Being "WhAsian" in the Grand Canyon State:

Racial Identity Formation and Societal Belonging and Agency

as Experienced by Young Bi-Racial Asian/white Americans in Arizona

by

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the experiences of biracial Asian/white young people in Arizona – specifically, their racial identity; the formation of that identity over time; their sense of belonging in their state and nation; their views on the common societal conceptions of what it means to be an American; and their own conceptions of Americanism. Prior research indicates that racial identity formation for biracial people is usually a process over time as they work through prevalent racism, mono-racism, and mono-centricity. Anti-Asian sentiment and legislation, miscegenation laws, and rules of hypodescent (one-drop rules) also have deep historical roots in the U.S.

This history has left a wake in which all Americans still live and operate today. However, there is also literature that suggests that current society may be headed in new directions. Multiracial people have been the fastest growing demographic in the last two Census polls, and research suggests (and my study corroborates) that the biracial experience often comes with not only challenges but also myriad benefits, to both self and others.

My research is qualitative in nature, and each of the eleven respondents in the study participated in a first interview, a second interview (two weeks later) and a focus group. Abductive coding of the resulting transcripts was around five main themes and twenty sub-themes. The findings both reflected some of this nation's fraught history (reflected in "American = White" and "Whiteness as Default" subthemes) and provided a hope for the future (especially in the subthemes of "Protean as Strength," "Dual Perspective," "Dual Empathy," and "Self as Quintessential American"). My conclusions indicate that as multiracial people become increasingly common in the U.S. population

(as is predicted on a grand scale) and given some of their strengths and unique perspectives on race, their very existence might aid in eradicating racism in society as a whole. Multiracial people may indeed be the quintessential Americans of the future and that may bode well for race relations more generally.

For Jonathan and David, in hope of a better future for you, for your descendants, and for all of us. May you be a part of the solutions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> [When I describe myself racially to others] I usually just say Asian and white. But sometimes I say "WhAsian" and then they usually look at me weird, and I'm like, "That means Asian and white." And I usually say it as a joke. But I mean, honestly, if that was like some sort of actual… established term, I wouldn't have a problem with that, because I like it. It's kind of fun.
>
> *–Abraham L. [AL], 1st interview*

I received a proverbial wake-up call last summer when I applied to Arizona State University (ASU)'s Graduate and Professional Student Association for their Jumpstart research grant. As I explained in my application, I was conducting a research study examining the experiences of young (18 to 30-year-old) biracial Asian/white Americans in Arizona, and my explicit research question was: How do young Asian/White biracial Arizonans navigate their own racial identity formation and their sense of belonging in their state and in their nation?

Specifically, I wanted to talk with members of this particular demographic in order to find out: how they identify racially and the process they have gone through in this racial identity formation; the experiences, social interactions, and conceptualizations around their racial identity that have shaped and informed that identity process; their sense of belonging in Arizona and in America; and their ideas of what it means to be an American.

After filling out the GPSA application, I thought that I had thoroughly answered their questions regarding a summary of my thesis proposal, the ethical considerations of my research, my main and secondary research questions, my research methods, timeline,

budget, and, briefly, that which I felt was implicitly obvious: the "Why?" or "So What?" rationales underpinning the entire research endeavor.

Several of my application reviewers were unimpressed, however, on that last point. They commented that the "significance of the research is not convincing enough," the "problem/issue is not adequately identified" and that it was "not clear why there… should be a particular focus on… this specific demographic." They questioned the "social impact" of my study, its "desired outcome," its "practical usage," "the larger goal" and how my research findings would contribute to a more "just, equitable society."

Ultimately, my application was declined, and soon afterwards, my advisor informed me that I had the dubious distinction of being the only student with whom she had worked who had been declined Jumpstart funding. Some of her past students, she explained, had received less than their requested amount, but no one had ever been completely declined outright. Maybe, she graciously posited, the grant was more competitive than in the past?

What I didn't know then was something that I would come to learn in the following months from my study participants -- in our interviews and focus groups -- and would be confirmed as well in my ongoing literature review: the experiences of my focus demographic are arguably undervalued in society at large. In fact, in not immediately comprehending the social significance of my research effort, my Jumpstart reviewers were simply reflecting the dominant culture around them and its social constructions of my participants' demographic. Why my research topic matters and what difference it makes is just not automatically evident to people. Its value has to be spelled out, and even then, it may be contested.

Some of this apathy may be reflected in conversations around race, which tend to highlight a black/white duality, and in which people of other types of backgrounds can be excluded, their viewpoints downplayed. As Tran (2021) puts it, both racism and anti-racism employ "identarian binaries… [which] prioritize some people to the exclusion of others" (p. 13), sometimes remaining innocuously content "with the idea that those… ignore[d] will eventually get a hearing" (p. xiv). Even the more inclusive category of BIPOC often seems to exclude some people, including those of Asian descent.

A second factor that may be at play is that most conversations around race hinge on what Jackson and Samuels (2019) call "mono-centrism," in which single race identities are privileged and the lived racial intersections of mixed-race people are often disregarded. This can be true even when Critical Race Theory is employed. For example, Harris (2016), in her critique of CRT, advocates instead for a CRT variant, MultiCrit. Harris asserts that CRT is so focused on monoracial populations that it may actually "unwittingly reinforce monoracial paradigms of race" (p.796) because monoracial hegemony forces multiracial people to either choose a monoracial identity or "risk being erased altogether" (p. 805).

Thirdly, when multiracial experiences *are* examined, it is a frequent assumption that being part-white is a protective factor or a buffer against racism, so biracial people who are white-mixed are presumed to not face the same injustices as other people of color. Similarly, in exposing the scourge of colorism and its ugly manifestations, many conversations about racial justice deduce that if someone is lighter skinned, as Asian/white people tend to be, any negative experiences they encounter can be discounted as less salient to the crucial issues at hand. So perhaps I should have expected

that the GPSA reviewers, like society writ large, wouldn't really be that interested in my demographic.

But my study participants, as was evident in my findings, would not have been surprised by the GPSA reviewers' lack of natural interest in (and/or understanding of) my study. My participants' comments brought this reality home for me when I asked them what had originally appealed to them about being in my study or what they gained from being a part of the study. Their responses included the following:

> I think it's important [to talk about these things]. And it's nice to be asked these questions because no one else has asked me these questions in Arizona, since I've been here, especially in like a non-judgmental, open-ended way. -- P2478

> I hadn't really come across [what] you're looking into… biracial Asian/white… and that was interesting. I haven't seen that very often… I haven't talked about [these topics] ever. *–P2*

> I was just kind of caught off guard by the whole like being… half white, half Japanese…. I've never had anyone ask me to be interviewed about that specifically. So, it caught my interest from the get-go. –Peanut Butter [PB]

> It's very rare for someone to ask us those kinds of questions and to be interested in the dynamic of our experiences as [Asian/white] biracial people, so I appreciate it. –Holly Golightly [HG]

When I decided to resubmit my application for the GPSA grant, at my committee chair's suggestion, I was careful to more fully explain the rationale for my study. My second submission included the following facts and observations about the current social climate in our nation and in our state:

- The rise in recent years of anti-Asian sentiment, mostly related to the COVID pandemic, and the increase in hate crimes against people of Asian background

- The ongoing, often white-centered, mono-racism (i.e., white supremacy) that plagues our nation, which either favors whiteness and leads to biases and prejudices directed towards people of non-white or multiracial descent, or which exotifies multiracials' differences, thereby unhelpfully characterizing them as decidedly outside the norm
- The positing of whiteness as a "pure" construct, which seeks to marginalize and exclude people of partial-white background
- The confusing dichotomy confronting Asian-Americans – and, by extension, white/Asian bi-racial Americans – whereby, on the one hand, they are deemed a proportionally insignificant portion of the U.S. population and "forever foreigners" (Tuan, 1998), but, on the other hand, they are seen as white-proximate, in terms of education and socioeconomic status, and thereby labeled model minorities
- The many prevailing and unhelpful definitions of Americanism that belie the actual demographics of our nation's citizenry and residency and seek to limit rather than include minoritized peoples' identification as full-fledged members of this society
- The fraught nature of the biracial existence for many people, who often feel both internally and externally pressured to choose certain sides of their ancestry over others or to deny certain aspects of their racial heritage altogether
- The ugly legal history of our nation, which until relatively recently (the 1970s) held "miscegenation" to be illegal and, in turn, stigmatized the offspring of interracial couples as half-breeds, mongrels, or worse

- The nativism and white nationalist tendencies of our state of Arizona, both historically and contemporarily, especially in regard to our proximity to the southern border and the resulting social policing generally around who is deemed an acceptable immigrant
- The inherent challenges involved in being a racially extreme minority in a state and country that is still grappling to comprehend and acknowledge people of color as having equal worth as majority whites, and
- The new conceptualizations around racial identity and social belonging that today's young adults espouse and increasingly offer to the larger society as a way forward

Happily, upon this second submission, I not only received the grant award, but did so in full, so, apparently, my rationales were able to convince the GPSA reviewers. But frankly, and significantly, as I reflected on them, my rationales did not fully satisfy *me*. While I believed that all the troubling social conditions that I had cited were legitimate and very important, I felt like I had overly-emphasized the negatives in order to "sell" my study as justice-oriented. It had worked; my study got funded. But in the process, I sensed that I had engaged in what Soliz et al (2017) call the "marginalization perspective" (p. 268) of the biracial experience, with my focus on the challenges that I imagined about my future participants' experiences, without an equally robust description of their possible opportunities and the agency, strengths, promise, and resistance which they would display. I had forgotten that justice is not only a *confrontation* of what is wrong but also a *celebration* of what is right.

Now I believe more than ever that understanding the experiences of this under-studied group of people provides insight into all of the bulleted social disorders above and how they play out around us on the national and local stage, but in addition, I want to reimagine, together with those in my research study, how 1) thinking about belonging in this nation might be better envisioned and 2) how better ways of interacting with one another might be lived out. With these goals in mind, I hope that my readership will include both bi-racial Asian/white people and people of diverse other backgrounds, so that both "insiders" and "outsiders" to this demographic could benefit from my research study's content and conclusions.

My Positionality and Personal Reflection

Five decades of life experience (which I outline below) have informed my interest in this research topic generally, and I have been desiring for years to specifically study and learn more about bi-racial identity formation and belonging. Thus, it was one of my main topics of research interest that I shared with my Methods professor in the first week of my current graduate program. Issues around inclusive and exclusive conceptions of Americanism have also been very moving to me for decades now. I have found myself in tears of empathy and anguish more than once when discussing this topic with peers and colleagues, as I sought to hear their perspectives and tried to understand their viewpoints.

It is not by random chance that I am drawn to these areas of research. As my committee chair, Dr. Swadener, says, "Scratch the surface of any theory and you'll find an autobiography." And like so many others, I have a personal and family stake in my own research. First, while I understand that racial identity is socially constructed and is

complicated for everyone, myself included, I do identify as racially white. I am of mostly European descent (primarily Scottish, Irish, English), along with very small traces of Cherokee and Jewish ancestry. So, because of how I look and from whence my ancestors originated, I see myself as "white," and I think most other people also see me as white, so I therefore operate in the world as a white person, with all the privileges and pitfalls therein.

That said, it is also true that, throughout my adult life, ever since my college years in Southern California, many (perhaps most) of my closest friends have been of Asian descent. Through them, I have learned a lot about Asian cultures and especially about distinctly Asian-American and bi-racial Asian/white experiences. Additionally, I have had the privilege of spending about five years of my adult life living in Southeast Asia (the Philippines and Indonesia), and I have had the opportunity to visit many other Asian countries -- Bhutan, China (Hong Kong), India, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Thailand -- sometimes for months at a time, so I have gained valuable perspective through those formative experiences as well.

In my late-twenties, I married one of those dear Asian-American friends of mine, Jai Choi, so I thereby not only gained a Korean-American husband (now of 22 years), but also an Asian surname and Asian extended family members, in the form of many in-laws, living both in the U.S. and South Korea. (My husband had migrated with his family to California from Seoul when he was in grade school, so he himself can be considered either first generation or second generation in terms of his immigration status.) Then, twenty years ago, he and I were blessed to have children, who are bi-racial themselves -- our half-Asian and half-white offspring. Finally, not without significance, our family has

also hosted dozens of international students, almost without pause, over the last twenty years. These students have lived in our home and shared in our common activities for months or years at a time, and most of them were from Asia (Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, and Indonesia). Hence, my entire adult life has been profoundly impacted by Asia, Asians, Asian-Americans, and biracial Asian/white people. I want to make clear, with this self-description, that I recognize that I am not a total insider to my research demographic, but because of my life experiences, I feel like I am an almost-insider or at least a very strong natural ally.

As my children (now young adults) have sought to establish their own racial identity as bi-racial people, it has not always been a simple path. It has been a definite process, and our family's socialization efforts around race have been decidedly bi-directional, with me learning from my kids just as they have learned from me and my husband. Of course, this bidirectionality has only increased as our children have gotten older and thereby increased their natural agency to match more fully that of their parents. (Atkin et al, 2019).

Because this research study looks at people's personal construction and de-construction of their thoughts on race and their own racial identities, it is not surprising that I have been personally challenged while doing this research. One small example of how I've had my thinking altered is that I have always considered my children, and many bi-racial Asian/white children and young people to be exceptionally handsome or beautiful. (No bias there at all, I'm sure.) But Kelly Jackson's (2019) writing made me aware that for some multi-racial people, sentences like "Mixed babies are so cute!" – sentences that I perhaps never uttered out loud verbatim but have certainly thought to

myself – can be considered micro-aggressions, not because they have evil intent, but because, given this country's legacies of white supremacy and colorism, mixed-babies are often especially considered cute when they are specifically white-mixed, which is just another way in which whiteness gets centered in our thinking. And as Jackson explains, microaggressions can deeply impact an individual's identity development and sense of security and/or belonging. In fact, even the term *microaggression* itself can be seen as a misnomer, because "micro" indicates that the effects of such aggressions are only slightly harmful, which may not often prove be the case. All this to say, beauty standards can have ugly foundations, like implicit racism and ableism. So, while acknowledging beauty where it can be found may be valuable at times, it is also important to question why we find certain people beautiful in the first place.

And then, I also have had shaping experiences around the issue of belonging in the United States. Over the years I have been dismayed when hearing certain friends and colleagues of color in this country say that they did not consider themselves and/or their children to be Americans. Of course, there can be many reasons why someone may feel and think this way. For example, for some people, there is simply *no desire* to be identified as American, and, in fact, I can certainly understand that viewpoint. As a student of both history and social justice, I am very aware that America's past and present are full of wrongdoing, so the refusal to identify with that legacy can be seen as a very logical and meaningful choice, as an expression of resistance.

But, if the fact that this country has engaged in wrongdoing and/or situated certain people in such ways as to make them feel like they don't even want to identify with or belong to it (or claim it or let it claim them) isn't disturbing enough, I have been equally

grieved for friends who have had a different reason for not feeling American. These people have desired in some ways to be seen as (and to see themselves as) American but have felt denied that identity in full by those around them, because of their racial minority status, religion, citizenship status, or other factors.

Similarly, as my own children have become young adults, it has also been hard for me to hear them describe others around them as "Americans" and to have that label be differentiated (albeit often subconsciously) from how they see themselves. This us/them dichotomy has not been of their choosing, but rather a result of how they think others see them and how they have, therefore, come to see themselves. The definitions of "American" to which they have been exposed have seemed exclusive of them, however subtly, because of their racial background. My feeling as their parent is "How is this possible? How could they ever be *more* American than they already are?" I am even tempted to list off their "credentials"-- all the reasons they should be considered *bona fide* Americans, as much as any other people in this land.

But ultimately that list of "proofs" which I would enumerate would just reflect some of the old, worn-out conceptualizations of what it means to "be American" that I am hoping this study will help revamp. Because, fundamentally, I don't think that to be American you should have to do certain things, or have certain experiences, or be enculturated in certain ways. In fact, I think the *tearing down* of barriers to belonging is to be commended, rather than encouraging or requiring people to jump through inclusion hoops. A big reason I even did this research project was that I was hoping to learn about a more viable and substantive definition of Americanism from the young people I interviewed.

These things I do passionately believe -- nothing and no one should be able to make my kids and other young people like them feel less or "other," in any way, and all racist and mono-racist conceptions should be set aside as illegitimate. Many people who hope and fight and work for social transformation say they want to make the world a better place for their own children. It is said so often that it can sound trite. But it is my sentiment, too, in the end. And perhaps it is, after all, the highest dream which a person can really have – an improvement of what is and what will be, for the benefit of the beloved those who are to come after. So, yes, I admit -- I indeed proclaim: I want to make the world a better place for my children -- and, in the process, for other people as well. I am hoping that this study will help contribute in some small or big way to that more excellent reality.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 (above) introduces my study and describes some of my personal background that led me to want to explore this research topic. Chapter 2 is a literature review, which is largely in two sections: a look back at our national past and a look forward, based on current realities. This chapter also helps further situate my research in the field of justice studies. Chapter 3 explains my research design – its rationale, and how I carried out the study, plus some of the conscious and apparently unconscious assumptions with which I entered this research project.

Chapter 4 is divided into my five main codes and their subthemes. The first two codes in this chapter (Bi-Racial Identity and Sense of Societal Belonging) were

deductively derived, based on the participant responses to my direct questions. The last three codes (To Be or Not to Be Protean?, Points of Duality, and Who is "American"?) were more inductive, based on participant responses that were not in direct response to my research questions but seemed to be none-the-less thematic and persistent across the interview questions. Chapter 5 examines some of the broad implications of my study, especially as they relate to the real strengths and positive possibilities that may result from the inevitable increase in multi-racial people in our national population. I also explore at length in this chapter other avenues for research that my study raised in my mind, as well as re-considerations I've had and ways that I could have conducted my study differently, in retrospect.

The Appendices include a section of adulation and gratitude for the Arizona Youth Identity Project (on which I worked as a transcriber and student coder), since it was this study that immediately inspired my own research. The appendices also include many of my study's instruments, in case the reader is interested in those specifics.

A Word about Words

This study is also framed by several key constructs which are complicated and contested, so before proceeding further, I want to acknowledge their context and provide some rationale for my use of them herein.

"Race." In the ancient eons of human history, prior to global exploration, colonialism, or globalization, when travel between continents was rare and societies were generally isolated from one another, there arose, on the various continents, people groups,

which not only developed distinct cultures, but also phenotypically presented differently from one another. From our current vantage point, many would classify such people as having belonged to different "races." And while it is hard to argue with the fact that often, even today, people originally hailing from different continents *look* physically different from one another, what *can* be vehemently contested is that those differences are accurately characterized by our prevailing (or any past) racial categorizations.

This is because "race," as it is and as it has been social constructed, is often unreliable, illogical, arbitrary, politically motivated, and/or used in nefarious ways, and therefore untrustworthy. Conceptions of race and presumed racial differences have spawned whole fields of eugenic pseudoscience, rooted in ideas of biological essentialism/determinism, which in turn have been used to create and bolster stereotypes, to argue for the superiority of certain races, and to justify the oppression of others. A focus on blood quantum has also been used to support or refute claims to racial purity. Thus, that which purports to be merely descriptive often actually actively works toward a purpose. As Tran (2020) argues, racial categories don't exist in a vacuum. They have a "why." They *do* something. They are useful.

As an example of such racial conceptual construction in medieval times, the British conceived of the Welsh as of a different "race" than themselves. This seems preposterous to us today, given that these peoples historically shared the exact same (and relatively small) island nation. So, of course, both historical Brits and historical Welsh were actually the same race, right? Yet no, because what this latter claim fails to understand is that racial categories have often been used primarily to not only differentiate, but to then divide and "other" people who may have even slight cultural

differences. If the Welsh were political enemies, then the British establishment had a reason to racialize them differently, as a way to foster alienation and distrust. Racial othering, in other words, *served* the goals of the Brits in this situation. Such racialization didn't have to follow any biological sense.

In fact, such broadly designated categories, like "white" as a catch-all for historically European peoples, have always been tenuous. Consider, for example, that many nations in Europe (e.g., Italy, Spain) were deemed non-white, and therefore racially inferior, for centuries. In an opposite trend, in more recent years, many Latinx people chose "white" on the 2010 Census pilots, even though they don't even identify as white, simply because there was no other racial category offered that they felt fit them any better (Demby, 2014)! Conversely, in the years since, Arab Americans have successfully petitioned *to be* categorized as "white" on U.S. governmental documents. It becomes clear through such examples that this particular racial category, like all of them, is not really about biology, or even about geography. It is about political power manifested and furthered through social constructs, on the one hand, and pure confusion on the other.

Other racial categorizations can also be logically unreliable, due to their arbitrary nature, with, again, a sometimes complete disconnect between phenotype and label. For example, Trevor Noah (2019), in his autobiography *Born a Crime*, talks about the racial categorizing that took place during apartheid in South Africa and how much of it was based on convenience and expediency. He writes

> Racism is not logical… Chinese people were classified as black in South Africa… [because] there weren't enough Chinese people to warrant devising a whole separate classification. Interestingly, as the same time, Japanese people were labeled as white. The reason for this was that the South African government

> wanted to establish good relations with the Japanese in order to import their fancy cars and electronics (p.75).

So again, racialization served its purposes: ease on the one hand; favor on the other.

These examples all reveal how the "real" racial categories in any given moment actually change over time and often do so purely in response to particular or changing social climates. Furthermore, any of these "illogical" applications of past racial conceptions can really only be given that designation if we assume that our own current racial conceptions are the true ones, and that itself is a dubious assertion. Given this complex set of propositions, it can be powerfully posited that race is purely a construct, meaningless in any objective sense, but merely used, rather, to exclude and dehumanize.

And yet, all this said, and notwithstanding the capricious and unstable nature of its construction, "race" is *not,* in fact, without social meaning. Indeed, racial categories are pregnant with social meaning, and usually laden with far more such meaning than is ever warranted. Assumptions about racial differences rarely end with examination of surface-level phenotypical differences (e.g., in skin tone, hair color or texture, or body type) or with differentiation between cultural practices and values commonly associated with varying racial groupings. This is because racial conceptions don't simply "other" people, but rather do so via overly broad generalizations and with the underlying human tendency to conclude that *other* is essentially *inferior*. *Not only are you superficially different than me,* racial thinking intimates, *but you are probably also inherently and profoundly different than me, and, by extension, you are less valuable than me*.

This conflation of skin-deep difference and deep-down pathology is particularly problematic when currently relevant historical events have unfolded in such a way that

certain "racial" groups are decidedly in positions of power and privilege in comparison to other racial groups. That historical reality tends to then be assumed to reflect not only the political dynamics of that given moment, but rather to reveal universal generalizations about racial characteristics, as if any particular social moment (and its corollary power positions) was inevitable, given the races of the parties involved.

