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“Be Confident”, “Creative” and “Careful”: Advice from Multiracial Adults

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As the U.S. and international multiracial populations have increased, so has research in this area. Despite a multitude of studies about the unique struggles of being multiracial, little empirical data has been published about specific strategies that multiracial individuals use to navigate a monoracial (single-race)-oriented society. In this article, I offer insights and suggestions to cope with discrimination involving family, friends, and others from 28 multiracial Americans with various racial backgrounds, although all participants have white ancestry. In advising their younger self and/or the next generation of multiracial people, participants suggested cultivating confidence, resilience, and assertiveness to withstand the onslaught of marginalization that multiracial people endure. Other respondents recommended creatively engaging with media to actualize affirmation, connection, and consciousness to generate space between themselves and others' perceptions of them. White-presenting participants proposed being careful about sharing their backgrounds, considering they are frequently questioned. This article offers strategies to navigate being multiracial in a racially tumultuous society that was designed by and for monoracial citizens.

The multiracial population¹ increased by 276% from 2010 to 2020, according to the United States Census (Jones et al., 2021); 34 states and Washington, D.C. saw their multiracial population double, or more, over the last decade (Henderson, 2022). Considering these numbers, what does it mean to be multiracial in a post-Obama, post-Trump, ever-browning America? Furthermore, what does it mean to be multiracial during and after the globally recognized “racial reckoning” that unfolded in 2020? Multiracial people have reported discrimination in family settings (Atkin & Jackson,

¹I use the term “multiracial” to refer to the population of people who have two or more racialized ancestries, such as Black and white.

2021; Franco et al., 2020; Gay et al., 2022), among friends and peers (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Jones & Rogers, 2022; Waring, 2017), with romantic partners (Curington, 2020; Waring, 2013), in school (Harris, 2016; Ingraham et al., 2014; Mohajeri, 2022) and at work (Harris, 2020; Hernández, 2018). These inequitable experiences demonstrate how parents, teachers, partners, and coworkers often marginalize multiracial people by constructing a monoracial background as the “norm or ideal” and framing a multiracial background as “substandard or different” (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 127). Given the growth of the multiracial population, a contentious racial context, and the systemic discrimination that multiracial people face, it is worthwhile to ask: What advice do multiracial people have for navigating a society that was designed by and for monoracial citizens via language, policies, organizations, and systems?

At the structural level, institutions have not equipped multiracial people to successfully traverse a nation that was not intended to recognize them, which is why this study is relevant. Although multiracial people appear to be celebrated and supported because they are featured in art, literature, films, advertisements, television shows, and popular culture (strmic-pawl, 2023), scholars critique this shallow support. Researchers have revealed how this seemingly progressive attitude is a tool for white supremacy as it centers part-white ancestry (strmic-pawl, 2023), relies on anti-Blackness (Mitchell, 2022; Phillips, 2017), insidiously preserves white privilege (Waring, 2023), and benefits educational institutions by seeming racially diverse and welcoming to People of Color (Giebel, 2023; Harris, 2016). Hence, these scholars demonstrate how the multiracial population is strategically celebrated and supported when it fuels the false narrative of the United States being racially progressive and/or equitable. This

research study builds on these studies by offering suggestions for what to *do* in response to the systemic marginalization and societal manipulation of multiracial people. The participants of this study explain how to thrive within the paradox of being superficially supported, yet institutionally and interpersonally silenced. These findings are relevant, given the rise of the multiracial population and the omnipresence of the marginalization and misrepresentation of multiracial people. This study is particularly relevant to higher education because it is often viewed as a progressive space, despite multiracial students feeling alienated (Giebel, 2023) and exploited for the university's gain (Harris, 2016).

Since the 1990s, research on multiracial individuals has increased and what this population means for the United States has changed. These studies have transformed the academic conversation around race by presenting new epistemological frameworks that contextualize, rather than pathologize, the identities and experiences of multiracial people (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008; Root, 1992; Zack, 1993). Some scholars maintain that multiraciality has the potential to dismantle racial hierarchies by disrupting rigid racial categories (Root, 1992; Daniel, 2002), creating a “more sophisticated understanding of race and racism” (Dalmage, 2005, p. 6), and rectifying a past marked by the “alienation and mistreatment” of multiracial persons (Walker, 2011, p. 70). Contrarily, other experts critique multiraciality as a triumphant steppingstone to transcending race by arguing that it jeopardizes solidarity (Tessman, 1999), propagates anti-Blackness (Essie, 2017), and upholds white supremacy (Phillips, 2017).

These differing intellectual perspectives unfold as American² society asserts a paradoxical narrative that proudly celebrates racial diversity, yet it somehow does not see race (strmic-pawl, 2016). This convenient yet contradictory narrative serves as a fertile backdrop to explore the experiences and implications of a multiracial America. Whether the multiracial population as a group disrupts or reinforces the racial hierarchy, this cohort of people would benefit from specific strategies to maneuver society as a multiracial person in a racially tumultuous nation that was designed by and for monoracial citizens. Through the stories of multiracial Americans of different generations and racialized ancestries, this study offers advice about how to thrive in a society that has rendered race “a fundamental axis of social organization” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 13) without careful consideration of the possibility or reality of a multiracial nation. I position my participants as experts, given their lived experiences, including monoracism, as multiracial people. Consequently, I typologize their “culturally relevant intervention strategies” that “address their unique barriers” (Ingram et al., 2011, p. 576) to center and enrich the shared experience of being multiracial in a monoracial society. My hope is that this article will transcend disciplinary boundaries and extend beyond academic contexts to make a fundamental contribution to the lived experiences of multiracial people.

