gender emerges out of social interaction itself. Since this is a comparative study on the experiences of multiracial men and women and dating, I used the concept of “doing gender” as a tool for interpreting how the participants’ experiences differ based on attitudes and interactions shaped by perceived ideals of masculinity and femininity. “Doing Gender” can be related to intersectionality because gender is not the only power dynamic that impacts expressions of masculinity and femininity. Race, class, and sexuality also influence how people express masculinity and femininity. Therefore, each power has to be looked at together in order to understand actions and behaviors displayed when “doing gender.”

### *Colorism*

Along with intersectionality and doing gender, colorism is also used in this study to understand the privileges and discrimination faced by multiracial individuals. Colorism is defined as discrimination based on society’s preference for whiteness (Strmic-Pawl 2014:64). Discrimination can be caused by hair texture, eye color, thickness of lips, nose shape and other phenotypic features that are associated with race by people in society (Strmic-Pawl 2014:64).



Colorism or skin-color bias originates from the United States' history of slavery and racial oppression (Hill 2002:77). The ideology that whiteness is civilized, beautiful, and virtuous while blackness is ugly and sinful has influenced skin-color bias and allowed for the discrimination of anyone who is not seen as white (Hill 2002:77). It has also resulted in a racial hierarchy based on skin tone which can be labeled as pigmentocracy. Pigmentocracy is defined as a hierarchy based on a color continuum and/or ethno-racial hierarchy with whites situated at the top of the hierarchy, blacks at the bottom, and multiracial and-or multi-ethnic people situated in the middle (Telles, Flores, and Urrea-Giraldo 2015: 39).

Dating back to slavery, skin color has always connected to opportunities available to people. A multiracial person had greater chances of receiving positions that were not as strenuous as picking crops (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000:132). They were also given jobs inside the house as servants, butlers, and coachmen. Slaveholders also were more likely to grant emancipation to their children giving them opportunities to become skilled artisans, gain an education, and to own property (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000:132). Multiracial individuals or "mulattos" created a buffer between the white and black race. This allowed them to gain privileges that were not given to black individuals such as running for local political positions to advance the interests of those sharing similar skin complexions (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000:133).

Because of the privileges that those with lighter skin complexions gained, multiracial people were able to climb the social and economic ladder unlike many of their black counterparts. They had access to education, political power, and economic resources making it possible for them to assert a position of dominance over the black community (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000:133). Within the African American community, multiracial people and those blacks that

had lighter skin tones were able to secure positions within the middle and upper class (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000:133).

Colorism and the concept of pigmentocracy are not specific to studying multiracial individuals, but they can be a significant part of the multiracial experience (Strmic-Pawl 2014:66). Therefore, I use colorism as a frame to understand the privileges and discrimination associated with multiracial experiences. Because pigmentocracy is used to describe the rigid racial hierarchy in society, it is important to include the concept when analyzing why multiracial individuals are given certain privileges that are not afforded to minorities. It also helps when analyzing the discrimination that multiracial individuals' experiences by both the white and black community.

Although there are many theoretical frames that have been used to study multiracial individuals, I take a multidimensional approach to analyze multiracial experiences. Influenced by intersectionality, I use the concepts of "doing gender" and colorism as tools to analyze how the power dynamics of race and gender affect multiracial individuals. As a qualitative study, Khanna's concept of reflected appraisals is a necessary tool for gaining an understanding of how the respondents use interactions to develop and negotiate their multiracial identity. Finally, the ecological approach is a tool used to explore how social factors impact the gendered and racist experiences of multiracial individuals.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

There were multiple purposes to this study. First, I wanted to gain an understanding of how gender affects the experiences of multiracial individuals. Second, I wanted to learn what it is like to date as a multiracial person. Lastly, I wanted to learn how multiracial individuals feel about the “check all that apply” option and term “other” as a means for racial identification. Interviews allow researchers to learn what people think and/or feel about a topic (Esterberg 2002:36). The interviewing process also allows the researcher to observe a person’s behavior such as facial expression and body language, while asking questions related to the study (Esterberg 2002:36). Therefore, I employed the use of semi-structured interviews to answer why and how questions that cannot be easily asked with quantitative research.

#### *Sample*

The sample for this study included fourteen multiracial individuals with a variety of racial backgrounds (See Appendix A). Seven of the participants had a black and white racial identity. Other participants’ racial identities included: black and Arabic, Hispanic and white, Native American and white, German and West African, Creole and black, and black and Puerto Rican. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 44. There were ten women and four men, and each participant currently lives in Tennessee or Mississippi, with three participants living in

Tennessee and eleven participants living in Mississippi. I chose to interview people from Southern states because of accessibility and to gain an understanding of multiracial experiences within the south. I used snowball sampling because participation required participants to have a multiracial and/or multi-ethnic racial identification or have two parents of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Also, participants had to be able to discuss experiences in relation to their racial identity and various questions about their dating lives.

### *Recruitment*

Participants were recruited in multiple ways using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is used to have participants refer friends or acquaintances that may be interested in participation (Esterberg 2002: 93). Emails requesting participation were sent to organizations that focused on racial inclusion. These emails were then forwarded to students that might be interested in participating in the study. Recruitment of participants took place from January 2017 to May 2017.

### *Recruitment Issues*

I faced challenges while recruiting participants. As multiracial individuals make up a less than three percent of the general population (Strmic-Pawl 2014:63), finding fourteen participants was a challenge. There were three men and two women that volunteered to participate and then withdrew their participation. Three of the multiracial individuals that withdrew from the study were men, resulting in the study having a larger number of women participants. With ethnographic research, women researchers may face sexual harassment while conducting field research because it entails traveling alone to new locations and taking a personal interest in the people there (Hanson and Richards 2017:2). There were situations where I had potential men

participants request sexual favors in exchange for an interview, and sexually harass me by phone after I declined. These situations included: explicitly being asked to have sex with a person in exchange for an interview, messages from men that included nude photographs, and being called pet names like baby and babe. It is important to highlight these challenges because sexual assault and violence are seen as problems that women researchers must confront when conducting research in social settings structured by patriarchy (Hanson and Richards 2017:2). However, it is also important to mention that not all of the recruitment process presented these challenges.

### *Interview Setting*

Interviews took place in the setting of the participant's choosing. Seven interviews occurred at the participant's personal home. Five of the interviews took place in my graduate office located in Lamar Hall at the University of Mississippi. The other two interviews took place at Starbucks located in Oxford, MS.

### *Description of Interview Process*

Before the interview, participants were given an information flyer (See Appendix B). This flyer provided participants with an overview of the study and what type of questions would be asked. Each participant was aware that participation was not required, and the interview could be stopped at any time. The study was approved by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board. Before conducting the interview, participants filled out a short demographic questionnaire that included: where they were from, the racial identification of their parents, the racial makeup of their neighborhood and high school, and if the person lived in an urban or rural area. Questions regarding sexual identity were not asked prior to the interview. While filling out

demographic information (See Appendix C), the participants also answered the racial identification question provided by the United States Census Bureau. The participants, then, underwent one semi-structured, recorded in-depth interview that lasted between thirty minutes to two hours with most lasting fifty minutes.

Interview questions were broken up into three sections. The first set of questions related to race, the second section focused on dating experiences, and the last section consisted of questions regarding “the check all that apply” option listed on the United States Census (See Appendix D). After each interview, I recorded initial thoughts about the interview in a notebook. The memos included: the pseudonym assigned to the participant, the setting in which the interview took place, details about interactions between the participant and me, expressions and body language made by participants when answering questions, and my impressions of how the interview went. I transcribed each interview with the use of Dragon technology, a text conversion software. This resulted in the eighty percent of the interviews being accurately transcribed. Then, I went through each interview transcript while listening to the audio file and made corrections where the software missed sentences and/or made mistakes. I organized each of the interviews in a binder. The interviews were placed in numerical order based on when the interview took place with the interview number and pseudonym labelled on dividers.

### *Coding*

For the coding process, I read each interview thoroughly to see what patterns emerged. I began with open coding. Esterberg defines open coding as a process in which you work intensively with your data, line by line, while identifying themes and categories that seem of interest (Esterberg 2002:158). I went through each interview and made margin notes about each response provided by each participant. Along with notes, common words and phrases were

circled and underlined. Then, I created summary sheets for each interview in order to condense the notes from each interview and provide a snapshot of the interview content. During focused coding, I compared each interview summary sheet to others. Similar responses, common words and sentences used by participants were compiled into a document to record common themes that had emerged. One theme was that family, friends, school, and religion impacts the participants' development of a multiracial identity. Another theme, relating to racial identification, suggested that the participants were pleased with the "check all that apply" option, but they had mixed feelings about the term "other." While focus coding the section questions on dating, there were a few themes that emerged. First, friends, school, work, and social media are popular avenues to find a partner. Second, a majority of the participants had a preference for white partners. Third, participants had experiences that demonstrated acceptance or non-acceptance from family when finding a partner. Fourth, women participants described being seen as exotic by men. Finally, while out on dates, participants noticed receiving stares from others. The themes related to my research questions were placed into an outline and quotes from each interview illustrating those themes were placed within the outline used to write my findings. For example, when finding a partner, there were multiple avenues listed by participants. These avenues included friends, school, work, and social media. Therefore, I placed relative quotes under each avenue named by participants.

### *Challenges and Limitations*

As a multiracial woman, I had insider status. Therefore, I was able to connect with participants which resulted in participants seeming to be at ease during their interviews. The participants were also willing to share experiences that may not have been shared if I were not multiracial. For example, when talking about dating, there were participants that mentioned

white potential partners keeping the participant a secret to their family because their family wouldn't be approving of the participant's multiracial identity. Because of my insider status, the participants felt comfortable sharing those experiences with me. My insider status allowed me to talk about race and dating without participants feeling uncomfortable.

However, insider status was also a challenge when completing this study. Because of my insider status as a multiracial individual, I had to separate myself as much as possible when conducting interviews, so participants did not feel persuaded to answer questions based on my reactions to their answers. For example, when participants shared an experience that I have experienced myself, I had to separate my emotions and thoughts towards the experiences so that the participant did not feel persuaded to agree with my thoughts and emotions. It also became a challenge when participants assumed that I have had similar experiences to theirs. This often occurred when asking participants about negative experiences with dating. For instance, when participants mentioned white partners telling them that they could not have an exclusive relationship because of the partner's familial views towards interracial relationships, I had to separate my emotional response because I have encountered the same type of experience. Therefore, when presented with experiences that I could relate to, I asked how those situations made the participant feel instead of giving an emotional response.

One limitation of this study was the small sample size. With only fourteen participants, it is not possible to use my findings to make generalizations about the multiracial community. Also, the majority of the participants were women. Therefore, multiracial men's experiences are not represented as well as the women's experiences. A quantitative study would have to be done with a larger sample to see if the themes found in this interview study reflect the dating experiences of most multiracial individuals.



## CHAPTER THREE

### DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY

To answer the question of how systemic gendered racism affects the experiences of multiracial individuals, it's important to examine how they perceive the development of their identity. In this chapter, using an ecological and intersectional approach to understanding multiracial identity, I will discuss how family, friends, school, and religion play a role in the participants' identity development with an eye to examining how race and gender impact these experiences. I will conclude the chapter by describing how the multiracial individuals in this study are navigating racial identification.

#### FAMILY

According to the ecological approach, family plays a central role in the identity formation of multiracial individuals (Gonzales-Backen 2013: 103-4). One of the main influences that all participants within this study noted was family. I will explore how culture and traditions were taught to participants, how family treated the participants and how the family talked about race within the household. Culture, conversations about race, and family dynamics can be associated with how multiracial use family socialization and acculturation when developing a multiracial identity (Gonzales-Backen 2013: 103-4).

### *Culture and Traditions*

The demographic make-up of the sample included: eight participants with a black and white parent. Other participants' racial backgrounds included: Hispanic and black, Hispanic and white, Native American and white, Creole and black, and Islander/white/black and Native American/black. Some of the participants shared that cultural norms and traditions passed down by family had a large impact on the way they identified. When asked about what influenced their identity, one participant named Melanie, a 22 year old woman with a Hispanic mother and white father, mentioned:

Growing up, I was very aware of my Hispanic culture because of the relationship between me and my grandparents...They weren't born in Mexico, but they were from New Mexico, and they grew up in a very Hispanic area in Albuquerque. So, the culture, the food, the music, all of that was really shown through my grandparents.

