Hybrid Racial Identities of Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White Mixed-Race Individuals: A Comparative Analysis

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Sociology and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: 2 May 2023

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Abstract

This study elaborates challenges faced and strategies deployed by Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White mixed-race individuals in asserting hybrid racial identities. Specifically, I ask: What factors influence mixed-race Asian Americans' assertion of racial identities? When comparing Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White individuals, what different strategies and challenges emerge? To address these questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 34 participants, and four major points of comparison emerged. First, Asian/Black participants' assertions of multiracial or Asian identity were more likely to be constrained by perceptions of their appearance because of their perceived blackness. In comparison, Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants' appearances were seen as more ambiguous, giving them more flexibility to identify multiracially, as Asian, or as some other racial option. Second, Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants' encounters with racism tended to reinforce mixed-race identity, whereas Asian/White participants' racist interactions were more likely to strengthen Asian identification. Third, Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants' family members were more likely to engage in conversation to support mixed-race identification. However, Asian/White participants frequently faced derogatory comments and othering behavior from White family members, which tended to increase self-perceptions of being racially Asian. Fourth, Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants tended to have less cultural knowledge of their Asian heritages, yet this generally did not prevent them from asserting hybrid Asian identities. On the other hand, Asian/White participants felt cultural knowledge was necessary to assert an Asian identity, and they generally had the option of gaining cultural membership.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the University of Kansas Department of Sociology, where I am grateful to have found a beautiful home. I would especially like to thank Professor Kelly Chong, who is a generous, thoughtful, funny, creative, and incredibly kind mentor. Her work on Asian mixed-race identities and interracial families directly inspires my research. I am grateful for the countless hours she has poured into this project, from helping me dream it up to strategizing data collection and analysis to reviewing drafts. She has been my tireless champion. Thank you. I would also like to thank Professor Fithawee Tzeggai, whose excellent seminar on race challenged us students to look for ways in which race is continually reconstructed through negotiations happening at the macro- and the micro-levels of society. Thank you. I would like to thank Professor Brian Donovan, too, whose advice about how to approach work and writing has helped me sit in front of a blank document and start writing, time and time again. Thank you. Thank you all for serving as my committee members.

Next, I would like to thank those who taught my graduate courses: Professors Bob Antonio, ChangHwan Kim, Tracey LaPierre, Joane Nagel, Ebenezer Obadare, and Lisa-Marie Wright, along with the professors on my committee. Thank you for the care you each put into your teaching. Additional thanks go to Professor Kim and the Graduate Studies Committee for a fellowship I received in my first year which allowed more time to develop this project. Thank you for this, as well as for additional funding in the summer of 2022 which supported data collection and analysis. Also, thank you to Corinne Butler for all the work she does to support the department, and especially the graduate students.

To everyone who participated in this study: thank you. It was an honor to hear your stories. I wish there had been room here to share more of them. Further gratitude goes to Diane

Beal and Tehani El-Ghussein, Mercedes Bounthapanya, Diane Burkholder, Steve Cerulli, Mrs. Wendy Cran-Carty, Selma Hedlund, Kris Johnson, Laura Muneton, Heeyoun Shin, Nancy Woods, and Yurong Zhang for their vital help at various stages of this work. Also, thank you to the Sister Scribes; I am grateful for the chance to sit in community with you. Thank you to those who provided feedback on a version of this paper which I presented at the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society. I particularly appreciate the two individuals who had also attended the presentation I gave at the 2022 Annual Meeting – your continued support and kindness is deeply moving.

Finally, I would like to thank my given and chosen family, most especially: my parents, Deanna Snyder and Chitra Poudel; Austin; Tomni; Hajuraama and Hajurbuwa; Gramma and Grampa; Robin, Luke, and Arun; Janaki; Nene and Christy; Poppy and Darcy; Neida; and Liz. I love you with my whole heart. Thank you for everything. Last but not least, I thank my fellow sociological apprentices: Damilola Adepeju-Fashina, Lars McColl, Qixin Pan, and Rafael Pinto Martinez. I am so lucky to be counted among you. Wow.

Dedicated to Ida Snyder and Uma Poudyal.

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Introduction

The share of Americans who are Asian/Asian American or mixed-race has increased dramatically since the mid-20th century. Whereas in 1970 they totaled less than one percent, Asian Americans now comprise 7 percent of the United States' population and continue to be one of the nation's fastest-growing racial groups (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Fourteen percent of all Asian Americans are mixed-race: about 248,000 are mixed Asian/Black and about 1.24 million are mixed Asian/White (Horowitz & Budiman, 2020).[1] At the same time, the portion of mixed-race Americans claiming a multiracial identity has grown from less than 1 percent in 1970 to 7 percent in 2015 (Pew, 2015).[2] Yet, the majority of Americans (about 6 in 10) who have parents of different races do not consider themselves to be multiracial. Instead, they identify monoracially by choosing one of their parent's races.

Interestingly, those with Asian and White parents are more likely than other mixed-race demographics to claim a multiracial identity as opposed to identifying with only one of their parent's races. According to a 2015 Pew report, 70 percent of Asian/White individuals see themselves as mixed-race.[3] As the Asian Americans and multiracial demographics grow, the study of mixed Asian identities is increasingly relevant to understanding the racial landscape. Therefore, this study asks two questions: What factors influence mixed-race Asian Americans'

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[1] Statistics about the population share comprised of Asian/Brown Americans were unavailable.
[2] "Multiracial" is a United States census category for people who identify with two or more races. The opposite of multiracial is "monoracial", a term which describes individuals who claim a single racial identity. Throughout this paper, I only use the term multiracial to refer to those mixed-race individuals who formally identify as such. The majority of mixed-race individuals identify monoracially, as this 2015 Pew Research study points out.
[3] Statistics about those with Asian/Black and Asian/Brown heritage are difficult to find, so it is unclear how likely these individuals are to see themselves as mixed versus monoracial.

assertion of racial identities? When comparing Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White individuals, what different strategies and challenges emerge?

Studies on mixed-race Asian identities constitute a small but growing subfield within critical mixed-race studies. The majority of this work relies on Asian/White mixed participants. There are fewer studies which discuss in-depth the experiences of mixed individuals who have an Asian/Asian American parent and another Brown or Black parent. Moreover, when investigating the factors shaping identity development, existing studies tend to focus on ascribed identity or the impact of factors external to the individual, and less on how Asian mixed-race individuals exercise agency to construct an identity, especially in light of growing-up experiences. Perhaps most significantly, there are few studies that seek to discover points of comparison which may exist among Asian mixed-race individuals with different racial backgrounds. In this study, I address these underexplored areas by considering how Asian mixed-race participants of varying racial mixes negotiate identity development and exercise agency in constructing their identities. I also contribute to the critical mixed-race literature by conducting explicit comparisons between mixed-race Asian Americans of multiple backgrounds: Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White. Through analysis of semi-structured interviews with 34 Asian mixed-race participants, four key findings emerged.

First, in my sample of Asian/Black participants, the ability to assert the racial identity they felt that they most affiliated with tended to be constrained by ascriptive identity. These participants were often assumed to be Black alone based on perceived physical characteristics, particularly skin tone. Asian/Black participants did not attempt to influence their ascriptive identity by adjusting their appearance; however, Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants alike would use strategies to manipulate their ascriptive identities. Some Asian/White participants, and

some Asian/Brown participants but with less success, had altered their appearance to reflect their chosen racial identities at various points in their lives. Thus, appearance tended to most restrict Asian/Black participants' agency in constructing their own racial identities. Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants generally were less restricted by their appearance.

Second, with regard to the experiences of racism, my study finds that Asian/BIPOC participants tended to interpret their encounters with racist or othering treatment in ways that reinforced their mixed-race identities, while racist encounters tended to emphasize Asian/White participants' Asian identities.

Third, the families of Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants in this study broadly handled racism in different ways, and these differences bore diverging impacts on the participants' racial identities. Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants' family members were more likely to affirm that they were mixed-race and to counter discriminatory messages participants had encountered in wider society. In contrast, Asian/White participants more frequently received discriminatory or othering behavior from their family members, particularly those who were White, and these interactions often emphasized their affiliation with being Asian American as opposed to being mixed.

Fourth, demonstrating familiarity with the Asian heritage was central in Asian/White participants' process of claiming an Asian or multiracial identity, but Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants did not feel a similar need to prove their cultural attachment before describing themselves as Asian or multiracial. Asian/White participants overwhelmingly felt that having cultural knowledge was necessary in order to shore up claims to being racially Asian. This is largely because their claims of ethnic membership are sometimes policed by Asian American communities for those attempting to claim membership, and so having demonstrable

knowledge helps protect against ethnic or racial rejection. Yet, Asian/White individuals' ability to pursue cultural knowledge in pursuit of cultural membership represents a major contrast to Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants. For Asian/BIPOC participants, demonstrating cultural knowledge may not be enough to overcome significant colorism and anti-Black prejudice they encounter within Asian American communities; therefore, the pursuit of such knowledge may not help them gain recognition as Asian or multiracial. Thus, a sense of distance or even rejection from Asian community, and a lack of ethnic knowledge, generally did not impede Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants in my sample from considering themselves to be racially Asian.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Macro- and Micro- Approaches to Racial Categorization

W. E. B. DuBois wrote in his 1903 The Souls of Black Folk that the divide between Black and White, or between those with dark skin and those with light skin, was the color line that defined America. Though DuBois did not use this language, his argument was constructivist in nature (Morris, 2015). He argued that structural oppression and violence against Black Americans, beginning with slavery and continuing after its formal abolition, reified race and placed great importance on ascribed categories of Black and White. Omi & Winant (1994) follow in this DuBoisian tradition. For them, the genocide of Native peoples and enslavement of Africans during European colonialism constituted the first "racial project", the dominant group or the state's efforts at "defining race and attempting to organize and distribute resources based on the defined racial categories (125)." Genocide and enslavement resulted in a racial structure founded on the categories of Indigenous versus settler, and Black versus White.

Racial projects organize society at both the macro and the micro level. Broadly, they give meaning to stratified categories of race by attaching these categories to particular allotments of resources and prestige. At the same time, racial projects work to connect everyday folk understandings of race to those official definitions outlined by institutions such as the state. For Omi and Winant, the colonial project formed the basis for subsequent racial projects, resulting in an enduring racial structure that subordinates Indigenous peoples in favor of settlers, and Black people in favor of White people. As time went on, Asian and Latine Americans joined the same side of the color line as Indigenous and Black Americans (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 131).

Like Omi and Winant, Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues that race results from the colonial encounter. While Omi and Winant study race from the perspective of boundary struggles and a

dialectic between micro- and macro-level interactions, Bonilla-Silva emphasizes the coercive power social institutions at play in forcing racial identities onto people. In his view, individuals become aware of their ascribed race due to racialization by institutions, and the resulting awareness of their ascribed racial identity shapes behavior and ideology. Bonilla-Silva leaves little room for individuals to assert their own identities, but for Omi and Winant, racial structure continues to evolve because there is room for individuals at the micro or macro level to exercise agency and use racial projects to make change.

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, key race scholars, Bonilla-Silva being one, began arguing that the United States is moving away from the color line and toward a system based on skin pigment, similar to what exists in many Latin American countries. Bonilla-Silva (2004) did landmark work in this area and described a new tri-racial system consisting of a "collective Black" category at the bottom, an intermediary "honorary White" category, and then an exclusive White group at the top of the hierarchy. His "honorary White" category is expansive. It conceives of ethnic groups' intersectional identities, including typical appearance of skin tone, average household income, educational attainment, and purported cultural loyalties. Bonilla-Silva contends that those in the "honorary White" group benefit from some forms of White or majority privilege, and they are incentivized to "whiten" themselves in order to gain closer proximity to the top racial group. Lee and Bean (2007) make a similar argument.

Locating Asian Americans within this tri-racial structure is a complex task. Bonilla-Silva argues that Asian Americans should not be considered a single racial group that belongs in the "honorary White" category. In his perspective, the Asian racial category is too heterogenous and lacks a strong sense of group consciousness. Bonilla-Silva therefore suggests the Asian category should be disaggregated according to economic and cultural factors. He includes Southeast

Asians with the “collective Black” due largely to their lower socioeconomic status, and he groups East and South Asians in with the “honorary Whites” due to higher socioeconomic status. However, he claims that East and South Asians can attempt to whiten themselves through high rates of out-marriage, and he cites as additional evidence Waters’ (1999) finding that about 44 percent of the children from such Asian/White partnerships can “pass” for White (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 940). Bonilla-Silva further concludes that overall Asian Americans’ socioeconomic status is closer to that of Whites than the collective Black. However, he does hold that Asian Americans continue to be racialized as forever foreigners.

Many scholars who study Asian Americans push back on Bonilla-Silva's disaggregation argument and his placement of some Asian American groups in the honorary White category. In particular, a number of scholars complicate or dispute the notion that Asian Americans are economically privileged to a similar extent as are White Americans. They point out that Asian Americans’ financial privilege relative to other BIPOC groups often rely on data using median household income. Asian Americans’ relatively high median household income obscures confounding factors, such as their tendency to live in coastal areas where wages are high, and it does not account for their high rate of poverty relative to White Americans (Kibria, 2002, p. 11). Large-sample studies have found Asian Americans face significant discrimination in the labor force, including wage disparities, diminished returns on education, and long periods of unemployment while actively job seeking (Austin, 2012; Kim & Sakamoto, 2010; Kim & Zhao, 2014). Other studies provide empirical evidence that though the Asian American category is expansive and diverse, East, Southeast, and South Asians more often than not identify with the Asian racial category and have a sense of shared fate (Junn & Masuoka, 2008; Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020).