And yet, ironically, it is this very social meaning revolving around race, ludicrous though it is, that forces us to examine race as an active and relevant concept. One's racial categorization may be absolutely malleable, and the social meanings associated with it may be unfair or without any real merit, but that will not stop one, in today's world, from being categorized by others (consciously or not) and being stereotyped (consciously or not) based on that categorization. In turn, it is challenging for one to not also internalize, at least to some extent, these same unfair, unmerited racial categorizations and stereotypes about *oneself*. It is within this incredibly messy situation that we all exist. Though "race" is in many ways a farce, and is, at best, an extremely charged and encumbered attempt to differentiate people, I am still using race as a starting point of my study's interrogation because racial categorizing (conceptually and personally) does still impact us all. Racism is persistent and pervasive, and it is not without social effect. Racial categorizing matters in people's lived experience.

For discussion of my decision not to utilize "ethnicities" in my study, please see the Conclusion, wherein I both explain my original rationale for excluding such designations but I also question that decision, especially in the context of a study on people of partially Asian descent. Which brings us to the next term which requires some unpacking.

"Asian." One specific constructed racial category that greatly impacts my study is that of *Asian*. The designation "Asian," in the West's commonly-accepted list of major racial classifications, encompasses the largest grouping of people in the world, many of whom do not consider *themselves* Asian in any meaningful (or often even superficial) way. Asia, as conceived by the West, includes a broad swath of land ranging from Indonesia to Eastern Russia to India to the Arabian peninsula and thereby clumps together people of vastly different cultures, religions, languages, government structures, socioeconomics, and phenotypes. Asia is indeed so vast and so varied that it seems that the term "Asian" was just created by Europeans to cover anyone geographically east of themselves, starting with "the Near East," (which historically including Turkey, the Levant, and sometimes even parts of eastern Africa, like Egypt) and extending out to Japan.

Those deemed Asian by the West may not ever conceive of themselves as such, since national or even regional identifications often run much deeper than any larger geographical associations. And Asian nations, while ascribing to various trade treaties with one another, do not have anything even close to resembling the European Union, for example, which would bind them together continentally, as a political and economic block.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the term "Asian Americans" has been employed by both insiders and outsiders, often for political purposes, as a way of grouping a variety of minority peoples into one category. This category can be used for political good, by Asian Americans themselves, to act as a voting block, for example, on issues of common concern, but the designation can also be used for ill by outsiders, as a way to further

stereotypes and disregard vast differences (Zhou, 2021). Both of these tendencies will be discussed in my Literature Review.

All this said, like the word "race," I am still employing, in my study, the terms *Asian* and *Asian-American* because, again, although they may be terms that were created by and founded on false premises and for purposeful political reasons, and although they often lack any real meaningfulness for the people so identified, they still hold broader social meaning in our contemporary society. Those social meanings, held by society at large about "Asian others" and simultaneously held by Asian-Americans, in turn, about themselves, is some of what this study was designed to uncover and critically analyze.

"American." The words *American* and *America* are no less fraught than the terms discussed above. While "Asian" takes a vast array of people and puts them altogether, deigning them to be of the same continent, "American," as used in our country, does essentially the opposite, borrowing the name from two richly diverse continents (North and South America) and co-opting it to mean *only* the people in the current-day United States. Despite this obnoxious etymology, the power of the word "American" in the U.S. cannot be overstated.

Belonging in the U.S. and claims to "American" status can often be connected to immigrant status, and this can be an especially emotionally-taxing relationship of identities. Therefore, let me make clear that although my study is focused on second-generation (and later-generation) participants, it is not because I consider first-generation immigrants to be less American. I simply think that the experience of second and later

generation people is unique from that of immigrants to the U.S., and it would be a disservice to both groups to lump them together.

Ultimately, although the term "American" is thus quite controversial and contested, I am again using it in my study because of the deep social meaning it has in the United States' context. It is, as I've stated, a very emotionally-charged label, conjuring up ideas of core belonging and patriotism. Few terms speak more strongly to the topic of inclusion and exclusion in the United States, and because my study is focused on societal belonging, the term *American* should not be avoided, even if its meaning in the U.S. is an extremely truncated form of its meaning in the Western hemisphere more broadly.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted above, this literature review is divided into two major sections: a look back, at some of the history which shapes our present realities and then a look forward, to hoped-for imaginaries, rooted in some of the current realities which bode well for our future. These two analyses – a frank examination of our national past and an expectant outlook for the future are, I believe, the twin vital pillars of my academic department at ASU -- Justice and Social Inquiry -- and they situate my research squarely in a justice studies framework.

Living in the Broad Wake of Our National History

> Though race is a social construction, it continues to be a real part of shaping everyday encounters for people of color in the US. (Harris, 2016, p. 805)
>
> The issue of ethnic diversity and national identity in an immigrant nation such as the USA is a recurrent topic of debate… Defining what it means to be American inherently implies delineating the boundaries of the national identity (Devos and Mohamed, *Shades of American Identity,* 2014, pp 739, 749)

Graphic novelist Rebecca Hall, in her book *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts* (2021), writes powerfully of how our present is shaped by our past. She uses the analogy of a wave's wake; history is the wave, and that wave may have already passed us by, but its consequences remain, its wake is still in effect, and that is where we live, in the wake of the past. This can be experienced, she says, as "ruins" or an "afterlife" or "ancestry in progress." And "the past," she says, "is not a ghost we want to banish or exorcise. It is something we want to internalize" (Hall, 2021).

The participants in my study, like all of us, live in a fraught wake. United States' history is full of unjust discriminations that impact them from the moment of their conception – discriminations both against people with minority racial statuses and against people who are bi or multi-racial and therefore do not fit into neat categories of typical racial constructs. Historical definitions of Americanism have also been unjust, leading to a sense of inclusion for some but exclusion for others. Much has been written on all of these wrongs of the past (some of which literature will be discussed in this section) and it is indisputable how profoundly they have bled into our present realities.

A racist past. A central tenet of Critical Race Theory is that race, rather than being a biological fact, is a social construction, with social significance (George, 2021). And the false pretense of colorblindness that much of our current society seeks to maintain is a main factor in our ongoing problems around race (Delgado, R. & Stefancic (2017). In fact, due to our collective history, it is impossible to perceive another's race and have no social constructions whatsoever inevitably strapped onto that perception (Haney-Lopez, 1994). Even the most well-meaning person cannot completely escape the historical and continuing legacies of racism and prejudice in this country.

Human developmentalists often speak of "proximal processes" -- the reciprocal interactions that occur between a person and the people, objects, and symbols in his or her environment. As Margaret Beale Spencer (2006) wrote, *"*There have been few proximal processes left unaffected by the particular gene expressions manifested as *skin color."* Hence, racism is not just part of our national history, but also part of the current

societal context, and the impacts of racism, prejudice and discrimination cannot be discounted (Harrell, 2000).

Relatedly, Asian favor and disfavor in the larger U.S. society seems to have cycles. The recent pandemic-induced anti-Asian violence and hatred that we have witnessed throughout the country has continuity with our hateful past. As Tuan (1998) posits, Asian Americans have been historically viewed as "forever foreigners" (regardless of how long their families have lived here). And COVID is not the first disease that has been blamed on Asian-Americans. Asians have been labeled as diseased since they began arriving here, having been historically associated with virulent venereal diseases, like syphilis and gonorrhea, and even with the Bubonic plague (Yellow Horse, 2020). Myriad other historic examples, from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, whereby the Supreme Court formally set up barriers to access to equal citizenship for Chinese immigrants, to the indentured servant status of many Asians during the California Gold Rush, to the historic pitting of Asians against other minority racial groups in a bid for white proximity, to the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II –- these and many other examples all reveal the racism endured by Asians in the U.S. since they first began arriving on our Western shores (Tran, 2021; Waite, 2021).

However, the more recent social situation is even more complex than that. While all of the above is true, there is also the contrasting social reality that in recent decades, Asian Americans have generally and increasingly been considered more white-adjacent than other racial minorities. As Tuan (1998) puts it, the contrasting view of Asians, if not as foreigners, is as "honorary whites" -- a view which obviously not only centers and

exalts whiteness, in unfortunate ways, as the presumed pinnacle racial experience in our country, but also plays on colorism and pigmentocracy to favor lighter-skinned Asians over other ethnic minorities in the U.S. As the wealth and education gap between whites and Asians has shrunk, with statistics putting some Asian Americans communities at even higher rates of wealth and education than whites, Asian Americans have been holding a more favored status in society generally, held up as a positive example and as role models to other racial groups -- as evidence of assumed American meritocracy. This can obviously also be problematic.

Then, in 2020 and since, the Asian American experience has taken yet another twisted turn, becoming even more complex. This change has been clearly seen in the recent racial animosity towards Asian people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-Asian racism fueled by the pandemic has been global in nature, documented in North America, Latin America, and Europe, but the former recent U.S. president and his administration and political cronies were most flagrant in their inflamed rhetoric, fostering an atmosphere in the U.S. that made it a hotspot for hate crimes.

As the coronavirus spread in this recent pandemic, hate, too, acted as a corollary virus, infectious both in physical society and on social media (Yellow Horse, 2020). There have been attacks, particularly against Asian-American women and the elderly. The result of these occurrences has been an understandable rash of anger and fear in the Asian American community, as they combat racism which is targeted so suddenly and unexpectedly at them. (Westervelt, 2021).

But racism is not a vice only of white people. Of relevance to this research study, there are strains of racial purity thinking in many Asian cultures as well. Therefore,

Asian/white biracial youth can face discrimination and exclusion from either their full-white or their full-Asian counterparts. Besides the cultural issues of whether one speaks the Asian language well enough or knows the Asian customs, etc, one's mixed racial composition alone can constitute an affront to Asians who consciously or not harbor mono-racist tendencies.

M.P.P Root (1997) tackled this issue head-on in her work, which sought to expand the definition of "Asian" to include Amerasians of mixed Latino, African, and Native American origins. Her research sought to challenge the Asian American community to deconstruct race and examine the racism inherent in their own cultures. Although her work focused on non-white mixed Asian ancestries and acknowledged that the racism experienced by mixed-race non-white Asians is often even more intense that that experienced by Asian/white people, the point still remains: Asian cultures can tend to be racially prejudiced against non-Asians, and that prejudice can indeed extend to Asian/white biracial people.

A mono-racist past (and the "mixed" response of Multicrit). This ties into the topic of the strong strains of not only racism but also mono-racism in our nation's past. Multiracial identities in the U.S. are not a new phenomenon; America has a long multiracial past. But there have been concerted efforts, throughout our national existence, to make that phenomenon socially and legally reprehensible (Kich, 1992). For example, the historical statutes enacted in many states around "the rule of hypodescent," otherwise known as the "one-drop rule," declared for many decades that someone with any trace of non-white ancestry -- no matter how small -- could not be considered white,

regardless of even how they looked (Blay, 2021). The criteria and reasoning employed by the courts to justify and determine the whiteness of some, and the non-whiteness of others, were often totally arbitrary (Haney-Lopez, 2006). Race became a matter of both biology and the law (Blay, 2021).

Laws against miscegenation are another example of a broader vehicle through which people's racial compositions have historically been either legitimized or de-legitimized by the courts, making certain people "legal" racial entities and making others criminal, even before their conception. (Trevor Noah's 2016 book *Born a Crime* poignantly and poetically tackles similar types of miscegenation laws in his own home country of South Africa.) It is striking to remember that there were laws making interracial marriage illegal in parts of the U.S all the way up until 1967. The Supreme Court finally put an end to this type of social policing, in a ruling aptly named *Loving vs. Virginia*, only fifty years ago.

These examples show how race has been, therefore, not just a social construction, but literally a legal construction, and the ways in which one could or could not identify racially or interact interracially was thereby not self-determined but subject to the ultimate determination of the courts (Haney-Lopez, 2006). As Reverend Martin Luther King (1964) aptly and succinctly characterized such situations, in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, "There are just laws and there are unjust laws." And as Kich (1992) reflects, it can be challenging for "biracial people to cope with [their] heritage, given the generally negative social, legal, and cultural history of race, ethnicity, and intermarriage" (p. 304).

One response or corrective to the historic mono-racism in our society, is the development of Critical Multiracial Theory (or MultiCrit), one of many branches of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which was first developed by the educator Jessica C. Harris (2016). MultiCrit has tried to adapt CRT's main tenets and alter them to have greater relevance and sensitivity to the differentiated experiences of people with bi- and multi-racial heritages. Atkin and Yoo (2019) describe those main MultiCrit tenets as: resisting ahistoricism; placing value on individuals' and groups' experiential knowledge; challenging dominant ideologies; focusing on racism, monoracism, and colorism; acknowledging the prevailing monoracial paradigm of race; and understanding the intersections involved with multiple race identities.

Harris (2016) critiqued CRT with the assertion that it is so focused on monoracial populations that it may actually "unwittingly reinforce monoracial paradigms of race" (p.796). In our national context of monoracial hegemony then, she says that multiracial people feel forced to either choose a monoracial identity or "risk being erased altogether" (p. 805). CRT's monoracial paradigm, she argues, can in this way be seen as yet another "structure of determinism," subjecting people to restrictive external racial constructions and thereby affecting their ability to assert their will in choosing how to racially identify.

But MultiCrit is also open to criticism because it can be problematic to consider "multiracial people" as a monolithic group. As Garrod et al (2014) powerfully posited: "the 'mix' matters," (Harris, 2016, p. 809) -- multiracial people have a plethora of diverse experiences, unique to their own specific intermingling of heritages, that are not always adequately expressed or acknowledged by a single MultiCrit framework. This line of reasoning can lead to a questioning of MultiCrit's usefulness as a construct. Thus, it

remains open for debate whether MultiCrit really is a better theory than CRT for examining, evaluating, and communicating the multiracial experience, or whether it can be just as misleading as CRT, albeit in a different way: CRT largely assumes monoracialism, which is obviously problematic for multiracial people ; MultiCrit can tend to lumps all multiracials into one group, which is "misleading because these individuals... have a plethora of diverse experiences due to their racial/ethnic makeup, lived realities, and [their] histories" (Harris, p. 809).

Either way, the fact remains that the dominant constructions of race currently privilege single-race identities, revealing a societal foundation of what Jackson and Samuels (2019) call *monocentricity*, which they describe as the idea "that one's racial identity should be restricted to a single category." They argue that monocentricty not only ignores or disregards the intersectional experiences of mixed-race people, but it also separates people into racial categories in, tellingly, a *hierarchical* fashion. In its quest to categorize people monoracially, monocentricity would usually tell multiracial people not only that they are essentially just one race, but that they are a *certain* race, which is most often *not-white*, again insidiously centering whiteness and intentionally excluding people from this assumedly exalted category. Such a malevolent context can complicate multiracial people's efforts to even answer to their own satisfaction the simple internal question of "Who am I?" (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2012).

The subtle expectation that everyone would neatly fit into racial categories has also generally meant that most bi-racial people have been insensitively asked questions throughout their lives such as "What are you?" or the hardly more-tolerable variant "Where are you from?" (or, even more annoyingly, "Where are you from *really*?") (Blay,

2021). Jackson and Samuels say that these foundations of monoracism and monocentrism perpetuate a continued pathologization and exotification of multiracial people.

An exclusionary past. Ironically, America bills itself and even often prides itself as "a nation of immigrants." Indeed, most all of us who live here have ancestors who hailed from other lands in the last 500 years (or even much more recently). But, unfortunately, more often than not, our nation still has a hard time embracing its newest arrivals. Many times, immigrants and their descendants, particularly from non-white nations, have a difficult time being accepted and feeling like they fully belong in this country, as authentic Americans. This is because, as Devos and Mohammad (2014) explain it, often there are implicit associations that people make between ethnic identity and national identity. The definition of "American" is too often conflated with "white American" in both white and non-white minds. "Consistently, European Americans are implicitly conceived of as being more American than African, Asian, Latino, and even Native Americans" (Devos and Mohamed, 2014, p. 739)

This implicit American = white effect often emerges even when a person's explicit knowledge or perceptions would tend to point in the opposite direction. For example, in research that looked at both minority and white perceptions of their own Americanness, the minorities felt less American than did whites, and believed that, *regardless of their citizenship,* they were not perceived as American by others. Sadly, responses in this study also suggested that minority participants believed that to be fully American, one must sacrifice some of one's connection to family and community (Rodriguez et al, 2010).

This problem can impact not only recent immigrants, but also their children and grandchildren. Second-generation immigrants, although born here, and therefore fully U.S. citizens in a legal sense, may still not feel truly "American" nor sense that others view them as truly American. (Park-Taylor et al, 2008). This is because while U.S. citizenship is arguably quite objective – one either is or is not a citizen -- whether one is deemed "American" is a *subjective* decision, based on the meanings associated with Americanism that each person holds.

Smith (1988) argues that many believe that an American national identity is now constituted by a commitment to liberal democracy and the "American Creed," rather than by ethnicity, religion, or country of origin. But ultimately, we still labor under the nation's dominant perceptions of what makes one like and unlike a "typical" American, and it can be a challenging environment for any person of color, including biracial Asian/whites. As mentioned before, generational status only heightens the stakes (Weisskirch, 2005) and can increase the internal and external push to integrate with the greater society. But this type of pressure to conform is what Yoshino (2006) would call a hidden threat to our civil rights. It denies the possibility of a preference for diverse American identities.

If at the intersection of race and national identity, being "American" is consciously or unconsciously linked with racial whiteness, this may end up leading to experiences of disorientation and isolation for anyone who doesn't identify as fully white, negatively impacting their sense of belonging in this country (Devos and Mohamed, 2014). It is important to interrogate all of these areas of contention and work at reimagining them.

Living into a Robust Hope for Our Future

> The multiethnic-racial experience cannot—and should not—be distilled into general orientations of good or bad, favorable or detrimental, problematic or constructive. Instead, we should focus on the constellation of experiences (i.e., benefits and challenges) for a more comprehensive and holistic understanding. (Soliz et al, 2017)

> This is the promise of choice at its brightest: By choosing to resist racial constructions, we may emancipate ourselves and our children. (Ian Haney-Lopez, *The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication and Choice*, 1994, p. 200)

> Advancing inclusion and belonging for people of all races, national origins, and ethnicities is critical to guaranteeing the safety and security of the American people. (The White House Briefing Room, *Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States*, 2021)

> Political theorists have long argued that the stability of diverse democracies rests on the ability of the country's people to feel like they share and value a common identity. (Schildkraut, *Boundaries of American Identity: Evolving Understandings of Us*, 2014, para. 55)

While justice never turns a blind eye to the past -- deeply contemplating it, rather, clear-eyed -- the past does not, at the same time, command all of justice's attention. Rather, justice is very much, in its essence, about not only past and current praxis but future possibility. The push for justice is both a demand for a change for today and a yearning for an ideal of tomorrow. Even when it is practically reified, it remains aspirational, utopian, holding in tension the *already* with the *not yet* and still pining for its ever-purer forms in the as-yet-unseen future. Arrigo Colombo (2000) describes justice as both ethereal and material: "a golden myth, the golden age," but also a "course of construction" (pp. 181-182), spanning from ancient to contemporary times.

Some would argue, like Lee (2022) in her recent New York Times article, titled "Asian Americans have Always Lived with Fear" that the present is not much different than the past. She reminds us that "ever since Asians began arriving in the United States, they've been met with hostility and rejection, often sanctioned by state and federal legislation" (p. 4), and she further states that

> For some, deep down, my ordinary Korean face – small, shallow-set eyes, round nose, high cheekbones, straight dark hair – reminds them of lost wars, prostitutes, spies, refugees, poverty, disease, cheap labor, academic competition, cheaters, sexual competition, oligarchs, toxic parenting, industrialization or a sex or pornography addiction… Far too many of us in this world are despised and rejected for our immutable characteristics (p. 5).

But while all this may be true, the rest of this literature review will focus on some reasons to hope that the future may be less troubled and distressing than the past has been and the present often still is.

Positive racial identity formation. For young bi-racial people today, there is increasing fluidity in how they feel able to racially identify. Whereas historically, there were limits to how people were allowed to identify or even pressures to identify in certain ways, those restrictive formulations seem to be waning. To be sure, complicating factors remain: how the young people "present" racially to others (Ahn et al, 2006); how their parents identify racially; how their parents have discussed issues of racial identity and passed on awareness of cultural identity to them (Atkin & Yoo, 2018); how close they feel relationally to the various sides of their family; how deeply and consistently they live and experience any cultural aspects associated with their various racial identities; and how societal stereotypes and assumptions surrounding various racial identities are formed

and embraced (based on historical and social constructions of various racial categories) (Haney Lopez, 2013; Jackson et al, 2012).

How one presents to the outside world and to oneself and the way in which one is seen and categorized by others can understandably be a major influence in how one identifies racially. But sometimes a person either sees his/her own features in ways that are different than most others see them or else the person has reasons that play more strongly than phenotype into their decision-making, leading them to identify differently from how they present. So, while physical appearance can be a big factor, it is not always the biggest when it comes to identity formation (Ahn et al, 2006). In fact, Ronald Hall (2001) states that a substantial portion of the scholarly literature on this topic concludes that social experiences are more key to identity development than physiological attributes.

For example, not only one's immediate family, but also the major branches of the extended family, can have a profound impact, and arguably, for a bi-racial child, this is particularly the case. If either side of the family, or any individual members of the family, reject a part of the child's heritage, that can lead to the child's sense of distance from, or enmity with, that part of their heritage and can affect how they later choose to identify. Conversely, how a child is embraced, valued, loved, and receives approval, as a bi-racial person, by the different sides of their family, can increase their sense of connection to and belonging with those various family heritages (Coates, 2017).

Ecological systems theory, first envisioned by Bronfenbrenner (1989), and then expanded on by many others since in the fields of psychology and sociology, is usually seen to have four main levels: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the

macrosystem. The *microsystem* encompasses the individual herself, plus her family, school, teachers, friends, neighborhood, religious organization, and other immediate influencers. The *mesosystem* mostly encompasses the bidirectional interactions among the various microsystem elements. The *exosystem* includes the government, social services, healthcare mechanisms, mass media, the economy, and other factors that affect a person indirectly or at a further relational distance. The *macrosystem* includes the ideologies and attitudes of the culture in which someone lives. All these ecological levels and their corresponding components are relevant to racial identity formation.

And besides just acknowledging and investigating the ecological social *space* in which one develops, it is also essential to see development as happening over *time*, as life span theories of development make so evident (Hall, 2001), and as Bronfenbrenner (1989) himself acknowledged with a fifth all-encompassing level of his ecological systems theory – what he dubbed the "chronosystem." While Umaña-Taylor et al (2014) describe racial identity formation as a normative process for all people, its components typically come to ascendence in different people's lives at different points, depending on one's developmental stage and personal life trajectory. Processes of identity development are fluid and can take different directions at various stages of life.

And of course, each of these above factors also has a varying level of impact, depending on the individual. While some of these factors are relevant for all people's racial identity formation, others are unique or especially pertinent for multi-racial people. Regardless, ultimately, it is instrumental to both their development and their positive life outcomes that young people come to a place of peace, confidence, and pride

in their own racial identity as they process and refine their authentic sense of "self" (Hall, 2001).

