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"Either or, Not as a Whole:" Challenges of Multiracial Student Placemaking and Belonging in Sorority and Fraternity Chapters

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"EITHER OR, NOT AS A WHOLE:" CHALLENGES OF MULTIRACIAL STUDENT PLACEMAKING AND BELONGING IN SORORITY AND FRATERNITY CHAPTERS

Pietro A. Sasso, Ph.D., Kim E. Bullington, Ph.D.

This qualitative narrative inquiry study explored how Multiracial members negotiate multiple racial identities and locations to find a sense of belonging within sorority and fraternity environments. Participants eventually found a sense of belonging within their chapters through peers who they educated about their multiraciality. Their placemaking was fraught with experiences of monoracism, colorism, and relationships, which positioned them to serve as racial buffers and cultural translators for their monoracial chapter peers. The tenets of interest convergence and monoracism of Multiracial critical theory are used to interrogate these findings. Implications are provided to help campus-based professionals engage in identity advocacy and inclusion.

Keywords: Multiracial critical theory, Multiracial students, fraternities and sororities, belonging, identity formation

The foundations of Multiraciality began in U.S. higher education through processes of settler colonialism when Indigenous males were removed by colonial English settlers from their communities to disrupt family systems and were placed into forced miscegenation (mixing of people from different races) through sexual violence with those who were already enslaved (Pascoe, 2009; Wilder, 2013). The disparaging racial identifier *mulatto* was applied by the White majority to denote the racial blending of diasporic Native and African Americans (Wilder, 2013). Other mixed-raced individuals were exotified in which their bodies were used as cadavers or embalmed on display in university museums and anthropological collections (Wilder, 2013). These histories are examples of monoracism, which is a social system of inequity that perpetuates the structural oppression of Multiracial persons "due to underlying assumptions and beliefs in unique distinct racial categories" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 125).

Monoracism is also responsible for hypodescent (one-drop rule) discourses and racism against Multiracial persons (Nadal et al., 2011; Pascoe, 2009). The "one drop rule" was a set of codified laws that assigned different monoracial categories based on the perceived amount of ancestry, such as for Black and Indigenous communities. This ultimately led to many Multiracial persons being assigned a monoracial or limited classification such as octoroon and quadroon, based on their *blood quantum* (Parker et al., 2015). These histories as well as other state and federal policies such as anti-miscegenation laws

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or limited representation options on U.S. Census and college admissions applications, have challenged Multiracial representation and visibility (Harris, 2016; Johnston-Guerrero & Renn, 2016).

Thus, it is hard to calculate an exact number of Multiracial Americans because of centuries of historical erasure and visibility issues. Recent national census changes to allow racial self-identification of multiraciality in 2000 led to the significant increase of Multiracial representation in the United States from approximately 6.8 in 2000 to 33.8 million in 2020 (Renn, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). On campuses, Multiracial students represent approximately 5-10% of undergraduate students (Johnston-Guerrero & Wiyesinghe, 2021). Yet, most institutions do not have designated spaces or intentional support for the increasing population of Multiracial college students as these are constructed to connect others across different social identities or are targeted to support monoracial identities (Harris & BrckaLorenz, 2017). Many Multiracial students look towards student involvement spaces such as sororities and fraternities to find belonging and friendships (Snider, 2020).

However, previous research indicates that Multiracial students, particularly women, experience forms of monoracism such as colorism, exotification, and racial microaggressions in student organizations (Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023; Snider, 2020). They may also limit their identity expression to avoid these forms of monoracism within these spaces (Lusk et al., 2010; West & Maffini, 2019). Multiracial college students also may feel intimidated or marginalized in identity- or culturally-based organizations in which they are forced to choose one identity over another (West & Maffini, 2019). Yet, these organizations can serve as sites of student development for identity, empowerment, community, and foster understanding with other monoracial students (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Museus et al., 2015). Scant research interrogates these experiences student organizations for Multiracial students in sororities and fraternities.

Extant research suggests that Multiracial sorority and fraternity life (SFL) members experience monoracial systems of oppression and racism in which they are culturally taxed to explain their multiple identities to others, transmit culture, and translate critical incidents of race (Snider et al., 2024). Thus, these students may experience multiple racial identity development and racialization differently from their monoracial peers in sororities and fraternities similarly to student organizations (Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023). This positions Multiracial SFL members in liminal spaces within the borders of these systems of oppression and racist structures (Harris, 2016).

There is limited understanding about the ways in which Multiracial students negotiate these identities to find belonging within sororities and fraternities within chapter cultures, regardless of their chapter's national or local council (Snider et al., 2024). This narrative inquiry study used Multiracial critical theory (MultiCrit) to examine how Multiracial undergraduate SFL members negotiate their multiple racial identi-

ties and locations to find a sense of belonging. Renn (2021) suggested that Multiracial identity development varies greatly from monoracial identity development, and there is a need for more research to increase professional understanding.

Literature Review

Multiraciality has previously been legally and structurally made invisible or established as a limited identity (Harris, 2016). Student constructed spaces have developed as attempts to provide visibility, identity development, and representation, which promote a sense of belonging for Multiracial students (Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023). This section addresses research about Multiracial microaggressions, belonging and placemaking, and student involvement.

Microaggressions

Multiracial students can experience racial microaggressions as a Person of Color and/or specifically connected to their Multiracial heritage. Multiracial microaggressions are "daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, enacted by monoracial persons that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights toward Multiracial individuals or groups" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 126). Harris (2016) also noted there are *micro-racializations* to specify how Multiracial identity is abstracted as *mixed*, rather than nuanced as concurrent multiple racial identities. Kellogg and Liddell (2012) noted that other students often challenged the authenticity of their identities, particularly within student organizations as,

> the frequency and intensity of these challenges to their sense of legitimacy increased when they entered college. Some students reported that their reaction to this challenge by others was to retreat: to drop the class, quit the organization, or avoid peers. (p. 535)

Multiracial students also experience these racial tensions frequently through colorism and hypodescent discourses (Nadal et al., 2011).