Melanie went on to say:

I honestly think food has been the biggest influence on my racial identity and just I enjoy the Mexican culture very much...the food and festivals and stuff like that have been a huge part of it because Anaheim does a lot of Hispanic festivals and stuff with dancing and all of that, but food has probably been the biggest influence and associating the Mexican language with the food is probably where that kind of all ties in.

The access to cultural customs such as food and language provided by her grandparents have helped Melanie in developing an identity that is inclusive of both the Hispanic and white

aspects of her ethnic background. Another participant Brody, a 25 year old man with a white mother and black father, mentioned that “music and various cultural identifiers” have been influential in helping him develop his identity. Although he was raised by the white side of his family, he identified more with being black. His reasoning behind this was, “Ya know, black people mostly listen to hip hop these days, so if you listen to hip hop, you’re gonna be naturally maybe more drawn to the black side of your identity.” From Brody’s perspective, hip hop is a way to identify with aspects of black culture. Therefore, he used hip hop as a resource to connect with the black part of his racial identity.

For participants like Melanie and Brody, traditions, music, and food have had a positive impact on the development of their racial identities. However, cultural values were not always depicted as positive by participants. There were a few participants that had negative experiences when it came to the racial and ethnic stereotypes placed on them. One participant named Natalie, age 22, is Arabic and Black. During her interview, she talked about how her mother and father exposed the Arabic ideals when it came to race and what it was like for her as a multiracial person in her family. She talked about the importance her Arabic family places on the structure of noses because they explain that it is “signature to them”. Therefore, she mentioned her Arabic father having to defend her because she doesn’t share the same facial features as her other Arabic family members. Her family labeled her as having a “squab” nose which is defined as short and fat. The concept of squab noses comes from a French traveler Francois Bernier who separated black Africans from other groups of people because of the “thick lips and squab noses” that black Africans had (Wheeler 2000:96). While talking about the things family members have said about her facial features, she went on to say, “You need to know the history of our noses. Like, it’s a very big thing in other countries...squab noses, the features of the skin, if it’s very clear

and dark, they are more African.” In Natalie’s case, her Arabic identity was devalued because she has blacker facial features than her family members. The cultural values associated with Arabic facial features impacted Natalie’s identity in a negative way because it hurt her self-esteem and Natalie became less tolerable of people that bring up the differences in others.

Another participant mentioned having negative experiences when it came to her racial identity. Sarah, a 20 year old female with an Islander, white, and black mother and Native American and black father, responded with:

When I actually looked at my mom, I realized that I looked different than she did even though we have similar mannerisms, I can see that we were different. Me and my sister are different. Then I looked at my dad, and he has these strong African American/ Native American features like his nose and his chin. I have always wondered where I fit in because my eyes are small, my hair is curly, and I look nothing like them. I cried for days when I figured out that I was different from everybody else, and it made me hate myself.

Although her family did not intentionally point out differences or talk about differences among her, her siblings, and parents, Sarah was not given the opportunity to develop an appreciation for her differences. This resulted in her developing a negative perspective when it came to her racial identity.

Some participants were not given access to learn about the other half of their ethnic or racial identity. For Victoria, a 26 year old female with a white mother and black father, the white culture and tradition taught to her by her adoptive parents was did not reflect the way in which

Victoria identified. As a child and young adult, her parents prevented her from exploring her black heritage. During her interview, she mentioned:

My mom would always force on me...and when I say force, I mean really force on me the fact that I was white. It was just horrible because like she would just try to influence me that I am white, and I never identified as such.

Therefore, she “rebelled against that (white culture) as much as possible.” Because her mother tried to force a white identity on Victoria, she now tries to only involve herself with black culture. She mentioned, “When you rebel against something and you try to do something else, you become that. That’s what you start looking for.” The negative interaction with her mother made her more inclined to identify solely with her black identity.

Tim, a 30 year old male with a Native American mother and white father, had a similar experience when it came to learning about culture and traditions. His adoptive parents only provided him access to white culture, although he felt more connected to his Native American roots. Tim vocalized, “I was raised in a total white bread culture, so I don’t have any like cultural experiences of any ethnicity with two adoptive white parents. I was my whole upbringing and life, and I didn’t really have like any ethnic relatives that allowed me to be exposed to any other culture besides white culture.” Both Victoria, and Tim were adopted and shared not having access to their ethnic and/or racial cultural roots. Within domestic adoptions, the American racial hierarchy is clearly reflected. Children of multiple racial backgrounds are less likely to get adopted than monoracial individuals. This occurs because adoptive parents have concerns of not being able to effectively socialize their adopted children (Khanna and Killian 2015: 573).

Therefore, many individuals that have gone through transnational adoptions, or adoptions across racial lines do not have the opportunity to have substantive, authentic lived experiences with

their birth cultures (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia 2012: 389). It is possible that other adopted multiracial individuals may not have access to their non-white racial or ethnic background.

### *Conversations about Race*

How race is explicitly or implicitly talked about within the family is another important aspect to understanding how multiracial people form a multiracial identity. Interpersonal relationships are fundamental to a multiracial person's identity formation (Bratter and Heard 2009:661). Families of multiracial individuals challenge "racial orthodoxy" by influencing the multiracial person to develop a multiracial identity while other families guide the multiracial person into developing a monoracial identity (Bratter and Heard 2015: 573-4). Through Khanna's concept of reflective appraisals, individuals use interactions with others to form their identity (Khanna 2010:97). This process is a negotiation between the individual and assumed evaluations from others (Khanna 2010:101).

During the interview, participants were asked if the topic of race has been discussed within their family. Some participants talked about the racial discussions they have had with their family, and others said they did not talk about race with their family. Some participants described racial conversations with their families that stemmed from racial questions raised by the participant, while others mentioned that their families talked about race because of racist attitudes and issues within their family or society, more generally. For Amy, an 18 year old female with a white mother and black father, race was discussed as a way to combat preconceived negative stereotypes towards black people. She said:

The topic of race has been dealt with because my family has never really been too keen on other races...mostly black or African Americans. So, when they

introduced me and my siblings into the family, they had to adjust to a different lifestyle and thinking of race.

Amy suggests that her family had to change their racial views towards black and/or African Americans after she and other multiracial siblings became a part of the family. She goes on to explain:

They (her family) actually have talked about race as I got older when it comes to dating or why they dislike certain things that they (Black people) do. I guess it's just the person and the race that it depends on, but there's just stereotypes that some people believe are true and some are not. So, we talk about those type of things in our family.

She did not go into depth about the type of stereotypes that were talked about within her family. However, by stating that they talk about things they dislike, it can be assumed that her family's conversations are related to negative stereotypes associated with black individuals.

Another participant named Katherine, a 24 year old woman with a white mother and black father, described the type of conversations her family had about race saying,

Discussions about race didn't really happen until the last two years and that is mostly due to all of the violence surrounding the black culture and police and stuff like that. So, now it has become a more serious subject because some things that would have been okay three, four years ago like a casual race joke could turn into a lot more. So, we've had to have the conversation a lot with my siblings because they need to be aware.

Katherine's family discussions were a result of current racial issues that are going on in the United States such as police brutality. Therefore, her family has had conversations about race as a way to prevent Katherine's siblings from being accepting of racist jokes made by others and to have an awareness of the racial violence towards those of a minority background.

Although the type of conversations held by Amy and Katherine's family were different. Both racial conversations were a result of some type of change. In Amy's case, the conversation occurred because her family was going through an attitudinal change toward black people after multiracial children entered the family dynamic. For Katherine, the conversation stemmed from the increase in violence towards black people such as police brutality.

Other participants talked about race conversations in another way. For some, race was talked about when the participant raised questions about race to their parents. Kelsey, a 20 year old female with a black mother and Puerto Rican father, talked about having the conversation of race with her grandmother who had gone through similar experiences because of her skin tone. When talking about her grandmother, she said:

She's told me stories where one time there was this white man that asked her what are you and she was like 'yeah, I'm Polish. I came from Poland. My last name was "Brownaski", but I shortened it to "Brown" and like he believed it... hearing funny stories like that kind of makes me a little bit more calm about navigating through those type of discussions because I am not the only one.

For Kelsey, the experiences shared by her grandmother made her more comfortable when being confronted with questions about her race because she did not feel as if she was the only person that had received questions like "What are you?" Her grandmother modeled a way of deflecting



those questions with humor in a way that made fun of the questioner's ignorance. The commonality Kelsey shared with her grandmother made a positive impact on the development of Kelsey's racial identity.

Drew, a 44 year old male with a white mother and black father, mentioned similar situations when talking about race with his family. He says,

I probably raised some questions to my father because he's more active in making the point of differences among those that were discriminated against and those who were privileged. For my father, the right think is to be an advocate. So, there have been moments when I have asked questions and my father can give me some historical context.

From this statement, Drew suggests that his father's active role in pointing out differences among people made him more comfortable to raise questions in relation to race. His father was able to provide a historical context as to why others faced discrimination.

Nonverbal messages about race were also communicated in families. Body language or behaviors made certain participants feel like they were treated differently. Brody, talked about how race was not particularly talked about by his family, but there were instances where he felt like he was treated differently from other family members. He tells the story about his grandparents and says, "I have never been to the grocery store with my grandmother. I've never been to church with my grandmother, but all my other cousins have." He later described a conversation with his white cousin, saying:

I was really young and it was a cousin that was the same age as me. We were just joking around. He was like I'm vanilla and you are chocolate, and I was like no, you are chocolate and I'm vanilla.

Each of Brody's examples demonstrated a way in which his family made him feel different from others within the family. Although his grandparents never explicitly said anything about Brody's race, he was not allowed to go out in public with his grandparents. However, each of his white cousins had the opportunity to go places with their grandparents such as the grocery store and church. This suggests that his grandparents were not accepting of Brody being multiracial. Also, his cousin specifically referred to him as "chocolate." This demonstrates that even from a young age, Brody's cousins saw him as other or not white.

Tim, a 30 year old man with a Native American mother and White father, also mentioned not specifically talking about race with his parents either. However, he was not excluded from activities like Brody. Tim referred to his grandparents saying, "Whenever I went with them, it was never like 'this is our grandchild.' It was like 'this is our adoptive grandchild.' Then, they told my adoption story." From this example, one can see that Tim's grandparents did not see him as being the same as themselves. By labelling him as their "adoptive grandchild," they placed him into the category of other. This behavior could have resulted from Tim being a multiracial child, or it could have been the result of not being a biological grandchild. Because he was adopted, his experience cannot be directly connected to the non-acceptance of having a multiracial grandchild like in Brody's case.

Overall, the participants did not mention their parents displaying behaviors like this. In most situations where participants felt like they were treated differently by family members, it was often grandparents that displayed acts of exclusion. These acts of exclusion such as in Brody

and Tim's examples demonstrate grandparents placing their multiracial grandchildren into the category of "other" or not white. The examples also provide insight as to how grandparents create a separation between themselves and their grandchildren. This includes: not going out in public or attaching a label to the grandchild.

## FRIENDS, PEERS, AND SCHOOL

Friends, peers, and experiences at school also impacted the emergence of research participants' multiracial identity. These experiences were often in the form of others asking questions like, "What are you?" There were also experiences where peers or strangers treated the participants differently. The participants experienced situations in which they were seen as privileged. They also experienced situations where they were labeled based on academic abilities or friends.

Melanie, a 22 year old female with a Hispanic mother and white father, shared a story during her interview about an incident at school where she was labelled as "dirty". She recalled:

I remember in the third grade, I had a couple books like out from underneath the desk, and I wasn't the most organized child, but my stuff was under my desk.

And, I had a teacher who put me in the front of what she called the cochino row.

She literally made a row of us in the classroom of a couple kids who couldn't keep their shit together in terms of organization. I took that in a very negative way especially knowing the word and knowing the connotation of the word.

She then explained the term cochino or cochina as meaning dirty boy or dirty girl. However, the term cochino stands for "pig" in Spanish. The reference to being dirty has a historical meaning when associated to the concept of race. According to Smedley, race was used to describe animals

and was later translated to describe humans and the differences of those that were seen as others or uncivilized to Europeans (Smedley 2012:37) Therefore, by creating a row in the classroom where the unorganized students were seated and referring to them as “pigs,” the teacher used a racialized reference to disorganization as a means to other Melanie and the students that she placed in the “cochino” row.