Expanding the identity options for multi-racial people. Most racial identity theories fundamentally expect that multiracial people will either identify with one of their main racial heritages exclusively or will fall into an integrated identity, where they identify exclusively *as multi-racial*. Of course, this type of "integration" is not the only or preferred way to look at the goals of multiracial identity formation. Miville et al (2005) state that many racial identity formation models do assume a fully integrated bi- or multi-racial identification as the optimal end state, but Rockquemore et al's (2002) study provides a critical overview of multiracial identity formation theories and finds that it is more complicated than that, concluding that there are not just two or three, but six ways that biracial people may see themselves.

Their study of Black/white biracial people revealed six distinct categories of racial identity for their participants: 1) *exclusively black;* 2) *exclusively white; 3) exclusively biracial, with this "border identity" usually validated* by others; 4) *exclusively biracial but with this identity usually not validated* by others; 5) a *protean* or changing identity, based on the context; or 6) an identity *transcendent* of race, where racial classifications were not salient to their self-understanding.

In the *biracial (unvalidated)* identity above, a Black/white woman, for example, might identify internally as biracial, but people around her may typically reject that identity for her, insisting that she is actually just Black. Therefore, the woman effectively experiences the world as a Black person although that is not how she self-identifies. As

Kich (1992) put it, “The assertion of the self as biracial requires both the personal organizing structure of a biracial self-label and the interpersonal and social recognition of the individual as biracial” (P. 317).

With the *protean* or changing identity option above, participants reported identifying as sometimes Black, sometimes white, and sometimes biracial, depending on the context -- where they were, who they were with, what the conversation was about, etc. Yoo et al (2016) did a quantitative study that included this protean identity as a variable and found that it tended to correlate with higher psychological distress, but there may also be strengths to a protean identity, and my research addresses that possibility.

The importance of a unique framework for multiracial people. In 2013, Gonzales-Backen lamented that while a body of literature was developing for understanding identity formation for racially minoritized people, there remained a dearth of research focused on multi- and biracial identity formation. She said that most of the existing research at that point had largely ignored biracial people’s unique experience by either erroneously including them with monoracial samples or excluding them from samples altogether. Although the last nine years have rectified this to some extent, Gonzales-Backen’s quote could still be largely relevant today. In February 2022 (just last month), I attended the virtual Critical Mixed-Race Studies conference, and presenters there were agreeing with the generally expressed sentiment that “We are still trying to find the language for our experiences.” Or as Soliz et al (2017) put it, “much of the academic discussion on experiences of multiethnic-racial individuals is still theoretical or

conceptual in nature, especially in comparison with research on monoethnic-racial populations" (p. 269).

As Kich (1992) points out, a biracial identity does not always mean an equal valuation of each of one's parent's racial heritages, but rather the bi-racial person usually "strives for a total-ness, a sense of wholeness that is more than the sum of the parts of [their various] heritages" (p. 317). As Murphy-Shigematsu (2012) put it, instead of being regarded as "half" this and "half" that throughout their lives, multiracial people enter a process of recognizing their unique wholeness.

Spencer (2006) also made important contributions to the canon of identity development theories with her Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST), and her work is particularly salient when considering racial identity formation for multiracial people. First, by fore-fronting a *phenomenological* approach, she advocated for a method of inquiry that concerns itself with people's perception and experience as a basis for research investigations into reality. This can speak strongly in support of qualitative research methods that allow for multiracial people to engage in storytelling.

Second, she pushed the envelope on some of our assumptions that start off placing people in unequal positions. For example, she defined the word "diverse" differently than it is often used (although in a way truer to its actual meaning), to include *all* people, not just people of color. Diverse, in her thinking, indicates a mix of whites and non-whites and to think otherwise, she argues, is to make white people the norm and everyone else a diversion from that norm. To this way of thinking, all people are diverse and to be

diverse is to be human. This framework normalizes everyone, including multiracial people, rather than continually accentuating differences and centering whiteness.

In another example, Spencer reminds us that *all* humans are vulnerable. To place all our attention on the vulnerabilities of certain groups of people serves no one well. Certain populations may indeed be vulnerable, but again, this is normal; all people are vulnerable. I appreciate her thinking because her ideas question the assumptions that keep us from seeing everyone on an equal basis. She pushes back against our tendencies either to downplay other people's experiences, to consider ourselves superior, or to "other" people who are different from us. Her frameworks thereby work well to normalize the experiences of multiracial people.

All of this to say, due to the social and historical influences discussed above, racially mixed young people have their own unique normative processes of racial identity formation, which are often overlooked by mainstream developmental theories (Harrell, 2000). But it is important to remember that this difference does not indicate that their unique paths are inferior paths or paths of deficit. In fact, it is important that researchers actively identify and emphasize individual's competencies, resiliencies, strengths, and opportunities along these unique paths, rather than always searching for deficiencies amid the differences, as developmental theorists have historically been prone to do (Coll et al, 1996)). In fact, as Jackson and Samuels (2019) argue, there may be an even more urgent need for us to focus on the strengths of multiracial people *because* history has not!

From Miville et al's "Chameleon Changes." Miville et al (2005) have done some important work in examining how reference group orientation works for bi-racial people, who may have two (or more) such reference groups. These researchers document what they call a "chameleon" experience for many bi-racial people, a tendency and an ability to blend into whatever circumstances they find themselves. The authors mentioned, in particular, what I considered to be two very positive traits of the "chameleon" bi-racial experience:

-- *Flexible social boundaries* – the willingness/ability to adapt to the demands or expectations of the cultural surroundings

-- *Flexible social attitudes/universal–diverse orientation* – more flexible and open attitudes toward others who are different from oneself

This relates to an important implication for and of my research: There is a common yet disputed assumption that multi-raciality is "the antidote to racism" (Harris, 2016, p. 797). Harris refutes that assumption, saying that, in fact, multiracial people "in no way… escape" (p. 803) race or racism, and in fact can be double victims of both racism (animosity toward their minority status) and monoracism (animosity towards their multi-racial status). Ropp concurs in her 1997 article "Do Multiracial Subjects Really Challenge Race?" She points out that the assumed biological nature of some people's mixed race status does not reduce the social significance of race, either for those multiracial people's lived experience or for society writ large. Ropp (1997) therefore agrees with Harris that it is inaccurate to assume that racial mixing will eventually lead to

a raceless society, that everyone will someday be mixed, or that interracial marriage is a cure for racism. I will address these competing claims in my Conclusions section.

"A constellation of experiences." Soliz et al (2017) take a two-sided approach to examining the experiences of multiethnic people, which I use as a model for my own study, looking for benefits as well as challenges. They believe that the "marginalization perspective" is still valid in some ways, but that the story shouldn't end there, emphasizing that a mixed heritage isn't "inherently [negative] (or predestined for) negative identity issues and outcomes" (p. 268). Some of the benefits that Soliz et al's participants reported about their multiethnic background included:

- a "*pluralistic worldview"* [which afforded them] awareness, appreciation and enhanced understanding of others," insight into the comparison of cultures, and a unique perspective on race and ethnicity (p. 271)
- a positive "*self concept (internal),"* which manifested as a stronger sense of self, since being mixed is unique in society, and a resulting pride in that distinctiveness (p. 272)
- a positive "*self concept (external),"* which revolved largely around the compliments and envy of others, regarding participants' physical appearance (p. 273)
- and "*pragmatic benefits*," like programs and scholarships for which they qualify, based on their ethnic background (p. 273)

Soliz et al (2017) also look at some of their participants' challenges related to their multiethnic heritage, all of which have been discussed in sections above, but with this focus on both the downsides and upsides of a multiethnic experience, Soliz et al crucially emphasize "a constellation of experiences," where both the challenges and benefits of their unique perspective are discussed "with equal rigor" (p. 277).

New understandings of Americanism. As Flores-Gonzalez and the other principal investigators of the *Arizona Youth Identity Project* (2020) describe their ongoing study, their research focuses on "how, where, and why U.S.-born young adults of diverse backgrounds reimagine, reclaim, rearticulate, and reconstitute national belonging" (p. 2). The young people in their study are reaching toward their belonging aspirations, not in denial of U.S. racism and nativism, which was particularly highlighted under the Trump Administration and its residual aftermath, but in the face of it, confronting it.

At least, today, multiracial people often have a greater choice about how to identify, whether when filling out forms or when simply speaking about their sense of self. In the past, bi-racial Asian/white people were usually forced to choose whether to identify with their white parent or their Asian parent. The 2000 Census was the first to allow people to check more than one racial category, and then the 2010 Census was the first U.S Census that allowed people to mark Multiracial as their racial category of choice (Rockquemore et al, 2009).

There is still much to understand. Weisskirch (2005) did research with various racial groups in the U.S. and generally found that Asian Americans and Latino

Americans had the highest levels of ethnic-specific identity and were least likely of all the ethnic groups to see themselves as typical Americans. However, Schildkraut's (2007) research, from around the same time period, offers a contrasting and more positive outlook in this regard. Her results confirmed that a "multiple traditions perspective" exists, meaning that many Americans think there are a broad range of norms that can constitute Americanism – his research indicates, in fact, that most Americans, regardless of their background, share this view.

As Devos and Mohamed put it, "Perspectives on the American identity are not monolithic" (p. 750). This variance in ideations offers us real hope for a more inclusive future. Defining the category "American" in the 21st century will, by necessity, look different than it has in our nation's past (Schildkraut, 2007). As Schildkraut (2014) writes, the boundaries of the American identity are evolving. How we understand ourselves -- the U.S., the "*us"* -- is changing.

Big-Picture Justice for All

Ultimately, this research study is not just an effort to join the call for greater justice, inclusion, and belonging for bi-racial Asian/white people; it is a call for that same justice, inclusion, and belonging for people of all racial backgrounds. As MLK said,

> Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly… Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider" (King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, 1964, p. 1).

Or as the Combahee River Collective (1977) put it, their work was not on behalf of themselves alone, but for all people, for "if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (p. 278). Increasing justice for any one group of people portends well for the increasing justice of all others.

Yoshino (2006) also speaks to the quest for justice by discussing a common barrier to authenticity that we all face – what he calls the pressure to "cover." He defines covering as downplaying certain unfavorable traits or our stigmatized attributes, in order to blend into the mainstream. This is an age-old tendency, as even Adam and Eve were said to have covered their nakedness, with shame, after their fall from the grace in the Garden of Eden. He says that for some people, that may look like pressure to change their name, or sideline their language or culture, but that this coerced conformity is applicable to everyone in the country, since everyone has things about them that are socially unacceptable to some extent.

Therefore, he says it is not just of benefit to certain identities or groups if we can eliminate the pressure to cover and conform; it would benefit us all. Although we may so frequently experience this pervasive pressure to conform that we begin to view it as just a simple fact of social life, we would actually all benefit from more breathing room -- freedom to just be our authentic selves without needing to hide aspects of ourselves or in any way dissemble, and this should not be framed as a request for state and social solicitude only for certain groups, but rather as a welcome break for all of us.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter reviews my research questions, study design, working assumptions and the rationale for my design. I also address the specifics of how I recruited participants, conducted the study, and coded my interview and focus group transcripts, and I describe my process of data analysis which led to my findings and conclusions.

The essential research questions for this study were: How do young Asian/White biracial Arizonans navigate their own racial identity formation and their sense of belonging in their state and in their nation? What factors or conceptions have been most influential to their experiences?

For this exploratory research study, I used a qualitative design, based upon interviewing and focus groups. My first interviews were extensive and semi-structured, with a set of prepared questions. These interviews lasted about one to one-and-a-half hours. The second interviews were less structured, allowing people to add more of their thoughts to our prior conversation, after having two weeks to reflect. These second interviews lasted about thirty minutes or longer, depending on how much the participant had to say. The third part of the data collection process was focus groups, in which people had an opportunity to dialogue together, with others from their unique demographic, about the topics discussed in the interviews.

Working Assumptions

Although I did not have any stated hypotheses for my study, inductively following, rather, what sociologist Kristin Luker (2008) called a "logic of discovery," I

certainly made no claim to be free from assumptions. Some of the assumptions with which I went into my research include the following.

- *Assumption #1:* Both racial identity formation and a sense of societal belonging or exclusion are largely determined by a combination of 1) practical life experiences, 2) lived interactions with others, and 3) broad hegemonic conceptions of race and of Americanism, to which all of us in the U.S., including my research participants, are subject.
- *Assumption #2:* This group of young participants would also have some of their own, perhaps different, understandings of what it means to be a racial person and an American.
- *Assumption #3:* My young interviewees' own insights could therefore contribute to broader alternate understandings around racial identity and Americanism.
- *Assumption #4:* Thus, these new conceptualizations can not only make a difference for my interviewees' own sense of belonging and sense of self, but as these new ideas are shared, their reformulations of tired ideas can influence future realities, and can help to question, challenge, and hopefully change the reigning or dominant paradigms around race and American identity.

Rationale for My Study Design and Methods

> I listen and gather people's stories. Then I write them down in a way that I hope will communicate something to others, so that seeing these stories will give readers something of value (Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, *When Half is Whole*, 2012, p. 1).

In her recent book, Kelly Jackson (2019) used a MultiCrit framework to talk about "multiracial cultural attunement." She used this new term around "attunement" as a contrast to the idea of "cultural competency," often popular in the fields of social work and human services. Jackson points out that saying one has cultural competency can denote that one has "mastered" another's identity, which can often be a ridiculous claim. Yet she argues that even though one may not be competent, or an expert, in another's culture, and especially in the myriad mixed cultures that may be represented by any number of varying multiracial categories, that doesn't mean one can't be attuned to the fact that multiracial people do face particular and unique experiences, and that they should be given space to articulate and relate their own realities, as experts themselves on their specific cultural milieu.

Attunement acknowledges and complicates intersections that may exist within a person and seeks to approach multiracial people with humility and a learning posture, rather than an inflated or misguided sense of cultural mastery. This is a main goal of my study, to enter my interviews attuned to the unique experiences of each of my participants, with an ear to hear their stories and their voices (Miville et al, 2005). Even quantitative researchers who study bi-racial people agree that more qualitative work needs to be done, particularly as a solid basis for writing relevant quantitative assessment measures (Atkin et al, 2019). In conclusion, given the personal nature of my research study's questions, a personable, phenomenological, qualitative approach will work the best.

This study is unique in comparison to other research efforts because of its exclusive focus on specifically biracial Asian/white Arizonans. When using PsycNet and

Google Scholar with the search terms "biracial, Asian, white, Arizona," I could not find any other research studies that focused exclusively on this demographic. I also asked several professors in ASU's School of Social Transformation if they know of articles focused on this specific demographic, but they couldn't recommend any. Other related studies seemed either to include participants of other bi-racial formulations or to have a more regional or national focus, rather than a focus on Arizona. My study is thereby extremely (and intentionally) limited in its focus.

Recruitment

I recruited participants from a variety of sources. I recruited widely, via electronic flier, in Arizona State University's School of Social Transformation. Specifically, some professors at ASU forwarded my recruitment flier to their students in the Asian-Pacific American Studies program. (A copy of my recruitment flier is included in Appendix A) I also spoke to our family's contacts to find more people in my research demographic. Finally, I asked my participants if they knew of anyone who might want to also be interviewed for this study, in the hopes of a partial "snowball sample" (or "tumbleweed sample" since it is an Arizona study).

I offered $65 in Amazon gift cards to everyone who completed all three aspects of the research design -- $25 for the first interview, $15 for the second interview, $25 for the focus groups. I was grateful that over the course of data collection, I had no drop-off; my participants all completed all three components of the study.

Perhaps as expected, because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as well as the norms to which we have become accustomed over the last two years, most of the

interviews occurred over Zoom. Those interviewed on Zoom signed their consent forms via DocuSign. (The consent form version that I used can be found in Appendix B.) Regarding the in-person interviews, those were all with people with whom I had at least some familiarity, so these interviews were held in my home. And then I ended up holding three focus groups (one in person, also in my home; two on Zoom), in order to accommodate everyone's schedules.

Procedures

Before submitting to the IRB (see Appendix A for my IRB proposal approval) and before starting my official interviewing, I piloted my interview questions with two friends who were in my research demographic (except that they live in California rather than in Arizona), which proved helpful in refining my interview questions. Talking to both of them was a definite quality control measure for my project. I also practiced with some family and friends on properly using Zoom functions for the interviews. And I applied to GPSA and my School for funds to cover participant compensation, transcription service subscription, and printer ink and paper (as I planned to hand code my transcripts).

My first and second interviews were conducted in September and October of 2021. In addition to the questions that I had prepared ahead of time, I also asked unplanned follow-up questions, as they occurred to me and seemed appropriate, during the 1st interview and especially during the 2nd interview. My focus groups were all completed by mid-November, 2021.

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

	September 2021	October 2021	November 2021
1st interviews	X		
2nd interviews	X	X	
Focus groups		X	X

The three focus groups were composed of 2-5 people who had already been interviewed twice. Each participant had a chance to be a part of one focus group. (The scripts for my interviews and focus groups are in Appendices E-G.) I used what Willis (2021) calls "cognitive interviewing" to test my interview questions, in an effort to produce questions that more people "get," so after talking to my first few participants, I re-worded some of my interview questions or clarified them when it seemed like people were having a hard time understanding what I was asking with my original phrasing.

Besides using direct questions in my interviews and focus groups, I also used some other types of prompts. For the first interview and the focus group, I asked participants to bring a personal item, one which they felt related to the concepts and stories we were exploring and sharing together. During the focus groups, I also showed the participants a comedy video clip, to get their reaction to it. In addition, during the focus group, I shared with the group my own modification of Rockquemore et al's six categories (into which multiracial people's experience of their own racial identities tend to fall). We then used these six categories as a catalyst for discussion.

All my interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. I mostly recorded using the Zoom record function and then I also used my phone as a back-up recording. For transcription, I took the Zoom or phone recordings and ran them through Otter.ai for a rough draft. I saved these video and audio recordings and related transcripts in Dropbox folders for security, organization, and easy access. I then thoroughly cleaned the transcriptions myself, thereby becoming very familiar with each of their content and tone.

Coding and Analysis

I decided to code by hand rather than use coding software. Although I was familiar with how to code using Dedoose, as that is the program we had used when I took a coding class for the Arizona Youth Identity Project, I decided that, given what a small sample I had, it might be more work than it was worth to load my material into Dedoose when I could just code by hand. Finally, I printed all the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups and began the coding process.

Because I had already spent many hours carefully cleaning each transcript, I had a good foundation to do what Saldaña (2009) calls "precoding." I asked myself what story my data was telling me so far and wrote down themes that popped out in my memory as possible codes. I then used a combination of those precoding themes and my main research questions to create a nascent codebook. For each code, I developed a definition, so I knew my parameters for that code, and then I color-categorized all the codes into five main "parent codes" with two to seven "child codes" under each of those "parents." (My codebook forms the general outline of my Findings section.)

I then began using my codebook to mark up the transcripts. I intentionally open-coded the first several transcripts, revising my codebook as seemed appropriate given the participants' responses, in order to include other salient themes or to add more nuance to my coding. As I continued to code more transcripts, I sought to remain open to altering codes, adding codes, or changing code definitions. I thus attempted to do "abductive coding," utilizing a combination of both deductive and inductive code formation. After coding each transcript, I would write a brief memo to capture my main impressions of that interview, asking myself these guiding questions:

- What was interesting?
- What was special?
- What highlights stood out to me?
- What did I learn?
- What surprised me?
- What intrigued me?
- What disturbed me?

After coding for several weeks, I identified five parent code themes that I wanted to focus on and twenty subthemes. I then wrote weekly reflections for the rest of the coding time period, based on the coding I had done that week and how that week's interviews built upon my five chosen parent codes and their related subthemes. Specifically, I would find especially interesting or salient "in vivo" quotes from that week's coding that spoke to each of the "child codes" within each of my three parent codes. I also had a plan to 1) journal about the effect of that week's coding on my thoughts about my themes, 2) consider similarities and differences in my participants'

experiences, 3) identify what factors affected those varying experiences, and 4) relate the relevance of what I was seeing to the key theoretical framings that I had chosen to guide my analysis. Finally, I used my coding, memos, and weekly reflections as a basis for writing up my Findings and Conclusions sections, looking for both commonalities and outliers in the participant responses. Also, I took note of issues raised in the study that were not addressed by my research questions, which could be followed up in future research studies.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Overview

This study examined the racial identity formation and sense of societal belonging and agency of biracial Asian/white young people in Arizona. My research questions were: How do young Asian/White biracial Arizonans navigate their own racial identity formation and their sense of belonging in their state and in their nation? What factors or conceptions have been most influential to their experiences?

In this chapter, I begin by describing my sample participants and their basic personal demographics (see Table 1). I then include some of the subconscious assumptions that they helped me to realize that I brought to this study, which may have influenced my research design. I then elucidate my coding structure. (See Table 2.)

The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to communicating my findings, by exploring each code and its related sub-themes. In each section, I define a code and then utilize extensive quotes from participants, to both clarify that definition and give ample space to my participants' thoughts and experiences. I intentionally wanted their voices to be centered, as I believe their original words are just as significant to this study as is my analysis of their words, which follows their quotes in each code section.

Sample

My study sample consisted of 11 young adults living in the state of Arizona (5 women, 6 men; ranging in age from 19-29, with a mean age of 21.4 years. The sample consisted of both undergraduate college students and young adults who had already

begun to work full-time. The majority of the participants (65%) reported being second-generation Americans—that is, born in the United States to immigrant parents.

Table 2

Basic Sample Demographics

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age	Racial percentage breakdown	Ethnicities (in order mentioned)	Job or major
P2478	Female	26	½ Asian; ½ white	Japanese, Irish, mixed European	Church office and ministry assistant; graphic designer
P7	Male	20	¾ white; ¼ Asian	Canadian, German, Filipino	Delivery driver for Toyota; studying to be a firefighter
Peanut Butter [PB]	Male	21	½ white; ½ Asian	German, Irish, Euro mix, Japanese	Uber Eats driver; COVID vaccination worker
Pi	Male	19	½ Asian; ½ white	Korean, Scottish, Euro mix	Studying Econ and Psych; works at Little Caesar's
Pumpkin Spice [PS]	Female	20	½ Asian; ½ white	Japanese, Norwegian, W. European	Studying Physiology and Medical Science; ophthalmologist's scribe and a chemistry tutor
Abraham L [AL]	Male	19	½ Asian; ½ white	Korean, Scottish, Euro mix	Studying Film and Media Production
P4	Male	21	¼ Asian; ¾ white	Korean, Swiss, German, Irish	Studying Neuroscience
P1	Male	19	½ Asian; ½ white	Korean, white	Studying Biochemistry
P5	Female	22	¼ Asian; ¾ white	Filipino, German, European mix	Working as a neuro and trauma nurse
P2	Female	19	¼ Asian; ¾ white	Korean, German, Irish	Studying Vocal Performance
Holly Golightly [HG]	Female	29	½ Asian; ½ white	Chinese, Italian	Studying Justice Studies

I herein present my findings using my five "parent codes" followed by their related sub-themes, which essentially mirrors my codebook. I utilized abductive coding, as the first two large themes – Bi-Racial Identity and Sense of Societal Belonging were more deductively derived directly from my specific research questions, and the last three

large themes (To Be or Not to Be Protean?, Points of Duality, and Who is "American"?) were more inductively based on Saldaña's (2021) idea of asking, "What story is this data telling?"

