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Self-Construal Influence on Individual Choice:
Does Culture Shape our Choices?

Marrie Shirzada

Marrie is a recent graduate of York University with an Honours B.A. in Psychology. This article was written for her Honour's thesis at York University in the Psychology Department. The paper was inspired by her professor, Dr. Joni Saski, as well as her thesis advisor, Alistair Mapp.

Psychological research conducted over the years has revealed cultural differences across a wide range of domains. As a result, many psychologists have now investigated the ways in which people in various cultures may think, behave, and feel differently (Suh, Diener, and Updegraff 2008), specifically, with a focus on members from Western and Eastern cultures. Cross-cultural research has identified one particular area of difference between members of Western and Eastern cultures: the extent to which the self is defined (Self-construal). This distinction has been referred to as egocentric versus sociocentric selves (Schweder and Bourne 1984), individualism versus collectivism (Triandis 1989), and independence versus interdependence (Markus and Kitayama 1991) and focuses on the extent to which an individual defines herself or himself as either an autonomous individual separate from others or as an individual deeply embedded within a larger social network (Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee 1999).

Countries such as China and India are conceptualized as collectivist cultures where the self is often defined as an entity embedded within a larger social network; whereas in individualistic cultures (e.g. North America) the self is often defined as an autonomous entity separate from others (Triandis 1989). Another distinction made between members of Western and Eastern cultures are differing attitudes towards uniqueness and conformity. Kim and Markus (1999) found that East Asians and Americans had distinct preferences consistent with their respective cultural attitudes towards uniqueness and conformity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conformity in East Asian Culture

The East Asian cultural context is centered on harmony and group cohesion, facilitating an environment that encourages its members to adopt an interdependent concept of the self (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, and Nisbett 1998; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Markus, Kitayama, and Heinman 1997; Smith and Bond 1993; Triandis 1995). The East Asian cultural context

emphasis on harmony and interdependence fosters fear among individuals within this cultural context of being separate and distinct from the group (Markus and Kitayama 1994). Following social norms is a core cultural goal in many East Asian cultures, promoting harmony and aligning with collectivistic cultural tradition (Hsu 1948; Yang 1981). Many people in this cultural context openly abide social norms and do so without feeling ashamed or pressured to conform which may be the view in individualistic cultures (Kim and Markus 1999). Conformity in East Asian cultural context is a process of feeling connected to others, leading to positive behavioral consequences in this context (Kim and Markus 1999). For example, research has shown that East Asian children tend to be more motivated, persisting longer on tasks compared to European American children when the task is selected by a member from their in-group (Iyengar and Lepper 1999). Additionally, one of the core goals in parenting and educating children in East Asian cultures is for children to respect and obey elders, tradition, and social norms (Kim and Markus 1999; Chao 1994; Crystal 1994). Thus, these findings suggest that following social norms is a part of the daily interaction of members of the East Asian culture and conforming extends beyond individual compliance in the face of group pressure (Kim and Markus 1999). Consequently, the process of conforming and complying with the group appears to reflect a norm within this cultural context of being similar to others and following social norms (Kim and Markus 1999). Such conformity promotes and maintains harmony within the culture as its members blend in with their surroundings, not standing out from the group which may also have positive connotations of connectedness within the East Asian cultural context (Kim and Markus 1999).

Uniqueness in North American Culture

In contrast, North American cultural context emphasizes autonomy and independence where individual rights and freedom are among the core cultural values (Bellah, Madsen,

Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton 1985; Spindler and Spindler 1990). In this cultural context, the individual's attitudes, feelings, and behavior are believed to be determined by the self, and should not be influenced or controlled by external factors (Markus et al. 1997). As a result, the Western cultural context promotes an independent self-construal, where individuals often view the self as an entity separate and distinct from others (Kim and Markus 1999). Also, in line with those values, a theme of uniqueness emerges within the culture. This theme of uniqueness and independence can be seen in popular American movies (e.g. Divergent, Hunger Games, and Good Will Hunting) which often centers on the idea of the individual going against powerful institutions and standing out from the crowd (Kim and Markus 1999). Thus, it appears that uniqueness is a norm in Western cultures, representing a social standard of going against the norm and being different from one's surrounding (Kim and Markus 1999). Such behavior of standing out from the crowd may symbolize the assertions of one's individuality and self-worth within this cultural context (Kim and Markus 1999).

Self-Construals and Individual Preferences for Uniqueness or Conformity

Cultural differences in preferences for uniqueness and conformity could be related to the individual's construction of the self which is shaped by culture (Triandis 1989). Kim and Markus (1999) documented culturally consistent preferences, choices, and behaviors in individuals from Western and Eastern cultures. They used abstract targets such as drawings, shapes, and colors that either appeared different or the same as the surrounding targets to represent uniqueness and conformity (Kim and Markus 1999). It was found that Americans preferred stimulus which was different from the other stimulus (unique) and East Asians preferred stimulus that were similar to the other stimulus (Kim and Markus 1999). The core cultural ideas and values about interdependence in East Asian cultures and independence in North American cultures were expressed in the choices, behaviors, and preferences of the members of each culture (Kim and

Markus 1999). However, it has not been shown that it is cultural values of interdependence and independence that shape these individual preferences for uniqueness and conformity. It seems that endorsing an independent self-construal may encourage a unique mindset, where the individual is more likely to separate themselves from the group and make a choice that solidifies their uniqueness. In contrast, endorsing an interdependent self-construal may encourage the individual to adopt a conformity mindset, where they are more likely to blend with their surroundings and make a choice that is consistent with the norm. However, previous research has not established a clear link between cultural values regarding uniqueness and conformity and the way an individual defines the self.

Self-Construal and Priming

In the present research, the causal role of self-construal was examined by priming participants with either independent or interdependent self-construals and seeing whether it would lead to differences in choice patterns that mirror themes of uniqueness and conformity that is traditionally found between East Asian and North American cultures. By including self-construal priming conditions in the present study, it is possible to directly observe the impact of cultural information on people's preferences and choices. Priming studies experimentally alter the mindsets of cultural members in order to align them with the researcher's theory (e.g. Gardner et al. 1999; Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto 1991). Self-construal priming conditions are a powerful strategy for establishing a link between an observed cultural phenomenon and a specific variable believed to account for the cultural difference (Suh et al. 2008). This technique is very useful not only for conceptually identifying potential mediators of cultural differences but also making it possible to directly measure the variable in question (Matsumoto and Yoo 2006).

As mentioned before, individuals in collectivist cultures tend to endorse an interdependent self-construal and those in individualist cultures tend to endorse an independent self-construal. However, both forms of self-construals are present in varying degrees in each cultural context. Culture may strengthen accessibility to one particular aspect of the self (Triandis 1989), but all individuals are able to think of themselves in both individual and collective terms (Suh et al. 2008). Several studies have shown that self-construals can even be shifted by a situational prime (Brewer and Gardner 1996; Trafimow et al. 1991; Triandis, McCusker, and Hui 1990). Salient contextual cues can temporarily modify self-construal styles, demonstrating the malleability of the self (e.g. Gardner et al. 1999; Suh et al. 2008). Therefore, even though an individual's culture may play an important role in determining the self-construal that is frequently accessed, self-construals are able to shift in response to situational accessibility (Gardner et al. 1999).

Although individuals may be able to display multiple forms of self-construals, in the present research, I am particularly interested in the instances when either the independent or the interdependent aspect of the self is relatively more salient than the other. It is expected that when the independent aspect of the self is more accessible than the interdependent aspect of the self, individuals will make choices that affirm their uniqueness and individuality by choosing target objects that are different from its surrounding. In contrast, when the interdependent aspect of the self is more accessible than the independent aspect of the self, individuals will make choices that align with ideas of conformity and interdependence by choosing target objects that are more similar to its surroundings. In sum, it is believed that the relative salience of the interdependent versus independent self-construal plays a very important role in explaining the cultural differences of attitudes and preferences for uniqueness and conformity found cross-culturally by Kim and Markus (1999).

PRESENT RESEARCH

In the present study, a social episode was designed to empirically link the observed cultural differences in preferences and attitudes towards uniqueness and conformity (Kim and Markus 1999) to the way an individual defines herself or himself (self-construals) which is shaped by culture (Triandis 1989), in order to support the idea that culture influences our choices. Studying choice across cultures is important because the act of choosing between two or more objects is a common occurrence in virtually every culture. Although the primary interest is in comparing Western and East Asian cultures, I did not limit my participant pool to them. York University is a very multicultural school, due to different levels of acculturations there is diversity within cultural groups as well as similarities across groups. As a result, culture was assessed by administrating items from the Asian Values Scale (AVS; Kim, Atkinson, and Yang 1999) and the European American Values Scale (EAVS; Wolfe, Yang, Wong, and Atkinson 2001). Both measures are intended to assess a wide range of values that vary across cultures, such as independence versus interdependence (Butler, Lee, and Gross 2007). Therefore, individuals that are not from an Asian or European background are still able to participate in the study and respond meaningfully (Butler et al. 2007).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two priming conditions; an interdependent self-construal prime condition, or an independent self-construal prime condition. In both conditions, the participants were given a questionnaire to complete which each included a story that primed them with either independent or interdependent values. The AVS and EVS served as a manipulation check for the primes. Since most of the participants are Canadian and have probably internalized Canadian values which emphasize individualism more than collectivism (Kemmelmeier et al. 2003), most of the participants would naturally score higher on the European value scale than on the Asian value scale. Therefore, to check whether the primes were

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successful in priming the independent or interdependent aspect of the self, it was expected that those primed with interdependence will report higher Asian values than those primed with independence. Similarly, those primed with independence will report higher European values than those primed with interdependence. Once participants completed the questionnaire, they were asked to choose one pen from a group of pens as their reward. The presentation of the pens was such that there was a clear distinction between the two colors of pens; the blue pen was in the majority (representing conformity) and the black pen was in the minority (representing uniqueness). The pens were presented in a clear round pen holder that held approximately 30 pens in total. When a participant selected a pen, another pen of the same color immediately replaced it to ensure that the presentations of the pens were consistent throughout the study. Both the blue and black pens were equally accessible from the pen holder. The purpose of this was to test how the presentation of the pens will affect individual's choice pattern. In other words, how will the cultural values conveyed to individuals through the presentation of pens effect their preferences and choice? Will the participants simultaneously appropriate and perpetuate these values through choosing a pen that is consistent with the cultural information they were primed with?

Studying cultural values this way allows researchers to examine the impact of culture on individual's behavior without the external pressure to act in a culturally appropriate manner (Kim and Markus 1999). It was hypothesized that consistent with the values and attitudes towards uniqueness and conformity of the respective cultures, individuals in the interdependent prime condition will show a preference for conformity and chose a pen in the majority (blue pen) making a common choice. In contrast, individuals in the independent prime condition will show a preference for uniqueness and chose a pen in the minority (black pen) making an uncommon choice.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

The participants in the study were recruited from York University using convenience sampling. A total of 60 undergraduate students took part in the study (30 participants in each condition). The participants' gender, age, and cultural background were recorded. After successful completion of the study, participants were rewarded with a pen.

Materials

Each participant received a questionnaire packet consisting of two parts. In the first part, participants were given a filler activity asking them to comment on their favorite season. Afterwards, participants were asked to read a short story that either reinforced collectivist values or individualist values, priming participants with either the independent or interdependent aspect of the self (Butler et al. 2007). In this task, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: the independent self-construal prime condition or the interdependent self-construal prime condition. In the second part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to report on their cultural values. The study measured participants' choice patterns using pens as target objects to choose. Two different color pens (black and blue) were arranged in a manner that presented the blue pens in the majority and the black pens in the minority. The pens were the same brand to limit the possibility of participants' choice being influenced by other factors such as branding of pens. After completing the questionnaires, participants answered demographic questions.

PROCEDURE

Prime Conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to either an independent self-construal prime condition, or an interdependent-self prime condition developed by Trafimow et al. (1991) and validated in later studies (Trafimow and Finlay 1996; Ybarra and Trafimow 1998).

Participants were primed with either an independent or interdependent story that has been shown to alter the balance between independent and interdependent self-construals on a self-construal task (Trafimow et al. 1991). The independent and interdependent story was adapted from Gardner et al. (1999) and describes a dilemma in which the main character has to make a choice on whom to select to complete an important task. In the independent self-construal prime condition, the main character only considers benefits to themselves and choses the person who is best suited to complete the task. In the interdependent self-construal prime condition, the same story was presented but the main character chooses a member from their own family and considers benefits to the family. After reading the story, participants were asked to report on their cultural values.

