

Multiracial Men in Toronto: Identities, Masculinities and Multiculturalism

by

Danielle Lafond

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Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education,
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Abstract

This thesis draws from ten qualitative semi-structured interviews with multiracial men in Toronto. It is an exploratory study that examines how participants experience race, masculinities and identities. Multiracial identities challenge popular notions of racial categories and expose processes of racialization and the shifting nature of social identities. I explore how gender impacts participants' experiences of multiple, fluid or shifting racial identities, and the importance of context in determining how they identify themselves. Participants also discussed the impact of multiculturalism and their understandings of racism in Canada. There were differences in the experiences of Black multiracial men and non-Black multiracial men in terms of how gender and race impact their lives. These differences imply that the colour line in Canada is shifting and that categories like 'whiteness' are being redefined. Analyses of these topics are taken up from an anti-racist and critical mixed race studies perspective.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

This thesis consists of a qualitative study of how multiracial men experience race¹, masculinities and identities. Multiracial² people are becoming more and more common, especially in large, diverse cities like Toronto, Canada. Statistics Canada predicts that, by 2017, one in five Canadians will be a visible minority (Bélanger and Caron Malenfant, 2005). Mixed unions (marriages or common-law relationships between a visible minority and a non-visible minority, or between visible minorities from different ethnocultural backgrounds) are also on the rise: in 2001, mixed unions made up 3.2% of Canadian couples, a 35% increase from 1991 (Milan and Hamm, 2004). While mixed race or multiracial children have become more common, there is limited literature examining the experiences of mixed race people in Canada. Much of the existing literature in the field emerges from the social sciences, and there is interest in how the media and advertising industries construct multiracial people. For advertisers, mixed race faces are of interest because they are seen as exotic, beautiful and racially ambiguous (Beltran and Fojas, 2008).

Canada provides an important context to understand multiraciality because of the implementation of multicultural policy, which celebrates diversity and encourages interaction between and among different ethnocultural groups. My research is premised on the now nearly universal understanding of race (in the social sciences) as a non-scientific, non-biological social construct that has a great impact on how one interacts with power, authority and privilege in Canada, where institutionalized racism still persists (Omi and Winant, 1993). We need to

¹ I have chosen not to place terms like ‘race’ or ‘mixed race’ in quotation marks. Some authors do this in order to avoid reinforcing the status quo use of these terms, but I have spent sufficient time in Chapter 2 explaining my position on race, and I do not feel that I risk presenting an unchallenged view on the use of ‘race’ and related terms. Rather, I feel that quotation marks would be distracting throughout, given the frequency that these words appear in the text.

² In this thesis, I use the terms ‘mixed race’ and ‘multiracial’ interchangeably to refer to individuals whose two biological parents would be differently racialized from one another in Toronto. Further discussion of the difficulties and ambiguities of this definition is found in Chapter 2.

understand racialized people's experiences in order to develop policies that are sensitive to this growing population, especially those young people who identify as mixed race or multiracial. In the field of anti-racism, there is little mention of the experiences of multiracial people, and a more nuanced knowledge of these experiences would add to anti-racism scholarship by contributing from a group that still resides in the margins of most anti-racism literature. Multiracial identities challenge popular notions of racial categories and their experiences expose the shifting and contextual processes of racialization that all people of colour experience.

In order to generate the kinds of discussions that would provide relevant narratives from multiracial men, I conducted 10 semi-structured qualitative interviews with men who live in Toronto³, Canada. This kind of qualitative data cannot be generalized to represent all multiracial men's experiences, but it will respond to the need for more diverse voices in the growing field of mixed race studies; multiracial Canadian men are under-represented in the literature as compared with multiracial women, and American experiences dominate scholarly publications on the topic.

My interest in the topic of mixed race is both academic and personal. I have academic interests in the field of anti-racism and gender studies, and these perspectives have been central to my undergraduate and graduate work. Courses in feminism, activism, anti-oppression, queer theory and anti-racism were the first courses that spoke to me as a woman of colour and reflected my lived experiences and worldview. I am a mixed race woman from Asian and French Canadian parents; both speak English as a second language, and they come from different religious upbringings, cultural backgrounds, and countries of origin. As a child and young adult, I moved through many identities, and each of them felt as 'real', authentic, and sincere to me as the next. I noticed that my sense of self, and my racial identity, often shifted in response to contextual factors. The intensity and variety of Canadian racism that I experienced changed significantly from one place to another, and I was always aware that people racialized me differently in different contexts, perhaps because most times, my internal identity and how others externally identified me were incongruous. I was always told I have 'olive' skin, which was confusing for many years, since I thought people were implying I was greenish in colour. I was also told I was

³ In this study, 'Toronto' refers to the Greater Toronto Area and suburbs of Toronto, including Brampton, Markham, Richmond Hill, and Mississauga.

‘off-white’, or ‘sort of’ white, but I was never ‘White’. In grade school, there was much attention paid to South Africa and what was going on there: I wondered what my life would be like under apartheid, and how I would be classified there. Would I get to be White, in comparison to darker-skinned Blacks, or was any trace of non-Whiteness enough to make a person ‘Black’? When I brought this up in my all-White classroom, neither the teacher and nor the other students knew how to respond, and I felt silly for asking, but still yearned for an answer. These and other questions led me to explore other people’s multiracial experiences and to take up analysis from an anti-racist and critical mixed race perspective.

Anti-racism is an appropriate tool for looking at mixed race people’s experiences because it maintains that the goal and purpose of such work is, ultimately, social change in favor of those who are disadvantaged. The participants in this study described a very nuanced personal understanding of racism, multiculturalism and racial identity. The anti-racist approach resonates with their personal narratives, in which they described the myriad ways they resist stereotypical constructions of race in everyday life, and how they challenge discriminatory beliefs. As Mohanty (1990) states, “resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces” (p.185). George Dei’s scholarly work has served as a guide in anti-racist theory, which he describes as “an action-oriented strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression” (Dei, 2000, p. 25).