Micro approaches to studying racial stratification examine how identity results from complex daily negotiations which are influenced by individuals' appearances and lived experiences. These studies increasingly use the language of colorism (discrimination associated with one's skin pigmentation) and featurism (discrimination associated with facial features) to describe how experience of identity varies widely within racial groups. Racial identity can further vary based on formative life events, particularly childhood experiences and memories, and how people are able to negotiate their given situational contexts through the daily exercise of agency (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2001). Indeed, this individual-level approach to identity demonstrates that it is important to pay attention the issues of agency in identity formation.[4] For example, people may use a different identity when filling out official paperwork versus when talking with friends; or, they may engage in a type of code-switching whereby they adjust their racial performance depending on the racial identities of the people they are talking to. These examples demonstrate differences between master category definitions and everyday folk use of race (Hordge-Freeman, 2015; Loveman, 1999; Wimmer, 2008).

Scholars within this paradigm, however, debate the degree to which individuals are conscious of choosing an identity and the extent to which their options are constrained by social

[4] There are myriad ways to delineate structure and agency. In this study, I borrow from Sewell's (1992) definitions. Structure can be understood as both resources and cultural schemas, or shared patterns of meaning-making. Agency, meanwhile, refers to "the ability to act creatively" by using one's knowledge of structure and deploying strategies to assert oneself (Sewell, 1992: 20). Therefore, participants' exercise of agency is situated within the larger racial structures of the United States. In seeking to understand how participants exercise agency, I am specifically looking at their ability to self-identify their own race, given existing resources and cultural schemas about racial identities. I am not looking for a particular identity to signify the successful deployment of agentic strategies; a participant could use their agency to assert various identities including but not limited to Afro-Asian, Asian, Blasian, Brasian, mixed, multiracial, or White. If a participant faces an obstacle in asserting the identity they feel most affiliated with, then I consider that obstacle a constraint on their agency.

factors. There are some scholars who argue that individuals exercise little agency and do not choose an identity so much as arrive at one through everyday confrontations between their self-image and the assumptions of others (Brubaker, Loveman & Stamatov, 2004; Monk, 2022). Other scholars argue that individuals have more agency and are able to organize themselves around racial categories in order to further political interests such as gaining citizenship rights or increasing access to resources (Lee, 2008; Omi & Winant, 2014; Roediger, 2005; Weber 1968; Wimmer, 2008). Still others take a middle ground, suggesting individuals' agency works through developing identity preferences for themselves which are based on cultural representations and their understandings of racial options (Collins, 2000; Roth, 2012).

The History and Significance of the "Asian American" Racial Category

Until the 1970s, people of Asian descent only comprised one percent of the American population (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). The federal census began separately counting Asian Americans in 1870 by adding a "Chinese" category. Over the following century, the census continued to add ethnic choices for Asian Americans, who eventually could choose between "Chinese", "Japanese", "Hindu", "Korean", "Filipino", and "Other" (Nobles, 2000, p. 189). These disparate categories were necessary because Asian Americans did not see themselves as members of a panethnic group. Instead, they often self-identified based on national, or even regional origin (Espiritu, 1992). Nevertheless, Asian immigrant communities were racialized through violence, including lynchings and race massacres (Gonzales-Day, 2006; Holden-Smith, 1996). Asian Americans also faced political exclusion and were denied citizenship until 1952, despite ongoing advocacy and litigation by Asian American individuals (PBS, 2020, May 11).

Prior to the 1960s, immigrant communities from various Asian countries remained largely separate due to histories of conflict between their countries of origin and the lack of a common language (Espiritu, 1992). A variety of factors converged in the late 1960s to construct a panethnic "Asian American" master category. Pivotally, demographics shifted as the American-born children of the 1940s cohort of Asian immigrants came of age and found community with each other. To these second-generation Americans, the history of geopolitical struggles between Asian countries seemed less relevant than their shared experience of being racialized in the United States (Espiritu, 1992). Then, uniting under the banner of Yellow Power, second-generation Asian activists organized across ethnic lines and began calling themselves Asian Americans (Espiritu, 1992). Their activism and interethnic unity were inspired domestically by the Black American Civil Rights Movement (Uyematsu, 1971) and internationally by several Asian countries' rejections of imperialist regimes (Wong, 1971). Some Asian American activists also sought to create an Asian alliance after facing discrimination in the course of their involvement with other social movements of the 1960s (Espiritu, 1992). To echo a distinction made by Tianna Paschel (2016) regarding activism in another context, second-generation Asian American student activists who had adverse experiences organizing while Asian saw the need to organize as Asian. In addition to Yellow Power, the establishment of Asian American studies programs at universities popularized the term Asian American, especially among middle-class and American-born people of Asian descent (Espiritu, 1992).

However, there has been uneven adoption of, and ethnic stratification within, the Asian American category. This is true of all racial groups, as Omi and Winant (2014, p. 131) wrote: "Panethnicity is a type of racialization; it is not without internal tension and conflict; it is often uneven and incomplete; it often does not liquidate ethnic difference but subsumes it." Non-urban

dwelling people of Asian descent, and the immigrant generation, tended to be particularly ambivalent or opposed to the panethnic identity (Chan, 1991). The opening up of Asian immigration in 1965 introduced additional demographic changes. Prior to 1965, about ninety percent of Asian Americans had Chinese, Filipino, or Japanese ancestry; but the new wave of immigrants originated from East, South, and Southeast Asia—namely Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Laos, Pakistan, Taiwan, and Vietnam (Espiritu, 1992, p. 95; Mishra, 2013).

This new diversity created some definitional struggles for the still burgeoning panethnicity. Due to their darker skin tones, some Filipino, Indian, and Pakistani immigrants felt their particular experiences of racialization were ignored by lighter-skinned Asian Americans. Furthermore, Indian and Pakistani immigrants felt internally divided due to historical conflicts between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Following 9/11, "South Asian" became a distinct subcategory of Asian American as the racialization of Islam also increased hostilities toward brown-skinned individuals (Mishra, 2013). This is one example of how Asian American identity in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century has experienced increased pluralization, though the panethnic master category remains relevant.

Sociohistorical and Cultural Foundations of Mixed-Race Identities

Just as with monoracial Americans, mixed-race individuals' assertions of racial identity are to a large extent constrained by racial categories' distinct histories and the official membership criteria outlined by large-scale social institutions such as the state. For example, mixed-race Americans with Black ancestry contend with the legacy of the one-drop rule (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). In contrast, those with Native ancestries may have to navigate blood quantums and highly regulated tribal membership requirements (Wolfe, 2006). While

there is legal precedent which insists that anyone with a single Black ancestor may be considered Black, individuals must prove they have multiple and recent Native ancestors to legally claim their Native identity. The rules are less clear for other forms of mixed descent. For census purposes, these other mixed people throughout the twentieth century were officially assigned either their father's race, in the case that both parents were people of color, or their non-White parent's race (Nobles, 2000).

Not all types of mixedness are equally fluid, as is clear when comparing historical attitudes toward Black/White racial mixing with those toward Asian/White racial mixing. There are important similarities between the two, as the regulation of Black/White interracial relationships created a template for the treatment of Asian and White Americans' intermarriage (DaCosta, 2007). Fourteen states across the U.S. passed anti-miscegenation laws targeting Asian Americans between the 1880s and 1920s (DaCosta, 2007). Like Black men, Chinese men were treated as a threat to White women, to the extent that politicians and popular media referred to their reproductive potential as the "Chinese problem" (Tashiro, 2016).[5] Anti-miscegenation laws were nullified by the 1967 Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia.* In the decades that followed, multiculturalism grew and the percentage of Americans identifying as mixed-race increased.

Despite some historical similarities, Black racial mixing, largely due to the legacy of the one-drop rule, is generally more rigidly defined than Asian racial mixing. Specifically, mixed-race Black Americans are thought to have fewer identity options than other mixed people and

[5] Though anti-miscegenation laws were intended to prevent the out-marriage of Asian Americans, Asian Americans continued to have interracial partnerships. The anti-miscegenation laws were most often enforced to prohibit marriage between East Asian men and White women (Pascoe, 2009).

American society tends to ascribe mixed-race people with any Black ancestry a Black identity (Daniel et. al, 2014). However, these mixed Americans' view of themselves can differ from public perception. The literature is unclear how salient hypodescent is in shaping the asserted identities of mixed individuals with Black ancestry. Khanna's (2010) qualitative study of 40 Black/White multiracials in the South found that the majority of participants felt themselves to be Black, rather than mixed or White. However, Davenport's (2016) review of over 37,000 survey respondents found the majority of the 5,330 Black/White participants felt most identified with being either mixed or as a person of color rather than as Black alone. There has never been a policy as consistent and exacting as the one-drop rule for Asian descent (Chong & Song, 2022). At times, Asian American racial mixing was highly quantified and stigmatized, such as during Japanese internment, when being even four generations removed from a Japanese ancestor could lead to removal (Tashiro, 2016, p. 10). Barring rare exceptions such as this, though, Asian mixed-race identity has not been legislated and regimented like Black mixed-race identity has.

Contemporary Factors Affecting Asian Mixed-Race Identities

In the past 30 years, a growing number of social science researchers have turned their attention onto Asian mixed-race identities. This growth in scholarship coincides a vast growth in the number of individuals describing themselves as mixed Asian and White. This share of the American population nearly doubled between 2000 and 2010 (Pew, 2015). There was an additional 56 percent increase between 2010 and 2020 (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Statistical analyses of national samples found that only 39 percent of adults who report two or more races

on the census consider themselves to be multiracial. However, the likelihood of identifying as multiracial is much higher for those who report being Asian and White (Pew, 2015).[6]

Previous sociological studies provide insight into what sociohistorical conditions and individual-level factors impact Asian mixed individuals' development of racial identity. The majority of this scholarship focuses on Asian/White individuals, though there have been a small number of studies that examine Asian/BIPOC identities. Studies on Asian/White Americans have tended to interpret these individuals as white-leaning for either one of two reasons (Alba et al., 2017; Gallagher, 2004; Lee & Bean, 2004; Strmc-Pawl, 2016; Waters, 1990; Yancey, 2003). The first argument is these individuals are structurally incentivized to assert White identities due to privileges they can receive. The second argument is that their asserted identities are irrelevant because their appearance and socioeconomic status ascribe to them White, or near-White, status.

Several additional studies from the recent decade challenge the whitening thesis with their findings that many mixed Asians strongly identify with their Asian heritage (Chong & Song, 2022; DaCosta, 2007; King-O'Riain, 2004). One study found mixed Asian/White individuals tend to feel greater attachment to their Asian heritage due to the recency of migration, and these individuals often aspire to find acceptance among their respective Asian communities (Song & Liebler, 2022). This accompanies a wave of recent literature challenging the notion that intermarriage between BIPOC and White Americans is motivated on the part of the BIPOC partner to whiten themselves (Chong, 2021; Chong & Song, 2022; Vasquez, 2014).

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[6] This 2015 Pew Research report is based on survey data from 1555 mixed-race adults. Of the 88 Asian/White individuals polled, 70% identified multiracially. Black/White mixed-race individuals were second-most likely to identify as multiracial, with 61% of the 118 polled identifying as such.

These recent studies suggest a majority of Asian/White people seek to create Asian or multiracial identities for themselves, and those who fail to do so are not motivated by a desire to whiten themselves (Chong & Song, 2022). Rather, the development of their racial identities is shaped by complex interplays of life experiences and broader cultural messages related to racism and stereotypes. Often, more localized cultural forces are also relevant, as the salience of Asian and multiracial identity varies by region (Aspinall & Song, 2013; Nishime, 2014). For example, one study suggests that Asian mixed-race individuals who live in areas with bigger Asian populations and those who live in the South may be less likely to identify as mixed, instead choosing to share one of their monoracial parents' racial identities (Davenport, 2016).

At the individual level, family experiences, cultural connections, and appearance can significantly shape mixed Asians' identity development. Asian/White individuals' identity constructions can be further shaped by other factors such as gender and personal appearance, but these factors are often mediated by cultural expectations and family upbringing. Among mixed Asian children, girls are more likely to self-identify as multiracial, while boys are more likely to identify monoracially (Brunsma, 2005; Davenport, 2016). In addition to gender, physical attributes such as skin color, eye shape, hair texture, and hair color can affect both the ascribed and self-asserted racial identities of mixed-race Asian Americans.[7] Whether their phenotypes lend themselves to recognition as Asian, mixed, or some other racial category is often a source of inner turmoil, which can cause negative emotions, and in some cases affects the extent to which mixed-race Asians feel empowered to claim a particular identity (Tashiro, 2016; Hentz, 2019).

[7] Evaluations of a mixed-race person's appearance can significantly contribute to their rejection by monoracial community members (Song & Liebler, 2022).