Katherine, a 24 year old woman with a white mother and black father, shared an experience from when she first moved to the United States and started school. She shared, “In seventh grade, I got called a Nigger when I went to school, and a girl fought me because of my hair.” She then went on to say that that experience caused her to be aware of race. Katherine was not the only participant to say that she was called names while going to school. Callie, a 24 year old female with a white mother and black father, talked about names she was called when she played sports in high school. Callie’s friends would call her “black Callie” or “Bla-Callie” during sports games. She mentioned that these comments came from other black friends and students, and she felt the names were meant in a positive way. It is clear that there is a racial undertone to these types of nicknames because of the stereotype that black people are supposed to be “good at sports.”

Tim, a 30 year old male with a Native American mother and white father, also got called names by his friends in school. He was called “Mowgli” after the Jungle Book character. He attributed it to his love of nature. However, the Jungle Book character Mowgli is an uncivilized boy that lives with the animals in the jungle. Therefore, the nickname given to Tim by his friends, although seen as positive, was a racist nickname. However, based on Smedley’s argument of race, the name Mowgli was racially under-toned because it referred to Tim as being dirty and uncivilized.

John, a 22 year old male with a white mother and black father, was called a “porch monkey” while in high school. Natalie, a 22 year old female with a black mother and Arabic father, was called a “sand nigger” while attending a private school. Each of the names that were provided by the participants can be seen as either a racial slur or a racially under-toned comment that refer to being dirty. For John and Tim, the names given to them placed them in to the category of being an animal. Although the racial slur that Natalie was called was not the equivalent to being called an animal, the term “sand nigger” attacked both her Black and Arabic identity.

Other participants did not share racial slurs or negative names that they had been called. Instead, they shared experiences in which they were treated or looked at as privileged because of their skin tone. Heather, a 35 year old woman with a Creole mother and black father, shared an experience from high school in which she was chosen for a basketball position over another girl...

As a kid I played basketball, and they were deciding on who they were going to take on a travel team. It was just me and this other girl. We were both pretty good, and I have to say that I do feel like she was better at that particular moment. And, the coach came over and she just kind of looked at both of us. And, she picked me. The other girl started bawling and said, “she picked you because you are pretty light skinned.”

From the story shared by Heather about her making the travel basketball team, one can see how the other player discredited Heather’s athletic ability by arguing that Heather made the team because of her light skin complexion. Throughout history, multiracial people have been seen as privileged within societies that have preference for whiteness (Allen, Telles, and Hunter

2000:133). The player, who identified as black, used Heather's lighter skin complexion to argue that preference for light skin resulted in Heather making the team. From the ecological approach, physical appearance can be used to by strangers to make assumptions about the multiracial person (Gonzales-Backen 2013:102). Therefore, in Heather's case, the teammate used to assumptions about light skin to make heather feel like her accomplishment was based on light-skin privilege.

Sarah, a 20 year old woman with an Islander, white and black mother and Native American and black father, had a similar experience when competing in a pageant with her older sister. After describing her sister by saying, "She has big eyes like my parents, and she's just darker complected than I am." She said, "They chose me over my sister because I fit what they were looking for apparently because I was super light at the time." With Heather and Sarah's examples, one can see the pigmentocracy that is exhibited while at school. Each of the girls were told or felt like they were picked over another person because they had a lighter skin complexion.

Some respondents, like Kelsey, a 20 year old female with a black mother and Puerto Rican father, and Victoria, a 26 year old female with a white mother and black father, made comments about being told that they were "not black enough". Kelsey stated: "I have been made to feel as if I'm not black enough as if I had to prove my blackness." During Victoria's interview, she said: "I hated school because it was a predominately black school, and I was never black enough to be black." After sharing these statements, both girls expressed that it made them feel uncomfortable because they each identified as being a black woman.

Each of the examples provided illustrate how multiracial people are treated in school or around their peers. Each of the participants have gone through situations in which they were called some type of derogatory or racially under-toned name or have treated differently from other students. However, there are some gendered differences that are displayed within these examples. Davenport (2016), argues that racial boundaries are less malleable for men and multiracial men to experience discrimination (Davenport 2016: 61) The men respondents in this study supported Davenport's argument. None of the men participants shared experiences where they were treated or seen as privileged.

However, some of the women respondents did share experiences in which they were seen as privileged because of skin tone, while other women respondents were made to feel as if they were not the race that they identified with. Studies show that light skin is more desirable than dark skin for men and women, but skin tone is a more significant factor of attractiveness for multiracial women (Davenport 2016:62). The treatment received by women participants can be linked to prior literature's notion of light skin privilege and pigmentocracy.

Derogatory names were experienced by both men and women within this study. Each of the names were in reference to being dirty or animal like. According to Smedley, race meant stock or group of animals (Smedley 2012:37). Therefore, names referencing being dirty or animal like can be linked to the historical concept of race as described by Smedley.

## RELIGION

Participants mentioned religion as an influence on their general identity, but not their racial identity. For most of the participants, religion has had a positive impact on them. One participant said that religion helped her cope with racial identity. For Victoria, a 26 year old

woman with a white mother and black father, “religion is the only way I get through every day is to know that I am loved by somebody unconditionally. Sometimes, I just don’t want to get out of bed because of racial identity, but religion keeps me going.” Melanie, a 22 year old woman with a Hispanic mother and white father, mentioned going to religious schools and said, “I am very in tune with my faith.” Melanie later stated: “Yes religion is a social construction, but you still have to have faith in some way and have hope in some way and how you can kind of pull those identities together.” While discussing religion, Sarah, a 20 year old woman with an Islander, white, and black mother and Native American and black father, mentioned that she has had a positive experience with religion. Sarah stated, “Religion tells me that the Lord didn’t look at me for the color I was, he looked at me for the person I am.” For Victoria and Sarah, religion has played a positive role in their identity by allowing them to cope with their racial identity. For Melanie, religion has allowed her to have faith and hope during her daily life.

However, there were a couple participants that had had negative experiences with religion and felt like religion was a basis for segregation. There were also some participants that did not feel like religion had any effect on their identity; those participants did not go into detail as to why they felt that way. The one commonality among those participants was that each one felt like religion was a racist institution created to allow people to segregate themselves from others. Drew, a 44 year old man with a white mother and black father said, “Religions are racists almost by definition. Most of all religions are just led by mostly white people.” Tim, a 30 year old man with a Native American mother and white father, made a similar statement in reference to religion, stating: “They were the most discriminating racist bigoted fucking folks...” Both of these participants felt like religion was racist and was used to segregate and discriminate against people who did not adhere to the same religious views.



Overall, there were varying experiences when it came to religion. As an institution, religion shapes society and culture based on that person's beliefs (Brimeyer and Smith 2012: 465). Women respondents were more likely to mention religion and their faith. This was seen when respondents talked about how they cope with racism. However, men were less likely to mention religion unless asked directly about religion during the interview. The men that did talk about religion did not associate it with positivity. Instead, some men participants distanced themselves from religion based on the assumption that religion is used as a form of self-segregation. According to Smith (2014), the gender roles associated with masculinity include independence, assertiveness, and self-reliance, while gender roles associated with femininity include: expressiveness, empathy, and passivity (Smith 2014:514). Therefore, I would argue that men may use self-reliance instead of religion as a tool to combat the racism that they experience. Studies with a greater number of men interviewees may wish to explore this theme in greater depth.

## RACIAL IDENTIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS

Another aspect of this study was to see how multiracial individuals felt about the "check all that apply" option on the census and how that affects their racial identification. After learning the participants' thoughts on the "check all that apply" option, I asked how multiracial people feel about the term "other" when it comes to racial identification. Therefore, this section will discuss how participants felt about both the "check all that apply" option and "other".

Overall, most participants were in favor of having the ability to check more options when it came to racial identification. When asking about their opinion on this option, Callie, a 24 year old woman with a white mother and black father, said: I personally love it whenever there is a "check all that apply" option. I am both black and white, so I want to be able to check that."

Kelsey, a 20 year old woman with a black mother and Puerto Rican father, responded, “I like it. I think it respects a person’s identity because most of the time, it’s like white, black, Hispanic-Latino. I can’t check both, so I feel like it respects a person’s identity.”

When discussing the term “other” as an option for racial identification, there were mixed feelings. Some respondents liked the option, while others were strongly against it. Katherine, a 24 year old woman with a white mother and black father, didn’t have any issue with the option because “there’s so many combinations and, you know, ethnicities and races.” However, for others, the feelings were not so positive. Natalie, a 22 year old woman with a black mother and Arabic father, made the comment, “I don’t like it. It makes me feel like I’m secluded. Like, I’m not like everybody else. Like, I don’t have my own category.” Melanie, a 22 year old woman with a Hispanic mother and white father, had mixed feelings about the term “other” because “the word “other” itself is othering somebody. It’s making an us and a them. Other means that you are not included or not thought of in terms of everything else.” The conflicting feelings participants had about the term “other” suggests the term “other” may not be the best choice when it comes to racial identification.

While discussing the census and racial identification options, there were some ways that people resisted the limited number of options available to them as a multiracial person. Lindsey, a 22 year old woman with a white mother and black father, said, “I will put black on one page then put white on another page if I am forced to check a box. I guess I do it just to confuse people or to see if anybody ever really notices.” Brody, a 25 year old male with a white mother and black father, who identifies as multiracial and black, said: “It depends on the form. It might be fucked up, but I put white on there (forms) sometimes and then show up. I’m not convinced that they look at the race a lot of the time, but sometimes I’ll do it.”

When asking about how the participant identifies when filling out forms, Katherine, 24 year old female with a white mother and black father, mentioned how she would answer racial questions at school:

I remember being in school and not having that type of option, especially before standardized tests. For the longest, I would just put white because fuck them trying to get quotas filled because I'm black too. But now, I just put black and white even if it doesn't tell me to pick more than one option, I pick more than one option.

Some of the participants expressed frustration and anger in their responses with use of curse words. Those participants stated that if the option to choose more than one option is unavailable, they will mark one race on a form and then mark a different race on the next form. Others said they will just put white on the form to avoid quotas, or mark multiple races regardless of what the instructions say. These forms of resistance were not collectively used by each of the participants. However, the participants that provided examples of how they resist the present racial categorization options suggests that there may be other forms in which multiracial individuals resist against racial categorization. According to the ecological approach, multiracial identity development is a relationship between individuals and environment or social factors. In this relationship, the environment influences the identity development, and the individual influences the environment (Gonzales-Backen 2013:97). Therefore, the resistance demonstrated by the participants is a reaction to the limited racial categories available to multiracial individuals.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### APPROACHES TO DATING

This chapter will focus on my second research question: what is it like to date as a multiracial person? Therefore, I discuss what it is like for multiracial people to find a partner. This includes the role that region plays when finding a partner and the preferences stated or described by participants in this study. I will also discuss how family acceptance or non-acceptance impacts multiracial individuals when trying to date. I will then discuss the challenges that come with multiracial dating and the forms of resistance that multiracial individuals employ to confront those challenges.

#### FINDING A PARTNER

There are many ways that multiracial people are finding partners to date as well as what they are looking for when it comes to dating. For many of the participants, high school and early college was the time each one started to seriously date. Amy, an 18 year old woman, mentioned: “I started dating, like serious dating, like in the beginning of high school. It was freshman year, and it just kinda happened.” Another participant Kelsey, a 20 year old woman, said:

I guess I really started dating in like...I don't know between high school and like the last year of middle school. I was really involved in school, so I've met most people through school and school trips and like a couple overnight school trips. I wasn't really allowed to go out on my own at that age. There was no doing that,

but I did meet people through school. But, that's kind of when I started, I guess, dating.

Brody, a 25 year old man, had a similar answer and responded with:

It was high school. It must have been 9<sup>th</sup> grade when I had like my first actual girlfriend. We were just in classes together. It was just a little light-hearted fun type of thing.

