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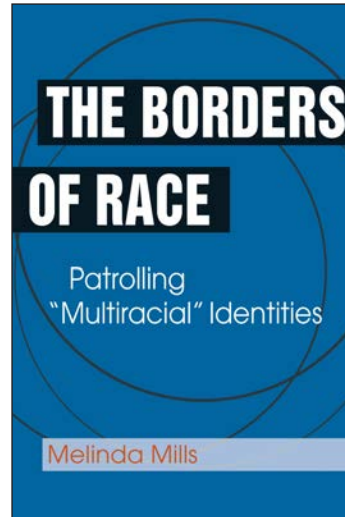
The Borders of Race:
Patrolling “Multiracial”
Identities

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
1 The Borders of Race	1
2 What Is “Multiracial”?	37
3 Managing Racial Identities in Public Spaces	65
4 Managing Racial Identities with Family and Friends	107
5 Internalizing Racial Identities	161
6 The Changing Geography and Demography of Race	205
7 The Shifting Mixture of Racial Identities	245
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>253</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>271</i>

1

The Borders of Race

Although she was born in a northern city in the U.S. into an interracial family, Bobbi, a black white multiracial woman, soon moved with her family to a European city. Growing up in a military family meant that she and her family moved around a lot, living in different cities and towns in the United States and Europe. Bobbi would later come to realize that these migrations were as much geographic moves as they were racial ones. Depending on the geographic location, Bobbi felt like she moved between racial categories, even though her racial composition stayed the same. Bobbi shared that she sensed her race shifted from one racial group to another, depending on where she was in a particular part of the country, and even in a particular part of a city. The social landscape and demographic of places and spaces shape the way people perceive Bobbi, and multiracial people like her. These perceptions are also based on how she looks, or appears to others. Except that Bobbi's appearance is what scholars call "racially ambiguous." Having a racially ambiguous appearance is not synonymous with multiracial identity, but many people with racially mixed heritage do identify as such (see Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001). The term, "racially ambiguous," suggests that the racial composition or heritage of the individual in question is difficult to determine. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that one's racial mixture is not always discernible to the naked eye. Thus, a person with a racially ambiguous appearance may look "clearly mixed" but is no more or less so than the majority of people in the nation's population. That is, a white person and a multiracial person may be more racially similar than not, despite phenotypic or physical appearances to the contrary.

According to F. James Davis (1991), much of the nation's population could claim a multiracial identity or at least acknowledge a multiracial heritage. However, the vast majority of people reject this racial reality, given the country's history of a sexually violent past. This

sexual violence remains a persistent stain on the nation, a perpetual embarrassment from which most people want to keep their distance. However, because of this sexual violence, racial groups as we now know them reflect this forced racial mixture. Increasingly, that racial mixture is now chosen, as are the many ways people who are multiracial choose to identify. Next, I will discuss what is multiracial and who is multiracial now. Then, I will discuss historical and contemporary mixture.

What is Multiracial? Who is Multiracial Now?

Like the 9 million people who checked two or more races on the U.S. Census form in 2010, or the 6 million who did so in 2000, when the choice first formally became available, Bobbi is multiracial in that she claims two or more races (see Jones and Bullock 2012; Jones and Smith 2001). She could be considered a part of what writer Danzy Senna (2004) dubbed, “the mullato millennium,” a moment in time literally and figuratively birthing multiracials. At some point during our interview conversation, Bobbi proudly beamed, “I’m always multiracial in social groups.” She reveled in the opportunity to embrace her racial sense of self and share that publicly with others. What exactly did Bobbi mean when she described herself in this way? In part, Bobbi is speaking to her public racial identity, or the identity that she asserts in public. This may or may not contrast with her private identity, or that which she asserts at home.

Bobbi’s way of being multiracial is both like and unlike the millions of people who identified as multiracial on the most recent Census form. Here’s how: Bobbi chooses “multiracial” as her preferred racial identity; a preferred racial identity means the identity a person prefers or chooses freely, rather than that which is imposed upon them, or s/he feel forced to choose. However, she also admits that she sometimes simplifies her life by choosing blackness, or “opting for black.” When Bobbi does this, she is often guided by a feeling that she is not being given the space, socially and/or formally, to acknowledge her racially mixed parentage. In social situations, this means that she often senses people’s reluctance to embrace or even accommodate her multiple races, or they explicitly refuse to allow her to choose. In formal circumstances, such as on surveys including the U.S. Census, the space now exists for people to identify the composite parts of their racial identity; however, this has not always been the case. Despite federal government mandates to create opportunities for people to identify as part of the multiple-race

population, many agencies and institutions lag behind in these efforts to provide forms allowing individuals to check all races that apply.

The Census refers to members of this population as the multiple-race population or the two or more races population. Bobbi's black and white parentage is typical for this population, with this particular combination being one of the most common (see Jones and Bullock 2012). More specifically, black men and white women partner with far greater frequency than black women and white men. Research indicates that the particular racial combinations of parents in interracial families shape the racial identities of multiracial children (see Stone 2009). Arguably, parents' racial identities, as well as their gender identities, impact how multiracial children learn to racially identify and arrive at their preferred racial self-identity.

But Bobbi is also multiracial in another way. This way is something I want to call "more than multiracial," for lack of a better term. Bobbi was born into a black and white interracial family that blended into a different kind of mixture when her father remarried her Asian stepmother. During our interview conversation, Bobbi explained to me that she knew she was multiracial because she has a white biological mother and a black biological father. In this way, she is like the almost 2 million individuals in the U.S. who reported this racial combination. According to a report on the two or more races population by Jones and Bullock (2012), the number of people reporting exactly two races, specifically white and black, increased considerably from 2000. This white and black population grew by over 1 million people, to 1.8 million, with this category growing the most in size in comparison to other multiple race groups.

Bobbi was less sure about how to account for the important role her stepmother plays in her life. What terms might describe her way of being multiracial that recognized the complexity of her biological and blended family's composition? How might Bobbi convey or account for the important social, ethnic, and cultural influences of her Asian stepmom? Perhaps Bobbi came looking for answers to those questions in our interview conversation together; while she searched for some answers to her own questions about race, identity, and family, she provided answers and insight to the questions I posed to her.

While Bobbi's experience is not altogether common, it is not exactly unique either. The U.S. Census data indicate considerable growth in the number of interracial households in the country. By 2010, interracial heterosexual marriages constituted about 10% of all households in America (see U.S. Census 2012). What is less clear is how many of those unions are blended ones, where the racial

composition of families has shifted as family members move in and out of these family structures.

Among interracial families that have not blended, individuals begin to understand one another racially. Speculatively, much the same can be said for interracial families that are blended structurally. Scholars including France Winddance Twine (2011) who have studied interracial families have found that members can form “honorary memberships” as a result of the sustained exposure to and meaningful intimacy with family members located in different racial groups. Following Twine, one could suggest, as I do in Chapter 6, that Bobbi, as well as her siblings, enjoy “honorary Asian” membership in their stepmother’s racial and ethnic group. That an increasing number of people identify as part of the multiple-race population also reflects another pattern: an increasing number of interracial unions.

As this shifting and restructuring of the family unit occurs, family members may endure or experience similar shifts in how they identify. This begins to explain why a black and white biracial woman like Bobbi would describe a close connection to her Asian stepmom, and feel that she is all three, not just black and white. In part, her feeling this way captures the contours of race, or the way that people can cross racial borders not solely their own, when they feel like they have respectfully become a part of those racial groups. That Bobbi feels multiracial in many different ways also illustrates both the social construction of race, and the porosity of racial categories.

Bobbi noted that she is often mistaken as her stepmother’s biological daughter; the two women do not make a distinction otherwise, so Bobbi could be seen as “passing” as Asian. That she slips into the racial and ethnic group of her stepmother shows how slippery racial locations are, and how easily being racially misread can be. Her entrance or slippage into another racial category also shows that her racial location is not fixed, or rather that there are no exact coordinates to locate a black and white multiracial person squarely in any one group. The racial rules of the past might work to place parameters around the choices that Bobbi makes. That is, the history of slavery and the practice of hypodescent largely dictated how people with any known black ancestry would have to identify (see Gallagher 2006). However, as more and more people ask themselves and others questions about race, the more these choices ostensibly open up. Or do they? I will revisit this momentarily.

Crossing Racial Borders

Along with all of the other individuals I interviewed for this book, Bobbi exemplifies an individual who crosses the borders of race. She does this by claiming a black white biracial or multiracial identity in public, as well as a singularly black identity formally (most of the time). If she had the words to describe her particular kind of mixture, including the aforementioned Filipina identity of her stepmom, Bobbi would acknowledge that dimension of her identity as well. Instead, when she has the “‘What are you?’ experience” (see Rockquemore 1998), Bobbi says “I always say ‘American.’...I tell them I am mixed with black and white.”