Cultural Values. Cultural values were assessed by including items taken from the Asian Values Scale (AVS; Kim et al. 1999) and the European American Values Scale (EAVS; Wolfe et al. 2001). Both measures are intended to assess a wide range of values that vary across cultures, such as independence versus interdependence (Butler et al. 2007). Following Butler et al. (2007), 10 items were selected from each scale that separates Asian and European Americans in the most relevant dimensions (role and norm conformity versus flexibility) from the original scale development studies (Kim et al. 1999; Wolfe et al. 2001). The items chosen are presented in the Appendix. Responses were given on a 7-point scale ranging from -3, representing "strongly disagree," to +3, representing "strongly agree" (Butler et al. 2007). The AVS items had an alpha of .69, and the EAVS had an alpha of .63. Following Rudmin (2003), the two scales were combined by subtracting the AVS from the EAVS. This combined measure produced a range of 5.00 indicating strong endorsement of European values to -0.55 indicating mild endorsement of Asian values, with a mean of 2.10 (moderate endorsement of European values). Individuals who scored around the mean were classified as holding both European and Asian values.

Choice. Participants were presented with a group of pens in a clear pen holder consisting of only black and blue colors to choose from as their reward for completing the questionnaire. The participants were unaware that their choice was being recorded as part of the study. To measure individual choice patterns towards conformity or uniqueness, the pens were arranged in a manner that presented the black color pens in the minority, appearing different from its surroundings to represent uniqueness. And the blue color pens were in the majority, appearing similar to its surroundings to represent conformity. Participants choice was recorded as either uncommon if they choose a black pen or common if they choose the blue pen.

RESULTS

Manipulation checks. To check whether the priming manipulation affected participants as intended, participants' scores on the value scales were examined. As expected, participants in the independent prime condition reported higher European values ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.57$) than participants in the interdependent prime condition ($M = 1.39$, $SD = 0.74$; Dunnet's $MD = 0.28$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .05$, Cohen's $d = 0.43$). Similarly, participants in the interdependent prime condition reported higher Asian values ($M = 0.59$, $SD = 0.77$) than participants in the independent prime condition. ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.71$; Dunnet's $MD = 0.77$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .01$, Cohen's $d = 1.04$). These results indicate that both primes were successful in activating a relatively greater independent self-construal in the independent prime condition and a relatively greater interdependent self-construal in the interdependent prime condition.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Values in Each Prime Condition

		Asian Values		European Values	
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Independent Prime Condition	30	1.36	.71	1.67	.57
Interdependent Prime Condition	30	.59	.77	1.39	.74

Choice. A 3 (Cultural Values: East Asian vs. European American vs. Both East Asian and European American) X 2 (Prime conditions: Interdependent vs. Independent) X 2 (Choice: uncommon color vs. common color) mixed log-linear test was used in the analysis. The test revealed no three-way interaction, $x^2(1, 59) = 0.41$, P > .01, and no two-way interaction that involved Choice: For Prime Condition X Choice interaction, $x^2(1, 59) = 0.22$, P > .01, and for Cultural Values X Choice interaction, $x^2(1, 59) = .87$, P > .01. These results indicate that participants' choice was not affected by the prime condition they were assigned to. Therefore, suggesting that the presentation of pens do not have any effect on individuals' choice or preferences for a particular pen.

Table 2

Results of a Mix Log-Linear analysis: Two-way Interaction between Prime Condition X Choice

Conditions	Choices	
	Uncommon	Common
Independent Prime	17 (56%)	13 (44%)
Interdependent Prime	10 (33%)	20 (67%)

Note. $\chi 2 = 0.22$, df = 1. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages. $p > .05$
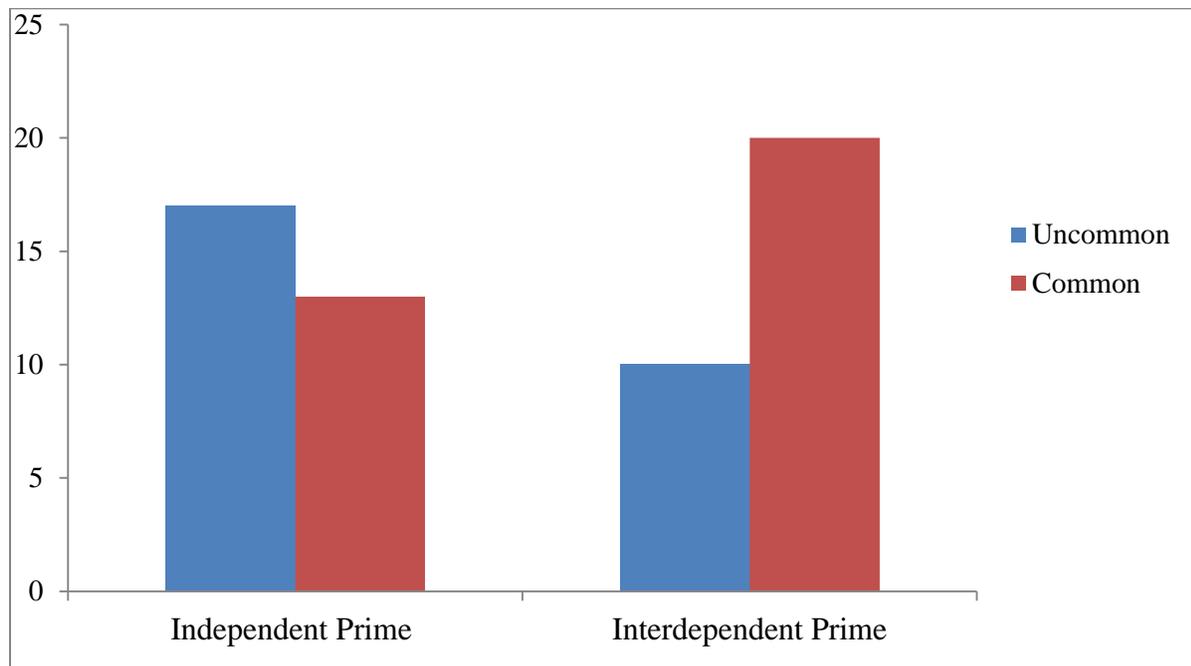
Figure 1. The number of participants making either a common or an uncommon choice in each prime condition.

DISCUSSION

A mixed log-linear analysis revealed no significant interaction between Cultural Values, Prime conditions, and Choice. The results obtained do not appear to support the hypothesis that

the content of self-construal priming influence individuals' choice pattern towards uniqueness and conformity. Thus, suggesting that self-construals do not play a significant role in predicting participates' preferences and choices.

Although the results were not significant, a trend did emerge in the data that is consistent with the hypothesis of the present study. Among the participants in the prime conditions, a noticeable difference was found between the selections of pens. In the interdependent prime condition, more than half of the participants (67%) chose the pen of the more common color (See Table 2). Similarly, in the independent prime condition, slightly more than half of the participants (56%) chose the pen of the more uncommon color (See Table 2). More than half the participants in each condition exhibited a choice pattern that is consistent with the respective cultural values they were primed with. If participants' choices were not influenced by the presentation of the pens then we would expect an equal preference for both the common and uncommon color across both conditions. However, it was found that when the independent aspect of the self (where the individual views herself/himself separate from others) is salient, participants were more likely to make an uncommon choice than a common choice. Likewise, when the interdependent aspect of the self (where the individual views herself/himself embedded in a larger social network) is salient, participants were more likely to make a common choice.

If participants' response (choice) in each condition were regarded as reflecting cultural attitudes towards norms then each responses could be interpreted as either following the norm (when a common color pen was selected) or going against the norm (when an uncommon color pen was selected). This pattern of finding is in-line with previous findings on cultural differences in practice related to attitudes towards norms. Previous research has found that East Asians were more willing to conform to the norm than European Americans were, whether the task at hand was insignificant (Kim and Markus 1999), or more important, as implied in past research on life

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satisfaction (Suh et al. 1998), child-rearing practices (Chao 1994), and motivation (Iyengar and Lepper 1999). The observed trend suggests that the way an individual views themselves in terms of being separate or embedded in a group impacts their choice pattern towards uniqueness and conformity.

Additionally, the observed trend may reflect the influential role of the meaning of acts which is shaped by culture (Kim and Drolet 2003) on participants' choice patterns. Previous research has found that people basis their preferences, which in turn influences their choices, on the meaning attached to a target object rather than the specific properties of the object (e.g. Hunt 1955; Irwin and Gebhard 1946; Rozin and Zellner 1985; Zajonc 1968). In line with these findings, it could be suggested that participants based their choice of pen on the meaning associated with each color rather than the properties of the pen. To better illustrate, participants may have chosen the uncommon color, not because of the specific color of the pen, but for the meaning associated with the act. Participants may have perceived the uncommon color as representing uniqueness, going against the norm, and standing out from the crowd. Priming participants with independence would have made these values more salient to the individual (Butler et al. 1999), explaining the greater frequency of participants within this condition choosing the uncommon color than the common color. Similarly, participants primed with interdependence would have values of conformity and harmony made more salient to them (Butler at et. 1999) which re-enforces the idea of following the norm (Markus and Kim 1999). Participants might have perceived the common color as representing conformity since it was in the majority, blending in with its surroundings. Thus, partially explaining why more than half of the participants within this condition chose the common color more often than the uncommon color. Consequently, regardless of the individual properties of the targets (whether they are pens or abstract figures), the meaning attached to an object which is shaped by culture may be a more

important predictor of attitudes and behavior (Kim and Drolet 2003). Therefore, suggesting that participants in both conditions may not have perceived the act of choosing a pen in the same way but associate different meanings to each color as a result of the cultural values they were primed with.

However, further research is required to support this theory as there were a number of limitations in the present study. One important limitation is the sample size of the study. The current sample size of 60 participants (30 in each condition) is small. The study could have benefited from a larger sample size since it generally produces more reliable data. Another limitation of the study is the lack of a control group (no priming). Including a control group would have provided a comparative group to contrast the results from the priming conditions with participants' typical responses (Suh et al. 2008). Furthermore, it would have been interesting to have switched the different colored pens positioning halfway through the study. So for example, the color that is originally placed in the minority (uncommon color) would switch in the second half of the study, and be placed in the majority (common color). By alternating the colors throughout the study, it would have limited the influences of the actual colors on participant choices.

Also, it is important to note that there are alternative explanations for the observed trend in participants' choice patterns. For instances, participants could have chosen a pen at random. If this was the case then we would expect more common color pens to be selected since there was a higher frequency of common colors in the group of pens. This explanation could account for why more participants in the interdependent condition choose the common color more often than the uncommon color. However, this explanation does not explain why more people in the independent condition chose the uncommon color more often than the common color. If participants were picking at random then it stands to reason that in both conditions participants

should choose the common color more often than the uncommon color. Another explanation could be that when participants saw the uncommon color, they interpreted the absence of this color as representing the more popular color. Reasoning that since there are fewer numbers of color X, people before them must have chosen it more frequently, signifying its popularity. Thus, choosing an uncommon color over a common color could have reflected participants' intent to choose a more popular color over a less popular color. Furthermore, another explanation could be that participants' choice of a pen was influenced by a pre-existing pen collection. If a person already possessed many pens of the same color then they might be more likely to avoid choosing the same color pen when given the option to select one pen from a group of pens. These are all potential explanation for the observed trend across both conditions and as a result, it has limited the interpretation of the data.

A potential implication of the study is that cultural values of interdependence and independence which are re-enforced in various degrees in East Asian and Western cultures do not account for the cultural differences in attitudes and preferences towards uniqueness and conformity. As a result, future research is encouraged to identify other specific mechanisms through which culture operates to influence individuals' choice patterns. For instance, future research could explore different cognitive processes as a potential mediator for the observed cultural phenomena. Fiske et al. (1998) found that East Asians tend to think in holistic ways (focusing on the whole of an object rather than its individual parts), whereas North Americans tend to think in analytic ways (methodical step-by-step approach to thinking). These differences in cognitive process style may help explain the difference in attitudes and preferences towards uniqueness and conformity. A holistic way of thinking refers to viewing an object as a basic unit rather than focusing on each subsection as an independent basic unit (Fiske et al. 1998). This type of categorization may lead to a greater liking for the common color since the uncommon

color would most likely be viewed as a small component of the larger presentation of pens that upset the arrangement of the basic unit that is otherwise carefully structured. Given that the uncommon color deviates from its surroundings, disturbing the arrangement of the basic unit. In contrast, an analytic way of thinking results in viewing the subsections of an object as independent basic units (Fiske et al. 1998). This type of categorization may lead individuals to view the uncommon color in the assortment of pens as an independent basic unit. Resulting in more attention allocated to the uncommon color since it stands out from its background, which may lead to a greater liking for it over the less noticeable color.