This study is one of only a few in Canada that addresses the experiences of Canadian multiracial men. I explore how gender impacts men’s experiences and understandings of multiple, fluid or shifting identities, and the importance of physical appearance and social signifiers of race in different contexts. Participants also discussed multiculturalism in Toronto and their understandings of racism. There were differences in the experiences of Black multiracial men and men who were not part Black, in terms of how gender and race impact their lives. This has implications for the shifting colour line in Canada and how we categorize and racialize certain identities.

In addition to literature from the fields of mixed race and anti-racism studies, I will be drawing from the field of masculinity studies to inform my analysis. I draw heavily from the theoretical perspective presented by R. W. Connell (2005). Connell’s approach to studying masculinities is

to acknowledge not only diversity among masculinities, but to look at “relations between the different kinds of masculinities: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination.” (Connell, 2005, p.37)

The goal of this thesis is to examine some of the complexities of multiracial men’s lives in Toronto and to highlight the importance of key issues and points of contention for them, such as racism and multiculturalism. More importantly, I show how a better understanding of multiracial identities can illuminate on changes taking place in Canadian constructions of race and diversity. Further, I add new knowledge to the fields of race and identity studies, and to mixed race scholarship, by documenting the experiences of multiracial Canadian men, a group that has been neglected in traditional sociological literature.

Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

People from multiple racial backgrounds have existed in many cultures past and present, yet the field of mixed race studies is relatively new to the social sciences. Over the past twenty-five years, a number of books and articles have examined the mixed race experience, focusing especially on identities and identity formation. Prior to this, the study of people with multiple racial origins remained in the domain of the ‘hard’ sciences; multiracial people were pathologized and studied as examples of racial mixing and hybridity at a time when so-called scientific definitions of race were also coded in hierarchical beliefs about the meanings of physical differences in terms of intelligence, civility and superiority (Ifekwunigwe, 2004). The eugenics movement, which arose in the 1930’s as the study of how to control the inheritance of desirable and undesirable genes, further contributed to beliefs about the negative consequences of racial miscegenation. The dominant view of multiracial people throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries was that they were both biologically and psychologically damaged (Ifekwunigwe, 2004). Biologically, they were said to be less intelligent, weaker, more prone to illness, and infertile (Nott and Gliddon, 1854; Knox, 1850). Perhaps most significantly for the purposes of this thesis, all of these beliefs about miscegenation were inextricably fused with beliefs about White racial superiority, which saw mixed White/non-White people as contaminated versions of monoracial White people. In 1853, evolutionary anthropologist Gobineau, who promoted ‘hybrid degeneracy’ theory, stated that:

The White race originally possessed the monopoly of beauty, intelligence, and strength. By its union with other varieties, hybrids were created, which were beautiful without strength, strong without intelligence, or, if intelligent, both weak and ugly... It shows us that all civilizations derive from the White race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species. (cited in Ifekwunigwe, 2004, p.40-41)

In the 1990's, Maria P. Root (1996) wrote the 'Mixed Race person's Bill of Rights', which demonstrates that there are a number of shared sociopolitical and psychological experiences among mixed race people:

I have the right not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical ambiguity.

I have the right to identify differently than how my parents identify me.

I have the right to change my identity over my lifetime-more than once. (Root, 1996, p.7)

While Maria P. Root's works highlight many commonalities in multiracial experiences (Root, 1992; Root, 1996), this experience is certainly not universal: it is highly subjective, and as the participants in this study confirm, it depends on the context in which the multiracial person is situated, it depends how their identities are 'read' by others, and it depends on the meaning and significance ascribed to their identities. In the interviews I conducted, it became clear that the context of multiculturalism in Canada has important impacts on my participants' mixed race identities.

Another important point made in the literature is that the identities of different kinds of mixed race subjects have been closely regulated through laws and social practices in any place where mixed race people became a threat to established racial categories, and therefore, to the social order. Historically, for example, mixed race Black/White people in the United States, who were mostly born of White men raping their Black female slaves, were socially constructed as slightly higher in social status than monoracial Blacks. In her Master's thesis, Debra Thompson shows that mixed race identities are still highly regulated. She compares the regulation of mixed race Black/White identities in the United States with that of the Métis (mixed White/First Nations) in Canada, in order to show how similar racist ideologies intersect with specific social and political contexts, resulting in the dominant group forcing a racial identity on mixed people. There is close regulation over who can and who cannot claim White identity and therefore accrue the benefits of White privilege (Thompson, 2007). The interviews I conducted with 10 multiracial men demonstrated that their mixed race identities are also closely regulated. Specifically, I discuss how the multiracial Black men I spoke with feel that that they are obligated to take on a Black identity and what this means for the White/non-white colour line in Canada.

It is nearly standard convention in the social sciences to preface any discussion of race with a discussion of how various ‘racial’ terms will be employed. Terms like race, racism, racialization, ethnicity, and culture are already complicated ideas, each stepping somewhat on the toes of the others; mixed race further muddles these terms, challenging our understandings of the categories of difference implied by race and ethnicity. A further challenge is that mixed race identities encourage us to try and re-conceptualize a new ‘mixed’ version of these same concepts, yet some worry that the very use of terms like ‘mixed race’ itself risks reifying the contested, and sometimes ugly, concept of ‘race’ that is used to oppress and dehumanize ‘others’.

2.1 Terms of reference

I will begin by clarifying the use of the terms race, racialization, racism, and mixed race.