Sarah, a 20 year old woman, also mentioned dating once reaching high school. She mentioned:

I started dating before my mother approved because I was a teenager who wanted to be her own person. I was at a football game when I met my ex-boyfriend (who identified as white). We started dating our freshman year. We dated all through high school. When we first started dating, it was hard because my mom, brothers, and sister accepted it, but I couldn't tell my dad who I was dating. I couldn't tell him or my grandma at all.

Sarah then explained later in the interview that her father and grandmother were not approving of her being in a relationship with anyone that did not identify as black. Therefore, she didn't feel comfortable sharing the racial identity of her partner or potential partners with her father and her father's black side of the family.

In Sarah's experience, it is clear that her mother had set restrictions on what age that Sarah was allowed to date, although Sarah did not follow those restrictions. Her black side of the family also placed restrictions on her by not wanting her to date anyone that was not black. For Kelsey, not having the ability to go out alone with potential partners was a restriction placed on her by her mother. Each of the participants that started dating during early high school or later on

during their final years in high school, dating during that stage was either not a serious relationship, or the participant's family had control over when and who the participant was able to date. Throughout history, others have had control over women's sexuality. Within the South, fears that "social mixing would lead to sexual mixing" reinforced the ideology that men and families needed to ensure that their daughters remained virtuous (Collins 2000:133). From Sarah and Kelsey's experiences, one can see that their families had influence over when and who the participants dated.

Others mentioned dating at a later time when they had reached college. Melanie, a 22 year old woman, did not start dating until college. She explained:

I didn't start dating until I was twenty almost twenty-one, so only within the last year or two, I started dating. I didn't date in high school. There was just no need to. I'm a very practical kind of person like that. I was too involved in girl scouts and sports in high school where I was like "okay I don't really have time for that shit."

Heather, a 35 year old woman, said: "I officially started dating like my junior year of college." She described the activities, such as playing sports, that she participated in during high school which took priority over dating.

For Melanie and Heather, dating during high school was not practical because of their involvement with sports and other school activities. Each girl simply did not have time to think about dating during that time. Therefore, they started dating later on once they reached college. For them, sports and extracurricular activities were more important than trying to meet a partner. Because we live in a patriarchal society, women have always been made to choose between

being in a relationship and having a career. This occurs most often for minority and black women. As a power structure, gender is policed by society to insure women adhere to the gender norms assigned to them. As a form of resistance, black women construct a knowledge of self and use that knowledge to combat negative images of black women (Collins 2000:100). Therefore, Melanie and Heather's choice to do sports and other extracurricular activities instead of dating can be seen as a form of resistance against the choice between dating and having an education. They may still feel they have to make the choice, but they suggest that they feel empowered by prioritizing sports or education over relationships at this time in their lives.

### *Dating Avenues*

There were many avenues that the participants took when looking for a potential partner. However, the most common responses were friends, and use of dating applications or sites. Brody, a 25 year old male, responded with: "friends and family, class... I've never actually dated a girl that I met at a bar. So, friends and family, class, just random interactions. I kinda just approach people sometimes." He later mentioned that he sometimes will try to have conversations with girls when out at the bar. The bar conversations were random interactions that he had with people, but he had never tried to pursue a relationship with the girls that he has talked to while at the bar. During Kelsey's interview, she mentioned friends and social media as a way to meet potential partners. She stated:

I guess like going out, meeting people through friends... Umm like if I see somebody and think they're cute, I just ask my friends "do you know who he is?" or "Have you heard about his existence?" Then I go on social media and see. Social media is a big thing. I think social media is like a huge role in how we date, interact, communicate, and deal with relationships all together.

Kelsey further stated:

If I go on social media and a guy has cusswords all over his page, is drinking all of the time, pants are down to his knees. I'm not interested. If you're exporting yourself like that to the world, you may not be the type of guy I want to affiliate with. Social media is like an extra arm of a person. I like to observe and be cautious about who I'm going to let in because I want to make sure it's the real deal.

Kelsey uses a social media as a way to observe the way potential partners present themselves to others. She feels like social media is another aspect of a person, like "an extra arm," because it allows her to see aspects of a potential partner's personality that may not be visible during face to face interaction. For her, social media is a tool used to observe personality and not racial identity. However, Kelsey did mention a preference for black men during her interview.

Therefore, it was interesting that she later mentioned "pants down to his knees" while talking about looking at potential partner's social media pages because the statement can be associated with a stereotype of black men. From that statement, it is suggested that although racial identity was not explicitly mentioned when examining potential partner's social media pages, Kelsey does think about racial and class stereotypes when making observations about her potential partners.

Callie, a 24 year old woman, also mentions friends and dating applications a way to find potential partners. She responded with:

A lot of mutual friends. I have used the dating apps. I've never actually needed somebody else (meaning she feels comfortable being single) but as far as talking



and getting to meet people...dating apps. As far as all the people that I've actually been in a relationship with, they've all come from friends knowing people or being friends with that person and it just progressed into a relationship.

In Callie's experiences, she uses dating apps as a way to meet and get to know people. However, she did not mention forming a relationship with anyone that she had met online. Each of the relationships that she has been in have come from meeting people through friends or forming a relationship with existing male friends that she has. She did not give any details as to why she generally only dates people that she has met through mutual friends.

Others mentioned work and school as being the most popular avenue for them to meet potential partners. Katherine, a 24 year old woman, said:

I have met people through work. That's how I met my last one, she was my supervisor. So, umm just work and school. I guess. I've never really gone out seeking a person to date. I've never done any of that coffee house, blind dates type of stuff or talked to people at the club. Nope none of that stuff. Just school and work. I'm not big on meeting people online, but it seems to be a thing nowadays. I don't really like it. It's just not something I care for but then again, I don't know if I really like meeting people in public places either.

Katherine was not completely comfortable with using social media a way to date because it makes it hard to "maintain a connection with one person." She mentioned work and school when asked about ways she finds potential partners. However, she did not share why school and work made it easier for her. Also, Katherine only mentioned how she has met past girlfriends. She did not discuss how she finds potential partners that are men. Katherine expressed it was

difficult for her to answer dating questions, saying: “I don’t date that often. After two weeks, I get bored, so I can’t really answer these questions.” From Katherine’s statement of not dating often, it’s possible that she doesn’t have many experiences that have impacted the way she’s found potential partners. Baunach, Burgess, and Muse (2010) found that people are less prejudiced towards homosexual women than homosexual men (Baunach, Burgess, and Muse 2010:53). Therefore, Katherine may not have trouble finding potential partners because there is less stigma associated with women having homosexual relationships.

When discussing how participants find people to date, Drew, a 44 year old, mentioned:

Environment. I’m attending classes right now, and I try to talk to different people. Very often, when people try to talk to me, I try to talk about different things. In this university environment, people are more likely to talk because it is a very safe environment. People here (in Oxford, MS) are very open and will keep a conversation with you.

He later talked about how he uses his current French class as a conversation starter when meeting new people. He stated:

I am attending a French class right now, and the class allows me to talk to new people when going to study sessions. People are open to holding a conversation because there is a common interest in learning how to speak French.

Drew feels like the university’s safe environment makes it easy to approach people that could be potential partners or friends because people are open to talk to him. Therefore, he uses the campus climate and classes that he attends as a way to meet others.

Historically, black men have been seen as dangerous or have been feared by others. After slavery, white southerners feared that black men would seek retributions for their mistreatment and abuse of black women (Nagel 2003:111). Because of this fear, white southerners labelled black men as sexual predators that could use their bodies as weapons to rape white women (Nagel 2033:11). This fear has been persistent over time, so multiracial and black men still experience the racist stereotype of being “dangerous.” Therefore, it is possible that Drew uses campus climate as a form of resistance against negative stereotypes associated with multiracial and black men.

Another participant named Lindsey, a 22 year old woman, said: “I like to go out and meet people like through work or school, or when I played sports. I don’t so much use social media. I want to see the person in a place, you know.” She later stated: “I like to see the way that a person carries themselves. It’s important to see how comfortable that you can be with somebody and if they will accept you for who you are.” From Lindsey’s perspective, meeting people in person makes it possible for her to learn more about a potential partner than she would if she met them online. She wants to be able to see how her potential partners present themselves and figure out if she will be able to be herself and be comfortable with that person. During the interview, she mentioned dating more black individuals than white individuals because she felt more comfortable around black individuals. This idea of being more comfortable with black partners may relate to feeling accepted for her racial identity by partners who identify as black. Because she uses work and school as a way to meet people, it suggests that these types of social spaces give her access to the face to face interactions that she needs when finding a potential partner to date.

From the multiracial participants in this study, I found that many of them used friends, work, school, and social media to find potential partners. There weren't any participants that talked about meeting people at social spaces like bars or clubs. Because some of the participants mentioned wanting to meet face to face and get to know their potential date, it is possible that meeting potential partners through friends, work, and school may allow multiracial people to be more comfortable when getting to know a potential partner rather than meeting them in a social space like clubs or bars or online. This can be linked to Khanna's concept of reflected appraisals.

Places like work and school allow the participants to negotiate self-conceptions multiracial individuals make from other's responses (Khanna 2010:97). These self-conceptions lead to the participant being comfortable around someone. Social spaces and the internet do not allow for the creation of self-conceptions. Within social spaces and the internet, the ideology of identifying the participant with a hypodescent status can still occur because of the preference for whiteness (Curington, Vaughan, and Lundquist 2015:766). Therefore, physical appearance becomes more pronounced in social spaces and on the internet where a person is assumptions about the multiracial person based on their appearance (Curington et. al 2015:766). This causes multiracial individuals to not feel comfortable with meeting potential partners online or in bars.

### *Race Conversations*

It is important to gain an understanding of how multiracial people are navigating questions about race when meeting people that could eventually be partners or when in a relationship with someone. Many of the participants had common responses when it came to handling questions about race from potential partners or current partners. The participants felt like being open and straightforward was the best way to approach the topic of race when dating.

When asked how one navigates the topic of race, Amy an 18 year old woman with a white mother and black father, who identifies as multiracial and/or white, responded with:

I don't really navigate questions. If they want to ask me a question, I'm pretty open. I just answer the question, or if I'm meeting their parents and they are asking me stuff, I just say what I think and what my views are.

After being asked what types of questions parents ask, she stated:

Most of the time, when I meet someone's parents, they ask "So, what color are you?" or "What is your actual race?" Then, after I answer them, they ask, "So, is your mom white or black?"

Amy was comfortable when partners asked her general questions about her race, but she felt like the questions that her past partner's parents, who identify as white, have asked her are rude. However, she just answers the questions that are asked. The type of racial conversations Amy has had with the parents of potential partners demonstrates a form of non-acceptance by families towards multiracial identity.

Callie, a 24 year old woman with a white mother and black father, who identifies as multiracial, responded with a similar viewpoint when discussing the way, she approaches race when meeting potential partners, saying:

I'm comfortable in my own skin and I'm 100% okay with being mixed. I have no reservations about it, so I am the type of person to be open and honest to answer any questions that someone has whether it's positive, negative, or something that concerns them. So, you just have to have that open communication whenever it

comes to that. Most of the time, people are just curious about what you are. They aren't trying to be negative.

Callie then shared an experience of when she and her ex-boyfriend, who identifies as white, had a conversation about her race. She mentioned:

In one of my last serious relationships, my ex-boyfriend, who identified as white, took me to meet his parents. Before we got to their house, he said that he warned me that his parents sometimes make racial jokes and that if they did say a joke that they weren't trying to be mean to me. However, his parents were really nice to me. I expected them to ask me questions about my race, but they didn't ask me any or make any type of racial joke like my ex-boyfriend had expected.

Callie is open about her racial identity when potential partners ask because she is comfortable in her own skin and is content with her multiracial identity. From the example she shared, the topic of race emerged because her partner was nervous about her meeting his parents. From Amy and Callie's experiences, conversations about race are connected to the partner's parents' racism. However, when meeting their partner's parents, each of the women were open to answering racial questions.

Melanie was another participant who is very open about her multiracial identity when questions about her race come up in conversation. Her response was:

I'm super open about it. Umm, if they ask, I'll tell them that I am half Mexican and half white. I usually don't tell them unless they ask, or it comes up in conversation somehow. It (the topic of race) usually comes through going to eat Mexican food because I make a lot of comments in regard to what is seen as

authentic Mexican food. But yeah, if it comes up in conversation, or if they ask, it (her race) will be mentioned. But, I don't think I've gone out of my way to talk about it.