Johnston and Nadal (2010) developed a Multiracial microaggression taxonomy grouping various types of microaggressions Multiracial people are likely to encounter. The taxonomy includes: (a) exclusion or isolation; (b) exoticization and objectification; (c) assumption of monoracial or mistaken identity; (d) denial of Multiracial reality; (e) pathologizing of identity and experiences. Nadal et al. (2011) validated the taxonomy of Johnston and Nadal's (2010) work in a content analysis focus group. All five domains were found, and one additional category emerged: microaggressions based on stereotypes. Museus et al. (2016) found seven ways Multiracial students encounter prejudice and discrimination. These experiences mirror those of Johnston and Nadal's (2010) taxonomy and further demonstrate a common set of microaggressions generally experienced by Multiracial people.

Belonging and Placemaking

Multiracial students experience monoracism from peers (Jackson, 2009; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Root, 1992; 1998). Given Multiracial students' unique positionality in a fixed monoracial society, they may have heightened levels of sensitivity towards racial issues (Binning et al., 2009; Brackett et al., 2006). Some Multiracial students feel rejected, excluded, and insecure based on the actions of their monoracial peers (Jourdan, 2006; Rockquemore, 1998; Root, 1998). Through organizational involvement, Multiracial students report feeling empowered to speak out against racism, but negative interactions with peers can cause them to also feel *out of place* in their collegiate environments (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012).

These negative interactions may result in an unhealthy self-esteem due to lack of social acceptance from peers, social stressors, and an absence of sense of belonging (Ford & Malaney, 2012). Multiracial students may feel isolated by race-oriented student services that perpetuate monoracial categories and leave Multiracial students without a sense of safety or belonging that these services were created to provide (Literté, 2010). However, Multiracial students must "appropriate space for an identity" in order to counter the dominant racist conceptions that exist (D. Delgado, 2016, p. 685). If not, Multiracial students may engage in forms of selective invisibility or passing to find a sense of belonging in monoracial spaces (Sasso et al., 2023). Passing is defined as "a deception that enables a person to adopt specific roles or identities from which he or she would otherwise be barred by prevailing social standards" (Kennedy, 2003, p. 283). Passing can allow Multiracial people to conceal their race, for example, by Anglicizing their name or changing their phenotype to manage identity (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). This can eventually have severe implications for students' academic and social integration on campus (Snider et al., 2024). Therefore, Multiracial students frequently look toward student organizations as sites of belonging through a process of placemaking.

Placemaking is a process by which an individual creates belonging within socially constructed spaces (Kyle & Chick, 2007; Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023). Placemaking also refers to how a student may *fit* within existing campus environments and how oppressed or marginalized identities must engage in additional efforts to find belonging (Banning, 1978; Bohl, 2006). Within Communities of Color, placemaking is defined as the ways people, "create sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance" (Hunter et al., 2016, p. 31).

Multiracial students receive discrete messages about the implicitly constructed racial borders and areas on campus (Harris, 2016). Thus, placemaking for Multiracial students presents differently across student communities because of their multiple racial locations and based on the perceptions of their monoracial peers (Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023). It may be contextually used for identity development, expanding community, or creating safe spaces (Moores & Papadiuk,

2011; Ozturgut, 2013). Placemaking for Multiracial students may be used for cultural connectedness or identity renewal, such as the ways in which Multiracial Native Americans engage in homegoing to reify connections to Indigeneity (Sasso, Jeffers et al., 2023; Waterman, 2012).

Student Involvement

Monoracial peers often hold postracial perspectives toward Multiracial college students and assume they do not experience racism (Literté, 2010, 2021). Other monoracial peers engage in racial questioning of Multiracial students based on how they perceived their racial identities which makes them feel inauthentic (Harris, 2016). This is more frequent if they affiliate with an identity-based student organization (West & Maffini, 2019).

Students are often challenged by members of student organizations about their motives for wanting to join monoracial student organizations because they may not look like other members of the group (Snider, 2020). This a byproduct of monoracism in which Multiracial students self-disclose, experiencing internalized feelings of not being enough of a certain race to join a culturally- or identity-based organization (Johnston-Guerrero & Renn, 2016; Malaney & Danowski, 2015; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008; Renn, 2000, 2004). Student organizations can uphold monoracial frames, and their members are unsettled and are often unilaterally unaware of multiraciality (Ozaki & Johnston, 2008; Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023).

For example, Multiracial students perceive the most prestigious predominantly White sororities held the highest percentage of White members while the more diverse chapters were viewed as lower tier chapters (Ekpe & Ofoegbu, 2023; Snider, 2020). Undergraduate students receive messaging about the implicitly drawn lines on campus that mark these racial boundaries and spaces (Park, 2008). However, some monoracial organizations may have diverse chapters and culturally-based organizations may be more likely to have Multiracial SFL members (Ekpe & Ofoegbu, 2024; Romo & Sasso, 2024; Snider, 2020).

Multiracial students are often drawn to monoracial organizations that reflect a physical commitment to diversity and inclusion through their membership in which they have more Students of Color and are more likely to join racially diverse chapters (Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023; Snider, 2020). Although not specifically focused on multiraciality, culturally-based sororities and fraternities offer spaces of belonging and sites of identity development to many Students of Color (Garcia, 2019; Garcia & Duran, 2021; Garcia et al., 2022). Thus, student organizations such as sororities and fraternities often may offer spaces of development and learning but can also limit the expression of their identities as suggested by the findings in this study.

Conceptual Framework

Using MultiCrit (Harris, 2016) as a conceptual framework allowed us to interrogate monoracism in sororities and fraternities and how forms of interest convergence influence their processes of placemaking to find belonging. Harris (2016) extended the boundaries of critical race theory (CRT) by Crenshaw (1989) to consider the unique experiences of Multiracial people missing in its tenets. MultiCrit was developed to "critique of the role that white supremacist structures play in the (re) construction of multiraciality" and offer a new, more inclusive conceptualization of the experiences of Multiracial people (Harris, 2016, p. 3).