CONCLUSION

Why do we make the choices that we do? Is there a recognizable pattern to our simple everyday choices? Well interestingly, research has shown that the values expressed on a cultural level can also be displayed on an individual level, through individuals' choices (Kim and Markus 1999). In other words, the core values expressed in an individual's culture can also be exhibited in the person's actions, leading to a recognizable pattern to their choices and preferences. In particular, Western countries value ideals such as individuality and autonomy, where its members are encouraged to be unique and different from others (Kim and Markus 1999; Snyder and Fromkin 1980; Brewer 1991). In many East Asian countries, however, ideals such as harmony and connectedness are valued, where conforming to social norms and being similar to others are positively viewed by its members (Fiske et al. 1998; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Markus et al. 1997; Smith and Bond 1993; Triandis 1995). As a result of these prevalent cultural values, a theme of uniqueness emerges within the Western cultural context and members establish their individuality through attempting to be unique (Kim and Markus 1999; Brewer 1991). Similarly, a theme of conformity emerges within the East Asian cultural context where members maintain harmony within the group through conforming to social norms and blending

in with their surroundings (Kim and Markus 1999; Fiske et al. 1998; Markus and Kitayama 1991). Kim and Markus (1999) found that the cultural values centering on uniqueness and conformity that have been traditionally found in Western and Eastern cultures were also expressed in the choices and preferences of its members. They found that American's were more likely to select subfigures and stimulus that were unique from its surroundings, whereas East Asians were more likely to choices subfigures and stimulus that were similar to its surroundings (Kim and Markus 1999). These findings indicate that the values prevalent in an individual's culture may also be reflected in their choices. However, the exact cultural mechanisms that accounted for the cultural consistent choices and preferences have not been identified.

The intent of the present paper is to address this gap by identifying a potential mediator of the observed cultural phenomena. I examined the causal role of interdependent versus independent self-construals on individuals' choices and preferences towards uniqueness and conformity. It was hypothesized that interdependent and independent self-construals account for the cultural differences in attitudes and preferences towards uniqueness and conformity found cross-cultural by Kim & Markus (1999) both on the cultural and individual level. A social episode was designed where participants were presented with a group of pens that were strategically arranged to reinforce Western and Eastern cultural values regarding uniqueness and conformity. By priming either the interdependent or independent aspect of the self and immediately observing participants' choices after, I was able to directly examine the impact of cultural information on participants' behavior. Using a mixed log-linear test, the analysis revealed no significant interaction between Cultural Values, Prime conditions, and Choice, suggesting that the presentation of pens did not influences participants' choices in either prime condition. In other words, whether a pen was presented as the more common or more uncommon color did not have a clear impact on participants' preferences for a particular pen; across both

conditions. The results suggest that self-construals do not play a significant role in predicting participates' choice patterns towards uniqueness and conformity. However, the data did reflect a trend that is consistent with the hypotheses of the present research.

Although the present study was not able to produce significant results, it is nonetheless a very important area of research that should be further studied. The influence of culture on our choices has several implications for our lives as we make choices daily. By further studying this topic, we can develop a better understanding of the interaction between the individual and their culture as well as expand our knowledge of the extent of cultural influences on our actions. Furthermore, culture, as influential as it may be on our behavior, it is learned and created by us and therefore certain aspects that hinder us as individuals and as a society can be changed and improved.

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Appendix

Items taken from the Asian Values Scale (Kim et al., 1999).

1. Children should not place their parents in retirement homes.

2. The worst thing one can do is bring disgrace to one's family reputation.

3. One need not achieve academically to make one's parents proud. (Reverse scored)

4. Parental love should be implicitly understood and not openly expressed.

5. When one receives a gift, one should reciprocate with a gift of equal or greater value.

6. One should not make waves.

7. One need not follow the role expectations (gender, family hierarchy) of one's family. (Reverse scored)

8. Educational and career achievements need not be one's top priority. (Reverse scored)

9. One should be able to question a person in an authority position. (Reverse scored)

10. One need not remain reserved and tranquil. (Reverse scored)

Items taken from the European American Values Scale (Wolfe et al., 2001).

1. Sometimes, it is necessary for the government to stifle individual development. (Reverse scored)

2. A woman who is living alone should be able to have children.

3. I'm confident in my ability to handle most things.

4. It is important for me to serve as a role model for others.

5. The idea that one spouse does all the housework is outdated.

6. I am rarely unsure about how I should behave.

7. I prefer not to take on responsibilities unless I must. (Reverse scored)

8. I do not like to serve as a model for others (Reverse scored)

9. Good relationships are based on mutual respect.

10. Abortion is okay when the mother's health is at risks.

Doing Well by Doing Good:
Benefits for the Benefactor

Aneka Khilnani

In the United States, approximately half of adults engage in volunteering each year (Piliavin & Siegl 2007). Moreover, 70% of adults report volunteering at some point in their lifetime and participation in volunteer work has been increasing (Piliavin and Siegl 2007). Given these trends, there is interest in the consequences of volunteer participation. In its broadest conceptualization, volunteer work is unpaid work on the part of an individual or a group of individuals with the intent of benefiting others with whom one has no contractual, familial or friendship obligation (Bussell and Forbes 2002).

Extant literature suggests there are six motives that drive the desire for adults to volunteer, which are: career-related experience, enhancing self-esteem, learning more about life, improving outlook on life, acting on our values, and strengthening social ties. Not included, but perhaps also belonging in this list, is improving health and well-being. Extant research demonstrates that volunteers gain significant benefits from frequently volunteering. Volunteering contributes to decreased psychological distress and buffers the negative consequences of stressors, it increases life satisfaction and decreases depression (Musick and Wilson 2003); and it is associated with better physical health and lower mortality (Piliavin and Siegl 2007).

The types of individuals who participate in volunteering should be considered before drawing on the benefits of volunteerism. Focusing only on the consequences of volunteer work overlooks the antecedents of human agency. People with greater personality resources and better physical and mental health, theoretically, would be more likely to seek, or be sought for community service (Casiday, Kinsman, Fisher, and Bambra 2008). Extant literature suggests that people who are involved in community service may have greater life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of purpose in life, physical health and mental health among other consequences (Mellor et al. 2008). It should be noted that much of the empirical literature producing these sets of findings rely on cross sectional data, leaving open the question of the direction of effects (Casiday et al.

2008). There are good reasons to expect bi-directionality in the relationship between various aspects of personal well-being and volunteer work, because results from extant research have demonstrated that volunteer work indeed enhances all six aspects of well-being and, conversely, people who have greater well-being invest more hours in volunteer service (Casiday et al. 2008). Given these findings, further understanding of self-versus social selection processes seems an important next step. Do positive, healthy people actively seek out volunteer opportunities, or do organizations actively recruit individuals of these types (or both)? In short, there is a question if individuals with high levels of well-being are more likely to volunteer or if volunteering is truly improving well-being.

This study sought to examine the relationship between volunteering and perceived mental and physical health status. In this study perceived mental and physical health are used to measure true mental and physical health. Extant research suggests that self-assessed mental and physical health are valid health indicators in middle-aged populations and can be used for population health monitoring (McGee et al. 1999). This study also examines the relationship between volunteering, social participation, and health-related behaviors on perceived mental and physical health status. The study hypothesizes that volunteering will be positively related to good self-reported physical and mental health, even after controlling for the effects of social participation and health behaviors.

DATA AND METHODS

The data is retrieved from a cross-sectional study titled *The Survey of Texas Adults* (2004). The purpose of this data set was to collect information about seven major aspects of adults' lives in Texas: civic management, volunteering, personality, physical health, health behaviors, mental health, religiosity and demographic characteristics.

The sample consisted of the Texas household population aged 18 and older. All surveys were administered by telephone from November 5, 2003 to January 29, 2004. Respondent level cooperation rate was 89%. A logistic regression model was used to analyze sociodemographic variables and the binary outcome variables perceived mental and physical health, and the exposure variables of volunteering, meditation, walking, relationship status, work status, feelings of isolation, and participation in religious organization. The sample size for the final model related to physical health was 1,411 and for mental health the final sample size is 1409.

Eight exposure variables were assessed: participation in monthly volunteering, meditation, walking, marital status, work status, feelings of isolation, participation in religious organizations, and meals eaten outside of the home. These variables were chosen to be able to control for the effects of socialization and health related behaviors. Each of the variables were recoded as a binary variable, except for the eight-exposure variable. In all cases when the respondents answered, "don't know" or "confused" they were excluded from analysis.

The two outcome variables of interest are: "perceived mental health," defined as the respondents' view of the status of their own mental health and "perceived physical health," defined as respondents' view of the status of their own physical health. Both ratings of mental and physical health were recoded as binary variables, where "0" representing excellent, very good, or good rating of mental or physical health and "1" representing fair or poor rating of mental or physical health.

The six exposure variables are: monthly volunteer participation, meditation, walking, marital status, work status, feelings of isolation, participation in religious groups, and number of meals a person has outside of the house. Aside from meals outside of the house, all the other variables were recoded as binary variables. 'Meals outside of the house' was categorized into three categories.

RESULTS

Table 1. Social participation and health behavior characteristics as they relate to poor perceived mental and physical health among adults in Texas: 2004 *Survey of Texas Adults*.

Variable	Percent Distribution (%)	Outcome: Poor Perceived physical health (%) (N=1411)	Outcome: Poor Perceived mental health (%) (N=1409)
Gender			
Female	61.5	16.70	14.30
Male	38.5	18.67	18.68
Volunteering Monthly			
Yes	34.66	11.20	4.64
No	65.34	22.19	8.62
Work Status			
Working	56.79	12.14	5.06
Not Working	43.21	25.98	9.48
Weekly walking			
Yes	74.31	15.50	5.86
No	25.69	26.63	11.02
Practice Meditation			
Yes	58.59	14.21	7.74
No	41.41	20.79	5.96
Feelings of Isolation			
Yes	8.40	15.91	29.51
No	91.60	44.00	5.19
Relationship Status			
In a relationship	61.45	15.54	5.58
Not in relationship	38.55	22.78	9.79
Dining Outside home per week			
0 Days	11.80	28.41	12.64
1-2 Days	47.52	16.81	6.93
3-4 Days	22.39	16.52	4.20
5+ Days	18.30	17.58	8.09
Religious Participation (Weekly)			
Yes	66.56	17.40	6.55
No	33.44	20.24	8.67

Table 1 presents the distribution of volunteering characteristics related to social participation and health-related behaviors. About a third of the adults did volunteer (33.4%). In terms of health-related behaviors over half of the participants practice meditation (58.59%) and go on walks at least once a week (74.31%). The majority of participants ate out outside of the house 1-2 days (47.53). In terms of social participation, about half of the participants work full

time (56.79%), over half are in a romantic relationship (61.45%), and participate in a religion (66.56%). About every 1 in every 11 adults, reported feelings of isolation (8.40%).