I begin with Bobbi’s example because she was one of the first people I interviewed who observed not only how she crossed racial borders, but how she discovered them as well. Sociologist Heather Dalmage (2000) describes this process of “discovering racial borders” in her book, *Tripping on the Color Line*. People typically discover racial borders when they cross them, as Bobbi noted here: “There are always people that come up to me and ask, ‘What are you?’ That was when I first moved here. That’s when I first kind of realized, ‘Okay, there’s definitely a difference and I kind of need to decide, I guess, which one (race) I’m gonna be.’” In my estimation, Bobbi’s realization relates to the borders of race and to the “geographies of race.” As she indicates, she discovers differences in the way people see her, and she notices that others’ perceptions of her shift, depending on the geographic location of the social interactions she has with strangers, school peers, or others. While the composition of her racial parentage does not change, her racial location, or the perception of that location, does. In Europe, in what she describes as a close-knit military family and community, race did not matter much. In contrast to the prevailing colorblind narratives that dominate discussions of race or the lack thereof, the tight-knit and strong ties formed in the military unit where she and her family lived for almost a decade in sum (with breaks in between), people may not have made much of any racial differences that they *did* notice. They did not deny these differences but also did not allow them to be divisive or counterproductive to the operations of military life.

In particular, her arrival to the American South signaled a difference, to her and to others. More and more people conveyed to her the idea that they knew that she was not “just black,” with some even thinking she is Asian like her stepmom. This “like mother, like daughter” effect hints at the racial logic that can occasionally buffer multiracial people like Bobbi from racial border patrolling. When people

do encounter this racial border patrolling, they often note that it can surface in the form of curious looks or glances, to what Amy Steinbugler (2012) calls, “visual dislocation.” This dislocation happens when members of interracial families do not “sufficiently” resemble one another or when strangers fail to recognize their familial ties given the racially disparate or different appearances of the family members.

Bobbi moves more easily through situations where she accompanies her stepmom because of her “Asian by proxy” identity and aforementioned honorary Asian membership. The two are seen as sharing the requisite racial resemblance or look convincingly like one another to avoid eliciting any contestations or much suspicion. Bobbi unintentionally yet effectively “passes as Asian,” blending the borders of her own multiracial parentage and blending into an altogether different racial category, as race and family blend together. Because of their family’s racial composition and their own ostensibly ambiguous appearance, Bobbi and her siblings often negotiate the borders of race. Based on her accounts, strangers ask Bobbi questions about her racial identity. They are seeking to clarify her racial location or where she resides in the racial scheme of things. Strangers may not know that Bobbi, like so many other multiracial people, inhabits an interstitial space between races. This book details these and other experiences among multiracial individuals who have learned to navigate the borders of race.

Shifting Categories of Race and Studying the Shifting Nature of Race

Every decade, the Office of Management and Budget administers a survey in an attempt to enumerate the national population. Since its inception, the US Census form has changed in one way or another. These changes illustrate the social construction of race. They speak to changes in the social landscape, the changing face of the population, and people’s racial literacy and consciousness. These changes reflect the shifting nature of race. If race were static, the categories introduced in that first survey would have stayed exactly the same over the course of time. That they have been modified and updated shows how race changes, sometimes in name, and in other ways.

The survey administered by the U.S. Census in 2000 was the first formal opportunity for any individuals completing the form to check all races that apply, or officially choose “two or more races,” as desired. This opportunity partially stemmed from the collective efforts of advocates and activists who converged in the form of the Multiracial

Movement; the success of the movement culminating in the expansive racial identification options (see Dalmage 2004a) provided on the 2000 Census survey. These increased choices allowed people to formally identify as multiracial where applicable, and generally to decide how to racially represent themselves and members of their household.

The 2000 survey presented people with six race categories: White, Black, African American, or Negro, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, or Some Other Race. The data survey initially revealed that almost 7 million people reported two or more races, although a report by Jones and Bullock (2012) offer a correction in response to a population overestimate; a more accurate picture of the two or more races population puts the number closer to 6 million people.

The changes to the Census, and the broader efforts of the Multiracial Movement, partially prompted my interest in the multiracial population and inspired my formal investigation of the topic of multiracial identity. I turned to the Census to get a better sense of the national population. Comparing data across decades provides a “then and now” sense of the multiracial population. Then, population estimates speculated that 7 million people would check two or more races. Due to overestimates, however, the actual number of people in what the Census refers to as the multiple-race or “two or more races” population was closer to 6 million. Now, a decade later, that number has grown to 9.0 million people (see Jones and Bullock 2012). Most people reporting more than one race reported exactly two races, as reflected in the data and presented in the 2010 Census Briefs (Jones and Bullock 2012).

The Census observed an 87 percent change between 2000 and 2010, with 1.6 million people claiming a white and Asian racial combination. Almost 2 million people, or 1.7 million, reported white and some other race, and 1.4 million people reported white and American Indian and Alaska Native combinations (see Jones and Bullock 2012). Since the number of individuals reporting more than one race escalated in the decade between the 2000 and 2010 surveys, the 2010 enumeration of the multiracial population reflects the prevailing pattern of the 2000 survey, but to a larger degree. In both Census surveys, these four groups have the largest number of people reporting those particular racial combinations. Cultivating a curiosity for anyone who reflected any of the 57 racial combinations made possible in the Census survey, I maintained a broader focus than the top four multiple-race groups.

By 2010, the contemporary multiracial population had changed by 32%, not adjusting for the data error in overstatement of the percentage of people in the 2000 “two or more races” population. In the 2010 U.S.

Census, people were prompted to “mark one or more boxes” in response to Question 6, which asks: “What is this person’s race?” The racial categorical options include the following: White; Black, African American, or Negro; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Other Asian, Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, or Other Pacific Islander; or Some Other Race. Of the 9.0 million people who constitute this population, about 92% of them formally reported exactly two races (see the Census Briefs 2012:4).

Despite the initial overestimation in this portion of the population, the changes in the 2000 Census did something interesting. By allowing people to choose more than one race, this Census made multiracial people appear from behind the veil of singularity that imposed itself on the “two or more races population” in previous surveys. In their daily lives, they could share their racial multiplicity, as desired, but formally, this option had been denied until the 2000 Census. This explains why the survey presents the “two or more races” population as incipient and emergent, thereby effectively reinventing multiracial people as “something new,” rather than as an always already existing portion of the population (Morning 2000; Rockquemore 1998; Williamson 1980; Turner 2013). Thus, categorical comparisons then, between 1990 and 2000, of the multiracial population prove cumbersome, as people of “some other race” were hiding in plain sight—their racial mixture concealed within single race options. Providing people with the opportunity to formally claim or recognize racial mixture drew attention to members of this population. Some of the attention remains oppositional, as people acknowledge and debate this ostensible “first generation” of multiracial people (Daniel 2002).¹

In effect, the option to choose two or more races was a victory celebrated and applauded by members of the Multiracial Movement, and beyond, who supported this idea and its coming into fruition (see Dalmage 2004a). One ostensible downside to the option to identify as two or more races was the absence of a “comparison other” or a preexisting reference point. That is, there was no U.S. Census data collection on the multiple-race population prior to 2000. In its absence, multiracial people appeared to emerge from the Census 2000 as if entirely new members of the population. This is not the case. Instead, it is a hiccup in how racial data was collected; this hiccup proved a small interruption to the otherwise celebrated victory of being able to choose more than one race. Because individuals were not given the opportunity to choose two or more races in the 1990 survey, they were effectively blending into the single race categories and/or choosing them as their

preferred racial identity anyway. Statistically, the survey disappeared those multiracial people who would have wanted to claim two or more races in any applicable surveys prior to 2000. Those who choose to identify as a single race, but might otherwise have preferred to check all that apply, effectively (re)appeared in the data as multiracial in 2000.

Any multiracial people claiming a single race would continue to show up as such from survey to survey. However, given the racial identity options possible, multiracial people may consistently choose the same singular racial identity, or shift from one racial group to any others that constitute their racially mixed background. (This shifting should not be seen as whimsical or arbitrary, but rather should be understood as one reason why studying race is complicated.) In either case, opting for a singular racial identity (either the same at every turn, or different singular racial identities across time and space) would technically disappear them from the multiple-race population. That is, if they claim membership in a single racial group, they would show up as belonging to that which they indicated. They would not be counted as a member of the multiple-race population. Making this move effectively erases any mixture they could otherwise claim. This is why it is hard to close the gap between the 1990 and 2000 Census surveys, and/or that of 2010 even, because race and racial identity are not static. Some multiracial people may always, sometimes, seldom, or never choose to racially identify a certain way. These options, this flexibility, explain why studying shifting mixture is messy and fraught with nuances and contingencies. These qualities of race underscore the importance of this study.

The changing nature of race makes measuring race challenging at best. That multiracial people may assert a multidimensional identity that changes over time and place, or a singular racial identity, or some combination thereof means that they have a lot to consider in how they assert their racial identities. It is important to value and explore the experiences of multiracial people, to more fully grasp some of the slipperiness of race, and their ways of managing the borders of race. This may be particularly so for multiracial individuals who choose a wide variety of racial identity options, their identity alternately between the different racial groups of their parentage and/or heritage, or some combination thereof, or something altogether different.