Discrimination: Monoracism and Microaggressions

It is no secret that being multiracial in a country with a turbulent racial past and present creates challenges. There is a plethora of studies that document the discrimination that multiracial people endure from peers (Campbell & Eggerling-Boek,

²In this article, the term “American” exclusively refers to U.S. American society.

2006; Harris, 2016; Morgan et al., 2021), lack of support from monoracial family members (Atkin & Jackson, 2021; Franco et al., 2020; Johnston & Nadal, 2010) and identity invalidation (Franco et al., 2016; Gay et al., 2022; Jones & Rogers, 2022). These findings are rooted in monoracism, “a social system of psychological inequality where individuals who do not fit monoracial categories may be oppressed on systemic and interpersonal levels because of underlying assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories” (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 125). Manifestations of monoracism include microaggressions that exclude, isolate, exoticize or objectify multiracial people, along with assuming a monoracial identity and denying a multiracial reality (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Exclusion (Franco et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2013), exoticism (Jones & Rogers, 2022; Waring, 2013), monoracial identity assumptions (Bettez, 2011; Ingraham et al., 2014), and the denial of a multiracial reality (Gonlin, 2022; Harris, 2016) are well documented in the scholarship, although not all scholars use the term “microaggressions.” Microaggressions can be unconscious and unintentional (Johnston & Nadal, 2010), which underlines the need for more education about monoracism (Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2020).

Monoracism can also be internalized (Hamako, 2014) since multiracial individuals are living in a society that was engineered in the image of monoracial Americans (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). In fact, it is probably impossible *not* to internalize a degree of monoracism, given that it is present in every institution and most first-generation multiracial people are raised by monoracial parents and/or caregivers. Studies show that monoracism exists in every corner of society. Much of the curriculum in education fails to include multiracial identities and experiences, even in schools that

proclaim to be inclusive and “anti-racist” (Hamako, 2014, p. 4). In higher education, race-oriented university student organizations offer a “safe space” for monoracial students of color while simultaneously questioning the “authenticity” of multiracial students (Harris, 2016, p. 806). Although the media appears to celebrate multiraciality³, monoracist tropes still exist that depict the doomed biracial “tragic mulatto,” including films directed by multiracial people (Mills, 2019, p. 413), which perhaps offers an example of internalized monoracism. Multiracial individuals experience “judicial erasure” in the legal system as legal actors attempt to align multiracial cases of discrimination “with traditional categorical doctrine” (Leong, 2010, p. 528). Lastly, in the most intimate institution, the family, monoracist assumptions persist about family membership and racial resemblance (Waring & Bordoloi, 2019). As this literature review makes clear, monoracism is pervasive. Consequently, a study that offers first-hand advice about how to contend with these inequitable encounters is empirically important and ethically essential.

Strategies: Resistance and Resilience

Despite multiracial people experiencing monoracism, they demonstrate distinct strategies in response to society’s institutional and interpersonal monoracist inclinations. The most consistent contribution to the literature is studies on racial self-identification and how these findings fit into American society’s rigid racial taxonomy. In some ways, multiracial people have resisted the long-standing racial order by declaring biracial,

³Although Hollywood appears to celebrate multiracial performers and characters, the emphasis on mixedness centers racial ambiguity and values cultural savviness rather than concentrating on dismantling racist structures (Beltran, 2005). Furthermore, when multiracial actors are cast or multiracial characters are the lead, the racial hierarchy is reproduced through a “symbolic whiteness” or a “bronzer whiteness” (Beltran, 2005, p. 62).

multiracial, or mixed-race identities (Gonlin, 2022; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008; Renn, 2004). In other ways, they have disrupted traditional understandings of identity by modifying their self-identification according to their social context (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008) and as they age (Albuja et al., 2018; Burke & Kao, 2013; Harper, 2016). Multiracial people have rejected traditional racial classifications altogether (Lou & Lalonde, 2015; Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008). Of equal significance, multiracial people who identify monoracially have also refused an imposed multiracial identity (Franco et al., 2016). Additionally, multiracial individuals with one or two immigrant parents resist some racial labels and assert an ethnic identity (Waring & Purkayastha, 2017). People with multiracial ancestries unsettle other people's limited understandings of their realities rather than (entirely) internalizing them. If identity is a microcosm of multiracial experiences, one central strategy is clear resistance.

Resilience is another method that has materialized to manage society's penchant for sticking to a monoracial script. Edwards and Pedrotti (2008) found that biracial women "possess a rich dual heritage of strengths and personal assets" that can be harnessed to foster resilience, hope, and agency (p. 42). Similarly, Waring (2017, p. 151) demonstrates how Black/white biracial participants frequently deployed "racial capital," impactful racial resources such as language and knowledge, to circumvent racist stereotypes and facilitate personal and professional opportunities. Jackson et al. (2013) note that mixed Mexican respondents critiqued race, associated or disassociated themselves with a specific racial or ethnic group, and found supportive spaces to navigate adversity linked to their multiracial heritage. Morgan et al.'s (2021) mixed

Latinx⁴ participants worked through anti-multiracial discrimination by fostering self-acceptance, practicing adaptability, and identifying with other multiracial people. These resilience-enhancing techniques draw attention to the agency and creativity of multiracial individuals.