The first four tenets are direct adaptations of popular CRT tenets while the remaining four are newly developed: 1) challenge to ahistoricism; 2) interest convergence; 3) experiential knowledge; 4) challenge to dominant ideology; 5) racism, monoracism, and colorism; 6) a monoracial paradigm of race; 7) differential micro-racialization; 8) intersections of multiple racial identities (Harris, 2016). Selected tenets of this model (interest convergence; and racism, monoracism, and colorism) are used in this study as a critical epistemological framework for exploring multiraciality beyond the campus borders and recognize the external systems and experiences of Multiracial college students because of the invisible and limiting histories of multiraciality facilitated by monoracial systems of oppression (Anderson, 2015).

Interest Convergence

Interest convergence occurs when gains for racial equity and justice happen only when it benefits or protects white interests (Bell, 1980; R. Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For Harris (2016), this tenet describes how institutions of higher education may make incremental, but not systemic, changes to acknowledge the presence of Multiracial students when it benefits them. Institutions may ignore the realities of Multiracial students and see the benefits of Multiracial students in university marketing efforts (Harris, 2016). Thus, the presence of Multiracial college students in sororities and fraternities and other organizations can be used to promote interest convergence in which whiteness assumes property or to promote a colorblind agenda, or to use Multiraciality in chapter recruitment efforts (Sasso et al., 2022; Snider et al., 2024). In this study, interest convergence is used to interrogate the ways in which Multiracial SFL members are positioned towards whiteness or used for organizational diversity efforts.

Racism, Monoracism, and Colorism

The notion that race is socially constructed and that racism is structurally embedded in U.S. society are core foundations of CRT (R. Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 2016). Multiracial students encounter racism but experience nuanced forms of monoracism because of their multiple racial locations, which is also tethered to colorism (Harris, 2016). Monoracism is a system that oppresses individuals who do not fit into discrete racial categories both on a systemic and interpersonal

level (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Colorism is oppression which "perpetuates a system of white over color dominance and maintains a racial/skin color hierarchy that stifles coalition building between racial communities" (Harris, 2016, p. 806).

Multiracial or even monoracial students with lighter skin tones may experience privilege but also experience exclusion within Communities of Color (Ozaki & Parson, 2017). Some Communities of Color intentionally or unintentionally marginalize Multiracial people due to monoracism or colorism (Snider et al., 2024). These experiences are evident in monoracial organizations or individual SFL chapters (Snider, 2020). In SFL communities, lighter skinned Multiracial members may be recruited more in historically white organizations or face discrimination by culturally-based organizations through racial questioning because of their skin complexions (Ekpe & Ofoegbu, 2023; Hunter, 2016; Snider, 2020; Snider et al., 2024). In this study, this MultiCrit tenet is used to interrogate the monoracism and colorism experiences by Multiracial SFL members.

Positionalities

Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) suggested a process of reflexivity when engaging in research interrogating systems of whiteness and identities. We use this framework in examination of monoracism which is rooted in norms of whiteness when considering our subjectivities and assumptions (Harris, 2016). We consider multiraciality through intersecting identities of race, gender, and social class. We also acknowledge the privilege and power they hold due to our proximity to dominant identities and the responsibility that comes with those identities to advocate for social justice.

The first author is a mixed-heritage Latino cisgender heterosexual male, and the second author is a heterosexual, cisgender biracial female. These varied experiences shaped their identities in navigating through *otherness*. The first author is a member of a culturally-based National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) fraternity, and the second is affiliated with a historically white National Panhellenic Conference ({NPC) sorority. Both authors have advised diverse chapters of different SFL organizations and have a deep understanding of the needs of members with marginalized identities.

We approached this research with intentionality in entering the research spaces shared by our participants. We were also aware that, as researchers, we are not members of culturally-based councils, which may have initially limited our perspectives. These *a priori* experiences required us to continually deconstruct our own internalized monoracialism and oppression. As researchers, we believe this is important because research can reconstruct new ways of thinking and being to approach Multiracial identity formation through the SFL experience as a formative and fluid process of becoming. We also believe that systems of monoracism and other forms of racism are embedded into Multiracial students' socialization, but the SFL experience offers

promise for these students to move from spaces of liminality to ones of belonging. We again bracket our subjectivities and understanding of systems of oppression that facilitate intersectional marginality for Multiracial college students from a MultiCrit lens (Harris, 2016).

Methods

Epistemology and Research Design

This study was guided by a critical epistemology of MultiCrit through two essential tenets of MultiCrit theory (Harris, 2016). First, we recognize the omnipotence of racism, monoracism, and colorism in American history and contemporary society, which permeates power structures such as fraternal organizations, and second, the interest convergence employed by monoracial peers to assume property and cultural capital (Harris et al., 2019). Given our epistemological framing, this narrative inquiry study followed the research design of similar Multiracial identity experience studies using intersectional methods and MultiCrit (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004; Snider, 2020).

Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) noted narrative inquiry is, "an epistemological stance and modus operandi for the examination (and interpretation) of (a) complex relationships, (b) cultural artifacts, (c) social contexts, and (d) researcher reflexivity" (p. 21). Narrative inquiry centers narration and seeks to capture stories to glean a composite understanding of lived experiences (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). This was selected because narrative research can be utilized as an approach to "defy historical and contemporary racial oppression" (Tyson, 2006, p. 24). Participant realities are told from their perspective of marginalized identities, which allows researchers to center "discussions of race, gender, class, and sexuality as part of a larger political and epistemological struggle for a better and just future" (Tyson, 2006, p. 25).