Considering all these factors, it is unsurprising that large-sample surveys have found a significant number of mixed-race Americans' racial identifications can change over the life course (Parker et al., 2015; Saperstein & Penner, 2012).

Clearly, some significant work has been devoted to understanding how Asian/White multiracials construct identities. Existing scholarship provides insight into the sociohistorical factors that shape these identifications; furthermore, previous studies indicate the importance of family, cultural community, and individual attributes, in addition to ascriptive identity. Further study is warranted on the way in which these factors affect how Asian mixed-race individuals feel about their own identity, and how they might exercise agency in asserting that identity. Furthermore, there are not many studies which comparatively analyze data from Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White participants.[8] Such an analysis would allow greater insight into how the same factors may impact Asian mixed-race individuals differently given their particular racial background. My study seeks to make a contribution to these two underexplored areas regarding Asian mixed-race individuals' identity: the factors and agentic strategies which shape their identity and points of comparison between Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White participants.

[8] Recent scholarship on Asian/BIPOC identities has called attention to the dominance of Asian/White perspectives in discourse on Asian multiraciality. This inequality of attention contributes to a sense of double invisibility for Asian/Black and Asian/Brown individuals, wherein their multiraciality is recognized by neither general society nor by the highly specialized critical mixed-race literature (Houston, 2017; Stickmon, Mendoza, & Spickard, 2017). Gay, Farinu & Issano Jackson (2022) use the term "white-mixed superiority" to describe the centering of Asian/White, as well as Black/White, individuals within multiracial communities and discourses.

Chapter 2: Methods

Conceptual Framework

This study uses a fluid, constructionist approach to racial and ethnic identity formation. Such an approach draws on Homi Bhabha's (1990) postcolonial theoretical paradigm, where identity forms through individuals' exercise of agency in response to external factors (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998). The concept of hybridity is also central to the framework used here. Hybridity "calls attention to the cultural contact between groups with unequal power and the ways in which hybridity or hybridized cultures that emerge out of interaction between colonial and indigenous cultures can represent an alternative, resistant space against the dominant cultural powers" (Chong, 2021, p. 15). Asserting a hybrid identity can be an act of resistance toward the assimilation or homogenization demanded by ongoing processes of globalization, colonialism, and cultural imperialism (Hall, 1997). Thus, many scholars studying identities formed out of imperial or colonial contact adopt a framework of hybridity.

For those studying Asian American perspectives, hybridity offers a way in which to explore agency while paying attention to historical, cultural, and political contexts that shape experience. "Asian" identities result from racialization as well as historic and ongoing colonization. Many leave Asia for the United States as refugees; others are "voluntary" migrants. Even those in the latter group, however, often make the choice to leave home due to economic or political instability created by American imperialism (Hsu, 2008). As such, the United States' imperial projects both domestically and in global politics affect the racial/ethnic stratification even of those who live within the country. Migrants from Asia and their descendants face various pressures to "assimilate" and abandon their heritage cultures. In response, Asian Americans have developed complex ways of negotiating resistance in the public and private spheres (Chong,

2021, p. 17). One way in which they do this is through creating hybrid identities. Some scholars call these identities a "third space" in which individual subjectivities transcend the binaries of the "Other" and the West, of fringe and core, of colonial subject and imperial power (Bhabha, 1990; Hsu, 2008).

Approaching identity through the concept of hybridity acknowledges the inconsistency of racial structure, as well as inconsistency within the quotidian language and racial logics used by individuals to locate themselves within the broader structure. As such, this framework acknowledges that Asian Americans construct identities "sometimes in similar and often in non-identical ways" (Hsu, 2008, p. 308). Hybridity attends to the resulting messiness and views identity as an ongoing process, not a static identity that is either ascribed or achieved (Raab & Butler, 2008). It can be understood as an extension of DuBois's double-consciousness, where an individual is aware of dissonance between their self-perception and the perceptions of others (Hsu, 2008). Hybridity has been useful already in the study of Asian American identity. It is also uniquely suited to examine the construction of Asian American mixed-race identities, given that such identities are a unique dimension of cross-cultural contact.

Data and Methods

Recruitment involved purposive and snowball sampling, relying most heavily on flyer advertisements, social media advertisements, and a word-of-mouth campaign. I also reached out to regional organizations for multiracial, Asian American, Black, and Afro-Asian college students and professionals. Between June 2022 and January 2023, I conducted interviews with 34 participants who considered themselves mixed Asian American. Each had one Asian or Asian American parent and one non-Asian parent. Because this project centers participants' self-

asserted identity, I chose not to restrict Asian identity to any official definition, such as one given by the U.S. census. The result was an eclectic sample with participants whose Asian heritages came from East Asian, Indonesian, Native Hawaiian, Filipino, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and West Asian parents.[9] Four participants were Asian/Black, five were Asian/Brown[10], and 25 were Asian/White.[11]

Interviews were semi-structured and took place over Zoom. They averaged 97 minutes in length, and in total there were 55 hours of interview data. Each participant chose their own pseudonym. Interview questions were organized around three themes: how participants have thought of their ethnic identity over time, their growing-up experiences of family, and their perceptions of popular culture.[12] The interviews were often but not always participant-led, and I invited participants to "theorize their own experience" (Harvey, 2015, p. 34). As in narrative research, I was interested in learning how participants themselves perceive the connection between their life experiences and ethnic identification. After each interview, I wrote brief

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[9] Following the hybridity conceptual framework, there was some inconsistency regarding categorical identification within the sample. A point of inconsistency relates to Native Hawaiian identity. One participant, Bryan, is Japanese, Filipina, and Native Hawaiian. She considers herself racially mixed because, to her, Native Hawaiian heritage is non-Asian. However, one Asian/white participant, Kelly, considers herself Asian-American due to her father being Native Hawaiian. Another inconsistency relates to "West Asian" or "Middle-Eastern" identification. Two Asian/white participants, Malik and Tom, claim Asian identity due respectively to Armenian and Turkish descent. However, a third participant, Olive, did not consider her Iranian ancestry to be Asian. In her view, her Iranian father is brown, and her Japanese mother is Asian. Thus, Olive sees herself as Asian/Brown. This points to another major ambiguity, which is the Asian/Brown classification. If a participant considered both parents to be BIPOC but neither was Black, then that participant was categorized in the Asian/Brown category. In all instances including the examples given here, I grouped participants according to their self-asserted identities. See Appendix A for a full participant summary.

[10] Following participants' lead, I use Brown to refer to those with Latine, Native, or Middle-Eastern heritage.

[11] Five participants were self-described "quarter-Asians" who each had a biracial Asian/White parent and a White parent.

[12] See Appendix B for the semi-structured interview guide.

memos about my initial impressions of the conversation and moments that seemed particularly revelatory. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai software.

Given the hybridity framework and the constructivist paradigm of this project, reflexivity was a crucial element. Like many who study the topic of Asian mixed-ness, I am a mixed Asian/White. I borrowed from Minelle Mahtani's (2014) reflexive approach, in which the researcher creates a dialogic interview space by offering a degree of transparency and disclosure during the interview. For example, when participants implied a shared experience, the researcher should acknowledge the shared aspects of their positionality before encouraging the participant to share how they interpreted the experience. I also drew reflexive interviewing strategies from other scholarship on ethnic membership and the practice of researching one's own communities. Regarding interview strategy, an important early lesson came from Tariq Modood, who wrote that group identity is similar to family identity: it varies greatly in importance and meaning for every affiliated member (2014, p. 110). In interviews, when I noticed participants seemed to have less to say about race, I would ask about other identities that may have been more important to them. In doing so, the participant would then reflect on ways in which their race shaped the experience of another identity, such as being a woman or a member of their high school marching band.

Beyond interviewing strategies, the main reflexive tool I used was memo writing. I wrote reflexive memos throughout the data collection and analysis process in order to consider personal, interpersonal, methodological, and contextual reflexivity (see Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). This was useful to examine my assumptions and note potential findings. Before starting work on this project, I anticipated that participants would share a variety of perspectives that would all vary widely. However, I expected that each of them would have thought deeply and

critically about their racial identities. While this was true of many participants, there were a handful who said they had not thought much about their race. I also anticipated that most of them would have found a stable racial identity, but participants often described instability.

For data analysis, I adapted an open-axial-selective coding model commonly used in grounded theory work (see William & Moser, 2019). While grounded theory traditionally begins with an open coding round, I started with semi-open coding. I looked for themes related to: comparisons between Asian and non-Asian family members; participants' sense of authentic cultural belonging; experiences of belonging versus experiences of being othered; and the emergence of ethnic identification. Other than these pre-selected themes, I worked inductively to find what themes the data could reveal. After the initial round, I conducted axial coding to consider how themes related to each other and grouped them into codes. The organizational logic was to connect "causes" and "effects." Thus, I grouped together experiences that shaped identity into codes relating to family, racial or ethnic community connections, racism, popular culture, and personal appearance. Then, I created a code for identity, with subthemes for each of the "causal" codes. Lastly, I did limited selective coding, where I returned to the transcripts and looked further for quotations that related to the final codes. During this phase, I also carried out the comparative analysis between Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants. All coding was done using MAXQDA software.

Limitations

Given the size and non-representative composition of my sample, the findings of this study are not meant to be generalized beyond the participants involved. Notably, there are only four Asian/Black and five Asian/Brown participants. Even among these small groups, there was

significant diversity of experience. These differences were in part related to other demographic variables such as their varying social class backgrounds, whether their non-Asian parent was an immigrant, and the geographic region in which they grew up. Nevertheless, some common themes emerged in the stories Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants shared. Still, I did not reach a saturation point with these interviews. My findings represent significant patterns which are necessarily limited to my participant pool and contribute some preliminary findings, which would benefit from further study. I welcome others to continue in this line of inquiry.

Chapter 3: Findings and Discussion

In describing their racial identity, most participants, Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White alike, spoke of an ongoing negotiation rather than a static label. Within these negotiations, four major themes emerged when comparatively analyzing the factors that shaped identity construction for Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants. First, Asian/Black participants were consistently seen as Black alone, which limited their ability to assert multiracial or Asian identities. In comparison, Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants' appearances were interpreted in a myriad of ways, and this often gave them the flexibility to assert a preferred identity. Second, Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants had differing experiences of racism, which affected how they thought about their race. Third, regarding racism, Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants also had different experiences within their family. Asian/BIPOC participants were more likely to receive supportive and anti-racist messages from family members. Meanwhile, Asian/White participants' family members were more likely to act in racist or racializing ways toward the participant. Fourth, Asian/BIPOC participants were much less likely than Asian/White participants to see their Asian racial identity as dependent upon cultural learning or acceptance from a broader ethnic community. I suggest this difference is due to the exclusion of Asian/BIPOC individuals within Asian American communities versus the admission but policing of Asian/White individuals into the same communities.

The Impact of Perceived Appearance on Asserted Identity

The interplay of agency and structure can be seen in the relationship between mixed-race individuals' identity and appearance. A 2015 Pew study found that appearance was a leading cause for mixed Americans to not consider themselves to be multiracial (Parker et al., 2015).

This study concluded that when a mixed person was often perceived to be monoracial due to their physical characteristics, the individual was likely to take on that identification. Several sociological studies provide further insight to this trend and suggest that Asian mixed individuals often consider how others perceive their appearance in negotiating a racial identity. Specifically, skin tone, eye shape, and hair presentation can affect both the ascribed and self-asserted racial identities of mixed-race Asian American (Song & Liebler, 2022). Studies of Asian/Black (Castillo et al., 2020) and Asian/White Americans (Khanna, 2004), found the same trend that the 2015 Pew survey found among multiracial Americans. Generally, others' perception of their appearance was one of the most influential factors that shaped participants' racial identifications. The extent to which they feel others see them as Asian, multiracial, or some other race can preoccupy and sometimes determine mixed Asian Americans' identity assertions (Tashiro, 2016). Thus, previous studies have found that appearance and the resulting ascriptive identities can be highly influential in shaping mixed-race Asian Americans' internal sense of their racial identity.

A few studies suggest that the relationship between appearance and racial identity can also work in the reverse: some mixed people adjust their appearance to bring their ascriptive identity in line with their own asserted identity. Pew found that 21 percent of mixed-race Americans have tried to adjust their appearance or behavior in an attempt to be seen as a member of a particular race (Parker et al., 2015). This includes about 25 percent of Asian/White Americans.[13] In their measures, Pew included hair styling, clothing, speech patterns, and choice

[13] No statistics were available for Asian/BIPOC Americans.

of friends. Furthermore, interviewing a sample of 10 Asian/Black participants, Castillo et al. (2020) similarly found many participants would also alter aspects such as their hairstyle and music preferences to meet often stereotypical expectations of Black or Asian identifiers. While these efforts largely did not gain them acceptance into the racial community they desired, they still helped the Asian/Black participants feel able to claim their preferred identity. Therefore, while appearance has often been discussed as a factor which limits a person's agency to choose a racial identity, sometimes stylistic presentation is actually a powerful tool by which a person can flex their agency.

