

“I woke up to the world”: Politicizing Blackness and Multiracial Identity Through Activism

by

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 Black multiracial students, this project explores the extent to which processes of racial socialization and racialization can differentially inform how Black multiracial students navigate and experience involvement in Black student and activist organizations. It unpacks the ways that anti-Black racialization and racism, experienced in the college setting, can motivate Black multiracial students' involvement in student organizations. Moreover, it highlights the ways in which involvement in anti-racist activism and Black student organizations can impact Black multiracial students' understandings of blackness, multiraciality, and identity more broadly. To operationalize the long term impacts of Black organizational involvement, specifically within the context of multiracial families, I introduce a concept called *reflective resistance*, which I define as the negotiations and interventions Black multiracial students employ, post-organizational involvement, to confront and actively resist family members' colorblind and/or antiblack racism. The data presented in this project suggests that Black multiracial students become politicized through their involvement in Black student organizations, developing more salient Black racial identities, nuanced understandings of race and racism, and invested commitments to anti-racist activism.

## INTRODUCTION: FALLING IN LOVE WITH MY BLACKNESS

*“We cannot effectively resist domination if our efforts to create meaningful, lasting personal and social change are not grounded in a love ethic .... To give ourselves to love, to love Blackness, is to restore the true meaning of freedom, hope, and possibility in all our lives.” -bell hooks, 2001*

As the opening quote from bell hooks (2001) suggests, in order to combat and resist prevailing white supremacy, both external and internalized racism, individuals must work to love themselves *because* of their blackness, rather than *despite* their blackness. However, this journey to Black love often runs counter to the harsh realities of our antiblack world, one fraught with prevailing messages and representations of blackness as linked to inferiority, negativity, ugliness, evil, etc. (Kendi 2016). As a Black<sup>1</sup> multiracial woman, with a white mother and an Afro-Caribbean father, I am embarrassed to confess that I have only recently fell in love with my blackness. I grew up inundated with persistent messages about my multiracial<sup>2</sup> “exceptionality,” which allowed me to distance myself from blackness so long as I internalized and performed displays of Black transcendence, implicitly perpetuating harmful messages about blackness (Joseph 2013). Whether it was laughing when my white peers made antiblack jokes, vehemently

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study, I capitalize “Black,” and other racially and/or ethnically minoritized groups as a form of linguistic empowerment. I do not capitalize “white” as a way of challenging hegemonic grammatical norms and thus, “reject the grammatical representation of power capitalization brings to the term ‘white’” (Pérez Huber 2010:93).

<sup>2</sup> Although I recognize that “mixed race,” “biracial,” and “multiracial” are often used interchangeably throughout research to refer to individuals who have parents of different races, I choose to primarily use “multiracial” and occasionally “mixed race,” intentionally avoiding the use of “biracial” as it “highlights the so-called graphic division between black and white” (Joseph 2013:10). I also choose not to capitalize multiracial throughout this study, largely because respondents emphasized the centrality of their Black racial identities, but also to contest notions of a homogenous or shared multiracial experience or cultural, ethnic, or racial identity.

refusing to wear Afrocentric, natural hairstyles such as braids and twists, fearing they might call attention to my blackness, or even my complicit role in my white mother's "I can't be a racist" social campaign, I consistently fed into popular notions of multiraciality. Not because I sought recognition of my multiracial background, as research and mobilization efforts around multiracial identities suggest (Daniel et. al 2014; King 2011; Renn 2000), but because I desperately hoped to disassociate from my own blackness.

Even as my multiraciality was celebrated, and often fetishized, I was still consistently racialized as Black, or at least "Black and..." by those around me due to my phenotype; yet, my mother, the primary agent of my racial socialization, refused to accept, or even acknowledge my Black racial identity and her carework always seemed to intentionally stifle my relationship with blackness. As a child, my media access was restricted to "mainstream" channels, instances of racial discrimination were addressed through colorblind rhetoric, and movie and music genres comprised of predominantly Black artists were described to me as explicit and inappropriate. However, the 'color-blind' shelter to which my mother worked so hard to confine me started to rupture during my freshman year of college at the University of Oklahoma when videos of a white fraternity singing racist chants that referenced lynching surfaced and went viral. The media frenzy that followed thrust me into an unfamiliar environment where students worked to either perpetuate or protest overt anti-Black racism. Moreover, as my college professors continually pressured me to speak on racial issues from what they assumed to be my Black racial experience, my resistance to adopting a Black racial identity proved impossible to maintain. It was within this context that I began to accept my blackness.

With this acceptance, and against the backdrop of a tumultuous, racially hostile campus climate, bloomed a budding curiosity regarding my position, as a Black multiracial woman, in the racial hierarchy. Hoping to further make sense of my blackness and multiraciality, I began enrolling in Black studies courses and delving into Black literature, which quickly confronted me with the realities of a violent racial history and legacy of racism that was largely absent throughout my upbringing. More and more, I was forced to critically reflect on my own racial socialization, identity, and privilege, unconsciously developing a toolkit to unlearn the colorblind racism and anti-Blackness that I had internalized throughout my childhood. As my level of racial consciousness rose, I sought out community, support, and affirmation from Black student organizations and activist spaces. Although initially apprehensive as to whether I'd be accepted, I first became involved with a small Black women's empowerment organization. Within this organization, the numerous commonalities that existed between my lived racial experience and that of other Black women became elucidated, I was given a new language to unpack my negative racialized experiences, and above all else, I began feeling intimately connected to Black culture and community. It was through my involvement in this organization that I fell in love with my blackness.

I begin with this autobiographical account because it provides context for this study and situates my positionality as a researcher. Thus, this project has emerged from my lived personal, racial, and political experiences as a Black multiracial woman simultaneously navigating the academy and anti-racist activism. Hence, this recounting serves as an internal roadmap to prominent themes explored throughout this study. Specifically, in this project, I address the following research questions: (1) In what ways do broad cultural (mis)understandings of

blackness, racial authenticity, and racialization influence how Black multiracial students experience and navigate their complex racial identities in the college setting? (2) How does this negotiation inform their involvement in Black student organizations? (3) How does involvement within Black student organizations impact Black multiracial students' understandings of blackness, multiraciality, and identity?

*Black while Multiracial: Mapping Coalitions and Divisions*

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Civil Rights and Black Power organizations effectively mobilized Black multiracial individuals in their fight for racial equality, promoting a strong sense of Black pride and racial unity. This mobilization proved to facilitate stronger and more salient Black racial identities for Black multiracial people, and an overall embrace of blackness. (Jones 2015; Khanna 2010; Root 2005). As such, scholars find that the subsequent institutionalization of race-oriented programs has strongly aided vulnerable and underrepresented racial and ethnic minority students in feeling empowered, increasing their self-esteem, and promoting their construction of more salient, or politicized identities via activism (DeAngelo, Schuster, and Stebleton 2016; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019; Kaplan and Flum 2012). However, the increasing visibility of multiracial students on college campuses has catalyzed debate among researchers about the unintentional consequences of these race-oriented student organizations. Specifically, some argue that they both reinforce and privilege monoraciality, ignoring the continually rising Multiracial student population. Scholars of this camp often highlight multiracial college students' feelings of exclusion, struggle for belonging, and battle for ownership over their complex racial identities (Renn 2000).

However, much of the research on multiracial college students' involvement remains predicated on the aggregated experiences of all multiracial students with minimal, or no specific attention to those who both have one Black parent and who are involved with Black interest groups and organizations. These experiences are representative of *some* challenges faced by multiracial students; at the same time, the experiences of multiracial students with long term involvement in Black student organizations might reveal the complex ways that Black

multiracial students differentially experience involvement, conceive of blackness and multiraciality, and position themselves vis-a-vis other multiracial students and Black-identified groups in the college racial hierarchy. Beyond individual constructions of multiracial identity, my aim for this project is to critically unpack Black multiracial students' involvement within Black student and activist organizations and highlight the broader impacts of white supremacy and antiblack racialization on multiracial identities and experiences within higher education.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on multiracial identity, higher education, and Black student organizations, focusing mainly on processes of racial socialization and racialization and their impacts on the negotiations of multiracial identity and involvement. In my second chapter, I detail my qualitative methodological approach and elaborate on my use of semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, I explain the demographics of my sample, my recruitment strategy and analytical process, as well as the benefits and implications associated with my insider status as a Black multiracial woman researcher. Additionally, I briefly introduce the concept "reflective resistance," which I define as the negotiations and interventions Black multiracial respondents employ to confront and actively resist family members' colorblind and/or antiblack racism. However, I develop this concept further in chapter five as it informs the final section of analysis. In the subsequent chapters, I present my empirical findings, categorizing them into three broad themes: motivations for involvement, involvement experiences and navigation, and impact of involvement.

In chapter three, entitled "Waking Up to the World," I highlight how Black multiracial students' racial socialization and experiences with antiblack racialization prior to college impacts how they navigate their racial identities and racialized encounters while in college. Ultimately, I

argue that because Black multiracial respondents enter college with varied levels of preparation for and exposure to racism and anti-blackness, they navigate their racialization and multiracial identities in distinct ways while in college, differentially influencing their motivations for Black organizational involvement. In chapter four, titled “Navigating the Politics of Acceptance,” I move to explore how Black multiracial students experience involvement, paying close attention to the ways that they confront barriers of inclusion and engage in a process of racial re-socialization while in Black student organizations. Through this process of racial re-socialization, I argue that Black multiracial students are forced to critically reflect on the impacts of their own racial socialization and reevaluate their perceived racial privilege and position within a collective Black identity. In the final empirical chapter, “Black, No Question Mark,” I present findings related to the impacts of Black organizational or activist involvement on Black multiracial students, emphasizing the ways that long term involvement can effectively politicize and mobilize multiracial students’ Black racial identities. Additionally, I further develop the concept “reflective resistance” in order to demonstrate the salience of respondents’ Black racial identities and commitments to antiracist activism post-organizational involvement and the implications that has on their familial relationships. In the concluding chapter, I revisit my findings and theoretical contributions, briefly discuss the limitations of this study, and outline directions for future research.

## CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Multiracial Utopianism: (Multi)racialization in a Colorblind Era*

Before delving into contemporary scholarship related to multiraciality and involvement within higher education, it is essential to historically contextualize the politicization of multiracial identity and identification. Despite claims that multiracial individuals can transgress and/or bridge racial boundaries, popular representations of multiraciality, both past and present, highlight the ways that multiracial identities have continually been used to reinforce white supremacy and essentialized notions of “racial purity.” Thus, contemporary understandings of and approaches to multiracial identities and identification 1) largely promote a colorblind agenda, 2) assume a monolithic multiracial identity struggle, and 3) avoid engagement with anti-blackness and anti-black racialization. As such, I take seriously Jessica Harris (2019) and Nana Osei-Kofi’s (2012) call to move away from analyses focused on individualized notions of race and multiracial identity, and instead move towards more structural analyses that interrogate broader systems of domination and the ways in which those systems inform processes of racialization and racism.

While most scholars agree to the notion of race as one of social and historical construction, Bonilla-Silva (2017:8) contends that race has an inherent social reality, whereby, “it produces real effects on the actors racialized as ‘black’ or ‘white.’” Bonilla-Silva (2017) goes on to explain the production of these consequences as privileges of whiteness over blackness in

established racialized social systems. Moreover, Michael Omi and Howard Winant describe race as “an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” through processes of racialization (1994:55). For the purposes of this study, racialization refers to the assignment of racial meaning to resources, behaviors, cultural objects, bodies, emotions, and even organizations, previously seen as non-racial (Omi and Winant 2015; Ray 2019). Following Evelyn Hammonds (1997) argument that race, in the U.S., has always been dependent on “the visual,” Black multiracial respondents in this study identified the racialization of their bodies and physical appearance as instrumental to how they understood their racial identities. Thus, I focus on the ways racial identity is often ascribed and understood through processes of racialization.

Although the politicization of multiracial identities is evident prior to biologically based chattel slavery and Jim Crow segregation, the historic one-drop-rule or rule of hypodescent, established and enforced within these eras, represents a codified and legal placement of Black multiracials, whereby persons with any Black ancestry were categorized as Black (Davis 1991). Scholars have argued that the development of the one-drop-rule exemplified a form of social control, where the white dominant race successfully reaffirmed their superiority by denying multiracial individuals any access to white privileges (Graves 2004; Jones 2015; Renn 2004; Root 1990). While racist laws such as the one-drop-rule worked to maintain white racial purity and white supremacy, they also unintentionally prompted coalitions between Black multiracials and monoracial Black communities (Joseph 2013). Through the historic acceptance of Black multiracials in Black communities, “these rules were internalized by African Americans who converted them from mere signifiers of shame to markers of pride” (Valerie Smith

2013:38). However, in the contemporary colorblind era of imagined post-raciality, scholars suggest opposite trends taking place.

Opposing monoracial norms of hypodescent, the multiracial movement of the 1990's, led predominantly by white mothers of multiracial children, succeeded in broadening standards of official racial data collection, allowing those of mixed-race heritage to mark one or more races on the US census (Joseph 2013; Thompson 2006). Following the 'Mark One Or More' movement, the number of people claiming one or more racial categories has proliferated exponentially, comprising 7% of the total population in 2010 (Museus, Sariñana, Ryan 2015; U.S. Census Bureau 2011). While some have hailed the formal recognition of multiracial identities as a positive step towards the demise of racial hierarchies and inequalities, others contend that the multiracial movement has been a political tool of the right to promote colorblind ideologies and continued anti-black racialization (Daniel, Kina, Dariotis, and Fojas 2014; Jones 2015; Literte 2010). Specifically, Jared Sexton (2008) argues that multiracialism actually "energizes white supremacy and anti-blackness through the effects of its subversion" (20). Because multiracialism relies on the construction of white racial purity which can only be contaminated through racial mixing, Black multiracial people have seemingly held precarious positions within the racial hierarchy, sometimes as what Bonilla-Silva terms "honorary whites," positioned below whites but above monoracial Blacks, and other times as part of the collective Black (Buggs 2017). Thus, Shantel Buggs argues "narratives around a colorblind society get shored up by multiracialism, which acts as a means of both undoing whiteness and creating a society that is beyond race while also keeping the social power of whiteness firmly in place" (Buggs 2017: 540).

Although much of multiracial scholarship advocates for individual ‘agency’ over one’s racial identification, these arguments are largely divorced from the realities of white supremacy and anti-blackness. As a result, modern representations of multiraciality assume multiracial individuals either do not experience their race or do not encounter racism (Harris 2016). Consequently, multiracial blackness is assumed to transcend controlling, anti-black images, fostering what Ralina L. Joseph refers to as “mixed-race exceptionalism” (2013: 158). Specifically, Joseph argues that “images of multiracial blackness largely do not illuminate the benefits of identifying as Black. Instead of showing Americans embracing blackness in messy, hybridized, multiracial forms, the unspoken dictate in contemporary representations of multiracial Americans is that blackness must be risen above, surpassed, or truly transcended” (4). Yet, even as these trends persist, some Black multiracial students still join distinctly Black student organizations and even come to embrace a Black racial identity. For the purposes of this project, I focus largely on the ways in which understandings of blackness and experiences with anti-black racialization informs multiracial involvement and experiences within Black student organizations. In order to fully grasp how Black multiracial identities have developed and operated within this racialized social system, we must now turn to the literature analyzing the construction of multiracial identities through processes of racial socialization and racialization.

### *I Am, Because: Multiracial Pre-College Racial Socialization*

In examination of multiracial identities and involvement within higher education, it is necessary to acknowledge that students are often exposed to various forms of pre-college racial socialization that differentially prepare them for the racialized climate of college campuses. For

example, scholars have argued that social interactions within racially homogeneous spaces such as neighborhoods, schools and peer groups hold significant weight in the racial socialization of multiracial children (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Wilton, Sanchez and Garcia 2012). Scholars have found that in largely minority social contexts (friendship networks, schools, locales, etc.) multiracial folks are much more likely to embrace their minority identity, whereas, in majority white social contexts, they are more likely to assert a solely multiracial identity (Brunsma 2005). Thus, I examine how being socialized within racially diverse social contexts informs understandings of multiracial blackness as well as comparatively influences the involvement choices of Black multiracial students .

Moreover, Patricia Hill Collins (1998:64) argues that “individuals typically learn their assigned place in hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class in their families of origin. They also learn to view those hierarchies as natural social arrangements, as compared to socially constructed ones.” According to David Brunsma (2005:1132), given that most people who claim a multiracial identity are below 18 years old, “it is clear that their parents/guardians were heavily (if not solely) involved in the designation of these children's racial classification.” Contemporary scholars have also found interracial parents to be influential socialization agents in their multiracial child's racial construction and sense of self (Csizmadia, Rollins, & Kaneakua 2014; Doto & Syed 2019; Rollins 2019; Stone & Dolbin-MacNab 2017).

Within families Jill Hamm (2001) contends that, white parents are more likely to engage in racial socialization by answering questions and teaching equality, whereas Black parents are more likely to emphasize awareness of racial differences and preparation for bias. Adrienne Edwards and April Few-Demo (2016) apply Black feminist thought and intersectionality to

examine how Black mothers engage in racial socialization processes with their preschool-age children. Although they do not focus on interracial families, Edwards and Few-Demo emphasize the salience of motherwork and conscientization as evident racial socialization strategies employed by Black mothers. Conscientization, or consciousness-raising, occurs “when marginalized communities become aware of systematic institutional strategies which are designed to disenfranchise, discriminate, and disempower and seek to actively fight against oppression.” (Edwards and Few-Demo 2016:59; Collins 1998). Edwards and Few-Demo further explore this feature of resistance by highlighting how the Black mothers within their study prioritized the instilment and reinforcement of racial pride and history when engaging in racial socialization. In this way, we should expect Black multiracial respondents raised by Black mothers to have more nuanced understandings of their Black racial identities prior to entering college.

In their study of Black fathers of mixed-race children, Erica Chito Childs and Heather Dalmage (2009) highlight the gendered dynamics influencing the ways Black fathers racially socialized their multiracial children. While Black fathers in their study expressed immense difficulty in combating racist images of Black masculinity, they discussed facing more challenges with racially socializing multiracial daughters, rather than sons, due to a desire to raise their daughters to become strong Black women. Thus, respondents, in this study, who were raised primarily or solely by their Black parents are likely to enter college with higher levels of exposure to and understandings of racial inequality and difference. However, research analyzing the socialization practices of immigrant parents paint a different picture. For example, Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman and Edlin Veras found that the racial socialization practices enacted by Afro-

Latinx families in their study, largely “emphasized their nations of origin or Latinx identities such that messages about Blackness were almost exclusively characterized by stigmatization, racial policing, or distancing” (2019:12). This finding is echoed in Kelly Jackson, Thera Wolven, and Chandra Crudup’s study of multiracial Mexican families who largely employed racial socialization strategies emphasizing white American superiority and assimilationist ideals (2019). Additionally, in one of the few studies that examines the racial socialization of mixed-race Americans with immigrant parents, Waring and Purkayastha (2017) found that respondents with one immigrant parent relied on their ethnic ties to “distance themselves from racial hierarchies,” opting to assert a distinct half racial/half ethnic identity. Given that several respondents within this study were raised by Black and/or non-Black immigrant parents, I avoid assuming that Black immigrant parents’ racial socialization practices mirror that of Black American parents, and instead center an analysis of diasporic notions of blackness.

