Identity Development of Mixed Students and The Role of Cultural and Ethnic Student Organizations in Higher Education

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A foreword for mixed individuals:

Bill of Rights
for
People of Mixed Heritage

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

Not to justify my existence in this world.
Not to keep the races separate within me.
Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.
Not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical or ethnic ambiguity.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

To identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify.
To identify myself differently than how my parents identify me.
To identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters.
To identify myself differently in different situations.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial or multiethnic.
To change my identity over my lifetime--and more than once.
To have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people.
To freely choose whom I befriend and love.

© Maria P. P. Root, PhD, 1993, 1994

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to evaluate how mixed college students develop their identity. This study also evaluates the experiences of mixed students in cultural or ethnic student organizations and how it impacts their first-year experience, self-identification, and identity development. Previous research indicates that student organizations play a large role in student development in higher education settings. However, this research has mainly focused on monoracial white or minority students and conceptualized racial identity as static and constant. Thus, the experiences of navigating these organizations from the perspective of multiracial, biracial, or multiethnic students has been largely unexplored. This study utilizes a qualitative approach and employs interview and survey data from mixed college undergraduates at a predominantly white institution in the Midwest. Responses were coded and analyzed to reveal trends about how mixed students develop their identity. Findings suggest that mixed students join student organizations to foster a sense of community, explore their identity, but also that mixed students face microaggressions and other challenges when attempting to integrate into these organizations are other subculture spaces on campus. These findings will hopefully add to the growing, but very limited, literature on biracial, multiracial, and multiethnic individuals in higher education spaces.

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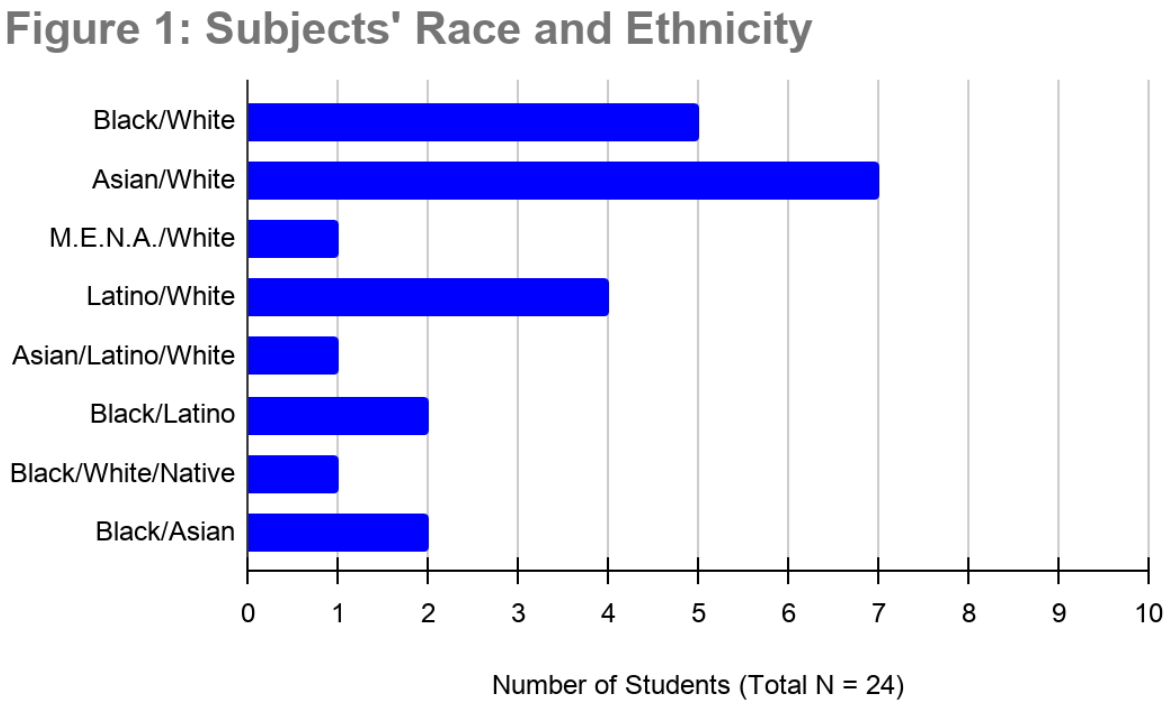

Figure 2

Introduction

What do Barack Obama, the former president of the US, Vin Diesel, a well-known actor, Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, Rob Schneider, an actor, director, and comedian, Kamala Harris, the current Vice President of the US, and Zayn Malik, a famous singer-songwriter all have in common? All of these individuals are multiracial, and many other Americans are too, including myself. In fact, according to data from the US Census Bureau, there are over 10,000,000 individuals in the US who identify as multiracial. With the growing rate of interracial marriages, this number is expected to grow and estimates project that in the next forty years that number will have tripled (Parker et. al, 2019). In the realm of higher education, estimates project that one in five new college and university students will identify as biracial or multiracial by 2050 (Brown, 2009; Smith & Edmonston, 1997). Despite this population's growth, it is greatly understudied, especially studies pertaining to adjusting to college life.

"Mixed" in this study refers to individuals who identify as biracial, multiracial, and/or multi-ethnic. This term is especially useful because it is more inclusive toward individuals of Latin or Hispanic descent (which is considered separate from one's race) who consider themselves belonging to more than one racial or ethnic group (i.e. someone who identifies as Ecuadorian and white). It is also important to note that mixed individuals do not have homogeneous experiences and differ vastly based on the other social and personal identities an individual possesses. Despite this, there is strong evidence that college campus environments impact students across racial and ethnic backgrounds, and for underrepresented minorities who unfortunately far too often feel excluded or invalidated at predominantly white institutions,

college subcultures like cultural or ethnic student organizations serve as vessels for support and validation. As the mixed population grows, so will the need for these college subcultures to provide support for mixed students. I hypothesize that “mixed” college students' experiences with these types of student organizations are more complicated since their racial or ethnic identity is more fluid compared to monoracial or monoethnic individuals.

This study aims to discuss the complexities of being “mixed” college student and student decision making around choosing to participate in a cultural or ethnic organization. Moreover, it will assess the impact of student organization participation on mixed first-year experience, overall college experience, and racial identification. More broadly, this study attempts to shed light on an overlooked population and demonstrate the need for and importance of inclusion of multiracial and multiethnic students in cultural and ethnic student organizations (as well as other kinds of student organizations). Therefore, this study examines *the experiences of mixed college students in cultural or ethnic student organizations as well as student organizations that do not have a cultural, racial, or ethnic component.* Additionally, it evaluates *the experiences of mixed students in college generally* and *the different ways mixed students come to identify at a predominantly white institution.*

Literature Review

This literature review outlines major sectors of research on multiracial individuals. Firstly, it introduces a brief history and broad overview of research that has focused on multiracial individuals. Next, it further discusses the area of research that has been done specifically on multiracial individuals in higher education. Lastly, this literature review zooms in on the role of subcultures in higher education and how they can impact mixed college students.

Research on multiracial identity

Historically, empirical studies on multiracial individuals and multiracial identity development were quite limited and grounded in a theory that oversimplified the diverse experiences of multiracial individuals. Particularly in the US, anti-miscegenation laws and narrow definitions of race often forced biracial and multiracial individuals to choose one race (which was not always of their own choosing) or be constrained due to social ostracization. Finally, in 1937, a sociologist, Everett Stonequist, created the "marginal man" framework, which argued that biracial individuals belong to two different worlds, but also neither due to their complex identity. More strikingly, it concluded that because multiracial individuals cannot belong to one race they are doomed to an existence of marginalization. Due to the limitations and inherent pessimism of this framework many social scientists challenged this theory and argued that biracial individuals can identify with different racial backgrounds (i.e. biracial, black) and they develop their racial identity through stages in their life course with adolescence as the stage where most biracial and multiracial individuals solidify their racial identification (Ferguson, 2016; Townsend et. al, 2012; Lou and Lalonde 2015; Miville et. al, 2005; Renn, 2008). After

scholars adopted these new models, social scientists could more cohesively analyze racial development among mixed individuals.

Largely the literature on multiracial individuals has focused on what factors play a role in identity formation and self-identification. Several scholars argue that other social identities, like gender and socioeconomic status, impact the way multiracial individuals choose to racially identify and therefore the activities and social experiences they choose to engage in (Davenport, 2016; Basu 2010; Perkins, 2014; Harris & Khanna, 2010). Social scientists also have focused on the role of institutions like families, schools, and universities rather than how mixed individuals exercise their own agency around their identity (Townsend et al., 2009; Nadal, 2013; Museus, 2016). Scholars already know broadly that multiracial individuals develop their racial identity over the course of their life and concluded that changes in racial identification over time illustrates fluidity in racial identification (Root, 1992). Yet, the ways in which mixed individuals explore and form their identity, especially in higher education spaces, has been neglected. Questions like how mixed students explore their identity in college and how colleges provide a space for identity development for mixed students are largely unanswered. The experience of being mixed has been conceptualized as a continuous process of "doing race" in which mixed individuals constantly assess, negotiate, and reflect on their identity (Lewis 2003). For mixed individuals, this process of race-making and identity formation can be amplified in college. Therefore, scholars should explore the how experiences in college shape mixed students' identities.

Mixed students in college

College is a very important time for many students to transition from adolescence to adulthood and enter a new phase of self-development. However, mixed students' experiences in

college are largely understudied with the exception of Kristen Renn's work. Renn's work lays the foundation for my study as she has examined situational identity, communities on campuses, and her results provide suggestions for student affairs professionals and educators in higher education (Renn, 2000, 2008, 2012). Most relevant to my study is her examination of situational identities, peer culture, and spaces (Renn, 2000). Situational identity refers to the emphasis of a particular social identity, in this case race and ethnicity, instead of another due to the circumstances and environment. For example, an Asian-white biracial student who passes as white might not assert their Asian heritage in a room of white peers whereas they may try harder to assert their Asian heritage in a room of Asian peers to be more salient with the group. This process is what Renn refers to as the impact of peer culture. Renn defines peer culture as "the forces, often tacit, that shape life on campus in terms of group membership, acceptable discourse, and desirable behaviors" (2000, p. 405). For mixed students, peer culture often affects their ability to fit in or feel excluded by a particular group whether it be a group of friends, a class, or a student organization. Since college provides numerous opportunities to socialize, there are numerous college spaces where students are regulated by peer culture (i.e. residence halls, campus events, classes). However, for mixed students this also means there are numerous opportunities to experience incidents of racial tension.

Numerous scholars have examined the forms of racial discrimination and prejudice that multiracial individuals experience and how incidents of discrimination at school, work, and even incidents within family units impact them (Museus et al., 2016; Nadal et al., 2013; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012). Specifically, Museus outlines eight different types of prejudice and discrimination that multiracial students face in college: (1) racial essentialization, (2) invalidation of racial identities, (3) external imposition of racial identities, (4) racial exclusion and

marginalization, (5) challenges to racial authenticity, (6) suspicion of chameleons, (7) exoticization, and (8) pathologizing of multiracial individuals (Museus et al., 2016). These forms of discrimination were useful for my analysis as I predicted several mixed students will have experienced at least one of these forms of prejudice or discrimination. Yet, these studies focus on the role of student affairs professionals rather than what students themselves do in response to these challenges and what other mechanisms of support they utilize like college subcultures. Research reveals that attending a predominantly white college or university poses several challenges for both minorities and multiracial individuals (Museus, 2008; Macrander & Winkle-Wagner, 2016; González, 2002). This research suggests that subcultures like student organizations can be a combatant to these challenges for minority students (Museus, 2008). However, I hypothesize that even within college subcultures like a student organization, mixed students face forms of prejudice and discrimination.