There is some indication that for mixed individuals with a Black parent, the legacy of hypodescent may constrain them from being able to assert any identity other than being Black American. Khanna's 2010 study of 40 Black/White participants found that the majority of participants identified as Black rather than mixed-race. Even those who were very light-skinned or who otherwise presented as racially ambiguous felt that both Black and White Americans saw them as Black, though Black Americans were much more likely to acknowledge their mixed-race background and White Americans tended to think in monoracial terms. This suggests mixed-race Black Americans may be more constrained, and may be afforded less agentic leeway, in attempting to influence others racial perceptions through altering their appearance.

In my study, a clear point of comparison emerged between Asian/Black participants versus Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants. Having a greater leeway in how their appearances were perceived by others, Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants on the other hand engaged in a variety of strategies to manipulate others' perceptions of their race. And, compared to Asian/Black participants, Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants' racialization tended to stem more from perceptions of their skin tone as well as their facial features.

Asian/Black participants tended to be seen consistently as Black alone, and they were more often racialized on the basis of their skin tone. Additionally, they generally did not attempt to influence their ascriptive identity by altering their appearance.

Asian/Brown and Asian/White Participants

Whereas Asian/Black participants were for the most part assumed to be Black American, Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants had more variety in ascriptive racial identities. For all but three of the 30 Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants, questions about their racial background were an accepted part of everyday life. Usually taking some form of "What are you?" or "What is your nationality?", these questions come from friends, acquaintances, and strangers alike. While the specific impact of these questions differed by participant, overall, these questions tended to reinforce to them the ambiguity of their appearance and the flexibility it afforded them to assert their identity. Vivian, 20,[14] describes the range of racial identities she commonly receives, and her experience was typical of other Asian/Brown participants:

> I mean sometimes it depends on who I'm around, I guess. Like some of my friends who are just straight up Mexican, I looked to them more Mexican. Some people think I look straight up Asian. Like it's kind of anyone was kind of vaguely Brown.

Similarly, Peter, 29, [15] described the range of identities commonly received by Asian/White participants:

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[14] Vivian's father is Lao, and her mother is mixed Potawatomi and Mexican American. Vivian grew up in Kansas.
[15] Peter's father is Chinese, and his mother is White. Peter grew up in California.

> I look so ethnically ambiguous I could be anything, right? You know, I look Filipino, Mexican, Chinese. I can look Greek, depending on how long my hair is.

Peter noted his ascriptive identity would sometimes change based on cosmetic changes such as hair length, and Vivian noted that others' racialized interpretations of her racial identity would change based on their own race. Both Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants noticed that slight variations in the social setting or in their personal presentation could change how others tended to perceive them. One Asian/White participant, Bosch, 25,[16] summarized the common sentiment:

> Really, it's a complete crapshoot, in my experience. I've had people tell me they're surprised that I'm Asian at all. And I've had people that have been very insistent that I'm Hispanic, Filipino, Middle Eastern, Italian, whatever. They just put whatever they want on me.

Among Asian/White and Asian/Brown participants, frequent ascriptive identities were related to Brown racial and ethnic groups, or sometimes White ethnic groups. Because they were aware of the flexibility afforded to them by their appearance, some Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants engaged in a variety of strategies with the goal of influencing how others perceived their race. Participants had varying levels of success, and the ability to shape their ascriptive identities was most constrained for those whose skin tone or facial features were less ambiguous.

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[16] Bosch has a Filipina mother and a White father. He grew up in Virginia.

An example of the flexibility typical of Asian/White participants comes from Tei, 20, who had a relatively high degree of success in adjusting her appearance to reflect her inner sense of racial identity.[17] Tei attended a private Christian school that was predominantly White. The lack of racial diversity heightened differences her White peers perceived about her appearance, which has ultimately led her to identify as a mixed Asian. However, earlier in her childhood, she would attempt to convince herself and others that she looked White. Then, as she grew to embrace her Vietnamese heritage, she adjusted how she presented herself to highlight her Asian mixed identity. She did this through her choice of clothing and hairstyle, as well is through the creation of self-portraits:

> I guess that's another thing is just like styling myself based off, throughout the years, to try and look more like what I identified more with. Like when I was younger, trying to look more White. And then when I was in middle school trying to look more Asian. ...I used to draw a lot when I was younger. ...you can see like, how I chose to depict myself and how, when I was younger, how I would make my eyes a lot rounder. And then when I was in middle school, I made them a lot darker, more like what they actually look like, which is fairly dark brown. In elementary school I'd be like, "They're blue!" But yeah, they're brown.

While these attempts were not always successful, and Tei never reached a point where she was consistently ascribed the White or the Asian racial identity she attempted to assert, these efforts demonstrate a high degree of agentic power.

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[17] Tei has a Vietnamese mother and White father. She grew up in Texas.

Another Asian/White participant, Hope, 30, attempted to influence her ascriptive identity by using makeup or styling her hair in particular ways so as to give the appearance of having a different eye shape.[18] Despite these attempts, she was still *"made fun of...for having slanted eyes."* Hope felt that though her skin tone and other features were racially ambiguous, her eye shape meant she was consistently racialized as Asian alone. Because she knowns other see her as Asian, she has come to see herself primarily as Asian American, rather than mixed or White. Her case supports an earlier study which found that eye shape is one of three key physical attributes which contribute to racialization of mixed Asian Americans (Song & Liebler, 2022).

One Asian/White participant, 22-year-old Elijah, chose to assert a White identity as a way to acknowledge systemic privilege. Elijah describes himself as a "quarter Asian": his father is mixed Chinese and White American, and his mother is White.[19] Unless others know his last name, which is common among Chinese Americans, his ascriptive identity is often White due to his skin tone and facial features. Though he has occasionally been asked, "What are you?", he does not get the question too often. Elijah is aware that he has systemic privileges due to colorism and featurism, so he therefore racially identifies as White. Yet, internally, he resists thinking of himself as White alone:

> I think you know, generally people perceive me as White, so maybe the whole assimilation thing worked in a sense. I just wonder about basically the question of, "Am I Asian enough?" I guess I think I'm Asian enough to have to grapple with that question.

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[18] Hope, the daughter of an Indonesian mother and White father, grew up in Connecticut.
[19] Elijah grew up in Oregon.

On the one hand, Elijah does not wish to deny systemic privileges he benefits from due to being perceived as White. On the other hand, he worries that accepting the label of White would also mean accepting himself as the final product of assimilation. Thus, awareness of his racialized-White appearance is weighed against questions of social justice and equity. Elijah's ability to weigh these options indicates he has a much greater degree of agency relative to participants with darker skin or features seen as more typically Asian.

Darker complected Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants still had some flexibility in how other perceived their appearance, so they had room to exercise some agency in choosing a racial identity they most related to. One of these Asian/Brown participants, 24-year-old Olive, experiences greater ambiguity due to her lighter medium-toned skin, but she has thought of herself as Brown and multiracial for much of her life.[20] Because both her parents' skin tones are shades of brown, she is surprised when others assume that she is White or that she would choose to whiten herself:

> A White coworker told me that I was "White passing" and I was really taken aback by it. ...I don't feel like my family would be perceived as White ever. ...The census would say like, I'm half White. But I don't feel like I am. Yeah, so being called White passing that one time, I was like, "Interesting." Like, I was like almost a little bit like offended by it.

The notion of "passing" refers to a historical strategy available to light skinned BIPOC Americans who would sometimes present themselves as White in order to gain legal and social rights from which various BIPOC groups would otherwise be excluded. In this instance, though,

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[20] Olive's mother is Japanese and her father is Iranian. She grew up in California.

Olive does not invoke passing as a strategy of avoiding oppression; she interprets someone's assertion that she "passes" to mean that individual assumed she does not face colorism, a suggestion that she strongly rejected.

Olive is not consistently racialized as Brown; her skin tone is light enough that sometimes others see her as mixed-race or White. Olive could capitalize on this ambiguity and whiten herself if she wanted to; yet she consistently asserts a Brown racial identity. This is because she interprets her own appearance within the context of her family. Her parents and siblings have brown skin, on the basis of which they have been targeted by racism and Islamaphobia, especially her father. As in Hentz's (2019) study that included Asian/BIPOC participants, Olive's sense of her own identity was not shaken by learning that others' perception of her misaligned with her own. In fact, her sense of her race was not even deterred by state-defined racial classifications that grouped Iranian Americans in with the White racial category. Olive's experience highlights the disconnect that can arise between census categories and everyday understandings of race, as well as the daily disagreements individuals can have over racial definitions. Her case also demonstrates that, even when their appearance gives them some room to whiten themselves, mixed-race Asian Americans can feel strongly opposed to asserting a White identity.

Another example of this comes from an Asian/White participant, Lily, 19, who was encouraged by her Sri Lankan mother to make efforts to whiten her appearance.[21] Lily did not

[21] Lily's mother is Sri Lankan and her father is White. She grew up in Kansas.

think much about her racial identity for much of childhood. However, she remembers feeling conspicuous and noticing that she would be treated differently from her White classmates. She felt this was due to her having medium-brown skin. She was often the darkest-skinned person, or only person of color, in class. When topics such as slavery, colonialism, or imperialism were discussed, Lily's classmates would glance her way. During these moments, Lily was not racialized simply as mixed, Asian, Sri Lankan, or Brown. She was treated as a representative of all marginalized people of color. The visible contrast of her skin tone versus those of her White peers, and the behavior of her peers to reinforce that sense of difference, reinforced to Lily that she was seen as Brown.

When Lily expressed to her mother that she felt othered as a result of these experiences, her mother tended to dismiss these feelings and encouraged her to find ways to fit in. Lily recently asked her mom why she would respond in this way. She explains her mother's answer:

> When she moved here, she didn't want to face as much racism. And she just kind of, like, repressed her culture, and she didn't want us to have those issues. And so she was not pretending that she was White, but like, behaving a certain way so that people would—I guess she thought people would respect her more if she talked a certain way, or dressed a certain way.

Lily's mother hoped altering her appearance by methods such as abandoning ethnic dress would prevent racist attention, and she hoped the same could be true for Lily.[22] However, these changes

[22] Lily's mother did encourage cultural connection through cooking, as did Lily's father. The family often ate Sri Lankan dishes at home. Though Lily felt appearance and behavior in public were meant to minimize racialization or ethnic labelling, these same concerns did not necessarily carry over into private family life.

could not alter their skin tone, and they continued to be racialized on that basis. Still, it is notable that they had the option to whiten themselves through altering their clothing and manner of speech, demonstrating some room for them to potentially influence how others see them. In this way, Lily's case suggests she has greater leeway than Asian/Black participants had when it comes to shaping ascriptive identity based on appearance.

Her experiences of racialization made Lily feel alienated from White peers, and she now thinks of herself primarily as Brown or Sri Lankan.[23] Lily has a sister who is seven years younger than her, and Lily has made efforts to discuss skin tone and impart racial consciousness in order to help her sister navigate the ascriptive Brown identity. She describes one instance, where she bought a Brown Barbie for her sister:

> I got one for my sister, even though she's 12 and doesn't play with Barbies anymore, just because I would have killed for a Brown Barbie. ...it makes you feel like you can never be a princess. ...when, you know, you have Cinderella and Snow White and Sleeping Beauty and you don't have anybody that looks like you.

In Lily's case, it was not cultural attachment that drove identification with the Asian heritage as opposed to mixed or White identification. Rather, it was the experience of being seen as Brown, and as some unspecified person of color, that largely reinforced Asian identification.

For Lily, her appearance left little room for her to choose whether she wanted to be Brown or Asian; the lack of ambiguity constrained her options. Yet, unlike Asian/Black

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[23] For Lily, there is some slight hesitation about this claim, since she does not have a high degree of cultural knowledge about Sri Lanka, but the racialization she has faced due to her skin tone makes her feel a greater affinity for her Asian heritage.

participants, Lily and other Asian/White and Asian/Brown participants felt some degree of power to influence their racialized identity and they engaged in some strategies to do so. For the majority of Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants, though, it was more typical to have a relatively high degree of ambiguity around their ascriptive identity, and they had greater agency to assert a chosen identity.

Asian/Black Participants

In my sample, the ability of Asian/Black participants to assert a chosen racial identity was more constrained relative to Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants. This is most demonstrated by Rick, 31, who grew up in California with a Filipina mom and a Congolese dad. He lived in an area with few Black and few Asian Americans. Having dark skin meant others often assumed him to be Black alone. As a child, Rick would tell others he was Filipino and Black, but they would often not believe him. This led him to identify solely as Black from about ages 11 to 18:

> When I was about 11 years old, I remember if people were to ask me what I am, I just stopped saying Black and Asian. I just said Black because for most people that's what they would see me as. And the only people who actually inquired and asked maybe if I'm mixed or Asian were people who focused more on my facial features rather than the color of my skin. But that was rare.

Rick felt himself to have physical characteristics that reflected both his Filipino and Congolese ancestry, yet his skin tone was the single most important factor in determining Rick’s ascriptive

identity. When he realized others saw him as Black alone, he did not attempt to change the ways others saw him; rather, he gradually acquiesced to the monoracial ascriptive identity of Black.[24]

Another Asian/Black participant, Alexander, 34, was also frequently ascribed a Black identity based on his skin tone.[25] Unlike in Rick's case, however, knowing others saw him as Black alone did not keep him from referring to himself as both Asian and Black American consistently throughout his life:

> It was quite clear, you know, visually, that I was not just Filipino. And I think on a day-to-day basis throughout my life, I'm usually identified as African American at first glance, and then sort of if I'm around somebody or talking to them, maybe they'll notice that I'm not just African American.