However, because most respondents, in this study, were raised by their non-Black parent, in most cases their white mother, it is crucial to also unpack the racial socialization practices of white mothers. Drawing from a longitudinal ethnography of British interracial families, France Winddance Twine and Amy Steinbugler (2006:344) employ the concept of racial literacy, to outline “specific practices, which enable White members of interracial families to adopt a critical racial frame: developing ‘double consciousness,’ negotiating localized meanings of whiteness, and recognizing everyday racism.” While Twine (2006) argues that white parents of Black multiracial children employ racial literacy to socialize their children in ways that prepare them for negative racialized encounters, many respondents throughout this study described feeling unprepared and ill-informed when navigating negative racialized encounters in college. As such,

I argue that non-Black parents may actually develop racial literacy as a result of the politicization of their multiracial children's Black identities through a process of *reflective resistance*, which I conceptualize further in chapter five.

Moreover, Dana Stone and Megan Dolbin-MacNab found that white mothers emphasized intentionality within their parenting strategies. "Intentionality extended to teaching their children both sides of their racial heritage, that they are a combination of both Black and white, not one without the other," instilling a strong mixed race identity in their children (2017:107). However, the instilment of such strong multiracial identities via white mothers can potentially lead to intrafamilial tensions, as expressed throughout interviews. Specifically, when white parents attempt to police the performance of their child's mixed race identity in ways that require a demonstration of their child's loyalty to their parent's whiteness (Buggs 2017). In so doing, white parents may implicitly force mixed race children to engage in what Shantel Buggs extends as "a performance of white racial obligation (Marcano 2009) – the investment in the discourses, logics and resources that reproduce systemic white social power" (Buggs 2017: 380). For the purposes of this project, *white racial obligation* will be explored within the context of how respondents discussed shifts in their racial identities as a result of their college experiences, and the ways they discussed negotiating these shifts in identification with family members through what I introduce as *reflective resistance*.

### *The Blacker the Berry...: Racialization and Racial Fluidity*

Scholars have moved away from analyzing race as a static process of identification, recognizing the complexity of multiracial identity construction (Brunsma, Delgado, &

Rockquemore, 2013; Hitlin, Scott Brown, & Elder Jr, 2006; Sims & Joseph-Salisbury, 2019).

This body of literature presents crucial themes for understanding multiracial fluidity and flexibility. Although some respondents in this study enter college with a more salient Black racial identity, others detail shifts in their racial identities as a result of their BSO involvement. Primarily, scholars argue that multiracial individuals are continually engaging in an ongoing social process of “doing race”(Khanna and Johnson 2010), whereby, one’s racial identity can shift over the life course, due to specific life events(Song, 2018), and in different situational contexts(Wilton, Sanchez, and Garcia 2013). Additionally, research has expressed the different ways one’s multiracial identity may coexist with their Black identity (Sims & Joseph-Salisbury 2019). For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand what contributes to shifts in multiracial identification and the relationship racial fluidity and flexibility have to broader racialized sociopolitical systems, such as predominantly white institutions and campuses.

Within the context of multiracial racialized experiences, numerous scholars have elucidated why the “mix matters,” emphasizing the role of appearance in the multiracial experience (Gallagher 2006; Harris 2019; Osei-Kofi 2012; Renn 2004). For example, studies have demonstrated how phenotypic characteristics, such as skin tone, hair texture, racial passing features and racial ambiguity play a role in influencing multiracial identity construction and fluidity (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Hordge-Freeman 2015; Khanna and Johnson 2010; Perkins 2014; Root 1990; Waring and Bordoloi 2018). Building from Cooley’s looking-glass self (1902) scholars have found that mixed-race identities are heavily influenced by the (mis)perceptions others hold regarding their racial identity. Various qualitative studies have presented narratives of multiracial people’s experiences with questions such as, what are you?

And, are you adopted? (McKinney 2016; Waring and Bordoloi 2018). Thus, racially ambiguous multiracial individuals may be ‘consistently inconsistently’ racially perceived by others, sometimes causing them to question their own racial identity, or even actively resist monoracial categorization (Sims 2016:580). Yet, in this study many respondents expressed resistance to adopting a multiracial identity, intentionally opting to exclusively identify as a Black. Hence, I explore how some multiracial students are never racialized as “multiracial,” rather they are assumed to be monoracial Black. Additionally, I unpack the complexities of passing privilege as it relates to Black multiracial students adopting a Black racial identity within BSOs, when they are often not racialized as Black in social interactions.

Skin color is also a salient factor of multiracial socialization. Rhea Perkins (2014:216) argues that, “depending on the degree of pigmentation or how light or dark one may be, will play a role in acceptance or exclusion from racial and social groups and communities.” Recognition of phenotypical, racialized distinctions within the multiracial experience rely on colorism discourse to emphasize how the societal privileging of whiteness or white conceptions of beauty, has placed a social capital on skin color, beyond that of race, thus providing lighter skinned individuals with special privileges and advantages. (Burton et. al 2010; Herring, Keith, and Horton 2004; Hordge-Freeman 2015; Monk 2014). This is not to say that all Black multiracial people are of lighter skin, but to shed light on the importance of interrogating the influences of anti-blackness via colorism discourse on the experiences of multiracial students. Further, scholars argue that the maintenance of this strict racial/skin color hierarchy “stifles coalition building between racial communities” (Harris 2019). Throughout this study I pay close attention

to how Black multiracial students experience colorism and negotiate the associated privileges/consequences as it relates to their involvement and racial identities.

In Harris' (2019) research on Black multiracial women's racialized experiences in college, participants with Black racial heritage consistently noted the ways their hair acted as a racial signifier in racialized encounters. Perpetual social devaluations of blackness and Afrocentric phenotypic features have prompted scholars to explore the gendered nature of the multiracial experience. For example, Warring (2013:301) finds that multiracial women experience exotification, "characterized by the paradoxical intersection of blackness and whiteness as hypersexual and chaste, and the intimate interest that derives from how that contradiction will be embodied and experienced." Referred to as a type of "triple jeopardy," Kerry Ann Rockquemore (2002) found that many multiracial women within her study experienced racial invalidation from Black women, reporting a range of challenges faced, narrowly centered around their physical appearance and perceived attractiveness. In examination of multiracial women's push back against adopting an exclusively Black identity, resulting from the observed tensions between multiracial and Black women, Rockquemore (2002:498) contends that the multiracial experience is "fundamentally gendered because it occurs within the cultural valuation of White-defined beauty and a patriarchal structure of mate selection."

This is also echoed within colorism discourse, whereby scholars have emphasized the persistent conflation of light skin with mixedness and beauty (Hunter 2002; Wilder 2010). However, Black multiracial women throughout this study also highlighted the affective rewards they garnered through participation in Black women's empowerment organizations, which increased their levels of confidence and affirmed their Black womanhood. As such,

affective capital is useful in conceptualizing the affective exchanges and rewards Black multiracial students sometimes gain through their BSO involvement. Hordge-Freeman introduces *affective capital* to refer to “the emotional and psychological resources that a person gains from being positively evaluated and supported, and from receiving frequent and meaningful displays of affection” (2015:5).

In contrast, “because their mixedness is constructed as compatible with, not a sexualized threat to, heteronormative masculine identities as constituted in racialized peer groups, black Mixed-Race men, more so than women, experience acceptance from, bond with, and develop a strategically same identity as same gender black peers.” (Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019:52; Newman:2019). However, scholars still note the ways Black multiracial men differentially become exoticized, emphasizing the hypermasculinity associated with blackness. In her study on Black multiracial men, Newman (2019:120) found that “when black multiracial boys did not perform black masculinity adequately, it was their authentic blackness that came into question, not necessarily their masculinity.” However, these studies primarily focused on heterosexual cis-gender mixed-race men, presenting a gap related to the racialized experiences and identities of queer and trans mixed-race men, a gap that this project begins to fill. Still, this research brings into context the role of gender, masculinity, and sexuality in the racial socialization and identities of multiracial men, highlighting both the gendered nature of multiracial socialization, as well as the overarching role of anti-black racialization in constructing multiracial identities and engagement with Black peers.

*Racialized Bodies: (Mono)racism in Higher Education*

Scholars have long posited higher education as a crucial institution for identity development and construction, especially in relation to race. Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009:579) argue that within college, students “make their way into adulthood and form self-concepts of, allegiances to, and aspirations toward various identities.” Yet, even as the number of multiracial undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions increased 97% from 2010-2014, less than 1% of scholarship published within the five top higher education journals explicitly focused on multiraciality (Harris 2019; Museus et al. 2015; NCES 2016). Of this 1% of scholarship, overwhelming attention has been paid to multiracial identity development, especially as it relates to experiences with monoracism. Monoracism, includes “forcing multiracial people to choose one monoracial identity over others, policing the authenticity of multiracial people, objectification, and exclusion and isolation from monoracial groups, organizations, and resources” (Harris 2016:806; Hamako, 2014; Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Leong, 2010). Specific to Black multiracial students, studies highlight how students consistently encounter instances of racial essentialism, invalidation when claiming a Black monoracial identity, exclusion from racial groups, and challenges to their Black authenticity (Museus et al. 2015; Tate 2017).

Although the Black multiracial student experience is inherently unique from that of monoracial student experiences, Black multiracial individuals are often still racialized as Black, due to Afrocentric physical features such as hair and skin, and consequently, experience anti-blackness throughout their college experience. Yet, research on how Black multiracial students negotiate and reconcile their blackness and anti-Black racialized experiences are

limited, and often minimized to quarrels about multiracial “identity struggles” more broadly. However, Jessica Harris argues that this explicit preoccupation with multiracial identity development leaves an incomplete picture of multiracial college students’ experiences within postsecondary contexts. Harris asserts that this “disconnection between Multiracial individuals’ experiences and ‘social, institutional, and structural realities,’ risks maintaining the invisibility and normalcy of whiteness on campus” (Harris 2019:1024; Osei-Kofi 2012:253; Texeira 2003). Through this process of normalization, the “hegemonic structuring of whiteness renders racial power relations invisible which serves to naturalize racial stratification where whites remain at the top of the hierarchy (Cabrera 2014:31; Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003).

Within the context of predominantly white institutions (PWI’s), scholars demonstrate an overrepresentation of whiteness, whether through student body demographics, faculty diversity, historical traditions, or even institutional symbols, markers, mascots, etc., reflecting an embedded and institutionalized white hegemony. (Brunsmas, Brown, and Placier 2013; Knapp et al. 2008). Within her study of Black multiracial women’s racialized college experiences, Harris found that “due to the pervasiveness and normalization of whiteness, Multiracial women recognized that students of color might need to interact and cope within their own racial communities” (2019:1038). Further, Harris identified college classrooms and historically white Greek organizations as some of the most racist and exclusionary spaces at PWIs, where Black multiracial women were either barred entry or tokenized as what bell hooks calls “native informants, or the sole student of color who is forced to speak as an expert on behalf of their entire race” (2019:1028; hooks 1994). Additionally, Jones’ (2015) study interrogating the impact of the racialized Black-white dichotomy on multiracial self-identification, further shifts

traditional centers of analyses away from individualized conceptions of multiraciality and brings into focus broader systems of white supremacy and racialization. Specifically, Jones' findings reveal how ascribed, negative stereotypes of blackness work to influence the widespread adoption of mixed-race identities, alongside an overall disassociation from blackness, demonstrating how anti-black racialization impacts understandings of multiracial identity and race-oriented involvement.

Similarly, in one of the few studies that examines the relationship between Black multiraciality and evaluations of blackness, Kristen Clayton (2019:81) found that, comparatively, historically Black colleges "improved [Multiracial] students' evaluations of blackness by increasing the visibility of black educational success and providing opportunities for biracial and black students to interact as academic-status equals." Clayton's (2019) research takes contemporary approaches to multiracial identity development beyond explorations of individualized identities, examining Black multiracial student evaluations of blackness and racial regard comparatively within both historically white and Black universities. Ultimately, Clayton finds that immersion into heterogeneous, Black racial institutions and enrollment in Black studies courses motivated positive evaluations of blackness by Black multiracial students, increased their participation within Black student organizations (BSO's) and activism, and facilitated seemingly more salient racial identities. Following Clayton's logic, this project examines how complete immersion into heterogeneous, Black student organizations can similarly influence positive evaluations of blackness and facilitate more salient understandings of Black multiracial identity.

*Racialized Belonging: Black Student Organizations and Black Authenticity*

Scholars argue that engagement within Black organizations, and involvement in social activism, can help affirm one's racial identity and eventual acceptance and immersion into a collective Black identity (Brooms 2019; Harper and Quaye 2007). Within analyses of the Rastafari, Garvey, and Black Power movements, Singh (2004) argues that blackness, as an organizational tool, relied on the deployment of Black diasporic experiences to generate a sense of collective past and belonging in the revitalization of racial and ethnic pride. Similarly, Harper and Quaye (2007) found that Black student organization (BSO) membership and involvement helped enhance monoracial students' Black identities and commitment to anti-racist social change. These findings have driven scholars to explore how sense of belonging within campus community differentially impacts the educational, affective, and mental wellbeing of students of color, especially those navigating primarily white institutions (PWI's) (Brooms 2017; Strayhorn 2012). Strayhorn (2012: 82) characterized this sense of belonging as an "optimal psychosocial condition," which provides students of color support and motivation, and instills a collective sense of racial pride. Moreover, as Brooms notes, "sense of belonging can yield both positive (e.g., involvement, happiness, achievement, and retention) and negative (e.g., depression and decreases in health and well-being) outcomes," highlighting the link between student wellbeing, retainment, and sense of belonging (2019: 752).

One mechanism that scholars identify as contributing to the role that sense of belonging within BSO's plays in instilling Black pride and allegiance has been through the employment of "peer pedagogies" by students of color at predominantly white universities (Brooms 2019; Harper 2013). Harper (2013) introduces peer pedagogies as "the methods minoritized students

use to teach each other about the racial realities of predominantly white colleges and universities, as well as how to respond most effectively to racism, racial stereotypes, and microaggressions they are likely to encounter in classrooms and elsewhere on campus.” (Harper 2013:208). As a result of the anti-Black racialization that Black multiracial students often face and largely discussed throughout these interviews, peer pedagogies become even more instrumental to understanding the impact that involvement within BSO’s has on Black multiracial identity development and evaluations of their own blackness. However, research on multiracial, as compared to monoracial identity development has emphasized opposite trends taking place. These studies suggest that race-oriented student services represent difficult racialized spaces for Multiracial students to navigate and negatively infringe on Multiracial identity development, by both assuming and imposing monoracial norms. For this project, I focus on the ways that anti-black racism becomes normalized on predominantly white college campuses, fueling debates around the proliferation of Multiracial student organizations (MSO’s), with some arguing that multiraciality has been manipulated to assert different claims about the social construction of race (Daniel 2001; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007), and others arguing that multiraciality only reifies biological and essentialized notions of race, generally ignoring structural realities (Osei-Kofi 2012; Renn 2004; Spencer 2011). This project illuminates how the structural realities of anti-blackness in the Black multiracial college experience motivate multiracial participation within BSO’s.

Central to arguments in favor of MSO proliferation and development, is the idea that Multiracial students “cannot engage entirely in an immersion in one of their component cultures without putting aside, at least for that time, other aspects of their heritage”(Renn 2000: 402).

Scholars of this camp argue that even when Multiracial students attempt to immerse themselves within monoracial student organizations, they are consistently rejected and seen as inauthentic (Daniel, 1992; Literte 2010; Renn, 2000). Even so, these studies have traditionally focused on Multiracial students with little to no long-term involvement within BSO's. As such, little is known about the true impacts of long-term immersion within BSO's on Multiracial identity and understandings of blackness.

Extant literature on mixed-race identities has largely discussed blackness as it relates to phenotypic variations, rooted in biological conceptions of race (Johnson 2003). For example, scholars have revealed several multiracial narratives discussing feelings of "otherness" and experiences of racial exclusion within monoracial communities of color. However, these narratives primarily refer to attacks on one's blackness in context to physical appearance: racial ambiguity, skin color, perceived attractiveness, and racialized gender discourses (Literte 2010; Sims 2012; Tate 2019). In so doing, scholars implicitly perpetuate 'discourses of otherness' and conceptualizations of blackness, constructed out of racist stereotypes and biological presumptions within a white racial worldview. Johnson's (2003) analysis of blackness as linked to performativity challenges these narratives and the explicit dichotomization of blackness, as only existing counter to whiteness. Further, Smith and Moore (2000:9) observe that "the extent to which biracials are accepted depends on the extent to which their physical characteristics, style of dress, speech patterns, and general mannerisms match those in the black community, as well as the extent to which biracials accept a black racial identity and show commitment to the mores of the black community" (Sebring 1985). Although scholars have discussed experiences of delegitimization of multiracial "Black authenticity," by Black peers, fewer studies have

explored how this employment of authenticity politics is inherently informed by an experienced racialized worldview. Specifically, Johnson (2003:8) argues that “blackness does not only reside in the theatrical fantasy of the white imaginary that is then projected onto black bodies, nor is it always consciously acted out; rather, it is also the inexpressible yet undeniable racial experience of black people- the ways in which the “living of blackness” becomes a material way of knowing.”

By situating blackness contextually within a collective Black identity, the interactional relationship between collective consciousness, identity, and activism are elucidated. Fleming portrays collective consciousness as “a kind of social knowledge that is grounded in not only awareness of one’s belonging to a group but also recognition of one’s ongoing subordination within a system of power relations.”(2017:42). In this project, I explore respondents’ conceptualizations of multiracial blackness, examining how these notions of blackness influence the ways Black multiracial students differentially engage with and operate within a Black campus community. Moreover, I analyze the role of collective consciousness in the experiences and identities of Black multiracial respondents involved in Black student organizations.

### *Theoretical Framework*

In order to fully unpack the experiences of Black multiracial college students involved in Black student organizations, I take a critical race theoretical approach. Emerging out of the field of legal studies during the Civil Rights Movement, critical race theory (CRT) provides a useful mechanism for interrogating oppressive structures that maintain and reinforce anti-black racism and white supremacy (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Specifically, CRT

yields a theoretical framework for assessing and analyzing social systems, ideologies, and groups, which moves to recognize how: (1) race is a central and ordinary, organized aspect of social life; (2) the ingrained and institutionalized nature of racism has always benefited dominant white society; (3) all members of society can contribute to the reproduction of racialized social systems; and (4) race is a social construction, continually manipulated and reinvented for a group's own self-interests. (Bonilla-Silva 2017, Brown 2003, Burton et al. 2010, Delgado & Stefanicic 2000, Garcia 2016). However, because CRT has traditionally been oriented towards racial issues existing along the Black/white monoracial binary, many scholars have adapted CRT to better address the experiences of racial groups falling outside of this binary (i.e. LatCrit, AsianCrit, TribalCrit). For the purpose of this project, I adopt some of the adaptations proposed by Harris (2016) in their development of a Critical Multiracial Theory, or MultiCrit in order to explore the relationship between racialization, multiraciality, and blackness within higher education.

Building from CRT, Harris (2016) outlines eight tenets that foreground MultiCrit: challenges to ahistoricism, interest convergence, experiential knowledge, challenges to dominant ideologies, racism, monoracism, and colorism, a monoracial paradigm of race, differential micro-socialization, and intersections of multiple racial identities. Although I recognize that multiracial students experience various forms of racial microaggressions such as having to identify monoracially or facing exclusion from monoracial groups, I am unconvinced that these experiences differ from the racialized experiences of monoracial students, who also must navigate the monoracial U.S. landscape and may similarly encounter instances of mis-racialization on the basis of skin color, hair, language, interests, familial resemblance, etc. (i.e.

light-skinned monoracial Black individuals being racialized as multiracial). Moreover, I contend that the overwhelming preoccupation with monoracism within research centered on multiracial identities and experiences often reifies genetic or biological notions of race by conceptualizing the racialized experiences of multiracial individuals as inherently unique, simply by virtue of them having parents of different racialized backgrounds. While I acknowledge that multiracial individuals have distinctive experiences with and understandings of race, I argue that, like all racialized bodies, the racialized experiences of multiracial students are predicated on physical appearance and cultural competencies. Thus, I do not specifically draw on MultiCrit tenets related to “monoracism,” and instead focus on the tenets: *challenge to ahistoricism, experiential knowledge, challenges to dominant ideologies, and intersections of multiple racial/ethnic identities*.