Melanie doesn't actively try to have the conversation of race when meeting potential partners. She is open about her racial identity, if asked. However, she doesn't have the conversation about race, otherwise. For her, food is used for her and her potential partners to ease into the conversation about race. Because racial categories are often seen as biologically based, the connection of race and food serve as a less threatening way to have a discussion about race. From an ecological perspective, Melanie is using promoting/inhibiting environments or micro-level social settings which are inclusive environments that encourage ethnic identity formation (Gonzales-Backen 2013:101). In Melanie's case, she is using Mexican restaurants as a motivational tool to talk about race and share her ethnic heritage.

Along with being open, many of the participants felt like race could be used as a teachable moment, or as a way to educate others about their multiracial identity when people asked questions about their racial identity. Kelsey answered with:

It really does not bother me when people ask because I'm very interested in race and how it operated. So, I'm always wondering like how does a person identify, so for me I use it as a teachable moment...Really to me, it always depends on how a person approaches me. If the person asks, "What are you?" I will say "What are you?" back to them because I want people to realize how their words sounds. However, if a person just asks a question, and I can tell that they are genuinely curious, I don't mind answering any questions that they have.

Sarah, a 20 year old woman with an Islander, white, and black mother and a black and Native American father, also felt like the conversation of race could be used as a teachable moment when people came to her in a positive way. She said:

I handle questions about race accordingly. It depends on how they approach me, that's the thing. If they approach the topic of race negatively, I try to be positive. But, if they continue to be negative, I leave it alone. If they come at me positively, I have nothing but positive things to say, and we can talk about it for hours. We can talk about history... When it comes to race, you either have those that like diversity or those who don't.

Sarah then shared an example of the negative way people have approached her. She stated:

I have had guys (who identified as white) make backhanded comments like "You're pretty for a black girl." I just get so angry when I receive those comments because they don't have any consideration for my feelings.

Kelsey and Sarah try to approach the topic of race in a positive way. However, each woman will take a negative approach if the potential partner makes a rude comment or asks questions that are seen as rude to the participants. Based on the responses Kelsey and Sarah receive, the assumption created from those response dictate how Kelsey and Sarah respond to the person questioning their racial identity (Khanna 2010:101). For example: if people are offensive when inquiring about the participants' racial identity, the women become defensive This suggests that the participants use the negative responses as a form of resistance to combat what potential partners say to them.



Overall, the multiracial individuals that participated in this study had a very positive outlook when potential partners and/or others asked about their racial identity. Each participant was open to questions asked by others in regard to their racial identity. However, some participants demonstrated a form of resistance when others make racist statements or ask racist questions. The resistance demonstrated was used as a way to teach others how the presentation of their comments or questions were offensive to the multiracial individual.

### *Racial Preferences*

Many of the participants had explicit or implicit racial preferences when it came to dating. There was variation in racial preferences when participants mentioned race. When discussing ideal partners, Amy, an 18 year old woman with a white mother and black father, who identifies as multiracial and/or white, stated: "I don't really see myself with a Black person." Melanie, a 22 year old woman with a Hispanic mother and white father, who identifies as multiracial, had a similar response, saying: I have never found myself attracted to an African American just in general. I always see myself with someone who is Hispanic or white as a partner."

Both Amy and Melanie explicitly mentioned a preference for white men as partners. There were also participants that had a preference for black partners. Victoria, a 26 year old woman with a white mother and black father, who identifies as black, mentioned: "I really don't have a preference on skin tone as long as he is black. It'd be great if they were dark, but they could be mixed. I'm not sure I would have a problem with that." When Katherine, a 24 year old woman with a white mother and black father, who identifies as multiracial, was asked about her preferences, she had different preferences for men and women. She stated: "I like white guys. I like guys of a lighter complexion. I just tend to be attracted to white guys. When it comes to

females, the darker the better.” Both Victoria and Katherine had preferences for black partners. Also, each woman preferred to have a darker skinned black partner than a light skinned black partner although they would still date someone of a lighter complexion.

Brody, a 25 year old man with a white mother and black father, who identifies as multiracial or black, had a preference for multiracial women and described: “I would say that my ideal partner would be a mixed girl. They don’t have to have the same ideas as me, but I do want a person who can understand the experiences that I have.” In Brody’s case, he wanted his partner to understand the experiences of being multiracial, so he wanted a multiracial woman.

I asked about ideal partners, and participants gave answers in relation to personality traits. Only when pressed on race, the participants described their racial preferences. Each of the varying preferences of multiracial people can be influenced by the concept of colorism, in which, members of a racial group make judgments about individuals within other racial groups based on skin color (Strmic-Pawl 2014:64). For many participants, whiteness was preferred when looking for a potential partner. However, there were some that preferred a black partner.

## FAMILY ACCEPTANCE AND NON-ACCEPTANCE

In the previous chapter on developing a multiracial identity, family was one of the main influences mentioned by participants. However, family does not only influence a multiracial person’s identity, it clearly has an impact on the dating lives of multiracial individuals. One way that family can influence multiracial dating is in terms of acceptance and/or nonacceptance of partners the multiracial person brings home. Each of the participants had varying experiences when it came to the influence their families have on them when it comes to dating.

Some participants had very positive experiences with their family when it came to potential partners. After being asked what type of reactions the person had from family when dating, Melanie answered with: "I feel like all of my responses have been positive. Nobody really cares. They're just like "Oh he's cute." They're just really supportive." John, a 21 year old man with a white mother and black father, said:

My family is pretty open to just about everything. So, as long as I am happy, they don't really care too much. There was one girl that had a kid. That's pretty much the only thing they've asked questions about.

There were also participants that have had negative experiences where family is or was not accepting of potential partners or has made comments that demonstrated a non-acceptance of certain groups of people that multiracial people may be interested in dating. Natalie, a 22 year old woman with a black mother and Arabic father, talked about her family and said, "My dad's not very supportive of me dating anybody outside of my race." Natalie's father was only accepting towards potential partners if the partner was Arabic. While talking about dating preferences with another participant, Amy, an 18 year old woman with a white mother and black father stated:

If I were to bring home a black person that I was dating, half of my family would be okay with it, and the other half probably wouldn't be okay with it. I once had a black boyfriend and my white side of the family always made comments about him being a troublemaker. They just were not okay with me dating him.

Victoria, a 26 year old female with a white mother and black father, talked about the statements that her white adoptive mother has made after being introduced to Victoria's

black/African American partners, saying that her mother asked, “Why don’t you want to date a white man?” Others also mentioned views of non-acceptance from family members. Lindsey, a 22 year old woman with a white mother and black father, who identifies as multiracial, stated:

If I bring a black person home, they (her white side of the family) ask the person a ton of questions like does he do drugs, does he smoke weed, is he in school, does he have kids, and so on. But, if it is a white guy, he is considered to be like us and doesn’t get those questions.

Lindsey’s white side of the family were only comfortable with her having a white partner, because her family felt like a white partner would share the family’s commonality of being white. Her family also displayed acts of colorism by associating Lindsey’s potential partners with criminality. Sarah, 20 year old female with an Islander, white and black mother and Native American and black father, described the experiences with her father’s black side of the family, saying:

I had negative experiences with my grandma on my dad’s family. They had nothing but negative viewpoints. They were saying that I was gonna get made fun of. They were gonna pick on me. I’m not supposed to be with a white man. I’m not supposed to be with anyone but someone like me or black.

She later explained how she responds to the negative viewpoints of her black side of the family, saying:

I do what I want to do because I know what I want in a partner. I don’t cry over it anymore. I do get frustrated by my family’s (referring to the black side of family), but I have learned to have patience.

Sarah uses patience as a way to combat the negative views the black side of her family has towards her dating white men.

There seems to be negative reactions from family when it comes to dating anyone who identifies as being black or African American. For some black and white multiracial individuals in this study, the negative experiences reported were in connection to family not being supportive of them dating African Americans or Black people. Although some participants mentioned their family being non-accepting of having a black partner, Amy and Lindsey were the only ones that gave examples of how the white side of their family has treated black partners that the participants have brought home. In both of their experiences, their family made comments that associated the partners with criminality. The negative reaction to having a black partner was not shown in Sarah's case as her black family showed non-acceptance of her dating anyone white or not multiracial. It is also important to note that some participants did not share any experiences in regard to their family's reactions to partners or potential partners.

Along with negative reactions received from the participant's family in regard to their partner's race, the participants were also judged by their partner's family. In these experiences, the family of the participant's partner were disapproving of the participant's multiracial identity. John, a 22 year old man with a white mother and black father who identifies as multiracial, described a past relationship with a white woman, saying:

It started out fine, dating wise and hung out all the time. Her family (who identifies as white) didn't have a problem with me. Then, I met her grandmother (who identifies as white), and she realized that I was mixed and then it became a problem. We broke up like two weeks later after that.

Because his white ex-girlfriend's family found out that John is multiracial, her family was not accepting of John which led to their breakup.

Amy, an 18 year old female with a white mother and black father who identifies as multiracial and/or white, talked about her experiences with some partners:

When it comes to dating certain people, because of how they were raised or their views, they don't want to date people of other races because they think they should have a pure thing in their family, like white should be with white. Black should be with black, and so on.

She later shared an experience that she had with a partner. She stated:

There was one guy that I started talking to, and he didn't want to make anything official or anything because he knew that his parents wouldn't approve of him dating or being with a person of a different race.

In Amy's experience, her potential partner's family was not accepting of her as a multiracial person. Therefore, the potential partner would not exclusively date her. However, the advice Amy gave to other dating multiracial individuals was to "not even think about what others think, or how people would react to situations" (referring to rejections by potential partners based on racial identity). This suggests that Amy does not allow rejections or non-acceptance from family to bother her. Kelsey, a 20 year old woman with a black mother and Puerto Rican father who identifies as black, shared a similar story when it came to trying to date, saying:

When I was in high school, there was a guy; he was a white guy. He asked for my phone number, and I was like yeah sure, I'll give you my phone number. We were texting or whatever, and he texted me and he was like you know you can't tell

anybody we're texting. You can't tell anybody that we are talking. It was pretty offensive.

Kelsey's experience was similar to Amy's experience, but Kelsey did not mention that the potential partner explicitly mentioned his parents being non-accepting of her racial identity. She did, however, give off the impression while talking about the experience that she felt like it was because of the potential partner's family.

From Amy, Kelsey, and John's experiences, who were all raised in the South, one can see that their partner's white family was not accepting of John, Kelsey and Amy because of their multiracial identity. During Amy's interview, she mentioned: "they (white men) don't wanna date people of other races...white should be with white, black should be with black, and so on." This statement can be associated with the ideal of purity within the white race which relates to the one-drop rule implemented in the south. The one-drop rule aided in producing a rigid racial hierarchy (Brunsma 2006:556). Because of this rigid racial hierarchy, multiracial individuals are often viewed with the hypodescent or minority status of their parents (Brunsma 2006:556). Therefore, the one-drop rule affects multiracial individuals living in the south when trying to date.

Davenport (2016) argues that racial boundaries are not as malleable for men as they are for women. Also, multiracial women are less likely to be perceived as a racial minority (Davenport 2016: 61). However, Kelsey, Amy, and John were each treated as a racial minority when it came to acceptance and non-acceptance of family members. Therefore, I suggest that gender is not the only factor that influences racial perceptions of multiracial men and women. One factor that influences racial perceptions of multiracial men and women is region. Within the south, non-white women have historically been seen as "hypersexualized" and "seductive,"

while black men have been historically associated with being “dangerous” (Nagel 2003: 103,111). Because these racist labels still persist, it is possible that Kelsey, Amy, and John were all treated as a racial minority because of Southern attitudes toward non-white individuals.

## THE CHALLENGES OF MULTIRACIAL DATING

This section will discuss the challenges that multiracial people mentioned during their interviews. These challenges include, being seen as exotic to others, and the public experiences shared by multiracial people when going out with partners. This section also discussed the positive experiences had by the participants when dating.