Table 2. Multivariate Logistic Regression Models for Perceived Physical Health Among Adults in Texas: *Survey of Texas Adults, 2004* (N=1411)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	OR (95% CI)[a]	P	OR (95% CI)[a]	P
Do not volunteer monthly	2.26 (1.66, 3.09)	<0.001	1.87 (1.33,2.65)	<0.001
Not working			2.08 (1.54,2.82)	<0.001
Not walking weekly			1.63 (1.20, 2.23)	0.002
Practice meditation			1.45 (1.06,1.98)	0.017
Feel Isolated			2.91 (1.90, 4.46)	<0.001
Not in a relationship			1.43 (1.07, 1.92)	0.017
Dining outside home per week (ref: 0 Days)				
1-2 Days			0.70 (0.46,1.08)	0.105
3-4 Days			0.75 (0.46, 1.23)	0.257
5+ Days			0.76 (0.45, 1.28)	0.304
Participate in religious groups			0.94 (0.70, 1.29)	0.739

Note
[a] OR= odds ratio, CI= Confidence Interval

When considered separately from the effects of social participation and health behaviors, poor physical health was significantly associated with not volunteering at least once a month (Table 2, Model 1). An adult who does not volunteer at least once a month has 2.26 times the odds of reporting poor perceived physical health, in comparison to an adult who volunteers at least once a month (Table 2, Model 1, p<0.001). A subsequent model (Model 2) considered additional sets of variables related to social participation and health-related behaviors, that might confound associations between physical health and volunteering. Associations between physical health and volunteering were robust to the inclusion of these variables. However, the association

between perceived physical health and volunteering was slightly attenuated. Adults who do not volunteer at least once a month have a 1.87 times the odds of reporting poor perceived physical health in comparison to an adult who volunteers at least once a month after controlling for selected social participation activities (work status, relationship status, feelings of isolation, and religious participation) and certain health-related behaviors (walking, meditation, and eating outside the house) (Table 1, Model 1, p<0.001). Intriguingly work status (OR=2.08, p<0.001), meditation (OR=1.45, p=0.017), walking (OR=1.63, p=0.002), feelings of isolation (OR=2.91 p<0.001), and relationship status (OR=1.43, p=0.017) were all predictors of poor physical health. Dining outside of the home for any number of days (1-2 days: OR=0.75, p=0.105, 3-4 days: OR=0.76 p=0.257, 5+ days: OR=0.70 p=0.304) and religious participation (OR=0.94, p=0.739) were not significant predictors of poor physical health.
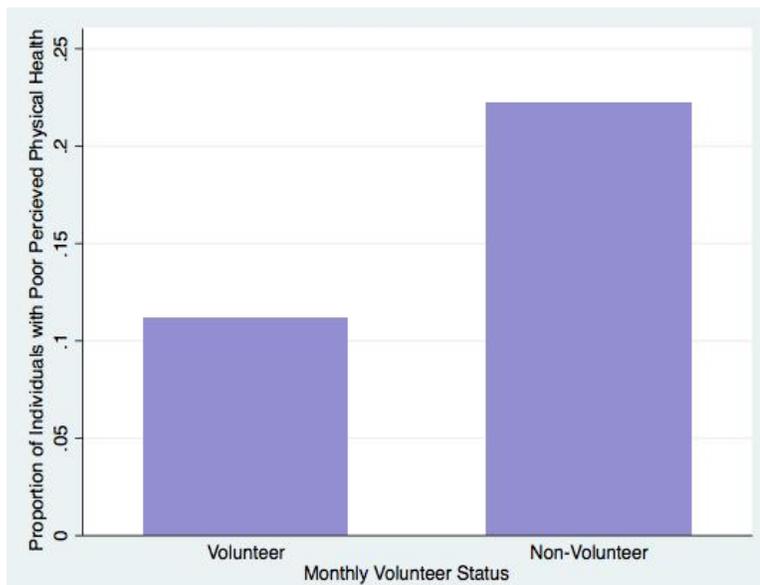
Figure 1. Proportion of volunteers and non-volunteers with poor perceived physical health among Adults in Texas from: Survey of Texas Adults, 2004 (N=1411). There was a higher

proportion of individuals who do not volunteer at least once a month who experienced poor

perceived physical health, in comparison to individuals who volunteer at least once a month.

Table 3. Multivariate Logistic Regression Models for Perceived Mental Health Among Adults in Texas: *Survey of Texas Adults, 2004* (N=1409)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	OR (95% CI) [a]	P	OR (95% CI) [a]	P
Do not volunteer monthly	1.93 (1.21, 3.09)	0.006	1.42 (0.84.2.41)	0.190
Not working			1.59 (0.99,2.53)	0.052
Not walking weekly			1.70 (1.07, 2.70)	0.025
Practice meditation			1.19 (0.75, 1.89)	0.468
Feel Isolated			5.78 (3.45, 9.67)	<0.001
Not in a relationship			1.39 (0.89, 2.18)	0.151
Dining outside home per week (ref: 0 Days)				
1-2 Days			0.84 (0.45,1.54)	0.564
3-4 Days			0.46 (0.21, 1.01)	0.053
5+ Days			0.94 (0.44, 1.98)	0.868
Participate in religious groups			0.98 (0.61, 1.56)	0.929

Note
[a] OR= odds ratio, CI= Confidence Interval

When considered separately from the effects of social participation and health behaviors,

poor mental health was significantly associated with not volunteering at least once a month

(Table 3, Model 1). An adult who does not volunteer at least once a month has 1.93 times the

odds of reporting poor perceived mental health, in comparison to an adult who volunteers at least

once a month (Table 3, Model 1, p=0.006). A subsequent model (Table 3, Model 2) considered

additional sets of variables that might confound associations between mental health and

volunteering related to social participation and health behaviors. Associations between mental

health and volunteering were not robust to the inclusion of these variables. After controlling for

the effects of working, walking, meditation, feelings of isolation, romantic relationships, food-

related behaviors, and participation in religious groups, adults who do not volunteer at least once a month do not have significantly different odds of poor mental health in comparison to people who volunteer at least once a month after controlling for social participation and health-related behaviors (Table 3, Model 2, p=0.190). It should be noted that the association between volunteering and mental health remained in the expected direction. Intriguingly, the only variables associated with poor mental health were feelings of isolation (OR=5.78, p<0.001) and not walking at least once a week (OR=1.70, p=0.025). Work status (OR=1.59 p=0.052), dining outside of the home (1-2 days: OR=0.84, p=0.564, 3-4 days: OR=0.46 p=0.053, 5+ days: OR=0.94 p=0.868), religious participation (OR=0.98, p=0.929) and relationship status (OR=1.39, p=0.151) were not significant predictors of reporting poor mental health.

DISCUSSION

Understanding factors associated with mental and physical well-being of adults is a major research priority in the United States. Interest is particularly high in changes that can be made at a low-cost. This study supports the research agenda by exploring the contribution of volunteering to mental and physical well-being.

The findings of this study suggest there is an association between physical health and volunteering. As hypothesized by this study, volunteers report better physical health, even after controlling for social participation and health behaviors (Piliavin and Siegl 2007). The findings are in contrast to extant literature because this study did not find a significant association between volunteering and status of mental health, after controlling for social participation and health behaviors. In contrast, extant literature suggests that consistent volunteering is associated with improved mental health (Musick and Wilson 2003). The lack of significant association between mental health and volunteering after controlling for social participation and health behaviors was in contrast to what was hypothesized by this study.

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Several factors should be considered in interpreting these results. First, it is difficult to extrapolate the results from this study and apply them to other states in the United States because of the original study focused on Texas. However, the random sample does appear to aid in the generalizability of the study. Second, perceived mental and physical health status was self-reported in the original study, so it is possible there is a reporting bias in how the respondents rated their own health. Individuals may be hesitant or cautious to share their health status on the phone with someone unknown. This may is especially true for mental health issues because they carry stigma (Van de Mortel 2008). Third, our data was cross-sectional and therefore, precluded any inferences regarding temporality between volunteering and health. It is equally possible that health determines volunteering or that volunteering determines health. It is likely that poor health constrains volunteering and certainly poor health is commonly given as a reason for not volunteering (Musick and Wilson 2003). Studies employing longitudinal designs are needed to investigate more conclusively the causal associations between volunteering and health status.

As mentioned above establishing a temporal relationship between mental and physical well-being and volunteering is difficult to do so, due to the cross-sectional design. For example, it is possible that if people are unwell they may be unable to volunteer and thus, it seems like good health is associated with volunteering, when those who have poor health are excluded based on ability to volunteer. If that were to be the case, implementing volunteer programs, as a public health intervention would be ineffective, because they would not be able to reach those who are meant to be reached. Moreover, other variables need to be examined that could be confounding the relationship between mental and physical well-being and volunteering. For example, feelings of isolation explored in this study were significantly associated with both mental and physical well-being. The possibility exists, such that the benefits of volunteering are more about connecting with community and engaging socially opposed to the actual act of

volunteering. Extant literature suggests the majority of explanations for the link between volunteering and health have been framed in terms of the individual benefits to the volunteer. These psychosocial benefits include the improvement of health related behaviors such as reduced smoking, maintaining social networks, and increased exercise (Musick and Wilson 2003). Nearly all explanations in the current literature point to the importance of socialization and physical and mental health. While this study attempted to control for social participation, it is important to note that this study did not account for all the complex components of social participation.

Despite this, this study consistently found across all models that volunteering is associated with good physical health, as hypothesized by this study. While volunteering was not significantly associated with good mental health after controlling for other variables, the association between volunteering and perceived mental health remained in the expected direction postulated by this study.

Based on the findings of this study and extant literature, policymakers may consider utilization of volunteer programs as a low-cost way to maintain physical health and well-being. However, before implementation, further research in the form of longitudinal designs and/or randomized control trials, are needed to develop the causal association between volunteering and physical health status. While this research concludes that volunteering is associated with good self-reported physical health, it is still not clear if better health is a result of volunteering. Furthermore, before considering implementing such programs it would be necessary to further investigate why volunteering that improves health, whether it be socialization, increased physical activity, or another explanation.

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A Layered Account of the Ways in Which Multiracial Identity is Communicated within Interpersonal Relationships

Jessica Frydenberg

My psychiatrist sits across from me, nodding his head along to everything I say. He is a petite older man, with rounded glasses and a balding head. His voice is calming, matching his very laidback and relaxed demeanor. I tell him about my insecurities, my fears, my every thought. He smiles, takes notes, and encourages me to dig deeper and embrace all parts of myself.

"Your multiracial identity is not something to be ashamed of nor should it be a source of insecurity," he says. "Why should it be? You get the best of both worlds. You have the Asian brains and exotic beauty and the height, athleticism, and all around good demeanor from your Scandinavian heritage."

He means it as a compliment but I immediately retreat into myself, uncomfortable that he doesn't think I am proud of my two races but especially that he's taking the most stereotypical characteristics of my ethnicities and saying they are advantages. I sit in my armchair, now hunched over, my arms tight across my body like a shield. I am confused by what this has to do with my severe depression and anxiety, the reason I am there to see him.

"It is the root of all your mental health issues," he explains, seeing my pained expression. "If you learn to be grateful for what you are the pain you are feeling will start to fade."

While to many this sounds great, I am disheartened. I know that by embracing his ignorant views, I will only end up hurting myself more. And while it may be true that I inherited attributes from both sides of my family that are unique, strong, and beautiful, I know deep down inside that I will never win when those around me expect me to be and behave in a particular way according to my race.

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Identity is vital to the essence of an individual. It is qualities, beliefs, and worldviews that make people unique and help them shape an understanding of their roles within the world (Mead, 1934). It has the power to not only influence who a person is and how they fit into the world but also how they communicate and present themselves to others and how others will identify them.

The multiracial identity is one that is becoming increasingly visible in today's modern age despite dating back at least three centuries (Nagai 2016). Multiracial peoples are one of the fastest growing groups of people across the globe. It is projected that one in five Americans will identify as multiracial by the year 2050 (Christian 2000; Winters and DeBosse 2003; Jackson 2009; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Sriken, Vargas, Wideman, and Kolawole 2011; Shih and Sanchez 2009) and yet little is truly acknowledged, understood, and even known about multiracial identity and how it is communicated in interpersonal relationships.

The mixed race experience is shrouded with much mystery and is often clumped with that of racial minority experiences despite the unique circumstances and struggles multiracial peoples must additionally face. We live in a time and culture that encourages if not expects us to follow inclusionary-exclusionary practices. When people do not fit into our traditional sorting categories, our response is negative. People are either in or out, they are foreign or native, they are black or white. There is no gray area but rather a dichotomy that forces people to embody a particular identity or be excluded, leaving those who do not fit in with extremely negative sentiments. Williams (2006) states that, "To see the world in black and white is to live within the contours of extremism." This is a mindset that we are socialized to have from childhood; this black and white thinking is unrealistic and fails to address the complexities of our nuanced and gray world (Williams 2006). Multiracial peoples challenge this traditional dichotomy because they are the gray area when it comes to racial sorting, fitting not into a single racial group but rather two or more racial groups. Unfortunately, because of the reinforced dichotomy, multiracial peoples have experience difficulties when it comes to interactions with others and understanding oneself and one's place in the larger society.