MultiCrit’s tenet *challenge to ahistoricism* posits that analyses of racial issues and ideologies must always be placed in both historical and contemporary contexts (Atkin and Yoo 2019; Harris 2016; Solórzano and Yosso 2001). By situating the racialized experiences and involvement of Black multiracial college students within a historical context, I argue that processes of racialization remain fueled by the legacy of the one-drop rule, but only to the extent that an individual’s one drop is physically visible. Further, through this historical and contemporary contextualization, I highlight prominent factors that have contributed to various shifts in multiracial understandings of blackness, privilege, and multiraciality, alongside their political positionings and acceptance/exclusion within monoracial Black communities. Taken together, Atkin and Yoo maintain that “in addition to understanding the dominant society’s perceptions and treatment of Multiracial bodies throughout history and today, the *experiential*

*knowledge and challenge to dominant ideology* tenets advocate for centering the narratives of marginalized populations in our understanding of racism, as this knowledge challenges dominant ideologies that uphold oppressive structures” (2019:2; Harris, 2016). Through the centering of Black multiracial students’ voices and experiences via in-depth interviews, I refute colorblind claims that multiracial individuals do not experience their race or encounter racism (Osei-Kofi, 2012). Moreover, I complicate analyses of multiracial microaggressions and monoracism through an examination of students’ understandings of colorism and passing privilege.

Lastly, I incorporate MultiCrit’s tenet *intersections of multiple racial/ethnic identities*, which expands CRT’s *intersectionality* tenet, in order to move beyond an exploration of singular social identities, allowing for an examination of the intersections of multiple racial heritages (Harris 2016). Kimberle Crenshaw, a leading scholar of CRT, developed intersectionality as a theoretical approach to explore “...the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color” (Crenshaw 1989:3). However, many scholars have since employed intersectionality in their examinations of how individuals’ social identities intersect and coalesce in various oppressive ways. While intersectionality remains significant to this project, as Black multiracial respondents comprised different class backgrounds, immigration statuses, gender identities, sexualities, etc., I use *intersections of multiple racial/ethnic identities* to also include intersections of students’ multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

### *Methods*

Through employing a constructivist paradigm, this study examines how Black multiracial students make meaning out of their lived racialized experiences and Black racial identities within the context of Black student organizations (BSO's) (Lincoln and Guba 1985). As a result, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting between an hour to two and a half hours with 21 Black multiracial individuals involved, or with past involvement in BSO's in the college setting. Although I used an interview guide<sup>3</sup>, semi-structured interviewing allowed me to deviate from that interview guide as important themes emerged and facilitated more open and conversational interviews (Fontana & Frey 2000). Interview questions spanned many topics including discussions of participants upbringing, familial and peer socialization, experiences with racism, romantic relationships, activist and campus involvement, classroom and college experiences, racialization, political leanings, and identity development. For the purposes of this project, not all these themes will be discussed to their full extent, instead, focus will rest on involvement, identity, and racialization. While the bulk of the interviews were conducted in person or via Facetime/Skype, only three were conducted via phone call with no visual aid. This was intentional as I felt it was important to visually see respondents as well as be seen by

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Appendix A for Interview Protocol

respondents, to build rapport and understand how they experience racialization, and for some, a perceived racial ambiguity.

### *Recruitment*

To recruit research participants, I relied primarily on snowballing, a distinct form of theoretical/purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Snowball sampling is a participant-driven strategy, where participants who've already participated refer future participants from within their own social and personal networks, expanding the data in quantity as more participants participate in the research. This technique is particularly useful as it allows researchers insight into the social networks of “hidden populations” (Heckathorn, 1997), such as multiracial students (Chang 2010). I began by contacting a personal connection who serves as the president of Black student life at a predominantly white university in the Midwest, asking them to distribute my recruitment flyer among the 13 Black student organizations affiliated with their Black student life office. Additionally, I posted and shared flyers on various social media platforms, specifically, Twitter and Instagram. I also sent calls for recruitment to different Black student organizations, fraternities, and sororities at multiple universities within the U.S. as well as attended local Black activist and student organization meetings, protests, and rallies to distribute recruitment flyers in person. Lastly, I asked various college professors, including those from historically Black universities and predominantly white universities, to circulate my recruitment flyer among students enrolled in their courses.

Inclusion in this study was contingent upon participants having one parent of Black heritage and one non-Black. Given the complexities of multiraciality, I recognize that not all

individuals from interracial households necessarily identify as mixed race, biracial, or multiracial, as such, I avoided using explicit racial categorization during recruitment, abstaining from labels such as biracial, Black, multiracial, white, etc., and instead, focused on parentage rather than personal identification (Clayton 2019; Khanna 2007). Additionally, in recognition of the multiplicity of Black heritage, as a result of increased immigration from African, Caribbean, and Latin American countries, sample criteria for Black heritage was not limited to Black American, incorporating various Black diasporic identities within multiracial experiences (Smith 2014). Specifically, the recruitment flyer called for research participants who have been involved or are currently involved with Black student or activist organizations, who have parents of different races, with one parent being of Black racial heritage and the other non-Black. No constraints were placed on which types of Black student organizations.

### *Sample*

This sample is comprised of 21 Black multiracial college students involved with Black student and/or activist organizing. Of the sample, there were 9 men, 11 women, and 1 non-binary respondent. Respondents identified their sexuality along multiple lines, including: (2) lesbian, (2) gay, (3) bisexual, (1) pansexual, and (13) straight; however, I use “queer” as an umbrella label to refer to participants who did not identify their sexuality as straight. Because recruitment allowed for participants currently involved in Black student organizations as well as those who were previously involved in Black student organizations while in undergraduate, respondents ages ranged from 19 years old to 33 years old, with most respondents being between 21-24 years old.

In order to protect anonymity, all participants were asked to select a pseudonym to go by throughout the study. All but three respondents attend(ed) universities where the Black student population is less than 5%, and white students comprise over 70% of the entire student population. Only one respondent attended a historically black university or HBCU, where Black students comprised over 75% of the total student population and white students comprised less than 2% of the student population. Two respondents attended universities where the white student population was 50% and the black student population made up over 10% of the student population. Involvement criteria was flexible and included any student or activist organization that specifically referenced and/or served Black students, every participant expressed holding membership within their respective organizations for a minimum of one year, with 9 participants specifically holding leadership and executive positions. In this sample, involvement included respondents involved in: Black Fraternities, Black Sororities, Black Student Unions, Black Women's Organizations, Black Mentoring Programs, Black Activist Organizations, and Black Male Leadership Programs. The sample demographic variables for each respondent are listed below in Table 1.

**TABLE 1.** Sample Demographics

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Mom's Race/ Ethnicity</i>	<i>Dad's Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Gender Pronouns</i>	<i>Sexuality</i>	<i>BSO Type</i>
<i>Ahmed*</i>	21	Black	Indian	He/Him	Straight	Black Male Org; Black Student Union
<i>Alex</i>	26	White	Black	She/Her	Straight	Black Student Union
<i>Antonio</i>	19	Puerto Rican	Black	He/Him	Straight	Black Male Org
<i>Audrey*</i>	22	White	Afro-Dominican	She/Her	Straight	Black Women's Org; Black Student Union
<i>Bobby</i>	21	White	Black	He/Him	Straight	Black Activist Org
<i>Collin*</i>	26	Chinese	Black	He/Him	Straight	Black Male Org; Black Activist Org
<i>Dakota*</i>	21	White	Black	She/Her	Bi-/Queer	Black Women's Org; Black Student Union
<i>Jamal</i>	32	White	Black	He/Him	Straight	Black Male Org; Black Mentorship Org
<i>Jasmine</i>	21	Black	White	She/Her	Straight	Black Student Union
<i>Jay</i>	35	Mexican	Black	He/Him	Gay/ Queer	Black Mentorship Org
<i>Jerome*</i>	23	White	Black	He/Him	Straight	Black Greek Letter Org
<i>Kaleb</i>	27	White	Black	He/Him	Gay/ Queer	Black Mentorship Org
<i>Marie*</i>	22	White	African; Cameroonian	She/Her	Straight	Black Student Union; Black Mentorship Org; Black Women's Org
<i>Maya*</i>	22	Afro- Guyanese/White	Indo-Guyanese	She/Her	Lesbian/ Queer	Black Queer Org; Black Women's Org; Black Migrant Org

**TABLE 1. (Continued)**

<i>Michelle</i>	23	White	Black	She/Her	Lesbian/ Queer	Black Women's Org; Black Student Union
<i>Nicole</i>	26	White	Black	She/Her	Straight	HBCU; Black Activist Org; Black Student Union
<i>Noelle*</i>	24	White	Black	She/Her	Straight	Black Mentorship Org; Black Student Union; Black Arts Org
<i>Renee*</i>	22	Korean/White	Black	She/Her	Straight	Black Student Union; Black Greek Letter Org; Black Women's Org
<i>Ryan</i>	20	Black	Mexican	She/Her They/Them	Bi-/ Queer	Black Student Union; Black Professional Org
<i>Sasha</i>	29	Afro-Indo Guyanese	Afro-Dominican/ White	She/Her	Bi-/ Queer	Black Women's Org; Black Student Union
<i>Theo</i>	25	Mexican	Black	He/Him	Straight	Black Greek Letter Org

*All respondents with an \* by their name held leadership and executive positions in one or more organizations.*

### *Analytical Approach*

All interviews were conducted in English, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. While the first eight interviews were transcribed completely by hand onto a Microsoft Word document, the remaining interviews were transcribed using Otter AI, an artificial intelligence-powered voice recording and transcription service, and then authenticated and edited by manually listening to the audio. Transcripts comprised 1,560 minutes' worth of audio, with over 23,720 words transcribed. Throughout data analysis, I adopted an inductive approach, which is

largely emphasized by grounded theorists (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Lincoln and Guba assert that inductive approaches to data analysis begin “not with theories or hypotheses but with the data themselves, from which theoretical categories and relational propositions may be arrived at by inductive reasoning processes” (1985:333). This approach allowed for more nuanced codes to emerge and a deeper substantive reflection and analysis of the data.

To begin, I printed out each individual transcript in order to conduct a close, line-by-line reading of my data (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). I then engaged in a process of open coding, “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data,” primarily employing in vivo codes, using participants’ words as codes (Corbin and Strauss 2008:195). First cycle coding ranged from descriptive codes such as “Familial Socialization” and “Motivation for Involvement,” to processual codes such as “Gaining Consciousness” and “Politicization Prompting Resentment.” Throughout analysis, I engaged concurrently in a process of analytic memo writing, which allowed me to critically forge connections between emerging questions, theoretical concepts, and personal reflections. According to scholars, “memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data (Clarke 2005:202),” which may include “future directions, unanswered questions, frustrations with the analysis, insightful connections, and anything about the researched and the researcher” (Saldana 2013:42). Memos included questions such as “what does it mean to identify as Black when one is not racialized as such?” and “is acceptance in BSOs contingent upon politics, physical appearance, both?” Additionally, memos included explicit questions and comments related to popular media references such as Netflix’s *American Son* (“how do parents differentially understand and respond to their multiracial children’s activism and/or performance of racial identity?”), Colin Kaepernick (“masculinity and

multiracial activism”), and Mixed-ish (“are there differences between the socialization strategies of Black moms, non-Black minority moms, and white moms?”).

After going through each transcript twice, I began linking and comparing emerging codes, detailed on individual transcripts, to the various themes, patterns, and questions noted in my analytic memos. From there, I used a constant comparative method to condense identified themes into broader descriptive or processual codes. Through my employment of a constant comparative method, I was able to avoid drawing conclusions based on singular cases, increasing research credibility (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Emergent themes included racial socialization, anti-black racism and racialization, racial authenticity, and a concept I introduce called “reflective resistance.” Reflective resistance involves the negotiations and interventions Black multiracial respondents employ to combat and confront family members’ colorblind and/or anti-black racism and racial socialization practices. While Twine (2006) argues that white parents of Black mixed race children employ *racial literacy* to socialize their children in ways that prepare them for negative racialized encounters, I argue that non-Black parents of Black multiracial children may actually develop racial literacy as an unintended result of the politicization of their children’s Black racial identities via reflective resistance and Black student organizational involvement. I conceptualize reflective resistance further in chapter five.

### *Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity*

Both data collection and analysis were reflexive processes where I continually reflected on my own position as a Black multiracial researcher who is “part and parcel of the setting, context, and culture he or she is trying to understand and represent” to reflect on how potential

biases may inform the data analysis process (Altheide & Johnson 1998: 285). Additionally, I remained reflexive about how my “insider status” as an Afro-Caribbean/white multiracial woman may have influenced the study. Although I recognize the benefits associated with the self-disclosure of one’s insider status for the purposes of rapport building and relatability, I strategically decided to avoid self-disclosing my insider status throughout interviews with participants. Given the research on multiracial microaggressions and monoracism, I was curious as to how Black multiracial participants would racialize me throughout our interviews.

While most respondents assumed, I was multiracial, partially due to the nature of my research and connotations of light skin with multiraciality, how they attempted to racialize me was not only surprising but often incited personal feelings of discomfort and contention. Specifically, several respondents engaged in what Newman (2019) calls “racial dissection,” a process of separating out individual body parts and physical features in order to categorize each part as they align with one’s notions of distinct racial and ethnic groups, as respondents expressed being intent on “figuring me out.” This process was intensified in interviews with cis-hetero male participants, who, through their participation in my racial dissection, simultaneously exoticized and evaluated my physical features (i.e. discussions of my “Black girl booty” and “pretty privilege”). While objectifying, I interpreted these interactions as reflective of respondents’ internalization and reproduction of multiracial microaggressions and negative racialized encounters.

Davies (1999) calls attention to the ways issues of reflexivity become even more critical when the research, or researcher is intimately involved or connected to the culture of those being studied. As such, I concluded each interview by asking participants how they thought the

interview might have differed if I were a different perceived race and/or gender. Many respondents reported feeling more comfortable with me due to perceived racial similarity, and frequently reported feeling as if they'd have to censor and simplify their responses if the interviewer had been perceived as monoracial. Examples of these types of responses are provided below:

“Yes, I made the assumption that you would understand what I was talking about. I made the assumption that as a fellow woman of color, I'm assuming you're a black woman, that you are researching something that is both personal and political. So, if you had been of a different gender or of a different perceived race, I would have taken more time to explain what I mean by certain terms. For example, if you had been also Caribbean or if I had perceived you to be, I would have used the word sisterin instead of community.” -Sasha, Afro-Guyanese, Dominican

“I think it would be different only because when you see somebody that looks like you, even if you don't know 100% what they are, you know that because of how you perceive them, outwardly, society has perceived them outwardly. So, you know that at some point, you don't have to overextend yourself to explain certain experiences. You almost feel this assumption of understanding.” -Marie, Cameroonian/white

“I feel like it would be more educational, if you were white. I would try to educate you a little bit and probably be a little bit more sensitive on how I say things.” -Ryan, Black/Mexican

“Yes, I feel like if you were white because the way I talk about my blackness with white people is different. Because there's this understanding that is ingrained in black people that you can't be fully black in front of a white person, you have to be “gentle” when talking about blackness and racism with a white person, because you don't want to offend them. And you don't want them to think that you're calling them racist or whatever. Because of just so many experiences that I've had where I just talked about race and then white people got offended. It's like well, I'm not talking about you, but if the shoe fits. It just becomes this whole thing. So, I think if you were white, yeah, it would have been different. But I think if you were fully black, it would have been the same.” -Dakota, Black/white

Moreover, some respondents expressed that if I had been perceived to be white, they would not have participated in the interview at all, as reflected below:

“Oh, yeah definitely. Yes, I think if you were a white woman, I wouldn't have done this, this interview in the first place.” -Maya, Afro-Guyanese/Indo-Guyanese/white

“Yeah, definitely, if you were white, I wouldn't have done the interview.” -Collin, Black/Chinese

Given the fact that many scholars of multiracial research are white women, this finding is significant as it demonstrates how the politicization of one's multiracial blackness potentially deters their willingness to participate in interviews conducted by white researchers centered on multiraciality.

### CHAPTER THREE: WAKING UP TO THE WORLD

*“You shouldn't have to explain that to me because I get it. I've been eyeballed when I've walked into a high-end store. I've been singled out during Black History Month for my "unique" perspective. I've been pulled over more than once for driving my dad's car because the police thought I stole it... But that's not my whole story! Because even though I'm seen as a black woman in this world, I'm biracial, I've got a black mom and a white dad. So that community that you talk about that you've lost, I've never had that, EVER! At least you get to come to a place like this [an HBCU] where people get it. I wouldn't know how to talk or how to act, or if people would even like me.”*

-Magnolia Barnard, *Insatiable* Season 2: Episode 5

While respondents identified multiple motivations for Black organizational involvement, their racial socialization prior to entering college and racialized experiences throughout college remained salient factors. In this chapter, I unpack the ways that respondent's racial socialization prior to entering college, both in familial and social contexts, differentially impacts how they understand and respond to negative racialized experiences during college and how they approach their involvement in student organizations. Specifically, I argue that Black multiracial respondents navigate their racialization and multiracial identities in distinct ways while in college, which plays a significant role in their motivations for Black organizational involvement and exposes their varied levels of preparation for and exposure to racism and anti-blackness prior to entering college. Thus, Black multiracial students' discussions of the various factors motivating their involvement in college organizations reveal their widely diverse understandings of race, blackness, and identity.

*“Where are my people?:” Racial socialization, Racialization, & Black Identity Salience*

While discussing their motivations for joining a Black student organization, some respondents laid clear identity claims and emphasized their strong ties to the Black community prior to entering college. Unlike others, these respondents relied primarily on their upbringing and racialized experiences prior to college in order to explain their motivations for joining a Black student organization. Important to note, many of these responses were made by Black multiracial students who were raised primarily by their Black parents and/or family members and socialized in diverse or predominately Black social environments. For example, Ryan, who’s Black and Mexican, explained:

“I think because my mom is Black and I was with her so much, that's what I identified more with. I felt like I was more comfortable being around black people. Definitely growing up too, with friends, they never said anything about my race, they never asked me what I was. I mean, they'd be like, oh your hair is pretty but never oh, you're this or you're that, what are you? where are you from?... I just felt like experiencing that side of me more since I do identify more as a Black woman.”

Reflecting the literature suggesting that Black mothers emphasize an instilment of racial pride and preparation for racial biases when engaging in racial socialization, Ryan’s motivations for joining a BSO primarily lay in them identifying as a Black woman prior to entering college, which they explicitly link to being raised by their Black mother (Edwards & Few-Demo 2016). Moreover, Ryan highlights how their upbringing within a predominantly Black social environment also contributed to the centrality of their Black racial identity and comfort within Black social spaces. Further, as opposed to the objectifying “What are you?” interactions identified throughout multiracial research (McKinney 2016; Sims 2016; Waring and Bordoloi 2018), Ryan expresses feelings of acceptance, comfort, and inclusion when reflecting on their

experiences within Black spaces prior to college. To this extent, Ryan's identification with blackness aligns with studies demonstrating the impact of socialization within largely minority social contexts on multiracial individuals' embrace of their minority identities (Brunsma 2005). Whereas for some multiracial students, there is uncertainty about their racial identity, Ryan's racial identity as a Black woman crystallized prior to college which allowed them to view joining a BSO as natural.