Alexander and Rick's experiences both underscore that skin tone is paramount to other people's assessments of their racial identities. They experienced others scrutinizing their facial features as well, but these assessments were secondary to skin tone. It was more common for Alexander than for Rick to have others notice his facial features and ask about his background. In these encounters, he is told he looks Egyptian, Kurdish, Iraqi, Moroccan, Caribbean, among other diverse ethnicities.[26] However, the vast majority of the time, Alexander is aware of being seen as

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[24] He continued describing himself as Black alone until early adulthood, when college and a military career gave him greater access to other Black Americans. In developing these friendships, Rick felt increasingly that he could not describe himself as Black alone because so much of his experience of race differed from that of his friends. He began, once again, to describe himself as both Black and Asian.

[25] Alexander's mother is Filipina, and his father is African American. He grew up in New York and the United Kingdom.

[26] These encounters happened more frequently when he lived in the United Kingdom, or when he was travelling in other countries, but they also occur in the United States.

Black, Alexander has never accommodated that ascriptive identity. He has always described himself as both Asian and African American.

Rick and Alexander were both often seen as Black due to their appearance, primarily their skin tone. While Rick adopted his ascribed identity for most of his adolescence, Alexander never ventured away from claiming his mixed-race identity. Both of these decisions represent a form of agency. Neither attempted to make adjustments to their appearance as an extension of their agency.

Overall, the findings in this section offer three implications for the literature on mixed-race Asian American identities. First, there is some support of Parker et al. (2015), which found that mixed-race Asian Americans sometimes change their appearance in order to increase their claim to a particular racial identity. In my study, a variety of tools such as clothing, makeup, hair styling, and even photo editing software may be used by Asian/Brown and Asian/White individuals to influence ascriptive identity, to varying degrees of success. While Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants were able to wield these tools due to greater ambiguity around their racialized appearance, Asian/Black participants were generally not afforded the same level of freedom and their appearance might be seen as less racially ambiguous. I argue this is the reason why Asian/Black participants in my study did not take steps to alter their appearance to influence their ascriptive identity. This finding stands in contrast to Castillo et al. (2020), which found several Asian/Black participants had tried to change their hairstyle or other aspects of their presentation in order to look more Asian or more Black. Among the participants in my study, racialized appearance worked to constrain Asian/Black participants' agency, while Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants were more able to leverage their appearance to enhance their agency. Third, my study finds skin tone was most influential in Asian/Black participants'

ascribed identity. Their facial features were also scrutinized, but they were often assumed to be Black based on their skin tone alone. For Asian/Brown and Asian/White multiracials, there tended to be more ambiguity around how their skin tone was perceived, and greater emphasis was placed on their facial features.

The Influence of Racist, Racializing, and Othering Experiences on Asserted Identity

In addition to appearance, racism can also play a powerful role in shaping mixed-race Asian Americans' identity constructions, but in existing literature, interpretations vary sharply between authors who fall into the whitening thesis camp and those who critique it. Part of the white-leaning thesis relies on a structural argument, that mixed-race Asians experience a lack of racial discrimination and othering akin to those of White Americans. The white-leaning thesis also encompasses an argument about agency, that mixed-race Asians seek to whiten themselves to avoid racism. However, this perspective largely ignores the existence of Asian/BIPOC Americans. Furthermore, recent studies of Asian/White individuals have complicated these two prongs of the white-leaning thesis, finding the majority of these individuals have been targeted by racism and are highly attached to their Asian heritages. In their review of literature on this topic, Chong and Song (2022) contend that the white-leaning view of mixed Asians has significant limitations including scant empirical evidence, a minimization of historic and ongoing anti-Asian racism, homogenization of Asian multiracial experiences, and a failure to engage with contradictory empiric evidence.[27] The claim that mixed-race Asian Americans do not face racism

[27] In fact, some early studies suggested that Asian/White individuals had a slight preference for self-identifying as Asian or mixed Asian as opposed to White (Khanna, 2004).

is empirically dubious. In fact, both national surveys and interview-based comparative studies have found that about the same percentage of mixed Asians have faced discrimination as had monoracial Asian Americans (Chang, 2016; Park, 2008; Pew, 2015; Tashiro, 2016). The rate of each groups' reported discrimination was about 75 percent prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021).

Historical and ongoing racism faced by mixed-race Asian Americans often hinges on notions of foreignness and assimilation. Invoking aspects of the tragic mulatto, mid-century America tended to imagine mixed Asians as unfortunate "conquest babies" resulting from the unions of East Asian "war brides" and American soldiers during World War II (Chang, 2016). In contemporary America, mixed Asians are often subject to the same model minority and forever foreigner stereotypes as their Asian American parents (Chang, 2016; Tashiro, 2016). The model minority stereotype, popularized in recent decades, contributes to a dominant sociological perspective that Asian mixed-race individuals and their Asian American parents incline toward whiteness and assimilation. However, the "model minority" argument obscures the diversity of Asian American experiences.

Some studies which do not employ the whitening thesis have found that perceptions of discrimination actually reinforce mixed-race Asian Americans' non-White identifications. For example, increased awareness of anti-Asian racism since COVID-19 has contributed to more Asian/White individuals identifying as Asian rather than mixed or White (Strmc-Pawl, Chito Childs, & Laudone, 2022). Norman and Chen (2020) found that both their Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants more strongly identified as multiracial if they had faced interpersonal discrimination. Interestingly, this study found that it mattered who was doing the discriminating. Discrimination from White Americans had no impact on Asian/BIPOC participants' identities.

Yet, discrimination from ethnic or racial community members had an impact; it reinforced Asian/BIPOC participants' sense of being mixed-race. Meanwhile, discrimination by White individuals did affect and strengthen Asian/White individuals' mixed-race identifications.

Turning to my study, the majority of participants had experienced racist interactions, but these interactions varied in terms of exact intersectional identities being targeted. These interactions also carried different consequences for participants' identity constructions. Twenty-six participants had experienced anti-Asian racism. This includes two of the four Asian/Black participants, four of the five Asian/Brown participants, and 18 of the 25 Asian/White participants. Thirteen participants had been called anti-Asian slurs or derogatory racial epithets such as "chink", "gook", "Chinaman", "ape", and "fish head" as children. Eight participants had also been called non-Asian racial slurs and epithets such as the n-word, "wetback", and "beaner." These participants included 2 Asian/Black participants, 3 Asian/Brown participants, and 3 Asian/White participants. Twenty-five had been taunted by peers who would pull the corners of their eyes, make fun of food participants would bring from home, commit other racial microaggressions, or direct racist statements to the participant's Asian parent. All Asian/Black participants, 50 percent of the Asian/Brown participants, and 20 percent of the Asian/White participants had faced discrimination due to colorism. One Asian/Black, 2 Asian/Brown, and 7 Asian/White participants described incidents of discrimination due to featurism, most often related to eye shape.

While experiences of racism where widespread among participants, there were discernable differences between Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White participants. To begin, Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants faced colorism much more frequently than did Asian/White participants; Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants were more likely to face

featurism than were Asian/Black participants. In addition to anti-Asian racism, Asian/BIPOC participants also faced various forms of anti-Black and anti-Brown racisms. For Asian/BIPOC participants, the experience of discrimination generally increased mixed-race identification. On the other hand, when Asian/White participants faced racist behavior, this more often reinforced an Asian identity.

Asian/Black and Asian/Brown Participants

Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants were comparatively more likely than those who were Asian/White to experience colorism and to have a variety of racial identities reinforced through racist, discriminatory, or othering encounters. One case comes from Breezy Seoul, 37, an Asian/Black participant whose mixed-race identity had been reinforced by a racist encounter which explicitly targeted his mixed-race identity.[28] The summer after he finished fifth grade, Breezy Seoul had a football coach who called him "Black Chinaman":

> I remember he would openly call me "Black Chinaman" because he knew my mom was Asian. …It was said in a way to elevate himself or to keep him in a position of power as compared to, say, me who was different with an Asian mom. And Mom's not even Chinese, you know. ... I just knew that it didn't feel good, but that was the nickname he coined for me.

[28] Breezy Seoul has a Korean mother and a Black American father.

Breezy Seoul had always felt identified with being mixed. This experience with his football coach was derogatory and othering, but it did not lead Breezy Seoul to reject his mixedness. Rather, this racializing nickname reinforced to him that he was both Asian and Black, and he continued to see himself as such.

Another Asian/Black participant, Alexander, 34, also felt his multiracial Afro Asian identity had been reinforced by his awareness of systemic racism and by his personal experiences of colorism. Alexander remembers his parents discussing anti-Black racism with him throughout his childhood:

> My father is African American from the South. I feel like that that's sort of an amplifier for African American identity because he grew up going to segregated schools. So the discussion around that was ever-present in the household. … There were things my parents wanted me to be aware of for my own safety…my mother and father would tell my brother and me about being careful with police.

While these conversations around anti-Black racism occurred first, Alexander also learned in childhood about anti-Asian racism, and from his adolescence he was able to draw parallels between the structural inequalities faced by Black Americans and Asian Americans. So, understanding the larger context of race in the United States gave him Alexander a framework through which to interpret discrimination. Perhaps this is one reason why Alexander consistently claimed both sides of his heritage, even when he felt othered by some Filipino Americans due to his also being Black:

> Because of that official identifier, I think that sort of might have created not necessarily any sort of dramatic form of ostracization from the Filipino community, but, again, there

> was definitely something that was different. ... I guess that kind of just made it feel more obvious to me that there was something different about me.

Alexander felt distance between himself and other Filipino Americans, and he remarked it was uncommon to see fellow mixed Black/Filipino Americans. Yet, he was clear that this did not dissuade him from asserting his mixed-race identity. If anything, the feeling of not-quite-belonging seems to have reinforced Alexander's affiliation of being multiracial.

Like Asian/Black participants, Asian/Brown participants more frequently were disadvantaged by colorism. However, compared to Asian/Black participants, those who were Asian/Brown were much more likely to describe incidents of featurism. To the earlier point, there are some parallels between Alexander and one Asian/Brown participant, 32-year-old Amuro, whose Brown racial identification was reinforced by his own and his family members' experiences of colorism.[29] Though Amuro also considers himself to be Asian, Latine, multiracial, and multiethnic, Brown identity feels most prominent to him. One reason for this comes from encounters with law enforcement officers, particularly those who are White:

> Our family doesn't have a good relationship with the police. They've definitely profiled us. So I think that solidified how we feel about them…the police multiple times pulling my dad over. They impounded his car. They're like, you know, a Brown Latin man can't have a nice car.

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[29] Amuro is the son of a Chinese-Filipina mother and an El Salvadoran father. He grew up in California.

Amuro also described encountering colorism from members of the Filipino community he grew up in, and particularly from Filipino American classmates. Because he was comparatively darker-complected, he said "there's expectations there" including that he was unintelligent, lazy, deviant, or untrustworthy. These instances of colorism within his Filipino ethnic community and within broader society reinforced Amuro's solidarity and identification with those who were racialized for having brown skin.

Fore Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants, racist encounters could reinforce a variety of racial identities, including mixed-race, Asian, Black, and Brown. But, there was one participant from these groups whose experience of both anti-Brown colorism and anti-Asian featurism made her not want to be Asian, Brown, or multiracial. Bryan, now 23, moved often in childhood with her parents, a Japanese father and a mixed Native Hawaiian/Filipina mother. She received racist harassment on the playground by White classmates at the elementary school she attended while living in Kansas:

> I'm just remembering a memory of being bullied every single day because I was one of like four or five people of color in the whole first grade. And then kind of just like not only self-doubting my identity but also just self-doubting myself in the way I looked because I look a lot like my dad. We're like carbon copies. I just have longer hair, and darker skin…I just remember being made fun of for that and also just having darker skin.

Then one day, these bullies began throwing pebbles at her and calling her "chink":

> I just remember hearing the word "chink" yelled. …I don't even know how they knew that word because we were first graders. Like, we were what, like six, seven?… But it's like hearing that word and then just being constantly picked on for how I looked. I

> constantly hated the way I looked growing up from then on, I think, until I finally got to high school.

Bryan internalized some of the racist messages of her peers, causing her to feel shame and a reluctance to eat traditional ethnic food or participate in ethnic practices. She tried to distance herself from Asian identification, though she could not escape this as an ascribed identity.

Bryan's attempts to deny particularly her Asian heritage reached a peak when she was living in Arkansas, attending middle school, and feeling extremely isolated from other Asian Americans:

> I was kind of assimilating to more White culture, so to speak—how my ex-friends acted and behaved. And looking back now I realize, "Oh, God, I hated that person." Like, that [Bryan] was terrible. She was so mean to herself, to others around her just to try and fit in.