Family racial socialization practices might play a role in developing resilience. Some monoracial parents in multiracial families deliver positive messages about having multiracial ancestry (Atkin & Jackson, 2021; Stone & Dolbin-MacNab, 2017) and provide critical support for their children (Waring & Bordoloi, 2019), which enhances their ability to deal with monoracism. However, if racial socialization messages are negative, it can lead to underdeveloped skills to cope with monoracism (strmic-pawl, 2023). Additionally, racial socialization messages are not always frequent, such as in multiracial families where parents identify their children as white (Csizmadia et al., 2014). Not all multiracial people receive uplifting and informative messages in their families. Also, monoracial parents do not have the same racialized experiences as their children (Funderburg, 1994). Therefore, a study that concentrates on how to handle monoracism, given how widespread it is, is imperative.

Methods

The findings from this study are based on 28 in-depth, open-ended interviews with multiracial participants of an array of racialized backgrounds, although all were

⁴See Salinas (2020) for how “Latinx,” although an academic trend, can be exclusive. Salinas states, “Latin* invites people to self-identify any way they desire and serves as a placeholder for new emerging terms that gives voice to Latin American people” (2020, p. 164). Latin* includes Latino, Latinx, and Latina.

half/part⁵ white. I explored several themes, including specific, realistic advice for multiracial youth and/or the participant's younger self. Qualitative research provides the advantages of nuance, complexity, and context (Beeson, 1997), which is of heightened significance in a group with various racialized ancestries that resist the racial binary. In addition, in-depth interviews can serve as a methodological conduit for storytelling, which "help[s] organize the flow of interaction, binding together or disrupting the relation of self to other and community" (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2005, p. 11). The connection and disruption between self and community are particularly pertinent in a study of interviewees offering advice to fellow community members and/or their younger selves. Finally, because qualitative research systematically examines meaning-making (Sprague, 2005), I was able to typologize participants' advice and offer an analysis of what their advice indicates about what it means to be multiracial in this historical moment.

Recruitment and Reflexivity

I recruited participants through convenience and snowball sampling after I posted a "call for participants" at two Midwestern universities (one in a rural area, one in a metropolitan area) to ensure a heterogeneous sample. In addition, I was committed to including diverse ages, ancestries, and socioeconomic backgrounds since most of the participants who contacted me (or were referred to me) were Black/white, enrolled in college, and in their 20s. While these sampling methods are not without limitations, they

⁵All participants had a white or half-white parent due to a larger study on whiteness in the multiracial population. Although language like "half-white" is not ideal, I use this imperfect terminology to communicate recent white ancestry and more importantly, to practice linguistic integrity (Johnson-Bailey, 2004) by honoring the language my participants used to articulate their backgrounds and lived experiences.

underscore the challenges of studying a group that is not necessarily identifiable and has no known gathering place (Waring & Purkayastha, 2017)⁶.

During recruitment, I revealed my Black/white biracial ancestry to explain why I am professionally interested in and personally connected to this population. Scholars have argued that sharing a distinct, non-dominant identity can cultivate a bond that inspires a powerful, honest conversation (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). A shared multiracial identity might be particularly relevant in multiracial research as participants discuss hostile interactions with monoracial people (Harris, 2016; Waring, 2023) or espouse uncritical beliefs that frame multiracial people as superior (Curington, 2020; Waring, 2013), especially those who are part-white (Gay et al., 2022), which they might be less likely to share if the researcher were monoracial. Additionally, a common identity can offer validation via “a knowing of [t]he[i]r emotional experience,” especially when participants’ views challenge social norms (Ross, 2017, p. 329). While I am an “insider” as a biracial person, I did not share the same racial ancestry as my non-Black/white participants. Additionally, other markers positioned me as an “outsider” with certain interviewees, such as my age, sexual orientation, and education level. Therefore, I was a “semi-insider” (Gonzales, 2020, p. 389) as “[t]he research process can never be totally ‘inside’ or completely ‘outside,’ but involves an interrogation of situatedness” (Woodward, 2008, p. 547).

Sample and Data Collection

I interviewed 10 men, including one transgender man and 18 women who were between 18 to 64 years old. Out of the 28 participants, 19 of them were from the

⁶One exception is a growing number of conferences, which are mostly frequented by highly educated academics and therefore, would offer an uneven perspective.

Midwestern United States. Seven participants grew up on the East Coast, one was raised on the West Coast, and one spent their youth and adolescence on many military bases. According to Charmaraman et al. (2014), the Midwest is the second-most studied region, after the West Coast (31%), in multiracial research at 15%; the East Coast is a close third at 14%. Participants reported their ancestries as white and one of the following backgrounds: Asian, Black, Latin*, or Indigenous (or a combination of three backgrounds). Table 1 offers detailed information on each participant's gender, age, and racialized ancestries. Half of the sample reported a Black/white combination, and while that might seem disproportionate, it also reflects the 2010 Census trends since the 2020 Census data was not yet available while I was gathering my data. Notably, Black/white biracial people endure more discrimination than their (part-white) multiracial counterparts due to anti-Blackness, and as young people, they are less likely to feel accepted by society (strmic-pawl, 2023). Grappling with both anti-Blackness and lack of acceptance further underscores the significance of a study on how to manage monoracism.

I conducted interviews between 2019-2021, a time period that has routinely been referred to as a "racial reckoning" in American society due to: Trump's racist rhetoric throughout his presidency, national police brutality protests following the murder of George Floyd, a highly racialized pandemic, and an election with strong racial implications that took three days to officially call. Interviewing in this context helped draw attention to how participants coped with sharpened racial tensions. Respondents chose where the interview would be held; most interviews took place at a coffee shop. I conducted eight interviews through Zoom due to COVID-19 social distancing

restrictions, which afforded the opportunity to take detailed notes on the video recordings regarding facial expressions and hand gestures. The average interview was approximately an hour and a half. With each participant's verbal and written consent, each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. I assigned pseudonyms to all participants.