This paper will examine the ways in which the multiracial identity is internalized, presented, and communicated within interpersonal relationships such as in families, with peers, in the workplace or with strangers, paying particular attention to microaggressions experienced.

METHOD

This research was completed from an arts-based approach meaning that I use narrative writing as a form of art in my inquiry into the multiracial identities in interpersonal relationships. Arts-based research is fluid and constantly changing rather than rigid, fixed, and singular in its definition and usage (Osei-Kofi 2013). It is a method used by qualitative researchers to adapt aesthetic and creative art tools to discuss, analyze and address research questions in a more

holistic and engaging way (Osei-Kofi 2013). It not only stimulates creativity, openness, interpretation, and reflexivity but it also allows the researcher to share their frames of reference and how their research might be influenced by their standpoint (Osei-Kofi 2013; West and Turner 2006). An arts-based approach allows for subjugated knowledge, ways of knowing and information that is intentionally left out, ignored, or not appreciated by the dominant culture or group, to be recognized, validated, and legitimized (Osei-Kofi 2013). It provides a stage for minorities and non-dominant knowledge such as multiracial peoples to be discussed.

Non-subjugated knowledge is a form of canonical narrative, a way of knowing that is viewed as the dominant and conventional story of the culture and is accepted as the truth (Bolen and Adams 2017). Historically, we have accepted the racial dichotomy as the true narrative of society; that an individual is either black or white but cannot be somewhere in the middle nor can they be both. Individuals who do not fit into this dichotomy have internalized and come to terms with this socially constructed story about race. Using an arts-based approach for social justice, I explore the truth about the multiracial experience from a minority perspective rather than the traditional dominant narrative (white, heteronormative, and male). By taking a critical approach, the voice of the marginalized multiracial identity can shine through and be explored (Manning and Kunkel 2014). This sense of voice illuminates not only the similarities to mono-racial minority experiences but it also highlights the unique experiences mixed race people endure in their lives, something which is muted or mixed with mono-racial minority experiences.

To make sense of the research and provide an impressionistic sketch of what the multiracial identity looks like in lived experiences, I decided to write a layered account, a series of brief narratives detailing vivid memories of my multiracial identity coming into play in my daily life, which, together with the essay, creates a layered account. This postmodern ethnographic reporting technique provides a method for incorporating consciousness, self-

reflectivity, and representations of an actual lived experience (Ronai 1995). As Richardson (2000) stated when discussing the power and strength of creative analytic practices (CAP) ethnography, this type of work "displays the writing process and the writing product as deeply intertwined; both are privileged. The product cannot be separated from the producer or the mode of production or the method of knowing (930)." While the research itself provides a detailed explanation of multiracial experiences in interpersonal relationships, it is important to recognize the role that I play as the researcher and storyteller. All knowledge has values and pre-existing views attached to it (Pearce 2009) because we construct and establish meanings and ascribe truths to everything. Being multiracial myself, my experiences, knowledge, and understanding of the topic influences and informs my interpretation and representation of the research (Bolen and Adams 2017). By acknowledging and exposing my standpoint along with my personal narratives, it helps flesh out the research and theoretical framework into something just as real and complex as the issues and experiences themselves (Richardson 2000).

Using a layered account was also to ensure that both the historical and the narrative truths were considered and analyzed. The historical truth, the facts of an experience, and the narrative truth, the meaning and significance of an experience, although can be very different from each other, have the power to complement and strengthen one another as well (Bolen and Adams 2017). The historical truth is presented through the research and findings on the communication of multiracial identities within varying interpersonal relationships whilst the narrative truth was reflected through my personal anecdotes and the lessons I learnt from these encounters.

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One of my friends in college was a naive and wealthy white girl whose parents spoilt her rotten. Nonetheless, we initially got along great and talked every day leading up to moving-in. The first time we met face-to-face however, she looked at me as though she'd just seen an alien.

Her bright blue eyes widen with surprise and her brows furrow. She looks me up and down puzzled, her lips pursed tightly. Before saying hello, she says, "wait how are you so tall? I thought you would be shorter because you're Asian."

My body shivers with discomfort. Thoughts race through my head to try and justify the comment: She's not trying to be rude...Did she really just say that?...Maybe she hasn't travelled internationally and hasn't interacted with people different from herself...What a joke.

I smile back, "Well like I said, I'm half Norwegian and half Chinese-American but I was born in Denmark and grew up all over Europe but mostly Belgium. That's why I say I'm from Belgium, it's easier for people to digest."

She looks over at her mom with a quizzical look on her face as if I just said something jarring. Her mom shrugs, out of confusion herself or disinterest I'm not entirely sure. She turns back to folding my friend's clothes and putting them away in the closet.
"Wait...But then what are you really? Where are you really from?"

I look back at my mom, her focus is on setting-up the bed but her eyes look pained and her face flushed with irritation. I look back at my friend, who eagerly awaits my answer, and I realize that no matter what I say, she won't understand that I am mixed, or if she did, she wouldn't fully accept the complexities that make me, me.

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STANDPOINT REFLECTION

A standpoint is "a location, shared by a group within the social structure that lends a particular kind of sense making to a person's lived experience" (West and Turner 2006:382). In other words, what shapes an individual's perspective on the world or an issue stems from their lived experiences and interactions. An individual comes to understand how they see and understand certain issues, topics, or aspects of the world through interactions with others.

My standpoint is greatly shaped by my multiracial identity and the experiences that have stemmed from this defining aspect of my identity. I am a HAPA child. Being asked, "where are you from," "where are you *actually* from," and "what are you" are questions that have become all too familiar to me. If I am feeling sassy I will ask them what they are, a curveball they never expect. What they are trying to figure out is what race I might be because I do not appear to fit in one phenotypic racial group. The term HAPA originates from Hawaiian pidgin and was used as a derogatory term for mixed-children of Asian plantation workers in the early twentieth century (Laughlin 2014). Today however, the term means being of mixed race, more specifically

partially Asian or Pacific Islander and partially white. Alex Laughlin of NPR and National Journal beautifully writes, "it's this confusion of identity that characterizes the experience of being HAPA - struggling to find a balance between being 'too white' and 'too Asian.'" I am also a third culture kid (TCK); a global nomad of sorts, finding myself to be a stranger in my own country. A third culture kid typically has parents of two different cultures and find themselves living in a third culture (Tokuhama-Espinosa 2003). They spend most of their developmental years in a foreign country and culture that is different from their own (Tokuhama-Espinosa 2003).

I also identify with so many different cultures that it is difficult for me to really explain who I am and what I identify as to someone in a few words. I was born to a Chinese-American mother and Norwegian father, but I was also born in Copenhagen, Denmark and raised in five other countries across Europe over the course of the first 18 years of my life. I am from everywhere but I am also from nowhere. I belong everywhere but I also belong nowhere. Identifying as multiracial and multicultural is an endless challenge because I am constantly trying to find my place in the world. I experience the hardships of being a minority; I am also told that I have the best of both worlds. I am constantly asked where I am *really* from and what my heritage is because "I am Chinese-American and Norwegian" is not enough. It is easy for me to understand why so many friends, co-workers, and even strangers think like this but it is also frustrating that they do not understand nor try to understand what it means to be multiracial.

I know that I do not fit into one racial, ethnic, or cultural category in society today because it is something that has been told to me repeatedly, by friends, family, peers, teachers, and strangers alike. Communication is the backbone to an individual's standpoint; it is through communicating with others that we learn more about ourselves, moreover, our identity and our place in society (West and Turner 2006). Through interactions with others I have learnt that I

belong nowhere and everywhere; that I will never really be accepted with the Asians, but I will never be accepted by Caucasians either. My experiences, knowledge, behavior, and identity are shaped by these social groups, especially the groups that I so clearly belong or do not belong to, which in turn impacts how I behave, what I know, and how I view myself, in a continuous cycle (West and Turner 2006). It is through communicating with others that I have and will always be viewed as and feel like a minority.

Individuals' stances are based on their privilege. The standpoint theory assumes that everyone will have a limited understanding of social relations or social issues because of their location in the class structure, socially, economically, politically, and demographically (West and Turner 2006). I, for example, come from a well-off family and have been lucky enough to have a stable income that allows my family and I to travel the world, attend the best private international schools, and live comfortably without having to worry about expenses too much. Because of this, I cannot understand the viewpoints of an individual who struggles with finances and are barely getting by or a family who does not have enough food for everyone.

This being said, I still worry. I worry because I am a college-aged woman in a patriarchal society; a culture wherein the dominant, but very partial view is that men are stronger, smarter, more successful, and all around better than women. Moreover, I am a young multiracial woman in a patriarchal and unfortunately, still extremely racist world. Because of racism, people of color have learnt and understand how the perceived dominant race, Caucasians, view the world but the same cannot be said for Caucasian people understanding the experiences and views of minorities (West and Turner 2006). My global multiracial identity allows me to understand the perspectives of the dominant racial groups, mostly the Caucasian race. I understand their heritage, their mentality, how they interact with and view other races; I know and understand the world from the Caucasian perspective but I cannot say the same for my Caucasian friends, peers, and co-

workers who admit that they will never have a complete understanding of the multiracial identity and experience. With their partial, subjective views on race and ethnicity, interaction is often extremely challenging because they unintentionally force me to choose and embrace one of my races over the other (West and Turner 2006). As the dominant mono-racial group, they decide, according to their partial knowledge and understanding, what is considered normal, abnormal, included or excluded when it comes to race and racial categories.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

A social constructionist approach was taken to study multiracial identity and interpersonal communication. This approach assumes that all that makes up the world, including reality itself and our knowledge of it, is "wholly or in part, the product of our own actions" (Pearce 2009). In other words, we make sense of things such as the multiracial identity based on our relationships and interactions with others and how we talk or do not talk about it (Duck 2011). There are infinite possibilities for what it means to be multiracial just as there are infinite meanings to the term "burn-out" or the hook-up culture because we construct and communicate the meanings of these over time (Pearce 2009). This is then culturally and socially reinforced in the sense that the external force of societal beliefs, views, and assumptions influences and helps construct and communicate the meaning of something (Duck 2011). The structure of society and its rules and regulations, both subtle and implicit, provide a guideline for what is acceptable communication and understanding about a topic of and what is not (Duck 2011). The lack of discussion of and content on multiracial identity in school for example, reinforces the view that people of mixed race are nonexistent or not important enough to be a part of the curriculum.

Manning and Kunkel (2014) explain that meaning is created, learned, shaped and negotiated continuously and is constantly changing because of this process. This interpretivist approach holds that meaning is not in our heads nor is it a natural occurrence but rather it is

constructed between people and we all help in the process of constructing, modifying, and understanding the meanings of something (Manning and Kunkel 2014). This ever-changing state extends to peoples' selves in communication in the sense that an individual's sense of self develops in the family, society, and daily interactions and communication with others. Every question a person is asked, every glance a person receives, and every interaction one has will influence how their identity is formed and the kind of standpoint they develop.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks of Identity

Identity is a flexible and fluid state of being that can be changed, concealed, and revealed in different social interactions, interpersonal relationships, and intra- and intercultural contexts. In other words, an individual can control and present their identity according to their desires and what they deem appropriate (Kim 2007).

The Communication Theory of Identity Management, originally coined by Goffman, argues that identity changes in each situation an individual may face because of the way in which they manage and handle their identities (Cupach and Imahori 1993; Goffman 1959). In this sense, an individual will decide on a certain presentation of their self in order to influence how they are perceived and how their identity is interacted with (Cupach and Imahori 1993; Goffman 1959). This can be used as a means of survival, protection, acceptance and fitting in. Depending on the circumstance and social context, a multiracial person may change how they communicate and present themselves for these reasons. Building on this, the Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) explains that every individual has the ability and the power to, to some degree, negotiate their cultural identity with others in diverse interaction situations (Kim 2007). In the case of multiracial identities, multiracial people can emphasize or deemphasize certain aspects of their identity in order to effectively send a particular message or create a particular narrative about

themselves that they want others to recognize. In this sense, cultural identity becomes a part of

the broader identity orientation of the individual or communicator. The inclusivity or exclusivity

as well securities and insecurities of one's identity further influences how one communicates and

behaves when interacting with others (Kim 2007).