2.1.1 What is ‘race’?

It is nearly universally accepted that the term race represents neither a biologically sound, nor a naturally occurring, nor a genetic human trait. The meaning of the term ‘race’ is constantly shifting, and we can trace varying interpretations of its meaning through various cultures and historical periods. Most social scientists now agree that ‘race’ has historically referred to the socially constructed meanings assigned to various physical and phenotypic traits, such as eye colour, hair type, skin tone, nose shape, etc. (Thompson, 2007; Martin-Alcoff, 2007; Hier and Bolaria, 2007; Tate, 1997; Dei, 1996; Gandy, 1998). The important point is that their meanings (whether positive or negative) are socially assigned, as opposed to being rooted in some objective biological property of human beings. Precisely because meaning is a social, not biological, phenomenon, the assigned meanings and assumptions tied to different ‘races’ are not fixed: they are always changing, shifting, and being renegotiated. In other words, being ‘raced’, or racialized, is an active process. This means that we can observe how certain groups go from being racialized to being non-racialized (or pass into Whiteness, which is discussed in further detail in Chapter 5). For example, there are numerous articles that address the changing racialization experiences of Jews, the Irish, and Asians in terms of being racialized and constructed as ‘other’.

While some writers have used inverted commas around the word ‘race’ to remind the reader of its illusory nature, I contend that it is now, in 2008, so widely known and accepted throughout

popular culture and academia that race has no biological basis and is best understood as a social phenomenon, that there is no need to use cautionary quotation marks. In fact, the popular use of the term race has become so imbued with the idea that race has no scientific basis that some conservatives have stretched this point, arguing that race is not real. Related to the argument that race is not 'real' are arguments that they are colour-blind, and that those of us who 'see' race are reifying it, and thus responsible for the continued effects of racism (Omi and Winant, 1993). I borrow from the anti-racism scholar George Dei, who cautions against the use of commas around the term race, lest it risk overemphasizing the idea that race is not real (Dei, 1996). Race remains one of the most salient aspects of identity formation and of social organization, not just in Canadian society, but also across the globe (Omi and Winant, 1993). In taking this approach to defining race, I am consistent with oft-referenced scholars of critical mixed race studies, such as Jayne Ifekwunigwe, Minelle Mahtani, and Maria P. Root: these authors also premise their analyses of multiraciality on discourses that emphasize the social origins of race.

2.1.2 The process of racialization

Racialization is the process by which meaning is assigned to phenotypical features, skin colour or other social signifiers of race, in order to categorize a person into a specific racial category. Hier (2007) points out that groups of human beings have been assigning meaning to social signifiers of difference since long before the language of race came into common usage. He traces the use of the term 'race' (in Europe) as a tool to classify groups of humans back to the 16th century. Hier adds that the process of racialization involves not only assigning meaning to otherwise irrelevant physical characteristics, but also the "additional stipulation that socially constructed collectivities (not races) are understood in terms of, or perceived as, real or imagined ancestral groups" (Hier, 2007, p.28). Race, he says, is a specific discourse that is relatively recent, whereas racialization is the "dialectical social process" of using physical features to group people along real or imagined ancestral lines.

In other words, the process of 'othering' based on difference is not new; what is more recent is our use of the term 'race' and all the complex assigned meaning we call up with it. Omi and Winant (1993) also point to the importance of studying the "socially constructed status of the concept of race", or what they call the process of racial formation. I will summarize this brief

discussion of the terms race and racialization with Martin-Alcoff's (2007) definition of race, which I have borrowed here. Martin-Alcoff states,

I will take race to be the very real aspect of social identity, one that is marked on the body through learned perceptual practices of visual categorization, with significant sociological and political effects as well as a psychological impact on self-formation. (Martin-Alcoff, 2007, p.173)

Hier says that when socio-cultural signifiers are used (with or instead of physical traits) to group people into categories of shared ancestry that are presumed to reproduce culturally, economically, linguistically or otherwise, this is the process of ethnicization (Hier, 2007).

2.1.3 Defining racism

Racism is about the beliefs and practices that are used to privilege some and oppress others. This thesis is based on the narratives and lived experiences of my interview subjects, and when I speak about racism, I am specifically referring to White racism. Rather than talking about race as an abstract concept, I want to focus on the centrality of Whiteness to mixed race studies, even for those multiracial people who are mixed race but not part White; Whiteness is always the measuring stick to which we are held. While there can be discriminatory beliefs and behaviours against non-White racialized communities by other non-Whites, the global re-structuring of world resources in the 19th and 20th centuries along White European ideological lines puts Whiteness at the centre of any critical examination of racism. Further, mixed race people are rapidly increasing in numbers in North American and European cities in part because people from all over the world are migrating to these places to escape the inequality, lack of opportunity and oppression in their countries of origin, much of which was caused by unfavorable interactions with powerful (White) nations, or with international organizations serving the interests of powerful (White) nations. Except perhaps in the most isolated communities, Whiteness is recognized as a privileged signifier of difference (Leonardo, 2002, p30). Omi and Winant (1993) speak about the global context of race, stating that the "territorial reach of racial hegemony is now global" (Omi and Winant, 1993, p.8).

2.1.4 Mixed race and multiracial

For the purposes of this thesis, the terms mixed race and multiracial are used interchangeably; they refer to individuals who self-identify with these terms, and whose biological parents would be differently racialized from one another in most North American contexts, with a specific focus on Toronto. A mixed race/multiracial person could be a White/non-White person or a mixed non-White/non-White person. Because of the pervasiveness of the ‘one-drop’ rule of miscegenation, which originated in the U.S. to deny anyone of mixed Black/White heritage from claiming a White identity, multiracial people have traditionally been constructed as non-Whites and excluded from the category of Whiteness. The centrality of White racism in defining identities makes their experiences categorically different from those of a mixed ethnicity White person; say, a half Australian, half German person, or a person from a mixed Christian/Jewish marriage. Therefore, a monoracial White person who is from mixed cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic backgrounds would not be considered mixed race or multiracial here; these identities do not threaten or transgress racial boundaries in the context of North American multiethnic societies. That said, I did not encounter anyone who is monoracially White wishing to claim a mixed race identity and participate in my study, but I have heard while people say they were from “mixed backgrounds” when they were from mixed religious backgrounds or from parents who were from different countries. In other historical contexts, these kinds of (White) mixed identities might have posed a threat to established social orders, and in some cases this would coincide with the racialization of some groups, like Jews, or the Irish. This is a reminder of the contextual nature of all identities, not just mixed race identities.