Table 1. *Interviewees' Information*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ancestries
Jasmine	18	Woman	Black/white
Daisy	19	Woman	Black/white
Lola	19	Woman	Cuban/white
Louis	20	Man	Black/white
Yanitza	20	Woman	Mexican/white
Vivian	20	Woman	Black/white
Isabella	21	Woman	Japanese/white
Khadijah	21	Woman	Black/white
Riley	21	Man	Black/white
Casey	22	Man (Trans)	Native/white
Esmerelda	22	Woman	Black/white
Alec	22	Man	Black/Japanese/white
Andre	23	Man	Black/white
Ally	23	Woman	Japanese/white
Gloria	24	Woman	Black/Native/white
Serena	26	Woman	Black/white
Bianca	28	Woman	Puerto Rican/white
Natalie	30	Woman	Black/white
Marisol	33	Woman	Puerto Rican/white
Rich	34	Man	Puerto Rican/white
Coral	35	Woman	Mexican/Native/white
Nadia	35	Woman	Thai/Chinese/white
Tatiana	35	Woman	Puerto Rican/white
Dante	35	Man	Chinese/white
Lyric	36	Woman	Filipino/white
Ezra	37	Man	Black/white
Isaac	44	Man	Black/white
Omar	64	Man	Black/white

Data Analysis

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory guided my coding and analysis approach. I identified codes or patterns that organically emerged rather than being

influenced by established theoretical or conceptual frameworks. Upon creating open codes (Merriam, 2009) from the transcriptions, I constructed categories (Saldaña, 2009) based on how participants articulated their advice. I then grouped these categories into themes by creating analytic memos (Saldaña, 2009). As I collected more data, I identified more themes, and thus, I re-read earlier transcriptions to update my coding system (Weiss, 1994). In addition, I documented subthemes, as they allowed me to accommodate nuances between themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003), such as the different agentic approaches to affirmation. During this process, I coordinated “member checks” (Merriam, 2009, p. 26) to ensure validity by sharing my preliminary analysis with participants and requesting their feedback to prevent misinterpretations, promote the “truth value,” and enhance the rigor of my work (Shek et al., 2005). As my study unfolded, I organized my data into a typology that includes three different approaches to advice for multiracial people of any age, gender, sexual orientation, racialized heritages and/or phenotype.

Findings

Within the broader interview protocol, I asked my participants, “What advice would you give your younger self when you were experiencing a struggle connected to your backgrounds⁷ and/or what advice would you give a young biracial or multiracial person now who is experiencing a struggle related to their backgrounds?” I did not use the term “monoracism” since it is not yet a well-known word, especially outside of the network of scholars who study the multiracial population. However, monoracism as a complex, systemic, interpersonal, inequitable multiracial-based experience is implied in

⁷This was after I asked them if they had experienced a struggle related to their backgrounds; every single respondent answered “yes.”

their responses. Most participants suggested developing confidence, assertiveness, and resilience to combat the cumulative impact of routinely experiencing marginalization, exclusion, and being misunderstood as a multiracial person. Other respondents recommended creatively engaging with different forms of media to actualize affirmation, connection, and consciousness. This offering was presented as an agentic buffer against internalizing being marginalized, excluded, or misunderstood. The final form of advice was to be careful with whom to share one's ancestry. This was exclusively instructed by white-appearing respondents, who were questioned and doubted when they disclosed their non-white ancestry. These findings include but are not limited to, racial self-identification because some participants never told their friends, peers, or family how they racially identified; they simply shared their ancestry in its totality and still experienced marginalization. Furthermore, in some cases, participants had not disclosed their ancestries to peers, and they still experienced monoracism after their ancestries were revealed by others, such as a friend or family member. Notably, all forms of advice foreground the inherently social nature of managing the marginalization, exclusion, and misunderstandings of multiracial people by centering the significance of community and/or consciousness.

Be Confident, Assertive, and Resilient

Out of the 28 participants who provided advice, 11 (39%) recommended cultivating personality traits that would help them cope with discriminatory experiences, such as confidence, assertiveness, and resilience. This response was the most prevalent theme and was expressed by respondents of all ancestries, as well as those who were white-appearing and participants who are visible People of Color. Lyric is a

36-year-old Filipina/white mother of two who grew up in a racially diverse city on the East Coast. White people routinely assume she is white, whereas people of color often recognize that she is “something,” in other words, not entirely white. Her father is Filipino and Irish; her mother is Irish. When she was younger, many people would question her Asian heritage, which compelled her to question her own identity, despite feeling more connected to her father’s Filipino customs and food than her Irish culture.

In Lyric’s words,

A lot of times, people made me feel like, “Oh, I’m not this [Filipina]. I’m white. And I should just shut up and not really speak.” So, what I would tell someone in my shoes is just to *be confident*. You know who you are and continue to be proud. If someone tries to tell you, “This is not what you are,” stand up for yourself. Be strong and correct them. Say, “It’s not your place to tell me who I am.”