Bryan described trying to muster up excitement for cotillion classes and other social concerns of her White middle-school classmates to lessen the risk of racist treatment due to perceptions of her difference. While she was still ascribed by others an Asian racial identity, she did not try to actively claim that identity for herself; in fact, she attempted to disavow it during this period of her life. This type of response to experiencing racism was an outlier among my sample. It is the only instance of an Asian/BIPOC participant approaching the whitening thesis. For Bryan, these middle-school attempts to "whiten" herself were part of a general strategy meant reduce her

chance of receiving racist treatment. As an adult, Bryan identifies multiracially, and she disavows her younger self's white-leaning approach, connecting it to internalized racism.[30]

Asian/White Participants

Like Asian/Brown participants, Asian/White participants were more likely to experience discrimination related to featurism. Tei, 20, demonstrates one case of an Asian/White participant feeling a stronger affiliation with their Asian side due to classmates' targeting her with racist remarks and gestures.[31] These peers would sometimes pull the corners of their eyes to mock her, and derogatory jokes were common:

> [My friend] would always talk about how people like me were named with wooden spoons, like because whenever you drop a wooden spoon it would be like, "clink clong" or something.

Also common were other types of microaggressions frequently discussed in Asian mixed-race literature: questions about "where are you from?" and comments about "your English is really good." Her White classmates' racist jokes and microaggressions reinforced to Tei her racial difference from them and increased her identification as Asian, as opposed to mixed Asian or White.

In other Asian/White participants' cases, racism reinforced their sense of being Asian American through emphasizing the recency of their family's migration. Such is the case for

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[30] For Bryan, living in Japan for a portion of her high school years and later joining a sorority for Asian/Asian American college students helped her to claim her identities of Asian, Native Hawaiian, Brown, and multiracial.
[31] Tei grew up in Texas with her Vietnamese mother and White father.

Elaine, 41.[32] As is common among many second-generation Americans, she helped older family members with learning English and preparing for their citizenship exam. She heard stories from her mother about the racism she endured shortly after immigrating in the 1970s during the height of anti-Asian racism surrounding the Vietnam War. She generally thinks of herself as racially Asian, an identification that is intensified by the racism her family encounters sometimes when out in public:

> What I will say is when I see others try and take advantage of my family because of a language barrier, it angers me. It really does. And I may vocalize my anger. Not in a violent way, but I will just say, "You realize that, you know, I speak English. I know my rights and my mother's rights. And by the way, I'm an attorney."

Elaine's evaluation of racist encounters reinforces her view of herself as Asian American, and as a second-generation American. Seeing her racial identity through being the child of an Asian immigrant who has encountered significant racism, being mixed-race is a less salient identity than being Asian American.

As Bryan offered a counter example to the broader Asian/Brown tendency to embrace a BIPOC identity, there were also four Asian/White participants who used strategies to "whiten" themselves at various points of their lives. One of them is twenty-three-year-old Francis.[33] For many of her growing-up years, and in response to microaggressive interactions, she tried to blend in with her White peers:

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[32] Elaine's mother is Chinese, and her father is White. Elaine grew up in Kansas.
[33] Francis's mother is Filipina and her father is White.

> So specifically growing up in Kansas where the demographic is very White, I feel like a lot of me, like, wasn't as proud of my Filipino culture...very much hiding that part away, ashamed of it in a lot of ways. Just trying to, like, lean into the whiteness a little bit more.

To lean White, Francis would ask her mom not to cook Filipino food on evenings her friends would be over for dinner. Francis also resisted her mother's attempts to teach her Tagalog. Like Bryan, Francis employed strategies of distancing herself from ethnic practices out of a desire to reduce her experience of racism. However, while Bryan continued to receive racist remarks related to her skin tone and eye shape, Francis was largely able to avoid further microaggressions. Francis, as well as the other three Asian/White participants who had previously engaged in whitening strategies, all ceased using these strategies in favor of claiming their multiracial or Asian racial identities during their teenage years or their early twenties.

Taken together, Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White participants' experiences broadly challenge the whitening thesis. There were one Asian/Brown and four Asian/White participants who had attempted to whiten themselves for a period of time, but these examples do not represent the general trend. Instead, my data found participants still tended to assert non-White identities despite encountering racism in their own lives and learning about systemic racism more broadly. Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants tended to feel a stronger affiliation with being mixed-race in response to racist encounters. On the other hand, Asian/White individuals who experienced racism tended to feel more connected to being Asian.

These findings differ slightly from Norman and Chen's (2020) study of mixed-race Asian Americans. While the earlier study found discrimination from White Americans had no impact on Asian/BIPOC participants' identities, both Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants in my study described feeling a greater sense of being mixed-race due to having racist or othering

encounters with White Americans. Additionally, my findings contrast Norman and Chen's (2020) conclusion that discrimination by White Americans reinforced multiracial identity among Asian/White individuals. Contrary to the earlier study, the Asian/White participants in my sample indicated racist treatment by White Americans tended to make them feel more racially Asian as opposed to multiracial.

The Role of the Family in Mediating Racism and Its Impact on Asserted Identity

Previous studies about mixed Asian experiences have found that family members have the potential to buffer or provide counter-messaging to the racism individuals face in wider society. On the other hand, family members can also sometimes augment and perpetuate racist messages. In this way, family can strongly influence Asian mixed individuals' identification. The feeling of being rejected by both parents' racial or ethnic communities – often referred to in the literature as "dual rejection" – which is characteristic of mixed-race experience often comes family members in the case of mixed Asian children (Chang, 2016). These intimate rejections can take the form of racist microaggressions or racializing comments, which include scrutinizing mixed children's appearances, policing their claims of ethnic membership, trying to isolate children from certain cultural influences, or offering preferential treatment to siblings based on phenotypes (Nadal et al., 2013). Over time, these experiences can result in strained relationships and sometimes cause a mixed-race Asian American to reject one of their parent's racial groups (Tashiro, 2016).

Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants were more likely to have discussions with family members about racism and how to cope with it. A small number of my participants, two, did at times encounter racializing microaggressions. Generally, however, Asian/BIPOC

participants were more likely than Asian/White participants to receive supportive messaging about their racial identity from family members. These positive interactions tended to enhance Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants' agency to claim multiraciality. In contrast, Asian/White participants were more likely to receive racist and racializing comments from family. These negative interactions tended to reinforce Asian/White participants' sense of being racially Asian and constrain their ability to identify as multiracial or White.

Asian/Black and Asian/Brown Participants

Asian/BIPOC participants who reported little racism from their families sometimes described their families as a refuge from the racism they faced within wider society and a source of affirmation for their mixed-race identities. Vivian, 20, considers herself mixed and has Lao, Potawatomi, and Mexican American heritage.[34] She has always been closer to her Lao family members, but she has felt consistently accepted by all her extended family. She describes periodically talking with Lao aunties and cousins when a worry would surface about being too different from her classmates due to her ethnic background:

> I'd be like, "When I go back to school, how come there's nobody that looks like me?" And they're just like, "Well, because everybody you know isn't Asian and Hispanic." And then my aunt would always tell me that that's not something to be ashamed of, though, that not everybody is like that. You should be proud of who you are.

[34] Vivian's father is Lao, and her mother is mixed Potawatomi and Mexican American.

Vivian also feels a sense of acceptance with her non-Asian family. She has many cousins on this side who are also mixed. She views these relationships as a source of mutual solidarity, and they have had conversations about dealing with racist classmates:

> We kind of just had that talk to where we just need to ignore what other people are saying about us when it comes to race, because, like I said, they don't know anything about us. They don't know anything that we've been through. They don't know our culture.

These supportive interactions with both sides of her family have helped Vivian assert her mixed-race identity and claim all three major elements of her heritage.

Two other Asian/Black participants, Famous Kimbella (50) and Breezy Seoul (37) also described their extended families in a similar manner, saying these individuals generally offered acceptance and encouragement.[35] For example, Breezy Seoul recalled a conversation in which he spoke with his father about racism. His father told them when discriminatory behavior occurs, he "should just not accept it." These direct and supportive conversations about racism, even if they were not frequent, had a lingering effect on Famous Kimbella and Breezy Seoul, helping them to recognize and resist internalizing racism they encountered in their daily lives. The support of these participants' family members also helped them feel confident in asserting their mixed identities.

One Asian/Black and one Asian/Brown participant did offer examples which departed from the general trend of supportive messaging from family members. One case comes from

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[35] Famous Kimbella has a Chinese-Jamaican mother and a Black American father. She grew up in New York. Breezy Seoul, introduced earlier in the paper, has a Korean mother and a Black American father. He grew up in North Carolina.

Alexander, 34.[36] Alexander's father, who is Black, sometimes makes microaggressive or othering comments about his multiraciality. Rather than changing how Alexander identifies, though, these interactions further confirm Alexander's view of himself as a mixed-race individual. One example Alexander gave of this dynamic related to his father wanting him to watch the 2018 movie *Black Panther* after hearing a rumor from a friend that Alexander was describing himself as Asian American:

> It was a very odd moment of like, we're still having this weird conversation about which side I was supposed to be on. Like, I would hope by now you would know that, quite blatantly, I'm opposed to these things. I'm not like, I'm not going to be played by a Marvel film.

Alexander felt his father wanted him to watch *Black Panther* in the hopes that it would make him feel more strongly identified with being Black, as opposed to being both Black and Asian. This is an instance of microaggressive behavior which Nadal et. al (2013) found to be common within interracial families. As in the previous study's findings, Alexander felt wearied by this behavior. Rather than convince him to choose only one racial category, this microaggression reinforced Alexander's sense of himself as a mixed-race person.

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[36] Alexander has a Filipina mother and Black American father. He grew up in New York and the United Kingdom.

Asian/White Participants

The experience of racial microaggressions was much more common among Asian/White participants, who frequently felt racialized and othered by their family members. One example comes from Max, 18, who has a mixed Vietnamese and White dad. Her mom is White. Her family moved often due to both her parents being in the military, but for a few years she lived in Georgia. Max's paternal grandmother, who is Vietnamese, was also living in Georgia at the time, and the two are very close. Max enjoys cooking traditional dishes with this grandmother and joining her for Buddhist rituals. However, Max's mother often makes disapproving comments about these activities, and this causes arguments between Max and her mother:

> When my grandma would make food, my mom would get mad at her for cooking in the house. She'd make her go outside. And when we were using fish sauce and vinegar and stuff as a dipping sauce, or eating kimchi, she would always be mad for like three days. …I didn't like her insulting aspects of the culture that I really loved.

Max would also have similar experiences when visiting her mother's family. Her maternal grandfather tends to also make microaggressive comments that alienate Max and make her feel more strongly affiliated with her Vietnamese family by comparison:

> When we go to my mother's father's house, he is very conservative. And so that usually poses more of a challenge...I've explicitly heard him say, "I was surprised that [my daughter] married an Asian" or "Wow she married a Brown person."

Max's grandfather would also ask her questions such as whether or not her classmates made fun of her for bringing Vietnamese food with her to lunch. Max's father often does not respond to these comments made by Max's mother and maternal grandfather, which is a point of further

frustration for Max. She finds herself often defending her Vietnamese grandmother to White family members, which strengthens her connection to her Vietnamese family side.

Another case comes from Hapabelle, 24.[37] Like Max, Hapabelle felt more identified with her Asian family because of racist comments made by White family members. In Hapabelle's case, these derogatory statements tended to be about Asian Americans generally and about her mother in particular. Hapabelle encountered, and saw her mother encounter, racism from peers, teachers, and strangers. However, racializing and othering family interactions have had the most profound effect. For example, Hapabelle's paternal grandfather would make negative comments about her participating in Buddhist rituals with her mother:

> My grandfather fears God, and he would tell me about how if you weren't Christian then you would burn in the fiery pit for all eternity. That's something that really scared me because I was thinking like my mom, is she Christian? No. And so I'd go home, and I asked her "Mom, are you Christian? Are we Christian?" I didn't want to be Christian, but I was scared…I did something that I would hate to have done to me. I had pressured someone to deny a part of themselves.

The intimacy of family relationships to some extent normalized racist and racializing treatment. But because they were normalized, they were hard to initially recognize. Furthermore, these experiences of being othered within Hapabelle's family also caused her to internalize some of the sentiments expressed by family members.

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[37] Hapabelle has a Japanese mother and a White father. She grew up in Georgia.

While Max and Hapabelle largely faced microaggressive racism from their White family members, another Asian/White participant, 21-year-old Karina received racializing treatment from members on both sides of her family.[38] From her White mother's side, she faced racism particularly from her cousins, who would make fun of her eye shape:

> They're all like, I don't know, kind of like fetishizing the fact that you know, I'm Asian. There's the racist remarks and the pulling up the eyes.

Because of this behavior, Karina is not close to her White family members, but she is close to her cousins on the Lao side of her family. At the same time, she does feel a degree of othering with these cousins as well when they tease her by saying she is not really Lao because she is also White and because she does not speak the language:

> I was with one of my cousins and she was FaceTiming her sister and she turned the phone so that my cousin could see me. And she didn't recognize me. And she's like "Who's that White girl in your bed?" I mean, she found out it was me. And she didn't seem fazed by the fact that she said that, because they're used to saying it to me.

The racism she faced from her White family, and the sense of othering she felt from her Lao family members' teasing made her feel uncertain about what racial identity to claim. Karina's experience of facing rejection from both her parents' racial groups is common in the literature on mixed-race Asian Americans. Yet Asian/White participants in my sample tended to report feeling relatively accepted by Asian and Asian American family members, with only three other

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[38] Karina's father is Lao, and her mother is White. Karina grew up in Kansas.

participants sharing they had felt racialized or othered by the Asian families. In general, Asian/White participants tended to feel othered by White family members.