2.1.5 What is a ‘visible minority’?

According to Canada’s Employment Equity Act, visible minorities are defined as “persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-White in colour”. The ten groups included are: Chinese, South Asian, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Japanese and Korean groups.

This term is relevant and important to understanding race in Canada because it is part of the everyday parlance of most Canadians. This is in part because it is used in important and wide-reaching policy such as the Employment Equity Act, and many local and provincial organizations have adopted the term as well. It should be noted that the term itself is in fact

contradictory, since so-called visible ‘minorities’ are the numerical majority in cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. In these places, those who are most ‘visible’ and in the ‘minority’ are often White people. Unless I am quoting a participant, I prefer not to use this term, since it is ridden with contradiction and is out of date for use with my participants.

2.2 Mixed race studies

Now that the most important terms for understanding this thesis are clearer, let us continue with the discussion of the field of mixed race. Author Jayne Ifekwunigwe is the author of several oft-cited works in the field of mixed race studies. In ‘Mixed Race Studies: A Reader’ (2004), she divides the literature into three periods: The age of pathology, the age of celebration and the age of critique. These three ages accurately describe the kinds of shifts in popular thinking that have taken place since the 19th century about mixed race people, led by the scientific community and later, the social science community.

Beginning in the 19th century, the western scientific community began to accept the notion that biological differences existed between ‘races’, that the so-called ‘White’ race was the most superior in mental capacity, and that non-Whites were less evolved and less civilized than ‘Whites’. In this context, mixed race people challenged notions of racial purity, and both legal and social categories were constructed to determine where mixed race people fit into the racial hierarchy (Ifekwunigwe, 2004, p.12). By 1915 in the U.S., the ‘one-drop’ rule was firmly entrenched in legal and social practice; it deemed that anyone with one Black ancestor was Black. This helped ensure that the children born to slave women, fathered by White slave owners, would remain enslaved and would be unable to claim any of the benefits of Whiteness.

During what Ifekwunigwe calls the age of pathology, the eugenics movement and social Darwinism shaped legislative and popular understandings of ‘race mixing’. Social Darwinists believed that the ‘races’ were fixed and distinct, and that there was a natural hierarchy of ‘races’ that should be maintained through social policy. The eugenics movement took social Darwinism one step further; its mission was the eradication of inferior races in order to prevent racial degeneracy. Eugenicists advocated various means of ameliorating the superior races (‘White’ races), from segregation to selective breeding, and from sterilization to extermination. Coupled with the legal and social mechanisms to enforce these practices, we are all too familiar with the terrible outcomes this movement had for people racialized as non-White. In the U.S., mixed race

people continued to be classified as Black because of the ‘one-drop’ rule. Jim Crow laws kept Blacks and Whites segregated, and anti-miscegenation laws made ‘interracial’ marriages and sexual relations between Blacks and Whites illegal. Anti-miscegenation laws were not repealed in the U.S. until 1967 (Ray, 1996).

In the age of celebration, Ifekwunigwe refers to more recent scholarship in mixed race studies, coming mostly from the U.S., Britain and Canada, that is both celebratory and social constructionist in its theoretical perspective, and that looks at mixed race identities as subjective, shifting, complex, multiple, situational, fluid and ambiguous. Ifekwunigwe’s text consists of a collection of works by other authors; one of the themes from this and other texts that will inform my study deals with mapping, crossing and understanding the borders and boundaries of race and group membership. Like many of the authors in the field I want to look at how mixed race people traverse these borders (Camper, 2004; DaCosta, 2007; Mahtani, 2002a; Mahtani, 2002b; Streeter, 1996; Williams, 1996), and how individuals maintain “simultaneous membership and multiple, fluid identities with different groups” (Root, 2004, p.145).

Several authors write about the significance of phenotype for mixed race people; one aspect of experience that many mixed race people share is that their phenotype (facial features and physical appearance) does not accurately predict how they identify, and that psychological stress can ensue when they are consistently misidentified by others throughout their lives (Williams, 2004, p.166-170). The literature supports the idea that because they are often called upon to explain, justify or defend their ethnoracial identity to others, multiracial people are especially cognizant of those moments or interactions during which race is being constructed. Race is central to people’s life experiences; therefore, social markers of difference, such as phenotype, behavior, speech patterns, and clothing become cultural clues that others read and respond to. Mixed race people are treated as individuals who represent certain groups, whether or not their actual identity matches their perceived identity or not.

As Williams (2004), Mahtani (2002a, 2002b) and others have discussed, one strategy that mixed race people use to cope with a racist and racially ordered society is to make active and conscious choices about physical appearance and other social signifiers of race so that they might ‘pass’ from minority status to majority status, or from minority status to a more accepted minority status. The politics of passing are discussed in many of the chapters in Root’s (1996) anthology

‘The Multiracial Experience’. The issues relating to passing that I would like to focus on in my study have to do with what kinds of active and conscious choices multiracial men make when it comes to passing, how they understand ‘passing’ and how they think it affects their lives, and what kinds of motivations they may have for ‘passing’ in different social contexts. Harris and Sim (2002) studied how multiracial people change their answer to racial identity questions depending on context. They found that answers varied when they were asked at school or at home, and that there is a generational gap in the U.S. between multiracials who were raised during a period when the one-drop rule was legally and socially prominent, and multiracials youth today, who are more likely to embrace a mixed race identity because they live in a social context that espouses the benefits and values of diversity and difference (Harris and Sim, 2002, p.624).