Theoretical Models of Multiracial Identity Development

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When I was in eighth grade, I took my first SAT exam. I was taking it for my application for the Educated Program for the Gifted Youth at Stanford University, per my English teacher's request. This was unbeknownst to the upperclassmen, who see a young Asian girl and likely presume that my tiger mom is just prepping me early. They don't have to say anything for me to know what they're thinking; it is all in their looks. As I stand awkwardly in the corner of the room alone, a little mousy Asian girl with her six 2B lead pencils pre-sharpened, an eraser, and a calculator with extra batteries, I watch the older students take turns glancing in my direction and whispering to one another. They stifle their laughs and snicker at me as I quietly walk to my room, head down, trying not to notice the extra attention on me.

The proctor tells us to fill in our information, quickly and quietly. I sit in my cramped wooden seat, pressed up against the burning radiator and stare blankly at the race categories available. Choose one. I scan the list of options for multi-racial but come up short. I look around to see what other people are doing. "Eyes on your own paper" the proctor booms, scowling.

I see white, I see Pacific Islander, I see Asian, but I don't see mixed. How do I choose one when I am both Asian American and White? I read down the list further and find an Other option and realize that that is what I am; an "other"; a person who does not belong to any racial category; a person who does not belong anywhere.

***

The concept of multiracial identities has been around for centuries, dating back to before

America was even discovered but society only began to truly recognize the social phenomenon

in the mid- to late 80s (Christian 2000; Nagai 2016). Arguably race, along with racial categories,

are a social construction and are therefore not fixed or undisputable categories (Shih and Sanchez

2009). Likewise, identity, a group or categorical membership in social groups, our essential

personal characteristics, and the traits ascribed to us by others, is not immutable but rather

constantly moving and changing over time in relation to our interactions and relationships with

other people and the development of larger society (Christian 2000; Mead 1934). We make up

the meaning of the term race and define and regulate what constitutes what race or identity

someone is (Pearce 2009). This way of thinking became apparent in the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s with the appearance of multiracial marches, protests, and town hall meetings demanding that a new racial category be created for people of multiple ancestry (Debose and Winters 2003). Despite the vast variety in ethno-racial mixtures and mixed heritages, these activists presented themselves as a single unified and supportive group, a collective consciousness (Debose and Winters 2003). The mid-90s was one of the first documented times and string of events that brought attention to the concept of multiracial peoples in a way that had not previously been discussed or explored (Christian 2000; Debose and Winters 2009).

The experiences of multiracial people have been defined and describe as a mix of "betweenness" and "marginality" (Jackson 2009; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2005). This dates back to the work of Park, a Chicago School sociologist, and his theory of the Marginal man (Christian 2000). Park asserts that human migration and the social interaction of different peoples produces a series of mixed offspring that were essentially the "marginal men" because they did not fit in anywhere (Christian 2000; Park 1928). Moreover, they were people who lived in two worlds, both in which they were deemed a stranger that did not fully assimilate (Park 1928). These perspectives resulted in false genetic and societal claims of the mixed blood person being not only below all races in the racial hierarchy, but also beneath humans because they were deemed the work of the devil and therefore naturally immoral, unbalanced, emotionally unstable, and degenerate (Christian 2000; Dover 1937; Jackson 2009). Based on the standpoint theory's assumption that the understanding of the dominant group will be both partial and harmful in situations wherein there is a dominant and subordinate group (West and Turner 2006), multiracial individuals have quickly have to learn and understand the dominant mono-racial races and that racial group's view of the world; individuals' of mono-racial heritage not only do not understand multiracial people and attribute inaccurate characteristics to them but they also do

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not completely acknowledge them as a racial category and exclude them (Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, Wong, Marshall, and McKenzie 2015).

Multiracial people have a much more flexible understanding of race and race relations than their mono-racial counterparts because they are on the margins of racial groups and can be part of more than one racial group (Shih and Sanchez 2009). They have a malleable identity that changes with each social context and interaction in which they find themselves (Goffman 1959; Shih and Sanchez 2009; West and Turner 2006). Unlike mono-racial groups, multiracial individuals tend to show greater comfort with interracial social interactions simply on the premise that race does not have the same meaning and weight as it does with other groups (Shih and Sanchez 2009). Unfortunately, because societal structures place an emphasis on maintaining racial distinctions, the mixed blood experience is one of not only more self-consciousness and understanding of oneself but also an experience of conflicting narratives and marginalization (Park 1928; Shih and Sanchez 2009). These external forces and interpersonal relationships have the power to shape not only how multiracial peoples understand and identify themselves but also how they then chose to present themselves to others. Multiracial individuals have the power to define their racial identity and communicate it in a way that ultimate suits them and what they believe. Tiger Woods is an excellent example of this in that he created and entirely different and unique racial identity, which he calls "Cablinasian" (Caucasian, Asian, Native American, and African American ancestry) as opposed to changing his identity to fit one of the pre-fabricated racial categories (Shih and Sanchez 2009).

Goffman (1959) posits that we are constantly enacting performances of our selves, performed in a particular manner and geared for a particular audience with the purpose of advancing an image that is beneficial to us. People symbolically communicate in ways that allow them to guide and control the version of their selves that the audience (those around them and

those they are interacting with), see and perceive (Goffman 1959). The behavior and image of

the self that a person puts forward will likely reflect what they deem as highly valued and central

aspects of their self that they want others to recognize and accept (Goffman 1959). For a

multiracial identity, this may be emphasizing one racial identity over another; or it could be

highlighting the beautiful blend of attributes that individual gets from their mixed heritage.

Multiracial Identities and Intimate Relationships

<div align="center">***</div>

When I was 14 years old and my sisters 11 and 9, my family and I went to Thailand for three weeks of exploration and relaxation. Over the years, we had travelled all over the world but this was our first family trip to Southeast Asia. We are not surprised by the looks of concern and the sneers of disgust we receive when walking around. It's s a normal part of our lives - my father, a 6'3 slim, white businessman walking around with three young and petite Asian-looking girls and a tall, older Asian woman. This time however, felt different...

As my middle sister and I walk alongside my dad, arms linked as we giggle and talk about what we want to see next, the sneers and concerned looks quickly become nods in our direction, smiles, and thumbs up. The more and more it happens, the more I notice that the positive responses and glances are coming from older white men, all sporting a young Thai girl or two no older than 25 years on their own arms. Confused, I look back to my mother. Clearly, I was not the only one to notice this new-found support of our supposed family dynamic. Both of my parents seem tense, carrying a mix of angst, anger, and irritation on their faces. It finally hits a breaking point for my father when two older Australian, white men approach us outside of one of the local markets. They take their time to look my sisters and I up and down before saying, in awe, "Wow...Oh my...They are beautiful. Where did you find them? How much did you pay?" My sisters and I shrink back into our seats and quickly pull our sweaters tight to make ourselves smaller. The smaller of the two men, probably in his late 60s smiles down at my youngest sister and strokes her arm as he says, "hello beautiful." My poor baby sister sits, frozen and panicked, a look of sheer terror and helplessness in her eyes as she looks to my parents for help.

My father's calm demeanor quickly explodes: his fists clenched, his face wrinkled and red, anger in his eyes. He steps in front of my sister and pushes the man away. "They are my daughters you sick fucking bastards and they are NOT for sale." His voice booms causing my baby sister to cry into my mother's protective arms while my middle sister and I wrap our arms around each other for security. Foreigners and locals alike begin to stare at us, disturbed by the loud aggressiveness of my father's tone and yet also curious by our family make up. My parents take positions in front of us, acting as a shield. My mother had otherwise been invisible to every person that glanced our way. The two men scoff and wave their hands at my parents. "They aren't worth the hassle" they say as they walk away, leaving us in complete shock, feeling violated and confused as to why someone would ever think we were prostitutes for our father.

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Having parents of two or more different races shows and encourages multiracial children from a young age that it is acceptable and permitted to marry someone of a different race. "Multiracial individuals, by virtue of coming from interracial families and having parents from different racial backgrounds, are likely to have different race-related experiences compared to monoracial individuals who come from families and parents belonging to a mono-racial group" (Bonam and Shih 2009:88). By growing up in a diverse household and observing and experiencing how people of different backgrounds can live together in harmony and love one another, a contradiction to society's messages about racial conflicts and divide, parentals' interracial relationships encourage comfort with intimate interracial relationships (Bonam and Shih 2009). Multiracial people typically regard race as an unimportant factor in their relationships but an important aspect of their self-identity (Kang and Bodenhauser 2015). Because of this, they are more likely to be interested in intimate interactions with other people who have a similar understanding and experience about mixed racial backgrounds and minority identities (Kang and Bodenhauser 2015; Lichter and Qian 2005).

Looking at intermarriage and interracial intimacy, racial and ethnic boundaries are more defined and prominent for some groups over others. Individuals that identify themselves as minorities, any race other than White, are typically more flexible with the category boundaries and intimate relationships between different racial groups (Lichter and Qian 2005). In not only friendships but also intimate interracial relationships, individuals with multiracial identities are more comfortable simply because they are accustomed to seeing races intermingle positively (Bonam and Shih 2009; Kang and Bodenhauser 2015). Overall, multiracial individuals report being much more open to interracial relationships both at the platonic and working level as well as the intimate, marriage and love relationship level than their mono-racial counterparts (Bonam and Shih 2009). Multiracial peoples will typically view race as a form of social construction by

the dominant culture and are less likely to categorize people based on race or other

characteristics such as faith (Bonam and Shih 2009). They are comfortable discussing race and

their interracial relationship with their significant others and will find ways to ensure that their

partner is also open-minded and comfortable with their multiracial relationship (Bonam and Shih

2009).

Microaggressions in the Multiracial Experience

<center>***</center>

*As my sister belts out Eponine's heartbreaking ballad in Les Miserables on the stage,
surrounded by twenty other students restlessly awaiting their turn, I sit in the audience, tense,
palms sweaty and my face flushed and hot, praying that everything goes smoothly. Musical
theatre that is her dream, a dream that my mother, seated nervously beside me, prays she
achieves.*

*Seated in front of us are the five admissions officers who will decide my baby sister's
future. I scan the back of their heads and their profiles for any inkling of what they might be
thinking. They are all straight faced, calm, and serious. As my sister's performance ends, they
slowly and quietly clap, their faces still unmoved. One officer leans over to the woman next to
him and says, "She has a "castable" face and is ethnically ambiguous. Does that count as
diversity?"*

*The woman chokes on her water and tries to stifle her laughter and coughing fit so as not
to draw attention. She turns her face to him, smirks and nods. They dismiss my sister, anxiously
scanning their faces for reactions, with a simple wave of the hand, as though she isn't even
worth their time or words.*

*"Don't tell your sister what they said," my mother whispers to me, her lips quivering. "It
will destroy her." I sigh, pained in knowing that she is right.*

<center>***</center>

The manifestation of microaggressions can occur in many different situations, between

many different individuals and groups of people; they also range in their subtle or overtness as

well as the intentions of the individual communicating the message (Nadal, Sriken, Davidoff,

Wong, and McLean 2013). "Microaggressions are subtle forms of discrimination, often

unintentional and unconscious, which send negative and denigrating messages to various

individuals and groups" (Nadal et al. 2015:147). In other words, microaggressions communicate

some degree of hostile, derogatory, or plain rude messages that target an individual or a group of

people based on their membership in a marginalized group, in this case, race. The phenomenon

of racism as subtle and covert microaggressions occur daily, and is often invisible to the

perpetrator because of their unconscious bias and partial perspective or standpoint (Johnston and

Nadal 2010).

Research on microaggressions focuses on individuals' experiences with singular

identities for example being a woman, non-heteronormative, or being a person of color but fails

to recognize the intersection of multiple minority identities such as being an LGBT person of

color or a female with a disability (Nadal et al. 2015). Moreover, racial microaggressions have

previously targeted mono-racial individuals of color but fails to recognize and include the

experiences of multiracial people (Nadal et al. 2013). Multiracial peoples are targets of

"traditional" racial microaggressions, negative or derogatory comments based on one's race or

skin color, in addition to unique multiracial microaggressions, enacted by mono-racial persons to

communicate hostile or exclusionary views or sentiments of inferiority (Johnston and Nadal

2010). The following sections discuss the different types of multiracial microaggressions that

occur in different settings: the family, the workplace, with co-workers, in education, in public

spaces and with strangers.