Unarticulated Assumptions

But before I get to the results of my coding, I would like to acknowledge some of the unspoken, subconscious assumptions that may underlie my research study, of which my participants themselves made me aware, when I asked them for this type of critical feedback. In the course of my research study, towards the end of my second interviews with my participants, I specifically asked them what *they* saw as my assumptions, based on the questions I had asked during the interviews. I wanted their feedback on what might have been subconscious starting places in my own mind that may or may not have been valid, to their thinking. Here are the questions I posed to them in this regard, during that second interview:

> I stated during the first interview that I am attempting to not have any hypothesis for my study, but obviously, I am a human being, and I wrote the questions, and questions alone can guide the direction of a study. As you've reflected on the types of questions that I asked, what unconscious assumptions or predictions do you think my questions indicate that I've made? Do you agree or disagree with those assumptions?

Here are some of their responses:

> Being 100% this [certain race] and being 100% from this [certain] culture is just as valid as being from an eclectic background, you know? That [mixed heritage] is also a culture. I think sometimes we can kind of be like, 'Oh, if you're mixed... you don't have a culture.' That's kind of what [your interview] questions made me realize – being biracial is in and of itself a subculture… it's a smaller one, and it's unique. –P2, 2nd interview

> You assume that people of mixed or half-Asian, half-white ethnicity… have a different racial identity than others, which is correct. If they have a connection to their background at all, I think they would. And you may assume that they have a difficult time connecting and getting to know themselves or just being themselves completely. And that's been true in my experience. And I think it would depend on the person, but yeah, I would assume it's true for most [biracial] people, if they think about it. –P2478, 2nd interview

> Even before the survey, it was like, 'Where do I belong in America?' kind of thing [for me]. I even have asked my friends -- my Asian friends here -- just like, 'What's it like living here in like the mainland [rather than Hawaii] for you? Do you ever feel out of place?' -- things like that. So, I do think [your line of questioning is] relevant. I really do, actually. But the situations change with each person. –PB, 2nd interview

PB here rightly points out my assumption that questions of belonging in America may be relevant to my research demographic, but he qualifies that, by emphasizing that his demographic is not a monolith, and these issues may therefore not be salient to all my participants. And as if to prove his point, here are some quotes from participants who did not find the questions in my interviews relevant:

> Given that [the] people you're [interviewing] are all within Arizona, I can't think of how you'd get significantly different responses than if your questions were broadly towards just the American experience [in its] entirety for this [Asian/white] demographic. I wouldn't be able to guess any main differences that you might come across. –P7, 2nd interview

P7 thereby rightly points out my assumption that the experience of living in Arizona might affect my demographic differently than if they were living in another state, but he doesn't think it would. Pi also felt like my themes were questionable: "It was kind of like you assumed that I feel like I'm outside when I'm not."

I was grateful to my participants for their frankness and openness with me. I am, and I am becoming. I continue to learn and grow. Like other human beings, I'm full of

biases and contradictions, but I continue to be challenged and (sometimes) changed through my interactions with others. Ultimately, it's imperfect people (like me) who do research, and therefore, research projects will always be just as fraught as their designers. But our research can also be transformative, not only for society at large, but even for our own lives. I think that mine has been so for me.

Now to the findings related to my original research questions:

Table 3

Parent Codes and Sub-Themes

Deductive Codes	Inductive Codes
Bi-Racial Identity ■ Shifting From What to What? ■ Presenting as White ■ Others' View Different from Self-View ■ Favoring of One Side	To Be or Not to Be Protean? ■ Protean as Liability ■ Protean as Strength
Sense of Societal Belonging ■ AZ Lack of Belonging ■ AZ Belonging ■ U.S. Lack of Belonging ■ U.S. Belonging	Points of Duality ■ Dual Identity ■ Dual Perspective ■ Dual Empathy ■ Translation/Mediation
	Who is "American"? ■ American = White (Others) ■ American = White (Self, Consciously) ■ American = White (Self, Unconsciously ■ American = English Speaker ■ Whiteness as Default ■ Self as Quintessential American

Parent Code I: Bi-Racial Identity

Theme 1: Shifting from what to what? This theme explores my participants' racial identity formation if it has significantly shifted focus over time. For example, if they at one point identified more as white, but then they began identifying more as Asian. The other changes I coded for could be a move from Asian to white, Asian to biracial, white to biracial, biracial to Asian, or biracial to white).

> Since I've gotten older, I've gotten more in touch with [my Filipino] family, like my grandparents, and met more Filipino people in nursing and actually learned more about like Filipino culture… when I was younger, [those opportunities weren't] as prevalent. --P5, 3rd focus group

> I haven't really been to Japan too much as I've gotten older… I spent much more time probably up to middle school there and… in high school, I'd only go for a few weeks at a time. [When I was younger], I was very integrated in that Japanese society for those two months, every year.
>
> – Pumpkin Spice [PS], 3rd focus group

> The way I think about [my racial identity] has changed since [college]… Yeah, I guess, over my life, it's changed. Because, yeah, I was pretty hyper-focused on it, at one point, mostly into looking into my Japanese heritage. Because I felt like I couldn't know that very well, just by living my life. You know, I'm exposed a lot more to the white American side of myself, because I live in America. But I think there was a point where I felt that I couldn't -- not that I couldn't -- I felt almost like, 'Who am I, to take on that kind of identity?," the Japanese side of myself, and some of that heritage, because just the fact that I had to *learn* about it, versus living it in my life. So, at one point, it felt like I was faking a little bit, that side of myself, which is not true, but it stills feels like that... That was the main thing, the feeling of faking a whole part of myself, which is hard to deal with, I think -- to convince myself that I have a right to identify in that way.
>
> –P2478, 2nd interview

> [When I was younger] I started identifying with my white side, because, you know, that was what I was used to, and because, in some ways, I feel like I was kind of repulsed by my Asian side because it seemed like everywhere I looked, there was just nothing but negative connotations for being Asian or having an Asian kind of culture or look to you. So, I was kind of like, "Nah, I'm both [white and Asian], so I'm just gonna embrace my white side," you know? And then I

> think I started realizing that just focusing on one aspect of myself isn't really being true to myself or being that self-reflective. So, I was kind of like confused for a while. I was like, "Well, I mean, maybe it's just best to not have a race." But then, you know, I feel like I realized that race, even though, you know, it's caused tons of problems, it also has a lot of like good sides, because it allows you to kind of identify with other people in a way that I don't think you can do with really any other trait. So, I kind of thought more about it. And then I was just like, "You know what? I can try my best to love both, you know, identify with both.
>
> – AL, 1st interview

This theme sought to add and compare to the findings of other researchers that racial identity formation for bi-racial people can change over time. This phenomenon was very much the case for my participants, and was rooted in multiple reasons or dynamics:

Sometimes the change had to do with social pressures. This could look like identity policing, where someone else is telling them that they are not Asian enough or not white enough to take on a certain identity. Or it could have to do with their own individual developmental stage -- for example, in the middle school years, when the need to conform and fit in was most acutely felt, they would identify with whichever group was most prominent in their social circles.

Sometimes the change had to do with societal or their own, internalized stereotypes. Negative stereotypes of Asians in the media could push them away from wanting to identify as Asian. Rightful societal pushback against white supremacy and white racism could make them uncomfortable identifying with their white heritage. Negative perceptions of and interactions with their own family members could make them want to distance themselves from assumed “cultural” characteristics of that side of the family.

In other cases, the change was due to more exposure to one side of their heritage during a certain period of their life. Living in one of their parent's "motherland" for a season or visiting that other country on a frequent basis led to closer identification with that side of their heritage. Spending more time and having a closer relationship with one side of the family led to stronger bonds of connection with that side's culture. Most all my participants had come to some middle ground of a biracial identity by the point that I had interviewed them, although many still felt like that designation needed to come with added qualifications.

Theme 2: Presenting as white. This theme explores when participants phenotypically appear white and are therefore often perceived as white by others.

> I haven't changed my maiden name since I got married over a year ago. And I think I knew pretty early on that I wanted to keep my last name if I didn't marry a Japanese person. Because I don't look Japanese all the time. Like, I could be kind of white passing. My name is a way to hold on to my identity. So, I probably won't ever give it up. [laughing] Yeah. –P2478, 1st interview

> I wouldn't say it's very often that I'm… falling into sort of, like an ethnic [minority] boundary line. That's not really, I wouldn't say, a big part of my experience, or at least it doesn't feel like it, not to my understanding. It may have been the case [however, for my] sister. For instance, she'll get asked that more than me, and she looks more like our [Filipino] mother. So, it's a little bit more believable, if you saw her, that she had a mother who was Filipino. And for me, for instance, some people will, if I answer that, they'll sort of wonder, "Oh, really? I wouldn't have guessed," right? So I actually [have] a picture of my [white] dad, for instance, at my age, and it's funny, because I look just like him. So, you know, one way you could kind of put it is like, well, I look exactly like my one parent. You wouldn't guess I'm half anything else. – P7, 1st interview

> There's this kind of fun spark when you find out that someone else is also… a quarter or half Asian. It's like "Oh, you know my secret!" –P2, 2nd interview

As previously discussed, most of the participants in my study identified as biracial, even if they are sometimes perceived by others as white presenting. Interestingly, the only participant who did not identify as biracial, but instead identified essentially as a white person, was racially one-quarter Filipino, was phenotypically white (with light eyes), and did not have strong relationships with the Filipino side of his family. His sister, although also only one-quarter Filipino, identified much more strongly as biracial. She attributed this to the facts that 1) she looked more racially ambiguous than her white-presenting brother, so 2) people asked her more about her racial background, which 3) made her more consistently conscious of her heritage. Plus 4) she had become more exposed to and connected relationally with Filipino people as she had studied to be a nurse and then as she began working in healthcare, since Filipinos make up a higher percentage, proportionally, of healthcare workers than most other ethnicities. (She even noted that because she is in healthcare, people often guess that she is not just part-Asian, but specifically part-Filipino.)

Some of the other participants who were one-quarter Asian presented more as white but still identified as biracial. One of them, P4, however, was adamant that this was not because he felt like his life is affected so much by being *racially* Asian, but rather that he has a *cultural* connection to his Korean *ethnic* heritage, through his relationship with his Korean grandmother, the traditions of his dad (who was raised in Korea as a half-Korean, half-white American military child), and the food preferences of his Korean relatives which he also has adopted. He was part of the first focus group, where he put it this way, “I have the culture kind of, but not really the Asian looks, so [being part Asian] affects me differently.”

Theme 3: Others' view different from self-view. This theme explores when other people tend to racially categorize my participants differently than how they see themselves. As mentioned above, the context for this is that almost all of them identify as biracial Asian/white, but often others assume differently.

> Multiple participants, focus group #1:
> Pi: "So what do people usually think you are? Like Mexican?"
> P4: "Like Hawaiian or… Mexican."
> AL: "Other people see me as Asian, and I view myself as kind of this non-categorical kind of person. I don't like fit into a category."

> I Facetime my mom all the time. And, obviously, I only talk to her in Japanese. But sometimes, there'll be other people in [my] apartment, and they have no clue that I speak Japanese. So, then they kind of do a double take… [like] my roommate's boyfriend. My roommates know me well enough to know that [I speak Japanese], but just like new people that come in that don't know me as well [are surprised]. –PS, 1st interview

> Typically, people see me as Asian. But I have also gotten people who thought that I was full-blood white… And then other people thought I was Mexican.
> – AL, 1st interview

> On like forms and stuff… if my [European last] name was on there, they'd be like 'Probably some white dude.' –P1, 1st focus group

> Remember how last week I was talking about how a lot of time in the media or society, then Asian men are kind of asexualized, but that's like honestly kind of the opposite with The Squid Game. Because it seems like there's some people, especially in America… a lot of people are saying how handsome the actors are… It seems, at least in this specific show, then the standards are kind of switched around a little… If [Asian men who felt asexualized by the American media] were to notice [this trend], then maybe their perspective on how they themselves are viewed would be changed a little. --AL, 2nd interview

This theme relates in some ways to the theme of Presenting as White because sometimes others view participants as white even though they themselves don't identify as only white. But as the above quotes reveal, this difference between how people identify and how they are received can go in many different directions. Some of these

discrepancies seemed at least partially driven by geography. For example, participants who have lived in Hawaii in the past were sometimes mistaken for full-Asians there (in a state with a high population of Asians), whereas participants' experiences in Arizona often involve being mistaken for Latinx (in a state with a high population of Latinx people). That said, in areas of the country that had a higher percentage of Asians, my participants' bi-racial identity was more likely to be correctly identified as opposed to in Arizona, where a strictly Asian heritage is more often assumed. Other times the mistake is made based on the social context. One participant used to work in a church of mostly Latinx people, so people, perhaps understandably, just assumed she was Latinx as well.

Several of the participants spoke of the concept of "identity policing," long discussed in Black Studies literature, whereby others tell them how they can and can't identify. For example, one person told a participant that because the Japanese side of her family had been here for several generations, she could no longer claim a Japanese heritage. There also were quite a few incidences where others did not feel comfortable with my participants' bi-racial identification, but rather wanted to label them and put them in a box of one of the commonly currently accepted racial categories rather than allow them to straddle categories or see themselves as outside of those racial categories.

Other participants said that their last name often acts as an identifier in others' minds and that assumptions, often fallacious or incomplete, are made about their race when people find out their last names. This can happen both when people see their name before they see their face, or even if they are introduced to their name and face simultaneously. Lastly, even a "white/Asian" assumption by others is not always consistent with how participants choose to see themselves as biracial people. For

example, one participant balked at that designation, saying she always introduces herself as specifically Chinese and Italian, avoiding the broader racial classifications (which are arguably more social constructed) in favor of her specific ethnic heritages.

Theme 4: Favoring of one side. This theme explores ways in which one side of a participant's racial identity seems to be more appealing or attractive to them than the other side.

> [My Italian grandmother] would tell my cousins, when she was alive, that I didn't want to hang out with her or spend time with her and that I liked spending more time with my other grandmother. But that wasn't necessarily the case. I just felt like I had to try to work harder for her affection. –HG, 2nd focus group

> [What] stands out to me about my Asian-ness is I feel like a weird sense of like 'brethren,' you know, with most Asian people… I like subconsciously like them, you know what I mean?" [Agreement, some of it emphatic, from others in the group] –AL, 1st focus group

> I think I probably identify more with the white side just because I'm in the U.S. Yeah, so I think my environment definitely influences my identity to an extent. –PS, 1st interview

> PB and myself, during the 1st interview conversation:
> PB: "My white side is a little bit vague. I think we're partially German, possibly Irish. Those are the two that I'm more certain about. Everything else is kind of like a mix. And then on my other side, my Asian side is Japanese, originated from Kyushu. My Asian side – I think my great-grandpa was the first generation in Hawaii."
> SC: And then what about your white ancestors' [time of immigration]?
> PB: No idea, no idea.

Many participants understandably felt that because they have grown up in a white-majority culture (being 2ndgeneration or later in terms of their families' immigrations status), they have internalized white culture more than Asian culture. Participant AL jokingly described himself as a "pale yellow banana." But their

Asian heritage came across as more of a point of pride for them. This might be related to another of my themes, Whiteness as Default, but that will be discussed later in the findings.

Either way, despite this sense that culturally they were more "white" than "Asian," most all of the participants still had these types of strong emotional bonds to their Asian heritage. Some described their Asian ancestry as what makes them unique. One said he roots for their Asian side as the preferred "underdog." Many appreciated presumed Asian values more than traditional white-culture values, citing a cultural emphasis on education, intelligence, politeness, kindness, reserve. Values they deemed as "white," like independence, speaking your mind, or insisting on your rights and freedoms were not as attractive to them or they felt estranged from them.

This desired affiliation with their Asian heritage also seemed rooted in familial ties. Almost all the participants said that their Asian relatives adore them, accept them, welcome them, cherish them. Some of their white relatives could tend to be more critical of them, seeming to "other" their Asian-ness rather than embracing it as their Asian relatives do. One participant said that literally all the Asian people he has ever met have been loving, which is obviously a stereotype, but may be one rooted in real cultural values.

> Asian people I interact with are pretty much all good people. I don't really know any Asian people that are mean… but I know of other people of other races that are. Obviously… we [Asians] do have our bad people, but like basically, every single Asian person I've met is like a good person, right? So, I just feel like proud to be part of a group that's full of good people. But then, the other races -- obviously, I know more of them -- but also just it seems like the ratio of mean people or insecure people or whatnot are [higher] in other races.
>
> --Pi, 1st interview

There were a few times when participants indicated that they wanted to grow more into some of the forthright personality traits of their white relatives, but there was much more conversation around ways they want to learn more about their Asian heritage – foods, history, language, customs, holidays. Again, this may have to do with living and being raised in a majority-white culture, where whiteness is more the norm, but whatever its reasons, there was a definite favoring of and affection towards their Asian sides.

Parent Code II: Sense of Societal Belonging

Theme 5: AZ lack of belonging. This theme explores participants' explanations of ways their experiences have made them feel like an outsider in Arizona

> I've recently moved here [from Hawaii], so it was kind of culture shock just being around a lot of whiter folk. –PB, 3rd focus group

> I wouldn't say I can picture much of an Arizonan identity. The only commonalities I can think of which bring us together is… a lot of us moved here, from other states. I mean… 'Being an Arizonian,' I've just never thought of it that way. I've never really identified with my state… I know my family [in Washington] does, but they're more established. All those families lived there for a long time. –P7, 1st interview

> I'm always conflicted… because I love Arizona, but at the same time, I just feel like I don't belong here sometimes, a lot of the time, especially with certain policies and more in a political sense. And then, sometimes, too, in the sense of the people that live here. It is predominantly white and Hispanic, so… [When I lived in California], it really wasn't the fact that I gained a group of friends that were mostly Asian [but rather] that I met so many people from so many different backgrounds, living there. That really opened my eyes to my own racial identity and how I thought of myself and how I thought of others. You don't meet [people from all different backgrounds] here in Arizona, definitely not. – HG, 2nd interview

I wanted to ask participants about this issue of belonging in Arizona because Asian and bi-racial part-Asian people living in Arizona face the special challenge of

being an obvious minority among minorities. Unlike the West Coast states, or Hawaii, for example, Arizona simply does not have a lot of Asian and bi-racial Asian residents. Asians and Asian-Americans in Arizona only make up 3.6% of the state's population, and this *includes* the thousands of Asian international students who are only here temporarily to study. Even if you do not discount the international students studying at the universities, Arizona's Asian population is significantly less than the national average of 5.9% and is downright puny compared to the over 15% in next-door California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). So being Asian in Arizona makes you automatically unusual racially. How much more being a person of bi-racial Asian descent?

But most of my participants did not seem to be affected by those demographics as much as I had anticipated. Some did mention the lack of ethnic diversity as a factor that made them feel like they don't belong as much here as in other states where they have lived, but most of the participants either felt like they totally belonged in Arizona or if they didn't belong, that sense was based more on not having lived here very long or not sharing the same political views as many (or at least half of) other Arizonans. Quite a few others also mentioned separation from extended family, most all of whom live on the West Coast or Hawaii, as a reason they don't feel as at home in Arizona as they would like. One participant did share the following anecdote that I feel relates to this theme:

> I think usually, when I see an Asian person on campus... probably not like anywhere else, but usually on campus, when I see an Asian person, then I usually assume that… they have like really broken English. They probably know some English. I'm sure they know English, but not like in the way I do, you know? …So, when it comes to… social interaction, then I feel like I tend to not seek it out as much [with them]. Especially if they're whole Asian. …It's not like I look at an Asian person and I'm thinking, you know, "Oh, I shouldn't talk to them" or whatever. And I think I would *enjoy* talking to them, but the fact that I think like subconsciously, "They probably don't know… They can't hold a conversation the

> way other people I know can" or maybe not, probably not, but possibly. And I kind of veer away from that.

I wondered about the dynamic expressed above because a huge percentage of the population of Asians in Arizona are indeed international students at ASU. That may possibly increase the sense that many Arizonans (including my participants themselves) have that Asians in Arizona are likely to be "foreigners." This also relates to my American = White theme below.

Theme 6: AZ belonging. This theme explores participants' explanations of ways their experiences have made them feel like an insider in Arizona

> We just got this Filipino girl in our [recovery] group now recently…. It was really cool to see another Asian in our group…. So, it's a little bit more belonging, I guess, there's someone else in there with me… So, it doesn't feel like I'm the only one. – PB, 2nd interview

> I totally feel at home in Arizona…. I feel like this [state] is a good deal better [about avoiding political extremism] than California might be.
> –AL, 2nd interview

> A lot of people from Arizona are from other places, so that kind of feels like it fits, to just have moved here and not been here your whole life…. So, I think that probably contributes to [me] having more of a sense of belonging in Arizona, where there's so many people from different backgrounds [in terms of place of origin]. –P5, 2nd interview

> Probably when I voted [is when I felt the most Arizonan]. I think that's the one. Or when I am hiking in like the Grand Canyon or somewhere that's really hot. When I feel the heat emanating off the rocks, and I'm sweating like a dog. I feel pretty Arizonan then. – Pi, 1st interview

> I think [Arizona] would be a pretty ideal spot [to settle down], in my estimation. I think it's a pretty good spot to get going on things. That's my plan now, with sinking into [job opportunities in] the fire departments that are here in the Phoenix area. – P7, 1st interview

> Because of knowing the environment and knowing the cities, yeah, [I feel a strong sense of belonging in this state], so yes, [I feel a strong sense of belonging here] because of the familiarity. –PS, 1st interview

My study participants cited multiple reasons for feeling like they belonged here in Arizona. Moving here from elsewhere, like so many others have, led to a sense of belonging for some participants, rather than an alienation, as they felt like their transplant status made them part of the norm for this area. Also, several participants cited the growing diversity of the state as providing a greater sense of belonging. P2478 said,

> Arizona's becoming more diverse… even since I've been here, since four years ago, I've seen it develop that way. So, I think I feel more comfortable as… I'm seeing more people like me or more people different from me [but also different] from most people that I've seen here.

Of note, for this participant and others, it is not just an increase in Asians or Asian/white people that give them a greater sense of feeling at home, but just *diversity* period provides that sense of comfort or social ease.

Arizona's landscape and weather were also cited as features that give this place a sense of home for my participants. Many of them think of the desert, the cacti, the Grand Canyon, the monsoons, and the land as the essential Arizona and they are drawn to that. They also identify with the notable heat, and their ability to persevere through the summers is viewed as a factor identifying them as authentic Arizonans.