Carol Camper explored Canadian multiracial women’s experiences in her 1994 anthology ‘Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women’. Mahtani has written the several Canadian works in the field in recent years (2002a, 2002b, 2002c), and there are a few master’s and PhD-level theses that deal with the topic of multiraciality (Thompson, 2007; Ahmet, forthcoming). In 1996, Kay Pamela Ray completed a master’s thesis that focused on the stories of White/Asian or White/south Asian people, and looked at the impact that a mixed race identity had on their lives. Ray used ten qualitative interviews where participants were asked about growing up mixed race in Canada. In the narratives, Ray found that experiences of racism and passing were important recurring themes. Debra Thompson completed a master’s thesis (2007) at the University of Carlton discusses multiracial identities in order to examine the “paradoxical, antithetical and convoluted nature of identity (Thompson, 2007, p.5)”. Currently, Akile Ahmet, University of London, is completing a PhD in geography that examines the home as a site for the performance of race in the lives of multiracial men (Ahmet, forthcoming). This work is informed by literature on how multiracialized bodies are differently sexualized (Allman, 1996; Kich, 1996; Streeter, 1996; Twine, 1996; Tyner and Houston, 2000;).

2.3 Masculinity studies

The analyses and theoretical understandings of masculinities in this thesis draw largely from R.W. Connell (2005), who states that neither biological determinism nor social constructionism,

nor the simple acceptance that both play a role, are adequate in understanding the complex processes involved in the construction of masculinities. As Connell states:

[Masculinity] is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture. (Connell, 2005, p.71)

According to Connell, what it means to be a man or a woman in society is tied up in how one enacts a general set of expectations related to one's sex. As Schippers (2007) explains, there are certain bodily features, certain behaviors, and certain personality traits that together, provide enough information to create a category of male or female that people are classified into.

Connell's central ideas are those of hegemonic masculinities and multiple masculinities. Each are seen as central constructs in the sociology of gender. Gender is not fixed, but constructed in everyday interactions, and masculinities and femininities both arise within a system of gender relations, where femininities are constructed as subordinate to masculinities. Some masculinities (such as gay male masculinities) are also constructed as subordinate to other, more dominant masculinities. All are produced in similar cultural and institutional settings, which help to explain the reproduction and continuity of some masculinities (or femininities). Connell's analysis is one that offers hope for social change, since sex roles are understood as the products of social learning. "Since the role norms are social facts, they can be changed by social processes" (Connell, 2005, p.35).

Connell points to the importance of bodies, reminding us that in our society (by which Connell means Western European-influenced societies), "the physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender" (Connell, 2005, p.52). This is helpful because my participants, mixed race men in Toronto, spoke of the importance of their bodies, especially physical appearance, skin tone and phenotype, to their lived experiences. It is also helpful to think about bodies when we consider how racialized male bodies are sexualized differently and the impact this has on how they create their identities. For example, Black men are hyper-sexualized, while Asian men are stereotyped as having small penises, and this affects how they are sexualized by others. As Connell puts it, "Bodily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are" (Connell, 2005, p.53).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also pay close attention to the geography of masculinities; this study focuses specifically on Toronto. These authors point to the importance of local, regional and global geographies, and they say that each are related to one another, as each requires a different construction of masculinity. On this note, Farough (2004) noted that in his study, White men felt ‘White’, or racialized, in mostly Black settings; this shows “how such seemingly mundane acts of moving across physical space highlight the context-specific ways White men must periodically confront being interpreted as privileged, as their identity is transformed from ‘nonracial’ to ‘racial’” (Farough, 2004, p.241). Farough calls the lack of awareness of a racialized self, such as that experienced by mainstream White men in majority-White settings, ‘sovereign individuality’.

Hopkins (2007) notes the importance of place of residence and its connection with how people identify themselves, and Hopkins cites Archer’s work examining Muslim boys in the U.K. and their perception of Asian and Black neighbourhoods as ‘friendly’, while they saw White areas as racist and less friendly. This is useful in understanding how my participants perceived ‘Toronto’ and ‘outside of Toronto’; ‘Toronto’ was described as comfortable, friendly, and accepting, while ‘outside of Toronto’ was perceived as hostile, racist and small-minded. This point is discussed in Chapter 4.

The questions that Connell (2005) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) raise about hegemonic masculinities lead to discussions about the relations of power between and among different masculinities. These questions complement the questions that anti-racist scholars and mixed race scholars ask about the construction of racialized identities: what are the relationships of alliance, domination and subordination, inclusion/exclusion, and intimidation that occur between identities? Connell (2005) asks this from a gender politics point of view but this analysis has helped to shape the approach I take in studying mixed race identities.

2.4 Anti-racism studies

In this work, I am taking an anti-racist stance because I wish to place race and processes of racialization as key aspects of the participants’ experiences and as a key marker of identity. Anti-racist scholars like Omi and Winant (1993) point to the continuing significance of race, despite its ever-changing categories and conceptualizations (Omi and Winant, 1993); they explain race as neither an ideological construct or idea, nor an objective (or biological) condition. Their focus

is useful for thinking about mixed race experiences because it draws attention to the relational character of racial identity and to the fact that it is created through constantly-changing social, and to the global context of race processes (Omi and Winant, 1993). They also discuss how Whites are increasingly racialized in the U.S. and Europe as part of the global context of race, which helps put Whiteness into a global context, even though the participants I spoke to mostly talked about the local context. Omi and Winant's (1993) analyses help to explain why, despite the fact that my participants do not live in majority-White communities, they are still influenced by a system that favours Whiteness.

Despite the lack of scientific or biological evidence for the existence of race, anti-racism allows for race to be placed solidly at the centre of the discussion, because we must recognize that it has powerful social effects (Dei, 2000, p.34). Haney-Lopez states that

Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions. (Haney-Lopez, 1995, p.165)

Haney-Lopez is an anti-racist scholar who is also influenced by his experience of being mixed race: he describes that he and his brother, who are of mixed Latino and White American descent, have different racial identities. He highlights the importance of the relational way that races are constructed; that is, there is no 'Black' without 'White'. Race is socially constructed, and different races are constructed in relation to other races (Haney-Lopez, 1995).