Echoing Ryan's sentiments, Theo, who is also Black and Mexican, states:

“Because I grew up with my black family, I identify more as black. That was just my go to, because that's where I was mostly raised and the people, I was closest to.”

For Theo, joining a BSO was almost instinctual as the Black community has always been his “go to,” and the community he felt closest to. Like Ryan, the racial socialization employed by Theo's Black family members played a significant role in his decision to assert his own claims to blackness or a Black racial identity. In so doing, both Ryan and Theo highlight how proximity to blackness in one's upbringing can shape the involvement choices of Black multiracial students.

However, throughout their interviews, Ryan and Theo also emphasized feelings of exclusion and disconnect when interacting with their Mexican family members and peers. In many ways, this correlates with Rebecca Romo's (2011:420) study exploring 'Blaxican,' or Black-Mexican multiracial experiences, as Ryan and Theo both recalled experiences of being perceived as “not authentically Mexican” due to their lack of cultural competency, such as Spanish language fluency. Even so, as Ryan and Theo further discussed their relationships with Mexican family members, they also unpacked traumatic memories of anti-black racism perpetrated within their Mexican families, such as Ryan's Mexican grandmother calling them

“Negrita” and “Black ass” and Theo’s Mexican mother sending him to live with his Black father for “acting too much like a nigger,” after punching a classmate for ironically calling him that same racist slur. This anti-black racialization experienced within their Mexican families prompted both Ryan and Theo to seek refuge in their Black parents and Black communities, hoping to make sense out of their exclusion from Mexican spaces, and subsequent racialized experiences prior to college. Thus, it is not only their proximity to blackness via Black racial socialization that contributed to their motivations for BSO involvement, but also the anti-black racism experienced within their Mexican families.

Akin to the motivations for BSO involvement expressed by Ryan and Theo, Marie, who’s Cameroonian and white, similarly associated her involvement motivations with her proximity to blackness throughout her upbringing. Specifically, when asked about her immediate participation in BSO’s, as opposed to African student organizations, Marie quickly reflected on her forced move across the country, with her West African father, as a result of her parents’ divorce, emphatically disclosing:

“If anybody asked, I'd be like, Yeah, my family's from Cameroon, I'm African, but I wouldn't necessarily say I'm African. I would always be like, Yeah, I'm black and my family's from Cameroon. So immediately, the first community that took me in when I moved there, the first friends I ever had, they were always Black, ALWAYS. And that's just who I identified with, who I gravitated towards, the culture I understood.”

Following Brunnsma’s (2005) study stressing the impact of minority peer groups on multiracial identity development, Marie connects her Black identity salience and motivations for involvement to early engagement throughout her childhood with a broader Black community.

Marie's motivations for BSO involvement stem from her early acceptance within the Black community, reflected by her claim that the Black community was the first to take her in.

Additionally, by claiming "I'm Black and my families from Cameroon," Marie simultaneously asserts a Black racial identity while acknowledging an African, or Cameroonian ethnic lineage. In so doing, Marie introduces another way that Black multiracial respondents negotiate their Black racial identities alongside their ethnic heritage, beyond those asserting a distinctly half racial/half ethnicity identity (Waring & Purkayastha 2017). Hence, Marie's navigation of racial and ethnic identity throughout her upbringing extends research centered on multiracial individuals with immigrant parents to include analyses related to diasporic consciousness- "the (mental) tightrope that people of African descent who live in the U.S. walk as they try to balance their superordinate racial identity (and the political interests associated with it) with their subgroup or ethnic identity and its closely associated political interests" (Smith 2014:7). Consistent with research suggesting that one's consciousness is typically associated with their direct ties to the collective, Marie's early immersion into diverse Black peer groups and social spaces compounded with her racial socialization within an African household fostered her embrace of diasporic blackness, motivating her continued involvement in both BSO's and African student organizations (Gay, Hochschild and White 2016).

In contrast to the aforementioned respondents, who directly linked their identification with blackness and understandings of their racialization to their racial socialization in Black social contexts, other respondents developed an awareness of anti-black racialization even within white social contexts. For example, when discussing her motivations for joining a BSO, Dakota,

who's Black and white, reflected on the impact of specific political events in shaping how she understood her Black racial identity prior to entering college, explaining:

“The Trayvon Martin case really impacted me because it made me realize. He was just this kid, this black kid walking on the street with a hoodie and some snacks and he was murdered. It really made me realize that no matter how I looked, no matter how straight my hair was, no matter how proper I talked, no matter who I hung out with, whatever, at the end of the day I'm black, my appearance was always going to be black, I am noticeably black.”

For Dakota, the hypervisibility of anti-black racialization via the widespread publicization of horrific instances of police brutality, such as the Trayvon Martin case, prompted drastic shifts in her understanding of racial identity and anti-blackness. Having suffered through torturous bullying for being “fat and Black” and the “nigger child” of a conservative, white family in the rural Midwest, Dakota unsurprisingly connects her Black racial identity to her physical appearance rather than distinct ties to the Black community. In this way, Dakota's recognition of the reality of being racialized as Black and the potential, and lived implications associated, ultimately worked to influence her eventual involvement with numerous BSO's and participation in anti-racist activism.

Ahmed, who's Black and Indian, similarly focuses on processes of racialization when outlining his motivations for joining a BSO, expressing:

“I always recognized that I had ties to both communities, but I always identified as a black man. I never really found myself struggling to sort of pick, particularly, because I recognized that the world was going to pick for me. That was sort of when I woke up to the world and what sort of propelled me to join initially, it was just wanting to say hey, where are my people, where are the black people at?”

While Ahmed acknowledges his ties to both the Black and Indian community, he ultimately lays claim to a Black identity as a result of being racialized as a Black man in society. Counter to scholarship focused on multiracial identity struggles (Renn 200), Ahmed recalls never struggling to racially identify, recognizing that with regards to his racial identity, “the world was going to pick” for him. However, notice that Ahmed’s claim to a Black racial identity did not entail an abandonment of his Indian identity. Reflecting Johnson’s (2003:8) assertion that blackness emerges from a collective Black experience, or the ways that the “living of blackness becomes a material way of knowing,” the centrality of Ahmed’s Black racial identity manifested from his Black racialized experience as one of few Black students at a predominantly white private school prior to college.

Further, by asking “where are my people,” Ahmed intentionally positions himself within a Black collectivity, emphasizing a shared Black experience and an overall embrace of a Black identity. Additionally, as a cis-straight Black multiracial man, Ahmed’s development of a Black racial identity coincides with research suggesting that Black mixed-race men are more likely to identify with blackness (Sims & Joseph-Salisbury 2019). Thus, Ahmed’s motivations for joining a BSO stem from his racialized experiences as a Black man prior to college and his resulting feelings of closeness and attachment to the Black community.

Although Ahmed was socialized in affluent white schools and neighborhoods, when asked to expound upon the moment he “woke up to the world.” He recalled:

“I think it was probably a conversation I had somewhere in middle school, where I realized that I was just being treated differently and I couldn't necessarily put all the pieces together. And I remember distinctly my mother saying something to me about "sometimes people treat people differently because of the way they look and I don't mean necessarily because they're funny looking, but quite literally because they have a different

sort of skin tone or skin complexion, what have you." And it was just sort of, it was fascinating to me."

Here, Ahmed recounts how the racial messages conveyed by his Black mother impacted his understandings of race and anti-Black racialization prior to entering college. Through this process of racial socialization, Ahmed was able to develop a more salient Black identity and foster close ties with the Black community before entering college, rendering his BSO involvement as seemingly intuitive.

For the Black multiracial students discussed in this section, BSO involvement remained predicated on the saliency of a Black racial identity and a heightened awareness of Black racialization prior to entering college. While some responses examined throughout this section reveal the impact of Black racialization, the majority highlight how being raised chiefly by Black parents or growing up in a racially diverse or predominantly Black social environment promoted Black multiracial students' assertion of a racial identity rooted in blackness as well as motivated their involvement within BSO's. Yet, many respondents in this study, like Dakota, weren't socialized within Black social contexts and still decided to join BSO's, which I explain further in the following section.

### *"The Lights Coming On:" Anti-Blackness and the PWI Experience*

"It was the night after the grand jury didn't indict the officer who shot Mike Brown and me and my black roommate were devastated and making posters to go to the protest that night. We put on our coats and I go get our other two roommates and I'm like "we're leaving, come on." And they're like, "Oh, no, we're not going to go." And I just remember looking at my black roommate and being like, "Oh, shit, this is gonna have to be a conversation that we're gonna have to have now." And they're like, "yeah, it's going to be a race thing and we don't want to go because we're white and we're uncomfortable." They literally said because we're white! I just remember pleading with them and saying, "no, this is an American man who was shot by a

system that's supposed to protect him, you don't have to make it about race.” And she was like, “No, it's not us making it about race, it's going to be the people there that are gonna make it about race” and they wouldn't go. And after that experience, I really started to think a lot about how people perceive me and I think for a lot of my friends, who don't have other black friends, I'm a certain type of black that is palatable to them and they, in ways that I wasn't realizing prior, had a lot of anti-black tendencies that they weren't aware of. And that got me to start being really critical about the people I was becoming friends with and the things I was involved in and that sort of thing. That period of college was kind of like the lights coming on to something I always knew, and I always felt but I didn't really have the experience or the toolkit to fully understand.”

-Alex, Black/white

While discussing their motivations for participating in Black student organizations, Black multiracial students continually described experiencing racial revelations or “a period of the lights coming on,” as referenced in Alex’s quote above. For these respondents, the experience of entering a predominantly white university/institution (PWI) entailed an unexpected confrontation of their racialized self and an illumination of one’s position within the racial hierarchy. However, this does not imply that these students had not experienced racialized interactions or racism prior to college, rather that the racial socialization employed throughout their upbringing had not fully exposed them to or adequately prepared them for the realities of overt racism on PWI campuses (Harris 2019). In contrast to the previous section, these respondents’ motivations for involvement can be better elucidated within the context of their racialized encounters and shifts in perspectives experienced during college. Specifically, this section examines how Black multiracial students navigate and respond to the lights coming on while in college, exposing the relationship between their racial socialization prior to college and motivations for joining a Black student organization while in college .

Although Alex emphasized her white mothers supposed “pro-Black” approach to racial socialization throughout our interview, her explication of the specific socialization strategies

enacted by her mother, remained premised on an instilment of Black pride via affirmations of Black beauty. While Alex's mother deviates from the research on white mothers of mixed-race children who emphasize intentionality and multiraciality in their parental socialization strategies, her elected "hands-off" approach to racial politics, as described by Alex, exposes her implicit engagement in colorblind racial socialization practices (Stone & Doblin-MacNab 2017). Hence, Alex expressed feeling inexperienced and unprepared when first navigating racial politics in college and responding to the antiblackness espoused by her white sorority sisters.

As Alex's reflection suggests, an exposure to anti-black racialization alongside an increased awareness of the reality of racial politics, largely absent from her upbringing, propelled her to critically reflect on her Black multiracial identity and involvement choices. Despite her colorblind appeals to notions of patriotism and human rights ("this is an American man" "you don't have to make it about race"), Alex's exposure arose from a failed attempt at convincing her white sorority sisters to participate in a local Black Lives Matter protest, following the acquittal of Mike Brown's murderer. Not only did this experience begin to fracture the colorblind shelter of Alex's upbringing, but it also illuminated her subordinate racial position within her white sorority. Specifically, Alex's revelation of her "palatable" blackness within the context of her white sorority reflects her position as what Bonilla-Silva (2006) terms an "honorary white," positioned below whites but above monoracial Blacks. Moreover, Alex's realization of the anti-blackness perpetrated within her sorority reflects Harris' (2019:1028) research on the exclusionary nature of historically white Greek letter organizations (HWGLOs), which found that HWGLOs maintained and enforced strict boundaries around whiteness in such a way that positioned multiracial women between, but never within, white womanhood. Thus, Alex's

recognition of her “palatable” blackness reinforces Joseph’s (2012) concept of “mixed-race exceptionalism,” whereby Alex’s blackness is assumed to transcend controlling, anti-black images as a result of her multiraciality, while simultaneously “tainting” her whiteness and full inclusion in her white sorority. As a result of the lights coming on, Alex goes on to describe her motivations for BSO involvement, explaining:

“I really just wanted a space to physically be that I didn't feel beat over the head by the whiteness of the place and listen to people talk about the things that I was feeling, as opposed to talking about the things that I was feeling with my white roommates, who would say things like, Beyoncé shouldn't dress up as a black panther because she's rich and she can't feel discrimination or any number of stupid things. So just a space to go where I didn't feel like I had to fight anymore.”

For Alex, BSO’s facilitated spaces to escape from the predominance and pervasiveness of whiteness innate within the PWI experience (Brunsma, Brown, & Placier 2013; Harris 2019). Alex’s motivations for BSO involvement stemmed from persistent feelings of frustration when trying to make sense of the anti-blackness she was encountering with white peers and her desire for affective validation and support from those she anticipated as sharing her racialized experience: the Black community. In so doing, Alex emphasizes how anti-blackness largely informed her BSO involvement and racialized college experience, as opposed to encounters with monoracism emphasized throughout multiracial research (Hamako 2014; Museus et al. 2015; Tate 2017).

Similarly, after pledging a white fraternity his freshman year, Jerome, who is Black and white, quickly found himself plagued by racial slurs and derogatory nicknames masked as “brotherly jokes,” prompting him to drop the fraternity after one semester and pledge a historically Black Greek letter organization. These “brotherly jokes” perpetuated throughout

Jerome's experience within a white fraternity are consistent with what Cabrera (2014:9) considers "racial joking," which allows white students to perpetuate and rationalize racist ideologies and white hegemony by masking racial microaggressions as "harmless jokes." When asked about his motivations for dropping the white fraternity, Jerome reflected on the traumatic impact of being asked to wear a noose around his neck during one of his fraternity's weekly house parties, explaining:

"When that incident took place that's when I really started to realize that this stuff still exists to this day and I never experienced that growing up so it was just crazy to me to see this open up in my world and to know that there are people like that everywhere to this day and it kind of changed my perspective on everything. So, the white people that I would meet, it would alter my view of them automatically, which could be a bad thing, but I was just so aware about what was going on behind closed doors with people that I really didn't know who to trust on campus."

As Jerome grappled with this overtly racist request for him to wear a noose around his neck as a form of entertainment for his white fraternity brothers, he describes undergoing a period of the lights coming on, much like Alex's experience navigating a white sorority. While Harris' (2019) findings related to HWGLOs focused on Black multiracial women, Jerome's struggles within a white fraternity draw attention to how similar processes of exclusion impact Black multiracial men. Additionally, by asserting that he never experienced such overt racism growing up, Jerome acknowledges his lack of awareness related to racial issues prior to college and explicitly links his negative anti-black and racist racialized interactions to his shifting understandings of race and multiraciality. Ultimately, both Alex and Jerome's racial identities became more politicized through their experiences with racism in college, leading them to reconsider their current organizational involvement and participation in BSOs.

What the experiences of Alex and Jerome illustrate is that the racial context of universities has a considerable impact on how students experience racialization and racism. Like them, other respondents shared feelings of isolation, discontent, and mistrust as they became more cognizant of the anti-blackness perpetuated within the social context of white Greek life and the PWI environment, more specifically. For example, after describing an instance where he was refused entry into a white fraternity party after watching the group of white peers, he arrived with, easily go in, Collin, who's Black and Chinese, explained:

“It was like, damn, that was all I needed to know, to know that I didn't belong on that campus for the next four years. And it continually happened, over and over again! Any party that I went to that was ran by a person of color always got shut down, while all the white parties I went to, which was only two or three, everybody was perfectly fine, the cops were even outside but were more like security rather than actually stopping a party. And it's just like alright, this is bullshit, now I know who this institution wants to protect, and it wasn't me.”

Collin's experience of continually being denied access into white social spaces, which he associates with anti-black racism, not only incited feelings of exclusion (including feelings that he “didn't belong on that campus,”) but also facilitated more nuanced reflections about how racism operates on an institutional level. Having been raised by his ex-Black Panther activist father, it is unsurprising that Collin moves beyond individualized interpretations of negative racialized encounters, such as his denied entry, and instead highlights observations of how white and black social spaces are disproportionately policed on campus. While the racial socialization employed by Collin's father worked to prepare him for racial biases, his awareness of his racially ambiguous, Asian physical appearance seemingly cultivated a sense of racial security when entering white spaces. In this way, Collin demonstrates how his racial socialization afforded him

the tools to makes sense out of his exclusion, while his understanding of his non-Black racialization prompted an initial naivety regarding the likelihood of that exclusion.

Echoing these sentiments, Marie, who's Cameroonian and white, reflects on similar feelings of exclusion when navigating the PWI campus climate, recounting:

“We get there the weekend before the first week of classes start and I go to a multicultural meet and greet where they give you an overview of all the multicultural orgs on campus, so you can understand that there is a community. So, I see all of these different people, different brown people, and I'm like, wow, okay, this isn't going to be what I thought it was. But then I went to my first week of classes and it was like I was the only Black person, I didn't see them [while walking to class], I didn't see them driving by, I did not see black bodies on campus unless they were in certain spaces. And that's when I realized, damn, I really go to a predominantly white institution.... And for the first time, I felt completely different, completely ostracized, like I don't belong here.”

As reflected by Marie's response, higher education scholars consistently shed light on the ways PWI's intentionally create a false sense of racial diversity and inclusion on campus, by strategically making Black students hypervisible in recruitment, orientation, and marketing efforts (Kelly et al. 2019). Hence, Marie's feelings of ostracism and discomfort while navigating the PWI landscape stem from the façade of campus diversity advertised to her during orientation weekend. Having grown up in predominantly Black social environments with her West African father and stepmother, the reality of Black invisibility on her PWI campus instantly heightened Marie's pursuit of BSO spaces as she actively yearned for a sense of belonging and community on campus.

As opposed to being exposed to persistent racism via involvement in white Greek life or from the absence of other students of color, some respondents noted that their exposure to the realities of white supremacy and eventual politicization surfaced from their enrollment in

required college courses dealing with social issues and/or racial politics. The following are indicative of these responses:

“Once I got to college, I remember one of my first courses was an African American Studies class, and my mind was blown the whole semester in that class, I was living in such a tiny bubble and I didn't even know about a lot of these issues, it was just very eye opening, very different once I got to college.” -Bobby, Black/white

“When I started university it was like, okay, I've been mistreated by these white people for so long, but now I'm doing sociology and I'm becoming more socially conscious and I decided that I don't have time for their bullshit anymore, essentially.” -Maya, Afro-Guyanese/ Indo-Guyanese/white

“I started going to more AFAM [African American Studies] classes and OBVIOUSLY public-school education did not teach me ANY of that stuff. So, just being in a class where those were the things that we were learning and all of the professors were so inclusive, it didn't matter who you were, they would still call on you, that's why I decided to continue with that [BSO involvement].” -Audrey, Black/white

Bobby, Maya, and Audrey all assert that their exposure to and expanding knowledge about racial histories and politics offered in college courses, such as sociology and African American studies, informed and often politicized their racial identity formation (Hordge-Freeman & Veras 2019). In this way, Bobby, Maya, and Audrey's experiences with the lights coming on in college via college courses, emphasizes their colorblind, and in Maya's case antiblack, racial socialization prior to college. Thus, their responses illustrate how Black multiracial students entering college with limited prior knowledge regarding racism and racial hierarchies can become mobilized during college through an increased racial awareness garnered by way of college courses and negative racialized interactions.