Using MultiCrit as an analytic framework and narrative inquiry as a methodological tool, it views social identities as individual narratives and assumes that people construct their own identities through storytelling (Museus, 2007). Within these stories, people come to understand their identities and how they are positioned within their world (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Reissman, 2008). Narrative inquiry was useful for this study as it allowed us to conceptualize participants' lived experiences through storytelling, which cannot be separated from their own storied lives (Museus, 2007). The study's research questions, interviews, and data analysis were informed by this critical epistemology to interrogate the ways in which power, privilege, and oppression showcases across participant stories in their lived experiences. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How do Multiracial SFL members negotiate their multiple racial identities and locations within monoracial sorority/fraternity environments?

2) How do Multiracial SFL members engage in placemaking to find a sense of belonging within monoracial sorority/fraternity environments?

Participants

Snowball recruitment for historically marginalized and under-represented populations was used to avoid facilitating the study as extraction research (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). To construct an authentic sample that organically allowed for the sophistication of mul-tiraciality, maximum variation sampling was coupled with this snowball approach (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Similar to Kellog and Liddell (2012), this study used maximum variation "to select a diverse group of participants who reflected a wide range of demographic char-acteristics, such as gender, year in school, and major, as well as various racial combinations" (p. 527). Three initial participants were recruited through email and text message and then existing participants made recommendations for additional Multiracial SFL members based on inclusion criteria. These included: (1) undergraduate status; (2) active participation in a predominately monoracial chapter national sorority or fraternity of any council type; (3) self-identification as Multiracial.

Monoracial chapters were described by participants and considered by the researchers as racially homogenous (Kellog & Liddell, 2012). The researchers attempted to align congruence with MultiCrit (Harris, 2016) and previous research about multiracial participation in student organizations or SFL (Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023; Snider, 2020) which indicates that monoracism is experienced across all contexts and even within more diverse organizations. Therefore, all council types were included in the maximum variation sampling procedure for Multiracial SFL members in monoracial chapters. These included National Multi-cultural Greek Council (NMGC) chapters, although typically diverse, which participants identified as monoracial (racially homogeneous) on their respective campuses.

All participants were active undergraduate students and attended different public and private Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The majority of these students originated from major suburban areas and urban centers across the country. All participants were members of historically white monoracial organizations or culturally-based organizations in which all chapters were single-gender and not co-educational. Participants selected their own pseudonyms and defined their own multiple identities (Table 1).

Data Collection

Collection of data for this study involved individual interviews, which lasted approximately 60 minutes. In congruence with the study's con-ceptual framework, assumptions were bracketed by what multiraciality and experiences with monoracism meant to participants and were kept intentionally broad. These were reflected in the semi-structured

Table 1

Participants

Participant	Academic Level	Gender	Racial Identities	National Affiliation	Membership Length
Jojo	Sophomore	Male	Black/Indian (Desi)	NMGC	2 years
Harris	Sophomore	Male	Dominican/Sri Lankan	NALFO	1 year
Gomez	Junior	Male	Latino/Black/Chinese	NIC	2 years
KaLonny	Senior	Female	Japanese/Black	NPC	3 years
Meagan	Sophomore	Female	Thai/Black/Desi	NPHC	1 year
Lizzy	Junior	Female	Iranian/Nigerian	NPC	3 years
Channing	Senior	Male	Native American/Black	NIC	4 years
Sable	Sophomore	Male	Afro-Latino	NALFO	1 year
Brittany	Sophomore	Female	Jewish/Chinese	APIDA	1 year
Jaylah	First Year	Female	Afro-Latina	NALFO	New Member
Brynlee	Sophomore	Female	Italian/Egyptian/Turkish	NMGC	1 year
Arlanna	First Year	Female	Pakistani/Italian	NMGC	New Member
Londyn	First Year	Male	Chamorro/Black	NIC	New Member
Norah	Junior	Female	Black/White	NPHC	2 years

Note: NMGC = National Multicultural Greek Council; NALFO = National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations; NIC = North American Interfraternity Conference; NPC = National Panhellenic Conference; APIDA = National APIDA (Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi American) Panhellenic Association; NPHC = National Pan-Hellenic Council.

interview guide, which included questions such as "In what possible ways, if at all, did your Multiracial identities influence your sorority/fraternity experiences?" and "In any possible ways have you experienced monoracism in your chapter?" The other topics explored in the interview guide were informed by previous research (Renn, 2021) related to participants' identity and student experiences. We asked probing questions and varied them slightly between participants depending on comfort level and rapport. Interviews took place in on-campus residences of the participants to facilitate increased au-

thenticity of responses. Participants were presented with a standard informed consent form and were provided with a coffee shop gift card as an incentive. Interviews ended once there was saturation or data redundancy, which is a process of finding consistently similar patterns in the data through which no new data emerge (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Saunders et al., 2018). Transcription of the interviews was performed by a professional third party for data analysis.

Data Analysis

In congruence with intersectional narrative inquiry, we used narrative analysis (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). In narrative analysis, researchers cannot "make sense of stories outside of the context in which they are situated" (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021, p. 149). We used the conceptual framework drawn from the MultiCrit tenets of interest convergence and monoracism to situate participant stories within these political, social, and historical contexts. Guiding questions by Gubrium and Holstein (2009) were also used for contextualization, which included: (1) who produces particular kinds of stories, (2) where they are likely to be encountered, (3) what are their purposes, (4) who are the listeners, (5) under what circumstances particular narratives are more or less accountable, (5) how do they gain acceptance, and (6) how they are challenged. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) also furthered this by asking, "how does this context bear witness and shape the story?" (p. 149). These questions were used to begin data analysis in which we constructed preliminary memos about salient concepts (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). Particular sensitivity was provided to participants' meaning making of multiracial-ity, monoracism, and relationships with monoracial peers to account for the conceptual framework and epistemological approach of the study.