In addition to drawing from George Dei's work (1996) in anti-racism, I use Miles and Torres' analysis of race and skin colour (1996) to inform my discussions and analysis of participants' narratives. Analyses of multiracial experiences tend to pay close attention to the importance of skin colour privilege, because it is something that most mixed race people talk about and are hyper-aware of. To those who would say that skin colour is highly visible, or 'obvious', and therefore somewhat 'natural', Miles and Torres state the following:

Skin colour is one such phenomenon. Its visibility is not inherent in its existence but is a product of signification: human beings identify skin colour to mark or symbolize other phenomena in a historical context in which other significations occur...Historically, and contemporarily, differences in skin colour have been and are signified as a mark which

suggests the existence of “race”: rather, they observe certain combinations of real and sometimes imagined somatic and cultural characteristics which they attribute meaning to with the idea of ‘race’. (Miles and Torres, 1996, p.40)

Other anti-racist scholars, such as Mohanty (1990) and Dixon and Rousseau (2005), remind us that another important part of anti-racism scholarship is about giving voice to those who have historically been denied a place in the literature. Multiracial people are one of these groups, and Dixon and Rousseau (2005) emphasize that even when scholars of colour are given voice, the scholarship of racialized faculty is often seen as ‘unobjective’, biased, or ‘overly subjective’ (Dixon and Rousseau, 2005), which emphasizes the need for a move further away from paradigms that place Whiteness at the centre, as hegemonic norm, and which are based on Western male values, such as rationality, objectivity and notions that anyone can be neutral in taking on anti-racist work.

This thesis adds one more voice to the discussion of multiracial experiences in Canada. It is my intention to place race and racism at the centre of this discussion, with meaningful discussions of masculinities, class and other aspects of social identities and how they impact participants’ sense of what it means to be multiracial in Toronto. In her criticisms of the pedagogy of teaching gender and race, Mohanty (1990) states that:

White students are constructed as marginal observers and the students of colour as the real ‘knowers’... while it may seem like people of color are granted voice and agency in the classroom, it is necessary to consider what particular kind of voice it is that is allowed them/us. It is a voice located in a different and separate space from the agency of White students. (Mohanty, 1990, p.194)

In Chapter 5, I analyze how mixed race men in Toronto feel about Whiteness and White identities, keeping in mind that they are always as racialized as they are sexualized/masculinized, and that this experience of race and gender plays a big role in how they see themselves. Dei (2000, p.28) and other anti-racist scholars have looked at the importance of examining Whiteness and White identities, and of challenging the normality of Whiteness (Dei, 2000; Howard, 2004; Leonardo, 2002; Leonardo, 2004; Satzewich, 2007; Walcott, 1990). Bannerji’s book (2002a) takes up issues of belonging and exclusion for non-Whites in Canada, and looks at how multiculturalism is implicated in these constructions. Bannerji’s analysis helped shed light on

some of the paradoxes that mixed race men expressed in their interviews related to belonging, inclusion and representation in Canada and in Toronto. This thesis looks closely at multiculturalism as well as at how participants, whether or not they are part White, relate to Whiteness and how they construct White identities.

One of the findings that I discuss is that the multiracial men I interviewed reported high levels of pride and confidence that being mixed race was a positive and advantageous identity for them. These findings suggest that I should consider the changing colour line, and new implications of what it is to be mixed race in Toronto.

W.E.B Dubois famously wrote that, “The problem of the 20th Century is the problem of the color-line” (Dubois, 1995, p.53). Bean, Lee, Batalova and Leach (2005) write that the Black/White colour line in the U.S. has historically been a sharply defined line, but that the presence of new, more diverse people calls into question traditional understandings of race and the colour line. In particular, they note that some Whites may be especially concerned about the growth in the number of people who are neither ‘White’ nor ‘Black’, especially if they are constructed as people of colour who are closer to the ‘Black’ side of the colour line than to the ‘White’ side (Bean, Lee, Batalova and Leach, 2005). Warren and Twine (1997) argue that the racial category of ‘White’ has been expanding over time to include previously non-White groups, such as the Irish, Jews, and some mixed race people, such as Asian/White mixed people, Latino/White mixed people, or First Nations/White multiracials. Their article addresses the argument of some that ‘White’ will become a minority, because Warren and Twine re-focus the discussion on who is considered ‘White’ and how this calls into question popular notions of ‘Whiteness’ (Warren and Twine, 1997).

Lee and Bean (2004) call attention to what social scientists can learn from multiracial people about the changing colour line. In the U.S., multiracial activists succeeded in getting census categories changed to reflect the increasing number of people who wish to identify as multiracial (DaCosta, 2007). Lee and Bean point out that mixed Black people in the U.S. are the least likely among mixed race people to claim a multiracial identity. Bonilla-Silva (2004) argues that the colour line in the U.S. is moving towards an increasing Latin-American style racial stratification, with categories like ‘White’, ‘honorary White’ and ‘collective black’ making more sense than the traditional White/non-White binary. This finding indicates that for Black multiracials, Blackness

may be inescapable, and that there may be qualitatively different experiences of mixedness for these people. As I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5, the content from my interviews with Black mixed race men in Toronto supports the idea that mixed Black identities are different than other multiracial identities in ways that are specifically related to being seen and identified by others as Black.

Chapter 4 of this study deals in part with the participants' discussions of Canadian multiculturalism. This is not an area I had intended to study, but it came up so frequently in the course of the conversations with multiracial men that it is clearly a very important part of the context of their lives. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the participants are largely critical of multiculturalism in Canada, and their views fit with Mohanty's view that multiculturalism itself is not bad, but that it must be challenged when it is defined as apolitical, ahistorical or acultural. Enid Lee (*Rethinking Schools*, 1991) also critiques multicultural education in Canada for being superficial and for leaving Whiteness unchallenged and at the centre; the 'norm' against which everything else is constructed (*Rethinking Schools*, 1991). Mahtani (2002c) found that multiracial people in Canada are in a unique position in relation to multiculturalism, since they challenge essentialist racial and ethnic categories and are also seen as living examples of ethnoracial sharing and crossing cultural boundaries.