The role of college subcultures: cultural and ethnic student organizations

There is another growing set of literature that focuses on college subcultures and their impact on minority students which helps form the basis of my analysis. Social scientists have revealed that prior to going to college many young Americans often find themselves in monoracial friend groups due to the prevalent residential and school segregation in the United States (Joyner & Kao, 2000; Mouw & Entwisle, 2006). However, attending a college or university and engaging with campus student events and organizations typically provides a more diverse environment for individuals to foster new friendships and gain exposure to different cultures and mitigate the effects of US residential and school segregation. In particular, I am choosing to focus on cultural and ethnic student organization participation on college campuses because of the tension around the subject. These student organizations greatly differ in their

focus and purposes but have some component of race, ethnicity, or culture built into their infrastructures. Some examples of these student organizations are multicultural clubs, ethnic dance groups, racial or ethnic-specific career organizations, and dialogue groups for race-based topics, and many of them started to emerge during the civil rights era in the 1960s.

Presently, there has been much ongoing debate about the impact and consequences of student engagement with racially, ethnically, or culturally specific student organizations. On one side of the debate, some scholars are critical of these types of student organizations because they believe that racial or ethnic-specific promote racial segregation. On the other side, supporters of these organizations argue that they promote learning and development as well as provide opportunities to create new peer relationships and exposure to other social networks on campus (Museus, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007). However, these studies on student organization participation frequently dismiss mixed individuals and do not address how they navigate student organizations and the outcomes of their participation or lack thereof. I hypothesize that this binary of understanding does not hold true for mixed individuals who are often already predisposed to multiculturalism. Since I anticipate that some mixed individuals will face exclusion, even within cultural and ethnic student organizations that they identify with, I think engagement with these organizations could substantially shape their sense of community and self-identification.

Several studies have found that minority students are more likely to join a cultural or ethnic student organization and often seek out these types of student organizations to find a community or a sense of belonging (Park and Kim 2013; Museus, 2008). This sense of belonging and peer support, that is facilitated by cultural or ethnic student organization participation, is vital to the success of most college students and research shows that it allows minority students

(with substantial empirical evidence of positive impacts on black students) to learn more about their cultural identity (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Social science researchers who study higher education and college student development often fail to include minority biracial individuals (i.e. Black-Asian biracials) in their population and usually define biracial as having one parent who is white and one who is another race (i.e. Black, Mexican, Asian). Additionally, many studies focused on young children or the parents of biracial individuals as their population which also undermines the importance of the adolescence/young adult phase for biracial individuals. There is a small literature on biracial individuals and the role of mentorship as well as how student affairs professionals can better support multiracial students (Talbot, 2008; Renn, 2008), but there is not much on the role of student-run organizations and what the implications of being involved in an organization can have on a multiracial student and how they choose to identify. Sociologists have insufficiently studied multiracial individuals' self-exploration of racial identity by focusing on the perceptions of others and family relationships (Nadal et al., 2013; Brittain et al., 2013). Even though both of these factors influence racial identification, there are other factors like self-perception that are more inherently internal processes. This neglect leaves huge gaps in the literature about how mixed individuals explore, reinforce, or reject racial identifications in a college setting. It also fails to acknowledge that mixed students can face exclusion or feelings of otherness in minority spaces as well as predominantly white ones.

In particular, student organizations on college campuses play a large role in self-development for college students and can even influence their choice of friends, career paths, and influence the other organizations and experiences that they are exposed to. More importantly, for

minority students at predominantly white institutions who often experience racial discrimination, these student organizations provide a space for students to express race and ethnicity related issues and topics that one might not feel comfortable sharing in other settings (i.e. class discussions). Yet, most studies do not include an analysis of how student organizations influence mixed students' identity development and overall college experience. Therefore, several questions are left unexplored: How do mixed students negotiate their identity in subcultures like student organizations? How do mixed students' experiences in cultural or ethnic student organizations differ from experiences in other organizations? How does student organization participation inform mixed students' identity development?

Significance and analysis

This study holds great sociological significance because its results could create policy changes at colleges and universities. I hypothesize that mixed students' decision-making surrounding choosing to join (and stay in) a club or organization on campus is complicated and could reveal insights on how student organizations can be inclusive toward multiracial individuals. In addition, I hypothesize that women will be more inclined to join organizations dedicated to biracial and multiracial individuals and have higher levels of participation (i.e. holding a leadership position for a student organization) because women are more likely to identify as biracial or multiracial (Davenport, 2016). I also hypothesize that mixed students will face prejudice, exclusion, and identity crises during their first year, especially students who come from less diverse communities. If my results do yield this, colleges and universities could provide more spaces for multiracial individuals to engage in dialogue about discrimination on campus or create more organizations that specifically cater to multiracial, biracial, and multiethnic students. Previous work has revealed that family engagement with conversations

about race and culture incites racial and ethnic exploration (Brittian et al., 2013). Therefore, the results of this study could also help encourage more parents who have mixed children to help foster their child's self-development and racial and ethnic exploration. Therefore, this study aims to answer the question: ***How do mixed individuals develop their identity in college? More specifically, it also aims to evaluate how cultural or ethnic student organization participation inform identity development amongst mixed college students?*** Building on the work that has been done on the role of student organizations in identity formation, this study seeks to reveal complex experiences that students with multiple racial or ethnic backgrounds face in higher education as well as evaluate some of the ways mixed students choose to identify.

Methodology

This study examines the following: ***How do mixed college students develop their identity?*** Thus, to answer this question, I evaluated the expectations and feelings that mixed students have when they are contemplating joining a student organization. Moreover, I examined what kinds of impressions did involvement leave on mixed college students and to what extent did it impact their first-year experience, overall experience, identity, and sense of belonging on a college campus. Thus, I utilized a mixed-method strategy to answer my question.

My methods included both a preliminary survey and follow-up in-depth interviews. After reviewing the literature, it was quite apparent that minority multiracial/mixed individuals are greatly understudied. Thus, I wanted to include students from many different combinations of mixed identity. The preliminary survey not only functioned as a method to collect data, but also as a method for screening participants. I wanted to ensure I had a variety of students from those who did participate a cultural or ethnic organization to those who did not and even those who joined a different type of student organization. It is quite difficult to look at someone and identify if they are mixed, and screening participants by directly messaging them asking if they are mixed would be awkward and probably produce a greater selection bias. Thus, participants were self-identified and volunteered to participate based on the criteria on the recruitment flyer.

Therefore, students who either checked more than one race or ethnicity option, biracial, or multi-racial on a race/ethnicity question; or have listed parents from two or more different races or ethnicities were considered “mixed” and included in my final sample. Moreover, to ensure individuals who were mixed with Middle Eastern, North African, or Latino descent were included, individuals who were multiethnic were also considered “mixed”. I recruited

participants online at the start of the fall semester (October) and finished recruiting in February. I surveyed respondents until I reached a pool of about 25 individuals who meet my study criteria and asked if these students would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

The preliminary survey involved several checkbox multiple-choice questions, a few short open-ended responses, and a checkbox question asking if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. I minimized the number of short open-ended questions on this survey to ensure that I collect meaningful responses. I asked surface-level questions like: What is your racial background? What is your maternal parent's racial background? What is your paternal parent's racial background?[1] Do you plan to join a student organization? What kind? Why do you want to join this organization? What do you hope to get out of participation? This survey was aimed at capturing the first facet of my question, so it focused on students' expectations and motivations for joining a student organization. Moreover, I anticipate certain mixed students being more willing to participate in student organizations than others. Specifically, I hypothesized that mixed women would be more willing to participate in multi-ethnic and multi-racial organizations since they are more likely to identify as multiracial compared to mixed men.

I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These interviews took place from October to February. These interviews were focused on evaluating any changes that students have experienced from joining a student organization or why a student may choose not to pursue or stay in a particular organization. My independent variable is cultural or ethnic student organization participation (yes, participated; or no, did not participate). My dependent variables

[1] These first three questions function to help me decide who meets my inclusion criteria of being a mixed individual (even if they report that they identify with one race, or with two races rather than referring to themselves as biracial/multiracial)

are cultural awareness, sense of belonging, identity development and self-identification. I asked questions like: How did participation in student organizations meet (or fail to meet) your expectations? Why did you choose to participate/not to participate? Do you plan to continue participating? Why or why not? How did you feel at student organization meetings and events? Where do you feel most welcome or where you most belong on campus? Has participation led to participation in other groups? To what extent, if any has student organization participation raised your awareness of issues that impact your community? Has student organization participation allowed you to celebrate traditions or holidays that you might practice at home (or were never exposed)? To be objective, I also did not further interpret interview questions for my participants and if they asked for clarification I only repeated questions that were posed.

Overall, I hypothesized that mixed students would have varying experiences participating in cultural or ethnic student organizations, but more importantly that due to their mixed identity they would face struggles understanding their race or ethnicity and face complications trying to fit into organizations. Additionally, I hypothesized that participating in a cultural or ethnic organization would impact students' identity (both social and personal) and promote a sense of belonging on college campuses.

During interviews, I asked students about their expectations of the student organizations they participated in and experiences during organization meetings, events, etc. Furthermore, I anticipated that participation in student organizations would change the types of people that students surround themselves with, so I asked generally about the racial make-up of their hometown or high school friends to compare to the college friends they describe in their interviews.

In particular, it was useful to include interview data to better understand the feelings mixed students have around student organizations and their sense of belonging and community on campus. In prior studies, very few include data from interviews, but interview data allows for better analysis rather than surface level survey questions like what kinds of career paths multiracial individuals choose. Additionally, I hypothesized that the experiences of mixed college students would differ in meticulous details which is data that surveys would potentially miss. Even if I had a section for participants to fill in their own short answers on the preliminary survey, the responses would likely lack depth or participants might be reluctant to fill it out at all. Thus, I interviewed participants and I utilized two sets of questions. One catered to those who participated in an ethnic or cultural student organization (or other form of student organization)[2] and one catered to those who did not participate.[3]

It is important to note that these interviews took place over Zoom where participants could see me face to face. Based on my appearance, participants likely understood me as a fellow student and moreover due physical appearance I know many participants assumed that I was Black and/or also of mixed race. Therefore, when I asked questions about race or challenges with being mixed I had to often probe participants (especially mixed black students) to ensure they fully explained their responses rather than assuming I had prior knowledge of their experiences because of my racial background.

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[2] Students who joined an organization, but later (within 1 - 4 weeks) decided to drop or stop participating were considered students who did choose to participate. Questions were slightly altered.

[3] Students who participated in other student organizations were asked similar questions to those who participated in cultural or ethnic organizations.

In order to analyze my data, I used RevAi, a transcription software, to capture responses in a text format. Then, I copied and attached these responses to a separate Microsoft document leaving my raw data in a zip folder. On this new Microsoft document, responses were coded using short phrases and terms to identify key themes and findings. Coding annotations were made using Microsoft Word's commenting function. This data was also compared to the preliminary survey data to reveal any changes in perspective.