An initial listing of significant patterns present in participant stories was completed for each participant using narrative analysis documents (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Then, overarching patterns that extended across participants pertaining to the research questions were applied to the narrative analysis documents that we completed for each participant (Saldaña, 2021). We organized sections of the transcripts into these narrative analysis documents and identified additional pieces that did not fall into these themes. Two rounds of participant analysis were conducted using this process, and we met to reconcile potential incongruencies. We used narrative analysis documents to complete thematic analysis to further refine the themes (Saldaña, 2021).

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were implemented to ensure standards of trust-worthiness (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These included the use of an audit trail in the two rounds of coding as well as regular debriefing between co-researchers to engage in critically self-reflexive processes. Using MultiCrit as the critical episte-mological framework, we discussed ideas with one another to remain

open to alternative interpretations of the data. Additional strategies included member checking (participants reviewed their interview transcripts) and an external auditor, a higher education researcher, who interrogated the veracity of the themes by reviewing the audit trail.

Findings

Participants described their Multiracial identities and their experiences with monoracism through involvement in their SFL chapters. These resulted in three shared experiences across their participation. First, they experienced monoracism as a form of oppression from others in their chapters. Second, they served as interest convergence for convenient minority tropes, which positioned them into roles of cultural taxation. Finally, they connected their membership experience to the formation of a small group of monoracial friends they had to educate who eventually served as allies which did not differ regarding their monoracial friends' races.

Oppressive Microaggressions

Multiracial SFL members experienced colorism and monoracism as forms of oppression, which was expressed through racial microaggression. These microaggressions were subtle and nuanced in ways that were initially unclear to the participants. Students experienced microaggressions from their monoracial peers about the color of their skin and consistent questioning about their multiple racial identities.

Racial Joking

After racialized microaggressions were more frequent, participants were able to recognize them as veiled racism couched as questions or racial joking. Brittany was the only participant to join a National APIDA organization (Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi American Panhellenic Association) and shared similar experiences with racial joking with KaLonny who was in a NPC sorority. KaLonny adds:

> …one of my struggles is that I am not Asian enough and the Asian sororities ignored me completely when I tried to join. They called me "Hafu" and called me Naomi Osaka because I have darker features. The Black sororities did not return my texts.

Like KaLonny, several other participants (JoJo, Gomez, Jaylah, Sable, Channing, Londyn) initially intended to join culturally-based sororities and fraternities. However, when considering joining National Pan-Hellenic Conference (NPHC) chapters, these participants suggested they were dismissed or ignored because of hypodescent discourses. Only two participants, Megan and Norah, were members of NPHC chapters but struggled when being considered for membership too due to colorism and assumptions of identity. They were perceived by others as holding abstracted identities that were incomplete.

Other participants (Jaylah, Sable, JoJo) were affiliated with national multicultural sororities and fraternities where they also experienced

racial questioning. Others joined NPC sororities (KaLonny, Lizzy) where their multiraciality was initially unsettling to their fellow SFL members. Lizzy's story resonates with KaLonny's when she went through National Panhellenic formal sorority recruitment. Lizzy was questioned about where she was from and about her parents. She said "It was fine the first couple of times, but eventually, I just kept seeing the same reaction of either disbelief or confusion. They were shocked that I could be like more than one race."

Exotification

Multiracial fraternity men (JoJo, Harris, Gomez, Channing, Sable, Londyn), and all sorority women, except for Norah, ubiquitously experienced different gendered forms of exotification. Norah shared that she did not experience this because of her interactions with monoracism as described in these findings. Moreover, men nuanced their experiences as *curiosity* whereas women described this as being hypersexualized. Multiracial SFL women described being approached by monoracial men in group study sessions, residence halls, and especially by other monoracial fraternity members at parties or campus SFL events. This exotification involved sexual innuendos through racial joking related to skin color, hair, or their multiple racial identities. Multiracial SFL men suggested they understood they were being exotified, but also felt it was just others being curious about their identities when other monoracial SFL members asked about their physical appearance. However, Londyn was the only male who shared his experiences being hypersexualized by women:

My fraternity brothers and drunk White chicks ask me if I have a big penis because I am mixed Asian, but Black too. I tell them what they [fraternity brothers and white women] want to hear but really, I just want them to leave me alone.

Hypodescent Discourses

Participants shared consistent stories and experiences as continued examples of the various microaggressions they experienced. Over time, these became more direct and less subtle as they escalated. Participants shared that their monoracial chapter peers became increasingly disoriented by their racial identities and asked them to identify in particular ways to make them comfortable. Multiracial members were micro-racialized and expected to perform and act specifically based on their skin tone and perceived race. Jaylah, a member of a national Latina sorority, struggled with acknowledgment of her identities:

My sorority only recognizes me, like, as one identity. They think of me as mixed as one identity, rather than a blend. Others, they just think of me as either Black or Latina. It is always like an 'either or,' and not as a whole.

Students were often asked to alter their appearance to appear more monoracial, but often to conform to White beauty norms. The female participants shared examples of being asked to straighten their hair

for formal recruitment and events or use filters for Instagram posts to lighten their skin tone. These hypodescent experiences were also expressed directly in their relationships with other monoracial peers.

Micro-Racialization

Multiracial SFL members experienced additional micro-racialization as microaggressions. Their identities were contextually permitted by their monoracial peers as forms of interest convergence by shifting the extent of their Multiraciality for organizational involvement. Depending on the role Multiracial SFL members were limited to serve, other monoracial SFL members selectively recognized their multiple racial identities through two processes of fragmentation and abstraction. These microaggressions continued frequently but subtly, and the proliferation often had a detrimental effect on SFL members.

Fragmentation and Abstraction

Monoracial SFL peers either fragmented the Multiracial students' identities or abstracted them. These two processes were used to rationalize limitations of individuals' positionalities or establish racial borderlands for SFL members. Multiracial SFL members in culturally-based organizations experienced fragmentation, but those in NIC or NPC experienced both forms of micro-racialization and did so more frequently compared to members of culturally based groups. *Fragmentation* occurs when monoracial peers feel multiraciality is composed of different, separate identities, and *abstraction* occurs when it appears Multiracial identities total one new identity.