With time and the support of family members, Lyric developed the confidence to proudly declare her ancestry. She recalled conversing with her Filipino uncle, who said, “You’re Filipino, girl. Eat your Adobo. You’re Filipino. That’s that. No questions.” After that moment, she was able to assert to naysayers, “Fuck no! This is how I was raised. This my *life*.” Lyric also made numerous deliberate decisions to cultivate positivity and acceptance around her identity. She refused to date partners who did not support her self-identification, and she intentionally maintained friendships from her hometown, even though she moved many hours away since that continues to be the most diverse and accepting place she has ever lived. Hence, Lyric engaged in social processes that constructed a supportive community, which enhanced her confidence in her identity over time. Her advice applies to multiracial people of all ancestries because disbelief and skepticism regarding one’s racial self-identification are not exclusively tied to one phenotype or heritage, as other studies show. For example, Funderburg (1994, p. 334)

explained that Black/white biracial people sometimes feel the need to “prove” their Blackness, and Dalmage (2005, p. 40) refers to discrimination that comes from both [racial] sides as “borderism.”

Lola is a 19-year-old Cuban/white college student who grew up in an upper-middle class, overwhelmingly white suburb in the Midwest. Most people presume she is white, specifically Greek or Italian. Lola’s father is Cuban, and her mother is white. Many people doubt that she is biracial, partly due to her phenotype and partly because of the class privileges that her family, school, and community afforded her. As other studies show, this illustrates how class and white privilege are often conflated (see Waring, 2023). Implicit in her advice is a willingness to embrace the journey to self-acceptance through assertiveness; Lola states:

I’ve thought about this a lot. First of all, I know I wouldn’t change anything because [of] the way that I’ve gotten to understand myself. I’ve done it all on my own, which I’ve really liked. It would be easy to go back and say, “I wish that I had accepted myself,” but that would be so inauthentic. I would just say to be more assertive if anyone was to question me about my identity. Because I think for a long time, I was very shaky. So, I would tell my younger self, “I am this, so accept me *like this*. I can do this; I can identify this way and not feel guilt.”

Lola went on to say that her lack of assertiveness when she was in high school was because she was concerned that she would sound racist or that she might offend a monoracial person of color as a white-passing woman. She wondered if she could be “hurting another person by claiming that role.” Her newfound confidence and willingness to be assertive sprang from majoring in Spanish, which helped her feel more connected to her Cuban roots, and what she called “the identity movement,” referring to several social justice movements that have inspired societal changes regarding race, gender, and LGBTQ rights. Lola explained how even her mother and best friend did not “see”

her as biracial because they believed Lola had “the quintessential white experience.” Remarks like these—from some of Lola’s closest relationships—underscore the omnipresence of monoracism and demonstrate why insights from fellow multiracial Americans are relevant because if (monoracial) caregivers and close friends question multiracial people’s identities, where will they receive support and guidance from? Lola is not an anomaly; scholars have noted that the children of one white parent and one biracial (part-white) parent often view their children as white. Cultivating assertiveness is particularly important when the closest people to a multiracial person question how they choose to identify based on their monoracist assumptions of what racialized experiences entail.

Nadia, 35 years old, is Thai/Chinese/white, spent her formative years in Thailand with her paternal relatives before moving to the same racially heterogeneous community on East Coast as Lyric. She is a mother of two, and most strangers assume she is Asian; a few people have guessed that she is mixed. Her father is Thai and Chinese; her mother is white. She proposes:

Life is so short, you got to make it what you want. I would say that everybody is entitled to a happy life, and sometimes that requires a little bit of effort on our part to make it what we want. You just have to be resilient and remember that you can find your people, your community, your tribe. You just have to surround yourself with those people that love you and care about you.

Nadia’s suggestion regarding resilience is inextricable from creating a community of reassuring members because it requires patience and determination to “find one’s tribe.” Her recommendation aligns with what other scholars have found: establishing a community of like-minded people can mitigate monoracism and strengthen ethnic pride among people with multiracial ancestries (Jackson et al., 2013). For example, Nadia

shared that, although her neighborhood was mostly white, her friend circle was racially diverse, and her family became close with another multiracial family in her neighborhood. In this way, she was proactive about establishing a “tribe” of people that is representative of society, and that reflected the diverse city she was raised in, which she described as a “bubble” where “it was the social norm to have a lot of [racially] mixed people in the community.” Likely, having such a strong foundation in a community where multiracial people were the social norm helped Nadia sustain her resilience in less diverse places. Furthermore, her community affirmation early in life likely helped build the expectation that she could find a “tribe” that would fully accept her. Notably, Lyric and Nadia demonstrate how crafting a community of advocates facilitated their confidence and resilience. Contrarily, Lola shows how if multiracial people do *not* have a circle of support, they need to develop assertiveness “on [their] own,” no less, perhaps to be able to defend themselves among family and friends.

Be Creative: Agentic Approaches to Affirmation

Participants also recommended creatively engaging with different forms of media to build community and deepen their consciousness, both of which are fundamentally social endeavors as they require other social actors. Seven of the 28 participants who provided advice (25%) proposed investing in different forms of media for inspiration, connection, and consciousness to help them better understand themselves in relation to the racially contentious society they live in. This was the second most frequent theme, and like the previous one, these recommendations came from participants of different backgrounds and from respondents who are racially coded as white and others who are regularly perceived as People of Color.