As my opening example of Bobbi illustrates, multiracial identity reflects the racial parentage and heritage of multiracial individuals, but little research has yet to more fully address the influence of family members who blend into interracial families. All of these social forces rearrange the structure of families and change the face of families that

are interracial and multiracial in many different ways. These changes capture the shifting nature of race, as well as any shifting mixture that exists in individuals and that individuals experience as members of these families. As families blend structurally and racially, multiracial individuals may opt for different racial identities, to acknowledge and respect the role of new family members woven into their existing family units.

The possibility exists, in a postmodern society, for anyone to enjoy the fluidity and flexibility of racial subjectivities. Across time, place, and space, multiracial people may assert or express their racial selves differently, depending on a variety of push and pull factors (see Rockquemore and Brunson 2002). The increase in the number of people reporting more than one race partially constitutes this multiracial population. Because many people with racially mixed parentage and heritage continue to claim singular races, they ostensibly “disappear” themselves or potentially veil their racial mixture (see Somerville 2000). I discuss this in terms of “invisible mixture,” a problem that complicates recognizing who counts as multiracial (see also Lewis 2006). From the standpoint of a researcher trying to identify multiracial people for a study, I found both shifting and in/visible mixture made identifying racially mixed people a challenge of this study. I address some of these dynamics and the research design in the chapter that follows. Next, I describe some of the important foundation work on racial identity formation, as it helps explain the many dimensions of multiracial identity and the many racial identity options that exist; this work complements my discussion of the difficulties of studying shifting mixture.

Shifting mixture captures any fluidity or flexibility in a multiracial person’s preferred racial identity expression. Shifting mixture complicates the way we understand race. It troubles a racial classification system that historically necessitated multiracial people to fit into “one-and-only-one” racial category. Much of my work is centered on this concept of shifting mixture, a concept I use to describe the fluid and flexible nature of race. Shifting mixture gets expressed by multiracial people in any multitude of ways, including when they formally indicate one race at one moment in time, and then another or other races at other moments; or choose a single race at one moment or claim all of the composite parts of their heritage. Shifting mixture reflects racial fluidity as opposed to a static position within a racial group. Shifting mixture underscores the extent to which people cross racial borders, or find racial borders crossing them.

In general, surveys cannot capture shifting mixture or the very racial fluidity and liminality I described above. Nor can they capture the growing number of identity options that many multiracial people choose to assert in their lived experiences. Based on research by Kerry Ann Rockquemore and David Brunsma (2002), people with racially mixed parentage and heritage express a number of racial identity options. They may opt for any and/or all of the following: singular, border (validated and invalidated), blended, protean, and transcendent. These identity options respectively speak to multiracial people choosing to identify as members of a single racial group; claiming their two or more races, and having that choice affirmed and validated, or contested and invalidated; claiming the sum of their parts; synthesizing these parts into a whole rather than fragmented or fractional identity (i.e., “half and half”); and opting not to claim a racial identity. The border identity can locate multiracial people in the “borderlands,” or that liminal space across the color line, a term which feminist mixed race and heritage woman of color Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) introduced in her work. Some multiracial people who assert a border identity describe themselves using terms such as “biracial,” “multiracial,” or “mixed.” When biracial people assert a border identity that others support and affirm, that marks a validated identity; when others reject or contest that identity, they invalidate, sometimes with expressions such as, “Well, I don’t think of you as biracial.” (see Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002).

Alternately, multiracial people can assert a protean identity, in which they claim any and all of the races that constitute their racial heritage, or they might choose a transcendent identity, eschewing race by regarding it as irrelevant to their (racial) identity. The latter allows them to maintain a raceless identity, by refusing to choose, or otherwise opting not to racially identify with any of the socially constructed and available categories. Many people do not know that these racial identity options exist, including some multiracial people. These identity options are not mutually exclusive and can be incorporated into a blended identity, in which the multiracial person may have a tendency to emphasize one race but not necessarily at the exclusive of any others in her background. Throughout this work, I explore how people of various racial combinations work to assert their multiracial parentage and to consider what informs their racial identity choices.

Shifting mixture emphasizes the potential protean identities that many multiracial people assert. The word, “protean,” speaks to diversity, versatility and fluidity. According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (2016), the term denotes an ability to “change into many different forms” or “do many different things.” Rockquemore and Brunsma

(2002) introduced the term, protean identity, to capture this changeability in multiracial people's racial identity. The term also reflects the racial composition of a person's parentage. Among members of the "two or more races" population, that might mean that someone who is Asian and white chooses to assert multiracial, White, and/or Asian identities, or someone Black and American Indian or Native American opting for biracial, Black, and/or Native American racial identities.

Books by Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) and Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) detail these multiracial identity options in greater detail. Their work, and that of many others, pushes the collective and current understanding of the complexity and dimensionality of multiracial identity (see Khanna 2011). Their work illustrates the variations made possible in a racially mixed person's heritage, with the options to choose any and all of the above, some of the above, and/or none of the above. These pioneering works created a pathway for understanding shifting mixture and the many different ways that multiracial people might move (or be moved) in and out of racial categories in a racially divisive society. The term, shifting mixture, then also speaks to these migrations and movement of multiracial people which are often voluntary and intentional, but can also be involuntary or imposed from the outside.

Understanding The Borders of Race: Racial Mixture within the Racial Hierarchy

Given the current racial hierarchy that cleaves the national population into three broad categories of whites, honorary whites, and collective blacks, multiracial people can cross color lines in intentional and accidental ways. Feeling that they primarily identify with one part of their parentage, some multiracial people choose a singular racial identity; increasing evidence indicates that more and more people who are multiracial (white and some other race besides black) are "opting for white" (see Rockquemore and Arend 2002). Some scholars argue that darker skinned or black multiracials experience a more limited range of options or less freedom to choose (see Chang 2015; Gallagher 2004).

Consider the research of Charles Gallagher (2004). In his article, "Racial Redistricting: Expanding the Boundaries of Whiteness," Gallagher provides evidence of the white racial category expanding to incorporate white multiracial people, with the exception of white black biracial people. He found that parents of multiracial children were likely to choose a white identification for their children, unless they were black

multiracial children. This occurs because multiracial people—of racial combinations including white and some other race/s (except black)—are seen as culturally, socially, and economically similar to white people. The selective inclusion of white multiracial people into categorical whiteness enables them to enjoy white privilege and to opt for white or at least make claims to whiteness without facing contestation from others (see McIntosh 1998). Their inclusion contrasts with the general exclusion of white black biracial people, or multiracial people with any known black ancestry, who are largely denied similar opportunities for inclusion in the white category. Their exclusion typically occurs as a result of a persistent anti-black racism observable in society and well documented in the social scientific literature.

Much of the literature to date provides evidence to suggest that Asian and Latino multiracials enjoy more freedom to choose their preferred racial identity, in comparison to black multiracials (see Gallagher 2004; Lee and Bean 2007; Xie and Goyette 1997). Constraining the choice of black multiracials (Lee and Bean 2007) denies them the same range of racial identity options otherwise available and accessible to multiracial people of racial combinations “beyond black.” For multiracial people with any known black ancestry, these choices show up more as constraints, a dynamic that reflects racial inequality and a persistent antiblackness in this country. George Yancey (2003) makes this point in his book, *Who is White?* He addresses the persistent black/nonblack divide in American society. Glenn Loury (2002) reiterates this point, focusing on the devaluation and stigmatization of blackness that remains.

The research of Lee and Bean (2007) echoes Gallagher’s findings, indicating that Asian and Latino multiracials increasingly opt for white as well. They may also symbolically claim their ethnic heritage but do so in ways that contrast with black multiracials. Lee and Bean (2007:19) posit:

Experiences with multiraciality among Latinos and Asians are closer to those of whites than to blacks. Furthermore, that racial and ethnic affiliations and identities are much less matters of choice for multiracial blacks indicate that black remains a significant racial category.... The findings thus suggest that a black-nonblack divide is taking shape, in which Asians and Latinos are not only closer to whites than blacks are to whites, but also closer to whites than to blacks at this point in time.... In essence, rather than erasing racial boundaries, the country may simply be reinventing a color line that continues to separate blacks from other racial/ethnic groups.

While I agree with Lee and Bean's assertion that the shifting color line continues to deny black multiracials the same range of racial identity options, I would also argue that the presence of multiple color lines means that black multiracials are increasingly mixed with more than white. They may not opt for white if their racial parentage combines blackness and nonwhiteness. The U.S. Census data clearly indicates that the numbers of multiracial people will likely continue to increase (see U.S. Census 2010). Given that data set, it is also likely that the particular combinations of multiracial people will continue to diversify, such that even more color lines emerge or that the existing color lines will prove harder to maintain.