### *Being Seen as Exotic*

A commonality shared among many of the women participants reported that they felt that people see them as a spectacle or that they were perceived as exotic by men who were interested in dating them. Women shared names that they had been called by men which were associated with having a lighter skin tone. Some of these included: red bone, yellow bone, and high yellow. According to the urban dictionary, redbone refers to a light skinned female or male mixed with black and another race (<http://www.urbandictionary.com>). Yellow bone refers to a black woman that has a light skin complexion (<http://www.urbandictionary.com>). High yellow is a multiracial or black woman with a light skin complexion who feels superior to women with a darker skin complexion (Strmic-Pawl 2016:110). These names can be linked back to racial labels during the late 1800s. Terms such as redbone and yellow bone were used by natives of Louisiana and South Carolina to describe multiracial individuals (Price 1953:143).



The women also shared names linked to royalty. The names shared by the women included: beautiful mixed princess, queen, and Puerto Rican princess. These names support the idea of pigmentocracy in which people with lighter skin tones are seen as privileged in relation to people with darker skin tones. Sarah, a 20 year old woman with an Islander, white and black mother and Native American and black father, shared her experiences when trying to date white men, saying:

I am always attracted to white men because they are always attracted to me right off the bat because I am different to them. I am exotic to them. They think I am pretty because my hair is like this (twirling her hair while talking), and she can do all this stuff (she did not explain what type of “stuff” she was talking about) and her body is like this (making a hand motion to demonstrate curves), but she has an attitude like a white girl, and she speaks white.

Sarah goes on to explain that she hates when the guys she talks to say, “I’ve never talked to a black girl before.” White men were the ones who had made the comments that Sarah referred to, and the comments made her question the potential partner’s motives because the comments made her wonder if they guy actually liked her or wanted her because she was exotic to them.

Kelsey, a 20 year old woman with a black mother and Puerto Rican father, shares a similar example when talking about white men that she had met while in high school, stating, “I had a couple white guys kind of fetishize me.” Then she gave an example of a guy trying to take her out but the guy did not want to date her. Natalie, a 22 year old woman with a black mother and Arabic father, shared examples of the types of conversations she has with men, saying:

I always hate when a guy approaches me and asks “Oh, what’s your name?”

“Where are you from?” Then says, “Oh, I got something exotic.” It makes me feel like I’m some type of like piece of meat. Like I’m some type of...you know...

That’s not a compliment to a woman. You’re just pre-labeling me. I don’t like it.

For Natalie, the comments referring to her as exotic make her feel like she is not being seen as a woman, but as “a piece of meat.” She also relates being seen as exotic as a type of label that prevents the person from knowing the real her.

Heather, a 35 year old woman with a Creole mother and black father, commented, “Guys were always at ease around me because of my hair texture, my skin color, just my features.” Heather did not provide insight as to why she felt like guys were at ease around her. However, throughout the interview, she mentioned the racial climate of Compton, CA as consisting mainly of lower class black individuals. Therefore, it is possible that the racial climate was the reason as to why guys felt comfortable around her because she was of a lighter skin complexion than other women in Compton. Also, Callie, a 24 year old woman with a white mother and black father, mentions getting compliments on her skin tone then receiving comments like, “I was just curious because you’re so pretty.” The comments Callie received occurred when a person was inquiring about her racial identity. Victoria, a 26 year old woman with a white mother and black father, had shared common experiences, stating, “I’ve been told I was pretty and stuff like that. I think the boys that liked me had a light skin fetish.”

Out of the ten women participants, eight women shared a story describing the ways in which they were treated as if they were exotic. There were two that did not mention being called positive names in regard to their skin color or labeled names linked to royalty. The women that did share these types of experiences included that it was often white men treating them this way.

Historically, skin tone played a role in shaping the social and economic status within the black community (Keith and Herring 1991:761). Those with lighter skin tones were able to attain more prestige than those that had darker skin because they were seen as being more “aesthetically appealing” to whites (Keith and Herring 1991:762). Following the Civil War, multiracial individuals emerged to the top of the social hierarchy within black communities. The privileges associated with their high social status remained for 50 years after Emancipation (Keith and Herring 1991:763). Because of the social and economic status that multiracial people were able to achieve and the idea that women have a more malleable racial identity than multiracial men, the names received by multiracial women in relation to royalty can be linked to the historically elevated status that multiracial people had within the black community.

Strmic-Pawl (2016) found that multiracial women are often objectified, seen as exotic or labeled with names associated with physical appearance (Strmic-Pawl 2016:111). However, she also found that multiracial men did not share experiences about being labelled as exotic. The men in this sample showed the same pattern. They did not discuss being labeled as exotic. This could also be related to constructions of masculinity in which men might not feel comfortable sharing experiences about being labelled as exotic, a sexually objectified position, with a female researcher. The experiences shared by the women participants demonstrates that the hypersexualized view of non-white women persists and extends to multiracial women.

### *Different Experiences than Partners*

When it comes to issues that come up between a multiracial person and their partners, there were a few respondents who described how they felt their partner or past partners didn't understand some of the issues that multiracial people faced. Natalie, a 22 year old woman with a

black mother and Arabic father who identifies as “other”, talked about the issues that she faces with her current boyfriend who identifies as Mexican. Natalie stated:

It’s kinda hard because we can’t really relate to the same stuff. We can’t really identify in the same things. Like the daily troubles that you experience are way different than mine. So, I feel like emotionally like how we feel in like our daily lives is always different, but we can still be on the same level.

From Natalie’s perspective, relationships are difficult because she feels like multiracial people go through a completely different set of problems and issues than people that don’t have a multiracial identity, and it is hard to get her partner to understand things that she goes through. However, Natalie and her partner try to identify or sympathize with each other’s problems. Brody, a 25 year old man with a white mother and black father who identifies as multiracial or black, also stated that different viewpoints were a difficulty when talking about his past girlfriends:

Just the different viewpoints about the world. What I mentioned earlier about not seeing eye to eye on certain things; categorizing things in a different way like the black girl might say something was racist, but I might just be like that seemed like a normal interaction to me...Stuff like that.

Brody later mentioned:

I think the black girl I dated grew up in a more rural area that was majority black, so she hadn’t dealt with like a whole bunch of white people. But, I grew up around it (referring to a majority white neighborhood).

With Brody, the idea of what was considered racist was different because he was exposed to white people throughout his childhood. Therefore, comments that may seem racist to others were normalized for him.

These specific examples were not shared by every participant, but the thoughts of how multiracial individuals operate and view the world differently compared to how others operate and view the world were common among many participants. Some gave specific examples, while others simply gave simple answers such as “what makes it difficult to find a partner is just like how we operate.” Therefore, participants in this study that did share examples, suggested that the way one behaves or operates within a social space is different from those that have a multiracial identity.

### *Staring*

When talking about going out publicly with partners, a majority of the respondents mentioned receiving stares from strangers. Amy, age 18, recalled:

I get a lot of stares. Like, there was this one time... I wasn't even with this person, we were just friends, and everyone stared at us. This happens on many occasions.

I don't know what they are staring at. Maybe- how can that guy get that girl? or “Oh my gosh, interracial dating!” But, I do get a lot of stares.

The partner that Amy referred to when talking about going out in public identified as white. Amy was not the only participant to mention getting stared at when in public. Natalie, a 22 year old woman with a black mother and white father whose current boyfriend is Mexican, said, “A lot of stares, awkward stares. Especially when we hold hands... We get it from Whites, Blacks, Asians...like even people our age. You would be surprised.” Victoria, age 26, told a story about

going out to eat with an ex-boyfriend, who identifies as black. She stated: “I remember when I was about 17, and my ex and I were together and we were walking. Everybody was staring at us. I don’t know why they were staring.”

Tim, a 30 year old man with a Native American mother and white father, described the type of experiences he has when going out on dates, and talked about how the stares he receives makes him uncomfortable to even be out. He stated, “I can’t go to Wal-Mart, and hold my boyfriend’s hand and get out of there without some emotional fucking damage.” In Tim’s case, the stares he receives in public may be the result of his homophobic attitudes not simply racism. However, he believed that both his racial identity and homosexuality caused people to stare at him.

Sarah, age 20, also shared her experiences when going out to the mall with her ex-boyfriend, who identifies as white, saying, “I get a lot of stares. A man even asked me why I was with him. Why was I letting him hold my hand? Was I okay? Was I in danger? Then, a woman asked my partner if he was in danger.” She explained that the man approached her and her partner first and the woman approached her and her partner a few minutes after. When talking about the mall experience, she implicitly mentioned that the town she lived in was not used to seeing interracial couples, which probably provoked the man and woman to ask questions without hesitation.

Three of participants did not notice getting stared at when going out. Each of the participants mentioned being able to pass as either white or black as a reason they did not receive stares when out with partners. However, for those that did mention staring, historical attitudes associated with interracial dating are connected to the stares received by majority of the participants. Historically, the south has had racial intolerance towards interracial relationships

(Cashin 2017). The ideology that whites were “stained” if they dated outside of the white race led to a stigma placed on interracial dating. Therefore, the stares received by participants reflect attitudes held by some individuals within society that are racially intolerant. Staring can be connected to the ecological factor of social position in which the people staring at the participants are demonstrating their social position in society in order to discriminate against multiracial individuals and their partners (Gonzales-Backen 2013:99).

### *Positive Experiences*

Despite the challenges highlighted by the multiracial men and women in this study, there were some respondents that shared positive experiences when going out in public with their partner or potential partner. Drew, a 44 year old man with a white mother and father who identifies as multiracial, grew up in Columbia and then moved to Mississippi after moving to the United States. Throughout his interview, the experiences he had were different from those reported by other participants because of the different racial climate that Columbia has in comparison to the United States. When talking about going out in public with partners, Drew mentioned:

People, in general, I would say celebrate our differences. Races don't exist. We are a human race. In my case, I would say that in the region where I grew up, it was about what I brought to the table because the Latino culture has many nice things that people like.

Callie, a 24 year old female with a white mother and black father, stated, “I would say that 99% of the time I have positive experiences. I've never really had anybody say anything.” She did mention that it was possible that she had gotten stares when out with her partners, but she had

never paid attention to them. Kelsey, a 20 year old female with a black mother and Puerto Rican father, said, “Overall good experiences. We will just go out, talk, and eat.” While some explicitly mentioned having good experiences, it is important to acknowledge that the other participants may have had positive experiences as well but failed to mention them during the interview.

## RESISTANCE

There are forms of resistance that multiracial participants within this study employ when encountering the type of issues and challenges that have been discussed. When it comes to staring, some of the participants stare back as a way to acknowledge that they are being stared at by others. Brody, age 25, said, “I just look at them back. I stare at them until they look away. You have to win. They look away first.” John, age 22, had a similar response stating, “I stare right back at them because people don’t like being acknowledged when they are being assholes.” Other participants choose to ignore the stares that they receive from people. Callie, age 24, responded with:

I just ignore it. I have never been in a case where someone will go out of their way to make me uncomfortable. A lot of them are just people watching. So, I just ignore it. People are going to have opinions.

Amy, age 18, had a similar response: “I just keep walking because they (the stares) don’t really bother me, but I do notice them.” Victoria, age 26, also mentioned ignoring stares she receives stating: “Umm, I just keep walking.” From Callie, Amy, and Victoria’s responses, one can see that the women participants showed relatively passive forms of resistance when it came to receiving stares.



When participants talked about how they react to staring, the multiracial men were more likely to report that they stare back to acknowledge the stares that they receive seeing it as something they must “win.” The multiracial women were more likely to say they ignore the stares. This could reflect a form of “doing gender” and a masculine identity constructed through dominant and protective behavior.

From the findings in this chapter, one can see that multiracial participants in this study use multiple avenues to find potential partners. These avenues include, social media, friends, school, and work. It is also possible to see how multiracial individuals’ families react to the racial identity of partners that the participants bring home. The challenges that multiracial participants go through when dating include being seen as exotic by men, and not being able to connect with potential partners when it comes to understanding experiences that occur to the multiracial person. Because of the taboos associated with interracial dating, many of the participants had experiences in which they had been stared at while in public with partners. The chapter also described the way some multiracial participants in the study resisted negative comments made by others and stares they’ve received.