Coding

Interview responses provided data on mixed students' beliefs, practices, encounters, relationships, organizational ties (as well as informal groups) and roles. The interviews were divided into four segments and thus responses were coded based on the subject of the segment. The first segment focused on the students' backgrounds and their racial and ethnic identifications. Students described their hometown community, their understanding and formation of their own racial identity, familial ties, and any cultural practices or holidays they took part in at home. Narratives were analyzed to locate *stereotypes, change, familial ties*, and *culture*. "*Stereotype"* was adopted as a code since several students divulged assumptions about racial groups they belonged to as well as what assumptions they believed other people drew about them. "*Change*" in this segment was defined as shifts in the way students' identify (i.e. a student who chooses to identify exclusively with one racial group), or even the way they express and perform their racial identity to others (i.e. hairstyling). *"Familial ties"* best fit to encompass the range of family relationships from parents, to grandparents, to aunts and uncles, to step-siblings. These relationships impacted students' exposure to culture and thus their engagement with it. Stories about family or cultural traditions, food, and holidays were coded as "*culture*".

The next segment was centered around students' sense of community on campus and transition into college. Beliefs about community and belonging on campus were analyzed for "*exclusion*", statements suggesting mixed students felt unsupported or unwelcomed; and "inclusion", which were remarks that suggested when students felt a sense of community and support. The influence of "peer culture" on students' identity formation was also noted (Renn, 2000). Then, the third segment asked students about their student organization engagement. Students were asked about their level of involvement, their expectations, everyday experiences within their respective student organizations. Descriptions were coded for "*in-group*" and "*out-group*" categorizations based on how much students felt included. Moreover, "expectations", what students assumed student organization would be like, and the "prospects", professional skills, knowledge, or positive personal experiences that students gained were coded.

The final segment was concentrated on understanding the impact of student organization participation. Most frequently, I coded for (*community and self) awareness* and *(cultural and professional) exposure*, and *track change*. Narratives that showcased heightened understanding of community-based issues were coded as *community awareness*, whereas self-realizations and beliefs about students' own identity were coded as *self-awareness.* Finally, unlike the first segment, "*track change"* specifically referred to shifts in career goals or academic interests rather than changes in self-identification.

Limitations

Despite these discoveries, this study has a few potential limitations. Firstly, my sample is very small in comparison to the overall population of all mixed college students and does not cover an extensive list of racial/ethnic combinations. My sample came from only 18 students

from the University of Michigan. As a result, many mixed racial combinations were excluded from this study (i.e. no students interviewed were Black and Latino). Moreover, since my data came solely from University of Michigan students, my study does not really speak to schools that are not predominantly white institutions (i.e. HBCU's). Additionally, this small sample only included very few men which could be due to the fact that mixed men as left likely to identify as such compared to women or another fact. Considering this, my study has low external validity and could be improved in the future by a larger sample size, interviewing students at other universities, and having a diverse representation of racial and ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and other potential identities.

Second, due to my sampling method my sample is not representative and biased since participants had to initially reach out to me to be considered. The students who did volunteer probably did so because they had a strong opinion about student organizations or about being a mixed student. Plus, students were recruited virtually, therefore students without internet or a Facebook account were likely excluded from this study. In addition, because I wanted coverage of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, my sample cannot really draw general conclusions about any particular subgroup of mixed identity, but instead the overarching complexities of a heterogeneous mixed group. Being "mixed" is not a homogeneous experience and should not be generalized without substantive data from large samples with coverage of stratified racial and ethnic combinations.

Another drawback is, due to the COVID-19, my questions about continued participation in organizations maybe inaccurate due to social distancing practices. Many students noted the lack of physical social events as a result of the pandemic as a reason for why they became disinterested in some organizations, took a break, or joined other organizations. Additionally,

responses to questions about participation frequency and engagement (especially for first-years who only experienced the university in a virtual format) were lackluster which I also hypothesized was due to social distancing practices. For some students who did not participate in student organizations at all, some pointed to the difficulty to join a new organization or participate in one given social distancing practices observed on campus. Still, although this methodology has flaws, it provides insight on how to better support mixed college students through student organizations and further understand the complexity of mixed identity.

Data

Eighteen in-depth interviews form the basis of my analyses. To gather my sample, I used a purposive sampling method and recruited participants via social media[4]. A recruitment flyer was posted on University of Michigan Facebook group pages. Interested participants contacted me and were sent the survey as well as a sign-up link for interviews. I continued to repeat this process until I have about 25 individuals who are multiracial and have completed surveys. I used this method to produce a pool of individuals with maximum variation of different mixed identity combinations. From this pool, I contacted these individuals to schedule interviews which resulted in final sample of 18 individuals who completed both a survey and an interview. As an incentive I offered participants who completed the survey and completed a follow-up interview a $15 compensation. I interviewed each individual and captured their responses through audio recordings and transcribed them. In addition to capturing the audio, I recorded notes to capture other physical and emotional reactions that were not captured in the transcription. Finally, my sample includes students who identify as men, women, and non-binary. I knew it was unlikely that I would achieve full maximum variation, but I ensured to select no more than 10 individuals in any one specific mixed identity combination.

[4] Facebook and Instagram were the platforms used.

Results and Discussion

Overview

As aforementioned, this study examines: How mixed students develop their identity and the role that cultural and ethnic student organizations play informing that development. Responses indicated that there are various ways in which mixed individuals develop their identity and identities can shift over time and between spaces. While this study does not go into depth about every way that mixed individuals come to form their identity, it does evaluate three ways crucial to the development of mixed individuals who attend college. Responses suggest that mixed individuals develop their identity (1) in early childhood through experiences with family members and peers, (2) in college through peer interactions and campus engagement, and (3) through participation in cultural and ethnic student organizations (as well as other student organizations).

The first chapter of these findings focuses on the childhood experiences that mixed college students described as mechanisms that informed their identity. Although this study aimed at evaluating the college experiences of mixed students, respondents made it apparent that early introductions to culture have lingering effects on college students' identity development. As a result, this section also discusses the relationship between introductions to identity in childhood, how students identified in childhood, and how students form their identity. It outlines students' early development of identity; the role of familial ties and exposure to culture; and concludes with three ways in which mixed individuals identify and how they come to develop their identity.

The second chapter explores the different ways mixed students identify as a consequence of their college experiences. This chapter focuses on the general experiences of mixed college

students in college, their experiences with cultural or ethnic student organizations as well as other student organizations (i.e. community service-based organizations, career specific organizations). In addition, this section explores the role of these organizations on identity development. This chapter examines mixed students experiences with culture shock, confusion around their identity, inclusion (or exclusion), and the opportunities and resources that student organization engagement provided. Students described professional and cultural opportunities, access to community, and a greater awareness of identity-based issues.

Chapter 1: Introductions to Identity in Childhood

Previous research conceptualized racial identity formation as not only static, but also often from a monoracial perspective. This fails to the account for the fluidity of being mixed as well as multiplicity of ways in which mixed individuals identify. Although there is no one particular way in which all mixed students form their identity as well as commit to it, three identity formation trends emerged. Many respondents indicated identifying as "mixed" or "multiracial" because they felt they could not did not fit any of their backgrounds exclusively and instead better fit an "other" or new category. Other respondents discussed identifying with one racial background more than another. Finally, another handful of students indicated that they identified with both identities equally. For example, some students felt that instead of stating that they are "biracial" they prefer to identify as "half-Black and half-Asian" or "Mexican and White". Importantly though, interview responses suggested that the ways mixed students identify is related to their exposure to identity in their early life and the strength of the cultural ties they make to their identity in childhood. Findings support ongoing research that suggests that families, communities, and schools can impact the development of mixed individuals' identity (Townsend et al., 2009; Nadal, 2013; LaBarrie, 2007; Lewis, 2003)

Early development of identity: school, community, and family

Although this study was initially geared toward investigating mixed students' college experiences and identity development, it became apparent that many students had experiences in their childhood that impacted how they developed their sense of identity and the way they identified. When students were asked about their racial identity and experiences in their hometowns, many students shared stories about feeling "othered" or initially becoming aware of

their race in their youth in schools and within their community. In fact, 17 out of 18 students interviewed mentioned feeling conflicted or unsure about their own identity. For several students, their racial background was frequently the source of bullying or microaggressions in school when they were younger:

> *"[Kids] used to sing this song [about my last name] ... like Ching Chang Chong ... [and] I definitely didn't process [that incident] being a microaggression until a lot later."*

Jessica, an Asian/White biracial student, described students in her middle school teasing her and singing songs clearly aimed at her Eastern Asian heritage. Another student of Eastern Asian heritage recounted kids in their school stereotypically stretching their eyes to mock her physical features.

Students also described coming to understand their identity through comparisons of themselves compared to the predominant demographic and through their experiences within their neighborhoods and communities. Several students indicated that their hometown or neighborhood was predominantly one race and only a handful of students indicated that they lived in a diverse community. Students who came from communities that were predominantly one race (in most cases predominantly white) suggested they felt "different" from the overall community growing up, which also made college a particularly enriching opportunity to interact with various backgrounds. These students also seemed to face more confusion around their identity due to a lack of representation and lack of opportunities to engage with and explore their identity. On the other hand, the few students who grew up in diverse communities reflected on friendships with kids from other racial minorities and even in some cases other mixed kids. Mixed students from diverse communities suggested that they felt less pressure around their identity due to the diversity and thus multiculturalism they were embedded in. These findings reinforce research that suggests mixed individuals are more likely to face discrimination and

conflicts due to their multiracial identity when they are embedded in less diverse communities compared to diverse communities where mixed individuals report less ostracization and more acceptance around their identity (LaBarrie 2007). Aside from the racial makeup of their community, respondents also recounted how their individual experiences informed their identity.

Victoria, who has a white father and a Panamanian mother reflected on her experiences with law enforcement in her hometown:

"Just like how different the situation [with police] felt from like the times when [my mom and I] had been pulled over, like in the same car as my dad, versus when my dad was driving… just like how uncomfortable and scared we were when my mom got pulled over and how like, especially cause I had to translate that was really scary… versus like the experience of like when my dad is driving and gets pulled over and just like how different the police officers treated us then, and that kind of stuff. When I was with my dad, I was just like, whatever, but with my mom, like I think it had a combination of just like my family lives in like Ohio and we were like in a part of like really rural Ohio and just like feeling really uncomfortable in general. And then just like, I don't know, I've always felt kind of uncomfortable around police officers"

Victoria discussed that in her predominantly white community she was around police due to her Latinx background. Specifically, she reflected on the difference in how her parents felt about police and the difference in their treatment. For Victoria, these experiences alongside her mother's strong engagement with their Panamanian identity informed her own identity and she felt closer to her Latinx identity than her white identity. She claimed that "it didn't feel right" to identify with white given how she thought she was received by her community and her strong attachment to her Latinx identity.

Another mixed student, Noah echoed this sentiment and discussed how growing up in predominantly white community led him to understand himself as closer to Asian than white:

> *"There were like really only white people and I was like one of the only people that wasn't white in my school, like I can only think of like a handful… In high school, and before I came to Ann Arbor, I primarily identified as being solely Asian, because like I said, like in a town full of white people I felt different from everybody else."*

These experiences within community show the importance in evaluating the role of communities in mixed students' identity formation. Responses suggest that students in diverse communities are more likely to embrace the fluidity of the identity and experience fewer challenges around their identity. They also showcase that community can be a driving force in identity formation amongst mixed individuals, but communities are only one of several mechanisms through which mixed individuals develop their identity. Experiences with family members and the extent of their family's engagement with identity growing up also informed mixed students' identity.