To summarize this finding, Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants in my sample were less likely than Asian/White participants to experience the dual rejection and racial microaggressions that Tashiro (2016) and Nadal et al. (2013) have found among Asian/White Americans. Instead, Asian/BIPOC participants in my sample tended to receive support and anti-racist messaging from family members. Among Asian/Black participants, this could be due to greater acceptance among Black Americans of mixed-race identities in general (Khanna, 2010). Meanwhile, though Tashiro (2016) and Nadal et al. (2013) emphasized that Asian/White individuals were othered by both sides of their families, my study finds these experiences happened much more frequently with White family members.

The Role of Cultural Attachments on Asserted Identity

At the individual level, family experiences, cultural connections, and appearance significantly shape mixed Asians' identity development. Existing studies find that while there is much variation in how mixed people identify and why, one very common theme among Asian/White individuals is a concern for authenticity. This is often measured by attaining some performing cultural knowledge in order to gain acceptance from members of their Asian ethnic community who police claims of membership (Chang, 2016; Khanna, 2004; Mengel, 2001; Tashiro, 2016). This policing stems from common perceptions among Asian American communities that Asian/White individuals are more similar to White than Asian Americans and therefore pose a threat to the community. While feared by many mixed-race Asians, this form of gatekeeping is a defense mechanism Asian diasporic used to help maintain ethnic identity in the

face of intense racism and assimilative pressures. Mixed Asians may select an identity based on the degree to which they and their parents have what Chong (2021, p. 87) refers to as "cultural thinness", or a lack of familiarity with a heritage culture. Sometimes having an immigrant Asian parent gives mixed individuals robust cultural knowledge, but in many cases these parents do not pass their cultural practices on to their children (DaCosta, 2007). Often, an Asian grandparent takes on the role of cultural educator (Chong, 2021).

While personal relationships with family members who are close to the heritage culture tend to be most significant in shaping racial identity, the treatment of food and language within the family offer additional opportunities for cultural access. Johnston (2022) notes that food is not only life sustaining but culture sustaining. The preservation of native or "authentic" food cultures is one way marginalized individuals can resist assimilationist, hegemonic pressures. Similarly, language is an important cultural carrier. Second-generation Asian Americans, mixed and monoracial alike, are often motivated to learn a heritage language in order to feel closer to the culture as well as to gain the ability to talk with family members (Chong, 2021; Xiao & Wong, 2014).

Beyond the familial sphere, cultural thinness is reduced by regular access to Asian communities (Aspinall & Song, 2013). This can happen through religious participation. Belonging to a Buddhist, Chinese Christian, Korean Christian, Muslim, Hindu or other type of "Asian" congregation can even create opportunities for developing competence in a heritage language while simultaneously increasing cultural awareness (Davenport, 2016). Religious membership is similarly important for second-generation Asian Americans. In the case of second-generation Korean Americans living in Chicago, Chong (1998), for example, found that attending a Korean church can be instrumental to constructing an ethnic identity because the

church space provides ethnic community, greater exposure to the immigrant generation, and resistance of assimilationist expectations. Castillo et al. (2020) studied the impact of cultural connections on the racial identities of Asian/Black Americans specifically. What they found was that participants often felt themselves to have significant cultural differences from both Black and Asian Americans so they would study popular music styles, clothing trends, and other practices they perceived to be typical of either group. By doing so, they felt that they could more confidently claim a multiracial identity.

Regardless of whether it comes in the form of religious affiliation, language, community connection, or family members' involvement, exposure to an Asian parent's culture generally increases the likelihood that someone with a mixed background would racially identify as Asian. According to my data, though, there are key similarities and differences in how cultural exposure influences the racial identifications of Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants versus those who are Asian/White. A major point of convergence is that both Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants tended to incorporate the racial identities of those family members they felt closest to. The quality of interpersonal relationships influenced the identity choices of all but two participants. Interpersonal relationships often gave participants a sense of cultural connection and an avenue by which to gain cultural knowledge.

Beyond this, however, the relationship of cultural knowledge to racial identification diverges for Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants in my sample. For Asian/BIPOC participants, cultural thinness typically did not prevent the assertion of a mixed Asian racial identity. This finding is not much discussed in existing literature. However, previous studies on Asian/Black individuals' identity formations have found these individuals face significant exclusion from Asian American communities due to the prevalence of colorism and anti-Black

prejudice (Castillo et al., 2020; Moscowitz, 2022). It may be that, due to this prejudice, Asian/Black and Asian/Brown individuals' attempts to gain membership recognition from Asian communities are often futile, making Asian/BIPOC identity unable to rely on cultural attachments for validation. Thus, Asian/BIPOC identity would need to be asserted regardless of Asian community evaluations. This offers a sharp contrast with the experience of Asian/White participants, who had some ability to gain acceptance by Asian community members provided the participant could demonstrate sufficient cultural knowledge. For Asian/White participants, rejection due to ethnic membership policing by Asian community members could strongly dissuade the racial affiliation.

Asian/Black and Asian/Brown Participants

In general, cultural knowledge was not necessary for Asian/BIPOC participants to feel racially Asian. Moreover, their parents sometimes discouraged them from pursuing cultural knowledge because they worried these attachments would invite further racist, derogatory, or similarly othering treatment. They were aware that their children would likely be racialized and face discrimination due to their appearance. Thus, while their lack of cultural attachment often made them feel distant from their ethnic community, it did not necessarily interfere with their sense of being racially Asian. Our first case comes again from Amuro, a previously mentioned 32-year-old Asian/Brown participant.[39] When describing his racial identity, Amuro thinks of himself above all as Brown. Both of his parents encouraged him to speak English and connect

[39] Amuro's father is from El Salvador and his mother is Filipina. Amuro grew up in California.

with American culture, rather than learn about their languages and cultures of origin. They talked with Amuro about adversities they faced as immigrants and people of color, and they hoped by not passing on elements of their culture, they hoped would minimize the discrimination he would face:

> I wish I kind of pushed it a little more, just so I could identify a little bit more with my culture growing up…[My parents] bought into the assimilation thing: "You need to adapt to their lifestyle" – very, you know, very colonized mentality. "We need to be like them to be successful: speak their language, get into their life and, you know, eventually stand on their shoulders." I think they just thought it would make our lives easier in the end.

Amuro feels sadness about his parents' decision and considers it a capitulation to assimilative pressures. This is certainly one way to look at the situation; in response to a racial system that is oppressive, punitive, and frequently packs lethal force, Amuro and his parents have been denied their agency to insist on the cultural affiliations they desire. Another perspective is that, in response to this oppressive racial structure, Amuro's parents adopted a strategy which they hoped would reduce his experience of racism and eventually lead him to success. This interpretation affords Amuro's family greater agency, though their ability to act is still heavily constrained by structure and required they sacrifice their cultural inheritance. In either case, the impact remains: Amuro has felt a lack of cultural connection to being Chinese, Filipino, and El Salvadoran. Yet, he has still always felt himself to be racially Asian as a secondary identifier after the more encompassing "Brown." Perhaps his cultural disconnect from ethnic practices does not interfere with his racial identification because, ultimately, his racialization as Asian and Brown was a factor in him not having access to his cultural heritage.

A previously introduced 31-year-old Asian/Black participant, Rick, was also discouraged by his parents from pursuing cultural knowledge.[40] Just like with Amuro, Rick's parents felt this was a useful strategy to avoid further marginalization and pave the way to success in America. But unlike Amuro, Rick does not remember ever having an interest in activities such as learning his parents' first languages. He views himself as culturally American:

> I always just felt comfortable. I mean, I already, I knew that, you know, I had, you know, heritage in Africa and also the Philippines. And that was enough for me. I didn't really need to research the culture too much. That's not for me, because, you know, ultimately, like I was saying is that I'm American.

Both of his parents placed more of an emphasis on helping Rick learn English and succeed in American society than on teaching him about their cultures of origin. Rick also did not have much connection to wider Black and Asian racial communities, nor was he immersed in ethnic communities. For him, a trajectory of cultural loss to acquisition to hybridization is integral to the immigrant story, and his status as culturally American represents in part the culmination of his parents' hopes in migrating to the United States.

In a third case, 22-year-old Lele suggests that at least for Asian/Brown participants, Asian identity can be reinforced when experiencing ethnic membership policing from the non-Asian parent's community.[41] Lele embraced an Asian identity to help explain her difference from her peers in the majority-Hispanic neighborhood she lived in for much of her childhood. When

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[40] Rick's mother is Filipina, and his father was Congolese. Rick grew up in California.
[41] Lele's father is Lao, and her mother is Potawatomi and Mexican American. Lele grew up in Kansas.

she was younger, it was awkward for Lele to explain to others and to herself why she was relatively unfamiliar with elements of Mexican culture:

> I would identify as Asian most of the time because it was easier for me to say that I was Asian, instead of explaining why I'm not as Mexican as maybe they think that I should be, you know. So, yeah, it was easier for me to just be like, "Well, I'm just Asian."

A major point of contention was that Lele did not speak Spanish. The reason was her great-grandparents had immigrated from Mexico in the 1930s, then moved to an Italian immigrant neighborhood where they faced harsh racist treatment. This experience discouraged them from passing Spanish on to their children. These examples from Lele, Rick, and Amuro demonstrate how immigrant parents and ancestors from multiple backgrounds are racialized upon arrival to the United States. At least in my study, these parents have sometimes chosen to cultivate cultural thinness in their children and descendants, including those who are mixed-race Asian, in an agentic bid to spare them some degree of the racial discrimination they faced. For Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants in my study, cultural attachment was secondary to racialization based on appearance. These racializations made it perilous to, and constrained their agency to, maintain heritage cultures or reclaim knowledge of them.

Asian/White Participants

Compared to Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants, Asian/White individuals in my study enjoyed a much higher degree of freedom to pursue cultural competence. This knowledge was central to Asian/White participants' justification of ethnic membership because they faced skepticism and scrutiny by Asian ethnic communities who saw them as culturally White rather than Asian American. In many Asian/White participants' families, there would be conversations

about and celebrations of traditional ethnic practices, particularly of food cultures. These findings are already well covered by the literature on Asian/White multiracials, so here I will focus on two examples which best illustrate a contrast to Asian/BIPOC participants in my sample whose cultural heritage quickly fell casualty to intersecting racial discriminations. Whereas cultural attachments among Asian/BIPOC participants were sometimes lost within a single generation, some Asian/White participants were able to maintain a strong sense of their Asian identity even two generations removed from the immigrant generation.

One such example comes from Max, who is 18.[42] Max's paternal grandmother is Vietnamese; her father is mixed Vietnamese/White; and Max's mother is White. For Max, cultural connections were kept alive through eating Vietnamese food, engaging in Buddhist practices, and maintaining correspondence through letters and phone calls with family in Vietnam. Because of her close connection to her Vietnamese heritage, Max has consistently wanted to assert a multiracial Asian/White identity. However, her ascriptive identity is nearly always White due to her light skin, brown hair, and blue eyes. A conversation between Max and her father explains the connection many Asian/White participants saw between ethnic culture and racial identity:

> I've never really known if I should put on forms--if I should put that I am Asian and White. And so I talked to him about that. And he was like, "Well, you're very connected to the culture. So, you should definitely put Asian if that's what you're comfortable with."

[42] Max moved frequently throughout her childhood but spent significant time in Georgia, Alaska, Illinois, and Maryland.

Because of her proximity to Vietnamese culture, Max chose to claim a multiracial Asian/White identity, and her father encouraged this. Max faced little threat of structural barriers to prevent her from asserting the identity she most related to.

A second example comes from 22-year-old Yennifer, who claims an Asian mixed-race identity due to her relationship to her Korean grandmother. Like Max, Yennifer is two generations removed from the immigrant generation. Yennifer's paternal grandmother is Korean; Yennifer's father is mixed Korean/White; and her mother is White. When she was younger Yennifer felt a certain amount of self-consciousness when identifying as Asian mixed-race due to frequently being perceived as White. However, she now consistently asserts this multiracial identity, which she sees as a way of honoring and providing some sense of ethnic community to her grandmother, who was born in what is now North Korea:

> I'm like, not only can she like never go back and never revisit her roots, but she left home one day as a teenager and she can never, ever, ever see that land again. So, I do think about that, and I think it must be really, really special for her to have, to see her grandkids have some connection.

Through her grandmother, Yennifer has been connected to Korean cuisine, language, and holiday customs. By weighing her appearance with her feeling of attachment to her grandmother, and the Korean cultural aspects her grandmother has introduced to her, Yennifer claims a hybrid Asian racial identity.

Both Yennifer and Max offer strong counterexamples to the whitening thesis. Commonly perceived as White due to their appearance, it would be easy for these participants to call themselves White. Yet, they choose to assert Asian mixed-race identities due to the strength of their cultural attachments. In so doing, these Asian/White participants resist real and powerful

assimilative pressures; at the same time, they demonstrate how much more room the racial structure affords those with light skin and Anglo features to assert and shore up knowledge of the heritage they feel most connection to. Asian/BIPOC participants in my sample such as Lele, Rick, and Amuro lacked the same opportunity. Their identities met at the intersection of two or more marginalized racial categories, which increased their risk of facing racial violence. Rather than seeking to maintain ethnic practices, the parents of Asian/BIPOC participants took agentic measures to reduce cultural connections in the hope that this would minimize racist attentions their children would receive.