Within this chapter, the participants demonstrate that race and gender are intersecting power dynamics. When talking about finding a partner, the women participants were faced with family having control over dating age and the choice to focus on education instead of relationships. Men participants had to negotiate stereotypes associated with black men in order to find potential partners. The challenges of dating faced by participants was also gendered: the multiracial women were associated with names referencing their lighter skin-tone sometimes with and association with royalty. The women were also seen as exotic to men. However, the multiracial men did not share any experiences of being seen as exotic. This does not mean that

the men have not had those experiences. It suggests that masculinity may prevent men participants from sharing those type of experiences with a women researcher. Finally, the forms of resistance to combat staring can be linked to assumptions about femininity and masculinity.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Multiracial individuals have often been placed into the category of “other” within our society. Because of this, there is limited research that focuses directly on the experiences of individuals that identify as multiracial. Most literature on the multiracial community focuses on identity formation and the factors that influence a multiracial person’s identity. However, former literature has neglected to demonstrate how gender impacts the experiences of those who consider themselves to be multiracial.

There is also limited research that focuses directly on the dating experiences of multiracial and multi-ethnic individuals. Many researchers have used the term multiracial dating and interracial dating synonymously to describe the dating and relationship experiences that consist of two monoracial individuals with different racial backgrounds. Therefore, the dating experiences of multiracial individuals are often not accounted for, which further reinforces the “othered” position held by those within the multiracial community.

This study demonstrates the impact gender has on the dating experiences of multiracial men and women who currently live in the South. There were three research questions that guided this study. First, how does gender affect the experiences of multiracial individuals? Second, what is it like to date as a multiracial person? Finally, how do multiracial individuals feel about the “check all that apply” option and the term “other” as a means for racial identification?

### *Identity Formation and Racial Categorization*

The fourteen multiracial and multi-ethnic individuals that participated in this study shared experiences associated with the development of their racial identities. From the shared experiences, there were four factors that impacted a participant's identity development. These included: family, friends, school, and religion. The participants also provided examples of how each factor positively or negatively affected them. When describing experiences with family, the participants explained the culture and traditions taught to them, how family treated them, and how race was talked about within the family. For experiences relating to friends and school, participants described the questions others have asked them, such as "What are you?", and the ways in which the participants have been treated differently than others. The participants also shared experiences where they were given privilege or treated differently based on their academic abilities. Although participants did not say that religion impacted their racial identity, I argue that religion is used by participants to cope with racism.

Each of the factors shared by the participants when talking about identity formation can be linked back to the ecological theory. The ecological theory is the relationship between individuals and the environment in which the environment influences development, and the individual influence the environment (Gonzales-Backen 2013:97). In other words, social factors such as family, peer groups, school, and religion impact a person's identity development (Gonzales-Backen 2013:100). From the experiences shared by the participant, one can see how family, school, religion, and friends influence the participant's development of a multiracial identity.

Along with the power dynamic of race, the participants' experiences demonstrate that gender also plays a role in their multiracial identity. This can be seen when the participants talk about the treatment they have received while in school and with friends. The racist names participants received from their peers were experienced by the men and women. However, the women also shared experiences in which they were treated or seen as privileged based on their skin-tone. These findings support Davenport's (2016) argument that racial boundaries are less malleable for men resulting in multiracial men experiencing discrimination (Davenport 2016:61). Yet, I argue that the "privileged" labels received by the women participants based on skin tone such as red bone and yellow bone are discriminatory. These labels are objectifying and define women as exotic, hypersexualized beings. Therefore, both multiracial men and multiracial women experiences discrimination.

Along with factors that influenced the participant's racial identity, the participants also shared their thoughts on the "check all that apply" option and the term "other" as a means for racial identification. Overall, most of the participants were in favor of the "check all that apply" option because it allows them to identify with each part of their racial background. When talking about the term "other," the participants had varying viewpoints. Many of the participants related the term "other" to being excluded or not being seen as everyone else. However, there were some participants that favored the term other because it allows them to differentiate themselves from monoracial individuals when there are limited racial options available.

From questions relating to the "check all that apply" option and term "other," I was able to learn some forms of resistance that participants use when given limited racial options. Some forms of resistance included: marking each racial option that the participant identified with regardless of directions, marking white on job applications and other forms where people must

adhere to affirmative action laws, and marking different racial options on forms that requested racial identification multiple times. These forms of resistance, although not mentioned by every participant, suggest that there may be other ways of resisting against racial categorization that is not inclusive of multiracial individuals. With an increasing number of people with multiracial identities, it is important that racial categorization is inclusive of all racial and ethnic identities.

### *Approaches to Dating*

To determine what it is like for a multiracial person to date, participants were asked a series of questions about their dating lives. Most experiences shared by participants related to finding a partner, acceptance or non-acceptance by family members, and challenges that arise when dating. When finding a partner, the avenues used by participants were friends, school, work, and online. The most common ways that participants found potential partners was through mutual friends or with the help of social media. Many of the participants preferred meeting potential partners in social spaces that allowed for face to face interaction. Therefore, in most cases, social media was not used to meet a person, it was used a way to learn more about the person that could be a potential partner.

Along with avenues used to find a partner, participants described their racial preferences. The participants in this study had varying responses regarding preferences for potential partners. However, half of the individuals explicitly or implicitly gave a preference for white partner. The other participants had preferences for black or multiracial partners. The preference for white partners can be associated with negative views towards black men and preference for whiteness.

The experiences of finding a partner show that race and gender are intersectional power dynamics that influence how the participants navigate dating. Multiracial men used environment as a way to combat racist stereotypes associated with being dangerous. However, the multiracial women shared examples where their family influenced when and who the women were able to date. The women also described choosing education and extracurricular activities over dating despite the comments made by family and friends. Therefore, one can see that gender also effects the dating approaches for multiracial individuals. Along with gender, region effects the dating approaches of participants. Collins (2000) argues that families play a role in women's dating lives to ensure that women remain virtuous (Collins 2000:133). These thoughts originate from Southern fears of racial mixing and the traditional double standard for women's sexuality. They must be sexually attractive, but not too sexual. Also, the racist stereotypes that multiracial men combat when dating originate from Southern racial intolerance. From these findings, I suggest that the issues that participants of this study encounter when trying to find a partner are specific to the South because of history of interracial relationships in the South. Further analysis of this claim could be bolstered by future comparative analysis of the experiences of multiracial individuals in various U.S. regions.

The acceptance and non-acceptance of partners by family members was another theme that emerged from the participants dating experiences. There was also acceptance and non-acceptance participants received from their potential partner's families. The response that participants received from their family varied. There were some individuals that expressed positive experiences when talking to their families about potential partners. However, there were other participants that mentioned their families being unaccepting of potential partners. In many of these experiences, families were not accepting of the participant being with a black partner.

Participants who provided examples of non-acceptance from their family or from their partner's family expressed indifferent attitudes towards the non-acceptance, meaning that participants did not allow family non-acceptance to dictate who they dated. This non-acceptance of black partners can be related to black men being seen as threatening to people who identify as white. This fear of black men can be linked to attitudes created after the Civil War by Southern white people, in which Southern whites believed black men's sexuality could be used as a weapon against white men by sexually assaulting white women (Nagel 2003:111).

Some participants shared experiences where the family of their partner or potential partner was unaccepting of the participants' multiracial identity. In these cases, the participants shared two ways in which families were not accepting. For some, potential partners would not make the relationship exclusive because their family would not be accepting. For others, the potential partner's family would ask racist questions or make racist comments when inquiring about the participants' racial identity. For example, families have asked if male participants who have a black racial identity were drug users. These questions are linked to the stereotype of black men as criminals. Multiracial women participants also shared experiences where their partner's family was not accepting of their multiracial identity. Within the South, non-white women have been seen as hypersexualized (Nagel 2003:103). Because of the one-drop rule, multiracial individuals have been placed below whiteness in the racial hierarchy. Therefore, ideas of racial purity within the south, reinforce racial intolerance towards those who are not identified as white.

Finally, participants described the challenges they face when trying to date. Two challenges mentioned by almost all of the participants were being seen as exotic to potential partners and receiving stares when going out in public with their partners. With a large number of women participants, it was interesting that eight of ten women reported being seen as exotic



by others. The women felt like men look at them and see them as “a piece of meat” instead of women. Skin tone was associated with being seen as exotic. The women provided me with names they have been called that further suggest that skin tone is associated with being seen as exotic. Some names included: yellow bone, high yellow, and red bone. Each of these names refer to multiracial and/or black women that have lighter skin complexions. Not only does being seen as exotic relate to gender dynamics by displaying how multiracial women are sexually objectified by men, the names employed by men such as “red bone” are rooted in Southern history (Price 1953:143). These names were used to describe multiracial women and associate the women with being of a higher social status than black women (Price 1953:143). The multiracial men participants did not share any experiences of being seen as exotic. However, this does not suggest that multiracial men are not objectified by women. It is possible that ideals of masculinity prevented men from feeling comfortable enough to share experiences in which they were seen as exotic.

The other challenge discussed by majority of the participants was staring. Out of fourteen participants, only three reported not getting stared at when going out on dates. Staring can also be linked to the south. The south is known for not being tolerant towards interracial relationships (Cashin 2017). Therefore, staring at multiracial individuals and their partners can be linked to the racial intolerance of interracial dating in the south.

While talking about staring, some participants described forms of resistance employed when receiving stares while out in public. The ecological factor of social position can be used to explain the stares received by participants. Personal characteristics such as gender and race are used to stratify individuals in regard to social power (Gonzales- Backen 2013:99). Therefore, I

argue that staring is a method employed by others to demonstrate their social position within society.

There were two common forms of resistance described by participants. The first form of resistance was to acknowledge the racist behavior by starting back at the person and ignoring the stares. The second form of resistance was to ignore the stares. The types of resistance can be connected to masculinity and femininity. The multiracial men were the only participants that reported acknowledging the person that was staring at them, while women were the only participants that mentioned ignoring the racist behavior. Women are socialized to be submissive and or quiet, while men are socialized to be dominant and protective based on heteronormative gender norms enforced by society. So, by acknowledging the person staring, the men seem to be showing their dominance and protecting of their partner.

## DISCUSSION

With the use of intersectionality as a theoretical framework, I looked at how race and gender shape multiracial individuals' experiences. One way I did this was by displaying experiences by men and women instead of making assumptions that multiracial men and women have the same experiences. The women in this study described the sexual objectification they receive from men and how they are seen as exotic by white men. However, the men did not provide any examples related to sexual objectification by women. Nagel (2003), argues that Europeans viewed minority groups as being racially sexualized exotic others (Nagel 2003: 91). This sexualization served as a way to dismiss white sexual attacks on minority women (Nagel 2003:97). Therefore, the sexualization of multiracial women demonstrates how the power that race and gender have on multiracial individuals.

When analyzing family acceptance and non-acceptance of potential partners, multiracial men in this study did not describe any non-acceptance from their families when bringing a partner home. However, the women presented examples of non-acceptance from family members about potential partner's racial identity. Also, most of the non-acceptance from women's family was towards black men. This can be linked to attitudes towards black men, in which black men are seen as threatening. After the Civil War, black men were seen as threat to racial and sexual order. Sexual suspicion and attacks on black men by whites increased because Southern whites feared that black men would seek retribution for the treatment given to them and the abuse of black women (Nagel 2003: 111). This fear has continued to impact views of black men by whites in the South (Nagel 2003:111). Family non-acceptance shows how race and gender both impact a multiracial individual's preference in partners.

Colorism, as a theoretical framework, allowed me to gain an understanding of why multiracial men and women are associated with being privileged. It also allowed me to understand the labels multiracial men and women receive based on skin tone. The family non-acceptance from partner's families can be associated with colorism. For some participants, their partner's families would ask racist questions such as "Which one of your parents is black?" This type of question demonstrates the family's preference for whiteness. The men and women in this study experiences discrimination based on colorism in different ways. The men were associated with being criminals when out with black friends, but they were not questioned when out with white friends. This bias is directly linked to colorism. The women in this study received some privileges for having lighter skin. For example, some women participants mentioned peers making comments that the women had only made the team because they were light-skin. However, the multiracial women were also labeled with names such as red bone and yellow bone

in association with their light skin complexion. These labels can be associated with the racial hierarchy formed from colorism.