Family interactions (both positive and negative) raised their self-awareness of their race and played a vital role in their identity formation. The extent to which families discussed race and engaged with identity at home impacted how students developed their identity. For example, a handful of students recalled how experiences with family impacted their sense of identity:

> *"[A relative] did not like the fact that my mother was white… so a good chunk of my childhood I was referred to as "the little foreign", because I was half white."*

This Black/White biracial student explained embracing both backgrounds and developing comfortability around being mixed as they matured, yet recounted racial tension within their family in their childhood. These early interactions helped students develop their sense of identity and influenced what racial and ethnic groups they claimed. Plus, these interactions, in many instances, initiated students' internal conflict, while other times these interactions solidified students' understanding of their racial identity and how they are perceived by others. These

interactions were also closely related to student's understanding of their own racial identity and the relationship they developed with their culture. It is important to recognize that due to these students' mixed backgrounds they are often thrown into multicultural environments that can amplify otherness, but also provide crucial learning opportunities for mixed youth.

Family, identity, and "cultural homelessness"

Respondents made it clear that cultural identity starts at home and is heavily reliant on what their families did (and did not) expose them to. Respondents opportunities to explore their own culture in their youth was heavily influenced by parents and other close family members. Mixed children, and just children in general, may not have the knowledge or resources to explore their culture independently so parents and cultural community spaces greatly influence this process in earlier stages of life.

When students described their experiences with culture in their childhood several variables arose that impacted their level of cultural exposure or lack thereof. These variables included: parents' marital status, having deceased parents, having immigrant parents, having mixed parents vs monoracial parents, and neighborhood and school racial makeup. For example, students who had a deceased parent, divorced or separated parents frequently grew attachment to the culture of the parent they lived with:

> *"My parents [are separated]. My mom is Japanese, and I feel like a lot of people are closer to their moms. Maybe just because like your mom kind of takes you to the store and just brings you around everywhere [or at least] I think that was just true for me. So, I think I adopted a lot more of her identity as like a Japanese woman and then saw myself that way. But also that was conflicting, like the image of myself in the mirror, did not reflect what [society thinks] a Japanese woman would look like."*

> *"I really started investigating my heritage… I wanted my dad to be alive. And so, I dug deep into it... I mean, I knew a lot about my mom's side. I just didn't really know much about my dad's side."*

Mixed families have higher divorce rates compared to monoracial families, frequently because of differences in values or racial tension that can arise from family or community members (Cooney & Radina, 2000). Respondents who did not live with both parents more often reported a desire to "know more" about the identity of their parent that they did not live with and having a greater attachment to one identity than their others. These students more often reported having to take initiative in learning more about their identity compared to respondents whose parents were not separated and were more likely to be exposed to all aspects of their identity. Importantly though, these results also affirm scholarship that suggests mixed youth grow a closer attachment to the identity of their caregiver and display the need to assess the role of caregivers in early identity development amongst mixed youth (LaBarrie 2007). Caregivers' immigration status also influenced how students developed their identity.

For mixed students who had parents who immigrated to the United States the process of understanding one's culture was further complicated by the disconnect between having immigrant parents and being "American":

> *"On my dad's [side] a lot [family members] are still in Taiwan, so I've never even met them. I don't really know who they are, so there's like a familial disconnect there. Then there's also a cultural disconnect because I'm American. I was raised American, but people don't really see that."*

This Asian/white biracial student discussed how being born and raised in the United States made it more difficult for her to relate to her Asian identity and Asian family members abroad. Thus, mixed students with immigrant parents negotiate not only their racial identities, but also their Americanness compared to the experiences and identity of relatives in their motherland. Respondents who traveled to their parents' country of origin compared to those who did not described rich cultural experiences abroad that informed their identity. For instance, Danielle, the

French-Haitian respondent discussed how her family's frequent traveling to the Caribbean and Europe informed her identity. Because of her exposure to many cultures, Danielle sometimes identifies as multicultural as well as multiracial and fostered deep connections across all her identities. Danielle's parents took an active role in developing Danielle's identity through travel and exposure to culture. This suggests that while factors like marital status and immigration status of caregivers impact the identity development of mixed youth, families' overall engagement with identity can be a driving factor in identity development.

Some families held dearly to their culture and fostered a sense of curiosity in their children around their own culture and others, whereas other families did not pass on culture for a multitude of reasons:

> *"I listened to a lot of like Spanish music because of my mom… when I was growing up she would speak Spanish to us because she learned Spanish in Spain."*
>
> *"What's tough for me is that my mom was adopted, so I didn't get hardly any like cultural heritage, like things passed down to me from my Korean side."*
>
> *"I went to Chinese school when I was younger, but I had to stop because I was having trouble in English, so I couldn't learn both languages at once… [My older sister] speaks Chinese fluently and was partially raised by my grandmother so we just had very, very, very different upbringings."*

These variables were not deeply explored in this study but are potential moderators that could be explored in future studies to see how they impact mixed students' attachment to their own culture and overall understanding of it.

In order to understand each respondent's experience with their own identity, respondents were asked to describe cultural practices and traditions they grew up with, and other ways they engaged with their identity prior to attending college. Respondents recalled traditional dishes and meals, cultural holidays, growing up with multiple languages, and family traditions. Again,

respondents experience (or lack thereof) with their own culture and understanding of their own backgrounds were largely rooted in their familial ties. 6 out of 18 respondents mentioned speaking a language other than English at home. Some students (like the respondent who found it difficult to learn Chinese and English simultaneously) revealed that they lost their language skills as a result of parents prioritizing English proficiency or were just simply never taught. Despite this, numerous respondents who did not speak a language other than English voiced their desire to learn (or have learned) their mother tongue.

Most interestingly, respondents also showcased the value of food and celebrations as cultural connections. Some mixed students revealed never participating in cultural traditions, some only participated in one cultural background, whereas others grew up with a combination of their heritages. Here are a few examples of these cultural connections that respondents spoke fondly of:

> *"[I] grew up with Eastern European dishes, but also on my dad's side, my grandpa was half Nigerian, so we actually grew up with some West African food and that was really cool."*

> *"We always celebrated the moon festival and Chinese New Year as a family. Most of my family immigrated here… So, we all, as a family celebrate the events together and we'll have very elaborate dinners and feasts for all the holidays… I'm really lucky to have that"*

> *"We'd celebrate Japanese holidays like New year's, Girl's day, Children's Day… and then I'd speak Japanese [at home]."*

> *"[I would] celebrate Juneteenth because I don't celebrate the 4th of July really. So we did that instead."*

Cultural holidays, family traditions, language, and food all shaped the way these mixed students understood their culture and impacted the strength of the mixed students' attachment to

their culture or cultures. For students who did not grow up with this early cultural exposure described confusion around their identity as a result of cultural ignorance:

> *"[My family] didn't [really celebrate Asian traditions], which was also a really, really weird thing because a lot of my other biracial friends, like they still celebrated some of their cultural holidays, but my family never did, which I think also contributed to [my] racial confusion."*

Akane, a Black/Asian respondent explained that their lack of a connection to black culture and their black parent's lack of cultural attachment in combination with their appearance made them feel "not really black":

> *"[Like certain] cultural things that I feel like I don't really identify with. And [my dad] was like 'I also don't identify with that either so quite frankly your whole idea of like blackness is wrong anyways'. Like black culture meant at the time for me, it was listening to hip hop or watching certain [televisions shows] that I just never watched… like my cousins would always talk about it and I'd be like, yeah, like I don't watch that, or I don't listen to that or whatever"*

Mixed individuals often due to racially ambiguous phenotypes, mixed cultural upbringings, and the demand for code switching to assimilate into different racial, ethnic, or cultural groups, experience "cultural homelessness" (Navarrete & Jenkins 2011). Mixed individuals, like these respondents, who often find themselves not fitting a particular cultural mold can experience cultural homelessness which consists of feeling othered, "not belonging", or "being different" (Navarrete & Jenkins 2011). Respondents largely reflected this sentiment and revealed that due to their mixed status they felt as though they did not quite fit into their respective cultures. Imani, a Black/White respondent elaborated on her experiences in school that made her feel different from her peers:

> *"[It was a] charter school and I went there until I was eight and it was all black. At that school, people didn't accept me because I was too light. Everyone would make fun of me and say, Oh, you know, you're too light to be black. You're not really a black person. And then I changed over to Country Day and I was one of the only black girls in the entire grade. And so [one day] I wore my natural hair. I have curly hair and a lot of people were just kind of like, 'Oh my God, she's black. She has curly hair. She doesn't belong*

> *here'. And so that was off putting, cause it was like, I wasn't accepted in my black community that I thought I belonged to. And then I go to a white school and they're like, Oh, she's black, she must be stupid. She must be poor. Like all these stereotypes started coming up…"*

Another student echoed this sentiment and explained how her racially ambiguous appearance shaped her experience:

> *"My appearance I think is kind of ambiguous, so a lot of times people even like now will try to guess my identity, because I don't necessarily look like I'm Chinese."*

These experiences of not fitting in can further contribute to mixed students' cultural homelessness, especially for those who already have little to no connection to their culture through their family. More importantly though, this sense of "cultural homelessness" can be amplified during students' first year of college and can result in confusion and isolation, or, in more positive cases, reassurance and validation. This amplification can reinforce, challenge, or mixed students' self-identification.

Identity formation and ways mixed students choose to identify

Mixed students' experiences and introduction to their identity in childhood played a key role in the way mixed students identified. Students' identification typically fit into three categories: students who identified as mixed/biracial/multiracial, students who identified with one background more than other, and students who identified with all of their racial identities (i.e. identifying as Black and Asian vs mixed). Most students in my sample fell into the first category. Because mixed students fall outside of dominant racial categories, they are often come to view their experience with identity as ambivalent of outside of current social constructs surrounding race (Taylor, 2008; Root 1990, Paragg, 2011). As previously mentioned, many scholars claim that college campuses offer students an opportunity to develop and further explore

their identity through peer interactions. Renn's model suggests that "formal and informal peer culture operates on both processes of identity development, exploration, and commitment" (Renn, 2020, p. 239). Responses showcased the power and impact of the desire to integrate into peer cultures. These interactions can be pervasive and shape the way mixed students' view the authenticity of their identity and their ability to integrate in campus subcultures. Furthermore, compared to students who identified with all of their racial identities (and sometimes also identified as mixed), these students mentioned not having exposure to their identity growing up or just did not foster strong ties to their identity because of family dynamics or living in a community that did not represent their heritages (i.e. Asian-White students who grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods and schools). I hypothesize that these mixed individuals feel hypervisible in these monoracial spaces that lack diversity which can reinforce feelings of difference and otherness.

Next, a small portion of students indicated that they often identify with one group more than another. One commonality these students shared was having one white parent. As previously noted, mixed individuals with one White parent and one non-White parent are more likely to face tension around race within their own family (Root, 1992; Gaskins 1999; Bobb, 2012). As a result, these individuals often feel as though their mixedness will not be accepted by their respective identities and that instead choosing one or opting to identify as "mixed" would be less draining. Moreover, students pointed to phenotypes as well as the level of exposure and their attachment to their identity. For example, one student who described themselves as white passing, and despite having a minority parent rarely identifies with that identity exclusively. This student suggested that given their looks they feel people would more often question the authenticity of their minority status rather than their whiteness. The other student pointed to their

phenotypes as well as their social experiences as justifications for typically identifying as just Asian. This student explained that not only did they feel people visually perceived them as Asian, but also that the felt that there lived experiences were not that of a white person. This student indicated that they typically feel uncomfortable identifying as white because they do not feel they have benefitted from the same privilege as their white peers.

As aforementioned, the last group of students preferred to identify with all of the identities (with a handful also identifying with terms like biracial, multiracial, or mixed). For this group denoting their specific racial or ethnic makeup seemed empowering and a form of identity affirmation. Naming their specific heritages for these students functioned as a way to affirm their identity without having to showcase some connection to their identity (i.e. sharing stories about cultural traditions of specific heritages). A common thread that all of these students shared was early engagement with their identity within their home or community which they further developed in college. These students most frequently recounted memories of eating ethnic food growing up, speaking a language other than English at home, or participating in community cultural events. These findings suggest that early exposure to identity and encouraging exploration greatly impacts the ways mixed youth come to form their identity and how they choose to identify.