There are gaps in the literature on mixed race identities when it comes to specifically focusing on the experiences of men, and there is also a shortage of Canadian research in this area. In masculinity studies, there are few authors who have looked at multiraciality and how it interacts with masculinity to shape one's identity. Hopkins (2007) looks at race, religion, young men and masculinities in the United Kingdom, and he cites the need for more research about multiracial men's experiences: "...much work about multiculturalism and gender has focused on women's experiences, meaning that young men's multicultural, racial and ethnic identities, interactions and experiences provides an ideal focus for future research" (Hopkins, 2007, p.172). This thesis project will respond to the need for authentic voices in the growing field of critical mixed race studies, and it will shed light on how a rarely-studied group, multiracial men, construct their identities in Toronto, a multicultural Canadian city.

Chapter 3

3 Methods

This study draws from that content of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 10 men who are mixed race / multiracial and who have lived in the Greater Toronto Area for the past five years or longer. Each participant was asked the same set of twelve questions, and discussion and open conversation followed each question. The questions asked about age, occupation, class status, racial background, and about the participants' thoughts on being multiracial, on race and racial categories, and on being male or masculine.

For the purposes of this study, the definition of a mixed race or multiracial person is someone whose two biological parents would be differently racialized in Toronto. I chose this definition because it was consistent with what other scholars have used as a definition of mixed race or multiracial in other studies, and because I hoped it would elicit responses from a diverse group of men. It is always difficult to predict how racialization happens; for most participants, whose two parents are consistently racialized in the same way (for example, as Black and White), this was a clear way of explaining who did and did not qualify for my study. This definition precluded people who may be from different White-identified groups from participating in my study. For example, an Italian and Russian mixed person would not qualify for my study, and consistent with most mixed race scholars, would not qualify as a mixed race person. There were potential participants who challenged this definition; for example, a mixed race Asian man, of Korean and Cambodian descent contacted me, and although we were unable to meet for an interview, this participant calls into question how Asians are racialized in Toronto, and whether his two parents would be differently racialized, and according to whom. I am certain that most Asians would racialize Koreans and Cambodians differently, but it is unclear how most Whites and other non-Asians would construct these identities and whether this participant would be considered Asian or mixed race according to hegemonic definitions of racial identities.

In order to find multiracial men who I could interview for my study, I combined two sampling methods: purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Mason, 2006, pp. 124-132). I began seeking out participants by using snowball sampling. I sent out e-mails and used word of mouth to try and encourage people I already knew (friends, family, classmates, workmate,

acquaintances) to put me in touch with mixed race men. The only stipulations were that the participants had to have been living in the Toronto area for at least the past 5 years, they had to be over 18 years of age, and they had to be men that I previously had never met. This method was quite effective and yielded me over a dozen potential contacts. However, one challenge to this method was that the people who first responded to my call were not necessarily willing to participate; often, they were writing or calling to get more information and to ask me about my research. This meant that some of these potential respondents were not necessarily interested in the topic of mixed race, or that they were reluctant to meet with a stranger to speak about it. Also, despite the fact that my emails clearly stated that I was seeking to interview men of mixed race, many women contacted me who were eager and willing to meet with me. I had to explain that I was only looking to study men, and in many cases, they were disappointed. A few of these women were able to put me in contact with a multiracial male friend or brother.

Many of the multiracial men I reached seemed hesitant to participate and were suspicious of my motives, and several asked me ahead of time about ‘what I was aiming to prove’. To each of these men, I explained in everyday language that my study is exploratory and descriptive; that is, I am trying to see if there are themes and issues common to men who are mixed race and who live in Toronto, because I think it is a unique identity that is underrepresented in scholarly research and literature. Everyone got some version of this explanation, and it seemed to satisfy people, but overall, the men I communicated with were concerned about boundaries, definitions and specifics, whereas the women who contacted me were very open, asked few questions, and seemed very eager to be interviewed.

If after three to five phone and/or email communications the person did not respond to me any further or would not commit to a meeting time, I let the communication lapse. No one actually refused to be interviewed but several men were noncommittal or reluctant, and three did not show up for scheduled interviews. Snowball sampling yielded three participants who followed through with the interviews.

Purposive sampling is useful when attempting to study a difficult-to-reach or specialized population (Mason, 2006, p.120-144). Since mixed race people are a small minority in Toronto, and are not visibly identifiable as multiracial, it was insufficient to rely solely on snowball sampling to find respondents. Mahtani (forthcoming) writes about the difficulty recruiting

multiracial participants, because the identification of “mixed race” subjects is complex. I used a variety of purposive (also known as selective) methods to find participants: I posted messages on online social networking groups about mixed race and multiracial issues, I emailed student groups, and I contacted the faculty of an undergraduate course on mixed race topics. I used the same script each time. This method was more successful than snowball sampling, and I attribute that in part to the fact that those who answered the call for participants already had some interest in the topic, and were motivated enough to send me an email on their own accord. Purposive sampling was so successful in capturing the attention of interested individuals that again, in addition to the men who responded, I received over a dozen emails and phone messages from women of mixed race who were eager to be interviewed, and who would have been pleased to share their stories. When this happened, I sent the women a grateful message informing them that I was actually looking for men to interview, and I used snowball sampling methods to ask them to connect me with any brothers they might have, or other mixed race men they may know. Two of the male respondents I interviewed were found because their sisters contacted me. In total, purposive sampling connected me with 7 men who followed through with the interviews.