Politics was brought up in the context of state belonging again, as it had been in the context of lack of state belonging. I think the variation here is that some participants preferred a political middle road that an arguably purple state like Arizona offers. Others had a more polarized liberal or conservative stance, making them pine for a state that matched their leanings more. Some also said that they had a strong sense of belonging

here, but it was rooted in something altogether different than larger state dynamics – either their connections to their church community, their school or work communities, their friendships, or relationships revolving around recreational activities, for example.

Theme 7: U.S. lack of belonging. This theme explores participants' explanations of ways their experiences have made them feel like an outsider in the U.S

> There are events taking place, ideas taking hold, which are becoming commonplace in the U.S. which I don't identify with… I'd say I still belong to the U.S. but [I'm] maybe not belonging with certain populations with the U.S. that maybe have a different set of ideas… that stray, in some cases pretty far, from [what] we can attribute [to] the successes of America and what I might identify with. – P7, 1st interview

> [A way I feel disconnected from America] could be… with politics. When things are really heated, and the country is all divided, then I feel both disconnected but I'm also like hyper-interested in what's happening, so I'm really connected in that way. But, you know, politics can make you feel like you just don't understand half the country… because of where I lean, politically, people have told me that I must hate being American. Or like, I don't like America. And that's hard for me to hear because I do [like this country]. It's my home. I just want things to be better." -- P2478, 1st interview

> [I feel disconnected from this country] when my Asian side is pointed out and it's brought [up] negatively in any sort of way… It's not that much, though. I don't think I've ever really felt like I don't belong here." --PB, 1st interview

The participants did not have strong feelings of alienation from the U.S. as their nation. In fact, they felt a strong sense of belonging, that this is their land. When asked if they felt "fully American," they almost all said yes, although there were a few instances where people said that racism towards their Asian heritage does make them feel sometimes disconnected from this country.

There were also multiple comments about how others around them may not perceive them as fully American, either because of their Asian racial heritage or because of the immigrant status of their parents, but the participants themselves categorically rejected that type of othering sentiment. As Pi emphatically said, someone may assume "like I feel like I'm outside, when I'm not!" Pi's comment connects to another subtheme, which will be presented later in this chapter, "Self as Quintessential American."

These two perspectives – that this participant demographic "belongs" here or else it doesn't -- are both of particular interest considering some of my other themes under the "Who is American?" parent code. These various subthemes complicate the issue of belonging, particularly as it relates to the personal experience of my participants, because there is evidence that these participants have not internalized the othering comments or thoughts of people around them, but there is other evidence that maybe they have, as will be discussed in later sections.

One other thing that people said did make them feel like they don't belong in this country is the divisive political climate. Participants that leaned to the political right and the political left both expressed this sentiment – the extreme polarization makes them feel like they don't understand their fellow Americans and they don't share common values with enormous swaths of the population.

Theme 8: U.S. belonging. This theme explores participants' explanations of ways their experiences have made them feel like an insider in the U.S.

> The opinions that I've heard from other people, mainly my friends, were kind of more… negative… so, when I hear [your] questions [about societal belonging], I

> almost feel like I need to say something negative, towards like not feeling like I belong, or, like growing up in a childhood where kids made fun of me or something like that. But it's not really the case, I feel like. I think I had every chance, and I was given every chance I could to really be a part of society, and it's really mostly my own decisions that were to ever set me apart, if at all.
>
> -- PB, 2nd interview

> I don't feel super-removed from… [what I consider to be commonly held] themes of what people feel like it means to be American. [It's] something that I just agree with, too, and identify with and I'm not super-separate from. --P5, 2nd interview

> [You're asking us], 'What do you think about how you're a sub-culture in the U.S.?' … And that's what America is. America is all about being eclectic…. I think [our racial demographic] is a subculture. --P2, 2nd interview

My participants said that when they do find shared values with other Americans, that really makes them feel like they are a part of this nation. They also tended to see their mixed demographic as representative of the America of the future. (See below for my code "Self as Quintessential American.")

Some of them seemed to take offense at me even asking them about their sense of belonging (although I had sought to keep those questions open-ended rather than leading). This came up during some of the second interviews, when I asked them, "As you've reflected on the types of questions I asked in these interviews, what unconscious assumptions or predictions do my questions seem to indicate that I've made? And do you agree or disagree with those assumptions or predictions?"

Those who took issue with my line of questioning felt like the fact that I even decided to ask about their sense of belonging was indicating that I thought maybe they didn't belong. One said that it felt like my questions were asking, "What does it feel like to be a foreigner?" On the other hand, others felt like my questions acknowledged that their reality may not completely reflect the realities of other Americans. One said,

"[Your questions] may assume that [your study participants] have a difficult time connecting and… just being themselves completely, based on their identity. And that's been true in my experience."

I do wonder if some of the seeming defensiveness surrounding these questions was rooted at all in an ambivalence about their stated sense of belonging. I would have taken it at face value that the participants all felt totally at home in the U.S. except that some of the comments discussed below under the parent code "Who is an American?" indicated that there are societal and personal framings of Americanism that inform my participants' understanding and may not include them as readily as they insist.

Parent Code III: To Be or Not to be Protean?

Theme 9: Protean as liability. This theme explores ways in which having a protean identity can be seen as problematic, linked to stress, or associated with weakness.

> In a way we're trying (or people could be trying) to figure out… where they fit in, but because they're really not in one or another category 100%, it's just like kind of this bouncing back and forth game they're playing. I could see that.
>
> -- P2, 2nd focus group

> P2478 and AL, during the 1st focus group:
> P2478: "I change my behavior and what I talk about based on who I'm with. A lot of my closest friends are Asian, and they have told me that they've forgot that I'm white at times…
> AL: Hm, that's a little weird.
> P2478: You know, I'm like fully open with my Asian side [with them]. Whereas I feel like I hide it a little bit in some situations, depending on how comfortable I think people are. Yeah, so not that they don't accept it, but maybe they don't know what to do with it because I'm mixed. People… the human race just loves categories in general because it helps us to understand the world, and when you don't fit in a category that they know, then it's more to deal with. Like 'How do I interact with you?' kind of thing."
> AL: Yeah, anomaly.

Because some participants' comments in the first and second interviews made me think about Rockquemore et al's (2002) six ways that biracial people tend to racially identify, I decided to present Rockquemore's six categories in the focus groups as a catalyst for reflection and discussion. I revised Rockquemore's categories, which had been originally worded for Black/white biracial people, turning them into Asian/white categories (see Appendix F for my focus group script), and then I asked my participants with which category they most closely identify and why and then opened it up for group discussion. Based on my prior interviews with them, I assumed that some of them would most identify with the protean identity, so I also presented them with a quote by Yoo et al (2016), expressing that in their quantitative study, the protean identity correlated with higher rates of psychological distress. I asked the participants what they thought about this, and they said they could understand how it might be stressful to always feel like you are changing who you are to fit with your surroundings. HG put it this way

> I'm Chinese-American and Italian-American, but then I also really live in this void, which is like, the unknown. Because I don't feel like I fit in with either [group] sometimes, a lot of the time, you know? Or I feel like I'm forced to choose, and I really just kind of live in this world of like, "the other." I wish… everyone could just see themselves in like this "other" [category, rather] than, you know, one or the other [race], if that makes sense.

Theme 10: Protean as strength. This theme explores ways in which having a protean identity can be seen as a benefit or an advantage.

> I feel like depending on who I'm interacting with, I kind of see myself as those people -- kind of like a chameleon, a social chameleon. So, when I'm with my dad's side of the family, then I see myself [as] way more Asian than white, even though I'm not, and then when I'm with my mom's side of the family, then I see myself as way more white than Asian… I don't really consciously think of race, but… I feel like I fit in with those people…. I'm kind of like adopting certain things or kind of changing my mindset to fit that group. --AL, 1st focus group

> I think that I've become more in touch with my white American side by being here [in Arizona] with how I approach life… to be direct and not beat around the bush, not [have] these niceties, but more to the point. So, I've seen myself develop that side more… because you are more effective, I think, living here, if you can be like that. Because that's how everything works here anyways, so…
> --P2478, 1st interview

> Being biracial, half-Asian, half-white, allows me to kind of jump from culture to culture much more easily, I'd assume, than someone who was completely one or the other. -- AL, 1st interview

I wanted to look beyond Yoo's possible liabilities of the protean identity to see what strengths might also be associated with this type of shifting experience. My participants also seemed to balk at the idea that a protean identity was always a negative stance. They seemed to cite the ability to blend in -- adopting certain traits in one instance and then other traits in another instance – as a strength, both relationally and practically. It allowed them to see from the different viewpoints of various groups and to identify with those varied groups. It allowed them to utilize the strengths of one culture when doing so was advantageous and then switch that plan of action or attitude when a new circumstance arose that called for other skills or traits.

One of the biggest benefits of being protean, in my estimation, was that it seemed to limit the tribal mentality of my participants. Their understandings of who exactly constituted their "tribe" was greatly expanded, beyond one certain race or even beyond the two racial backgrounds that made up their own DNA. Their biracial status and ability to blend in and conform to multiple racial situations made them better situated to take a universalist approach to humanity – an approach which was either more readily inclusive

of all races or more dismissive of race as a reliable and trustworthy identifying characteristic. (See the Conclusion for more on this last point.)

Parent Code IV: Duality

Theme 11: Dual identity. This theme explores my participants' active, conscious, and sometimes fraught experiences of having a dual identity

> I guess, honestly, I don't mind it whatsoever [when people are confused by my racial look]. I guess I actually prefer it because if they assume I'm either [fully] white or [fully] Asian, then I think that's not ideal because [then] they assume that I'm just one aspect of who I am, racially. --AL, 1st interview

> The black and white race[s]… there's so much tension. So [if] someone is a mix between black and white, then [maybe] they have all this pressure to choose a side because there's all this political tension, whereas if you're mixed white and Asian, [those two races] kind of coexist a lot more, you know. At least that's how people view it. So, I think it's easier for [Asian/white mixed] people to identify as both. --Pi, 1st focus group

> Embracing identities is important, rather than just denying them. --HG, 2nd interview

> My whole life is kind of balancing between these two sides of myself… There's two pieces of my identity, and they don't fit together perfectly all the time or most of the time. --P2478, 1st interview

> My dad was born and raised in Korea. He's half Korean, so I'm only a quarter, but I'm biracial, I guess. -- P2, 2nd focus group

> I've dealt with [situations where I don't know as much about Korean culture as those around me, but] instead of thinking, "'I don't have these things in common with all these people,'" I feel like I see it more as… "[This] is part of my background, and I'll take this experience and I'll try to learn from it." --AL, 1st focus group

This section of coding closely relates to Soliz et al's (2017) "benefits" of having a biracial identity. I contend that my participants' biracial *dual identity* status empowers

them to also have what I called *dual empathy, dual perspective,* and an ability to *translate or mediate* between cultures.

As the above quotes may indicate, the biracial dual identity is not always automatic or without its complications. My participants who were only one-quarter Asian tended to have a harder time seeing themselves as biracial. Several of these participants would often emphasize that they were mostly white, or hardly Asian. During the focus groups, I showed a comic sketch video, introduced to me by one of the quarter-Asian participants after our first interview, entitled, "Are you Asian Enough?" put out by College Humor.

In the clip, a panel calling themselves, "The Tribunal of Mixed Asian Heritage" and composed of three people (with placards designating them as "Full Asian," "Half Asian" and "Quarter Asian"), meets to interrogate and "decide the fate" of a man who is 1/8 Asian. At one point in the video, the Quarter Asian, stumbling in her attempts to match her judgments with those of her more Asian counterparts, says, "Guys, to be honest, I don't even think I should be up here… I'm totally deferring to you guys." The quarter Asian participants in my study all readily identified with her standpoint.

Other participants more easily identified as biracial and felt like their mix of specifically Asian and white made it easier to do so without internal conflict because, as the literature has indicated, whites and Asians are now often considered to be proximate, due to current socioeconomic and educational similarities.

Theme 12: Dual perspective. This theme explores the ability of biracial people to more easily see the perspectives of people from a variety of racial backgrounds.

[My racial identity] might affect how I think… just knowing that I'm… also part-minority, I think that helps sometimes. If I was just a white male, then I feel like [my] perspective on things would be pretty different… [Arizona's] more like a red state, and I feel like that's kind of affected my political leanings. However, as an Arizonan, my Asian background has also, I think, stopped me from going further into my Republican or conservative learnings than I would probably have if I was just white. --Pi, 1st interview

The family gatherings of [the white side] of my family [are] very different. You get the pot roast or okra soup, which is one of my favorites. You know, things like that. And then you go to my other side's parties and there's all [these] little games and it's really nicely put together. Everyone's very polite, too. And so, it really show[s] a very large difference in the culture… [Biracial people] could have cool opinions, different than other cultures because they're the mix. Maybe if anything, they would have of an unbiased opinion, compared to the white side only or the Japanese." --PB, 1st interview

My mom… would often talk about the difference between… Japanese American versus American -- white American -- ways of communicating, ways of dealing with issues and conflict and courtesy kinds of things. Yeah, what it means to be polite in two different cultures." --P2478, 1st interview

Two people… were sitting in [the MultiCultural Center] at ASU and they were both white, and one of them, on their computer had a 'Police Lives Matter' sticker on it. And the other one had a shirt that said, 'I did not vote for Biden.' And these activists basically like walked up to them and told them that they had to leave and [the activists] were being super racist… And they had some points. The fact that the place was designed for… multicultural [purposes]… but they said they felt threatened by [the white people's] presence and they really shouted a lot of bigoted stuff at these white people… The reason why this thing became an issue was because [the activists] didn't like what they saw…. I don't think they hate white people, but they didn't like the fact that they were white and had that stuff on them, and in that space in particular…. It kinda made me mad. MLK, the Civil Rights [were] all about equality and living in harmony, but these people were basically working towards more segregation. They were kicking them out because their views are different and because of their skin color. And they said, 'It's because you're white.' That's what they told them. So, it was unfortunate…. [But the activists] said that they had worked a lot, a long time to have a space for multicultural people. That's part of the reason why they got so mad because they felt like it was being invaded or something. --Pi, 2nd interview

I came back from Japan, and I was going to school in the U.S., starting second grade. And I remember a teacher and I passed in the hallway. And in Japan, it's custom to kind of slightly bow, and it's not weird at all. That's just what you do. I remember doing that! [laughing hard] And [in the U.S.] that's so weird, so

> embarrassing. I think afterwards, I was like, 'What are you doing?? You're in the U.S.!" Yeah. --PS, 1st interview

This coding was surrounding ways in which my participants saw the value in multiple perspectives and adopted different cultural outlooks, sometimes simultaneously. This could be seen as related to the section of coding on "To be or Not to Be Protean?" and it is similar, but the Dual Perspective of which some participants spoke was not only a switching between perspectives -- off and on, back and forth -- but rather holding two (or more) perspectives at once, in a both/and way, not only an ever-changing either/or way.

Many of the participants spoke of the varied views of the two sides of their families, but they not only were able to speak of both sides with the understanding of someone looking in, but with a sense of having internalized both perspectives. They were able to articulate two different views as a special kind of insider to those views. This was a learned understanding, not always natural. For example, many participants spoke of not understanding one of their parents' perspectives when they were younger, but how they have come to appreciate it greatly as they have matured. Others have had the advantage of having two "home languages," whereby they have, since infancy, learned the nuances of culture and outlook through the special lens of dual linguistic fluency.

Theme 13: Dual empathy. This theme explores my participants' ability to empathize with the experiences of people of a variety of racial backgrounds.

> I was thinking about the violence against Asian-Americans that got worse, due to COVID. And it was difficult to talk to my dad, who's Japanese, about it… I wanted to talk about it, but…he just didn't want to talk about it… I was more worried about him than he was about his children… [begins weeping]. Because I'm white passing, I don't have fear of violence against me or my siblings, but I worry for my dad and other people in my family. --P2468, 2nd interview

> Being biracial, I could sense both... I could feel both sides and try to understand both sides. I feel like definitely that, you know, those boys that were in the Multicultural Center, were absolutely there as a setup. They were definitely trying to get a rise out of somebody… And I'm not entitled to say… how those young women should have reacted or anything… But if it could have been more of a conversation or even like, if they had just lied to them and been like, 'Hey, this table is reserved for a group meeting. Can you guys go sit somewhere else?' … [sigh] I feel like it just should have been handled better. But then there was one phrase that like the young woman had said that I just felt wasn't like intersectional and like, wasn't inclusive…She had said, you know, 'Because you're white...' Yeah… [the white guys] wanted to start controversy. And, like it just sucks. I don't know, it's just, again, I was trying to see it from both sides. …I felt a certain way about trying to see it from both sides, based on my, you know multi-ethnicities… Because I'm biracial, I feel like I try to see both sides. --HG, 2nd interview

The most moving parts of my interviews for my participants, several of whom began weeping, and probably for me as well, were centered around times when my participants were evidencing what I eventually coded as "dual empathy." Dual empathy is similar to dual perspective, but rather than just *understanding*, in a cognitive way, two sides of a situation, my participants seemed uniquely positioned *to feel* what people positioned on opposite sides of a situation were feeling. This is like the finding mentioned above that diverse environments in general feel more welcoming and comfortable for these participants, contributing to a greater sense of belonging for them, regardless of whether the diversity necessarily includes others of their exact racial make-up or not.

Examples include P2478, who could identify with both the feelings of apathy or personal unconcern that many white people felt when it came to the pandemic's anti-Asian violence, but who also wept with concern for her dad and other Asian family members. Or another example is HG, who also wept, as she talked about her white dad, who since 2016 has become very right-leaning, Trumpian even, saying very hurtful things to HG's Chinese mom and to HG herself, eventually contributing to her parents' recent divorce.

But she wasn't crying because of the pain her dad had caused. Her tears were actually on her dad's behalf, as she shared about how sick he was with COVID and other longer-term ailments, hospitalized and incapacitated, and how worried she was about him, despite his hateful attitudes and words. She shared her mom's pain at her dad's actions, but she also empathized with him and the ways she said that his mind has been distorted by "fake news" and conspiracy theories on social media.

Theme 14: Translation/mediation. This theme explores examples of times when my participants have acted as mediators or translators between people of different racial backgrounds.

> [My divorced parents] still hang out. If my mom's in town, [my dad and she and I] will have dinner… And I naturally will only speak Japanese to my mom… If I'm having an interesting conversation with my mom [in Japanese], and I think my dad would be interested in it, too, then I'll include him [by switching to English or translating] --PS, 2nd interview

> I just started dating this guy. He's Persian actually. And their whole family's Iranian, but they love Korean barbecue, and they invited me to come. And I went, and it was funny, because they were just asking me like, "What do we order…?" And I was like, "I'm not that Asian, not that Korean, but like, I know what's good." … Even though I'm only a quarter, they're like, "You know what to

> order because you're the most Asian here," I guess. But if I was with 100% Koreans, then I would let them take over, you know, kinda, so...
>
> -- P2, 2nd focus group

> [Racial identity] is more than the biological side of it. It's the cultural side. Being brought up by both [sides of my family] at the same time, it can create interesting combinations of the two. You can be a more Japanese white guy, or you can be more white Japanese guy. For me… I could really identify as both and not feel like I have to identify as one over the other. And so, I really just got a mix of the two, like, the more polite side of the Japanese culture and the more outgoing side of the, like, white side.
>
> --PB, 1st interview

My study participants seemed to cite different incidences where they sought to be a bridge or make a safe space for others, whether that was in social situations with friends, family, or strangers. They tried to help people to understand others' language, food, culture, or they tried to facilitate greater inclusiveness for people who seemed like they felt on the outside of a social situation.

As I reflect on my interviews, I wish now that I had somehow coded for affect because my interviewees seemed very calm. The description that came to my mind was "peacemakers." I don't know if they were uniquely situated for this type of affect as biracial people, or even specifically biracial Asian/white people, exhibiting strengths from a combination of both races, or maybe I just projected this type of persona on them because of my own biases towards Asian/white people. But this is why I wish I knew how to code for affect, so I could see if my impressions had real merit or not.

This type of peacemaker role also evidenced itself in the focus groups, as the participants interacted with one another. They often tried to understand, articulate, and even channel the different experiences of one another. They also sought to be a voice for

perspectives other than their own, whether that be the voice of their sibling, their parent, another group member, or someone else not present.

Perhaps it can be argued that this whole parent code, Issues of Duality, with its themes of dual perspective, dual empathy, and translation/mediation, could apply to any person who is just actively seeking to understand and care about people who are unlike them. Although I did develop real bonds of affection for my participants, I do not want to cast them as unrealistically saintly or good-hearted. There were definite times when they were lacking in love for others in what they thought and said, but most of them were very quick to re-evaluate those statements, rectify them, qualify them, retract them.

Generally, they really did seem like people who had a special ability to see multiple perspectives, to be diplomats amid societal vitriol -- calm, measured, gracious, and clear-eyed in their assessments. They were by no means perfect, but most all of them had a goodwill and a poise about them that, to my eye at least, was unmistakable.

Parent Code V: Who is "American"?

Theme 15: American = white (others). This theme explores examples of how people in general tend to link an American identity with whiteness.

> I know that some white people who [immigrate] from Europe… when they walk up, then a white person [here] would assume that they're from America and they're privy to everything that's American, but when they start speaking, then all of a sudden, they're kind of sequestered in some sense, you know?
>
> --AL, 1st focus group

> Even in Japan, if you see a white-looking person, you assume they're American, not like European. --PS, 1st interview

> I've never really ran into someone who [talks] about "Americans," but it turns out they were really talking about just white Americans…. I've seen that on television

> before, but I feel like it's on television because it's not only rare, but it's also like shocking… I do know that like when you [people/I?] think "American," you [they/I?] think of a white person." --Pi, 1st interview

> I feel like outside of the country, when people think about America, they usually just think about white people… since it's vast majority white, then when you think of an American person, the first person that comes instantly to mind won't be anything other than white. --AL, 1st interview

During the 1st interview, P7 spoke at length about how he thinks there is a common outlook in our country today "that's a mindset that [isn't associated with] any racial demographic; it's just a political mindset" that makes anyone who is not fully white or is female or has an alternate sexual orientation want to distance themselves from being "American." "There isn't much to gain [in these people's minds] in identifying with being a part of America. There's a sense of detachment… and they don't want to identify as like a typical American."

This parent code was both the most interesting and the most convoluted to me. It was interesting because I saw multiple ways that Americans were being framed by my participants. Many of them said that other people (in the general public) associate an American identity with whiteness, but some of them adamantly denied that presumed connection. Those who denied it tended to also apparently either consciously and/or subconsciously embrace that conflation, though, as my later themes illustrate. But they also almost all stood against the idea of American = white by positioning themselves, as biracial people, to be the true Americans -- if not of the past, then at least the true Americans of the future and maybe even of the present. This parent code is trying to capture this fascinating mix of conflicting beliefs and seeking to examine how it is that an

individual person or a group of people can have beliefs that are at odds with one another and yet somehow reconcilable.

Maybe my participants are no different than any other American demographic, though, in this bipolarity of views. As my literature review revealed, Americans tend to equate white people with "true" Americans, at least subconsciously, even while consciously holding to the premise that Americans can be of any race or ethnicity. I do wonder what kind of toll that exacts, though, on people like my participants and on *anyone* in this country, to have two opposing beliefs held in tension -- one stated, the other assumed.