Riley, 21 years old, is typically assumed to be “everything brown... Middle Eastern, Puerto Rican... all types of brown.” His father is Black, and his mother is white. He grew up in a large, mostly racially segregated Midwestern city. When I asked him if there was ever a time that he struggled with being biracial, he responded with, “*Hell yeah.*” When I inquired how he handled that struggle, he said, “Music.” Upon invitation to elaborate, he explained that he listened to and made music to connect with artists with similar stories and empower himself to tell his own story. He cited a lyric from an artist that resonated with him: “Too white for the black kids, but too black for the whites.” This line inspired Riley to pursue a career in music and turn to music when he was experiencing multiracial-oriented hardships. This connection and calling echoes the role of community, or bonding with fellow group members over shared experiences, in thriving, despite being marginalized as a multiracial person.

Another respondent, Alec, referenced the media to connect with hybridity or “in betweenness.” Alec is 22 years old and has a Black father and a Japanese/white mother. He grew up in a large Midwestern inner city and is routinely perceived as a person of color. When I asked him for advice, he said to his younger self, “Bro, you’re not going to be the same as anybody ever, to be honest. You are a unique individual.” Alec then brought up a Japanese manga character that he “really associated with” because this character is:

half human, half ghoul... so I identify [with it]. He’s a person who’s trying to bring the world together and show the ghouls and humans the similarity of their lifestyles because he’s actually experienced them fully. I would say I’m a person that sees all sides of most of the major races out there, and so I have my ideas that can be shared with all the races to hopefully bring them together in a more cohesive unit.

Alec, like Riley, sees dimensions of himself in media that he does not see in his everyday social world. Connecting with art is an agentic act that allows Alec to identify with a character portrayed as “in-between” and develop a positive perspective about being multiracial, despite enduring monoracism. His interpretation of the benefits of being multiracial, being able to “see all sides of most of the major races,” had considerable consequences. This viewpoint shaped how he anticipated practicing medicine. I interviewed Alec the summer before he began medical school, and he discussed the justified “general mistrust among people of color” regarding medicine. This awareness guided his plan to rectify the well-founded wariness of communities of color by becoming a physician in a predominately Black and Brown area. Alec’s agentic approach to affirmation facilitated a promising career path and a personal crusade grounded in community and consciousness.

Natalie is a 30-year-old woman who grew up in Eastern Africa, where her parents were missionaries and the American South. Her mother is Black, and her father is white. In Africa, most of her peers were African; as a light-skinned foreigner assumed to be privileged, she stood out as the minority. In the South, she lived in a racially diverse community, yet her classes at school were almost entirely white due to academic tracking. Natalie suggested educating oneself to build a stronger understanding of society’s past and how that informs the present. Natalie stated:

I would say read more books about race because there will be times when you can’t argue someone into thinking correctly. But there are still times when I’m really frustrated because I don’t know things or don’t have the facts. I’m like, “Oh if I’d known that five years ago, that would have been really instrumental.” For example, things about society, how it was built, and what systems we live in. I wish I had cared more or thought to learn more about that.

Natalie's emphasis on becoming more aware of the history and structure of the United States is an agentic way of understanding why monoracism exists in the first place. Developing an informed perspective of race relations might help multiracial persons not take monoracist statements personally, despite how hurtful and isolating they can be. In addition, taking this step could potentially decrease the degree to which multiracial individuals internalize monoracist ideologies, impacting how they interact with and guide others who are multiracial. Finally, these intentional steps speak to the impact of community and consciousness-raising when dealing with being marginalized, excluded, or misunderstood as a multiracial person.

Coral, 35 years old, also suggested tapping into knowledge and research to work through the struggles accompanying multiracial ancestry. Coral's mother is Mexican and Indigenous, and her father is white. As a result, she has been assumed to be of many different ancestries, including Albanian, Italian, Latina, Indigenous, and mixed. She lived in a large, diverse Midwestern metropolitan area until kindergarten; then, her family moved to a rural, predominately white Midwestern town with a small percentage of Latin* residents. Her advice to her younger self was to read Root's (1992) groundbreaking contribution, the Bill of Rights for Mixed People. Coral shared:

I think that I would share the poem that I was referring to earlier: the Bill of Rights for Mixed People. What I really like about that poem is that there's just so many things that I feel like are represented. Like, you have the right to not always identify the same way in different settings or different situations. Or you may sometimes identify differently than some of your siblings. Basically, all these in between that we feel are *normal* and...you are enough. Like, you're always enough in every setting, and you don't have to comply with what other people think you are just because that's what they think. I feel like if I had that poem earlier, it would have made me feel more confident.

Inherent in Coral's suggestion is an acknowledgment of being constructed as abnormal simply because of a multiracial background, which is a classic example of monoracism. Coral, an educator, explained that she recently shared Root's work with a Black/white biracial transracially adopted student. After he read it, he said, "Oh, my God. This is me!" She also shared it with a Black/white biracial romantic partner whose emphatic response was, "That is amazing!" These anecdotal stories attest to how valuable Coral's advice can be for the multiracial community, including persons with different ancestries. Both Coral and Natalie underscore the importance of expanding one's consciousness through reading and research, which was also found in strmic-pawl's (2016, p. 129) work, in which Asian/white and Black/white interviewees were asked to provide advice for multiracial individuals who were trying to "figure out how to identify." From exploring one's identity to processing monoracist encounters, deepening one's awareness can have a positive, empowering impact.