Multiple Minority Status

4 out of 18 interview respondents (and 7 out of 25 survey respondents) indicated that they belonged to two or more racial minorities. These mixed students differ from the others in this study and have an even more complex multiple minority status. As mixed students, these individuals are marginalized in white spaces as well as monoracial minority spaces. However, for these students rather than negotiating a minority culture with one's whiteness, these mixed

students negotiate two cultures within their own contexts as well as through the lens of whiteness and blackness. Additionally, because these students did not have the same proximity to whiteness as for example Asian/White biracial students, they more often considered their experiences different from these who might benefit from white privilege because they cannot pass as white. Furthermore, this multiple minority status is further negotiated if a student identifies as LGBTQ+, is first-generation, or is disabled, etc. For example, a Black/Asian student when asked about her experience compared to her Black/White biracial friends responded:

> *"When you're from two different minorities, [you can] feel more oppressed, well I don't want to say that… like I think you really observed the struggles from both."*

This student showcases how mixed students who belong to two or more minority groups can be marginalized due to not just one minority, but two or more, with the addition of being marginalized as a mixed individual.

Some studies have suggested that claiming biracial, multiracial, or mixed status rather than just identifying with one race is associated with being of higher status (Townsend et. al 2012). Additionally, Asian/White individuals are more likely than Black/White or Latino/White individuals to identify as biracial (Townsend et. al 2012). I hypothesize that this choice also relates to mixed individuals' proximity to whiteness, meaning mixed students' physical features (i.e. hair texture, or skin color) are key factors in addition to socioeconomic status when making this decision.

Another key point that arose was students with Black ancestry often found that their experiences were negotiated largely by their blackness but also due to proximities to whiteness in Black spaces. For example, a handful Latinx/White and Asian/White biracial students identifying or being identified as white or biracial on campus, whereas Black/White biracial students showcased how identifying as White was inaccessible to them in White spaces.

> *"I'd say I'm black. I'm also like multiracial, so I have a bit of white and I'm like half white, half black, but yeah [people see me as just] black or mixed."*

> *"I think black people can tell that I'm mixed. I think mixed people can tell that I'm mixed. I think the Japanese community can also be like I think you're mixed, but I'm not really sure. Whereas like white people, I feel like [white people] are never able to tell. They're [always] just like, Oh, you're black."*

This trend was common amongst mixed students with Black ancestry and sheds light on another way in which mixed experiences differ across a racial spectrum. For mixed students who are mixed with Black typically found that in white spaces their Black identity overshadowed other parts of their identity.

Interesting though, 3 of these 4 students felt they could identify with their all respective identities putting them in the third category of identification. I hypothesize that these students were able to identify this way and maneuver through multiple racial spaces as a result of their openness to explore their identity. For instance, Jonathan who had both Native American and Black ancestry was able to learn to how maneuver through predominantly white business spaces and attended a campus powwow because he had mentorship and his confidence in his self-identification. Akane, a Black and Japanese student also echoed this sentiment:

> *"I think I went from finding out like, or wanting to be one side or one race over the other and being more like, neutral about like being biracial… so I'm Black and Japanese… I wouldn't say that I identify with one more than the other."*

I also hypothesize that these students had more complex development of their identity in their youth due to their parents' openness around conversations of race. Compared to students with one white parent, students with two parents of color had more discussions around race and identity in their youth. Many respondents with one white parent, indicated discussing race with their minority parent while having "little to no" conversation around race with their white parent. Black and other racial minority parents are more likely than their white counterparts to make

their child aware of race, race relations, and social ignorance (Cooney & Radina, 2000). However, minority and white parents alike should engage in more discussions around race to facilitate the development of their child's understanding of identity to avoid confusion and combat racial tension. Ignoring these issues and avoiding conversation around race and identity can have negative impact on mixed youth's social integration and development of identity (Nadal et al., 2013; Nishimura, 1998; Root, 1996). Scholars claim that mixed individuals with one White parent and one non-White parent more frequently face rejection from both identities within their own family which can have an impact on the way students come to identify in college (Root, 1992; Gaskins 1999; Bobb, 2012). Many internalize this rejection which prevents them from identifying with their racial identities exclusively and instead only identifying as mixed, multiracial, or biracial or feeling that they must choose one over the other to fit in. This is starkly different compared to how multiple minority status students identified, who more frequently explicitly named their respective identities.

Broadly, these findings exhibit how families, schools, and communities influence the development of mixed students' identity. Experiences in childhood are some of the first ways in which mixed students inform and sometimes explore their identity. However, this exploration is limited in childhood to what families of mixed individuals expose them to and leaves little room for them to explore on their own terms. Thus, college provides mixed individuals with a rich opportunity to further develop their identity, but more importantly a space to explore their identity.

Chapter 2: Identity Development in College and The Role of Student Organizations

College provides a diverse environment for students to explore and further develop their identity. Scholars claim that attending a predominantly white university poses several challenges for minorities and mixed students (Museus, 2008; Macrander & Winkle-Wagner, 2016; González, 2002). Scholars also suggest that colleges provide subcultures like student organizations that can further inform students' identities and help them overcome those challenges (Museus, 2008). Specifically, the influences of student organizations have been explored amongst monoracial minority students, but studies fail to include critical analysis of the experiences of mixed students within student organizations. I argue that student organizations, particularly those with a cultural or ethnic component, can reaffirm mixed students' identities. However, I also argue that in some cases because mixed individuals face challenges trying to socially integrate into monoracial spaces cultural and ethnic student organizations can also challenge mixed students' identity which is an issue that is less likely to be experienced by monoracial students. Overall, respondents discussed their experiences on campus, their experiences within student organizations, and how their identity further developed in college.

Culture shock and the identity crisis

Many college students who belong to minority backgrounds seek student organizations or other subcultures in order to integrate into college and develop a sense of belonging (Park and Kim 2013; Museus, 2008). This process is quite nuanced for mixed students who might find cultural integration difficult or for mixed students who did not grow up in communities that represented their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, the first year of college for mixed students

can be filled with confusion, isolation, and shock. In fact, 16 out of 18 respondents revealed experiencing an "identity crisis" or "culture shock" as they transitioned into college.

Studies indicate that college students who belong to communities that are not largely represented on college campuses experience culture shock which can include feelings of confusion or discomfort that reinforce a sense of not belonging (Torres 2009, Cushman 2007). Given that the University of Michigan serves a predominantly white and affluent demographic, students who are first generation, lower income, or non-white find themselves along the margins of the larger campus culture. Many students described feeling excluded in white spaces on campus. Given that the university is predominantly white these spaces ranged from student organizations, to classrooms, to dorms. For instance, Imani, a Black/White respondent who professionally dances mentioned feeling unwelcome in white dance spaces:

> *"[Black] body types, you know… especially in the ballet world that their body types aren't valued by white people. And that is horrible to put that mindset to have that their natural body type can't be considered beautiful by white people. So I think that that has changed my ideologies about the dance world and like the fact that you don't have to conform to white ideals of beauty in order to be a dancer, to be on Broadway, to have a dance studio in the future. Like you can create your own, you could do what you want and just practice and figure out what you love and then perform it."*

Kevin, another Black/White student compared his experiences within their student organizations and friend circles compared to the institution as a whole:

> *"[In my research program] we're always there to support each other. Like when we're down. I appreciate that a lot and comparing being in that group versus I guess a typical class at U of M, if I'm in a class where I'm like the only person of color in there, I definitely feel like not welcome at all. Um, or if I'm in like a large lecture room, it's like, you're just another number kind of thing."*

This cultural disconnect or lack of inclusion in white spaces pushed many of these students to search for subcultures like student organizations (both culturally specific and interest-based organizations).

Mixed students experience culture shock as a result of belonging to marginalized identities, but also due to their mixed status and can find it difficult to integrate into minority subcultures. Most frequently students pointed to their mixed identity or socioeconomic status to explain their culture shock. For instance, one respondent who was an Asian/White biracial touched on both of these:

> *"There are a lot of rich people here, it was really hard for me to be here and even like talking about this with my friends. It just was like a culture shock for me to come here… Like when I was growing up, I've never had a house that had two floors. So to me, if somebody had two floors in their apartment, or their house, they were rich... and then I go to school with the son of like the 19th richest person in the world. It's just, it's very complicated."*

Here, this student revealed how jarring it can be for students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to culturally integrate at universities where the majority (or what appears to be the majority) of students come from wealthy backgrounds. In addition, this student further explained his culture shock from the standpoint of being a mixed student. Prior to college, this respondent revealed that he identified as "solely Asian" due to the fact that he grew up in a predominantly white community and went to a predominantly white school. He claimed that he felt different compared to his white peers, but explained that this shifted after interacting with other monoracial Asian students on campus:

> *"Coming to Ann Arbor with a lot of different Asian people present, I then started to doubt, am I really Asian? I'm not Asian enough. So I kind of then started going more towards [identifying as] white, but I try to think of myself more as being a biracial individual more than anything… In situations where I was with other Korean people, for example, I wouldn't be able to like connect with them the way that another Korean person would so this kind of made me feel like I didn't necessarily belong… Coming to college, I was coming from somewhere where I was like, Oh, I'm Asian. But now I'm like, Oh, am I even Asian at all?"*

This is again is another example of the ways in which mixed students experience culture shock in college. For this student, because he had not grown up learning about his Korean culture felt

disconnected from monoracial Korean students. This was a common theme amongst respondents and these interactions can cause students to experience identity crises where students feel constantly at war with their racial identification because they do not fit the typical cultural standards of their respective racial or ethnic identities. Consequently, like this student, several other students revealed experiencing confusion or reevaluating the way they identify themselves as a result of their initial social interactions in their first year of college. Nia, a Black/Asian student reflected this confusion and insecurity and claimed:

> *"[This incident happened] like my sophomore year and I was with my Filipino friends, and [when meeting this guy I said I was Filipino] and [the guy] was just like, 'Oh, you're the fake Filipino', because you know, cause I'm half Filipino... That was another really degrading comment."*

This student explains that at a social event another student challenged her Asian identity and created tension around her racial identification. Nia also felt that her blackness was challenged by another remark made by a peer in her dorm:

> *"One time [a friend and I] were talking about divorce and how black men are prone to being divorced more or like having trouble in their marriages. And I was like, wow, I didn't know that statistic. And she said, 'you don't matter, cause you're like half black'. And, I understood what she was saying, but then I feel like, the world sees me as black, you know? And I don't know that kind of [caused] a turmoil with myself."*