Abstraction assumes that multiple racial identities are subtractive and incomplete to represent all racial locations. In this study, monoracial SFL members relegated or limited multiraciality as a singular identity as *mixed*. Their monoracial chapter peers did not recognize multiple racial identities or locations, particularly in NIC or NPC organizations. Abstracted identity was experienced by Channing in his relationships with his monoracial SFL fraternity brothers, who suggested, "They [my fraternity brothers] just think of me as one mixed person and don't see the different parts of me." Similarly, Lizzy shared that she struggled to be recognized, "My sisters just put me into this biracial box as just being one thing. I think they forgot about my other identities."

White monoracial chapter members often perceived the Multiracial members as racially ambiguous with a *fractured identity* in which they rationalized them as only *part minority* or incomplete. Monoracial Students of Color questioned their racial heritage as authentic as noted by Arlanna:

> One of my sisters got drunk one time and poured a beer on me at a party and said I was as empty as the can. Another cut up a pizza and pointed to each slice to joke that like each piece is one of my races. They quiz me on eating different foods or curse words in Italian or Pakastani, like I have to validate my own heritage too. Some of sisters like her see only parts of me and not, the whole. I can be both

too. They do not see me as Desi and do not recognize that my dad is from Pakistan and my mom is from Italy. They are also both mixed too actually. I am proudly mixed, but others need to see that too. It's hard when they see you like pizza slices.

Multiracial SFL members shared many of their peers believed that Multiraciality lacked *fullness* and was a quotient. They described being called "part" of their identity and asked to perform administrative tasks for their chapter. Multiracial SFL members in culturally-based organizations shared similar experiences to Jojo who recounted an experience he had:

One of the biggest problems I think I had was that like, I was always expected to make them comfortable by not being myself. I just felt like the token minority friend sometimes when I get asked, "Hey, are you part Indian, can you…" This always made me feel like I can't be myself. They ask me to do stuff based on whatever part of me is convenient for them.

Convenient and Safe Multiracial Friends

Multiracial members experienced abstraction or fragmentation, which were tethered to binary relationship statuses with their monoracial SFL peers. They were positioned as a *convenient minority friend (Sasso, Bullington et al., 2023)* to monoracial White SFL members or *a safe mixed friend* to monoracial SFL Persons of Color. Multiracial SFL members described how this status facilitated liminal or superficial relationships within monoracial chapter peers, which often made them feel used for their Multiraciality.

Monoracial SFL Persons of Color fractured Multiracial identities in positioning them as the *safe mixed friend*. There were expectations to translate issues of culture and race in acting as racial buffers between their multiple racial identities and their peers. Norah (NPHC member) was asked to *translate* something from a rap song to white peers because they were *part Black* as a test of her Blackness during her new member process. Britanny (APIDA member), like Brynlee and Arlanna (NMGC members), was often asked to translate issues about other white or Black students for their monoracial chapter peers.

Multiracial SFL members experienced abstraction and served in the capacity of *the convenient minority friend* because they were perceived as not a full minority and safer to ask questions about race. This occurred particularly for Multiracial SFL members who joined NIC or NPC organizations (Gomez, KaLonny, Lizzy, Channing, Londyn) or NALFO (Harris, Sable, Jaylah) because they were assumed to be more proximal to whiteness. The convenient minority friend status given to Multiracial members made them feel like it limited their identity expression because they felt tokenized and pressured to conform to expectations to find belonging.

Students experienced tokenization in which they were often forced to engage in the politics of respectability by conforming to monoracial or

white norms to make others comfortable. They felt they were intention-
ally recruited because they were safe and were used by their monora-
cial peers to claim a non-racist identity. Monoracial white peers in NPC
or NIC chapters expected Multiracial SFL members to consistently
translate issues of race based on their multiple racial locations. Londyn
(NIC member) compared the way his monoracial fraternity brothers
perceived him to his family. He shared:

> Some of my family members asked me if I was okay during the
> Black Lives Matter protests this year, but instead they [fraternity
> members] would then ask me 'what they [Black persons] wanted.'
> It is confusing why they [fraternity brothers] ask me this when these
> same brothers joke and call me a reverse Oreo and then think I am
> supposed to be the Black translator when they do not think I am
> Black enough.

In NALFO organizations, Multiracial SFL members like Sable said he
was subjected to racial joking. Sable believed his treatment from his
Latino fraternity brothers was similar to how other white men approach
him. They both felt the right to present offensive messages as comedy
because he is the *safe mixed friend*:

> I get a lot of shit from people because they [fraternity brothers]
> think I am like this 'safe mixed friend, and they can act however they
> want around me. I get references to all the biracial rappers from
> these woke White kids who think they get me. Other people [fraterni-
> ty brothers] would make fun of me and make jokes about the rapper
> Sean Paul and make Jamaican impressions of him or they call me
> Logic or J. Cole. I am pretty fucking sure this is not the best way to
> make friends with me because you think it is not racist. Just because I
> am mixed, I am convenient and safe.

Being placed as the convenient minority friend made Multiracial SFL
members feel like some of their members had possession of them as
their minority friend. Multiracial SFL members in NPC, NIC, and NALFO
organizations were frequently asked to recruit monoracial Students
of Color or other Multiracial students. Multiracial members often are
assumed by their monoracial peers to be *diversity magnets* according
to Lizzy (NPC member) who shared that, "just because I am Nigerian
and Iranian does not mean I can relate to every African or person from
the Middle East, it's not like diversity attracts color like a damn magnet."
Within NIC or NPC organizations, Multiracial SFL members shared
that their monoracial peers assumed that because they were Multira-
cial, they were also used for a *diversity defense* in claiming a specific
chapter diversity quotient. They experienced this tokenism in which
they are used to recruit other monoracial Students of Color or other
Multiracial students, while also trying to feel a sense of belonging.