Be Careful with Your Disclosure...When You Look White

The last theme was to be careful about whom to share one's ancestry with. Although this only emerged in two of the 28 respondents (7%) who provided advice, it was the third most common theme. Additionally, it is noteworthy because of the characteristics of the participants who offered this suggestion and what this pattern indicates about diversity and inclusion in 21st-century America. Being careful with disclosure was exclusively recommended by white-appearing respondents, who were repeatedly questioned and distrusted when they revealed their non-white ancestry. Ally is a 23-year-old college student; her father is white, and her mother is Japanese/white. She lived in a large, racially segregated Midwestern city until she was five; then, her

family relocated to a Midwestern town that was primarily white. Ally also spent considerable time in Hawaii, where her maternal grandmother lived, as a child. Most strangers think Ally is “100% white, like from Sweden or something.” After sharing a plethora of interactions where she has been angrily interrogated, Ally advised:

Um, I think I would've...been more careful with whom I would talk to...about my life. I think even in middle school, I would've been more careful with whom I told, just because people aren't afraid to share their opinions and tell you that you *aren't* something that you *are*. It takes me a lot to get to the point where I say, “This is a part of my life. This is what I'm willing to share.”

Ally recalled circumstances in school when she marked “Asian American” as one of her races on surveys, and her classmates regularly commented, “Why would you put Asian? That's not funny, Ally. You need to put what race you are.” She also recounted several other examples of people fervently contesting her Asian ancestry. As a result, Ally developed a coping mechanism: photographic “evidence” of her Japanese heritage. She says, “I get a lot of resistance from people not believing. So, I like to show *photos* [of her with her Japanese family]; I like to *constantly* try to prove that I am something that I am.” Contrary to what many of her counterparts recommended regarding confidence, she explained, “I'm not sure in finding my own identity that if I just believe it, then that's all that matters.” This assertion is striking, as it highlights that there is no universal strategy to successfully navigating the complex struggles of being multiracial, regardless of one's ancestries or phenotype.

Omar was the oldest respondent in the study at 64 years old. His father is Black, and his mother is white/Jewish; his mother raised him, and most people assume he is white. He grew up in diverse communities on the East Coast and has lived in the Midwest for many years. When I asked him if he had advice to offer his younger self

and/or the next generation, he explained how different his life would have been if he had grown up today, where “being biracial is everywhere.” He noted how his social context shaped how he experienced being biracial, “In retrospect, I would not have had this *lifelong* struggle” marked by feeling “eternally conflicted” about whether he should share his background with others. Throughout the interview, Omar made it clear that he learned from an early age to be strategic about whom he shared his Black ancestry. For example, when he started school in a predominately white suburb with “blatantly racist” white neighbors, he deliberately did not disclose his entire background. Lack of disclosure was a defense mechanism to cope with the “stigma” of being biracial at the time, although it came with a substantial cost. When he fell in love with a Black woman in college, he refused to disclose his Black heritage, despite her informing him that her parents would never approve of her relationship with a white man. After explaining how his life would have been different if he were growing up today, Omar reflected on why he practices judicious disclosure, which was mentioned several times throughout his interview. The conflicting emotions he experiences due to disclosure discernment are evident in his words:

I found myself becoming very selective about whom I would tell about my background...It's like, I *want* to [tell people], but then sometimes I don't want to deal with their reaction, you know, because then it's always like, “Now do you look at me differently?” Then I feel so *bad* that I've *denied* who I am, you know? Although I've always felt this really strong connection to my African American family members. It's been so hard for me sometimes because I never know if telling people will be liberating for me or... they will start looking at me like, “Maybe he's lying.”

Omar's testimony closely aligns with Ally, who is more than 40 years his junior, grew up in a different region of the United States, and has different racialized heritages. This finding highlights the U.S. inclination to use skin color as a proxy for race. What Omar

and Ally's stories demonstrate is that looking white can create a different dynamic as a multiracial person. Therefore, it may require different tactics to handle monoracism, depending on other mitigating factors.

Having shared advice from participants about how to cope with the marginalization that accompanies a multiracial background, I want to close by acknowledging a unique piece of advice by Vivian, a 20-year-old woman with a white mother and Black father. She grew up in a Midwestern metropolitan city, and strangers usually guess she is Puerto Rican, Mexican, Hawaiian, or Asian. In her words, "Everything but Black. People don't think I'm Black." Her advice was markedly different from everyone else in the study. She began by saying, "Just try to be yourself," which participants who discussed confidence also suggested. However, after more thought, Vivian offered:

I actually don't know if I would give them advice. I would probably *help* them. I would share my experiences with them and let them know that they aren't alone. I always feel like that is more important than telling them what to do because I feel like if you can connect with someone or if you feel like you're not alone in something, that goes further than "Oh, you should try this."

This rare recommendation can help people with multiracial ancestries, regardless of how they identify, by validating that monoracism exists and that it is difficult to navigate. Just as other studies center the significance of validation regarding identity and its impact on well-being among multiracial people (Lou & Lalonde, 2015), this study centers the significance of validation that monoracism is a distinct systemic problem that needs attention and rectification. Validation in itself is a form of care because "[i]ntimate labor becomes a form of community building—performed out of care—in response to oppressive conditions" (Ortiz, 2021, p. 10). Multiracial individuals whose confidence

wavers, who may not (yet) feel affirmed through agentic activities, or who may not find relief in prudently revealing their backgrounds, might be able to experience a momentary respite in the acknowledgment of a shared experience of marginalization, exclusion and/or being misunderstood. In fact, Ally's assertion that her belief alone "is [not] all that matters" implies the urge for validation and/or the yearning for community membership. Vivian's suggestion to listen, provide fellowship, invite connection, and alleviate isolation stands regardless of racialized backgrounds, phenotype, and/or self-identification. Moreover, her recommendation could point to an emerging multiracial consciousness (Harris, 2020; strmic-pawl, 2023), which might be a precursor to institutional efforts to identify and eradicate monoracism as a system of oppression.