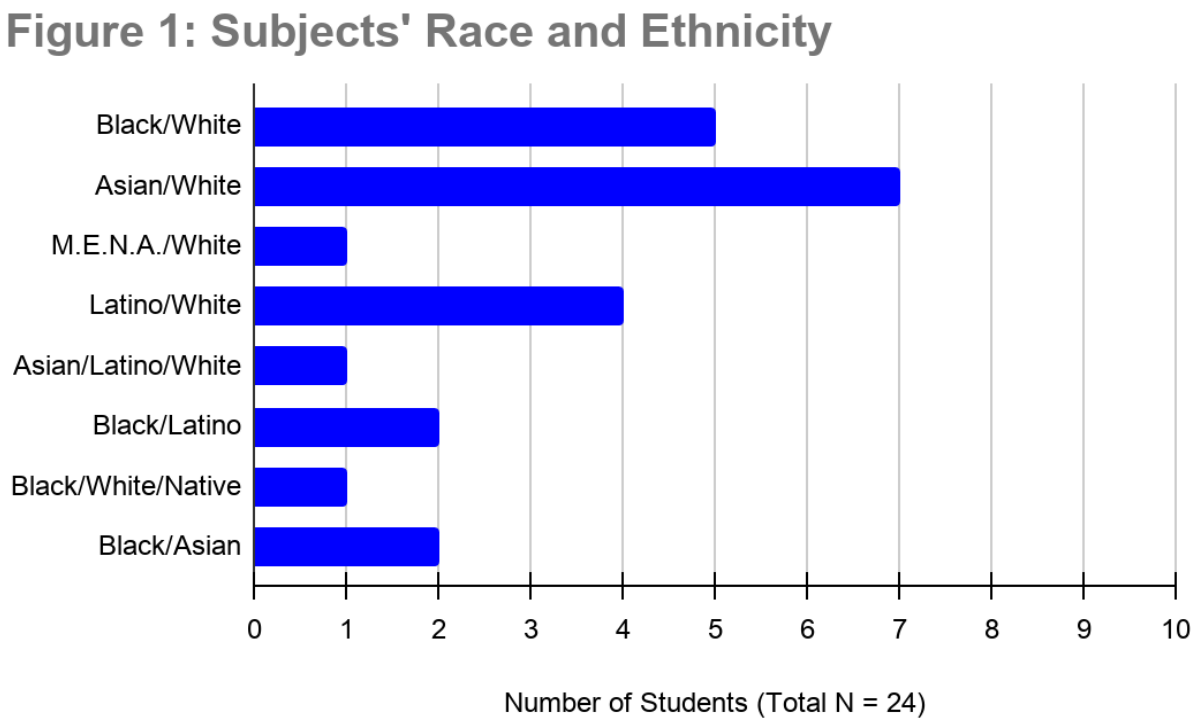
Here again this response showcases how mixed students come to develop their sense of identity through peer interactions on campus. Most importantly though, these responses reveal that mixed students can be objectified in social interactions and feel isolated due to their mixed identity even within their perceived communities and not just in predominantly white spaces like the broader campus or typical classrooms.

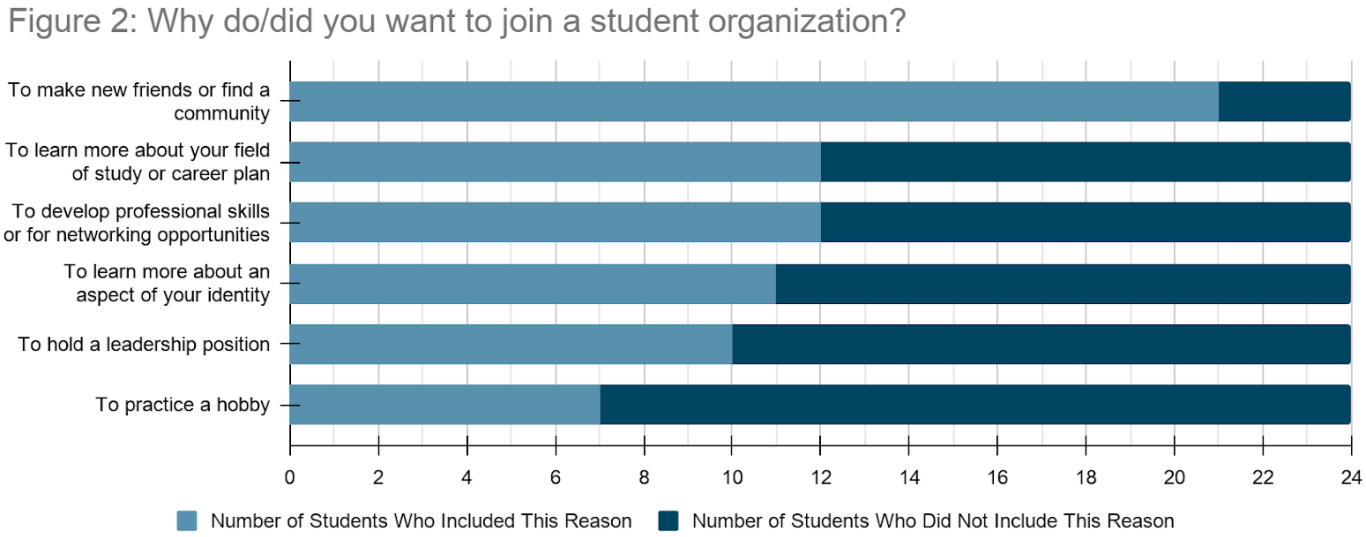
Many individuals can experience an identity crisis in college, but usually not in terms of race, but instead feeling unsure or insecure about their career choice. Mixed students'

experiences with identity formation in college are unique in that many mixed students will experience insecurity around their racial or ethnic identification which is not typical of their monoracial peers. Students explained reevaluating their own racial identification or experiencing identity crisis both as a result of their own internalized understandings of race and early social interactions that they had with other university students.

The role of cultural and ethnic student organizations and other student organizations

As a result of feeling disconnected from the broader campus or out of pure curiosity, many respondents participated in a cultural or ethnic student organization or other interest-based student organizations. Aside from not participating in any form of student organizations, when it came to participation in cultural or ethnic student organizations, I observed three different paths that mixed students took. Mixed students either (1) joined a cultural and ethnic student organization and left for another type of organization (2) joined only a student organization without cultural or ethnic component, or (3) joined a cultural and ethnic student organization and continued to participate. Respondents' responses to questions about their interactions within student organizations and other subculture spaces like dormitories made it clear that there is a need for better inclusion of mixed individuals within student organization life and the larger college culture. Responses also suggested that this is a dual layered issue of inclusion that comes from (1) “othering” and uncomfortable social interactions and (2) mixed individuals’ assumption of exclusion or inability to culturally connect as a result of their mixedness.





Even at a predominantly white institution, I was able to retrieve a diverse sample representing numerous racial and ethnic backgrounds {Figure 1}. The Asian category included a wide variety of students from Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian, Filipino, and Korean backgrounds. Additionally, the Latinx group included students who identified as Panamanian, Colombian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Ecuadorian. 7 out of 25 survey

respondents indicated belonging to two or more minority groups. Out of the 25 students surveyed, 22 students participated in some kind of student organization, and 12 of those 22 indicated participating in an organization with a cultural or ethnic component. According to the survey results, the top four reasons why students joined student organizations were: (1) to make new friends or find a community, (2) to learn more about their field of study or career plan, (3) for professional skills development or network opportunities, and (4) to learn more about an aspect of their identity {Figure 2}[5]. 21 respondents claimed that seeking community or friendship was a reason for why they joined or sought to join student organizations. These findings are in line with several studies that suggest minority students are more likely to join a cultural/ethnic student organization and often seek out these organizations to find a community or a sense of belonging (Park and Kim 2013; Museus, 2008).

Overall, I hypothesized that mixed students would have varying experiences participating in cultural or ethnic student organizations, but more importantly that due to their mixed identity they would face struggles understanding their identity and face complications trying to fit into organizations. Additionally, I hypothesized that participating in a cultural or ethnic organization would impact students' identity (both social and personal) and promote a sense of belonging on campus. Largely, I observed that participants who engaged with cultural or ethnic organizations were met with inclusion, but also exclusion as well as opportunities for identity expression and exploration.

During interviews, students were asked about their expectations of the student organizations they participated in and their experiences during organization meetings, events,

[5] 2 respondents left these questions blank and are included in "Students Who Did Not Include This Reason"

etc. Many students described facing challenges when participating in cultural or ethnic student organizations and communicated a sense of exclusion. Firstly, respondents explained feeling othered, unwelcomed, or uncomfortable at student organization meetings or events as a result of the actions of peers. Most students pointed to their mixed identity while others pointed to socioeconomic status (or a combination of the two) as reasons for why they felt excluded, thus socioeconomic status could be a possible moderator. Lucas, a multiethnic student, described how he faced challenges in a Chaldean student organization due to his mixed identity:

> *"She was like, no, you're not Chaldean… show me your driver's license."*

Lucas mentioned that due to their lack of "typical" Chaldean physical features, yet common Chaldean last name, he was asked to show his driver's license to prove that he was indeed Chaldean to another student within the student organization. This was a common trend and other students described feeling excluded in monoracial cultural and ethnic student organizations:

> *"It felt very exclusive and because I didn't grow up with that cultural background and because I was half, a lot of people would point that out."*

This Asian/White student, Rachel, described feeling excluded in her Chinese student organization because monoracial organization members would often call attention to her mixed identity, and thus rejected her in-group status. Another Black/Asian student claimed that at a student organization event geared towards black students she did not feel welcomed:

> *"This was like freshman year… it was like a black student council meeting or something. I just kinda got stares. I don't know. I was like I feel like I'm being stared at and so I asked [a peer at the meeting about it and she said] 'yeah, it's because you're mixed'."*

This student's experience in particular shows how jarring and uncomfortable it can be for mixed individuals to explore their identity in spaces with monoracial students. It also again illustrates that mixed individuals can be excluded and experience rejection even within community spaces

that are supposed to be welcoming and inclusive. During her freshman year, this student was eager to participate in black student organizations and events, but as a result of the interactions they began to have with other black students began to feel "not black enough" and was discouraged from exploring further. This motivated this student in particular to thus explore more into their Asian identity and heritage. Ultimately, this student found a community within a Filipino student organization, but there were still moments that reinforced feelings of exclusion and a sense of being different and she frequently was told by other students that she "did not look Filipino" or she could not be Filipino "because she didn't even know the Filipino language". Another Asian/White respondent explained their disinterest in seeking inclusion within cultural or ethnic student organizations because of their exclusion in the past:

> *"I didn't particularly want to join a cultural organization because I don't necessarily like identify as either white or Chinese... I've felt alienated in both spaces before, so now I'm kind of turned off from like organized school things because of that. And I also, like, I don't necessarily look for community in those spaces. Like I have a community at work and in my own friend group and stuff."*

Thus, the majority of students who did not have strong ties to their identity and faced more interactions where their identity was challenged or questioned fell into fell into the first two pathways. These students either participated in a cultural or ethnic student organization, left, and participated in another type of student or joined a student organization without a cultural or ethnic component to avoid conflict or invest time in developing other aspects of their identity like their career. Therefore, these students more often participated in community service student organizations, career and profession student organizations, or other interest-based student organizations (i.e. astrology club).

A handful of students did feel included though and even held leadership positions in these student organizations, but they still mentioned internal conflict and initial discomfort when

joining their respective organizations, because they did not believe that they would be accepted as a mixed student. When probed about the reason for their discomfort, students responded that they felt they would stand out (whether due to phenotypes or cultural differences), or not know enough about the culture to integrate into the group easily. Maya, an Asian/White biracial student put this simply, stating:

> *"I don't feel Indian enough… compared to other people who are Indian that I know."*

Maya went on further to discuss that she would not fit into an Indian student organization because she did not speak her native language and was not well-informed about Indian pop culture. These conditions to join may seem trivial, but for mixed students these cultural ties appear to be quite impactful on whether students feel included and accepted within monoracial groups.