Microaggressions in the Multiracial Family

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When I was three, I spent my first Christmas at a tropical destination, Maui. I was a social butterfly with everyone I met and was a fish in the water; my parents had a hard time getting me to do anything but swim and play with my newfound friends. One day, I became buddies with a petite blonde Russian girl and invited her to play games with my dad and I in the pool.

    We take turns having my dad throw us in the water, squealing with excitement and laughter. As I run back to my dad to get thrown in again I notice a young couple standing with him, smiling graciously and pointing to my friend and me.

    "Oh my god, that is so cute. You have one daughter that looks just like you and one that looks like your girlfriend! Honey do you see that? That is so precious." She tugs at the man's arm; her eyes are sparkling and wide like a child staring into a candy store.

    The man stands there in his swim trunks and flip-flops stiff and unmoved. He leans closer to my father and nods his head in my direction as he quietly asks, "or is she adopted?"

I did not understand what he was saying until I was older and my parents recounted the story to me. To this day I cannot help but laugh to myself. My parents had been married for five years when this happened and my friend and my father had no similarities besides being white and having different shades of blonde hair and blue eyes.

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Nadal et al. (2013) asserts that there are five main themes in the types of microaggressions and interactions with others that occurred within multiracial families: "(a) isolation within the family, (b) favoritism within the family, (c) questioning of authenticity, (d) denial of multiracial identity and experiences by monoracial family members, and (e) feelings about not learning about family heritage or culture (195)." This is not to say that all multiracial individuals and their families experience all these microaggressions, nor does it mean that these are the only experiences people of mixed heritage experience in their familial relations. No experience is the same especially with regards to how family's shape one another's understanding of their 'racial self' and influence one another's racial identity however, research on multiracial identities all explore similar key ideas to that of Nadal et al. (Christian 2000).

All mixed-race persons experience some form of exclusion or isolation within the family because of their multiracial identity (Nadal et al. 2011; Nadal et al. 2013). This is generally from older generations with traditional views on race relations as well as with an individual's extended, often monoracial, family (Nadal et al. 2011; Nadal et al. 2013). Participants in research have continuously expressed sentiments of one side of the family belittling or treating the other side of the family poorly because they do not approve of the interracial relationship and mixed race offspring (Nadal et al. 2011). There was extreme discomfort and a sense of isolation and discrimination because they did not necessarily fit in and share the same heritage as the rest of the family (Nadal et al. 2011; Nadal et al. 2013). Multiracial individuals can often feel judged and excluded because they do not speak the same language, share the same traditions and culture, or simply do not look like the rest of their family further enforcing a sense of isolation

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(Nadal et al. 2013). Because of this alienation, they find ways to "prove" that they are part of the family by emphasizing one side of their racial identity or behaving in a similar way to or would be acknowledged by their family (Nadal et al. 2013).

Mixed race persons felt that their views and understanding of identity and race relations and how they communicated their own multiracial identity to others in society largely stemmed from the ways in which their parents' discussed these issues (Christian 2000). In families, wherein the parental figures willingly talked about race relations and the experiences of their respective racial, ethnic and social groups, people were more honest, open, and supportive of one another and their experiences than in families that did not take the time to have a dialogue about race (Christian 2000). One of the most difficult experiences of multiracial peoples is the lack of racially similar role models (Shih and Sanchez 2005). Parents have the inability to fully empathize with and understand the experiences of their children because they will likely not have the same racial identity (Christian 2000; Shih and Sanchez 2005). Siblings will have a better understanding of one's experiences but this can also differ depending on their gender and their phenotypic traits and may be experienced differently. Multiracial individuals might experience difficulties trying to talk about this within their immediate family because their parents will not fully understand what they are going through, leaving them feeling extremely isolated and alone (Nadal et al. 2013). In other words, parents can support their multiracial children and foster a mutually respectful environment and an open dialogue but are unable to be immediate role models. Some parents also use color blindness to teach their children about race despite this conflicting with external forces. Multiracial individuals therefore have difficulty understanding where they fit in larger society, what is expected of them, and above all do not know how to understand and react to how others' views and behavior toward them from a very young age (Shih and Sanchez 2005).

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Sentiments of differential treatment and in some cases favoritism from family members is another common experience of multiracial peoples (Nadal et al. 2011; Shih and Sanchez 2005). This is especially apparent in grandparent-grandchild relations wherein the grandparent still holds traditional views on race and race relations. Multiracial individuals experience both favoritism and ill treatment based on if they behave the way the grandparent thinks they should, such as a half Black, half White female being favored and privileged by her grandparents because she behaved "the way a White girl should" while her sister was mistreated and denigrated because she had Black features and did not behave like a White girl (Nadal et al. 2013). This type of interaction results in distress and tensions between siblings who may feel that they are treated differently despite having the same multiracial heritage and identity.

The pathologizing and denial of identity and experiences with microaggressions is another commonality shared by many if not all multiracial persons (Nadal et al. 2013). By and large, strangers make assumptions about multiracial peoples' family relationships and the interracial relationship of their parents and do not shy away from expressing their inappropriate sentiments of disgust or confusion (Nadal et al. 2011). Rude and intrusive stares during family outings, being verbally attacked (intentionally or unintentionally), and in extreme cases being spat at or physically attacked, leave individuals feeling upset and alone (Nadal et al. 2011; Nadal et al. 2013). Moreover, the mono-racial family member's lack of concern or dismissal and invalidation of these microaggressions leads to further feelings of isolation and a lack of support (Nadal et al. 2013).

Many multiracial individuals experience conflicting messages from their parents and their community because of their clashing racial backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives (Nadal et al. 2013; Shih and Sanchez 2005). Even if a multiracial child grows up with parents who deemphasize the importance of race or try to encourage peaceful race relations and views on

cultural awareness and sensitivity, that child will likely experience and be forced to learn about interracial conflict, racial prejudice, racism, and discrimination from other interpersonal relationships and societal structures (Shih and Sanchez 2005). While race may be viewed and openly discussed in a positive manner within the family, a multiracial individual quickly learns that race is salient and still shapes people's experiences beyond the family bubble (Shih and Sanchez 2005).

Identity and Stigma in the Workplace

Many individuals with stigmatized, non-normative, or minority social identities, including multiracial identities will consciously and deliberately chose to conceal and not disclose these aspects of their identity in the work place to be accepted and avoid being interrogated by their colleagues (DeJordy 2008). With the historically dominant ideology of the model worker being a white, middle class, married man with children, it is no wonder that anyone who did not fit this image would present themselves differently to try and be included or be given certain work (McUsic and Selmi 1997). This image of the model worker has loosened over the years, allowing marginalized peoples to work the same type of jobs, however many have continued to give up or change aspects of their own racial identities to fit in (DeJordy 2008; McUsic and Selmi 1997). As McUsic and Selmi (1997) stated, "although for many the concept of the melting pot still captures the essence of American society, there is a growing realization that such a goal too often requires individuals to melt down to blend in and thereby lose their distinctive identities (1340)." The denial of one's identity in this situation becomes a consequence of the reinforced racial categories and racial dichotomy of the larger society. Like many other aspects of the multiracial experience, multiracial employees will experience objectification and exoticization from their co-workers and bosses (Nadal et al. 2011). They are

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viewed as the atypical employee who does not fit into any racial group or line of work but as rather an ambiguous body (Nadal et al. 2011).

Multiracial Identity and Microaggression in Education

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"Why are your eyes closed? Don't fall asleep in class, that's not nice. Keep your eyes open!"
The joke seems harmless or unintentionally rude coming from my best friend in the middle of our class lecture on the human digestive system. I laugh it off and dismiss the mockery as my friend simply trying to be funny.
"Jessy! You're letting your brain go to mush. You're letting your Asian side down, eyes open, Jessy! Eyes open!"
Each crack she makes hits closer to my heart. She out of all people should understand my insecurities, she herself is extremely mixed and gets annoyed when people make jokes about part of her identity and take it too far.
I tune her words out and try to focus on memorizing the diagram of the digestive tract that the teacher has drawn on the board. My mind is miles away, thinking about the many times my friends made "Asian F" or other racial stereotype jokes and how I brush them off like they don't bother me and my friends don't mean it. Somehow, the Asian scale always drags me down.

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The role of race and race relations in the education system is something that has been studied extensively over the years but has failed to address the interpersonal experiences of multiracial students (Williams and Chilungu 2016). Multiracial students especially at the high school and college level must deal with and navigate microaggressions and potentially hostile structures and interactions every day in a system that is largely monoracial (Johnston-Guerrero and Renn 2016; Williams and Chilungu 2016). The extent to which multiracial students become comfortable with expressing their identity is influenced by how open the peer culture is to fluid racial identities and how prevalent mono-racism is on campus (Johnston-Guerrero and Renn 2016). It is extremely difficult to find spaces in which they are comfortable and feel their entire multiracial identity be communicated and presented as opposed to one specific aspect of their identity such as in the racial and ethnic student unions (Johnston-Guerrero and Renn 2016). This endorsement of a mono-racial society and norms results in the second-class status and treatment of multiracial people and their inherent exclusion and isolation (Nadal et al. 2011).

Mixed race students not only experience the racial challenges of exclusion and marginality, racial stereotypes, ignorance, awkwardness, and racial hostility that monoracial minority students' experience but they face a series of unique challenges due to their multi-raciality including being alienated and excluded from the monoracial minority student groups (Museus, Sarinana, Yee, and Robinson 2016). A hallmark of the multiracial experience is the unintentionally rude "what are you?" question (Museus et al. 2016). While a question about one's background may be deemed harmless by the inquirer or even bystanders, the constant queries and expectation to explain one's racial heritage results in many multiracial students feeling that they do not belong in these monoracial campus spaces or with their monoracial peers because they are different (Museus et al. 2016; Nadal et al. 2011). Furthermore, multiracial students are often ascribed monoracial identities and labels based on their appearance as perceived by classmates and teachers, forcing them into a specific racial category that they may not even be a part of (Museus et al. 2016).

The marginalization of multiracial students from monoracial groups is also a common experience especially when it comes to multicultural and racial groups and communities on campus (Johnston-Guerrero and Renn 2016; Museus et al. 2016). Multiracial students are told that they are not Asian, Black, Latino, or White enough to be a part of a group or they are not deemed minorities in today's culture despite being a minority both in numbers and in social context and treatment (Museus et al. 2016; Nadal et al. 2011). In other words, if a student is not "racially pure", they are often excluded from monoracial minority groups unless they demonstrate loyalties or key qualities of that race as means of justifying, legitimating, and authenticating their heritage (Museus et al. 2016; Nadal et al. 2011). This type of racial essentalization, or reducing one's mixed-race identity to a singular racial category occurs because students and teachers alike are unable to fit multiracial students into a racial category

and therefore do not acknowledge and validate their identity as real (Museus et al. 2016). Most multiracial individuals experience a mix of social acceptance and rejection growing up; students would go through periods of not fitting in or feeling targeted because of their multiracial status through ridicule or racial slurs as well as periods wherein they felt that they could move easily between different racial groups and be met with little to no resistance (Shih and Sanchez 2005). This is not only dependent on the peer culture and monoracial dominance of the community but also the type of school that multiracial students went to (Shih and Sanchez 2005). If they were at a school with a large international student or mixed racial and ethnic student population, multiracial students were met with greater social acceptance and support than if they were in a very monoracial school system (Shih and Sanchez 2005). Tying into this, multiracial students are forced to endure racial stereotyping based on one racial component of their multiracial identity whether it be that Asians are smart or African Americans are untrustworthy; these stereotypes get reinforced by students' chatter and their policing of that multiracial student to ensure that they are following these ascribed traits (Nadal et al. 2011).

Another form of microaggression experienced by multiracial female students moreso than male students is the exoticization and objectification of their mixed-raced identity because of their unique and different phenotypic traits (Museus et al. 2016). Research concluded that monoracial students were fascinated with the uniqueness of their mixed-raced peers and unintentionally viewed that as super exotic, new and exciting (Museus et al. 2016). While it is often menat as a compliment and has no malicious intent, it can make multiracial students feel uncomfortable and highlight how they are different and do not fit into the dominant demographics and culture of the students (Nadal et al. 2011; Museus et al. 2016).

Microaggressions in Public Spaces and With Strangers

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Christmas markets are my favorite part about the holiday season in my Belgian home. I love the cool, brisk air on my face, the scent of Glögg wine and fresh frites in the air, and the sweet sounds of bells, Christmas carols, and people laughing and enjoying themselves.