*“A Thread of Connectivity:” Searching for Belonging and Community*

“I remember reading for the first time, *The Color Purple*, in middle school, and I remember reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the hurt and emptiness that those characters were grappling with were the same feelings that I thought that I carried around my neck. I feel like I connected with black women outside of my community life, like tangible people, because I wasn't 15 calling Alice Walker like "hey girl, thanks for the book," but because I had the space and a library card to just delve into these stories, I felt less alone and my blackness emerged as a kind of thread of connectivity with other black women who I had yet to meet but told me how I felt with the words that I hadn't had yet.”

-Sasha, Afro-Indo Guyanese, Afro-Dominican

Just as Sasha's blackness emerged as a “thread of connectivity with other black women,” other students described their BSO involvement as stemming from a deep longing for community and connection. For Sasha, this thirst for belonging originated from a connection to Black literature, specifically the works of Black feminists, who provided her a language to unpack the anti-black racial socialization of her Afro-Indo Guyanese mother and family, who perpetuated “deep colonial antiblackness.” As opposed to respondents seeking out BSO's to cope with antiblackness experienced during college, this section explores the impact of familial antiblackness and limited community ties prior to college on some student's involvement choices. In reflection of her childhood experiences of being ostracized and bullied for being a “sand nigger” and having no familial support or community to help her grapple with those racialized experiences, Sasha expressed finding solace in the literary works of Black women who she had yet to meet, but who shared her pain. As a result, Sasha introduces this thread of connectivity as fueling her strong desire to seek out and occupy spaces in college that center on the mutual nurturance and community ties, emphasized by the Black feminist writings of her childhood. Specifically, Sasha discloses:

“I’ve always carried this need for connection and community, which is why every opportunity I’ve gotten, I’ve tried to join different clubs or societies or avoid certain events that center on that otherness and center on one of the monoracial categories that connect with me, in hopes that I’m going to find somebody else who gets it and I don’t have to explain, I don’t have to do mental gymnastics to figure out how to translate my feelings to someone else’s experience.”

While Sasha’s involvement was largely motivated by a need for community, absent throughout her upbringing, her participation in Black women’s empowerment organizations, had more to do with her wanting to escape the persistent exoticification and “otherness” celebrated within her antiblack family. Contrary to research suggesting that the exoticification of multiracial women leads to tensions with other Black women, Sasha intentionally sought out Black women for community, wanting to push back against the antiblackness reinforced through exoticification (Rockquemore 2002). In this way, Sasha views BSOs as safe spaces where, rather than being viewed as an Other, she can engage with similar-minded individuals without the extra baggage of having to explain or educate others about her racial background.

Likewise, when asked about her motivations for joining a prominent Black Greek letter organization, Renee, who is Black and Korean, expressed a similar longing for community; however, Renee’s motivations for involvement resulted from her first-hand exposure to and seeming fascination with Black culture and community in the college setting, rather than through a pre-established thread of connectivity. Reflecting on attending her first probate ceremony for recognizing those pledging a Black Greek letter organization, Renee recalls:

“It [probate] was new, but it was super cool to me. It was like WOW, there was community and they were so passionate, and it looked so fun. So, I just started paying more attention to stuff like that. I was following different HBCU stuff, seeing things and exposing myself to more of black culture in the college setting and I loved it, I thought it was everything. I don’t know, it was just something that I never experienced, I had never

experienced community in that way, I never had a sense of belonging in that way, so it was cool to see that, to see all of these different organizations being together, and the sisterhood and brotherhood.”

Having been raised by her Korean and white grandparents in Korean schools, churches, and social environments, Renee was quickly enthralled by her initial exposure to Black community and cultural spaces/traditions in the college setting. Accustomed to the persistent antiblackness of her Korean upbringing, Renee’s exposure to Black Greek life introduced her to more positive representations of blackness and Black community, ones otherwise nonexistent throughout her upbringing. Following this exposure, Renee immersed herself into Black student life, ultimately, developing an appreciation for and affirmation of her own blackness and finding the sense of belonging she always longed for. In this way, both Sasha and Renee highlight how antiblackness experienced prior to college can differentially motivate BSO involvement.

While research suggests that multiracial children socialized within predominantly white social contexts are more likely to embrace a multiracial identity and disassociate from blackness (Brunsma 2005), some respondents linked their motivations for BSO involvement to feelings of incompleteness and disconnect from blackness as a result of their upbringing in white social contexts. For example, when asked how she got involved with so many BSO’s in her first semester of college, Dakota, who’s Black and white, conveyed:

“It was definitely a goal coming into school because I saw the lack of diversity in my town, and I was very aware of it and I wanted to be surrounded. I felt like I wasn't exposed to black culture and I mean I really wasn't. I lived in a very white town with a very white family and black culture is something I wanted to be a part of, I wanted to understand, I wanted to feel included, and I wanted my blackness validated, I guess.”

Given Dakota's hyperawareness of her Black racialization, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, it is unsurprising that she describes her decision to participate in BSO's as related to wanting to understand her own blackness and connect to Black culture, in ways she could not prior to college. In this way, Dakota perceives BSOs as offering another form of racial socialization or education centered on blackness. Likewise, when unpacking his motivations for BSO involvement, Jay, who's Black and Mexican, explained:

“For me, it was really about connecting more with my community, especially the African American side, because we really didn't get a lot of that growing up.”

For both Dakota and Jay, BSO involvement was partially motivated by a lack of engagement with the Black community throughout their upbringing and a deep desire to not only connect with but also “feel included” within the Black community. For both, BSO involvement was an intentional meant to both explore and foster what were previously more tenuous connections to blackness and the Black community.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

In this chapter I highlight the centrality of racial socialization and antiblack racialization in the involvement choices of Black multiracial students, revealing how one's proximity to blackness, exposure to racial politics/discourse, and experiences with racialization prior to entering college differentially impacts how they navigate predominately white college campuses and approach involvement in student organizations. Further, I unpack the complex and interrelated nature of students' motivations for Black organizational involvement, which simultaneously involves their shifting understandings of racism, multiraciality, and racialization,

both prior to and throughout college. While some respondents entered college with pre-established intentions of joining a Black student organization, as a result of their Black identity salience or in opposition to their antiblack socialization, others expressed turning to Black student organizations in hopes of making sense out of their negative racialized encounters and increased awareness of racial biases while in college.

Although research assumes that Black student organizations reinforce monoracism, inherently excluding multiracial students from full participation (Johnston-Guerrero & Renn 2016), this chapter conveys how Black student organizations are often the only spaces for Black multiracial students to escape the persistent antiblackness dominant on PWI campuses. This is not to suggest that Black multiracial students do not experience monoracism while in college, or even while in Black student organizations, but to emphasize the overarching impacts of antiblack racialization in Black multiracial student experiences, a somewhat underdeveloped area of multiracial research. In the next chapter, the relationship between racial socialization and students' experiences with antiblackness and monoracism while in college is further elucidated, as I examine how Black multiracial students navigate and experience their involvement in Black student organizations through a process of racial re-socialization.

## CHAPTER FOUR: NAVIGATING THE POLITICS OF ACCEPTANCE

*"I tell you this, I'm a black man and Colin Kaepernick -- he's not black. He cannot understand what I face and what other young black men and black people face, or people of color face, on an every single (day) basis. When you walk in a grocery store, and you might have \$2,000 or \$3,000 in your pocket and you go up into a Foot Locker and they're looking at you like you're about to steal something. You know, I don't think he faces those types of things, that we face on a daily basis. I'm not saying he has to be black, but I'm saying, his heart is in the right place, but even with what he's doing, he still doesn't understand the injustices as a black man, or people of color, that's what I'm saying."*-Rodney Harrison, NBC Football Analyst

While extensive research has explored the ways that Black student organizations (BSO) can positively influence monoracial Black identity development, through an instilment of Black pride and collective consciousness (Brooms 2019; Harper & Quaye 2007), this has rarely been explored within the context of Black multiracial students. Moreover, because much of the scholarship on multiracial identities in higher education focuses on multiracial students' experiences encountering instances of monoracism, racial essentialism, and exclusion from racial groups based on challenges to racial authenticity, little is known about the actual implications of long-term BSO involvement on Black multiracial identity development (Museus et al. 2015; Tate 2017). Although respondents in this study similarly detailed encounters with monoracism and authenticity politics within BSO's, these encounters worked to deconstruct pre-existing notions of authentic blackness and multiracial privilege, acting as a form of *racial re-socialization*. Through this process of *racial re-socialization*, respondents were forced to critically reflect on the impacts of their own racial socialization and reevaluate their position within a collective

Black identity. Key to this process of *racial re-socialization* are the peer pedagogies employed within BSOs, “the methods minoritized students use to teach each other about the racial realities of predominantly white colleges and universities, as well as how to respond most effectively to racism, racial stereotypes, and microaggressions they are likely to encounter in classrooms and elsewhere on campus” (Harper 2013:208). Thus, in this chapter, I move to explore how Black multiracial students experience and navigate involvement, paying close attention to the ways they engage in a process of *racial re-socialization* and the role that peer pedagogies play in helping them through this process. In doing so, I highlight how understandings of blackness, and specifically notions of multiracial blackness, impact the experiences of Black multiracial students in BSOs and inform their long-term involvement.

*“Down for the cause?:” Black Authenticity and the Politics of Acceptance*

Throughout my interviews, questions of Black authenticity perpetually arose as some Black multiracial students discussed facing barriers to inclusion or a perceived *politics of acceptance* when navigating BSO involvement. For many, this *politics of acceptance* remained predicated on them either 1) *looking the part*, being racialized as Black, or 2) *acting the part*, demonstrating a commitment to anti-racist activism. While research has often explored multiracial students’ encounters with monoracism and racial essentialism (Renn 2004), fewer work has addressed what these encounters reveal about multiracial students’ understandings of blackness and privilege, more broadly. In the same ways that white students are expected to demonstrate an awareness of their racial privilege when engaging in anti-racist activism (Jacobs

& Taylor 2012), this section reveals how instances of monoracism can often operate as checks to multiracial privilege, specifically within the context of racial passing and colorism. I center this analysis on privilege not to delegitimize multiracial microaggressions or experiences with racial essentialism, but to highlight how this *politics of acceptance* to BSO involvement often confronts Black multiracial students with their own privilege, forcing them to unpack (mis)understandings of blackness and racial authenticity.

Reflecting on her current BSO leadership position, Marie, who's Cameroonian and white, recalled:

“I think there was an initial hump to get over in [the Black student organization] but there were multiple speed bumps in [the African student organization], if I could say that. [The BSO] was more so like, all right, we see you can identify with our community, but then there was a realm of, and not necessarily even just towards me, but for other black bodies as well, black people, are they down for the cause? And once you were identified to be down for the cause, then you were accepted.”

Consistent with Smith and Moore's (2000) observations of biracial acceptance being dependent on an embrace of a Black racial identity and expressed commitment to the Black community, Marie identifies the *politics of acceptance* to BSO involvement as nothing more than “an initial hump to get over” contingent upon her not only identifying with the Black community, but also being “down for the cause.” Yet, Marie does not perceive this barrier to BSO inclusion as being unique to her, as a Black multiracial woman, and instead considers “down for the cause” as a fundamental requirement for BSO involvement extended to all potential BSO members. In this way, Marie decenters her multiraciality and African ethnicity, instead revealing her understandings of blackness as tied to racial consciousness and social activism. Interestingly,

being down for the cause is expressed as a relatively minor hurdle when compared to the *politics of acceptance* faced in African student organizations, which Marie described as a perpetual process of “proving [her] Africanness.” Marie goes on to describe what she identifies as being down for the cause, explaining:

“Down for the cause is not only identifying and relating, but almost a sense of activism, being able to speak out against racial discrimination.”

Thus, Marie reinforces notions that acceptance within BSO’s is dependent upon one’s ability to *act the part* and demonstrate their allegiance and commitment to anti-racist activism, multiracial or not (Smith & Moore 2000). However, not all respondents encountered this *politics of acceptance* with such ease, as some reported facing overt challenges to their black authenticity regarding BSO involvement. Reflecting Perkins (2014) findings, these challenges to Black authenticity were directly tied to respondents’ physical appearance and perceived racial ambiguity; however, it is important to note that these challenges to racial authenticity did little, if nothing to deter multiracial students continued BSO involvement. Thus, I focus on the ways Black multiracial students respond to and grapple with these challenges to their racial authenticity. For instance, when asked why he felt “less Black” after entering college, Theo, who’s Black and Mexican, elaborated on the first moment he was ever confronted about his use of the n-word, disclosing:

“Nobody ever challenged me on it [Black racial identity] until I got to college, and I'm talking specifically about the black community. I realized it when I would say nigga a lot and they [Black members of BSO] would feel some type of way because they didn't really see me as fully black. But I mean they came to after a little while, after we started

hanging out a lot and they realized that my dad is black and that I grew up in a black family and a black household and after that, they started accepting it. But that's the first time I really experienced that because I grew up around black people and even kids in high school who I would hang out with in class, they knew I was mixed, so they didn't really care.”

Scholars have long debated the history and politics of the n-word, finding that in contemporary society, Black Americans’ reappropriation of the n-word “serves a useful purpose in expressing a primary aspect of their consciousness and identity as African Americans” (Rahman 2012). As such, many Black Americans impose censorship on non-Black individuals’ (or those not perceived to be non-Black) use of the n-word, as reflected by Theo’s initial BSO engagement. Given that race in the U.S. has always been predicated on the “visual” or physical appearance, and blackness, as conceptualized in this project, involves the lived racial experience of Black people, it is unsurprising that Theo, one of the most racially ambiguous respondents in this study, was called out for his use of the n-word<sup>4</sup> in Black organizational spaces (Hammonds 1997). Having grown up in predominantly Black social environments where his ties to blackness were well established via the visibility of his Black father, Theo was unprepared to negotiate his racial identity in the college setting, where his ties to blackness were made less apparent. In this way, Theo’s non-black racialization within BSO’s created unfamiliar obstacles to his inclusion and acceptance, such as the policing of his use of the n-word, within those same contexts.

While in some ways Theo’s experience represents an instance of racial essentialism, Theo’s ability to pass as non-Black complicates this line of thinking and posits questions as to

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout my interview with Theo, which lasted 73 minutes, he used the n-word a total of 47 times, significantly more than any other respondent.

what it means to be multiracial and/or racially ambiguous in Black spaces. Given MultiCrit's mandate to *challenge ahistoricism* and the racist history of the n-word, Black Americans' reclamation and censorship of its use has represented a form of empowerment for the Black community through the subversion of white supremacy. Thus, by interpreting the policing of Theo's use of the n-word as only related to racial authenticity or monoracism, we risk overlooking the influences of broader racialized systems of power and oppression, implicitly assisting in the disempowerment of the Black community. This is not to suggest that Theo should or should not be able to use the n-word, but that more attention should be paid to the ways his non-Black racialization affords him an embodied privilege over his peers who are racialized as Black. That being so, Theos BSO experience extends the meaning of *acting the part* in BSOs to include one's willingness to recognize, confront, and acknowledge multiracial privilege within BSO spaces.

Rather than interpreting this BSO experience as a check to his passing privilege, Theo chose to confront this *politics of acceptance* to BSO inclusion by attempting to legitimate his black authenticity by pointing to his upbringing in a black household through the tokenization his Black father. In so doing, Theo directly connects blackness with familial ties, as opposed to consciousness or activism as suggested by Marie. While in some ways this reinforces biological notions of race, Theos approach to legitimating his racial authenticity via the display of his Black family ultimately proved effective for his BSO acceptance. However, because BSO members didn't initially racialize him as Black, the subsequent ways that Theo discussed performing his Black racial identity highlight his desire to be racialized as Black through essentialized notions

of what that entails. For example, when asked if he'd ever manipulated his appearance or behavior in order to avoid being racialized as not Black, Theo answered:

“Well my hair, yeah. I actually grew it out and I asked my friend to do it and if she would put it in bantu knots, and it actually made my hair really curly, so I was doing that ...usually when people associate with being black they think curly hair, or even mixed, because usually mixed people have curly or wavy hair, but I don't.”

Here, Theo discusses an attempt at altering his physical appearance to make his hair curlier with the use of bantu knots, in hopes of being perceived as Black or at least mixed with Black. Coinciding with studies focused on racialization and Black physical features (Hodge-Freeman 2015; Harris 2019), Theo indicates hair texture as a physical marker of blackness that can be intentionally manipulated to enhance one's Black racialization, positing another way Theo navigated the *politics of acceptance* to BSO involvement. Although modern representations of multiraciality emphasize colorblindness and a transcendence of blackness (Joseph 2013), Theos desire to be racialized as Black demonstrates an appreciation for, rather than a resistance to blackness.

Like Theo, Collin, who's Black and Chinese, detailed instances where his physical appearance also became a site of contention, provoking distinct challenges to his Black authenticity. After creating, directing, and starring in a politically charged activist video, exposing his universities continued legacy of racism and maintenance of white supremacy, which eventually went viral and caught national media attention, Collin revealed:

“I did experience a lot of backlash, especially from the black community. When the viral video went out, people were like, you're not even black enough to do this, you should've got a shadow writer and had another black student do it. And I was just like, THE

FUCK? No, I wrote this, I'm gonna perform it, I'm going to shoot it and do whatever. But I had friends that were supportive about it and they rallied around the fact that we were doing something a lot bigger than ourselves. But at the end of the day, the most backlash I got, especially in person, was from black students, who literally said that I wasn't black enough to be standing up for what I was standing up for. And it just sucked, it was super ironic because I was just like I don't care if you don't like me, I'm still gonna fight for you at the end of the day. Because at the end of the day, this is something that's bigger than all of us, something my dad went through, this is something that we're all gonna still go through after this and if you're caught up in identity politics, as much as you are, then you're going to forget that there's something bigger that we need to be pursuing, rather than attacking me for not looking the part.”

Although other Black BSO members were featured in the film, the fact that Collin, arguably the least phenotypically Black presenting of the group, not only starred but held the only speaking role, invited negative backlash and hate mail, largely from the Black community. Thus, Collin was confronted with the *politics of acceptance* and seen as “not Black enough” to be the face of a Black anti-racist movement, linking back to the opening quote of this chapter, in which Rodney Harrison, an ex-NFL player, questioned if Colin Kaepernick was Black enough to initiate antiracist activism and protest. However, unlike criticisms of Kaepernick’s light skin privilege, Collin described his racialized interactions as overwhelmingly premised on his Asian physical appearance, and subsequently, his abilities to pass as not Black. With that said, questions around Collin’s racial authenticity link back to Johnson’s (2003) portrayal of blackness as a lived racialized experience and material way of knowing.

Oddly enough, despite recognition of his passing privilege, which he continually acknowledged throughout our interview, when critiqued for not having another Black student replace him as the lead role, Collin quickly got defensive, vehemently refusing to relinquish his role due to his creative contributions. Despite *acting the part* via his antiracist activism, by not

*looking the part* Collin was confronted with his racialized privilege within BSOs and asked to act on that privilege yet, he elected not to do so. Rather than reflecting on and internalizing concerns expressed within the Black community, Collin chose to inadvertently chastise his critics for not celebrating his activist efforts and instead “attacking [him] for not looking the part.” Specifically, Collin deployed colorblind rhetoric, emphasizing fairness and meritocracy (Bonilla-Silva 2017) to position himself in a heroic, savior light, claiming that despite their inability to recognize his larger anti-racist agenda, he would still “fight” for the Black community. In so doing, Collin dismisses debates surrounding his blackness and perceived privilege, minimizing these confrontations to unnecessary squabbles around identity politics. While Collin might recognize the societal privileges associated with his racially ambiguous physical appearance, this response suggests that he does not interpret those privileges as holding the same weight within the Black community and thus, is unlikely to relinquish any of that privilege.