Theme 16: American = white (self, consciously). This theme explores ways in which participants themselves *consciously* link American identity with whiteness.

> I tend to think about white people, too, when I think about America… I just think of your typical white guy. But I feel like when I try to think about it in a more wide lens than that, then I just think of people who just live in this country, I guess… Even so, if I were to just imagine a [non-white] person when I think of America, it just really wouldn't be that accurate because there's so many more white people than anyone else.
>
> --AL, 1st interview

Several participants expressed a view very similar to this one – when they think of a stereotypical "American," they automatically think of a white person. They explained this as being rooted in the majority numbers of whites in the American population, the over-sized amount of social and political influence wielded by whites in this country, the mostly white-controlled American media, and our history of white dominance.

But when they purposely analyzed this automatic connection in their minds, many of them rejected it as inaccurate. They acknowledged that people of all kinds of racial

background could legitimately stand as symbols of America. Several even mentioned how Native Americans would be the most logical representative race of the American people since they were the original Americans and everyone else is a descendant of immigrants (voluntary or forced). Some said it would make much more sense to have a group of people symbolizing America rather than a single individual, since our nation is so uniquely diverse compared to the many nations which tend to still be mostly mono-ethnic. But it was especially intriguing to see how common it was in my transcripts for participants to *unconsciously* link Americanism and whiteness without even recognizing it, as evidenced in the next theme.

Theme 17: American = white (self, unconsciously). This theme explores when participants themselves *unconsciously* link American identity with whiteness

> {When he was introducing himself to others, with the prompt to tell the group his "racial background," "racial identity"} I'm biracial, Korean/American.
> -- Pi, 1st focus group

> I feel more American than anything…just because that's the kind of culture that I feel like I've grown up closest to more than Asian… [I'm] Filipino and American
> -- P5, 2nd interview

> When I'm with my mom and my baby sister and we only communicate in Japanese… I do think I feel a little bit more Japanese. But then if I'm with my dad and just talking to him in English…. I kind of forget about it. I feel American. -- PS, 3rd focus group

> Some people are like, 'Oh, you're not Asian,' and [I'm] like 'I'm more American.' -- P4, 1st focus group

> I grew up more white. And so, I just inherently [took on] more of Americanized culture. --PB, 1st interview

> I think I might have gone very U.S. when I was like in middle school because you want to be like everyone else… generally [my friends] were mostly white, not

> Asian. So, in that sense, I think I was pretty heavy towards my American side [then]. --PS, 1st interview

Frankly, I could probably find multiple quotes to support this theme in every single interview and focus group I conducted. Yet I was hesitant to code for it because it felt like I was playing "gotcha" with my participants, which was not my intent at all. I eventually realized that it was fine to code for this because I am not being accusatory in showing this pattern; I am, rather, being revelatory. I am revealing not only a common unconscious connection that my participants made, but one that many of us make, on a consistent basis. I became much more aware of this unconscious connection in my own speech as well through the course of this research.

I also became much more conscious of it everywhere around us. I'm sure that this thesis itself could even be picked apart to find the times that I have unwittingly continued this ubiquitous trend of conflating an American identity with a white racial identity. Many of us do it virtually without thought. Look at how insidious and subtle it is in the above quotes: Pi, P5, P4 don't say they're part-white; they say they're part-American. When PS speaks in English to her white dad, she feels American. This implies she didn't feel American a second before, when she was speaking in Japanese. PB spells it out clearly: growing up "white" means your culture was "Americanized." This theme relates closely to another of my themes, Whiteness as Default.

It did occur to me that one of the reasons why the word American is being used so often here is because people may have an aversion to identifying as white. Several participants said as much. HG said,

> I hate saying that I'm Asian and white because for me, I'm Chinese and Italian. I don't like [to] participate in saying that I'm part of this system of whiteness, even though we all are. But I would rather say that I'm Chinese, I'm Italian, and I'm American.

AL put it this way:

> White people, if they're mixed with something else, then all of the sudden, they're not blamed… [and] a target for so many social problems, even for things that [they] literally have no hand in. And I'm literally not a target for that at all. I've never gotten any kind of backlash, I feel, for being a racist, because I'm not full-white, you know? So, I guess being mixed, in some ways, is more of a blessing than anything else.

But the theme American = White, whatever its motivations or justifications, and whether it's a theme embraced by society generally or by individuals specifically, either consciously or subconsciously, still begs the question: If whiteness equates to Americanism, then who besides white people can really belong here? Can anyone?

Theme 18: American = English speaker. The theme explores ways in which my participants speak of a link between American identity and the English language.

> I don't speak any other languages. When my parents were growing up, their parents really wanted to Americanize them. So my mom never got to learn Chinese, and my dad never really learned Italian. – HG, 2nd focus group

> My dad moved to the U.S. like late high school [from] Korea, Marshall Islands, [on the U.S. military base]. They were trying to Americanize…. Same thing with my grandpa [who] was born in Munich, Germany… He spoke German when he was younger, but then in the U.S., they're like, 'Nope, only English'… But it's sad! Because then you have these family members you can't speak to sometimes. –P2, 2nd focus group

> The [director of the motion picture] Parasite... said in [an] interview that a lot of Americans don't watch media outside of English titles. People don't like the subtitles. And he said if people can just look past [the effort of] reading, then they can be exposed to a whole different media. Yeah, I thought that was interesting, that people wouldn't want to watch like any sort of foreign media just because [the actors are] not speaking in their native language or… they have to read subtitles. --P1, 2nd interview

> My grandparents came through together, bringing [their German last name] here into the States, came through Ellis Island, where [the officials gave] name changes that they would place on a lot of [people] to make [the names] a little more American-English-friendly. --P7, 1st interview

Many of the participants mentioned the bicultural issue of language in their interviews. Of course, relationships with relatives that occur in multiple languages is not a surprising feature of this demographic's experience. But quite a few participants spoke of the loss of language as their ancestors or parents moved to the U.S. and forsook their language of origin, under an unfortunate understanding that to be American is to speak English. Participants lamented that their families don't always know the languages of the Asian and European countries from which they hail, and they express regret about this because, as HG said, "it's so much harder now, trying to learn a language" and because the family's original language was abandoned and younger generations were encouraged to speak English only, as P2 put it, "then you have these family members that you can't speak to sometimes."

Interestingly, the participant who was the most white-identifying did not seem to view it as a loss at all that his Filipino family had forsaken Tagalog in favor of English upon arrival in the U.S. He addressed that decision and his German's family loss of both their language and their last name (via an altered spelling by U.S. immigration officials)

as very matter of fact. (However, that lack of affect may also just be attributed to his personality.)

Regardless of their feelings about it, this issue of language loss was relevant to almost all the participants. Nine of the eleven participants had parents or grandparents who grew up with a language other than English, but because of preference for English as the presumed proper American language, only one of those nine participants is fluent in one of her family's mother tongue.

Theme 19: Whiteness as default. This theme explores when participants speak as if the white experience is the default experience.

> Sometimes… especially on my dad's side of the family, I felt kind of a little bit "outsided" because maybe they didn't know how to relate to me because of my Asian-ness, and so, that was why I always felt a kind of disconnect between [myself and] them. --HG, 2nd focus group

> In my interview with P7:
> SC: So the first [question] would be your racial identity, and how you describe or think of yourself.
> P7: I don't [have] very many in-depth answers that're very personalized to myself.
>
> Oh that's kind of cool, you know, [that I'm] like Asian, diverse.
> --P4, 2nd interview

> [Me] having light eyes… [is something which my mom] thought probably wouldn't happen, given that, if there isn't any trace of having light eyes through one of your parents, it's pretty unlikely you're going to turn out with light eyes. [But when I did grow up to have light eyes], she's like, "Yes! It turned out all right." --P7, 1st interview

> I've always appreciated how being Japanese [and also white] sets me apart. Especially now that I live in Arizona, it's like the cool thing is that I'm Japanese, too. -- PB, 1st interview

> Usually, like to others, if they ask, I'll just say I'm half Japanese because usually they can figure out that I'm white, the other half. --PS, 1st interview

> If I had to pinpoint why I might fall into the [transcendent of race] category, it's probably because I don't carry much appearance of being mixed race…. It hasn't really played a big role in how I feel my experience has been shaped. --P7, 3rd focus group

> My Japanese side… is how I differentiate myself from most the people I meet in the U.S., especially here [in Arizona] --P2478, 1st interview

This theme was also extremely prevalent in my study's interviews. It is similar to the American = White theme except in this theme, there is not an explicit connection between Americanism and whiteness, but rather an even broader reference, almost as if the typical human experience is the white experience, or whiteness is the universal norm. Because of this, I found it equally as disturbing as the American = White coding, if not more so, but regardless, I also discovered over the past months that this type of referencing is also very prevalent in our society. It is perhaps more prevalently used by white people and people who consider themselves white-adjacent, but the fact that it is commonplace among any group/s at all bodes ill for our society because it is such a damaging perspective.

The quotes above show evidence that whiteness is the norm for most of the participants and their families in the following ways: Asian-ness is outside of a white "inside" and therefore othered by some members of their families. One's racial identity is seen to only impacts one if one is non-white; for white and white-presenting people, their racial make-up is assumed to be irrelevant to their experience. Being Asian is considered diverse, different from the norm of whiteness. (This is in direct opposition to Margaret Beale Spencer's (2006) incisively inclusive definition of diverse, discussed in my

literature review.) Lighter colored eyes are considered a cause for joyous exclamation and an indication that a baby turned out "all right." If one is biracial, when explaining their racial background, all they need to tell people is their non-white heritage; the white heritage will be assumed as the standard, if unspoken.

Viewpoints that hold to whiteness as the default often have a hard time being accommodating when people of color are seen as so focused on their race. I believe what this perspective fails to acknowledge is that we are all constantly being racially profiled. The difference is that for some of us, that racial profiling is to our advantage, and for others of us, that profiling works against us.

Theme 20: Self as quintessential American. The theme explores when participants link an American identity specifically with themselves.

> I don't really think of myself as Korean. I just think of myself as like me, and I'm just another American. --Pi, 1st focus group

> How many people decide to give up their entire lives from wherever they come from and decide to make this move [to immigrate to America]? Sometimes they're leaving all of their families, all their livelihood. From any demographic, and every demographic, we know people are making this choice. Your best shot at life, even if you have to give up everything, is coming to America, right? And it doesn't matter your background, where you're from. You could be anywhere, you could be any person, born into any position, and people are still making that choice. -- P7, 2nd interview

> Being biracial, not just half-Asian/half-white, but just being biracial is kind of like a symbol of America. Just because we're a country of so many different races. We're kind of about that, about mixing races, and I think it's more looking towards the future. Because in the past, it was always like white people married white people, Asian people married Asian people, Black people married Black people. But now we're kind of like mixing, you know? --Pi, 1st interview

> There's so many people who are mixed now. It's like everyone's like a quarter something or half something. --PS, 1st interview

Because I ran across it so many times in my interviews, I intentionally started coding for when my participants perceived themselves to be the quintessential Americans of the future. This was expressed in many ways, most centering on the idea of mixed identities as the increasingly new normal. Many of the participants spoke at length about our nation's history of immigration and how this country is a gathering place for people from all over the world. They actively identified themselves as living, breathing products of that melding of cultures.

One participant spoke of a time he felt the strongest connection to America as his nation. It was when he went with his high school government class to watch the swearing in of new citizens – people from all over the globe who had come here to make this land their home. Others contrasted the heterogeneity of the U.S. to so many other countries around the world, where monocentric single-race identities reign supreme, virtually unchallenged in those national contexts. (For example, I recently had a conversation with our Korean housemate about the idea of refugees coming to Arizona. She said that Korea doesn't accept refugees, and that there are essentially only Koreans in Korea.)

The Census numbers seem to clearly bear out my participants' claims that they are the Americans of the future. Multiracial respondents were the fastest growing demographic in the 2010 Census and are expected to be shown to be increasing at an even faster rate once the recent 2020 Census reports are fully released. I think this code is a fitting one to end on because it reveals that despite the wake of history that still influences the thinking and experiences of my participants, they are also looking forward,

into a more hopeful future, where their own racial heritages are more accepted and celebrated and, along with them, the heritages of all diverse Americans, no matter their shade or combination.

In conclusion, this chapter presented and analyzed some of the main findings of this research study, mostly revolving around the thematic codes of: bi-racial formative processes, societal belonging, the protean identity, issues of duality, and formulations of Americanism. These large themes provide a base upon which, in the next chapter, I will present the conclusions I've drawn, the implications I see, and the ways this type of research can possibly move forward in the future.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Racial Bridging in the Grand Canyon State

> It's kind of like there's this one interval here, for whites. And there's this one [over here] for Asians. And my interval's around the same width, but I cover each one. I don't cover each one completely, obviously, but I have a foot in each one, though not both feet. So, I think it's been kind of fun that way for me.
>
> –AL, 1st interview

> I think, obviously, since I'm half and half, then my allegiances are like spread out, because, you know, I've got two legs in two different zones, so I feel like that kind of helps. Because I feel like people that are only one race, they don't really know what… they feel like a different race is totally foreign to them.
>
> –Pi, 2nd interview

As I heard quotes like these and others from my participants about ways that they act as a bridge of sorts between the two sides of their racial heritage, I couldn't help but think of the Grand Canyon, especially since my study focuses on Arizona, which prides itself on being "the Grand Canyon state." Perhaps the challenges of a racial divide, which can sometimes seem cavernous, conjure up the idea of people of different races on two sides of an abyss -- a giant hole full of the historical baggage of injustice, prejudice, mistrust, and even just simple ignorance and misunderstanding.

Participants consistently expressed the idea that they are or can be a bridge between those two divided sides. They inhabit each side of the divide in various ways, but they also inhabit the gap between the sides, or as HG put it, "this void, which is like the unknown." As an unknown, this bridge identity may not yet be fully tested, but with its points of duality (dual identity, dual perspective, dual empathy and

translation/mediation capabilities), it also seems full of possibilities and potentials. In fact, the conversations I had with participants expanded my understanding of what kinds of questions I should even be asking about (and to) this demographic.

Like Soliz et al (2017), I have tried to take a two-sided approach to examining the experiences of multiethnic people, looking for benefits as well as challenges, addressing not only the "wake" of history, in the difficulties of which we still live and operate, but also the hope for tomorrow, rooted in both the advantages of being mixed race and the fact that the multiethnic population is the fastest growing demographic in the U.S.

Some of my coding relates to Soliz et al's findings of benefits. My participants' biracial *dual identity* status empowers them to also have what I called *dual empathy, dual perspective,* and an ability to *translate or mediate* between cultures. I also looked beyond the liabilities associated with a *protean* (or shifting) identity to its strengths. And I coded for instances where my participants perceived themselves to be the quintessential Americans of the future.

With this focus on both the downsides and upsides of a multiethnic experience, Soliz et al's (2017) study is a good model for my own. Similar to my participants, theirs experienced both positive and negative moments and phases in life as they developed their identities and had both "constructive as well as problematic encounters" (p. 278) and experiences with others. Acknowledging both the strengths and hardships of a bi-racial identity provides a more holistic analysis of the bi-racial experience and moves away from focusing on its pathologization in order to move towards the real promise inherent in an increasingly multiracial world.

I hope that my research conclusions, without ignoring the challenges faced by biracial Asian/white people in Arizona, highlight some of the adaptive, positive, and productive routes that my study participants have taken and may be able to further take along their life journeys. In the end, multiracial people's process of learning to connect to all parts of themselves can also end up connecting them to others in their communities of heritage and being a bridge of understanding between cultures. Thus, the biracial identity formation process itself can have not only intense internal benefits, but also external social benefits.

Limitations and Re-Considerations

Like many qualitative studies, some of the limitations of my research revolve around the small sample size, the short turn-around time between data collection and conclusion-drawing, and non-randomized participation, since much of my recruiting ended up being by participant referral. But beyond these typical limitations, there were also other aspects of my specific study that caused me to re-consider some of my design decisions.

For example, I am still not sure that it was the best decision for me to code by hand rather than using a software program. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. Hand coding requires a lot of paper, ink, and a lot of time to print transcripts. Software coding requires learning the technical skills necessary to input the data and then extensive time to do the inputs. Hand coding feels more personal. It's more tactile. It's easier on your eyes than a screen-based program. Software coding allows for easier searches and makes it simpler to capture quotes. Software makes coding "shortcuts" available and therefore more tempting. Hand coding requires the researcher

to comb through the data, whereas the software can do some of that coding itself. But alternately, the codes created by software can be too technical, missing the nuances of human speech: contradictions, sarcasm, agreement, affect.

I also reflected several times during data collection about whether it was the best decision or not to focus solely on race and not ethnicity. For the purposes of my study, I intentionally made this decision to exclude ethnicity, and one of the reasons for this was that as Umana-Taylor et al (2014) pointed out, a clear distinction between racial and ethnic identities may be outdated, especially as the younger generation may have a more global perspective or an intersection of various identities (p. 2).

I had also noticed that even in my graduate-level classes, very intelligent and educated students had a hard time coming to a common understanding of what defines a race versus an ethnicity. I often also witnessed that confusion in the transcribed data for the Arizona Youth Identity Project, for which I was working during the time I was designing my study. (See Appendix B for more information on this.) If this was true, that ethnicity and race were increasingly problematic in their differentiation for the younger generation, I wondered whether Ethnic/Racial Identity frameworks needed to be revised in their conceptualizations. Perhaps there were better words to use?

However, in choosing to just focus on the racial aspect of identity development, particularly as it related to identity formation for people of mixed Asian/White backgrounds (which according to current social constructions of the various main racial categories, would be a cross- or inter-*racial* identity), my interview questions confused some of my participants, especially those who were one-quarter Asian (three-quarters white) and who identified much more with their specific Asian *ethnic* heritage (Korean,

for example) than with the Asian race generally. I also realized that for people of Asian descent, ethnicity might be a much less confusing term than it is for some other people (e.g., Latinx people) because Asian cultures tend to be much more homogenous and culturally separate from one another. So perhaps I should have included questions about ethnicity and not just race.

Regarding other limitations, I also recognize that other social positions, including gender, sexuality, ability, geography, generation, class, and immigration status could have also been examined as different important parts of my participants' intersectional equation. This study addressed some, but not all, of these intersections and did not follow an explicitly intersectional design or analysis. The intersection of geography was addressed with the study's focus on Arizona, as well as the intersection of generational immigration status with its focus on young adults who were born in the U.S. Some of my participants addressed, in the interviews and focus groups, issues of white-proximity, wealth and education levels and issues of male/female stereotypes, which relate to the intersections of class and gender, but I did not code for these per se.

I think it is fair to say that this study was too small to really look closely at all the possible intersectional dynamics, and I am not convinced that all social positions have equally essential bearing on my initial research questions, so I had therefore intentionally limited the scope of social positions herein analyzed. But in retrospect, I do think that I should have more closely explored the intersection, especially, of class and race as they relate to societal belonging. One quote from a participant in particular made me realize that this was possibly a real oversight on my part:

> A lot of [your interview] questions [were] asking if I felt a sense of belonging or if I felt like I had a place in the community I'm in currently. And I think that's an important thing -- that people recognize that there are different situations. People aren't [only] in financial situations, but also in [racial] identity situations as well, which are equally as important. And they should feel comfortable in both. And I predict that this study's bringing awareness to that fact, and I think that's always a good idea and always a positive thing to bring awareness to other people's situations, whatever they are. --P2, 2nd interview

This participant seems to be saying that equal value should be placed on finances and race and that often her own demographic's financial success wrongly overshadows their racial identity concerns, at least in the public consciousness. I do agree with the participant that people "should feel comfortable in both" their financial and racial identity situations, but this intersection is key. As Jonathan Tran (2022) in *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism* wrote, a "focus on racial identity to the exclusion of political economy tells us little about Asian American life specifically and race and racism generally" (p. 154).

Asian Americans have also been holding a more favored status in society generally, held up as a positive example and role models to other racial groups and as evidence of assumed American meritocracy and colorblindness. There is, arguably, the issue of colorism at play here – as East Asians are among the lightest-skinned of the minoritized peoples, underlying prejudice related to skin tone can also contribute to a favoring of Asians as near-white or white-adjacent. This perception likely has a considerable bearing on societal belonging for Asian Americans and Asian/white biracial people. Thus, I think it would have been prudent to address colorism more specifically in my study.

As I continued my literature review throughout the data collection and analysis process, another of Tran's (2022) central premises really made me question the basis of my entire study, so it would feel remiss to not mention this part of his work and some of my potential blind spots, of which his writing raised my awareness. He strongly challenges what he calls "identarian anti-racism," saying that it falls into the same pitfalls as racism does, giving too much emphasis to racial identity, problematically reducing people to who they are racially. I found this very personally challenging because I have wondered whether my own research study is too focused on race as an identifying category. I tried to put some measures into my research design to address this possible over-emphasis, but when I read this book by Tran, while concluding the research, it still made me question the essential premise of my study and whether I am just contributing through my research to the problems he outlines.

Tran's warnings in this regard remind of what black pastor Justin Giboney, of the Gospel Coalition said: Efforts to "essentialize our identities" actually "spurn truth to flatten reality."

> The reality is one's race or class or gender can often tell us something about their experiences, but it tells us nothing about their character or competence. Suggesting otherwise might make for a cleaner and easier argument, but it's a lie…. Our identities often tell us less than some… would have us believe.
>
> --Justin Giboney, *The Lies that Serve Us*

And one of my participants, Pi, put it this way:

> Maybe, I'd say, the assumptions [your study] made were that race had a bigger impact on the interviewees than it actually does. But also, at the same time, I'm me, and your other interviewees are other people, so they might have different opinions on that…. [Your interview questions weren't] irrelevant, but not something I myself [have] really thought about…. I think [race] is a smaller part [of people's overall identity] than a lot of people think. And I think, obviously, since I'm half and half, then… I have two histories, then it kind of

> makes me think [that] history is history, but I am different, you know? … Trying to avoid [talking about someone's race] is dumb, but also assuming that just because they're a certain race says anything about them, just beyond like the color of their skin or what they look like is dumb as well.

Despite the limitations, this study has the potential to be an instrument of change. To the extent that my participants gave evidence of remaining barriers or hindrances to societal belonging and to positive racial identity formation, we need new ways of community thinking and being. That said, challenges to identity development and belonging for this Asian/white demographic should be approached, I believe, with what Powell et al (2019) call a "targeted universalism" approach. Targeted universalism, they explain, is different than either universal responses (doing the same thing for everyone) or targeted responses (doing different things for everyone). They point out the pitfalls in these two typical approaches: universal responses can be too resource-intensive and often don't really help those most in need; targeted responses, on the other hand, can be seen as unfairly favoring certain groups, causing resentment and potential envy or enmity.