Multiracial students struggled to disrupt these monoracial percep-
tions of others about their multiple racial identities. However, Multi-
racial members used this as an opportunity to create placemaking
as a component of belonging within their chapters. All Multiracial

SFL participants felt like they had to educate or *train* their monoracial peers about their multiple identities. Multiracial students surrounded themselves with a small circle of White or other monoracial peers in their chapter who provided them with a sense of belonging. These peers eventually became fierce advocates once they understood. This process of identifying advocates was a component of placemaking within their monoracial chapter environments.

Processes of Placemaking

Multiracial chapter members identified a constant struggle with ambiguity or liminality about their position or status within their chapter. They engaged in extensive process of placemaking to find a sense of belonging in college, which they eventually found within their chapters.

Challenges to Placemaking

Participants shared they were rejected from at least one or more sororities or fraternities because of their multiraciality. They discussed how this rejection was internalized because it made them feel like their multiraciality was a burden and was disorienting to other SFL organizations. These initial experiences with hypodescent discourses preceded their disinterest in affiliation with SFL organizations. This was a wayward process for Multiracial participants to find belonging in sororities or fraternities. Channing (NIC member) joined his fraternity to find a home on campus and noted:

> I often struggle with where I fit in, ya know? Joining a fraternity gave me a chance to kinda like figure out. I felt like [these] White dudes might say some ignorant shit, but at least I would be the cool mixed person, rather than the loser outcast like I felt in high school.

Within their respective SFL organizations, Multiracial SFL members disclosed their challenges being recognized and finding leadership opportunities. In NIC or NPC chapters, Multiracial SFL members again shared they experienced microaggressions and other racialized experiences which eventually faded once other chapter members better understood their multiple racial locations and identities.

Within some culturally-based organizations (NALFO, NPHC, APIDA), participants frequently cited that other monoracial SFL member Persons of Color questioned Multiracial identities and also felt Multiracial members were allowed to join for tokenism or were not authentic representations of their culture. Multiracial SFL members also provided examples how monoracial SFL member Persons of Color limited their participation in recruitment activities or stymied their efforts to obtain chapter leadership positions. Norah (NPHC member), as well as other Multiracial members, shared that other monoracial SFL member Persons of Color often bullied and harassed them in the chapters. Norah passionately shared, "I ain't no house [racial epithet removed]. Just because I am light skinned and biracial, other Black people hate me. I get called [racial epithet removed] all the time."

Finding Place

To find belonging, participants described that they sought chapters they perceived welcomed diversity rather than more racially isolated or homogeneous chapters. However, they found that their chapters were not as initially welcoming because there was a period of adjustment. Brynlee (NMGC member) shared her experiences when negotiating monoracial microaggressions when educating about her racial identities, "After some explaining, my sorority sisters understood me, but they are so damn dense, for real. I had to flex some big facts on them. They understand now how I can thrive as a Thai and Desi-Indian."

The cultural tax of the *convenient minority friend* or *safe mixed friend* or negotiating their identities with other monoracial SFL member Students of Color caused some membership challenges for Multiracial members. Yet, Multiracial SFL members engaged in intentional place-making to achieve a sense of belonging in their SFL chapters. Arlanna, like Brynlee, stated:

I joined a multicultural sorority and there are a few others just like me. I thought I was the only one and just to be around [hashtag] Mixed Girl Magic is empowering and beautiful. All my sisters said the same thing, that like…they would have dropped out of school or transferred if not for the sorority. We all feel like we did not fit anywhere until this [sorority name].

Multiracial SFL members eventually arranged a circle of close peers within their SFL organizations to draw away from the broader liminality of their undergraduate experience. Harris (NALFO member) echoed his belief by summarizing, "I joined my fraternity, and it is the only place where I feel comfortable as a mixed person." The SFL experience was a difficult initial navigation when affiliating with their chapters and organizations, but their persistence facilitated a sense of belonging and affinity for their organization. Harris also similarly shared: "My multicultural [NALFO] fraternity has been *mi familia* and *mi paisanos*. It is the only place I believe I can be myself."

Discussion

This study offers findings to suggest that more racially diverse chapters of sororities and fraternities are possible sites of belonging for Multiracial students which were intentionally sought by participants. Our participants experienced significant cultural taxation which led them to engage in intentional place-making to discover their own sense of belonging. These findings can be contextualized by drawing from the critical epistemology of this study which were the select tenets of interest convergence and monoracism of MultiCrit (Harris, 2016).

Despite the identity negotiation of Multiracial SFL members, there were prevalent processes of interest convergence for those in NIC and NPC chapters. Multiracial SFL members served as racial buffers

and diversity magnets as forms of interest convergence for historically white fraternities and sororities. Multiracial students often exist in multiple racial and cultural locations, and particularly when these locations are monoracial or have proximity to whiteness, Multiracial students are used as a *diversity defense* to avoid race-based conversations or to demonstrate racial diversity in their organization, such as in this study (Snider et al., 2024). Multiraciality is often used to promote a colorblind agenda to propagate the concept that race is not a systemic or structural issue (Harris, 2016; Snider et al., 2024). This wielding of Multiraciality continues underrepresentation, forced racial representation, and White students' deficit views of other Students of Color which are additional functions of whiteness as property (Harper, 2007; 2009; Harris et al., 2019).

Participants experienced various forms of monoracism from their monoracial chapter peers. They had expectations to describe and educate others on their multiple identities by communicating or translating racial and cultural differences as the *safe mixed friend* in culturally-based organizations or the *convenient minority friend* in NIC, NALFO, or NPC organizations. These included conforming through the politics of respectability within the convenient minority friend status (Harper, 2009). For Multiracial SFL members, having to do this led to racial microaggressions through micro-racialization (Harris 2016; Harris et al., 2021), liminality of racial binaries (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004), increased proximity or non-proximity to whiteness (Harris, 2017a), and identity miscategorization (Guillermo-Wann & Johnston, 2012). This created cultural taxation because of postracial ideologies which allowed their monoracial peers to hide behind colorblindness (Harris et al., 2012; Literté, 2021).