Dakota, who’s Black and white, employs a similar rhetoric when discussing the backlash, she received after winning an NPHC-sponsored Black scholarship pageant, contending:

“After I had won, I was, of the girls performing, the only mixed girl and the lightest of the girls by probably two or three shades. All of the girls that competed considered themselves dark skinned and I guess would be considered by society as dark skinned. So, I was the lightest of the girls that competed, and I won the pageant, **BY MY MERIT** because I did well, I tried hard, and I worked on my talents, and I brought the energy and whatnot that I needed. But one of the other girls who did not win, I think she placed third, started talking about me behind my back saying that the only reason I won is because I was light skinned and because I was mixed and blah blah blah. And part of me was extremely pissed off because, like, no, what the hell, I worked my ass off, I went to the same practices that you went to, I went to more practices than she went to, I practiced my talent, I had a very original talent because she did not write her own poem and I did. I worked just as hard as she did and it's not fair to chalk up my accomplishments to me being light skinned, even though I do recognize that light skinned women do have privilege over dark skinned women, in a lot of situations. Light skinned privilege is very

much real, but I don't think it applied there. Especially because I mean looking at the other girls that performed, I was the only fat one, which for a pageant is usually a big deal.”

As opposed to challenges to her Black authenticity, Dakota’s pageant experience reveals how colorism, the societal privileging of whiteness or white conceptions of beauty, which provides lighter skinned individuals with special privileges and advantages, plays a significant role in Black multiracial students BSO involvement and inclusion. (Burton et. al 2010; Herring, Keith, and Horton 2004; Hordge-Freeman 2015; Rockquemore 2002). However, even as Dakota acknowledges the reality of colorism and light skin privilege, she similarly resorts to colorblind claims of individual meritocracy and work ethic, in order to rationalize how she won the pageant (“I won the pageant by my merit”), ultimately victimizing herself as a way to escape confronting her own privilege (“it’s not fair to chalk up my accomplishments to me being light skinned”). Rather than dismissing notions of privilege altogether like Collin, Dakota contends that yes, light skin privilege exists; however, within the context of a pageant, her fatness voids her access to that privilege. Although scholars consistently demonstrate how “ processes of devaluing fatness, blackness, brownness, and femininity – and thus of idealizing thinness, whiteness, and masculinity” have been central to the construction of ideal American beauty, I am reluctant to assume that light skin privilege only operates within the realm of anti-black beauty standards (Sanders 2019:291). Yet, because Dakota situates her argument within the context of pageants, often considered beauty contests, it is unsurprising that she holds this assumption. Regardless, by highlighting how she perceives her fatness as intersecting with her racialized and gendered

identity, Dakota calls attention to the ways that respondent's other intersecting identities potentially influence their navigation of and response to this *politics of acceptance*.

For example, when reflecting on her frustrations and negative experiences navigating BSO involvement, Sasha, who's Afro-Indo Guyanese and Dominican, expressed:

“I was very disappointed when I came here and I went to the [BSO] meetings, I went for a solid six months and every time I was talked over and not really included. I went to a homecoming brunch and no one spoke to me, I just sat there, and I tried to talk to people and they'd be like, Oh, yeah, mmmhmm and walk away. And I processed it with my friend who is now the president this year and she's also Guyanese, but both her parents are “black, black.” And she had said well, I just think people don't see you as black and don't know why you're there, or how you connect. And I'm like, therein lies the problem, it's not my responsibility to expand people's understandings of what blackness looks like. So, I think that when I meet Caribbean people who are from, not America, they understand that I'm black because race looks different, ethnicity looks different, nationhood looks different there.”

Sasha's experiences with the *politics of acceptance* to BSO involvement were marked by exclusionary tactics predicated on her seemingly non-Black racial appearance. However, as the daughter of Caribbean immigrants, the way that Sasha made sense of her negative racialized experiences within BSO's, was by recognizing differences in understandings of what blackness looks like across the diaspora. In this way, Sasha's navigation of BSO involvement not only invokes the MultiCrit tenet of *intersections of multiple racial/ethnic identities* and contributes to the literature on multiracial individuals with immigrant parents, but it also exhibits her attainment of *diasporic consciousness* (Smith 2014; Walt 2013). Through this diasporic consciousness, Sasha can affirm her Black racial identity despite negative racialized experiences,

highlighting how her ethnic ties work to both complicate her BSO inclusion while also helping her rationalize her BSO exclusion.

In contrast to those having to confront a *politics of acceptance* to BSO involvement because of their racialized appearance or perceived racial ambiguity, Kaleb, who's Black and white, expressed,

“I felt that like my queerness was a blemish on my black identity, and that's why I wasn't welcomed in.”

Further unpacking the ways his queer identity hinders his acceptance into BSO's, Kaleb goes on to explain:

“And particularly when I'm thinking about being a black man in community with other black men, I have often had to soften discussions around sexuality or gender presentation because of my perception of what I'm supposed to do through black masculinity.”

Unlike other respondents, Kaleb's barriers to inclusion were more connected to his queer identity and gender presentation, rather than how he's racialized within BSO's. Yet, in further dialogue, it became clear that these barriers had less to do with actual challenges to his black authenticity and more to do with his “perception” of what it is to perform and embody Black masculinity. Although focused on cis-hetero Black mixed-race men, this directly correlates with Newman's research, which found that “when black multiracial boys did not perform Black masculinity adequately, it was their authentic blackness that came into question, not necessarily their masculinity” (2019:120). Kaleb's perception of Black masculinity as inherently incompatible

with his queer identity relates to his experience of being socialized within white queer spaces and points to broader historical representations of Black masculinity. Consequently, Kaleb actively “softens discussions” around his sexuality with other black men as a sort of defense mechanism against potential challenges to his racial authenticity, which he links to his ability to perform Black masculinity.

Other respondents discussed employing strategies to combat similar anxieties around their perceived Black authenticity within BSO’s, as reflected by the following:

“I just had to just tell myself you belong in that space, it's fine and I haven't had anybody try to question it or try to challenge it. I definitely will sometimes be overthinking in that space, are people looking at me, are they judging me, are they like why is this bitch here? And I have to be like no, this is in your head, it's fine. This all definitely goes on in my head but the more comfortable I am with the people in that space, the more that goes away.” (Maya, Afro-Guyanese/Indo-Guyanese/white)

To cope with internal doubts regarding acceptance within BSO’s, Maya consciously affirms her own Black racial belonging when first entering BSO spaces, until she establishes some level of comfort with other BSO members. Akin to Kaleb’s worries, Maya similarly identifies feelings of anxiety when navigating and participating in BSOs. I refer to both Kaleb and Maya’s worries surrounding their Black authenticity as anxieties in order to emphasize the internalization of the “Black enough” narrative dominant within representations of multiracial blackness (Joseph 2013), as both Kaleb and Maya center their internal perceptions or overthinking of Black authenticity, rather than overt challenges made to their blackness. While research on multiracial student experiences emphasize instances of monoracism and racial essentialism, this section interrupts traditional approaches to illustrate how monoracism can also operate as a tool to check

multiracial privilege within BSO spaces. Moreover, because respondents remained involved in BSOs, despite their navigation of this *politics of acceptance* to BSO inclusion, the ways Black multiracial students were confronted with and made to respond to and negotiate their racial, and often privileged positions within BSOs demonstrates their engagement in a process of *racial re-socialization* while involved in BSOs.

*“Nah girl, you Black:” Peer Pedagogies, Affirmation, and Affective Capital*

Even as some Black multiracial students identified facing barriers to their BSO inclusion, many characterized their BSO involvement as validating, empowering, and nurturing. These respondents described BSO’s as either affirming their feelings regarding *racialized experiences* or affirming their understandings of their *racialized identities*. Hordge-Freeman introduces *affective capital* to refer to “the emotional and psychological resources that a person gains from being positively evaluated and supported, and from receiving frequent and meaningful displays of affection” (2015:5). While the previous section unpacked how instances of monoracism can also operate as checks to multiracial privilege, this section illuminates how BSOs can sometimes bolster multiracial privilege through the administration of affective rewards and affirmations that implicitly perpetuate antiblackness and reinforce multiracial exceptionalism (Joseph 2013). Thus, affective capital is useful in conceptualizing the affective exchanges and rewards Black multiracial students sometimes gain through their BSO involvement.

Additionally, Black multiracial respondents depicted BSO's as "safe spaces" where they could actively confront and develop strategies to combat persistent anti-blackness within the college setting. While not made explicit, these spaces were often achieved through the employment of peer pedagogies, or the ways BSO members collectively taught each other about the realities of racism via the disclosure of shared racialized experiences (Harper 2013). In this section, I argue that the peer pedagogies employed within BSOs work to racially *re-socialize* Black multiracial students by prompting them to reinterpret their racialized selves and experiences in the college setting and deconstruct their assumptions regarding the commonalities and/or differences between a collective Black monoracial and Black multiracial experience, as adopted throughout their upbringing.

For example, in discussion of his involvement within a notable Black Greek letter fraternity, Jerome, who's Black and white, explains:

"Honestly, it was just a different light and hanging out with the guys within [the Black fraternity] or within the organization even. We would all talk about our different experiences as a group and the different things we were experiencing in college because everyone's experiences are different. So, let's say even if I didn't experience hands on racism but one of my brothers or one of the guys from the organization walk in and they're like "man, listen to what happened to me today," it changes things, your views completely change when it's happening to people you care about. It gave me a better understanding of race once I started interacting with other people like me."

For Jerome, BSO's offered new spaces to engage in racial dialogue with Black students he closely identified with, as opposed to the "trust fund douches" from the white fraternity he joined his freshman year. As a result, Jerome continually found himself in conversations related to his fellow fraternity brothers encounters with racism, ultimately elevating his overall understandings

of race and highlighting the impact of peer pedagogies in the *racial re-socialization* process enacted within BSO's. In the same way that Jerome attributes his broadened understandings of race to his interactions with other BSO members, or "people like [him]," Audrey, who's Black and white, made similar connections, revealing:

"It's so weird because I feel like I didn't know that I related to other Black women, until I was around other Black women. I just never had that opportunity to be around other Black women so once I was, I was like wow they have so much in common with me and my experiences."

Undoubtedly, Audrey's upbringing and racial socialization within predominantly white social contexts, prior to entering college, contributed to her initial surprise regarding the commonality between her experiences and other Black women. However, once these shared racialized experiences were identified, Audrey expressed an increased level of comfort and acceptance when engaging in racial discourse with other BSO members, claiming:

"I think the whole thing is like you have to have those conversations [about racism and racial identity] and I was able to in those spaces, with the executive team and everyone. I was comfortable to acknowledge and speak on my internal issues and experiences, and had them not only affirming me, but also making me feel like "no, that's a legitimate feeling to have.""

For Audrey, BSO's served as sites where she, for the first time, was able to openly discuss negative *racialized experiences* faced on campus and feel validated and supported in doing so. In this way, Audrey emphasizes the utility and necessity of peer pedagogies in helping students navigate the white supremacist landscape of predominately white college campuses and reassess their role in maintaining or dismantling its antiblack legacy. Similarly, when reflecting on her

initial experiences joining a BSO, following racist incidents on campus, Alex, who's Black and white, recalled:

“I had never been to the [BSO] until that stuff started happening and then I was there all the time and it was affirming to be around other people that got it. I used to be afraid to go, like they would look at me and think huh, you're a little black, but you're not black like I'm black. But once those conversations started happening, I felt like there was some level of solidarity of going through the experience of watching all this terrible stuff happen and being on a campus not fully equipped or ready to support you. So, we had to support each other, and I was able to connect with other black students in a new way.”

Consistent with numerous studies that have analyzed the impact of campus racial climate and racist incidents on the continued exclusion and marginalization of students of color, Alex's Black activist involvement emerged as a result of the circulation of white supremacist flyers and threats spread throughout her college campus (Boysen, Vogel, Cope, & Hubbard 2009; Castagno & Lee 2007; Davis & Harris 2015). In the same way that students in the previous section discussed doubts about their acceptance into BSOs, Alex referenced her initial anxiety about entering BSO spaces, fearing she would not be perceived as authentically Black. Even so, once Alex overcame her internalized anxiety about entering BSO spaces, she described her involvement as affirming and supportive. In this way, BSO's facilitated a meaningful support system for Black students to bond over mutual frustrations regarding their shared racialized experiences with PWI racism and anti-blackness. Additionally, Alex illustrates how BSO's oftentimes serve as the only outlets for Black students to feel community, belonging, and solidarity on a PWI campus. Just as Jerome and Audrey identified shared and collective racialized experiences with other BSO members, Alex highlighted the impact of peer pedagogies in instilling a level of solidarity between her and other BSO members, thus, helping her grapple with racist events happening on campus.

In contrast to those describing feelings of affirmation related to their *racialized experiences*, other respondents elucidated feelings of affirmation with regards to their *racialized identities* within the context of BSO involvement. For instance, when asked about her experiences within a Black women's empowerment organization, Dakota, who's Black and white, exclaimed:

“I loved it. I had a lot of fun. It was really nice to be in a place where like, I wasn't necessarily an outlier. I mean, I guess I still was being mixed, but it wasn't something that was pointed out, I didn't get asked if I was mixed, people just accepted my blackness without too much hesitation.”

While Dakota conveyed positive experiences associated with her BSO involvement, her feelings of racial acceptance left the most profound impact. In contrast to Dakota's experience negotiating her “light skin privilege” after winning a Black scholarship pageant, detailed in the previous section of this chapter, Dakota's long term experiences within BSO's were marked by the validation of her Black racial identity and feelings of belonging. Echoing these sentiments, Renee, who's Black and Korean, reflects on her BSO involvement stating:

“I've been told 100 times in my life you're not black, but overall, my experience in the black community has been one that is nurturing, it's very nurturing, very loving and very accepting cause they'd be like "nah girl you black"... I guess I never felt like I had Black culture, nobody ever called me a Black woman, nobody ever saw me as that or treated me as such. Nobody ever put the two in one place. Like whenever I joined [the Black sorority], or in the journey of joining [the Black sorority], I was literally surrounded by only Black women, I was literally encouraged and claimed by Black women, I was inspired by Black women, I was loved by Black women. It was just a setting where its only Black women, and I'm there and I'm a part of them. I learned so much about what it means to be a Black woman by being surrounded by Black women and just hearing their experiences and learning who they are, hearing about their past, their stories, where they come from, all of the different things that we have in common. Our commonality is what really helped me to just view myself even, as a Black woman.”

Because Renee was raised by her Korean grandparents and socialized within Korean schools, churches, and neighborhoods, the ways that her physical blackness became a site for surveillance and exclusion within Korean spaces was in many ways normalized, as reflected in the emphasis placed on her experiences with persistent racial invalidation. As opposed to the first section of this chapter, Renee’s challenges with Black authenticity stemmed from her experiences in non-Black spaces, rather than attempts at BSO inclusion. Here, Renee engages in a process of *racial re-socialization*, reflecting on her prior racial socialization and initial feelings of never having or being exposed to “black culture” and moves to discuss how the peer pedagogies of the Black women in her sorority helped her view and accept herself as a Black woman (i.e. “I learned so much about what it means to be a Black woman by being surrounded by Black women and just hearing their experiences”). As opposed to the “triple jeopardy” expressed by the multiracial women in Rockquemore’s (2002) study who experienced racial exclusion and invalidation by monoracial Black women, Renee details experiencing full acceptance and support from the Black women in her sorority. For Renee, BSO involvement provided a welcoming community to both embrace and grow into her blackness; however, much of this growth was facilitated by the other mothering and affirmation of Black women in her sorority. While highlighting her positive experiences within BSO’s, Renee goes on to describe how the affective exchanges, support, and nurturance of Black women within her sorority impacted her self-esteem and helped her gain a “newfound confidence,” explaining:

“In my sorority, they always highlighted these things about me that they found to be beautiful, that I never thought of as beautiful, I just thought of as different. They would just point out things about me that was different but that was beautiful, and it made me

bring confidence to those aspects of myself and my differences. I learned to love my differences and it was never said in a way where I felt like an outsider, it was just like "you have pretty hair." In white spaces, my differences were not seen as beautiful, or I felt that they weren't seen as beautiful. And at my old school, they didn't see these things about me as beautiful things, they saw these things as Black, what's black about me, if that makes sense. Those are the things that make you black versus in a black setting, it was these things that makes me different, make me beautiful."

Affective capital, which is largely demonstrated through positive affirmations and verbal praise, is useful in conceptualizing the affective rewards Renee garnered through her BSO involvement. Because affective capital can be differentially employed in ways that simultaneously resist and reproduce hegemonic hierarchies of inequality, it is important to interrogate the affective exchanges described by Renee (Hordge-Freeman 2015). Specifically, Renee attributes her elevated levels of confidence and self-esteem to positive affirmations and praise provided by her Black sorority sisters, primarily related to her physical appearance and perceived attractiveness. Yet, by complimenting certain aspects of Renee's physical appearance, such as her hair, which are what "makes [her] Black" in white spaces, these affirmations become inseparable from anti-black standards of beauty, and therefore, reproduce racial and gender inequalities. Through affective capital, we see how BSOs can sometimes bolster multiracial privilege through the administration of affective rewards and affirmations that implicitly perpetuate antiblackness while reinforcing multiracial exceptionalism (Joseph 2013).

### *Concluding Thoughts*

In this chapter, I examined Black multiracial students' navigation and experiences within BSOs, revealing the diverse ways that BSO involvement facilitates a process of *racial re-socialization*. Through *experiential knowledge* and this process of *racial re-socialization*, respondents were made to critically reflect on their racial socialization, reevaluate preconceived notions of authentic blackness, and confront the ways that their multiraciality can simultaneously become a site of privilege and contestation within BSO spaces, actively *challenging dominant ideologies*. Moreover, the peer pedagogies employed within BSOs represent a key mechanism fueling this process of *racial re-socialization*. In this case, peer pedagogies entailed an open racial dialogue with monoracial BSO members, which worked to both confront and validate multiracial students' racialized encounters, ultimately, fostering a sense of belonging and embrace of a collective Black identity. Despite Black multiracial students' encounters with monoracism and racial essentialism, respondents remained involved in their BSOs, with some eventually even attaining leadership positions. The impacts of long-term BSO involvement and this process of *racial re-socialization* are further explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: BLACK, NO QUESTION MARK

*“Just as black and white, when mixed, make grey, in many ways that's what it did to my self-identity: it created a murky area of who I was, a haze around how people connected with me. I was grey. And who wants to be this indifferent colour, devoid of depth and stuck in the middle? I certainly didn't. So, you make a choice: continue living your life feeling muddled in this abyss of self-misunderstanding, or you find your identity independent of it.” - Meghan Markle*

*“Screaming fuck whitey, forgetting I'm still mulatto” -J Cole*

Undoubtedly, the childhood and familial racial socialization of Black multiracial respondents factored into their motivations for joining a Black student organization; however, respondents involvement within Black student organizations revealed how, for some, BSO's facilitated a distinct form of *racial re-socialization* or a process of unlearning and relearning one's position in the racial hierarchy. In this way, BSO involvement forced many Black multiracial respondents to critically reflect on their racial identities and unlearn the anti-blackness taught throughout their upbringing. This is perhaps most evident in the analysis of the impacts of Black multiracial students BSO involvement. In this chapter, I unpack how respondents' involvement within BSO's not only broadened their understandings of blackness and multiraciality but also influenced politicized shifts in respondents' racial identification. Further, I explore how respondents' evolved consciousness and shifts in identity necessitated unexpected negotiations within their familial and intimate relationships. I introduce the concept of *reflective resistance*, to discuss the ways that respondents applied the *racial re-socialization*

experienced within BSO's into their familial relationships. *Reflective resistance* involves the negotiations and interventions Black multiracial respondents employed to combat and confront their family members' colorblind and/or anti-black racism. While Twine (2006) argues that white parents of Black biracial children employ *racial literacy* to socialize their children in ways that prepare them for negative racialized encounters, I argue that non-Black parents may actually develop *racial literacy* as a result of the politicization of their multiracial children's Black identities via *reflective resistance*.