Despite the potential blurring of racial borders and the dissolving of color lines, the racial hierarchy persists as people maintain their place in society, in part by maintaining the logic of race. Why does the aforementioned racial inclusion and exclusion happen? Why does it matter? Based on the current racial hierarchy, one's racial location positions them closer to or further away from access to various resources (Bonilla-Silva 2003a, b; Gallagher 2006, 2004). For people who approximate whiteness, their social location is closer to whites and they enjoy privileges accordingly. For darker-skinned multiracials and people of colors (a term I borrow from Reanae McNeal in Keating 2013), their social location is typically much further away from whiteness and its attendant privileges. For multiracial people, negotiating racial identity likely involves the negotiation of this social location and the proximity to racial privilege. This negotiation may not be consciously or publicly acknowledged in a society that encourages colorblindness precisely to protect this system of inequality. Some scholars argue that even the category "multiracial" serves as a strategy of keeping white racial privilege intact, reserving it for those putatively deserving individuals (whites and honorary whites), and denying it to those people (collective blacks) who are not (Bonilla-Silva 2003a).

Many of the accounts of multiracial people reveal that their racial fluidity and multiplicity make them aware of where they belong and where they do not. For white-looking multiracial people with invisible mixture, they arguably "enjoy" many of the white privileges afforded people who, as Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) puts it, believe themselves to be white. As Peggy McIntosh (1998) describes, these privileges accrue and allow white(-looking) people to move through life without much resistance from others. They do not encounter the weight of oppression or become targets of racial discrimination in ways that so many darker-skinned people do (see Almaguer 2008; Ferber 1998). Conversely, for darker-skinned multiracial people, they are denied any privilege that

knowledge of their familial claims to other categories (white or honorary white) might otherwise generate. They are not bestowed with the same racial privileges as their multiracial counterparts with whiter or lighter skin color. Instead, they likely inherit the social, economic, and political disadvantages attached to collective blackness, as constructed in a society fractured by race and structured by racism. These disadvantages reflect how much racism is internalized by everyone and maintained through this racial sorting mechanism and the overall racial organization of society.

Navigating the Borders of Race and Clarifying Multiracial Borders

Historically, the color line has divided the national population into two racial groups: whites and blacks. This racial binary attempts to reign in the racial variation observed in the population; the binary negates this racial variation by funneling people primarily into two-and-only-two categories. Nevertheless, this color line has persisted, in part because of anti-black racism whereby society was structured to create a different quality of life for blacks than whites.

Within the past decade or so, scholars have begun to contend that the white/black binary no longer (or ever did) sufficiently characterizes the national population. They argue that the color line continues to evolve, so much so that it has developed into multiple color lines. According to Jennifer Lee and Frank Bean (2007), these multiple color lines have emerged to form new racial hierarchies. This explains why people are often categorized into three broad categories introduced by sociologist Eduardo Bonilla Silva (2003a,b): “whites,” “honorary whites,” and “collective blacks.” These three categories point to the problem (or limitations) of the previous color line, as they hint at a new racial hierarchy emergent at the start of the 21st century.

Lee and Bean (2007:3) contend, “If the problem of the 20th century was the color line, the question of the 21st century could be one of multiple color *lines*” (italics theirs). This question, “Are multiple color lines emerging?,” invites consideration of how multiracial people brighten or blend racial lines through their racial identity choices. Brightening racial lines is a way of clarifying race or amplifying the divisions between groups socially constructed and perceived as different. Blending racial lines speaks to the way many multiracial people inhabit interstitial spaces between racial groups while also moving to the center of the racial groups of their parentage and heritage.

This movement within and between racial groups blurs racial boundaries.

Increasingly, some multiracial people permeate racial lines or boundaries not their own; they have an appearance that approximates any number of racial and ethnic groups and their ambiguity allows them to effectively take advantage of the porous nature of racial borders and float into racial groups that are outside of their known parentage or heritage without much resistance or contestation. This movement, however, can also reveal how rigid racial borders can be, for example, when multiracial people are blocked or impeded from entry or membership into certain racial groups. These rigid racial lines may be inflexible to them based on their known racial composition or their phenotypic (physical) appearance. That racial lines can be either rigid and inflexible or porous and permeable speaks to the shifting nature of race. These characteristics of racial lines also highlight the ways in which people protect or defend them, a point I will return to momentarily.

Lee and Bean (2007:3) argue, “Multiracial identification thus provides an important analytical lens through which to gauge the placement, strength and shifts of America’s color line.” Their research shows that racial categories curiously expand and contract depending upon the individuals being considered for inclusion or exclusion. The expansion and contraction of racial categories occurs in part to ensure that certain racial groups maintain their positions of power, privilege, and dominance (whites), while others (honorary whites) who approximate whiteness enjoy some, but not all, of the advantages of whiteness; while others still (those considered to be part of the collective black category) are generally denied a good quality of life and much of the resources, privileges, and power of the dominant racial group. The scholarship on the current racial hierarchy speaks to this point, as does much of the literature on racial inequalities.

The matter of inclusion and exclusion factor in to this discussion of the expansion and contraction of racial groups because some scholarship suggests that members of racial groups previously excluded from full membership or citizenship in this country, now arguably enjoy greater rates of inclusion and enjoyment of racial privileges because of their closer position to the dominant group. This largely explains why, for example, many people consider Asians (especially some of their larger ethnic groups in the U.S., including Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos) to be “honorary whites.”

Use of the term “honorary white” to describe the racial location of Asians remains a dubious distinction that is not without contestation, as

scholars, including Anthony Ocampo (2016) and Brenda Gambol (2016), demonstrate. In their respective work, they contend that Filipinos inhabit a more complicated racial location, one that is not always already “honorary white” or closer to whiteness than blackness or any other race. I mention their work here as it also relates to my above example of Bobbi and her interracial family that is white and black by her parentage and Asian by remarriage. These scholars invite us to consider the close connections and feelings of racial solidarity and kinship between Filipinos and racial and ethnic minority groups, including blacks and Latinos, in the U.S.

Ocampo’s discussion of Filipinos as the “Latinos of Asia” alongside Gambol’s discussion of Filipinos as “honorary blacks” invites readers to consider the multiple color lines that people cross in their daily lives. Crossing color lines can be both celebrated and contested. These color lines can be blurred such that people considered “outsiders” to certain racial groups can still experience a sense of belonging somewhere rather than nowhere (see Deters 1997); color lines can also be “brightened,” such that the socially constructed distinctions between racial groups become more apparent. Their scholarship challenges some of these distinctions and the taken-for-granted nature of race and ethnicity; such research also reveals some of the complexities within categories previously perceived as simpler or more cohesive.

The work of Ocampo, Gambol, Deters, and others shows that racial and ethnic categories can sometimes fail to adequately capture these complexities or the connections people form within a racial hierarchy and across racial and ethnic groups. That a Filipina may consider herself both Asian *and* Latina speaks to these increasingly changing color lines, or existing color lines that have always already been blurred. A Filipina who describes feeling like she has more in common with black people in this country (and therefore embraces her “honorary black” membership) is asserting an identity similar to a black white biracial woman like Bobbi (who embraces her “honorary Asian” membership as she makes claims to her Filipina stepmother’s familial influence on her identity).

Much of the recent and emergent scholarship provides evidence that racial categories constructed as singular have the residue of racial mixture. This research reminds us that racial groups expand and contract, contingent upon which individuals want entry into them. It partially explains why both whiteness and blackness expand as racial categories, the former opening up for those considered desirable and deserving, the latter broadly inclusive of those largely rejected or excluded from categorical whiteness.

I will note here that other scholars continue to demonstrate how blackness is broadly defined. Take sociologist Nikki Khanna (2011:155) who notes, “Multiraciality is nothing new in the African American community, and for many black Americans it may seem senseless to begin now differentiating biracial people from blacks (since many so-called blacks are actually multiracial).” Similar understandings of other single race categories as always already mixed (much like the black category) fail to exist. Blackness seems to envelop or incorporate mixture into its folds, while other racial categories maintain illusions of purity, particularly whiteness. Curiously, there is a greater specificity with which we understand who is white, Asian, Latino, and Native American, and yet, blackness remains a seemingly more inclusive category, even as black people remain the most excluded from social opportunities, access to privilege and power, and a good quality of life in society.

Why is “black” such an expansive category while the other racial groups remain ostensibly more exclusive and closely guarded? Consider the “one drop rule.” This specific mechanism was introduced to ensure that the black slave population maintained its size. The “one drop rule,” or hypodescent, pressures people with any known blackness to claim a black identity (Davis 1991; Gallagher 2006; Khanna 2010; and Lee and Bean 2007), while allowing people with ancestry from other racial and ethnic groups, such as Asian and Latino heritage, to choose from a wider range of options.

The construction and perception of white purity and black contamination guides much of the felt inclusion and exclusion in society. The “problem” with the persistence of even multiple color lines is in their failure to adequately capture these complexities and ostensible contradictions, as well as the racial migrations within and across racial locations or lines. Multiple color lines neglect or deny people multiple places at once; typically, people’s racial location is envisioned as a coordinate, or a dot on a map, not an intersectional point converging or moving along multiple lines, across time and space.