Multiracial SFL members also experienced colorism and hypodescence as identity abstraction or fracturing from their monoracial peers, forcing people to fit into or choose a monoracial or dominant racial category according to their chapter's racial identity (Hunter, 2016; Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). Questioning Multiracial SFL members about their identities can lead to antagonistic challenges (Museus et al., 2015). Students were also hypersexualized through processes of exotification and positioned into racial binaries or monoracial categories which supports existing research about Multiracial microaggressions (Harris, 2017a, 2017b; Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Ozaki & Parson, 2017).

Limitations

The researchers have extensive *a priori* knowledge with sororities and fraternities which may have influenced participants to provide socially desirable responses during the interviews. There was also a lot of variation in the personal narratives of the Multiracial participants. There is not a universality to multiraciality as their identity experiences may not be applicable to others (Johnston-Guerrero & Chaudhari, 2016). These individual differences can affect the purpose and

meaning in the participants' racialized narratives, experiences, and perspectives.

The transferability of this study is limited to the participants' membership in predominately white and multicultural sororities and fraternities at PWIs. However, we believe the findings can provide insight on how monoracism and interest convergence affects Multiracial SFL members. We recognize that this research does include some, but not significant NPHC representation and the importance of voice because of the limited representation among members of other national organizations in light of historically marginalized communities. Therefore, future research should continue to explore colorism and how Multiracial members negotiate whiteness.

Implications for Practice

The most salient finding beyond forms of interest convergence or monoracism is how Multiracial members persisted with finding belonging within their chapters. They engaged in intentional place-making to disrupt the convenient minority friend status by surrounding themselves with monoracial advocates despite the forms of cultural taxation. There are a number of implications for practice that may facilitate increased inclusion and involvement for Multiracial SFL members. These include increasing advisor competency and multiracial student belonging to help them better understand how to allow Multiracial students to authentically identify within sororities and fraternities.

Increasing Advisor Competency

Campus-based professionals should consider how sororities and fraternities can serve as affinity spaces or programs. This is most salient at the beginning of the academic year to promote social integration considering the positionality and context of multiraciality (Mohajeri & Lou, 2021). An initial step is through co-constructing student organizations such as sororities or fraternities and identifying advisors as allies or advocates. Student organization advisors can serve a powerful role in supporting Multiracial students as spaces of liberation and belonging (Renn, 2021).

Mohajeri and Lou (2021) suggested a four-stage process of critical praxis that can be used by student organization advisors to promote multiraciality as a space of counterstorytelling to acknowledge power-blindness. They suggested exploring the ways in which advisor's post-racial ideologies about multiraciality may influence increased pressures of "responsibility for healing labor on Multiracial individuals, thereby absolving others of involvement" (p. 185).

Advisors should consider that Multiracial students inhabit co-located, multiple identities so that students can move toward awareness and acceptance of their identities. They should encourage less diverse and monoracial chapters to move from colorblind to color brave conversations (Snider, 2020). These conversations could be important during the recruitment process as Multiracial students often feel uncomfortable

when asked about their heritage (Harris III & Harper, 2014; Koo, 2021).

Increasing Multiracial Student Belonging

An assumption of monoracial students is that Multiracial college students are being inauthentic when they join an identity-based organization such as a culturally based sorority or fraternity and this is a byproduct of monoracism and dominant racist discourses which affect identity development (Harris, 2016; Osei-Kofi, 2012). There can especially be feelings of racial exclusion when joining a predominately White organization as non-White members (Snider et al., 2024). However, in this study, Multiracial students initially sought sororities and fraternities as a place of belonging where they did not have to limit the expression of their multiple racial identities, such as being tokenized (D. Delgado, 2016).

Yet, as indicated from the findings of this study, Monoracial college students experienced initial confusion and disorientation by multiraciality which caused discomfort and cultural taxation for Multiracial SFL members. This suggests that monoracial SFL members need more education about the ways in which Multiracial students are managing the realities of multiple racial heritages and how they straddle connectedness across multiple communities and cultures (Guillermo-Wann & Johnston, 2012). Monoracial SFL members should experience diversity and belonging programming as a part of their membership education, which includes anti-deficit narratives about Multiraciality and the deleterious histories of intentional erasure.

Education initiatives should initially challenge the current climate of colorblindness, which is especially prevalent in historically white fraternities (Sasso et al., 2022). This is important in the context of Multiracial students who join less diverse chapters as they experienced colorblindness, an unwillingness to discuss racial issues, and must navigate others' assumptions about their heritage (Jackson, 2010; Snider, 2020). Such opportunities may humanize experiences for Multiracial SFL members and empower them to have conversations around racial nomenclature and erasure, which have been found to be harmful to Multiracial students' identity development (Ford & Malaney, 2012).

Additionally, campus-based professionals should work with their chapter leaders to encourage Multiracial students to find significance and seek out complementary leadership experiences such as Sister Circles, Women Caucuses, or other identity-based organizations which provide spaces for identity development and racial salience (Croom et al., 2017; Snider, 2020). This intentional involvement may facilitate leadership development and increase involvement in their own chapter (Garcia, 2019; Malaney & Danowski, 2015; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008). Such efforts to encourage supplemental leadership experiences and educate monoracial SFL members may facilitate a greater extent of belonging within their chapters to ease tokenization and the role of Multiracial SFL members in serving as racial buffers and interest convergence, as found in this study.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that this is a small and resilient intersectional student population which is pushed to the borders of student engagement as they deconstruct existing boundaries of identity to forge a new Multiracial congruence. This was challenging for these students as they felt unseen due to monoracialism expressed by others, which influenced participant conceptualization of their identity and feelings of personal reservations of their authenticity. Participants frequently decided to be selectively invisible in response to these challenges. Future research should expand on these findings and explore ways to intentionally engage these or other invisible Multiracial populations.

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