*"How to walk through the world:" Nuancing Blackness via Conscientization*

Reflecting the literature that suggests that immersion into heterogeneous, Black spaces fosters more positive evaluations of blackness and increased levels of racial consciousness, respondents consistently associated their changing conceptions of blackness and understandings of racial inequality with their BSO involvement (Brooms 2019; Clayton 2019). Jamal, who's Black and white, distinctly remembered shifting how he understood blackness when asked about his involvement within a Black men's professional and leadership organization, claiming,

"So now [post-BSO involvement], blackness to me is definitely more than skin tone, it's more about culture, heritage and history and recognition or respect for Black history and knowledge. Blackness is how to walk through the world, how you represent yourself as it aligns with the African diaspora." -Jamal, Black/white

Jamal's response highlights how involvement within BSO's can inform more nuanced understandings of blackness that move beyond physical appearance towards deeper notions of a

collective Black history, culture, and way of being or “walk[ing] through the world.” For Jamal, blackness involves not only a collective Black experience but an appreciation and respect for that experience. Contrary to contemporary scholarship on multiracial college students, Jamal’s response demonstrates how exposure to Black history, peer pedagogies, and diverse Black peer groups can instill a sense of Black pride and collective consciousness in Black multiracial college students.

Like Jamal, other respondents similarly expressed their shifting understandings of blackness as a result of involvement; however, these respondents elaborated on the ways that those shifts differentially impacted understandings of their own blackness and racial identity. For example, in reflection of her experience attending an HBCU, Nicole, who’s Black and white, divulged:

“Being at an HBCU, there's a lot of black traditions and black culture in terms of the divine nine, black Greek organizations, and things of that nature that I had never been exposed to before. And being at that kind of institution, there's such a deep history of racial knowledge there and racial history that we learn, while we're there, because it's talked about. It's integrated into classes in a way that you don't get in a regular high school textbook anywhere. I was realizing that I didn't know things about being a black woman.”

Coinciding with Clayton’s (2019) research on multiraciality within the context of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Nicole details how an introduction to Black culture, discourse, and history via the HBCU experience, forced her to confront her own racial identity and cognizance of Black womanhood, in ways that she hadn’t had to prior. This is further elucidated when Nicole is asked about the impact of her HBCU experience, recalling,

“It was a wake-up call for me and definitely made me question myself and some of the views that I had been socialized to have, that I didn't really realize I had. And just moving in the direction of being way more cognizant of race and how that factored into my life, past, present, and future.”

While modern representations of multiraciality assume that multiracial individuals do not experience their race, Nicole's response illuminates how engagement within Black community spaces often elicits multiracial students' reevaluations of how race has factored into their lives (Harris 2016). Nicole's long-term immersion into an HBCU facilitated a much needed “wake up call,” prompting an introspective evaluation and interrogation of herself and the “views that [she] had been socialized to have.” As a result, Nicole identified her increasing level of racial consciousness as an impact of her HBCU experience. Here, Nicole underscores this process of *racial re-socialization*, whereby Black multiracial respondents, raised primarily by their non-Black parents, learn a new set of values, history, and culture that implicitly alters their understandings of race and multiraciality. Specifically, *racial re-socialization* is demonstrated by Black multiracial respondents' engagement in deep, critical reflection that allows them to actively unlearn the colorblind, and often anti-black racial socialization of their upbringing, subsequently gaining a new racial consciousness. Thus, engagement within Black community spaces alongside exposure to the realities of racial hierarchies worked to impact some respondents' racial awareness and identity through a process of conscientization, or consciousness-raising (Edwards and Few-Demo 2016).

In a similar vein, Dakota, who's also Black and white, described how her BSO involvement impacted her perception of the Black community, and more specifically, where she positioned herself, as a Black multiracial woman, within that community

“I mean being involved in black student organizations exposed me to black culture in general, something I didn't have because of my upbringing. And they gave me a better appreciation for black culture. It helped me understand different parts of myself or helped me understand how black people, as a community, come together, and how black people, as a community, interact with one another, and how I fit into that.”

In the same way that Nicole exemplified undergoing a process of *racial re-socialization* throughout her HBCU experience, Dakota similarly reflects on her exposure to the Black community via BSO involvement as unfamiliar and missing from her upbringing within rural, white social contexts. While Dakota also links this exposure to her broadened understandings of blackness and racial identity, it is her newly developed appreciation for Black culture that is most significant. Through her involvement, Dakota was able to develop a "better appreciation" for black culture despite her mother's employment of an overtly antiblack racial socialization. This aligns with Clayton's (2019) research on racial regard, as Dakota's response demonstrates how BSO involvement can not only inform multiracial students' conceptions of blackness and multiraciality but also positively shift their evaluations of black culture and community. Ultimately, Dakota's BSO involvement helped her unpack "different parts of [her]self," elucidating her position and belonging within the Black community. When asked how she saw herself fitting into the Black community, Dakota earnestly responded:

“Just the same as everyone else, for the most part. I'm only different if I make myself different. I'm only different if I walk around parading that I'm mixed, which is not

anything I will ever do. Some girls do that, some girls walk around talking about "I'm not black. I'm mixed," and that could never be me, I don't have to worry about that. I have faced some people trying to say something out the side of their neck because I'm light skin or because I'm mixed. And I acknowledge light skin or color and colorism. I acknowledge light skin privilege; it is very much a real thing that I have experienced. But it's something you still have to speak up against, just like I would with racism in a white environment, that's something you gotta call out, especially as the privileged party."

As a result of her BSO involvement, Dakota explicitly placed herself within a collective Black identity, repositioning herself as "just the same as everyone else." Moreover, Dakota implies that the rejection of multiracial folks from Black social spaces may have more to do with their rejection of a Black racial identity, as reflected by attempts to differentiate themselves from monoracial Black individuals by "parading that [they're] mixed," as opposed to a policing of their Black authenticity. Dakota's interpretation echoes Smith and Moore's argument that acceptance within BSO's is contingent upon "the extent to which biracials accept a black racial identity and show commitment to the mores of the black community" (2000:9). In this way, Dakota suggests that acceptance within the Black community is tied to one's acceptance of blackness, even as it coexists with multiraciality.

By reflecting on what she perceived to be unwarranted doubts cast on her willingness to acknowledge multiracial privilege, Dakota called attention to the ways BSO involvement can inform multiracial students' recognition of light skin privilege and colorism. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Dakota's experiences with benefiting from light skin privilege within BSO spaces, while contentious, seemingly improved her overall awareness of colorism and anti-blackness. In so doing, Dakota demonstrates how BSO involvement can impact respondents' understandings of their own oppression, as Black multiracial individuals within the racialized

system of white supremacy, as well as how they also benefit from that same system. For Dakota, BSO involvement impacted her racial awareness and recognition of privilege, resulting in a heightened sense of obligation to confront and “speak up against” colorism discourse. This impact of BSO involvement is echoed by Collin, who’s Black and Chinese, in discussion of his racial ambiguity, where he claimed:

“That’s the advantage that I have, whereas if I did look, quote-unquote, typically black, then I think people would be like, of course, he’s saying this, of course, blah, blah. But because it was me, it was like “Oh shit, this dude does not look like he would be combative, because he’s Asian.” And it’s just using that stereotype they have of me against them. A lot of it is very strategic in the sense that when I do approach certain activist behavior or pursuits, whatever it is, it’s knowing that I have the space and privilege to be in certain areas, with certain people, whether it’s administrators, professors, whoever it is, who don’t see me as a threat initially, in order to get in that room. I think it’s something that my friends can’t do, but then as soon as I’m in that room, I can either pull them in with me or make sure I represent them as best as I can when I’m there. And that’s where I’m at now, it’s obviously a difficult battle, but nowhere near as difficult as it would be if I looked like my peers.”

Although Collin avoided confronting his passing privilege in the last chapter, here, we see how he’s made sense of that privilege and employed intentional strategies that exploit his racial ambiguity with the goal of advancing collective anti-racist activism. In recognition of racialized and gendered stereotypes, Collin strategically finesses his perceived Asian and masculine phenotype, cognizant of stereotypes of Asian men as emasculate, intelligent, and non-threatening, in order to access spaces that his Black male peers are otherwise restricted, as Black cis-hetero men are traditionally stereotyped as hypermasculine and “combative.” Further, Collin moves beyond the manipulation of his ambiguity, suggesting that once he enters anti-black exclusionary spaces, it is then his responsibility to pull his Black peers in with him or represent

the collective Black struggle to the best of his ability. Moreover, Collin acknowledges that although the negotiation of his racialized identity is often difficult to navigate, it's "nowhere near as difficult as it would be if [he] looked like [his] peers." While far from a flawless approach, Collins intentions and navigation of his racialized identity demonstrate the impact BSO's can have on respondents' understandings of what it means to be a Black multiracial activist with privilege.

Akin to Collin, other respondents similarly detailed how shifts in their understandings of racial identity and blackness, resulting from their BSO involvement, impacted their engagement in activism more broadly. For example, when asked what the biggest takeaway from her BSO involvement was, Alex, who's Black and white, noted,

" I definitely didn't have the toolkit that I have now to have been as vocal about these issues."

Alex's reference to the "toolkit" she gained from BSO involvement reflects Harper's argument that the peer pedagogies employed within BSO's teach minoritized students "how to respond most effectively to the racism, racial stereotypes, and microaggressions they are likely to encounter in classrooms and elsewhere on campus" (2013:208). Similarly, Kaleb, who's Black and white, expressed how the peer pedagogies enacted within his BSO experience also impacted his LGBTQ+ activism, adamantly asserting:

"Now [post-BSO involvement] I refuse to sacrifice my identities, particularly related to my masculinity in relation to other black men, and this has been a more recent type of introspection. I also won't sacrifice my centering discussions of racism and doing anti-racist work in conversations with queer white people, if you can't center that, then for me, you're not actually doing any work. If you can't center that, then you actually don't care

about the same types of equity and inclusion and social justice work that you're saying you do.”

In the previous chapter, Kaleb expressed feeling as though his queer identity represented a “blemish” on his Black identity. An extension of the research on Black mixed-race men (Sims & Joseph-Salisbury 2019), Kaleb’s experiences navigating BSO’s involved a reconciliation of his queerness in relation to his perceptions of what constitutes “authentic” Black masculinity. Here, we see Kaleb’s negotiation of his racialized gendered identity with his queer sexuality, as opposed to a negotiation of his multiraciality. Throughout Kaleb’s interview, he expressed that much of the queer socializing that he’s done has “been predicated on whiteness,” leading him to stereotypical assumptions regarding Black masculinity. However, by developing meaningful relationships with cis-straight Black men, through his experiences with anti-racist activism, Kaleb was able to deconstruct the essentialized notions of Black masculinity that he adopted from his socialization within white queer spaces. In this way, Kaleb demonstrated how BSO and activist involvement can motivate more nuanced understandings of blackness for Black multiracial respondents. Additionally, Kaleb’s refusal to “sacrifice” any of his identities demonstrates how BSO involvement can also strengthen the saliency of respondents’ Black identities in ways that allow for fluidity and the coexistence of intersecting identities, rather than their dismissal. As respondents expressed developing racial consciousness and more nuanced understandings of blackness, some even conveyed shifting how they racially identified, which I discuss further in the next section.

*“The only thing white about me is my mother:” Politicizing Blackness via Identity Salience*

While scholars argue that BSO involvement can positively affirm monoracial Black students’ racial identities and solidify their immersion into a collective Black identity, this section reveals how BSO involvement can similarly impact the racial identities of Black multiracial students (Brooms 2019; Harper and Quaye 2007). Although respondents reflected on feelings of confusion and tension when marking their racial identity on formal documents, many also discussed shifting what they marked as a result of BSO involvement, opting to mark Black solely, rather than multiple races. For example, when asked if her involvement in a Black women’s empowerment organization impacted her racial identity, Audrey, who’s Black and white, explained:

“Instead of ‘other,’ I just put Black now. Only since maybe junior year. Because even my boyfriend commented on it, he was like “oh, you’re not biracial anymore?” But yeah, I would say when I got more into African American Studies courses and things of that nature it changed, just learning more, being around other people like me, because I would identify as black now.”

Audrey’s immersion into African American studies courses and engagement in BSO’s not only affirmed her Black racial identity but also made it more salient. In referencing her Black peers as “people like [her],” Audrey explicitly positioned herself within a collective Black identity, demonstrating how increased knowledge and exposure to Black history and community can motivate a deconstruction of multiracial notions of race as only linked to parentage or DNA. For Audrey, BSO involvement instilled a sense of Black pride and collective consciousness,

influencing her adoption of a Black racial identity. Other respondents similarly noted shifts in how they racially identified while involved in BSO's, asserting,

“If somebody asks me, I'm black! I'm just Black, I don't know when that switched though, probably like sophomore year when I started going to the organizations as a general body member and hearing the conversations and joining in on them and all of that.” -Noelle, Black/white

“Yea so now I don't mark all of them, I just mark Black because like I said, the only thing white about me is my mother.” -Jamal, Black/white

As a result of their BSO involvement, both Noelle and Jamal conveyed adopting an exclusively Black racial identity. While Noelle's Black identity emerged from the peer pedagogies employed throughout BSO general body meetings, Jamal's adoption of a Black identity acted as an overt attempt to disassociate from whiteness. In this way, identifying as Black represents a political act for some Black multiracial respondents to demonstrate their allegiance and commitment to the Black community, highlighting their immersion into a collective Black identity. Just as these respondents indicated shifts in how they marked or pronounced their racial identities post-BSO involvement, other respondents denoted how their BSO involvement strengthened the centrality of their blackness alongside an embrace of their multiraciality. Renee, who's Black and Korean, for instance, disclosed:

“Growing up, I didn't look in the mirror, I didn't see a black woman, how would I have? I never identified as such because I always listed in this grey area where I was not so much this, not so much that, not so much that, but I'm all of these people, equally all of them. And it's been an experience where for the first time I grew in my identity, I learned more things about myself. I've learned more things, I started to view myself differently, I started to view my experiences differently because I would hear all these different stories,

all these different things about people and it was like, I get that, I've experienced that, I feel that I've experienced this, you understand me, even though we're different, I'm still the same, we're the same.”

In the same way that respondents in the previous section experienced a *racial re-socialization* within BSO's to critically reflect on the colorblind socialization of their upbringing, Renee reported undergoing a similar process in order to begin viewing herself as a Black woman. For Renee, BSO's facilitated space to grow into her blackness and racial identity, to transition away from “the grey area” of her upbringing towards a point of Black pride and acceptance. Although Renee illustrates the impact of BSO involvement on her Black identity salience, her celebration of a Black racial identity did not signify an abandonment of her multiracial background. Thus, BSO involvement fostered a sense of wholeness in Renee's understandings of her multiraciality, while simultaneously affirming her Black racial identity. Given that many of the respondents in this section who opted to claim a solely Black racial identity had one Black parent and one white parent, it is significant that Renee, someone holding two marginalized racial identities, detailed being able to identify as a Black woman while viewing herself as “equally” Korean within BSO spaces.

Unlike previous respondents, Renee highlighted how a shared Black experience, identified through peer pedagogies and BSO involvement, allowed her to view herself as a Black woman, who is simultaneously inside and outside of the Black collectivity. Specifically, by saying “even though we're different, I'm still the same,” Renee identifies herself as part of the Black community, with similar racialized experiences, while also acknowledging the differences present in her multiracial experience. This theme is elaborated further in Nicole's explanation of

how her activist experiences at an HBCU impacted her racial identity. Nicole, who's Black and white, detailed:

“If people ask me, I will tell them I'm half black and half white because I know that that's what they're asking me, for my background, because they're trying to figure me out. But internally, personally, I identify as a black, multiracial woman. Having gone to an HBCU, blackness has become a lot more central to my identity and very important to me. But I also think it would be disingenuous to not recognize that I am biracial because there are a lot of differences in my social experience that come with that, in comparison to a black woman who is not mixed, or who is not perceived as mixed even if she is mixed.”

Much like the literature on multiracial experiences, Nicole pointed to a consistent fixation on her racial background as representative of many of her racialized experiences (Renn 2004; Sims 2016). Having grown accustomed to the “what are you” questions, Nicole automatically parses out her biraciality via the “half and half” response to avoid any further objectification or interrogations of her raciality. Even so, Nicole acknowledged how her HBCU experience fortified her Black identity salience, making blackness more “central” and salient to her racial identity. However, Nicole, like Renee, identifies as a Black multiracial woman, recognizing the distinctions associated with a multiracial experience. For Nicole, claiming a Black racial identity at the expense of her multiracial background would be “disingenuous,” and appropriate a monoracial Black experience that in many ways, she has not had. Moreover, Nicole links these differences in social experience to how she understands her racialization, which she describes as “Black and question mark.” In this way, Nicole recognizes the ways she's racialized as Black alongside being racialized as “exotic” or “other,” providing her with distinct privileges and disadvantages from those racialized as monoracial Black.

Interestingly, Nicole also acknowledged differences in how multiracial people are racialized, recognizing that some multiracial people are not racialized as multiracial, rather as monoracial. This recognition deviates from much of the literature on mixed-race identities, which suggests a monolithic multiracial experience marked by invasive “what are you” questions and racialized negotiations of authenticity. Further, Nicole’s recognition of differences in Black multiracial folks’ racialized encounters introduces new questions related to multiracial student organizations (MSO’s) and multiracial authenticity. Specifically, if some Black multiracial students are consistently racialized as monoracial, how will they be embraced within MSO’s and how will their multiracial experiences align with other multiracial students who are racialized as multiracial? Regardless, Nicole’s centering of her Black racial identity further highlights how BSO involvement can inform the racial identification of Black multiracial respondents, promoting an overall acceptance and love of blackness.

*“Us and Them:” Reflective Resistance and Familial Interventions*

As demonstrated throughout the previous sections, the *racial re-socialization* that Black multiracial students experienced via BSO involvement actively politicized some respondents’ Black racial identities by broadening their understandings of blackness and racial inequality. Yet, for several respondents’, their development of more salient and politicized Black racial identities evoked unexpected shifts with regards to their familial relationships. For some, these shifts in familial relationships acted as a positive and strengthened their relationships with and appreciation for Black family members, as reflected by the responses below:

“It definitely made me and my grandmother much closer because I felt like it strengthened our relationship and it also made me have a new appreciation for her role in my life, as the only black woman close to me.” -Nicole, Black/white

“I started to get even tighter with my dad. I mean, he would tell me about these things, but it kind of would fly over my head when I was in high school and junior high because I had no real-world application and then once I got to college and I was actually seeing these things and they were happening to me, I was like, “Oh my gosh, all those things he told me about make sense now and all these lessons are starting to become useful.”  
-Bobby, Black/white

For both Nicole and Bobby, BSO involvement motivated a deeper appreciation for the contributions and experiences of their Black family members, ultimately strengthening their relationships. However, other Black multiracial respondents outlined encountering more negative challenges associated with their BSO involvement and non-Black family members. Specifically, as respondents became more politicized in their Black identities, as a result of BSO involvement, many expressed a heightened awareness of family members’ anti-blackness or colorblindness. This enhanced racial consciousness prompted some respondents to critically reflect on their familial relationships and renegotiate their role within the family as it aligned with their Black racial identities. For example, Kaleb, who’s Black and white, expressed,

“I was a mama's boy but as I grew in my identities, I became more and more aware of all the ways that my mom was racist.”