Let’s return to Ocampo’s work for a moment, as his focus on Filipinos introduces interesting questions about the racial location of this ethnic group and challenges or complicates current conceptualizations of Asians and/or Latinos as members of seemingly separate groups. In turning the title of Ocampo’s book, *The Latinos of Asia*, into a question, readers can consider the multiple locations that people inhabit and the many racial migrations or moves that multiracial and multiethnic people make. These migrations reflect multiracial people in motion, sometimes literally moving from one country to another or one region of this

country to another, and sometimes figuratively moving between racial categories socially constructed as discrete or distinct, innately different from one another. These distinctions falter when we consider anthropological evidence of humans sharing more genetic similarities than differences even amidst what appears to be quite visible racial human variation (see Bliss 2012).

That Ocampo and others open up the space for these discussions of racial and ethnic multiplicity, racial migrations and translations, and the fluidity and ambiguity of identity acknowledges how society can and does open up space for people to embrace these multiple racial locations for themselves and others (see also Roth 2012; Hochschild 2014). My work attempts to accomplish this goal as well, while acknowledging that the same hierarchy that sorts people into their respective racial locations also imposes different kinds of constraints on multiracial individuals depending on their racial composition.

Revisiting Race

Lee and Bean (2007), among others, speculate that within the next three decades, 1 in 5 people in the U.S. will identify as multiracial (see also Farley 2001; Smith and Edmonston 1997). This contention raises a number of issues. The first issue that arises is that this rising population data makes the multiracial population appear amplified or suddenly birthed into our national population, when it has existed from the nation's very foundation. This amplification occurs in part because of the changes in race reporting in the Census survey. Prior to 2000, people could not formally choose more than one race. In the 2000 Census, for the first time, people were allowed to choose more than one race, or all that applied. And, nearly 6 million people did so. Because many of those people lived during the 1990 Census, and therefore only checked one race, in many ways, the US Census (2000) metaphorically birthed the "two or more races" population, making them appear rather instantaneously, as opposed to people always already in existence.

Another issue with the above claim about population estimates of multiracial people relates to terminology. Not everyone employs the existing terminology about race in the same way. Instead, given variations or differences in people's racial consciousness and racial literacy, people attach different meanings to racial terminology. Furthermore, as I discussed earlier, not all people with racially mixed parentage or heritage call themselves multiracial. They opt for a variety of names to refer to their racial multiplicity, sometimes simply by preferring to name their racial identity in singular terms. People should

have the space to claim their preferred racial identity, or use their own terms (of race) on their own terms, as a matter of agency or expressed choice, free of societal constraint. Social scientist researchers need more nuanced ways of exploring and measuring multiracial identity (a topic I turn to more centrally in Chapter 2).

As Rockquemore (2005:18) posits, “[m]ost people do not have the cognitive schema for ‘biracial.’” Instead, people often make that term (“biracial”) or “multiracial” synonymous with or equivalent to “mixed with white.” Interpreting these terms in such limited ways reveals patterns in the way people are thought to think about race, and encouraged to both center whiteness and perpetuate the invisibility of whiteness at the same time. While it is important to acknowledge members of the “two or more races” population who are mixed with white, it is equally important not to ignore or erase other types of mixture, particularly that which *excludes* whiteness.

Making the term “multiracial” always already equivalent to “white and some other race(s)” centers whiteness at the core of multiracial identities, rather than simply a possible part of them. In some ways, whiteness becomes synecdoche, where the part becomes the whole, or “multiracial” becomes metonymy for presumed whiteness (see Dawkins 2012). In either case, this association of multiracial identity with some whiteness creates a hegemonic kind of mixture, proving troublesome in its erasure of mixtures that do not involve whiteness (see Gambol 2016). Associating mixture with whiteness ignores or makes invisible or illegible other racial combinations and mixtures. This association potentially intensifies what is always already “invisible mixture,” in that multiracial people of “two or more races,” but none of which is white, may not be seen or recognized as “multiracial.”

To my mind, many race scholars have made similar moves, working to acknowledge mixture, but in so doing have basically erased its existence prior to the 2000 Census. This erasure also occurs, casually and informally, in social situations where multiracial people’s preferred racial identities are illegible or invalidated. Take, for example, the work of George Yancey (2003). In his discussions about “thin” and “thick” racial identities and interracial relationships, he neglects to fully consider that some people might already assert a multiracial identity. In other words, if multiracial people have felt denied the choice to assert and embrace their racial multiplicity, they may likely be hiding in plain sight. They are not necessarily “passing” as a member of a singular racial group but researchers may read them as such, or through a singular racial frame. In these cases, multiracial people remain “clearly invisible” (Dawkins 2012), rather than what I call “clearly mixed.”

In part, this practice of presuming racial singularity in people who do not look “clearly mixed” reinforces racial categories as racially singular, cohesive, and homogeneous; the same presumption often occurs with ethnicity as well, with the presumption suggestive of a purity in ethnic categories. This move also ignores the fact that prior to the 2000 Census multiracial people were sorted into (and formally sorted themselves into) singular categories. However, we cannot be clear whether they did so for enumeration purposes only (asserting a formal identity different than their instrumental one) because of an absence of choices (being able to “check all that apply”), or because they intentionally chose to locate themselves in a single racial location or category.

To that end, consider the example of multiracial people who could be said to embody what I call “invisible mixture.” These are individuals who do not look “clearly mixed,” but based on physical appearance alone appear to belong to one-and-only-one racial category. This appearance, or its logic, can be contested but for purposes of this example, I will continue. For any multiracial people with invisible mixture, and based on research by F. James Davis, this could likely be about 80–90% of the population, they likely fall into the racial group in which they look like they belong. This way of sorting people out reflects the logic of what Eduardo Bonilla Silva (2003a,b) and Edward Telles (2014) call a “pigmentocracy.” This term calls out the patterns of racial discrimination reflected in preferential treatment of whites and the persistent devaluation of black lives, or colorism, despite claims to the contrary.

Based on racial hierarchical practices in this country, people who identify with any of the many racial group options presented in the U.S. Census are distilled into one of these three groups, regardless of how many boxes are checked. Herbert Gans and others suggest that multiracial people may float between categories contingent on a variety of factors. Bonilla Silva (2003a,b) would argue that skin color most heavily informs where multiracial people get sorted, such that a white-looking multiracial person would enjoy residence in the white or honorary categories, while a darker-skinned multiracial would likely reside in the collective black category.

What complicates many people’s lack of such a cognitive schema is twofold: 1) multiracial people both fit and do not fit into singular race categories; and, 2) society seems unable to understand that someone who looks “clearly mixed” may or may not identify that way (as mixed or multiracial). That is, “multiraciality” is not always legible or visible to everyone, or at all times, nor is it always claimed. For people with

racial ambiguity, they may also appear “clearly ambiguous,” which may make racially categorizing them more difficult to some.

Looking clearly ambiguous or having an appearance incongruent with one’s identity creates a dilemma for those who rely on phenotype, or physical appearance, to decipher/determine race. In this society, people expect continuity or congruence between individuals’ appearances, and their asserted identities (see Buchanan and Acevedo 2004). For example, when Rockquemore (2005) writes that she is “black by self-definition, white by phenotype, and biracial by parentage” (2005:17), she is highlighting how her appearance proves ambiguous enough to be read racially different by different groups, in different contexts, for different reasons. In part, she argues, and I would agree, that people in the U.S. are quite ill-equipped and unwilling to deal with this racial ambiguity, as expressed by the generalized anxiety with ambiguity we observe regarding multiracial individuals (see also Streeter 2003, 1996). In general, others often expect that their perceptions of a racially ambiguous person will align with the latter’s appearance and identity. When this proves not to be the case, the likely results are cognitive dissonance and border patrolling; the border patrolling, which get expressed as questions (such as “What are you?”) that are designed to clarify racial lines, helps people resolve any experienced cognitive dissonance (see also Gaskins 1999).

Multiracial Border Patrolling

Throughout this book, I discuss what happens as people fit into and fall out of racial categories, or blend multiple racial categories as a result of their racially mixed parentage and heritage. This movement of multiracial people over and across and within racial borders often prompts others to pose the ubiquitous question, “What are you?” People ask this question and related ones to figure out the exact racial coordinates of the multiracial person’s location. However, as sociologist Heather Dalmage (2000:4) asks in her book about interracial families and multiracial people, “How do any of us know what to call ourselves racially?” This question helps us to reflect on the history of racial categories and the social construction of race in America, as discussed above (see also Davis 1991; Omi and Winant 2014).

Because many multiracial individuals like Bobbi (from the beginning of the chapter), serve as “the nation’s racial Rorschach tests,” they may find managing their racial multiplicity complicated at best or confusing (for others) at worst. As Dalmage (2000:106) explains, “Human bodies are interpreted and explained as they might be with a

Rorschach test. Some bodies easily match a category's description and appear simple to interpret; others are more ambiguous.... When people encounter a racially ambiguous person, they conduct a flurry of analyses to determine how the individual should be categorized. This is a racial Rorschach test, taken in a society that creates and accepts racial stereotypes. Interpretations develop within a cultural, social, and historical context and, like all interpretations, depend on the language available to frame ideas."