Other respondents explained this internal conflict as well:

> *"[Being with other Asian students] kind of made me feel like I didn't necessarily belong... it's not like their fault and it's not like they were trying to be exclusionary or something. It just was like [a me thing], does that make sense?"*

These examples of internal turmoil point to the second layer of the issue of inclusion. Because mixed individuals can greatly differ from monoracial individuals it is difficult to overcome feelings of being "othered" or experiences of cultural homelessness. This internal conflict can impact the types of student organizations mixed students seek or even if they decide to join one at all. It also impacts students' sense of belonging in monoracial spaces on campus that reflect one part of their identity as well as their sense of belonging within the larger predominantly white student population. It is vital to note that these preemptive assumptions can limit mixed students' experiences with monoracial peers, their cultural exploration, and their personal

growth. For several students, these assumptions prevented them from seeking cultural or ethnic student organizations altogether.

These assumptions also reveal the need for support for mixed students to validate their racial identity and help them better begin their independent exploration. One student suggested even bringing a close monoracial friend when going to student organizations that are based around a culture, race or ethnicity can help build confidence and give mixed students a sense of racial or cultural affirmation:

> *"If you feel like you already have that issue with yourself, like an identity crisis already… just make sure you take a trusted friend with you. That would be my advice…. [My] freshman year, I wish there was like a support group, when I went to CAPS, they told me there was [no group that existed at the time] and they said I could create one..."*

This student, although she faced challenges fitting into student organizations initially discussed later reaffirming their own identity through student organization engagement which leads to the last group of mixed students who stayed in cultural and ethnic student organizations and were positively able to further uncover and inform their identity.

Opportunities for identity exploration and raised awareness of identity and community issues

Participation in student organizations provided students with ample professional and racial identity exploration opportunities. Students indicated the importance of mentors in their respective organizations who helped validate their experiences and promote personal and professional growth:

> *"[My mentor] didn't study business, but they really helped me think about what I want to do for my career and set me up for really good success in the future."*

Here, Jonathan described the importance and impact of the mentorship he received within his student organization on his professional goals. When asked about their mentorship experiences, some students indicated that their mentors boosted their confidence in academic and professional settings, and even validated their group membership within their respective racial and ethnic identities. For example, Jessica explained,

> *"I've never really felt particularly validated or acknowledged in Asian spaces. So I was very stressed that I would come away feeling that same way… I think it definitely helped [having upperclassmen friends] on the board and feeling comfortable with them, which kind of led to me to feel comfortable with other people."*

This suggests that cultural and ethnic student organizations can provide opportunities for mixed students to make connections with peers that can affirm their identity and promote inclusion. In addition, mixed students who participated in student organizations that were not a cultural or ethnic organization also developed their sense of identity in other ways. A small portion of participants who did not participate in a cultural or ethnic student organization discussed further developing their political ideology or career goals in other organizations. Another student, Noah discussed how his participation in a service organization further promoted his passion of social justice. For instance, Lydia recounted how her experiences in a diverse student organization exposed her to individuals from many different backgrounds and political ideologies. She explained that her own community was predominantly white and her family like others in their community were conservative, but her exposure to various ideologies transformed her own political leaning and her perception of larger social issues. Several other students who grew up in non-diverse communities talked about the value of being able to interact with individuals from other backgrounds.

I anticipated that participation in student organizations would change the people that students surround themselves with, so I asked generally about the racial make-up of their hometown or high school friends to compare to the college friends they describe in their interviews. I found that students described having rather diverse friend groups and expressed their relief in finally finding other mixed students and an opportunity to seek diversity at college. Even those who mentioned having non-diverse friend groups in their hometown found themselves with completely different friend group racial makeups in college.

Not only did student organization participation give students the opportunity to diversify their friend group but also the opportunity to explore and express their culture. Due to a lack of representation in their hometown, school, or lack of familial or cultural ties (i.e. if a student grew up with a single parent), mixed students mentioned college as an initial opportunity for cultural exploration. Cultural or ethnic student organizations provided students with opportunities to practice cultural traditions, celebrate holidays, and discuss shared cultural experiences:

> *"They were like, no, if you identify as Native American, you should definitely stop by and see it [powwow]. And I don't think I ever would've done that if I wasn't in [this organization]."*

Jonathan elaborated on his first experience engaging with Native culture and suggested that this experience sparked further interest in researching and exploring his indigenous heritage. His mentor suggested he attend a campus powwow which actually turned into a positive and profound experience for him.

Student organizations also motivated students to explore their culture outside of student organizations or student-led events. Specifically, some respondents discussed taking particular classes related to their own identity to learn more. For Nia, a Black/Asian respondent whose

Filipino identity was challenged because she did not know the language opted to take Filipino language classes and now speaks Tagalog:

> *"There weren't really cultural resources, you know, in Flint, Michigan to really learn about myself and everything and so that's [what] pushed me to go to Ann Arbor [and] learn about my heritage and everything. I studied the Filipino language here at U of M."*

These organizations also encouraged students to explore cultures outside of their own. Olivia, a mixed student from a Japanese background, described celebrating Chinese and Vietnamese holidays on campus with peers. This exploration raised students' awareness of shared racial and ethnic specific experiences as well as informed them on cultural practices outside of their own. Students who did participate in cultural or ethnic student organizations reported engaging with an identity outside of their own more frequently than students who participated in other types of student organizations.

Participation in student organizations raised students' awareness of their own background and how they were perceived by others through both educational materials provided by these organizations and their own lived experiences within the student organization and on campus more broadly. Peer interactions of rejection and validation of mixed students' group membership within these organizations, within their respective racial and ethnic groups, and within the campus broadly solidified mixed students' understanding of how their racial or ethnic background is perceived by others. Several participants revealed becoming more involved in community service, advocacy and activism as a result of their engagement with student organizations. Some students also expressed increased interest in career paths surrounding social justice and public policy:

> *"[I volunteered with] Seven Mile… It was a response to like music resources being cut in Detroit public schools. And like it's basically students who drive to community centers in*

Detroit that we partner with and teach kids either music, art or coding, depending on which branch that you're a part of. I've always felt really at home with the arts branch, which is where I taught writing [to kids]."

"Yeah, I definitely learned more about community organizing [through this organization] and that sort of thing and how that's a [viable] career path."

"[I participated] in a program that seeks to improve wellness, like through mental health, cardiovascular health, nutrition, and mindfulness in underserved communities."

In other cases, peer interactions within student organizations and the campus broadly in combination with a student's curiosity or desire to learn more about their own identity motivated students to take courses about immigration, language, and culture like Nia. A few students indicated that taking classes that engaged with race or ethnicity helped develop their own understanding of their identity and motivated them to enroll in similar courses. Jessica for example discussed taking courses and attending campus events related to evaluating the socio-political issues that Asian-Americans face.

Students who held leadership positions in cultural and ethnic student organizations also discussed how they gained skills from their positions. Olivia claimed that her role in an Asian-American student organization further validated her Asian identity, but also improved her speaking and organization skills. Outside of cultural and ethnic student organizations, students who held leadership positions in other organizations, participated in community service organizations, or participated in career focused organizations also indicated gaining valuable skills. For example, students who participated in professional fraternities or other career focused organizations discussed the advantage of being able to network and being provided with catered academic assistance and career guidance. While these skills and opportunities are valuable by

their own merit, many of these students did fail to learn more about their heritage and less frequently engaged with cultures outside of their own.

Community and sense of belonging on campus

I observed that participants created close-knit relationships within student organizations which helped them foster a sense of belonging on campus. Nearly all of the students (16 of 18) when asked if they felt a student from their background could easily find a community at the university responded no. One respondent who answered yes pointed to the fact that they were "white passing" as their reasoning. The other respondent indicated that it would be easy for someone from their background to find a community pointed to student organizations as a solution to navigating a big campus, but they did suggest that sometimes it is difficult to locate student resources. This finding suggests members in charge of student life and campus engagement need to work harder to ensure non-white students and students who belong to identities that are underrepresented feel more included by changing campus culture dynamics. It also supports scholarship that suggests minority students seek student organizations to develop a sense of belonging (Park and Kim 2013; Museus, 2008).

Students referenced the need to join an organization or locate peer support, mentorship, and professional connections to be successful and feel a part of a community. This trend suggests students who are not racialized as exclusively monoracial and white may feel disconnected and unsupported at their institution. Despite this disconnect, some participants suggested they may have increased interest in their career goals due to these close-knit relationships. Lisa described an increased sense of motivation in pursuing a career in STEM after heated debates about racial injustice within her student organization:

> *"It's actually motivated me a little bit more to continue to STEM because we need more people of color in STEM."*

Others spoke on how broadly inclusion in subcultures like student organizations helped combat "imposter syndrome" or feelings of difference or isolation. These responses indicate the power of student organizations in promoting a sense of community and thus promoting academic success amongst mixed students.

Conclusion

These results discuss how mixed students develop their identity through experiences in their childhood and experiences in college, and specifically experiences within student organizations which is understudied amongst mixed populations. Respondents suggested that families, schools, and communities influence mixed individuals' identity formation in their childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, respondents indicated that their experiences with peers and within spaces on college campuses later in life shaped the way they further developed their identity and even changed the ways some mixed students identified. Cultural and ethnic student organizations also influenced mixed students understanding of their identity and showcased challenges that mixed students face when joining cultural and ethnic student organizations. Findings indicated that there is a problem of inclusion that many mixed individuals face in monoracial spaces, even within their own communities. However, findings also showcased that cultural student organizations can give mixed students a sense of validation and access to knowledge around their identity that they did not have access to in their childhood. Moreover, cultural and ethnic student organizations as well as other student organizations provided mixed students with opportunities to explore career paths, examine community issues, develop skills, and foster a sense of community.

This study's findings reaffirm the sociological call for inclusion and subculture spaces for minority students to seek cultural integration in higher education settings. Several studies suggest minority students are more likely to join a cultural or ethnic student organization and often seek out these organizations to find a community or a sense of belonging, which is affirmed by my survey findings (Park and Kim, 2013; Museus, 2008). More importantly though the interview

results reflect the complex experiences of mixed college students and how their experiences differ from (and relate to) monoracial students. For instance, most mixed students in this study described feeling isolated or excluded in white spaces, but in their own racial and ethnic spaces as well due to their mixed identity. These complex experiences showcase the need to further study multiracial identity and identity formation in higher education settings.

A common thread that began to emerge was numerous mixed students expressed a willingness to have spaces for more profound dialogues about race and opportunities to meet other mixed students. Quite a few students directly pointed to the fact that they attended a predominantly white institution as a roadblock when seeking support or mentorship and when trying to engage with campus life. Mixed students who sought campus support suggested that there is a disconnect between the plentiful resources the university offers and the lack of straightforward access to them. Therefore, colleges and universities should provide more spaces and educational resources for multiracial students to engage in dialogue about prejudice on campus or create more organizations that specifically cater to multiracial, biracial, and multiethnic students. In addition to creating these new spaces, student affairs professionals and campus leaders should also strive to strengthen the organizations and resources in place to also move toward better supporting of mixed college students. Over 50% of minority students attending four-year colleges fail to graduate within six years and one explanation for this is students' inability to integrate into campus cultures (Museus, 2008). Mixed students in my study have also showcased this difficulty to integrate on campus and develop a sense of community, but many pointed to peer connections made in student organizations as gateways to their personal growth and success. Consequently, higher education administrators should strategize

how to utilize student organizations in the future to promote campus engagement and success amongst mixed students.

Given this study's results, I propose five suggestions and solutions for higher education professionals, student leaders, and current and prospective mixed college students to better assist mixed students' transition into college, enrich their overall college experience, and promote academic success.