This study is valuable because it displays how gender and race are necessary components for understanding multiracial individuals' experiences. Because this study takes an intersectional approach, I was able to see how the power that race and gender affect people that identify as multiracial. Although the sample for this study is too small to make generalizations about the multiracial community, it does demonstrate the need to conduct further research on multiracial dating in order to understand: what it is like for multiracial men and women to date, how multiracial individuals approach dating in other regions, and what forms of resistance multiracial individuals are using to combat racist behaviors. This study illustrates that multiracial men and women have different experiences when forming a multiracial identity and when approaching dating. However, further research is needed to examine other ways in which gender affects the multiracial community. One topic that needs more research is the sexual harassment encountered by multiracial women because of the ways multiracial women are objectified by men.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

## APPENDIX A

### Participant Demographic Information

Name	Age	Sex	Location:	Race of Parents	Religious Affiliation	Neighborhood Type	Neighborhood Racial Makeup	High School Racial Makeup	Census Racial Answer
Amy	18	Female	Jackson, TN	Mother: White Father: Black	None	Rural	Mostly White	Mostly White	White, Black
John	21	Male	Clarksville, TN	Mother: White Father: Black	None	Rural	Mostly White	Mostly White	White, Black
Natalie	22	Female	Memphis, TN	Mother: Black Father: Arabic	Muslim	Urban	Mixed	Mostly White	Black, Arabic
Brody	25	Male	Oxford, MS	Mother: White Father: Black	None	Rural	Mixed	Mixed	Biracial
Melanie	22	Female	Anaheim, CA Now: Oxford, MS	Mother: Hispanic Father: White	Christian/ Lutheran	Suburban	Mixed	Mostly White	White, Hispanic
Tim	30	Male	Ecw, MS	Mother: Native American, Hispanic Father: White	Pantheism	Rural	Mostly White	Mostly White	White
Sarah	20	Female	Pontotoc, MS	Mother: Islander, White, Black Father: Black, Native American	Formally: Catholic Now: Pentecostal	Suburban and now Urban	Mixed	Mixed, but Segregated	White, Black, American Indian, Pacific Islander from Bahamas
Katherine	24	Female	Germany Now: Clarksville, TN	Mother: German Father: West African	Evangelical	Mixed	Mixed	Mostly White	White, Black
Lindsey	22	Female	Hattiesburg, MS	Mother: White Father: Black	None	Rural	Mostly White	Mostly Black	White, Black

Name	Age	Sex	Location:	Race of Parents	Religious Affiliation	Neighborhood Type	Neighborhood Racial Makeup	High School Racial Makeup	Census Racial Answer
Callie	24	Female	Indiana (Ft. Wayne)	Mother: White Father: Black	Christian	Small Town/Rural	Mostly White	Mostly White	White, Black
Heather	35	Female	Compton, CA	Mother: Black (Creole) Father: Black	Christian	Urban	Mixed	Mixed	Black
Kelsey	20	Female	Quitman, MS	Mother: Black Father: Puerto Rican	Christian	Urban then Small town	Mostly Black	Mixed	Black
Drew	44	Male	Cali-Columbia	Mother: White Father: Black	None	Urban	Mixed	Mixed	White, Black, American Indian
Victoria	26	Female	McComb, MS	Mother: White Father: Black	Christian	Small Town	Mostly White	Mostly Black	White, Black

**APPENDIX B: INFORMATION FLYER**



## APPENDIX B

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FLYER

My name is Kayla Williams, and I am a graduate student working on my Master's Degree at the University of Mississippi. You are being asked to participate in a study focusing on racial identity and dating. I hope to learn about the experiences that multiracial individuals have and how multiracial individuals feel about dating. You were selected as a participant because you have identified as being multiracial or as having two parents of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. You have also indicated a willingness to participate in this study.

As part of this study, you are being asked to participate in one in-depth interview that will last between approximately one to two hours and a short demographic questionnaire that will last approximately ten minutes. During the course of the interview, I will ask you questions that will invite you to recount your unique personal experiences with race and dating. If any questions regarding your racial or dating experiences are sensitive to you, you may opt not to answer them. Each interview will be recorded using a voice recorder and later transcribed. If you wish, you may receive a copy of the transcript.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with you will remain confidential. Your name will not be used at any time nor will any information that could identify you. Upon completion of this study, all recordings will be destroyed.

If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the interview process at any time. You may withdraw your consent to have specific excerpts used, if you notify the interviewer. If I want to use any materials in any way not consistent with what is stated above, I will ask for your additional written consent.

If you have any questions, I encourage you to ask. You can contact me by email at [kwilli12@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:kwilli12@go.olemiss.edu), or you may reach me by phone at (731) 225-7478 for any questions that you may have in regards to this study, and/or your interview. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Kirsten Dellinger, at [kdelling@olemiss.edu](mailto:kdelling@olemiss.edu).

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at [\(662\) 915-7482](tel:6629157482) or [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX C  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Sex: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Where are you from: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Race of your parents:
  - a. Mother: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Father: \_\_\_\_\_
6. What type of area was the neighborhood you grew up in: urban, suburban, small town, or rural? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Would you describe your family's neighborhood as mostly white, mostly black, or something else? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Would you describe your high school as mostly white, mostly black, or something else?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Lastly, Will you please fill out this race question provided by the United States Census? This question will later be used during the interview.

**6. What is this person's race? Mark  one or more boxes.**

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↘

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Asian Indian       Japanese       Native Hawaiian

Chinese             Korean             Guamanian or Chamorro

Filipino             Vietnamese       Samoan

Other Asian — *Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.* ↘

Other Pacific Islander — *Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.* ↘

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Some other race — *Print race.* ↘

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APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/ INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### RACE

[Thank you for allowing me to interview you, I'm going to turn on the recorder so that we can start the interview. This interview is organized into two sections. The first deals with questions about your racial identity and general experiences of what it is like to be multiracial. The second section focuses on your dating experiences as a multiracial person.]

1. How would you describe your racial identity?
  - a. Can you tell me a little bit about what you think has influenced your racial identity?
  - b. What has been most influential for you?
  
2. Can you tell me about any memorable experiences that you had growing up (with family/friends) that made you aware of race?
  - a. Did that experience make you feel like you were different? How so?
  
3. Was the topic of race dealt with in your family? How was it discussed?
  - a. Did your parents, friends, or significant others try to shape your racial identity?
  - b. (If Yes) Do you have any examples?
  
4. Can you tell me about any memorable experiences where you felt like someone treated you differently because of your race, appearance, or background?
  - a. Has this occurred with whites or others? Men or women?
  - b. How did you respond?
  
5. Are there any names, either positive or negative, that you remember people calling you in regards to racial identity?
  - a. Who normally called you these types of names, men or women?
    - i. Can you tell me more about this experience?

[I would like to now discuss your experiences with dating]

## DATING

1. Can you tell me a little about when you started dating and what was going on during that time?
  - a. Do you think race has played a role in your dating life? If so, how?
  - b. Can you tell me about the past few people you've dated and their racial identity?
2. Can you describe your ideal partner?
  - a. Do you envision race when thinking about your ideal partner?

[Okay, let's now discuss what it is like to find a partner to date]

3. In your experience, what makes it easy/difficult to find a partner or be in a relationship?
  - a. Can you give me an example?
4. What are some issues, if any, that you feel arise when trying to date?
  - a. What are some comments that others make, if any, about your race when it comes to dating?
  - b. Has this ever made you feel uncomfortable or uneasy?
5. What are some ways you've found people to date?
  - a. Can you give me an example of a technique you use to navigate questions about race?
6. Can you describe a negative or positive experience when finding a partner to date, such as reactions from friends or family?
  - a. How did you handle this situation?
7. What type of experiences do you have when going out publicly with your partner?
  - a. Can you give an example?
  - b. How do you respond to this experience?
  - c. How do your partner respond?
8. If you could give advice to someone multiracial trying to date, what would it be?

[Before we end, I would like to go over the census question that I had you fill out at the beginning of the interview. I see that you checked\_\_\_\_\_. The census now allows people to check all that apply]

1. How do you feel about the idea of the check all that apply option on the census?
  - a. (If only one race was chosen) Why did you check \_\_\_\_\_?

2. What do you usually fill out on forms? Example: admission forms, job applications etc. Some forms do not have the option for “check all that apply”; sometimes the only option available is “other”. How do you feel about the option “other” on forms when it comes to racial identification?

## CURRICULUM VITAE



## VITA

**Kayla M. Williams**

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### EDUCATION

2017 M.A. in Sociology, University of Mississippi

2015 B.S. in Sociology, Austin Peay State University

Major: Sociology

Minors: Psychology and Political Science

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

Race, Class, Gender      Political Sociology

Sexuality                      Pedagogy

Family

### COURSES TAKEN IN AREAS OF INTEREST

Research Methods              Teaching Sociology

Social Statistics                Culture

Sociological Theory          Empire and Revolutions

Debates in Gender

### TEACHING ASSISTANT EXPERIENCE

2014-2016: Department of Sociology. Austin Peay State University.

- Managed attendance rosters for twelve Introductory Sociology Classes.
- Assisted students having difficulty with course material.
- Graded assignments: papers and exams.

2015- Present: Department of Sociology and Anthropology. University of Mississippi.

- Managed Attendance rosters for assigned classes.
- Developed assignment rubrics and graded assignments: papers and exams.
- Assisted with facilitating class discussions.
- Taught classes during absence of the professor.

## **WORKS IN PROGRESS**

Williams, Kayla. "Multiracial Individuals, Gender Dynamics, and Dating." (In Progress)

Brown Tucker, Trevor W. Brooks, and Kayla Williams. "United Way of Greater Clarksville TN Region Allocation Project: Phase Two." (In Progress)

Brown Tucker, Jonniann Butterfield, and Kayla Williams. "Flip it All: Rethinking Introduction to Sociology in the New Millennium." (In Progress)

## **PRESENTATIONS**

2016. Williams, Kayla. "The Sexualization of Teen Girls within Magazines." Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association. Jackson, Mississippi.

2015. Brown Tucker, Jonniann Butterfield, and Kayla Williams. "Flip it All: Rethinking Introduction to Sociology in the New Millennium." Southern Sociological Society. New Orleans, Louisiana.

2014. Brooks Trevor W., Amber Dirk, Logan Emery, Angelica Harris, Crystal Williams, and Kayla Williams. "United Way of Greater Clarksville TN Region Demographic Profile." Presented to the United Way Clarksville, Tennessee

2014. Brooks Trevor W., Logan Emery, and Kayla Williams. "Using Census Data to Help Undergraduate Students Gain a Transformative Learning Experience." Southern Demographic Association. Memphis, Tennessee.

## **GRANTS**

2015. Williams, Kayla. "Research Travel Grant." University of Mississippi Graduate School. Funded for \$200.00

2015. Williams, Kayla. "Minority Travel Scholarship." Southern Sociological Society. Funded for \$500.00

2015. Williams, Kayla. "Undergraduate Research Travel." Alpha Kappa Delta. Funded for \$400.00

2014. Williams, Kayla. "Undergraduate Research Travel." Austin Peay State University. Funded for \$500.00

## **AWARDS**

Hattie Walker Wilhoite Award: African American Woman Leadership Award (2015)

Who's Who Among American Universities and Colleges (2014)

Austin Peay State University Student Organization "Character Counts" Award (2014)

## **SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERISM**

Pre-Law Society (2012-2015) Austin Peay State University

Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance (2013-2015) Austin Peay State University

Gay Straight Alliance (2013-2015) Austin Peay State University

Psychology Club (2013-2015) Austin Peay State University

Sociology Club (2013-2015) Austin Peay State University

Sociology Club President (2014-2015) Austin Peay State University

Psi Chi Honor Society (2014- present) Austin Peay State University

Pi Sigma Alpha, Political Science Honor Society (2014- present) Austin Peay State University

Pi Sigma Alpha Honor Society President (2014-2015) Austin Peay State University

Phi Alpha Delta Legal Fraternity (2014-present) Austin Peay State University

Gamma Beta Phi Honor Society (2014-present) Austin Peay State University

Alpha Kappa Delta Honor Society (2014-present) Austin Peay State University

Sociology Department Tutor (2014-2015) Austin Peay State University

Sociology Department Teaching Assistant (2014-2015) Austin Peay State University

Alpha Sigma Lambda Honor Society (2015-present) Austin Peay State University

Omicron Delta Kappa (2015- present) Austin Peay State University

## **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Southeastern Psychological Association

Southern Demographic Association

Southern Sociological Society

Sociologists for Women in Society

American Sociological Association

Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association