Discussion and Conclusion

Approximately one in 10 Americans marked more than one racial ancestry in the 2020 Census, making this subpopulation the fastest-growing demographic in the country (Foster-Frau et al., 2021). In addition, the multiracial population increased in almost every U.S. county (Chavez, 2021). Although this population is often propped up like a hard-won trophy—proof that racism has declined—one look at research renders this opportunistic conclusion invalid. As mentioned throughout this article, multiracial people experience marginalization from family, friends, peers, and partners, in school and in the workplace. Furthermore, international research on the multiracial population across Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa also report marginalization⁸, which

⁸Examples include, but are not limited to, the United Kingdom (Campion & Lewis, 2022), Latin America and the Caribbean (England, 2010), Singapore (Rocha & Yeoh, 2022), South Africa (Metcalf, 2022), and Switzerland and Morocco (Gillieron, 2022).

illuminates the global significance of insights and strategies for dealing with multiracial-oriented adversity.

In the absence of institutional efforts to acknowledge, let alone eliminate monoracism, advice from people with multiracial ancestries is a starting point, especially following the racial and political whiplash of the last few years. My study contributes to the growing field of critical mixed-race studies by outlining three practices to navigate adversity that multiracial people often face, regardless of racial self-identification, grounded in community and/or consciousness. Almost 30 participants of different racial ancestries, although all were half/part white, offered thoughtful advice based on their own racialized lived experiences. The most common suggestions were to develop confidence, assertiveness, and resilience to withstand the ubiquity of monoracist beliefs and comments. While this advice might seem rooted in individualism, interviewees referenced how other people catalyzed their confidence or resilience, like family members or a group of multiracial friends, which indicates a multiracial consciousness. Developing assertiveness when deprived of social support is also noteworthy because it was developed in response to a monoracist environment. Cultivating these traits was an inherently social act, which is important for readers to understand because it infers that we all play a role in nurturing the necessary tools to identify and tackle monoracism.

Creatively engaging with media was another technique to affirm my participants' identities and experiences, and to expand their knowledge about the U.S. and the multiracial population. These processes generated space between themselves and monoracial people's perceptions of them, potentially reducing the likelihood of internalizing monoracism. This finding is inextricable from the media-oriented culture in

which young Americans are embedded; music, television shows, books, and academic articles are easily accessible online. These strategies also demonstrate how, despite a lack of institutional support and society-wide acknowledgment of monoracism, multiracial people innovatively assemble their own toolkits to thrive in a monoracist society. This finding is rooted in the community by seeking out shared experiences and consciousness by strengthening one's understanding of the organization of society, the history of race relations, and the specific experiences of multiracial people. Additionally, this advice confirms the value of this study, as more multiracial people might look for resources and support online to process and protest monoracism in their lives.

The third theme was only offered by white-appearing respondents, who proposed judicious disclosure, as their non-white ancestry is often vehemently questioned and doubted. This finding is sociologically significant because it calls attention to stunted racial progress. As we hear countless platitudes supposedly valuing diversity and inclusion, this study shows that white-appearing people with "diverse" racial backgrounds feel inclined to withhold their non-white ancestry to avoid being interrogated or labeled a liar. These experiences demonstrate a lack of collective awareness of the phenotypic variation that exists in the multiracial population (and other racialized populations). An increase in multiracial people who do not feel comfortable sharing their ancestries creates a paradox: more racial diversity, a more multiracial America, but less disclosure, in hostile contexts, of such diversity. This dynamic produces an almost "invisible diversity" that does not challenge the long-standing racial hierarchy. This theme underscores the value of racial and cultural humility when discussing race and racialized identities.

All three findings reiterate that “life is not lived in the singular” (Garcia, 2010, p. 152), as participants of this study's struggles and suggestions are deeply rooted in the social world. This socio-historical moment, social interactions, and the larger, monoracist social structure profoundly inform the participants' advice. Their guidance is relevant to people committed to social change because it underlines the lack of collective institutional action, the empowering impact of shared identities, and the adaptation strategies to systemic inequality. While this study has the potential to help multiracial individuals cope with monoracism, I do not argue that my findings are generalizable to all multiracial people. Although most multiracial people in the United States have white ancestry (Henderson, 2022), not all do. Those without white ancestry should be acknowledged because they have been severely understudied (Rondilla et al., 2017). Additionally, since my participants experience “white privilege by proxy” (Waring, 2023, p. 64), their advice is dipped in white privilege and, consequently, might not be (as) applicable to those without white ancestry and the privileges that accompany proximity to whiteness.

Nevertheless, this study provides realistic strategies to counter monoracism that could serve the rising multiracial population of all ancestries since the entire multiracial population experiences monoracism, unfortunately. Furthermore, this research offers insights into how monoracial allies with multiracial relatives, students, partners, friends, and others can be more aware, supportive, and anti-monoracist. By becoming more racially inclusive, members of society have the potential to enhance the lives of multiracial people and transform what is considered the racial “norm” in society. I hope this article informs higher education policies, practices, and programs to better serve the

increasing number of multiracial students as well as faculty and staff. More research should explore advice from multiracial people as well as institutional initiatives to disrupt monoracism as a dominant (albeit almost invisible) ideology in the United States.

Additional studies might incentivize leaders to implement policies and programs that identify, denounce, and dismantle monoracism. Until then, I invite all of us to take

Vivian's advice to do our part to build connections between multiracial people, reduce isolation and validate the systemic problem of monoracism.

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