Targeted universalism, by contrast, does not even focus on *doing* as the primary starting place; it starts with setting goals. Targeted universalism encourages us to set *universal goals* (the same hopes for all people) and then, from there, develop targeted processes (what each person needs to succeed, to get to those goals). If we can agree as a society that the universal goals and hopes that we have for *all* who live here are adaptive racial identity formation and a strong sense of social belonging, then we can use those goals as a foundation for then asking what exactly specific groups need, in order to reach those goals. All diverse Americans -- again, this designation should include not only

people of color, but everyone -- need some kind of targeted help to reach these universal goals. Specifically, young Asian/white Arizonans will need processes relevant to their unique situation, and that leads into the next section, on areas for possible future study.

Areas for Possible Future Study

Besides some of the ideas for future research that I mentioned above as re-considerations and "targeted universalist" policy and programs, another theme that I considered adding to my Findings was that of "American" as a Pan-Racial Ethnicity. Some of the participant quotes that raised this theme in my mind are presented below:

> I've had someone, a Japanese person, tell me that because I'm sixth generation [in terms of immigration status on my Japanese side], basically I'm just straight-up American at that point. Which is true, but it was kind of cutting off what I was talking about, as far as my Japanese heritage. So yeah, it was hurtful.
> --P2478, 2nd interview

> I think for many white Americans, if they don't feel any tie to Europe, like their parents grew up here, their grandparents did, and so did their great grandparents, and so on… if [they] say like 'I'm American'… [it's] because that's the only [country] that they identify themselves with. --Pi, 1st interview

> I think there are people who see whiteness as American. Yeah, people will identify their ethnicity as American if they're white, often. But I don't feel like I have [that option]. If someone asked me, 'What's your ethnicity?' and I said, 'American,' I don't think that would be a satisfying answer to people. And maybe not even to myself." --P2478, 1st interview

I ended up not including this idea as a theme because 1) it didn't really seem like a finding, but more like a theoretical question, and 2) it was not a concept that I had put a lot of thought or time into, but was rather kind of throwing into the mix at the last second, so I ultimately left it out, but it might be a catalyst for future thought or research.

I would also be interested in seeing what conclusions the AZYIP (the study which was such a big part of my original inspiration for this project) comes to when its findings are released -- particularly around the areas of American identity and multiraciality -- and seeing how its published conclusions compare and contrast with my own discoveries.

Another route for future research might be a possible impact of gender on racial identity formation, by examining whether bi-racial people tend to more often identify racially in the same way as their same-gendered parent. For example, does a white/Asian woman – whose mom is Asian and dad is white – tend to identify more with her Asian heritage and might her brother tend to identify more with his white heritage? And how do non-binary people's racial identity match those of their parents? This is a curiosity to me, based on some of the quotes from both my pilot interviews and study interviews and focus groups.

Other research could also look more specifically at the influence of what human developmentalists call "ecological influences" on racial identity formation for young biracial people. Circles of influence, like neighbors, friends of various racial backgrounds, people from one's communities of faith, and school settings, where academic and social experiences, including peer relationships, extracurricular participation, and relationships with teachers can all have an impact and play a particularly acute role in identity construction as children grow up (Lee and Weis, 2005).

Yet another idea I have for possible future research would be a longevity study with these same participants. I chose to have only a short, two-week gap between my two interviews but having a follow up interview in a few years would be interesting

especially as relates to their ongoing journey of racial identity formation as well as their understandings of Americanism as the U.S. becomes an increasingly diverse nation.

Lastly, there is the question of who I included in my research sample and who else could have been included and indeed *should* be included as mixed-race research studies continue to be conducted with increasing regularity. One major issue for the study of Asian-Americans, addressed by Stacey J. Lee (2009) in her book *Unraveling the Model Minority Stereotype*, is that the Asian-American experience is not monolithic. One cannot presume that the experience of all Asian-Americans, across ethnicities, is largely the same because it is, in fact, very dissimilar.

Jamie Lew (2006) would argue as well that the model minority myth belies the vast differences not only between, but also within, Asian ethnic populations. This, therefore, relates to one of the other major limitations of my study: In focusing on an already small population – bi-racial Asian/white young people in Arizona – and trying to look for commonalities there, I did not further distinguish between the differing experiences of biracial people from diverse Asian ethnicities.

As I designed this study, I also went back and forth around the question of whether to include biracial people in my sample who are specifically part-Asian but also part-*non-white*. I felt conflicted because I did not want to "center" whiteness in my study and conclusions, nor did I want to promote the idea of whiteness as the normative racial identity in America. Similarly, I did not want to favor white-proximity or posit part-white as a more adaptive bi-racial identity than others. (Rondilla et al, 2017). But for several reasons, and in consultation with several professors, I finally decided to specifically focus on the Asian-white experience. Frankly, becoming knowledgeable on

the historical and current socio-political experiences of all types of multi-racial Asian Americans seemed outside the reasonable scope of this project's timeframe or purposes.

In addition, most likely Asian-white bi-racial people would make up the majority of my sample even if I were to include more diverse part-Asian groups in my recruitment, since Asian/white is the dominant bi-racial combination for Asian Americans anyway. In this scenario, my small study could do any other multi-racial participants an ultimate injustice because it would be presumptuous to generalize about the broad Asian multiracial experience based on a mostly Asian/white sample. As Rondilla et al (2017) emphasize, there are often very different dynamics that exist for mixed race people who are not part white. And as Atkin and Yoo (2019) wrote, "Scholars… need to be mindful of lumping Multiracial groups together given the uniqueness of each Multiracial experience" (p. 18).

Thus, in an effort to make my small exploratory study deeper, rather than wider, I decided to limit the bi-racial Asian participants to those who are part-white. However, although my research study specifically and deliberately sought to focus on one type of biracial experience (Asian/white in Arizona), it would be wonderful if more research studies could be conducted about all types of multiracial populations who call the United States their home, thereby contributing to the new field that is emerging in critical mixed-race studies.

Each unique group of people has its own contributions to make to this conversation around identity and belonging. We benefit from one another's ideas. In the end, as we share our views and challenge one another's conceptions and assumptions; as we change others' minds in some ways, and have our own minds changed in some ways;

as we seek to make our own path and facilitate or allow others to also make their own paths, may we find that there is ample and welcoming room here (in both the material world and in the world of goodwill ideas) for us all.

A Final Word

> The way in which academics and states [and any others among us] talk about problems affects the range of possibilities for action. (Balaam and Dillman, 2019, p. 102)

Constructivist theories around idea development directly link and deeply relate to the issues tackled in my research, especially around the conceptions of racial identity and Americanism. It is critical to examine and interrogate the historical and current framing (and potential for re-framing in the future) of conceptions of race broadly -- and multiraciality and American identity, more particularly. Who defines racial categories? Who defines Americanism? What limits and parameters have been put on societal belonging in the past and how does that shape the present realities? What qualifies someone to belong, what authenticates them, and who makes that decision? How are new ideas and revised conceptualizations created, and how do they spread? How are hegemonic ideations torn down? Constructivist ideals were on display in my sample participants and their alternate ways of thinking about their own racial and American identities.

My findings analyzed the idea of norms, especially around how Americanism is delineated, but norms themselves are not fixed. They have a life cycle, as Balaam and Dillman (2019) describe it – starting with norm emergence (where norms are framed and adopted by a few key players), proceeding to a norm cascade (which occurs once the

norm reaches a cultural tipping point), and then leading to norm internalization (where most people accept it, and it is generally taken for granted). This cycle supports Balaam and Dillman's assertion that "ideas are very powerful and should be taken seriously" (page 120).

But ways of seeing and understanding can and must change, especially as our nation's demographics change. Preliminary results from the 2020 Census are telling for the future of our national populace. The bi and multi-racial population in the United States is expected to grow at astonishing rates in the coming decades. In recent decades, there has already been a biracial baby boom (Chong & Kuo, 2015; Root, 1992), and multiracials are the fastest growing group below age 18 in the country (Saulny, 2011).

PBS Newshour reported on 2/10/22, in a segment on the recent Census findings release, that "the multiracial population in the United States has grown from 9 million people in 2010 to nearly 34 million people in 2020, a 276% increase." In other words, the multiracial population in our country is growing exponentially. Not only are multiracial people growing in numbers but also as a percentage or proportion of the population. This increase is due in part to simple biological reproduction, as increasing numbers of inter-racial couples have children, but also due to a growth in people's identification as multiracial, either because such an identification is now actually a choice (on forms, for example), or because, as monoracism continues to be dismantled in our country, such multiracial self-identifications are more accepted and therefore increasingly embraced by mixed individuals).

In such an environment, where multiraciality becomes increasingly the norm, certain hegemonic ideas, like monoracism, for example, will become an increasingly

inviable perspective as their constructions will apply to fewer and fewer people in the population. (Marston, 2021). Ideas must and will change, just as the constructivists told us they could and would.

Given that Soliz et al (2017) and Miville (2005) and many others' research suggest, and my study seems to corroborate, that multiracial and biracial people are often more able to get along with a variety of people who are different from themselves and tend to more easily understand varying perspectives than monoracial people do, this begs some important questions. While the literature confirms that multiracial people do not automatically squelch racism in others, it is arguable from my and others' research that racism may tend to be less of a problem within the hearts and minds of multiracials themselves. If this is the case, then as multiracial people become increasingly common and make up a greater and greater proportion of our population, as they are predicted to do on a grand scale, might their very presence and existence aid in eradicating racism in the society as a whole, since they themselves are less prone to racism? In other words, if multiracial identities are increasingly the identities of the future, does that bode well for the reduction of racist tendencies in humanity overall?

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

FROM ASU IRB:		
	Page: 1 of 7	
	PREPARED BY: IRB Staff	***APPROVED BY: Heather Clark***
DOCUMENT TITLE: HRP 503 A Social Behavioral Protocol	***DEPARTMENT: Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA)***	***EFFECTIVE DATE: [3/26/2020]***

INSTRUCTIONS
Complete each section of the application. Based on the nature of the research being proposed some sections may not apply. Those sections can be marked as N/A. Remember that the IRB is concerned with risks and benefits to the research participant and your responses should clearly reflect these issues. You (the PI) need to retain the most recent protocol document for future revisions. Questions can be addressed to research.integrity@asu.edu. PIs are strongly encouraged to complete this application with words and terms used to describe the protocol is geared towards someone not specialized in the PI's area of expertise.

IRB: 1. Protocol Title: Racial Identity Formation and Societal Belonging as Experienced by Young Bi-Racial Asian/white Americans in Arizona

IRB: 2. Background and Objectives

2.1 List the specific aims or research questions in 300 words or less.

2.2 Refer to findings relevant to the risks and benefits to participants in the proposed research.

2.3 Identify any past studies by ID number that are related to this study. If the work was done elsewhere, indicate the location.

TIPS for streamlining the review time:

ü *Two paragraphs or less is recommended.*

ü Do not submit sections of funded grants or similar. The IRB will request additional information, if needed.

Response: The research question for this study is: How do young Asian/white biracial Americans who live in Arizona navigate their own racial identity formation and their sense of belonging in their state and in their nation? What factors have been most influential on their experiences? This study is interested in learning about 1) the participants' racial identity development process, from childhood through their young adulthood, 2) how their phenotypes and names impact how they racially identify; 3) how their experiences and interactions with others in Arizona have impacted their sense of belonging or exclusion, 4) their understanding of the common stereotypes of "Americans," 5) how their own definitions of Americans may be similar to or different from these stereotypes, and 6) whether they identify as Americans, and why or why not?

This study will use existing literature as a foundation and will involve the conducting of 60-90-minute interviews, 30-minute follow-up interviews, and 60-90-minute focus groups. The current literature indicates that racial identity formation for biracial and multiracial people can be complicated and that being of partial Asian descent can also complicate one's sense of belonging in the U.S., especially in a state like Arizona, where Asian-background people are a very small portion of the population. This proposed research study bears some similarities to ASU's Arizona Youth Identity Project (AZYIP), using some similar questions, but with a different focus demographic.

IRB: 3. Data Use - What are the intended uses of the data generated from this project?

Examples include: Dissertation, thesis, undergraduate project, publication/journal article, conferences/presentations, results released to agency, organization, employer, or school. If other, then describe.

Response: The planned use of the data generated from this project is for Suzanne Choi's master's thesis (MS Justice Studies) and for any related publications or presentations.

IRB: 4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

4.1 List criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final sample.

Indicate if each of the following special (vulnerable/protected) populations is included or excluded:

- *§ Minors (under 18)*
- *§ Adults who are unable to consent (impaired decision-making capacity)*
- *§ Prisoners*
- *§ Economically or educationally disadvantaged individuals*

4.2 If not obvious, what is the rationale for the exclusion of special populations?

4.3 What procedures will be used to determine inclusion/exclusion of special populations?

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

ü Research involving only data analyses should only describe variables included in the dataset that will be used.

ü For any research which includes or may likely include children/minors or adults unable to consent, review content [here]

ü For research targeting Native Americans or populations with a high Native American demographic, or on or near tribal lands, review content [here]

For research involving minors on campus, review content [here]

Response: The participants for this study will include bi-racial Asian/white people living in Arizona who are between the ages of 18-30 and who are second generation or later in terms of immigration status. This study will not include any minors or people of Native American descent, according to the sample focus demographics. The study is also not expected to include any people with impaired decision-making capacity, any prisoners, or any economically or educationally disadvantaged individuals. However, this study is not seeking to intentionally exclude such people, and if any people in these special populations (who also meet the other sample qualifications) show an interest in being involved in the study, they will be welcomed, and this IRB protocol will be re-submitted to reflect that change.

IRB: 5. Number of Participants

Indicate the total number of individuals you expect to recruit and enroll. For secondary data analyses, the response should reflect the number of cases in the dataset.

Response: The plan is to recruit and interview 10-15 participants.

IRB: 6. Recruitment Methods

6.1 Identify who will be doing the recruitment and consenting of participants.
6.2 Identify when, where, and how potential participants will be identified, recruited, and consented.
6.3 Name materials that will be used (e.g., recruitment materials such as emails, flyers, advertisements, etc.) Please upload each recruitment material as a separate document, Name the document: recruitment_methods_email/flyer/advertisement_dd-mm-yyyy
6.4 Describe the procedures relevant to using materials (e.g., consent form).
ü

Response: Suzanne Choi will be doing the recruiting, via email flyer (and consenting of participants), in coordination with faculty in ASU's School of Social Transformation. She will also recruit outside of ASU through her contacts in local Asian churches and the Asian-American community in the Phoenix area and through referrals from participants. Recruitment will occur in the summer and fall of 2021. Anyone who fits the sample demographics -- age 18-30, Arizona resident, bi-racial Asian/white, second-generation (or later) American – and who expresses an interest in the recruitment materials or in personal invitations will be consented via DocuSign. Their consent to be both interviewed and recorded will also be re-confirmed at the time of the interview.

The recruitment flyer and letters, and the consent form are in the accompanying uploaded documents.

IRB: 7. Study Procedures

7.1 List research procedure step by step (e.g., interventions, surveys, focus groups, observations, lab procedures, secondary data collection, accessing student or other records for research purposes, and follow-ups). Upload one attachment, dated, with all the materials relevant to this section. Name the document: supporting documents dd-mm-yyyy
*7.2 For each procedure listed, describe **who will be conducting it, where it will be performed, how long is participation in each procedure, and how/what data will be collected in each procedure.***
7.3 Report the total period and span of time for the procedures (if applicable the timeline for follow ups).
7.4 For secondary data analyses, identify if it is a public dataset (please include a weblink where the data will be accessed from, if applicable). If not, describe the contents of the dataset, how it will be accessed, and attach data use agreement(s) if relevant.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.
ü Ensure that research materials and procedures are explicitly connected to the articulated aims or research questions (from section 2 above).
ü In some cases, a table enumerating the name of the measures, corresponding citation (if any), number of items, sources of data,

time/wave if a repeated measures design can help the IRB streamline the review time.

Response:
The following research procedures will be conducted by Suzanne Choi, either via Zoom or at a quiet location of the participant's choosing:

- ***60-90-minute initial interview***
- ***30-minute follow-up interview, two weeks later***
- ***60-90 minute focus group***

Please see the attachment titled "Supporting Documents 4/20/21" for exact interview and focus group questions.

IRB: 8. Compensation

8.1 Report the amount and timing of any compensation or credit to participants.

8.2 Identify the source of the funds to compensate participants.

8.3 Justify that the compensation to participants to indicate it is reasonable and/or how the compensation amount was determined.

8.4 Describe the procedures for distributing the compensation or assigning the credit to participants.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

ü *If partial compensation or credit will be given or if completion of all elements is required, explain the rationale or a plan to avoid coercion*
ü For extra or course credit guidance, see "Research on educational programs or in classrooms" on the following page: https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations.
ü For compensation over $100.00, review "Research Subject Compensation" at: https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations for more information.

Response: Study participants will be compensated at the following amounts: First interview -- $25; second interview -- $15; focus group --$25. Compensation will be given to the participants when the focus groups are completed. Funding to cover this compensation will be sought from ASU's GPSA Jumpstart Research and Project Grant and the GPSA Graduate Research Support Program Grant. The compensation amount comes out to about $15-18/hour, which seemed like a reasonable dollar amount – not impossibly generous but not exploitative in any way. Secure digital apps (like Zelle, ApplyPay or CashApp) will be used for transaction if participants are given cash gifts. If compensation is in the form of gift cards, Suzanne Choi will either mail them to the participants or hand them to them directly if the interviews/focus groups are in person.

IRB: 9. Risk to Participants

List the reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences related to participation in the research.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ***Consider the broad definition of "minimal risk" as the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research that are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.***
- ***Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks.***
- ***If there are risks, clearly describe the plan for mitigating the identified risks.***

Response: This study has the potential to raise some uncomfortable and difficult memories for the participants around racism, discrimination, and prejudice. Choosing to remember and share about potentially hurtful or damaging events, during either the study interviews or focus groups, could be psychologically or socially challenging. But it is important to note that these participants will have already self-selected to be involved in the study, knowing its focus content, and they may actually be joining this study with the hopes of talking through and coming to some resolution on burdensome issues around racial identity and belonging which they have encountered and with which they have wrestled. The interview and focus group questions have been designed in ways that seek to allow for and even foster open conversation, reflection, and debrief. Rather than simply opening old or current wounds, the hope is that this study's interviews and focus groups can also be times and spaces of contemplation, affirmation, collaboration, and healing. (As an added mitigation effort, any participant who joins the study will have the stated option to choose to end the interview early or to not answer any particular question with which they are uncomfortable.)

IRB: 10. Potential Direct Benefits to Participants

List the potential direct benefits to research participants. If there are risks noted in 9 (above), articulated benefits should outweigh such risks. These benefits are not to society or others not considered participants in the proposed research. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. A direct benefit comes as a direct result of the subject's participation in the research. An indirect benefit may be incidental to the subject's participation. Do not include compensation as a benefit.

Response: This study was designed to benefit participants. Talking through issues of racial identity formation and societal belonging with the interviewer and then with others of their own racial background in the focus groups could potentially be very helpful for young Asian/white biracial Arizonans. The research procedures and interpersonal and group interactions may lead to beneficial personal reflection and concept creation or elaboration, to which the participants otherwise would not have had exposure. Because the study's focus demographic is so specific and there are so few Asian/white Arizonans, for many of these participants, this study may be the first time they are really discussing these issues, and the focus group may be their first opportunity to talk with others who share their biracial identity. Therefore, the relevancy and timeliness of the research questions and the opportunity to be heard, share their stories, better understand their own experiences around race and belonging, and collectively heal will all be possible and hoped-for benefits of their involvement.

IRB: 11. Privacy and Confidentiality

Indicate the steps that will be taken to protect the participant's privacy.

*11.1 Identify who will have **access to the data**.*

11.2 Identify where, how, and how long data will be stored (e.g. ASU secure server, ASU cloud storage, filing cabinets).

11.3 Describe the procedures for sharing, managing and destroying data.

11.4 Describe any special measures to protect any extremely sensitive data (e.g. password protection, encryption, certificates of confidentiality, separation of identifiers and data, secured storage, etc.).

11.5 Describe how any audio or video recordings will be managed, secured, and/or de-identified.

11.6 Describe how will any signed consent, assent, and/or parental permission forms be secured and how long they will be maintained. These forms should separate from the rest of the study data.

11.7 Describe how any data will be de-identified, linked or tracked (e.g. master-list, contact list, reproducible participant ID, randomized ID, etc.). Outline the specific procedures and processes that will be followed.

11.8 Describe any and all identifying or contact information that will be collected for any reason during the course of the study and how it will be secured or protected. This includes contact information collected for follow-up, compensation, linking data, or recruitment.

11.9 For studies accessing existing data sets, clearly describe whether or not the data requires a Data Use Agreement or any other contracts/agreements to access it for research purposes.

11.10 For any data that may be covered under FERPA (student grades, etc.) additional information and requirements is available at https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations.

Response: The people with access to the collected data will be Suzanne Choi and her thesis committee members, including Dr. Beth Blue Swadener (chair), Dr. Madelaine Adelman, and Dr. Kathryn Nakagawa. Some data may be shared with these committee members as they assist with data analysis. The data will be stored on Suzanne Choi's personal computer, which is password encrypted, in either her iCloud or Dropbox, until the end of the Spring 2022 semester. After Suzanne Choi's thesis is written and defended, she will download the data to a thumb drive, which she will keep at her house. Participants will be given the opportunity to choose pseudonyms instead of having their names associated with their transcripts or else they will be assigned a random four-digit ID number. During the focus groups, they will have a choice about whether or not to change their Zoom name (if virtual) or verbally give their pseudonyms for people to call them (if in person). Their names will not be attached to any of the data, findings, results, or written products coming out of the research study. Interviews will be taped and transcribed. The audiotapes will always be kept either in Suzanne Choi's personal bags, present with her at all times, or in her home. She will not be leaving audio tapes in any public location. Consent forms and confidentiality explanations will be collected electronically prior to the first interview, using Docusign, and stored in Suzanne Choi's computer, separately from the other research materials and data. Participants' true names, email addresses, phone numbers, mailing addresses, and linked pseudonyms/ID numbers will also be collected in a master contact list and kept in her computer, where it will be maintained until she has defended her thesis, graduated, and had her thesis published in ASU's Proquest.

IRB: 12. Consent

Describe the procedures that will be used to obtain consent or assent (and/or parental permission).

12.1 Who will be responsible for consenting participants?
12.2 Where will the consent process take place?
12.3 How will the consent be obtained (e.g., verbal, digital signature)?

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ***ü*** *If participants who do not speak English will be enrolled, describe the process to ensure that the oral and/or written information provided to those participants will be in their preferred language. Indicate the language that will be used by those obtaining consent. For translation requirements, see Translating documents and materials under https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission*
- *ü Translated consent forms should be submitted after the English is version of all relevant materials are approved. Alternatively, submit translation certification letter.*
- *ü* ***If a waiver for the informed consent process is requested, justify the waiver in terms of each of the following: (a) The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects; (b) The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects; (c) The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and (d) Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation. Studies involving confidential, one time, or anonymous data need not justify a waiver. A verbal consent or implied consent after reading a cover letter is sufficient.***
- ***ü*** *ASU consent templates are [here].*
- *ü Consents and related materials need to be congruent with the content of the application.*

Response: Suzanne Choi will conduct consenting prior to the interviews, via email, utilizing Docusign.