Dalmage's discussion explains why Bobbi, like other multiracial people, faces a lot of inquiries about her racially ambiguous appearance. That she is "clearly mixed" seems to invite others into conversation so that they might explore the borders of race with her to better figure her out racially. Bobbi is one of these tests because what Dalmage makes clear is that racially ambiguous people, like Bobbi, are likely to be asked a variety of questions designed to clarify the blurred lines of race. She describes this practice as "border patrolling."

As Dalmage (2000:40–41) sees it, border patrolling is a "unique form of discrimination faced by those who cross the color line, do not stick with their own, or attempt to claim membership (or are placed by others) in more than one racial group. Like racism, borderism is central to American society. It is a product of a racist system yet comes from both sides." People are likely to experience border patrolling from a variety of sources and also for a number of reasons (see Dalmage 2000). Border patrolling happens because most people feel the borders of race should be kept intact.

By implication, the term "both sides" reinforces the racial binary that prevailed in the U.S. decades ago and still exists among members of the nation's population. This racial binary (expressed through the language of "both sides") promotes a racial logic based on "two-and-only-two" racial categories. Most commonly, the racial binary attempts to categorize people as "white" or "black," but also as "white" or "nonwhite," and "black" or "nonblack" (see Hacker 1992; Yancey 2003). These variations in the racial binary hint at the impossibility of characterizing an entire national population into "two-and-only-two" racial categories, despite historical and contemporary efforts to do so.

In her book, Dalmage describes the differential treatment that white-black couples experience in this way (from "both sides") to highlight how this racial divide persists. Dalmage describes the opposition that white people in interracial families face as "white border patrolling" and that which black people in interracial families face as "black border patrolling." While useful for addressing this discriminatory action, the terms solidify a black/white binary. This dichotomous way of viewing

race fails to accommodate racial “Others,” as Maria Root (1992, 1996) suggests.

In this work, I tackle the challenge of building on Dalmage’s discussion of border patrolling, and that of Khanna (2011), who speaks of the “multidimensionality of racial identity.” When taken together, a need emerges for a concept that captures the way border patrollers police multiracial people ostensibly from “all sides” because of the many dimensions of their racial identities. I introduce the term, “multiracial border patrolling,” to add to the existing concepts—“white border patrolling” and “black border patrolling”—to acknowledge and argue that multiracial people may uniquely experience racial border patrolling because of their racial mixture. As multiracial people attempt to assert their preferred racial identities, they may experience support and/or opposition or resistance to these preferences in the form of multiracial border patrolling.

Living “on the border,” as Homi Bhabha (1991) puts it, parallels life in what Gloria Anzaldúa described as the “borderlands.” Both terms capture the in-between-ness that many multiracial people call home. While many multiracial people find this liminal racial location quite enjoyable, others describe the difficulties of living this shifting mixture. These difficulties often surface when other people patrol the borders of race, demanding clarification to the question, “What are you?” As implied above, questions of identity can be complicated for some multiracial people to contemplate; when posed by complete strangers, or issued as challenges by friends and family, these questions become fraught, mired in a weight of history. These questions prove tricky to answer. These questions are a form of border patrolling, or a way of policing the borders of race. When posed in particular ways, these questions can suggest that only certain answers or responses are the right ones.

Many people border patrol as if a “two-and-only-two” system of racial categorization still exists and, for many of them, this way of seeing race likely does. For people whose racial lenses sort others into “two-and-only-two” racial categories, or who fail to read between the lines by seeing shades of gray (or beige or brown), multiracial people muddy their dualistic vision. Failure to read between the color lines means that some border patrollers place multiracial individuals into single racial categories, and/or squarely into a racial group that departs from the multiracial person’s known ancestry.

As a general rule, border patrollers fail to recognize the very porosity of racial categories. Instead, they hold onto their dichotomous way of thinking about race, despite the millions of people who reported

two or more races on the two most recent Census surveys. Given the statistics, the limitations of the racial logic of “two-and-only-two” options appear more obvious. Thus, the practice of borderism does not always match the many ways multiracial people assert their racial identities or prefer to identify. This is especially the case with shifting, situational (protean) identities (Campbell 2007; Korgen 1998; Maxwell 1998; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002); incipient identities²; and honorary memberships (see Twine 2006). It reflects a persistent misrecognition of multiracial people.

Border patrollers maintain myths of racial purity and contamination, often regarding whiteness as “pure” and blackness as “contaminated” and “contaminating” (see Myers 2005; Douglas 2002). Border patrollers often expect others’ ways of seeing (or not seeing) race to align with their own, which privileges their own vision and understanding over any alternatives. As I show throughout this book, multiracial people encounter various kinds or levels of border patrolling partially because individuals do not know where best to locate them. In addition, others might sincerely be curious about them and ask questions that are guided more by a genuine curiosity and benevolence than by ignorance or the malevolence of racism and borderism.

People located interstitially present a potential problem to those who border patrol others. This may be particularly the case when a multiracial person’s interstitial position is not constant, nor is constantly legible to others. Furthermore, people may border patrol when racial markers fail to situate a multiracial person into a single racial category, or when they lack intimate knowledge of the racially and ethnically ambiguous person’s racial identity, family heritage or parentage, and racial/ethnic affiliations. Generally, in these types of interactions, strangers will try to gather behavioral cues; decipher and decode racial markers; and otherwise filter information during social interactions with multiracial people to determine a multiracial person’s racial location. This information then allows them to border patrol, or not, as they see fit. This location, in the border patroller’s mind, is almost always singular and static, seldom plural and fluid. Border patrollers may attempt to dictate the specificity of the multiracial person’s racial identity, and/or insist on a singularity to this identity. Even well-intentioned and less imposing people may engage in border patrolling. Their inability to accommodate racial mixture may stem from ignorance about the multiple-race population, or (as noted above) more malevolence, expressed as resistance to embracing this racial mixture as a reality.

Additional factors influence the social dynamics of border patrolling. Borderism reflects a societal impatience with, or inability to handle, multiplicity, ambiguity and liminality or fluidity. It is easy to see, then, how easily conflicts can arise when border patrollers put multiracial people in the *wrong* racial category. This often happens because a border patroller misreads a racially ambiguous person and makes an incorrect determination about that individual's racial location. At other times, multiracial people prefer only one racial location, but that one may differ from the racial location in which the border patroller wants them to reside. This can create tensions that inform the social interactions multiracial people have with strangers and even family members and close friends.

People who border patrol may crave a fixed racial location for a multiracial person, particularly a racially ambiguous one, because they are troubled by shifting mixture. Shifting mixture is not a problem, even though border patrollers regard it as such, because shifting mixture creates a "now you see it, now you don't" effect. Shifting mixture may make racial mixture only situationally visible, by masking it at times and unveiling it at others. Shifting mixture makes multiracial identity and heritage appear and disappear. When shifting mixture is met with invisible mixture, such that a person's racial mixture is only visible to those who can read racial ambiguity, it complicates the process of correctly categorizing the multiracial person into the most appropriate racial group.

Border patrollers might be just as perturbed by invisible mixture, except that as the term implies, this racial mixture remains invisible, or at least largely undetectable. Border patrollers without a sophisticated way of looking may miss indicators that a person is "clearly mixed." If a person who a border patroller thinks is located in a particular racial group claims a different racial identity, a border patroller may get frustrated with the knowledge of the multiracial person's racial identity and heritage. Often, a border patroller expects her/his perception of a multiracial person to neatly align with that person's racial identity. This is not always the case.

Where Do Multiracial People Fit?

Dualistic sorting of multiracial people occurs as this society attempts to maintain a racial hierarchy that values whiteness and devalues blackness. This racial hierarchy generally ensures that people perceived as white receive better treatment and enjoy a higher quality of life, while simultaneously denying these opportunities and experiences to people

perceived as black. Viewing white and black racial categories as seemingly “opposite,” works to maintain a racial dichotomy that never truly existed yet persists in many places to this day.

These days, however, some scholars argue that this racial binary or this “two-and-only-two-races” way of thinking, is outmoded and no longer sufficiently describes the national population. Sociologists including Eduardo Bonilla Silva (2003a,b) and Herbert Gans (1999) suggest that the racial binary has given way to three categories more closely reflective of Latin American countries. This “Latinization of America” translates race by sorting people into the following: “white,” “honorary white,” and “collective black” racial categories (Bonilla Silva 2003a,b). That is, as the current racial hierarchy loosens its binary stance, it seems to be attempting to cleave the population into the aforementioned three categories.

Does the “two-and-only-two-races” effect turn into “three-and-only-three-races”? Where do people who are multiracial, or two or more races, fit in this system of racial categorization? According to Herbert Gans (1999), multiracial people are “residuals” or people who sort of fall into and out of racial categories. Eduardo Bonilla Silva goes a step further to suggest that, in what Telles (2014) calls a “pigmentocracy,” multiracial people reside in racial categories reflective of their skin color, such that multiracial people with lighter skin color will likely take up and enjoy residence in the white or honorary white racial groups, while multiracial people with darker skin will reside among collective blacks. The idea of a pigmentocracy engages the concept of a racial hierarchy but specifically draws attention to the way society draws racial boundaries around people primarily based on skin color. In general, society distributes privileges unevenly, with people of whiter and lighter skin color receiving preferential or better treatment than people with darker skin color.