As Kaleb’s Black identity became more salient, he was forced to make sense of the racism perpetuated by his white mother. Similarly, Audrey, who’s Black and white, described her

feelings after an argument that took place with her mother after she moved across the country for graduate school, hesitantly unveiling:

“I met one girl and she's Black and lives in a Black neighborhood, and I hang out with her and her family a lot and my mom kind of questions it, like, “well do they know that you're mixed?” That was weird for me and that was just from moving here. So, now I feel different about her [white mom], I don't know because I am half white. It's tough because my white family, they are such good people. I know, it's much easier for, say, my friend [Rachel], where I'm pretty sure her white family was terrible to her. But I grew up in an environment where they were so welcoming, so it was hard for me to be like ‘us and them’. But at the end of the day, that's how society is, and my role is that of a Black woman and my societal motives are to uplift black women, and as I said, it's hard for my mom to see that and understand that.”

Here, we see how Audrey’s white mother attempted to police her performance of multiraciality, fearing that her daughter’s decision to befriend a Black woman would “taint” her mixed-race identity and signify her shifted loyalty to blackness. By asking “well do they know that you're mixed?,” Audrey’s mother is pressuring her to engage in what Buggs refers to as a “performance of white racial obligation— the investment in the discourses, logics, and resources that reproduce systemic white social power” (2017: 380; Marcano 2009). As Audrey was confronted with her mother’s antiblackness, she began questioning her familial relationships, wondering how she would negotiate her politicized Black racial identity in relation to white family members. Although she details her initial difficulties with this negotiation, the centrality of Audrey’s Black racial identity and her aligned commitment to anti-racist activism ultimately took precedence in her familial relationships, creating tension with her white mother.

Respondents in this study consistently conveyed opposition from non-Black family members regarding their embrace of blackness and anti-racist politics, both during and post-BSO

involvement. Thus, some Black multiracial respondents expressed employing distinct strategies to cope with and respond to intrafamilial racial conflicts and racism. To unpack these strategies, I introduce the concept *reflective resistance*, which I define as the negotiations and interventions Black multiracial respondents employ to confront and actively resist family members' colorblind and/or anti-black racism. Although familial racial socialization is traditionally concerned with parents racially socializing their children, I argue that through engagement in *reflective resistance*, Black multiracial young adults, with established and politicized Black racial identities, also racially socialize their parents and family members. Thus, *reflective resistance* emerges as an anti-racist strategy, which requires Black multiracial respondents to critically reflect on their own racial socialization, recognizing and responding to the racism perpetuated throughout their childhood and presently, and negotiate their Black identities within interracial families, often through confrontation, resistance, and intervention. Although contentious at times, engagement in *reflective resistance* forces interracial family members to critically reevaluate their racist beliefs and begin accepting and embracing their multiracial children's blackness. While some respondents interpreted these strategies as unsuccessful, I argue that engagement in *reflective resistance* demonstrates not only the impact that BSO involvement has on some respondents commitments to antiracist activism via their willingness to confront the racism of loved ones, but it also works to complicate the social power of whiteness within families.

For example, when detailing the impacts of her involvement within a Black women's empowerment organization, Sasha, who's Afro-Indo Guyanese and Afro-Dominican, explained:

“I also learned the tools to protect myself, so that meant when my mom made disparaging comments about how all my friends are black, I confronted her. When she talked to me about how I hadn't straightened my hair, or how I was getting too dark living in the south, why wasn't I wearing sunblock, I pushed against it. When my mom did those things, and my dad did nothing, I confronted him on his silence and complicity. When my sister did similar things or talked about how she was an elite bitch because she wasn't black.... I would push against her.”

Here, we see how BSO involvement provided Sasha the “tools” to engage in *reflective resistance*, characterized by her recognition of the ways antiblackness was being perpetuated within her family and her willingness to confront and “push against it.” Sasha not only calls attention to the explicit anti-black racism of her mother, but also confronts other family member’s unwillingness to intervene and their overall complicity. Regardless if Sasha’s family actually internalizes her employment of *reflective resistance*, her willingness to resist intrafamilial racism exhibits the amplification of collective consciousness and Black pride garnered through BSO involvement. Moreover, through engagement in *reflective resistance* Sasha’s family members are continually confronted with and forced to reevaluate the ways they, either explicitly or implicitly, contribute to the very systems of oppression negatively impacting their loved ones.

As opposed to other respondents in this study, both of Sasha’s parents identify as mixed-race, with each having one Black parent. Although I initially questioned her inclusion in this study, Sasha’s racially ambiguous physical appearance, multiracial identity claims, and multiethnic immigrant background presented a compelling case for her inclusion. Moreover, throughout her interview, Sasha detailed how her parents are differentially racialized in social

interactions due to having different multiracial backgrounds. When asked how her parents responded to her resistance and confrontations, Sasha emotionally revealed the ways she's had to rationalize their reluctance, conveying:

“I definitely think my consciousness around who I am and what I stand for politically, makes my parents very nervous for themselves, but also for me. My mom comes from a country that was incredibly conservative, my father comes from a country that enacts genocide on black bodies all the time, so when I've participated in protests, when I've been arrested for protesting or when I was detained by the airport, multiple times, my parents are panicked, they're like, keep your head down, don't make trouble because that's the only way they know how to survive... I think it hurts them that I align myself with an identity that only causes pain, in her eyes, I don't think that they see blackness as the beautiful gift that it is for me.”

Reflecting literature centered on the racial socialization practices enacted within immigrant families, Sasha's parent's antiblackness seemingly stems from pressures to assimilate and disassociate from blackness as a form of survival (Waring & Purkayastha 2017). Thus, Sasha interprets her family's reluctance to embrace and acknowledge her blackness to be a result of the violence they've both witnessed enacted on Black bodies in their countries of origin, leading them to perceive blackness as “an identity that only causes pain.” This rationalization has fueled Sasha's evocation of *reflective resistance* as she expressed hope that one day, they'll be able to see the “beauty of blackness.”

However, other respondents identified some levels of success in relation to their employment of *reflective resistance*, for example, when discussing the impacts of her consistent push back against her white mothers “racist criticisms” of her and her younger siblings, Nicole, explained:

“I don't think it hurt our relationship any, but I think it widened her perspectives on us [Nicole and her younger brother] and her role in our lives and the meaningfulness of race that she hadn't really considered.”

Nicole's employment of *reflective resistance* seemingly helped instill a level of racial literacy in her white mother by forcing her to acknowledge and understand her children's blackness, increasing her racial awareness. Other respondents exhibited engagement in *reflective resistance* through strategies of intervention, primarily within the context of their younger siblings. When asked if her involvement within a Black women's empowerment organization impacted her relationships with family members, Dakota remarked:

“With my little sisters, it changed primarily because that was around the time that the older of the two started to go to school and I just really started to focus on teaching them self-love and self-acceptance. Because even now, they're going to school in the same town that I grew up in, so I know exactly what they're going through, it's a little more diverse now, it's not as bad, but I still see them talking about not liking their hair and not liking their nose, wishing that they had straight hair and wishing that they were lighter, coloring themselves with the peach crayon instead of a light brown crayon, things like that. And that really hurts me because I went through it as well and I don't want that for them.”

The *racial re-socialization* experienced through Dakota's BSO involvement, allowed her to critically reflect on her own racial socialization in a rural, white conservative social environment. Through this critical reflection, Dakota expressed worries that her elementary school-aged multiracial sisters might encounter the same antiblackness and discrimination she did throughout her upbringing. As a result, Dakota engages in *reflective resistance* in order to intervene in her white mother's colorblind socialization practices, instead, attempting to racially socialize her

sisters to embrace and love their blackness. When asked to elaborate on the specific strategies she employs, Dakota explains:

“A lot of it comes from encouragement, positive affirmations. So, if their hairs down and curly and whatnot, saying things like, "Oh, wow, your hair looks great today, I really love your curly hair, it's beautiful." Or just talking about features that I have, I'll talk about how, in the summer, I'll get a tan and get darker and I'll be like "Yeah, I really love that, dark skin is beautiful." And try to throw that into conversations with them and hope that they internalize it.”

By intentionally celebrating her younger sisters more Afro-centric physical features, Dakota is utilizing the aspects of her BSO involvement that she noted as influential to her adoption of a Black racial identity, reapplying them as a form of *reflective resistance* within her family. In doing so, Dakota highlights how BSO involvement can not only affirm Black multiracial identities and allegiance but also provide Black multiracial respondents strategies to resist and challenge antiblackness within families.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

Scholars argue that engagement within Black student organizations, and involvement in social activism, can help affirm one's racial identity and eventual acceptance and immersion into a collective Black identity (Brooms 2019; Harper and Quayle 2007). Although research on Black student organizational involvement is traditionally premised on monoracial Black student experiences, this chapter highlights how BSO involvement similarly impacts Black multiracial students. In this chapter, I have put forth the concept of *reflective resistance*, and evidence of the

positive impacts of long-term Black student organizational involvement on the identities and experiences of Black multiracial college students. As a result of the *racial re-socialization* experienced while in BSOs, Black multiracial students developed more nuanced understandings of racial politics, blackness, and privilege, and thus, fostered more salient, politicized Black racial identities. Through the politicization of their Black racial identities, students expressed an entrenched, personal commitment to antiracist activism.

One way this commitment was carried out was through students' engagement in what I term *reflective resistance*, the negotiations and interventions Black multiracial respondents employed to combat and confront colorblind and/or anti-black racism within their families and intimate relationships. In so doing, students illustrate how long-term BSO involvement not only influences their understandings of race and identity, but also provides them the tools and language necessary to critically reflect and resist antiblack racism. Further, by engaging in *reflective resistance* multiracial students highlight how those same tools adopted from the *racial re-socialization* enacted within BSOs can be reapplied to *re-socialize* their family members, ultimately advancing collective antiracist activist efforts.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

*“Without community, there is no liberation...but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.” -Audre Lorde*

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Civil Rights and Black Power organizations successfully mobilized black multiracial individuals, largely looking to college students, in their fight for racial equality, promoting a strong sense of Black pride and racial unity. This mobilization proved to facilitate stronger and more salient Black racial identities for Black multiracial people, and an overall celebration of blackness. (Jones 2015; Khanna 2010; Root 2005). However, the proliferation of research related to multiracial college students’ identities and experiences reveal an opposite trend taking place today, with more and more Black multiracial students expressing feelings of racial invalidation and exclusion from Black student organizations and activist spaces (Museus et al. 2015; Renn 2000; Tate 2017). Given the significant rise in the number of individuals identifying with more than one race, the political leanings and affiliations of this racial group will become increasingly influential in shaping the course of U.S. racial politics. Thus, in this project, I explored the ways that broad cultural (mis)understandings of blackness, multiraciality, and racialization informed the involvement choices and experiences of Black multiracial college students involved in Black student organizations. From my data emerged consistent themes of racial socialization and racialization, both of which played instrumental

roles in every aspect of Black multiracial students BSO involvement: their motivations for involvement, involvement experiences, and the impacts of their involvement.

In chapter three, “Waking up to the World,” I unpacked how respondents’ racial socialization and racialized experiences, prior to and during college, played a significant role in their motivations for joining Black student organizations. For respondents who were raised by their Black parents and/or socialized within predominately Black social contexts, BSO involvement was natural as many of these participants shared a pre-existing comfort, attachment, and preference for Black social spaces. However, respondents who identified a more colorblind, whitewashed racial upbringing expressed their motivations for BSO involvement as being linked to their perpetual antiblack, negative racialized encounters/exposure while in college. For these respondents, the experience of entering a predominately white college initiated a period of the *lights coming on* to their previously colorblind understandings of the world, illuminating how the racial socialization of their non-Black parents blinded them to the realities of racial hierarchies and antiblack racism, leaving them unprepared to navigate the racialized climate of PWI campuses. In this way, BSOs facilitated a space to unlearn the colorblind socialization of their childhood and make sense of their negative, antiblack racialized experiences while in college. In contrast, some respondents shared how their experiences with antiblack racialization prior to college alongside a lack of Black community ties and familial support propelled their BSO involvement. Specifically, these respondents expressed coming into college with clear intentions of joining a BSO, perceiving BSOs to be spaces where they could learn, understand, and appreciate their blackness.

Continuing with this theme of racial socialization, in chapter four, “Navigating the Politics of Acceptance,” I highlighted the ways that involvement in BSOs compels Black multiracial students to engage in a process of *racial re-socialization*, where they must critically reflect and unlearn the colorblindness and/or antiblackness enabled throughout their childhood. Consistent with literature on multiracial college students (Renn 2000), some respondents detailed experiences confronting a *politics of acceptance* to their BSO inclusion, predicated on them being able to “look the part” and/or “act the part.” While respondents encountered instances of monoracism and racial essentialism within BSOs, typically due to their racial ambiguity, I highlighted how these encounters also work to maintain Black agency and empowerment within BSO spaces. Specifically, I argued that what is traditionally understood as a form of Black multiracial invalidation or authenticity politics, in many ways operates as a mechanism to call out multiracial or passing privilege. While I do not intend to delegitimize multiracial microaggressions, reinterpreting these instances of authenticity politics as checks to multiracial or passing privilege begs crucial questions as to what it means to have privilege within Black antiracist spaces, especially, when one is not often racialized as Black in everyday social interactions?

Additionally, in chapter four, I analyzed how some respondents explained their BSO experiences as affirming, validating, and nurturing. For these respondents, the peer pedagogies employed within BSOs, or the ways BSO members collectively taught each other about the realities of racial hierarchies via the disclosure of shared racialized experiences (Harper 2013), provided meaningful spaces that affirmed Black multiracial students’ racialized experiences and identities. While in many ways these peer pedagogies led respondents to develop more salient

Black racial identities, I revealed how they also work as a form of affective capital (Hordge-Freeman 2015). Specifically, through affirmations regarding multiracial students' "attractiveness," some respondents expressed receiving affective rewards that implicitly perpetuated antiblackness while reinforcing multiracial exceptionalism, primarily in relation to exoticized notions of multiracial beauty (Joseph 2013). These affective rewards ultimately bolstered Black multiracial women's levels of "confidence" and "self-esteem."

In chapter four, "Black, No Question Mark," the impacts of the *racial re-socialization* Black multiracial students experienced within BSOs was crystallized and made explicit. Specifically, just as scholars posit that Black student organizations positively influence monoracial Black students' acceptance and appreciation of blackness (Brooms 2019), so too did they influence Black multiracial student's embrace of blackness. Ultimately, respondents noted how the peer pedagogies employed by their monoracial Black peers within Black student organizations politicized their multiracial identities as they developed a heightened sense of Black racial consciousness and a commitment to anti-racist efforts. I introduced the concept *reflective resistance* to highlight how the tools garnered from the *racial re-socialization* enacted within BSOs were internalized by Black multiracial students and reapplied in order to *re-socialize* family members, demonstrating one's dedication to collective antiracist efforts. Thus, *reflective resistance* involved the negotiations and interventions Black multiracial respondents employed to resist and confront the antiblack and colorblind racism often perpetuated within their interracial families.

As the opening quote from Audre Lorde suggests, "without community there is no liberation." In many ways, this project stands as testimony of the self-affirming and subversive

power of Black student organizations, which provide Black students community and empowerment within the hegemonic, racist confines of predominantly white college campuses. Yet, this study also highlights Lorde's claim that "community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist," as exemplified by the acceptance and experiences of Black multiracial students depicted throughout this study.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

While I am not advocating for the erasure or denial of multiracial identities, these findings suggest that long-term involvement within Black student organizations positively influences the ways that Black multiracial students grapple with their racialized Black experiences, understand their racial identities, and mobilize around a collective Black experience. Research on multiracial identities perpetually advocates individual agency in multiracial individuals' abilities to racially self-identify; however, further work must be carried out to acknowledge and confront the institutional realities of anti-blackness. Future research would also benefit from a more holistic approach to Black multiracial involvement in Black student organizations. Specifically, scholars should examine multiracial experiences within Black student organizations alongside an analysis of the perceptions and experiences of monoracial Black student leaders and members within those organizations. Additionally, research should also explore the varied ways that anti-blackness manifests within other race-oriented student organizations, specifically non-Black student organizations. Moreover, as multiracial student organizations proliferate, scholars should explore the ways Multiracial student members differentially experience participation within these organizations, focusing on

their motivations for joining, if they hold simultaneous membership with other race-oriented organizations, and any resulting benefits from their participation.

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## **APPENDICES**

## *Appendix A: Interview Guide*

- Upbringing/Family
  - How would you describe your upbringing?
    - *Probes:*
      - *Where are you from? What was it like there? What were your neighborhoods like racially? What about the schools you went to?*
  - What are your relationships with family members like?
  - How do your family members racially identify you?
  
- Identity
  - How do you identify racially?
    - *Probes:*
      - *How did you racially identify as a kid? What about as a teen? How do you racially identify with your friends? What about with your family?*
  - How do you think others perceive/have perceived you based on your racial identity?
    - *Probes:*
      - *Do you believe that your physical appearance signals to others that you are biracial? Which ones?*
  - What racial categorization box(es) do you check on forms?
  
- Black Student Organizations
  - What motivated you to join the Black student organization you're involved in?
    - *Probes:*
      - *Peers? Class? Specific event on campus?*
  - Do you feel like there are certain expectations associated with being a member of a Black student organization? Can you tell me about that?
    - *Probes:*

*Appendix A (Continued)*

- *What are meetings like with this organization? What does it mean to “fit in”?*
- *What is the best aspect of being a member? Are there any negative aspects?*
- *Performativity? Music, food, language?*
- Have you ever witnessed racism on campus? If so, did it impact your involvement in any way? Could you explain...
- Can you describe any experiences you’ve had where you felt you were treated differently based on your physical appearance? Has this ever happened within a Black student organization?
  - *Have you ever felt like you were treated special compared to others within the organization? Have you ever felt you were marginalized within the organization? If so, why do you think?*
  - *Authenticity?*
  - *Colorism, Hair Politics, Exoticization?*
- Has your involvement in a Black student organization impacted how you understand your racial identity?
  - If so, how?
  - If no, what has been an outcome of your involvement in a Black student organization?
- What do you think about the development of organizations specifically for bi/multiracial students?
- Post College Impact
  - In what ways has your involvement within a Black student organization influenced your life/involvement post college?

*Appendix A (Continued)*

- General Information (if not already discussed)
  - Race, Age, Gender, Sexuality, Marital Status, Parentage (Racial Makeup of Parents)
  
- Reflexivity
  - Do you think the interview would have been different if I were a different race?
  - Are there any questions that you wish I would have asked?
  - Do you have anything else to share that I haven't asked about?
  - Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

*Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval*



**RESEARCH INTEGRITY & COMPLIANCE**  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd, MDC35, Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 FAX (813) 974-7091

July 30, 2019

Angelica Loblack  
Sociology  
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: **Exempt Certification**  
IRB#: Pro00040684  
Title: Racial Identity and Student Activism

Dear Ms. Loblack:

On 7/29/2019, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that your research meets criteria for exemption from the federal regulations as outlined by 45 CFR 46.104(d):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests(cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted as outlined in your application and consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report and with USF HRPP policies and procedures.

Please note, as per USF HRPP Policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in ARC. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant an Amendment or new application.

*Appendix B (Continued)*

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subjects research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristen Salomon", followed by a horizontal line.

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board