I walk from stall to stall, checking out the intricate handmade gifts available this year. Stall after stall, person after person says hello to me in a different language - in every language besides English, or the local languages of French and Flemish. "Konichiwa!" "Yeoboseyo!" "Ni Hao Ma!" These are all phrases I am accustomed to hearing no matter where in the world I am. But something about hearing it repeatedly in a matter of minutes causes me to lose my patience.

As an older Moroccan man jokingly says, "Konichiwa Ching Chang Chong!" I turn around and yell back at him, "J'appartiens ici tout autant que toi" I belong here just as much as you do.

Shocked to see an Asian girl suddenly speak french fluently, he quickly jumps to apologizing and saying that he's not trying to be offensive but is rather trying to make me feel more welcomed as a tourist.

"Excusez-moi madame mais mon français n'est pas très bon" Excuse me miss but my french is not very good.

Excuses. I immediately switch to Flemish to tell him off for making assumptions about me, where I am from and what I speak when he himself was not a white Belgian man. My body is tense, I can feel the blood rushing to my cheeks, my voice strong and irritated, "What? You don't speak Flemish now either?"

He waves his hand at me and mutters "grosse putte," whore, under his breath and turns away. Angry and tired of always giving others the benefit of the doubt I respond with a mix of a French and Flemish, "Va te faire foutre, Onnozelaar." Fuck off, idiot.

It is the first time I intentionally blow up and swear at someone but for the first time I feel stronger and more confident in myself than ever before. I am of Chinese heritage, yes. I have certain traits that could be deemed more Asian, sure. But am I 100% Asian? Definitely not. But people assume that I am. They assume I am a tourist even in my own home of twelve years. A tourist who doesn't speak English so instead they shout these phrases and laugh when I don't respond. I'm tired of people thinking they can crack jokes and step on me, I vow to never let someone make assumptions or incorrectly speak about me again, perhaps next time it will be with less swearing.

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As is now evident, our daily interactions and communication with others has the power to influence how we come to understand ourselves, our identity, our place in the world, and how we in turn interact and communicate with others. The multiracial identity is one that activists are still trying to get recognized by the larger society the societal structures (DeBose and Winters 2003). Being repeatedly asked "What are you?" and "Where are you really from?" continues to be quintessential to the multiracial experience, especially when it comes to multiracial individuals' interactions with strangers (DeBose and Winters 2003; Museus et al. 2016).

The multiracial identity has become a racialized ideal and a form of poster child for positive race relations in the eyes of many strangers and outsiders causing many multiracial people to feel dehumanized and uncomfortable even if that was not the intention of the communicator (Nadal et al. 2011). People respond to one's multiracial identity as though it is something extremely bizarre and completely out of the ordinary, leaving the individual feeling like their very existence is a strange occurrence (Nadal et al. 2011). Strangers quickly view multiracial people as a symbol of how races can come together and be something good, a form of check mark next to the diversity and equality box. One example of this is a young multiracial woman, being described by her mono-racial friend to others as a melting pot because she looks African American but has a European last name and speaks fluent Spanish (Nadal et al. 2011).

News companies run predominantly by mono-racial Caucasians have viewed the development and appearance of the multiracial identity as a positive step toward and a symbol of a color-blind society even though the multiracial identity is not even entirely acknowledged in public policy and societal institutions (Sanchez and Bonam 2009; Shih and Sanchez 2009). Black and other mono-racial minority run newspapers argued that multiracial people are using their mixed heritage as an attempt to escape discrimination and public devaluing institutions (Sanchez and Bonam 2009; Shih and Sanchez 2009). Both views are partial and based entirely on their own standpoints and experiences but do not take into consideration the interactions, communication, and experiences of the multiracial people themselves. Although there has been an increase in the media exposure of multiracial persons such as Barack Obama and Tiger Woods, often these public figures are also subjected to the same microaggressions and denial of the multiracial identity (Nadal et al. 2011). Both Obama and Woods for example, are solely classified as African-American. Mistaken or deliberate identification as a mono-racial or a different racial identity is one of the most common microaggressions experienced by multiracial

individuals from strangers and public spaces (Nadal et al. 2011). These types of interactions and communication not only invalidate one's identity but it also pathologizes it, leaving multiracial individuals feeling once again, isolated, alone, and abnormal (Nadal et al. 2011).

The denial of the multiracial reality and experiences is another commonplace in public spaces for multiracial peoples along with the "us versus them" complex (Nadal et al. 2011; Tajfel and Turner 1986). The social identity theory states that group memberships and our identities provide individuals with a sense of belonging and place in the social world (Tajfel and Turner 1986). These groups are then often used to enhance the status of one group and discriminate or hold prejudice against another to enhance and promote a specific presentation of their selves (Tajfel and Turner 1986). This us versus them complex quickly becomes used to marginalize and discriminate against multiracial peoples as minorities who not only do not fit any racial category but do not even fit into a minority group. Many multiracial people have described feelings of inadequacy or invalidity because others have dismissed or ignored their identity as a multiracial person (Nadal et al. 2011). Friends and strangers alike did not understand the struggles and hardships that they faced and sometimes appeared not to care. Others would dismiss the multiracial individual's experience or perspective and tell them to get over it because they cannot really be offended by something if they are not purely that race (Nadal et al. 2011).

The exoticization and objectification of the multiracial identity is especially prevalent in multiracial peoples' interactions with strangers (Nadal et al. 2011). This not only encompasses unintentional objectification such as viewing multiracial people as the "racialized ideal" but it also includes not being acknowledged a multiracial (being mistaken as monoracial), being acknowledged as exotic, and the sexualization of being an exotic blend of different racial groups (Nadal et al. 2011). Research found that many multiracial people experience strangers staring at them from afar, asking them what they are or coming up and complimenting the beautiful blend

of phenotypic characteristics they have, an experience which is extremely atypical for people of monoracial backgrounds (Nadal et al. 2011). One research participant described being unintentionally dehumanized by an interracial couple who asked about her heritage and then told each other that they could "have one just like that" (Nadal et al. 2011, p. 41). Not only are experiences like this disturbing, intentional or not, but it proves to be uncomfortable and confusing for the recipient, the multiracial individual. For many multiracial women, the sexualization of their multiracial identity is apparent. They experience men (and women alike) coming up to them and calling them a sexy hybrid, mysterious and exotic, or a sexy blend and the best of two worlds, referring to the best physical attributes of two or more different racial groups (Nadal et al. 2011). These interactions dehumanize, sexualize, and objectify women but also reinforces the rarity or abnormality of being multiracial in a predominantly monoracial society (Nadal et al. 2011).

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We sit huddled around the People gossip magazine in our dorm room, laughing as we read article after article about how to find the perfect man, the best and worst dresses at the Golden Globes, the latest fashion trends, and the cutest and most stylish babies of beloved celebrities. Page after page I notice that there are mostly white models and celebrities. I frown and look up at my friends, none of whom seem to notice.

"Hey...did you notice that all but one of the babies they include in this piece is white?" I point out to my girlfriend sitting beside me. She pauses for a second, her eyes skim the pictures on that page and shrugs.

"It's probably because most celebrities in Hollywood are white," she says nonchalantly before going back to giggling over the worst dressed celebrities. Not satisfied with her brushing off answer, I sigh and shrug back, "yeah I guess."

We stop on a picture of a male model that looks to be of mixed-race. The two other girls ooh and ahh, googly eyes, all taking turns looking at the magazine up close.

"Damn he's hot," one of them says.

My friend gasps, "oh my god you and this guy would have such cute mixed babies!"

What? I stop and look over at her, taken aback and stunned. "Umm, what?"

She is super excited, she bounces in place, giddy as she says, "I think Blasian babies are the absolute cutest. I hope I can have one too one day."

I sit back, surprised by her random comment. She has no reason to say something like that other than just she really thought I'd make cute babies with a completely random racially

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ambiguous model, as though I was even thinking about kids let alone a significant other at this point in my life. Unfazed by my clear negative and confused reaction to her statement, she absent-mindedly continues to go through the magazine.

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IMPLICATIONS

The "marginal men" are increasingly common today and it is important to not only recognize this but to really try to learn and understand the perspectives and experiences of mixed race peoples. As Park (1928) states, "the marginal man holds the key to our understanding of human progress even though he lives a life of supposed 'inner conflict' and outer oppression from the social forces at large in the dominant society (881)." Multiracial persons clearly experience a great deal of internal conflict and difficulty understanding their identity in addition to the external positive and negative multiracial interpersonal interactions with family members and loved ones, with peers and teachers, with friends, with co-workers, and with strangers. Because no multiracial identity or set of multiracial experiences will be exactly alike it is difficult to provide a specific practice that will work for all people in all circumstances and situations. It will ultimately all come down to the promotion of healthy multiracial identities and open discussion and supportive dialogue about race and ethnicity (Nadal et al. 2013). The open dialogue of race and ethnicity is a challenge when our society continues to deem it a taboo topic and people who speak out are nuisances. Multiracial people must be willing to confront microaggressions head on and address them with the individual communicating it, whether intentionally malicious or not, for there to be any progress towards a more accepting and positive multiracial experience (Shih and Sanchez 2009; Nadal et al. 2011; Nadal et al. 2013). Families must not only teach their multiracial children about the social construction of race and race relations but they must also be ready and willing to address issues of racism, prejudice and discrimination that their children will face in other aspects of society such as in the education

system, with friends or in public spaces (Christian 2000; Nadal et al. 2013; Shih and Sanchez 2005). Families should and must discuss the issues of race among other power divisions with their children from a young age and explain the complexities of the issues associated with being a minority race.

The multiracial student experience is very complex however it is important that administrators, faculty, and staff understand the growing concerns and experiences of the population and find ways to make them feel supported on campus, whether it be through organized meetings, clubs or events for multiracial peoples to come together, or simply acknowledging them and being there for support and guidance (Johnston-Guerrero and Renn 2016; Williams and Chilungu 2016). In the curriculum for history classes and race-related courses, faculty should incorporate a discussion and examination of the multiracial experience as they do with minority races such as African-Americans and Asian-Americans. By educating students and exposing them to accurate information and experiences from a young age, we can ensure that the alienation of mixed race peoples is diminished.

Another fruitful research investigation and step forward would be to delve deeper into the role that media and social media plays in not only forming our understanding of multiracial identities and how that plays into interpersonal relationships and communication but also how an individual will internalize their identity and how they are seen by the rest of the world. Having a lack of mixed race role models, like mono-racial minorities, available in the media has the power to influence the societal normalcy and discussion of race and race relations.

We live in a time of great uncertainty and high tension as the world clashes across races, religions, classes, and immigrant statuses, amongst many others. So much needs to be changed for the multiracial population to be fully recognized, acknowledged, and accepted as valid

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members of society. Ultimately, it will come down to identity and how society choses to

communicate, react to, and treat one another's identities.

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Amidst the 2016 presidential elections, tensions were at an all-time high. People were going at it with one another and every type of minority out there was being threatened and feared for their safety. Perhaps it was too naive of me to think this couldn't possibly happen here, and on the outskirts of Santa Clara's campus. Perhaps I believe people are better than they really are.

I stroll down the street as I do every day for class, face to the blue sky, enjoying the beautiful sunny weather and humming the tune to the latest song stuck in my head, One Republic's Counting Stars. It is a day like any other. I stand at the light, patiently waiting to cross, watching the cars zoom by, imagining what each of their lives is like. One car catches my attention and I feel my stomach surge with discomfort. I take a step back from the curb and wrap my arms around my stomach. Despite the green light, a red jeep wrangler slows down as it nears me, rap music blasting and a group of four maybe five guys hooting and hollering out of their open windows.

"Your time in the US has come to end, Chink!" one yells at me, followed by a laugh.

"Go back to where you belong you dirty mutt" another one booms, proceeded by their attempts at howling like dogs.

Whore. Disgusting. Ching Chong. Die. They hurl insult after insult at me, each one stinging more than the next. I stand still and alone at the light for another five minutes, my arms tightened around me, in complete shock and disbelief that my Claradise, my home away from home, could cause me so much hurt and fear.

The blaring horn of another car startles me, throwing me back into reality. I immediately turn back around and head home, wanting to hide my shame and embarrassment in my bed even though I know I have just as much as right to be here as those boys or anyone else.

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