Whether it is within the context of a pigmentocracy or some other limiting artificial demarcation, racial border patrolling shows up in many ways; sometimes, this border patrolling reflects people’s desire to regulate racial categories or retain the rigidity of racial boundaries. At other times, this border patrolling illustrates how race remains fluid and its borders permeable. Consider a point sociologists Lee and Bean (2007) make in their work. They posit that Americans appear much more comfortable with Asian and Latino multiracial ambiguity than with black multiracial ambiguity; they are much better equipped (socialized) to detect African ancestry than other racial/ethnic ancestry. This means that members of the general population may not see a white and Asian multiracial person as multiracial, but may misread them as only white;

they might see a white and Latino person as white instead of Latino. However, they are more likely to see a white and black person as just black. Nikki Khanna (2010) makes this point in her article, "If You're Half Black, You're Just Black." Seeing multiracial (white and Asian, or white and Latino) people as white but other multiracial (white and black) people as black reflects a kind of racial border patrolling borne out of a racial classification system designed to differentiate and devalue blackness.

That people can detect and make space for racial mixture in white-looking white-Asian and/or white and Latino multiracial people but contest the same in multiracial black people reinforces, rather than reinvents, a color line that demarcates blackness from all other racial groups. This occurs in part because racial mixture in black people, if detected, is often ignored, negated, or refused. Everyday racial discourses and contemporary ways of seeing race reflect a historical residue and legacy of race that restricts racial identity choices for black multiracial people, while opening up or expanding racial boundaries for white, Asian, and Latino multiracial people. As a society, we can simultaneously see blackness as always already racially mixed while denying this very mixture when any black multiracial people want to claim it and/or whiteness.

Whiteness can expand to encapsulate Asian and Latino parentage, but not black parentage. In many ways, blackness disappears racial mixture. This partially explains why, when compared to black multiracial people, white and Asian or Latino multiracial people can assert racial identities without any or much contestation. They are often not viewed as having a singular race (Asian) or racialized ethnicity (Latino). Rather, they can generally and more easily assert multiracial identities that are affirmed by others, which contrasts with the experiences of black multiracial people who find less public support for and validation of their multiracial identities. Moreover, unlike black-white multiracials, Latino-white and Asian-white multiracials are often identified as white, which in turn, affects the way they see themselves" (Lee and Bean 2007:23).

Other people's disbelief at the racially mixed parentage of Asian-white and Latino-white multiracials suggests that members of these groups "look" white or have a white phenotype. But what happens when this is not the case and nonwhite racial markers compromise the multiracial person's seemingly white appearance? Drawing on literature that discusses racial ambiguity, I would further complicate the existing conversation about the reinvented color line by arguing that border patrolling may be inversely related to the legibility or visibility of

whiteness. The whiter a multiracial person is, the less likely they may be to border patrolled, unless they are seen as “compromising” that ostensible whiteness with the racially diverse social networks they form.

Making the face of mixture synonymous with whiteness suggests that an erasure of racial mixture is taking place in certain parts of the country; it also suggests that racial mixture remains synonymous with a racially and ethnically ambiguous appearance or face (LaFerla 2003; Buchanan and Acevedo 2004; Lee and Bean 2004; Morning 2003; Winters and DeBose 2003; Wu 2002, 2003; Wynter 2002; Zhou 2003). Where one’s features “do not necessarily fit into any easily definable category” (Rockquemore 1998:208), multiracial people, as “residuals,” fit uneasily into the black/nonblack divide or the triracial hierarchy, while also easily fitting into categories that they may or may not want to claim. For the white and Asian multiracial person who looks white and gets read as white, but wants to be seen as multiracial, easily fitting into the white category will likely produce privileges and benefits, at the expense of an invalidated racial identity. If multiracial people who “look white” are shifted into that category, and multiracial people who “look black” are shifted into that category, the white/black or “two-and-only-two” racial categorization system might reemerge to explain multiracial people’s racial realities. This would occur because people often misperceive multiracial people’s appearances as monoracial, otherwise interpreting racial ambiguity and multiplicity as singularity. However, at times, this ambiguity can intensify border patrolling for “clearly ambiguous” multiracial individuals who do not easily fit into any particular racial categories. This failure to fit can intensify border patrollers’ need to know where the clearly ambiguous belong. To their frustration, border patrollers must realize that multiracial people may belong everywhere and nowhere at once.

If people rely on racial markers to border patrol, and these markers float on a racially mixed person, then people in different racial groups may patrol this ambiguity. That is, shifting mixture may make race an even greater floating signifier (Hall 1999, 1997). Multiracial people have changing faces or appearances that shift to make them look like different races (not necessarily the combination of their racial mixture, but also approximations of other racial groups). That multiracial individuals interpellate (Althusser 1971), or hail, members of “similarly different” racial groups illustrates the social construction of race, its fluidity, and the illusion of racial purity and fixity. This paradoxical term, “similarly different,” updates Naomi Zack’s (1997) discussion of the “same difference.” The term calls attention to the ways multiracial people approximate groups that are different from them, even as they are

perceived to be similar. It is this perceived similarity that ushers them into these different groups, allowing them to fit in easily to some groups, and per the above discussion, barring them from other group membership. This begins to explain why multiracial people often describe their experiences with racial multiplicity and fluidity as locating them everywhere and nowhere.

Belonging Everywhere and Nowhere: Notes on Being “Clearly Mixed”

Here I want to return to my earlier example of Bobbi. When Bobbi faced increased inquiries about her racial ambiguity and multiplicity, this increased attention suggested to her that other people were not sure what to make of her racial mixture. They wanted to know or had some “need to know” her racial mixture (see Rockquemore 1998). They wanted her to clarify her racial location, to decipher or decode the dimensions of her racial multiplicity, ostensibly complicated by her black white parentage but also by her desire to claim connections to her stepmom’s heritage. Ironically, living on the borders of race meant that, for the most part, Bobbi and her siblings could enjoy their honorary membership among Filipinos, blending and blurring the borders of race even more than their membership in two racial categories already did.

While Bobbi found it relatively effortless to blend into her stepmother’s Asian racial group, she had to actively assert her multiracial identity in order to clarify this racial mixture to others. That is, while she unintentionally slipped into the Asian category at times, she had to more purposefully and intentionally claim the specificities of her preferred racial identity; otherwise, they remained hidden in plain sight, where strangers could not see that she was clearly mixed (black and white). Instead, they see her as Hawaiian, Hispanic, almost anything but black and white.

What Bobbi’s example illustrates is that many multiracial people can be questioned for their ambiguous appearance and policed for not phenotypically fitting neatly into any one racial category. Sometimes these questions are guided by people who are confused by multiracial individuals who looked “clearly mixed,” as opposed to “clearly white” or “clearly black” or some other race. These people may want to know exactly where a multiracial person resides racially in order to know how to interact with and/or understand them.

Border patrollers attempt to reproduce racial borders for multiracial individuals. They fail to recognize the multiplicity of selves (Rosenberg 1979) that people possess or the multiplicity within categories

constructed as singular. Consider a variation of this point, as Lee and Bean (2007) make a note that racial categories are “socially constructed and a great deal of ethnic heterogeneity exists within them.” Arguably, the same can be said about *racial* heterogeneity within racial categories socially constructed as singular.

This failure to racially accommodate “the sum of our parts” (Williams-Leon and Nakashima 2001) prevents an understanding of the composite and sometimes competing parts of multiracial people’s racial selves. This multiplicity ideally merges together to create a cohesive and coherent whole that is synthesized rather than fragmented or fractional (see Chang 2015; Stryker 1989, 1991). Arguably, when strangers border patrol others’ racial multiple selves, they ignore or deny the reality of racial multiplicity. Alternately, some border patrollers do recognize this multiplicity but refuse to make space for it. They believe in the singularity of racial groups or categories and apply the same logic to social selves. This contrasts with people who question a multiracial person, out of ignorance more than malice, or benevolence more so than malevolence. Of course, the line between benevolence and malevolence is another potentially blurred line, given the prevailing racial rhetoric of colorblindness and colormuteness. As Bonilla-Silva (2002) contends, the style of contemporary racism remains polite and smiling.

When strangers border patrol people’s racial multiplicity, they do not want to admit to a multiracial reality or consider Stryker and Serpe’s (1994:17) footnoted assertion that, “The possibility that two or more identities may exist at the same location in a hierarchical order should be recognized explicitly.” Instead, borderists prefer collapsing racial differences into similarity and singularity. In doing so, they make individuals with multiracial heritage or parentage ostensibly easier to deal with, conceptually and interactionally. Collapsing differences into coherence and the multiple into the singular, allows border patrollers to reify racial divides.