1. Mixed students you are valid and thus deserve not only validation, but also equal access to community spaces and campus resources without the fear of prejudice. Although, feelings of "being different" or "not X enough", microaggressions and other forms of prejudice can appear inevitable, college offers opportunities for identity exploration and personal growth. Many students struggle to overcome this challenge, but the outcome can be fruitful. **Mixed students should be brave and open to learning more about their own identity as well as challenge the inaccurate perceptions others have of mixed students.**
2. **Higher education and student affairs professionals need to invest initiatives and programs that are specifically dedicated to mixed students.** Being mixed is quite unique experience and can often provide students with an early introduction to multiculturalism. Colleges and universities, especially predominantly white institutions,
3. **Higher education, student affairs, and campus engagement professionals should work alongside student organizations to provide mixed students with community spaces to exchange experiences, access mentorship, and seek other resources.** As previously stated, student organizations have been shown to inform student's identity formation and foster a sense of community within the larger student body.

4. **Student organization leaders should work toward ways to be more inclusive in the language the use around their organizations as well as in practice.** Several students admitted to not joining certain cultural or ethnic organizations because they did not know if they were welcomed as a mixed student or were merely worried about how they would be perceived or the extent to which they would fit in the organization. Student organization leaders and community members should strive to incorporate mixed experiences in discussions of identity and be mindful of "othering" language that could make mixed students feel excluded or unwelcomed.
5. **Colleges and universities should financially invest in mental health resources catered to assisting mixed students.** Numerous studies point to the necessity for mental health resources and counseling tools for mixed individuals who more frequently face identity-based conflict that can impact their mental and emotional well-being. Even though this study did not focus on the mental health of mixed college students, it is undeniable that mental health plays a pivotal role in the way students experience college as well as their academic success.

Appendices

Appendix I

Participants' Self-Described Racial/Ethnic Identification and Gender from Interview & Survey Data

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Self-Identification
Jonathan	Man	Black, White (Dutch), and Native American
Lisa	Woman	Black and White; Biracial
Victoria	Woman	Latina (Panamanian) and White
Imani	Woman	Black and White; Biracial; Multiracial
Ethan	Man	Chaldean and White
Rachel	Woman	Asian (Taiwanese) and White
Avery	Non-Binary	Mexican and White; Biracial
Camille	Woman	Black and White, Biracial
Maya	Woman	Indian and White (German); Multiracial
Olivia	Woman	Japanese and White (Latvian); Multiracial
Kevin	Man	Black and White (Jewish); Biracial
Danielle	Woman	French-Haitian; Biracial; Multiracial
Jessica	Woman	Asian (Chinese) and White
Akane	Woman	Black and Asian (Japanese)
Lydia	Woman	Colombian and White
Noah	Man	Asian (Korean) and White (Italian); Biracial
Sofia	Woman	Asian (Filipino and Chinese) and White (Italian)
Nia	Woman	Black and Asian (Filipino)

Appendix II

Recruitment Flyer

Are you **mixed, biracial, multi-racial,** or **multi-ethnic**? Are you an **undergraduate student** at the University of Michigan? Would you like to **make money by participating in virtual interview**?

Anju Jindal-Talib, a senior in the Honors Department of Sociology, is completing a research study to explore how students from multiracial or multiethnic backgrounds are making decisions about participating in cultural or ethnic student organizations and how it impacts their college experience, self-development, and perceptions of their identity. Previous research indicates that student organizations play a large role in college student development. However, this research has largely focused on mono-racial white or minority students, whereas not many have not revealed the experience of navigating these organizations from the perspective of multiracial, biracial, or multiethnic students.

Please contact Anju Jindal-Talib via direct message on Facebook or email me at ajindalt@umich.edu for more information, questions, or concerns.

All study participants will receive a monetary compensation for their time. Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors are all welcome.

Appendix III

Pre-Survey Questionnaire

Uniqname: _____

Subject ID Number: _____

Major(s)/Minor(s)/Academic Interests:

_____

1. Are you of **Hispanic, Latino,** or **Spanish** origin?

    ▢ No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

    ▢ Yes, Mexican, Mexican-American

    ▢ Yes, Puerto Rican

    ▢ Yes, Cuban

    ▢ Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, please specify: _____

2. What is your racial or ethnic identification? **Mark all that apply.**

    ▢ White

    ▢ Middle Eastern or North African (please specify)

    ▢ Black, African-American

    ▢ American Indian or Alaska Native

    Asian

        ▢ Indian

        ▢ Japanese

        ▢ Chinese

        ▢ Korean

        ▢ Vietnamese

        ▢ Filipino

        ▢ Other Asian, please specify: _____

Pacific Islander

- ▢ Native Hawaiian
- ▢ Samoan
- ▢ Guamanian or Chamorro
- ▢ Other Pacific Islander, please specify: _____

▢ Biracial

▢ Multiracial

▢ Other race, please specify: _____

3. What is your **biological mother's** racial or ethnic identification? **Mark all that apply.**

▢ White

▢ Middle Eastern or North African (please specify)

▢ Black, African-American

▢ American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

- ▢ Indian
- ▢ Japanese
- ▢ Chinese
- ▢ Korean
- ▢ Vietnamese
- ▢ Filipino
- ▢ Other Asian, please specify: _____

Pacific Islander

- ▢ Native Hawaiian
- ▢ Samoan
- ▢ Guamanian or Chamorro

▢ Other Pacific Islander, please specify: _____

▢ Biracial

▢ Multiracial

▢ Other race, please specify: _____

▢ Unknown

4. What is your **biological father's** racial or ethnic identification? **Mark all that apply.**

▢ White

▢ Middle Eastern or North African (please specify)

▢ Black, African-American

▢ American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

▢ Indian

▢ Japanese

▢ Chinese

▢ Korean

▢ Vietnamese

▢ Filipino

▢ Other Asian, please specify: _____

Pacific Islander

▢ Native Hawaiian

▢ Samoan

▢ Guamanian or Chamorro

▢ Other Pacific Islander, please specify: _____

▢ Biracial

▢ Multiracial

▢ Other race, please specify: _____

▢ Unknown

5. What is your gender identification? **Mark all that apply.**

▢ Woman

▢ Man

▢ Transgender

▢ Non-binary, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, gender fluid

6. Have you participated in a student organization or do you intend to join a student organization during this academic year?

▢ Yes (if you know the exact organization, please specify: _____)

▢ No (skip questions 7-9)

7. What type of organization do you intend to join?

▢ Cultural/Ethnic

▢ Graduate/Professional

▢ Creative or Performing Arts

▢ Religious/Spiritual

▢ Sports and Recreation

▢ Social Fraternity or Sorority

▢ Other, please specify: _____

8. Why do/did you want to join a student organization? **Mark all that apply.**

▢ To make new friends or find a community

▢ Develop professional skills or network opportunities

▢ To hold a leadership position

▢ To learn more about your field of study or career plan

▢ To learn more about an aspect of your identity

▢ To practice a hobby

9. What else do/did you hope to gain from participation?

   _____

   _____

   _____

10. I have signed up for an interview slot at {scheduling link}.

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

Appendix IV

Interview Guides

Interview Guide 1 (for Students Who DID Participate in a Cultural/Ethnic Student Organization)

Background, Racial Identification, Self-Identification, and Interests

1. Where are you from?
2. How would you describe the racial makeup of your community in your hometown?
    - Do most individuals share your identity? Do most individuals not share your identity?
    - Would you consider your community diverse?
3. What is your racial identification?
    - Do you identify with one race more than another?
    - Do you identify as a new category (i.e. mixed, biracial)
    - Have you ever felt unsure or conflicted about your identity?
4. Does your family take part in any cultural practices or holidays?
    - Food? Place of worship? Clothing? Holidays?
    - Could you tell me a story about it?
5. Have you talked to your parents about your racial identity or topics about race?
    - Can you describe the things that you have discussed?
6. What are your academic interests?
    - What are your career goals?
    - To what extent has college impacted your career choice?
7. What are your hobbies and other non-academic interests?

Student Organization Engagement and Experience

1. How did you get involved in this student organization?
2. How did participation in student organizations meet (or reject) your expectations?
3. How did you feel at student organization meetings and events?
    - Did you feel included/welcomed?
    - Were students from a similar racial background? Monoracial background?
    - How well did you fit in?
    - Did you face challenges trying to fit in?
4. Would you plan to continue participation?
    - Why/why not?
5. Did you hold any leadership positions?
    - What did you gain from this position?
6. If you could change an aspect of this organization, what would it be?

7. Can you describe one of your favorite memories with this organization?
8. Did you ever hang out with peers from this organization outside of organization-led events? (i.e. to go out to eat)
    - What were you doing? How often?

The Impact of Student Organization Participation

1. Has participation in this student organization led to participation in other student organizations?
    - Which organization(s)? How did it lead to this participation and why do you participate in this new organization?
    - Can you describe your experience with those organizations?
2. To what extent, if any has student organization participation raised your awareness about issues that impact your community?
    - Were you able to learn more about a facet of your identity?
    - Did your experiences motivate you to engage in community service, service learning, or activism?
    - What kinds of activities?
3. Has participation made you reevaluate the way you identify racially?
4. Has participation exposed you to career paths that you were unaware of?
    - Has participation led to you changing your career path or shifting academic interests?
5. Has student organization participation allowed you to celebrate traditions or holidays that you might practice at home (or were never exposed to)?
6. Would you recommend joining this organization or one similar to an incoming freshman?
    - Why/why not?

First Year Experience and Sense of Community

1. Where do you feel most welcome or where you most belong on campus?
    - Why is that?
2. What is the racial makeup of friends?
    - Is it diverse? Is it mainly one race?
    - Are any of your close friends in the same organization?
3. Do you feel that you have found a community at the university?
    - How would you describe this community?
4. Do you feel that it would be easy for students from your background to find a community at the university?
    - Why/why not?
5. Do you think participating in this organization helped your transition into college?
    - Why/why not?

Interview Guide 2 (for Students Who DID NOT Participate in a Cultural/Ethnic Student Organization)

Background, Racial Identification, Self-Identification, and Interests

1. Where are you from?
2. How would you describe the racial makeup of your community in your hometown?
    - Do most individuals share your identity? Do most individuals not share your identity?
    - Would you consider your community diverse?
3. What is your racial identification?
    - Do you identify with one race more than another?
    - Do identify as a new category (i.e. mixed, biracial)
    - Have you ever felt unsure or conflicted about your identity?
4. Does your family take part in any cultural practices or holidays?
    - Food? Place of worship? Clothing? Holidays?
5. Have you talked to your parents about your racial identity or topics about race?
    - Can you describe the things you have discussed?
6. What are your academic interests?
    - What are your career goals?
    - To what extent has college impacted your career choice?
7. What are your hobbies and other interests?

Rationale for Not Participating, Other Experiences on Campus, and Reevaluations

1. Why did you choose not to participate?
2. Do you wish you had participated in an organization?
3. Did any of your close friends participate in a student organization?
4. Do you think you will ever join a student organization during your undergraduate career?
    - Why/why not?
5. What do you often do outside of academics to destress, relax, or have fun?
6. Can you describe one of your favorite memories on campus?
7. Have any of your classes raised your own awareness about issues that impact your community?
    - Were you able to learn more about a facet of your identity?
    - Have you engaged in community service, service learning, or activism?
8. Have any experiences you had in college made you reevaluate the way you identify racially?
    - How so?

First Year Experience and Sense of Community

1. Where do you feel most welcome or where you most belong on campus?
    - Why is that?

2. What is the racial makeup of friends?
    - Is it diverse? Is it mainly one race?
    - Are any of your close friends in the same organization?
3. Do you feel that you have found a community at the university?
    - How would you describe this community?
4. Do you feel that it would be easy for students from your background to find a community at the university?
    - Why/why not?
5. Did anything or anyone help your transition into college?
    - Why/why not?

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