This difference in cultural knowledge between Asian/BIPOC and Asian/White participants could be the consequence of patterns found in other work on interracial family making. In her sample, Chong (2021) found the arrival of children often motivated Asian Americans married to White partners to connect with their heritage cultures and raise their children with ethnic consciousness. For their part, the White spouses tended to lack awareness of anti-Asian racism. Thus, it could be that Asian/White participants in my study were encouraged toward cultural connection by Asian/Asian American parents in response to the threat of anti-Asian racism and assimilative pressures. On the other hand, Asian/BIPOC individuals have faced significant exclusion from Asian American communities due to the prevalence of colorism and anti-Black prejudice (Moscowitz, 2022). Thus, someone who is Asian/BIPOC and wants to assert a hybrid identity would likely have to construct that identity without input from the Asian ethnic community. In line with my argument, Castillo et al. (2020) found that some parents of their Asian/Black participants discouraged their children from pursuing cultural learning because they feared their mixed-race children would face discriminatory behavior within their Black or particularly their Asian community. My findings differ slightly; Asian/Black and Asian/Brown

participants in my sample suggested their parents were not worried about racism within their own communities so much as in society at large. Nevertheless, those Asian/BIPOC participants who arrived at multiracial or Asian identities did so without shoring up familiarity with ethnic practices in order to defend their membership claims.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

To conclude, let us consider again this study's research questions: What factors influence mixed-race Asian Americans' assertion of racial identities? When comparing Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White individuals, what different strategies and challenges emerge? I elaborated four key findings to address these questions.

First, this study finds Asian/Black participants' preferred racial identities were sometimes overridden by ascriptive identities based on racialized perceptions of their appearance. But, Asian/Brown and Asian/White participants were sometimes able to mold the ascriptive identity to match the one they internally identified with. Second, my study finds that being targeted by racist, derogatory, or othering behavior was more likely to bolster Asian/BIPOC participants' sense of being multiracial, whereas such behavior tends to reinforce for Asian/White participants an Asian identity alone. Third, this study finds Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants more often than Asian/White participants experienced supportive and anti-racist interactions with family members, which generally encouraged them to claim a mixed-race identity. In contrast, Asian/White participants were more likely than those who were Asian/BIPOC to experience racist, discriminatory, and othering behavior within their own families. This increased their Asian racial identification. Fourth, this study finds that cultural attachments were necessary to justify Asian/White participants' claims of being Asian or multiracial. However, due to colorism and anti-Blackness within Asian American communities, familiarity with ethnic practices does not offer Asian/BIPOC participants a pathway to multiracial or Asian identity, so they assert these racial identities regardless of their level of cultural knowledge.

What might these four findings suggest about the ability for Asian mixed-race individuals to assert hybrid identities? The three analytical categories of Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and

Asian/White participants each contained a multitude of experiences. Yet, each group had their own collection of agentic strategies at their disposal, as well as challenges they faced, in carving out a "third space" to claim the racial identities that combined dissimilar aspects of their ancestry (Hsu, 2008).

The ability of Asian/Black participants to assert hybrid identities is most constrained by a society which subjects them to colorism, anti-Asian racism, and anti-Black racism. These participants are further constrained by often being racialized as Black alone, and by pressures to abandon cultural attachments. Nonetheless, many Asian/Black participants did form hybrid identities using strategies such as refusing to accept a monoracial ascriptive identity, seeking support from family members, and finding solidarity with other minoritized Americans whose cultural attachments were truncated by migration and systemic racism. For their part, Asian/Brown participants generally faced constraints due to colorism, featurism, anti-Asian racism, anti-Brown racism more generally. In addition to the agentic strategies used by Asian/Black participants, Asian/Brown participants also sometimes used the strategy of altering their appearance in order to influence their ascriptive identity.

The situation of Asian/White participants largely differed from that of Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants. For Asian/White participants, significant challenges to asserting a hybrid racial identity included anti-Asian racism within broader society, derogatory treatment by family members, and the need to demonstrate cultural knowledge to gain acceptance into Asian American communities. Their main agentic strategies involved attempts to leverage the ambiguity of their appearance and increase knowledge of their Asian heritage cultures. Though Asian/Black and Asian/Brown participants faced more challenges than did Asian/White participants in seeking a hybrid identity, they also employed more agentic strategies to maintain

their sense of hybridity. The prevalence of these hybridizing strategies in the face of structural limitations makes clear that the majority of participants in my sample did not want to whiten themselves. On the contrary, the majority of participants in all three groups sought ways to claim their Asian or their mixed-race identities.

While these findings are not generalizable, they do offer some potential hypotheses that can be further tested to learn what existing statistics in large-sample studies seem to not address, which is the prevalence of multiracial identification among Asian/BIPOC individuals. One of these large-sample studies, for instance, found only 40 percent of mixed-race individuals identify multiracially, but about 70 percent of Asian/White individuals call themselves multiracial (Pew, 2015). I was unable to find statistics about the prevalence of multiracial identification among Asian/Black and Asian/Brown Americans. My findings suggest that they, like Asian/White individuals, may identify multiracially at a higher rate than those with non-Asian mixed-race backgrounds. Testing this would be a fascinating avenue for further study.

The prevalence of multiracial identification among my sample stands in sharp relief against scholarship that advances the whitening thesis (Alba et al., 2017; Gallagher, 2004; Lee & Bean, 2004; Strmc-Pawl, 2016; Waters, 1990; Yancey, 2003). These sources argue either that Asian mixed-race individuals will choose a White identity for themselves in order to receive racial privileges, or that the question of agency can be viewed as largely irrelevant because these mixed-race individuals are structurally located in a privileged near-White position. In fact, the findings of my study push back on both prongs of this argument. Nearly all Asian/White participants identified at the time of the study as multiracial, even those who had previously attempted to whiten themselves. Furthermore, all Asian/Black and three out of five Asian/Brown participants identified as multiracial. Though the particularities of their methods varied,

participants in all three groups undertook significant effort to insist on their multiracial identities. Looking beyond the agency argument, my findings also challenge the notion that Asian mixed-race individuals are treated in a manner comparable to White Americans. On the contrary, the majority of Asian/Black, Asian/Brown, and Asian/White participants had faced racist, discriminatory, and othering behavior. There were some differences among these groups in how this behavior played out, and in what context, but nevertheless racist encounters were a common occurrence.

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Appendix A: Participant Summary

Participant	Race/Ethnicity of Parents	Age	Where They Grew Up
Albert (he/him)	Vietnamese mother, White father	51	Colorado
Alexander (he/him)	Filipina mother, Black father	34	New York, United Kingdom
Amuro (he/him)	mixed mom (Filipina and Chinese), El Salvadoran father	32	California
Anna (they/them)	mixed father (Chinese and White), White mother	24	Oregon
Bosch (he/him)	Filipina mother, White father	25	Virginia
Breezy Seoul (he/him)	Korean mother, Black father	37	North Carolina
Bryan (she/her)	Japanese American father, mixed mother (Filipina and Native Hawaiian)	23	Illinois, Kansas, Arkansas, Japan
Chloe (she/her)	Lao mother, White father	21	Illinois
Elaine (she/her)	Chinese mother, White father	41	Kansas
Elijah (he/him)	mixed father (Chinese and White), White mother	22	Oregon
Emily (she/her)	mixed father (Filipino and White), White mother	23	California, Colorado
Famous Kimbella (she/her)	Chinese-Jamaican mother, Black father	50	New York
Francis (she/her)	Filipina mother, White father	23	Kansas
Hapabelle (she/her)	Japanese mother, White father	24	Mississippi
Hope (she/her)	Indonesian mother, White father	30	Connecticut
Jane (she/her)	Vietnamese father, White mother	19	Indiana
John (he/him)	Chinese American father, White mother	23	California
Karina (she/her)	Lao father, White mother	21	Kansas
Kelly (she/her)	Native Hawaiian father, White mother	59	Nebraska
Lele (she/her)	Lao father, mixed mother (Potawatomi and Mexican American)	22	Kansas
Lily (she/her)	Sri Lankan mother, White father	19	Kansas
Malik (they/them)	Armenian father, White mother	20	Missouri
Marie (she/her)	Chinese American mother, White father	26	California
Max (she/her)	mixed father (Vietnamese and White), White mother	18	Georgia, Alaska, Illinois, and Maryland
Olive (she/her)	Japanese mother, Iranian father	24	California
Peter (he/him)	Chinese father, White mother	29	California
Phoebe (she/her)	Korean mother, White father	31	South Carolina, Virginia
Rick (he/him)	Filipina mother, Congolese father	31	California
Rosa (she/her)	Filipino father, White mother	29	Kansas
Sam (he/him)	Filipino father, White mother	24	Kansas
Tei (she/her)	Vietnamese mother, White father	20	Texas
Tom (they/them)	Turkish father, Pontic Greek mother	22	Missouri
Vivian (she/her)	Lao father, mixed mother (Potawatomi and Mexican American)	20	Kansas
Yennifer (she/they)	mixed father (Korean and White), White mother	22	Wisconsin

Appendix B: Thematic Outline of Interview Questions

Questions in this list are informed by multiple sources, significantly: Aspinall & Song (2013); Chang (2016); Chong (2021: 210); and Hordge-Freeman (2015: 257).

Ethnic identity

How do you define your ethnic identity? How do you define your family's?
Probes: Do you use words like biracial, mixed, multiracial, Asian, white? How do you feel about using any of these descriptors to describe your identity? How do you feel when others use these descriptors? Do you have a strong opinion about these descriptors? Why or why not?

Did you always define your ethnic identity in these terms?
Probes: Did you ever have an experience that made you uncertain of your ethnic identity? Can you remember a moment where you chose to describe your ethnicity in a different way? Did you begin to think of your ethnicity in new terms as the result of an event, such as making a new friend, watching a new tv show, taking a class, etc?

Do you feel like people can tell your ethnic identity by looking at you?
Probes: What do you think indicates or obscures your ethnicity? What have others assumed about your ethnic identity? How could you tell?

When was the first time you became aware of having a racial or ethnic identity?
Probes: What experience made you aware? Do you remember how you felt? Did you have a language to describe your ethnicity and how you felt about it?

Tell me about a time you experienced racism. What happened, and how did you process it?
Probes: Have you witnessed racism toward a family member? Can you tell me about another time you experienced racism? Did you discuss these experiences with anyone?

As a child and while growing up, did you ever receive questions from others about your ethnicity?
Probes: How would these questions make you feel? How would you respond to these questions?

What languages do you speak?
Probes: How did you learn them? What languages were spoken in the home while you were growing up?

Were you raised within a particular religion?
Probes: What are your parents' religion(s)? Were they raised in that religion?

What do you think shapes your identity the most?
Probes: How important is your racial identity? What impacts your racial identity the most: family experiences, pop culture, religion, something else?

Family experiences

How do people respond to your family when you are out in public together?

Probes: Do you recall ever receiving any comments about your appearance?

What do you know about your family history?
Probes: In what ways were you taught about your heritage? Did you parents encourage you to have any particular feelings about this heritage? Was it different for the Asian vs. the non-Asian side of the family? Were you able to participate in the passing down of oral histories?

How are race and ethnicity treated within your family?
Probes: Do you discuss culture, language, or ethnicity with your family? Who initiates these conversations? Do these discussions center your own racial identity? Did these conversations change as you grew up? Have they changes in recent years?

What did your family teach you about race? Are there aspects of your race that are not often discussed in your family?
Probes: Can you think of any particular family members who have shaped the way you think about your ethnicity? Do you feel your family members understand your racial identity? Can you recall how would your parents fill out demographic information on paperwork?

Do you have any siblings? If you do, what are their ethnic identities? What is your relationship with them like?
Probes: Are your siblings' identities the same as or different from yours? Do you speak with them about ethnicity? In what ways did you and your siblings have different relationships with family members from each side of the family?

What languages do your siblings speak?

Do you and your siblings practice the same religion?

Are you closer to one of your parent's sides of the family?
Probes: Do you have a close relationship with your extended Asian family? How about your extended non-Asian family? What activities do you remember doing with each side of your family?

Pop culture experiences
What do you remember noticing about how ethnicity was depicted in movies and tv shows you watched growing up?
Probes: Do you remember noticing that there was a character who had a similar ethnicity to you? What were your favorite tv shows and movies as a child, teenager, and adult?

What do you think about how mixed-race Asians and Asian Americans are portrayed in the media?
Probes: Are you satisfied with how they are depicted? Would you like to see any changes?

Did you ever see a family that reminded you of your own, culturally, linguistically, religiously, or in other ways related to ethnicity? How did you feel when you noticed these similarities?

As an adult, do you seek out movies and tv shows that depict characters of a certain race or ethnicity?
Probes: Have you always sought out these characters? If not, when did you begin to, and why? What do you particularly appreciate about these characters?

Would you say that a tv show or movie has impacted the way you think of your race?
Probes: Have any actors, directors, comedians, or other pop culture figures influenced the way you think about your race?