What confounds border patrollers may be that multiracial people claim any of the aforementioned racial identities in ways that depart or differ from the border patrollers’ perceptions of the multiracial people and the racial identities they *should* claim. That an increasing number of people claim two or more races, *and* these increasing number of identity options, may also stir up border patrollers’ racial imagination about where multiracial “best” belong. Border patrollers may also find that their curiosity about the racial locations of multiracial people contradicts any of their claims of colorblindness. While the question of how border patrollers’ resolve any frustrations and cognitive dissonance created by members of the “two or more races” population, I am more interested in

how multiracial people make sense of the contradictions and claims of colorblindness.

Managing Border Patrolling Amidst Colorblindness and Colormuteness

Some multiracial people confront the contradictory presence of colorblindness and border patrolling, or the regulation of race along color lines. At times, they may hear comments such as “I don’t see you as (fill in race/s here),” while being asked to disclose details about their racial identities, parentage, and/or heritage. This contradiction exposes people’s perceptions of the “same/difference” (Zack 1997). In the racially colorblind mind, people all look the same, while simultaneously remaining different, particularly to border patrollers who see racial divisions as fixed and static. These two contrasting positions create cognitive dissonance, for the simultaneous seeing and not seeing race at once, produces a contradiction. It makes visible what colorblind racism refuses to see: racial “difference” as embodied by the multiracial “Other.”

Because of historical and contemporary patterned evidence of racial inequality and racial discrimination, people learn that access to resources and a better quality of life is primarily contingent on color. As a result, people engage in border patrolling in part to keep this racial hierarchy intact. In many cases, they do so without drawing attention to race. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003a) and Mica Pollock (2005) demonstrate, people develop discursive practices, or ways of speaking, particularly about race that appear to have nothing to do with race, except that they do. Bonilla-Silva calls this practice “colorblindness.” Pollock calls it colormuteness. Upon closer inspection of these twin discourses, colorblindness and colormuteness, we can see how people talk about race even as they deny it. People leave traces of race in the racial code words they use to conceal any racist ideologies or thoughts they have. These ideas and racist ideologies reinforce the racial hierarchy by reinforcing who deserves a better life and who does not.

Colorblindness and colormuteness are curious discursive practices in the U.S. given the racist foundation of this country and the very persistence of racism. As discursive practices, colorblindness and colormuteness become suspect when people who make claims to this racial reticence and irrelevance ask a multiracial person that quintessential question, “What are you?” Racially ambiguous people often become the typical targets of this question, and all of its variations, even if those people do not identify as multiracial. People who ask these

kinds of clarifying questions of multiracial people explicitly engage in behavior that characterizes border patrolling.

Here I want to introduce the irony of this reality, that many of the same people who espouse statements such as “We are all human,” or “We are all the same,” are also often the same people who make racialized statements about people’s behaviors or hastily draw attention to problematic behavior by suggesting that such unsavory action is reflective of race. Other ways in which colorblindness and colormuteness shape the way people talk about race emerge in their curiosity about others. Consider the cumulative narrative of the multiracial people I interviewed. Most of them had stories to tell about the many questions people had regarding their racial identity, parentage, and heritage. Very few of them recognized the disjuncture between the discourse of “not seeing race” and that which accommodates such questions as “What are you?” and “Where are you from?” As I show in the first substantive chapter, these questions operate as a double-edged sword. Kerry Ann Rockquemore (1998) dubbed these interactions, “the ‘What are you?’ experience.” Growing up in a colorblind, and colormute, society, most of my respondents themselves could not see how being asked questions about their racial locations or position across the color line betrayed these (colorblind) claims.

Because colorblind narratives continue to grip this nation but do little to satisfy people’s curiosity, people present themselves as having sufficient racial etiquette, which allows them to publicly explore their racial curiosity through thinly veiled questions that skirt around race using the guise of excessive politeness (Bonilla Silva 2002; Houts Picca and Feagin 2007). In addition, they may rely on other strategies designed to acquire information and curb anxiety about ambiguity and multiraciality. Discursively, race talk enables people to navigate racial conversations while appearing interested in other issues that are not necessarily race. The ability to slip into race talk also allows people to address their anxiety about ambiguity and curiosity about multiraciality, all the while appearing polite and not policing. Relying on race talk then supports colorblindness. In some situations, people also deploy colormuteness, avoiding any direct reference to race (Pollock 2005). Both colorblindness and colormuteness facilitate the reproduction of racial categories, which endorses racial borders and supports the racial hierarchy.

These twin rhetorical strategies or practices of colorblindness and colormuteness make living in a racially divisive society interesting, to say the least. In a country with an increasingly diversifying population, claiming and choosing to not see race seems like a lofty project. The

very bold admission seems foolhardy, at best, given the richness in experience and the wealth of knowledge that could be shared among people, particularly pertaining to their everyday experiences with race. People who cling to colorblind claims do not want to do the difficult work of discussing race, including their own. However, many of them do not seem to hesitate asking others about their racial identity. This seems particularly so for people who are, as I previously described, “clearly mixed,” or racially ambiguous, or in/visibly mixed.

That people who deploy the aforementioned twin discourses can also ask questions that directly deal with race (in terms of racial identity) while maintaining that race does not matter captures the contradictions of race in this country. To Bonilla-Silva’s research, colorblindness accommodates these and other contradictions. Border patrollers often rely on colorblindness to navigate their way through conversations about race, even at the expense of contradicting themselves. They concurrently claim not to see race and deny that racism is real, yet want to figure out what multiracial people “really” are in terms of race. This practice of border patrollers, and this attendant need to definitively decipher the racial coordinates of a multiracial person, begs several questions that I concentrate on throughout this book: How does one determine the “correct” racial category for a multiracial person? Who decides? Do multiracial people make such decisions on their own terms or do the views and perceptions of others matter more in these instances? What happens in those moments when other people cannot figure out the racial location(s) of the multiracial person in question?

To more specifically explore this matter of who is multiracial, I designed and conducted research on the multiracial population living in the Southeast United States in the mid-2000s. I set the challenge of interviewing 60 individuals of any racial combinations for this research. I created flyers to advertise my study, assuming that through “snowball sampling” I would likely attract and recruit people in particular social networks or friends of friends. The only trouble was figuring out how to ask the “What are you?” question with more grace than I found the inquiry offered. What if people—my potential respondents—were hiding in plain sight; their invisible mixture impeding my ability to ask them to consider participating in my study? I worried that soon people would take pity on me, seeing my desire to talk to strangers, and volunteer to participate despite having any known racial mixture in their heritage. These were silly concerns, in many ways, but ones that helped me identify themes that linked my experiences to that of my respondents; I reflected on my worries and recognized the traces of the authenticity tests I had been put through by others. I started to ask

myself, “What if the respondents do not *look* mixed? What do I expect them to look like? (How) will their appearance impact our interactions during the interactions?”

While I believed it did not matter who showed up and how, I realized that reflecting on these questions strengthened my ability to understand much of what I focus on in this book. Even as someone who finds herself living “across the color line” (see Dalmage 2000), or in the “borderlands” (see Anzaldúa 1987), I was a little bit guilty of wanting my respondents to be “clearly mixed.” In actuality, I wanted what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1977) calls “thick description,” so I critically considered who indicated an interest in my research. In retrospect, these faulty initial concerns and considerations informed much of what respondents detailed in their interviews: a negotiation of racial borders. As they figured out how to answer the “What are you?” question, many of them discovered racial borders and their locations in relation to them. This book is about how they make sense of and situate themselves across these color lines and how they manage interactions with strangers, families, and friends, to feel validated and arrive at racial identities that they prefer. I also discuss instances where these preferences in racial identities are invalidated or negated and I asked respondents to share how they handled these variations in reactions to their racial identities. I turn next to a discussion of the ways studying shifting mixture creates methodological challenges.

Notes

¹ The term describes a person who has one parent of one socially defined race and another parent of a different socially defined race, regardless of their own racial mixture. This term, and the increasing literature dedicated to exploring the experiences of “first-generation” multiracial people enabled the reinvention of mixture. It also facilitated the historical amnesia and revisionism about race mixing and exposes the extent of our societal investment in socially constructed racial categories as singular and static.

² Incipient identities reflect the process of “becoming” in the manner that some multiracial individuals increasingly acquire information about their familial biographies, in an effort to solve “mysteries of histories.” This information, and a growing desire to recover mixture or “choosing to select a varied multiracial identification that acknowledges a great diversity of racial mixing” (Campbell 2007: 926) partially explain this process of becoming. We can turn to Hansen’s (1952) discussion of the third generation’s attempts at cultural maintenance and preservation (of family diversity), achieved through efforts to recover the forgotten past. An example of this incipience came from Miki, who described how the convergence of experiences (border patrolling

from others, the impact of her Japanese grandmother's death, and her own maturation) motivated her to claim being both white and Asian (Japanese), and "really feel like I need to embrace it and learn about it." Other respondents expressed this desire for reclamation and recuperation of the composite parts of their heritage, such as Sophie, who was adopted into a white family that had also adopted biracial black/white children. Contrary to an Asian becoming American, Sophie described her experience as this: "I'm an American becoming Asian."