IRB: 13. Site(s) or locations where research will be conducted.

List the sites or locations where interactions with participants will occur-

- *Identify where research procedures will be performed.*
- *For research conducted outside of the ASU describe:*
  - *Site-specific regulations or customs affecting the research.*
  - *Local scientific and ethical review structures in place.*
- *For research conducted outside of the United States/United States Territories describe:*
  - ***Safeguards to ensure participants are protected.***
- *For information on international research, review the content [here].*

For research conducted with secondary data (archived data):

- *List what data will be collected and from where.*
- ***Describe whether or not the data requires a Data Use Agreement or any other contracts/agreements to access it for research purposes.***
- *For any data that may be covered under FERPA (student grades, etc.) additional information and requirements is available [here].*
- *For any data that may be covered under FERPA (student grades, homework assignments, student ID numbers etc.), additional information and requirements is available [here].*

Response: Many of the interviews and even the focus groups may be conducted via Zoom, if that is the preference of participants. Otherwise, interviews and focus groups will be conducted in any quiet place where the participant feels comfortable -- my home, their home, the public library, a church classroom, or anywhere the participant recommends. (The participant will be asked if there is a quiet location where they prefer to meet, if they choose to meet in person rather than virtually.) For the Zoom meetings, protective protocols such as a waiting room, password requirements, and individual admission will be employed.

IRB: 14. Human Subjects Certification from Training.

Provide the names of the members of the research team.

ASU affiliated individuals do not need attach Certificates. Non-ASU investigators and research team members anticipated to manage data and/or interact with participants, need to provide the most recent CITI training for human participants available at www.citiprogram.org. Certificates are valid for 4 years.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

ü ***If any of the study team members have not completed training through ASU's CITI training (i.e. they completed training at another university), copies of their completion reports will need to be uploaded when you submit.***
ü ***For any team members who are affiliated with another institution, please see "Collaborating with other institutions" [here]***
ü ***The IRB will verify that team members have completed IRB training. Details on how to complete IRB CITI training through ASU are [here]***

Response: The research team members include Suzanne Choi, Dr. Beth Blue Swadener (the PI of this study), Dr. Madelaine Adelman, and Dr. Kathryn Nakagawa.

[redacted]

General Tips:

- ***Have all members of the research team complete IRB training before submitting.***
- ***Ensure that all your instruments, recruitment materials, study instruments, and consent forms are submitted via ERA when you submit your protocol document. Templates are [here]***
- ***Submit a complete protocol. Don't ask questions in the protocol – submit with your best option and, if not appropriate, revisions will be requested.***
- ***If your study has undeveloped phases, clearly indicate in the protocol document that the details and materials for those phases will be submitted via a modification when ready.***
- ***Review all materials for consistency. Ensure that the procedures, lengths of participation, dates, etc., are consistent across all the materials you submit for review.***
- ***Only ASU faculty, full time staff may serve as the PI. Students may prepare the submission by listing the faculty member as the PI. The submit button will only be visible to the PI.***
- ***Information on how and what to submit with your study in ERA is [here]. Note that if you are a student, you will need to have your Principal Investigator submit.***
- ***For details on how to submit this document as part of a study for review and approval by the ASU IRB, visit https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission.***

[redacted]

APPENDIX B

AZYIP: MY IMMEDIATE INSPIRATION

The specifics of this study were inspired by the Arizona Youth Identity Project (AZYIP) out of ASU, which looked at the life experiences, conceptualizations, identity development, sense of belonging, views on citizenship, and political beliefs and engagement of diverse young people in Arizona. I transcribed for the AZYIP in 2020-2021 as a research assistant, and I also took a qualitative research Coding class, based on that study's data, which was taught by its Principal Investigators, Dr. Nilda Flores-Gonzalez, Dr. Angela Gonzales, and Dr. Emir Estrada. I want to unabashedly and unequivocally express that I am so grateful to have been involved in the AZYIP and its related coursework. I greatly enjoyed (and learned so much from) being involved in that project!

I applied to work on the AZYIP because its research focus was closely aligned with my own long-time interests, but there are some significant differences between this research study and the AZYIP. One difference is that although I am very focused on some of the racial identity formation and societal belonging themes explored by the AZYIP, I am less interested in that study's emphasis on political engagement and framings of citizenship. A second difference is that the AZYIP limited its intensive interviews to Latinx, Native American, and white populations, choosing to not conduct interviews with other demographics, including people of Asian descent (Flores-Gonzalez et al, 2020). Thus, besides having a notably different *overall* research focus, I am also working with a very different population demographic from that of the AZYIP.

In addition, even my interview questions, which bear some similarity to those of the AZYIP, are generally re-worded so significantly that I cannot really say that my study is any type of replication of the AZYIP, but rather, perhaps, an informal extension. Either way, my inspiration from the AZYIP was extensive enough that I felt compelled to ask permission before using or modifying AZYIP questions for my own study. I gratefully received such permission in the spring of 2021 (in written form from Dr. Gonzales and in verbal form from Dr. Flores-Gonzales) to use AZYIP questions, either verbatim or with similar phrasing, for my own research study.

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT FLIER

Are You a Young Biracial (Asian/White) Arizonan?

Make your voice heard!

If you are between 18-30 years of age, a second (or later) generation American, an Arizona resident, and an Asian/white biracial person, you are cordially invited to participate in an ASU research study looking at racial identity formation and societal belonging!

- ***Earn $65 in Amazon gift cards!***
- Share your story and experiences via interviews and a focus group
- Learn more about yourself and others of your racial background!
- Show up and represent!

When: Fall 2021

Where: In person or by Zoom (your choice)

Time: Whenever is convenient for you

How? If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, contact Suzanne Choi (master's student in Justice Studies at ASU's School of Social Transformation):

- scchoi1@asu.edu
- (480) 491-1347

ASU IRB-approved STUDY00013909

APPENDIX D

IRB-APPROVED CONSENT FORM

IRB-APPROVED CONSENT FORM (to be completed via Docusign before the interviews begin)

Racial Identity Formation and Societal Belonging as Experienced by Young Bi-Racial Asian/White Americans in Arizona

Hello!

My name is Suzanne Choi, and I am a master's student under the direction of Professor Beth Blue Swadener, in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to better understand the experiences of young, biracial Asian/white Arizonans around the issues of racial identity formation and societal belonging.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve 1) a 60-90-minute interview, 2) a 30-minute follow-up interview two weeks after the first interview, and 3) a small 60-90-minute focus group. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. During the interviews and focus group, you will have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty whatsoever.

As a participant in this study sample, you should meet the following demographic criteria -- age 18-30, Arizona resident, bi-racial Asian/white, second-generation (or later) American. Your responses to the interview and focus group questions will be used to help answer the study's research questions around racial identity formation and societal belonging for young Asian/white Arizonans. Your involvement will help people both within and outside of your demographic better understand the experiences of those who live in Arizona and share your racial background.

There may be some foreseeable risk to your participation, as you may find that some of the questions are challenging to answer, especially if your racial identity formation process or your sense of inclusion or exclusion in our state or in our nation has been problematic, but there will be ample time to reflect, debrief, and discuss with others who share similar experiences with you, so your involvement in this study will also have the possibility of being a very helpful and insightful experience for you personally. In addition to the social and personal benefits, there will also be monetary compensation for your involvement in this study, up to $65 ($25 for the first interview, $15 for the second interview and $25 for your focus group participation).

Your interview responses will be anonymous and confidential. You will be assigned a Study ID number or you will choose a pseudonym which will be used to label yout responses. A master list containing your name, contact information, and study ID will be stored separate from research data. The master list will enable the research team to link your interview and focus group responses. At the end of the study, the master list will be deleted. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used. Due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality in those settings cannot be guaranteed, but you will be given the opportunity to privately change your Zoom name (if the meeting is virtual) or to use a pseudonym during the focus groups.

The interviews and focus groups will be recorded, with your permission. It will be your choice whether to participate via Zoom or in person. Zoom interviews will be recorded both as video and audio. In-person participation will be audio-recorded only. By signing below, you are agreeing to have the interviews and focus groups recorded, but you can also change your mind after the interview starts, if you just let me know.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact one of these members of the research team (Suzanne Choi at scchoi1@asu.edu or Dr. Beth Blue Swadener at beth.swadener@asu.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please sign below if you wish to be a part of this study.

By signing below, you are agreeing that you would like to be part of the above-described study.

Name:

Signature: Date:

APPENDIX E

REVISED SCRIPT FOR FIRST INTERVIEW

Hello, _____! I'm Suzanne Choi, and I'm so happy to meet you! I just wanted to confirm before we begin that you consent to having this interview recorded? Okay, great, let me start that recording then.

How is your day/week going so far? I'm so glad you are wanting to be interviewed for this research study! So, you heard about this opportunity to join as a participant in this project from _____ [wherever/however they were recruited], right? Before we start the formal interview, can you tell me what appealed to you about being involved in this project?

That's wonderful. I look forward to getting to know you better through the course of our interactions. So, before we begin, let me just tell you a little more about myself and about what you can expect during the interview process. If you have any questions, feel free to ask. I am a master's student in Justice Studies in ASU, and I am completing my thesis by doing a research effort around racial identity development and societal belonging for young Asian/white biracial Americans in Arizona. To give you a little sense about my own personal interest in this research topic -- as you can maybe tell from looking at me, I identify as a white person, but my husband is Korean-American, and our children are therefore biracial people, who definitely fit into my research focus demographic. So, I feel very connected to biracial Asian/white people.

One thing that I really want you to know about this study is that I do not have any research hypotheses ~~under which I am laboring~~. For the purposes of this project, my thesis advisor has given me permission to be ~~blissfully~~ free of any hypotheses or educated guesses about what my findings will be, but I am instead operating in the mode of what researcher Kristin Luker calls "a logic of discovery." This means that not only are there no right or wrong answers to the following interview questions, [but I'm trying not to] even have any set presuppositions about how I think you will answer. So, in other words, I have no idea what you will say during this interview, but I am very interested to find out!

Regarding the details of the interview, as you may recall from my initial email to you, there are actually two opportunities to be interviewed. The first interview will be today and will last about 1 -1.5 hours, the second interview will be a follow up time, two weeks later. It will be a shorter interview (about 30 minutes). Lastly, there will be a focus group with other Asian/white young Arizonans. The focus group should last about 1-1.5 hours. All of these opportunities with come with incentivization, for a total of $65 in compensation if you are able to be involved in all three aspects of the study. The interviews and focus groups will all be recorded and transcribed as part of the research study.

Your name will not be associated with the interview recording or transcripts, as you will be given a participant number instead, as an identifier. Or would you like to choose a pseudonym? Today's interview will have four main thematic sections, with between five and nine questions per theme. If at any point in the interview, there is a question you do

not want to answer, please just tell me and we will move on to another question. I have put a lot of thought into how to make this interview process not only helpful to me as a researcher but [hopefully] enjoyable and beneficial for you as a participant, so I hope you find this time ~~very~~ worthwhile. Do you have any questions about this research project, the process, or this interview in particular before we officially begin the interview? Great, let's begin!

Today's date is _____ and I am with participant number [or pseudonym] _____.

1) Okay, first can you tell me a little about yourself:
-- Where were you born?
-- How old are you?
-- ~~What gender pronouns do you prefer?~~
-- What city do you live in now?
-- How long have you lived in Arizona?
-- What are you doing now -- working (job?) or studying (major?)

2) Great, so the next set of questions is about your racial identity. So, first, obviously you are an Asian/white biracial person, but
-- can you tell me a little more about your specific racial or ethnic heritage?
-- What are your parents' racial or ethnic heritages?
-- At what point did your family or ancestors immigrate to the U.S.?
-- How do you usually describe your racial or ethnic identity to others or to yourself? Are there certain terms or phrases that you use to describe yourself racially if someone asks you about your heritage?
-- When people see you for the first time, how do they usually racially or ethnically identify you? Do people ever find your racial identity ambiguous at first? If so, why do you think that is? How does it make you feel when that happens?

-- As you have probably noticed, a lot of the questions in this interview ~~so far~~ have to do with your racial identity. Would you say that your racial identity is a big part of your overall sense of self, or not necessarily? Can you tell me a little more about that?

3) People who have done work on racial identity development in biracial and multiracial people note that rarely is such identity development an overnight phenomenon. It is usually a process that occurs over time and in relationship to life stages, as children mature into adults, and it can have many evolutions or changes over a person's lifetime. I would love to hear some about your process so far in life:

[Ask about contexts of stories, if the contexts were significant]
-- For example, when you were a child, what are some of your early memories of noticing that different people are of different races? Of noticing that you yourself have a racial identity?

-- Do you think your racial identity has social significance, or meaning beyond just a biological fact? If not, why not? If so, at what age did you start to come to that realization/understanding?
-- Have you always identified racially the way that you do now? If so, tell me more about how that identity came about. If not, can you tell me some stories of what this process of racial identity evolution has looked like for you at various stages of your life? How has the way you think about or describe yourself changed over time?
-- Do you think your name influences how you racially identify? If so, how?

-- Can you give me any examples of ways people have influenced your racial identity process, positively or negatively?
-- Often, it is not just interpersonal interactions and experiences that inform our racial identity development, but also our own internal thoughts and ideas. Have there been any ideas, concepts, or ways of thinking that have helped or hindered your process? Can you give me any examples?
-- Do you have anything else you would like to share about your individual process of racial identity development?

4) The next section of our interview is going to be around your sense of societal belonging.

People of Asian descent are a small minority in Arizona -- how much more so, people who are biracial Asian/white.
-- What have been some of your memorable experiences and social interactions with others, if any, as relates to being a bi-racial, Asian/white person, living in Arizona? An early memory? A recent memory? Any especially affirming memory? Any especially alienating memory?
-- How, if at all, do you think your racial identity has played a role in your experience of being an Arizonan? Can you imagine what might be similar/different if you had grown up in a state or region with a higher percentage of Asian Americans or biracial kids?
-- When have you felt the most "Arizonan"? Least? Overall, do you feel a strong sense of belonging in this state? If so, why? If not, why not?
-- To what extent, if any, has your racial identity affected your experience of belonging in this state?
-- What other thoughts or feelings do you have around this topic of belonging in Arizona?

This last section is about your experience of belonging in the U.S.

-- What do you think are some of the common ways people [in general] define what it means to be an American?
-- What do **you** think it means to be an American?
-- Overall, do you feel a strong sense of belonging in this country? If so, [can you tell me more about that?] ~~why~~? If not, why not? When have you felt a great sense of belonging? When have you felt disconnected?

-- Sometimes when people talk about "Americans," what they are really talking about are white Americans. ~~Do you find that one's American national identity and one's ethnic identity are often conflated or linked?~~ [Have you found that kind of linkage to be the case?] If so, what are your thoughts about that [assumed] connection?
-- How identified are you with being "American" or what are your thoughts about being American? [Do you see yourself as a "full American"?] If [not,] ~~you don't feel like you identify as a "full American,~~" do you experience that as a loss or not necessarily?
-- Do you have any other thoughts or feelings that you would like to share about Americanism, American belonging, or your American identity?

Did you happen to bring an item with you to the interview that you feel says something about your experiences around your racial identity formation and/or your sense of belonging in Arizona [or America]?

There are just a few more closing questions:

-- What else, if anything, would you like others to know about you that they might not know just by looking at you?

-- In terms of how people of different backgrounds in the United States interact with one another, do you have ideas about how you think these interactions can improve?

-- Finally, how was this experience for you, being interviewed about these topics?
-- Was there anything that you thought about for the first time or anything new that you learned about yourself during our conversation today [or a]ny main takeaways from this time?

-- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Alright, our interview is officially over. Thank you so much for meeting with me today and sharing your stories and your thoughts! They are valuable, and I appreciate so much the opportunity to hear from you. A few more quick questions before we end:

-- Can I schedule a shorter interview with you again in two weeks, as a follow up to today? Would two weeks from today work, at the same time?
-- How should I get your compensation to you? Can I hold off on that until the interviews are all over?
-- Do you know any other young Asian/white Arizonans that you can recommend to me who might also be interested in being interviewed for this study?

Thank you so much for meeting today. I look forward to talking again in a couple of weeks!

[Stop recording device.]

APPENDIX F

REVISED SCRIPT FOR SECOND INTERVIEW

It's great to see you again. How have the last two weeks been going for you?

[Start recording]

Has anything happened recently in the news, or in current events, or in your own life that made you think about our conversation/interview from a couple of weeks ago?

In our last interview, we talked around six main themes. For this interview, I am going to simply mention a theme and just see whether, since we met last, you have been thinking about anything else related to that theme, upon which you would like to expand or clarify.

-- Your racial identity and how you describe or think of yourself
-- Your process of racial identity formation throughout your life (childhood to present)
-- Your experiences and social interactions with others around your race
-- Your sense of belonging in your state of Arizona and in the U.S. as your nation
-- Common societal conceptions of what it means to be an American
-- Your own conceptions of Americanism

Is there anything else you would like to share related to these issues?

[Two more questions:

I stated during the first interview that I am attempting to not have any hypothesis for my study, but obviously, I am a human being, and I wrote the questions, and questions alone can guide the direction of a study. As you've reflected on the types of questions that I asked, what unconscious assumptions or predictions do you think my questions indicate that I've made? Do you agree or disagree with those assumptions?

What question or questions, if any, do you <u>wish</u> that I had asked you in these interviews?]

Thank you so much for meeting with me again! The third and final component of my research design is a focus group. For your participation in a focus group with other bi-racial Asian/white young people, would you prefer to meet by Zoom or in person? (We may need to do a hybrid group, with some people in person and others Zooming, depending on the preferences of everyone involved.)

Since we met last, can you think of any other young Asian/white Arizonans that you can recommend to me who might be willing to also be interviewed for this study?

I would also like to invite you to bring another item with you to the focus group that you feel says something about your experiences around your racial identity formation and/or your sense of belonging in Arizona. This could be the same item that you brought to our first interview, if you would like to share that item with the group, or it could be another item that you would like to share.

APPENDIX G

REVISED SCRIPT FOR FOCUS GROUPS

[GROUND RULES

- This group time will be recorded [start recording] – I want to capture what you have to say, but I will not be sharing the recording or related transcripts with anyone other than possibly my thesis committee. I won't identify anyone by name in my report. Your responses will remain anonymous.
- It will be best if everyone has a chance to participate during our time together. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while, or I may cut you off if you speak at length, in the interest of time. Try to make your points both thoroughly and clearly and concisely, so that we can fully understand your own perspective, but there is also room for others to contribute their input.
- There are no wrong or right answers – every person's experiences and opinions are important
- Speak up if you agree or disagree with others – it will be great to hear a range of opinions\
- What is said in our Zoom room should stay here – folks should be able to feel comfortable sharing sensitive issues that may come up. However, because it is a group discussion, I cannot personally guarantee that group members will not share what they learned after the discussion.

- You have the right not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable during the conversation. Although we hope you stay to the end, you can leave the discussion at any time, as your involvement in this study is fully voluntary. If you are able to stay for the whole time and participate in the conversation, you will receive a $25 gift card, in addition to the $40 in gift cards that you will already get for your involvement with the first two interviews.

- Please keep in mind that we are here to have a group discussion. I will ask some questions to guide the conversation, but you do not always have to respond directly to me. You are encouraged to have a conversation with everyone in this focus group. And again, we would like to hear from all of you. If you are talking a lot, I may ask you to let others have a chance. If you are quiet, I may ask you what you think about the topic that's being discussed. We just want to be sure that everyone is heard. I also ask that you let everyone get a chance to finish their thoughts and avoid interrupting one another

VIRTUAL RULES (for Zoom meetings)

- When you are not speaking, please mute yourself.
- Please keep your video on, so that this can at least approximate an in-person conversation.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?]

Next 5 minutes:
-- Welcome – I am so glad you decided to join this focus group!

-- Introductions – age, where born, where living now, employment or university, racial identity

Next 50 minutes:
-- I have some questions prepared, but first, I would like to see if there is anything related to the two interviews, in which you all participated, that you would like to open for discussion here with your peers?
-- What questions in the two interviews seemed most salient and resonant to you? Which topics or subtopics, if any, have kept coming back to your thoughts since you were interviewed? What questions, if any, caused you to reflect in ways that were especially meaningful to you?

--Did you happen to bring an item with you to the interview that you feel says something about your experiences around your racial identity formation and/or your sense of belonging in Arizona [or America]?

[Here I will maybe ask some questions about discrepancies or differences of opinion that have become evident so far in the interviews and raise those questions or issues for the purposes of group discussion and dialogue]

[Discussion of Rockquemore et al's study: Most racial identity theories fundamentally expect that multiracial people will either identify with one of their main racial heritages exclusively or will fall into an integrated identity, where they identify exclusively *as multi-racial*. But Rockquemore et al's research finds that it is more complicated than that. Their study of biracial people revealed six distinct categories that described their participants' experience around their own racial identities. (Their study was with Black/white people, but these categories have been adapted to the demographic of this current study.)

1) Do you see yourself as *exclusively Asian?*

2) Do you see yourself as *exclusively white?*

3) Do you see yourself as *exclusively biracial and find that this "border identity" is usually validated* by others' views of you?

4) Do you see yourself as *exclusively biracial but find that this border identity is usually not validated* by others' views of you (e.g., you might be an Asian/white woman who identifies internally as biracial, but people around you may typically reject that identity for you, insisting, directly or indirectly, that you are actually just Asian, or actually just white (depending largely on your phenotype), not biracial?

5) Do you have a *protean or changing identity* -- sometimes Asian, sometimes white, and sometimes biracial, depending on the context -- where you are, who you are with, what the conversation is about, etc?

6) Or lastly, do you view your identity as *transcendent* of race? (Racial classifications are simply not salient to your self-understanding.)

If #4, you would effectively experience the world, in some ways, as a fully Asian person (or fully White person) although that is not how you self-identify).
As G.K. Kich (1992) put it, "The assertion of the self as biracial requires both the personal organizing structure of a biracial self-label and the interpersonal and social recognition of the individual as biracial" (P. 317).

(Interestingly, Yoo et al (2016) did a quantitative study that included the protean identity as a variable and found that it tended to correlate with higher psychological distress.)]

[Show video that P4 shared with me:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVR3B01NxiM
Is this funny? Offensive? Affirming? Hurtful? Does this type of "identity policing" resonate with your experience in any way?]

Last half hour:
I realize that for some of you, this may be the first time that you are in a group solely composed of Asian/white young people. Given this unique situation, are there any other questions, whether around these issues we've been discussing or around any other topic, that you would like to ask your fellow participants and discuss with one another before our time together is over?

-- How, if at all, has being involved in this study been helpful to you? If it hasn't been helpful, is it because the questions did not seem relevant enough to your life, or was there another reason?146