One ongoing challenge that I faced using both purposive and snowball sampling methods was that multiracial men were concerned first with my definition of mixed race, and concerned that if they did not identify with the label ‘mixed race’ or ‘multiracial’ in their everyday lives, I would not want to interview them. They thought I was looking to speak with men who used the labels ‘mixed race’ or ‘multiracial’ to self-identify, and many of them told me that they identified as Black, Asian or as another monoracial label in everyday life. Mahtani (forthcoming) notes the difficulty that self-identity labels pose in researching mixed race people: advertisements and calls for participants may not capture the attention or interest of multiracial people who do not identify as such, and that this could be because they have a monoracial identity and/or have passed into Whiteness, or because they view their multiracial status negatively.

It was interesting that none of the women who contacted me expressed this concern, and they would have been much more willing to set up an interview after our first phone or email communication. Several of the men, however, began their communications with me by first emailing to say that although they were biologically mixed race or multiracial, they identified as ‘Black’ or ‘Brown’ (or another singular racial term), and so they wondered if I would want to interview them, or if qualified for the study. The men who emailed me with these questions were

both from the reluctant group (those who never ended up following through with the interview) and from the eager group (those who wanted to do the interview), so I am not sure why this occurred, and I can only speculate as to its significance. At the very least, I think it is indicative of how men and women think about race, and the importance or emphasis they place on labels and descriptive terms. These inquiries came as emails prior to scheduled interviews from men who both did and did not complete an interview, and respondents also asked me about this at the in-person interviews.

Twine (2000) writes about the importance of insider/outsider status when it comes to race between the researcher and participant. My call for participants clearly states that I am a multiracial woman, which gave me insider status in terms of racial identity, and outsider status in terms of gender. It is likely that my insider racial status was helpful in terms of getting some of the participants to meet with me, but that my outsider status in terms of gender was a limitation to my being able to collect rich data about the men's experiences of masculinities and gender. As is discussed in Chapter 5, the men were reluctant to speak about gender, and seemed to be able to speak about gender only when it was experienced through race; this was especially true for the men who are racialized as Black.

Interviews were scheduled and conducted in various locations across the city. They took place in semi-private public spaces, such as coffee shops or common spaces on university campuses. Each respondent was first presented with two copies of the letter of consent (see Appendix B), and they were asked to read it while I bought them a coffee or prepared my notebook, tape recorder and papers. I explained that one copy was for them to keep, and one copy was to be signed and returned to me, and asked if they had any questions before we began. This is often where participants raised questions about my definition of mixed race and about whether it mattered to me what racial identity label they used. If they returned the letter, I asked if it would be ok to begin tape recording. Once they indicated that they consented to the recording beginning, I would begin the interview using my 12 prepared interview questions as a guide, and allowing the conversation to flow naturally otherwise. This gave me room to inquire into certain topics raised by the respondents, and to follow their train of thought and build a rapport with them. The interviews lasted an average of one and a half hours; two interviews were under one hour long, and 5 interviews ran approximately two hours in length. Three participants were very interested in my life experiences and I stayed with them long after the interview was over to

answer questions about my own experiences. Generally, they wanted to know about other research on mixed race people and how I came to be doing this study.

I had anticipated that there were contextual aspects of living in Toronto that would be important, which is why I asked that respondents be men who have lived in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) for at least the past 5 years. The GTA includes communities like Mississauga, Scarborough and Brampton, which were important to include since so many immigrants settle in these communities, and they would be places where mixed race and multiracial people would be as likely to reside as in metro Toronto. Since multiracial people are a minority, I wanted to have a wider area in which to search for potential participants.

The ten participants who completed interviews were very diverse. They ranged in age from 20 to 40 years old. In terms of socioeconomic class, I asked about how they grew up and how they currently identified. Three respondents said they grew up middle class, six said their parents were working class, working poor, or poor and one respondent identified as upper middle class. When it came to their present-day socioeconomic class status, 5 were undergraduate students, 4 were working class with either incomplete or no post-secondary education, and one identified himself as holding two graduate degrees and high-status job in the financial industry. Nine of the participants were raised in homes with both their parents, and one participant said he did not know his White father. All but one participant had at least one sibling from the same parents.

The table below specifies how each participant answered the demographic question about racial identity and background. It is important to note that their answers to ‘how do you identify racially’ change according to context, but that the answer listed below is what they said at the beginning of the interviews. All of the participants’ names have been changed to protect them from being identified, as was agreed upon in the consent letter that each of them signed.

Participant Name	“How do you identify racially?”	“What is your mix?”
1. Ahmed	West Indian or Brown	Guyanese or West Indian (Muslim) and Irish

2. Jamal	Uncategorized or Mixed Race	Chinese and Anglo-Saxon
3. Dante	Mixed	West Indian (Black and mixed) from Dominica and White
4. Doug	Spanish	Venezuelan (Latino, mixed) and West Indian (mixed)
5. Greg	Black, West Indian	Black (mixed West Indian) and Portuguese
6. Isaac	Black	Jamaican (Black, mixed) and White
7. Manuel	Chinese or Asian	Chinese and White (Italian, Dutch)
8. Damien	Trini or West Indian	Trinidadian (Indian, Muslim) and White (Irish, Catholic)
9. Santo	Jamaican or Black	Jamaican (Black) and Italian
10. Amal	Indian or Brown	Indian (Hindi) and French Canadian

As shown, a number of the respondents were multi-generational mixed race (MGM), meaning that one of their parents was already someone of mixed racial ancestry. This was especially common for respondents whose parents came from the West Indies or were Latin American, as these are already identities that can be racialized in a number of ways. Interestingly, only two participants regularly used the term ‘mixed’ when referring to their identity. The others used the above-listed terms the most often, but all said that they sometimes answered differently, depending on the context, and all also said that as children or young adults they went through periods where they would have identified differently.

Nine of the respondents were first generation Canadians on at least one side, meaning that at least one of their parents was born outside of Canada. Three of the respondents were first generation Canadians on both sides. Only one of the respondents was born outside of Canada and immigrated here as a teenager. Eight of the respondents were raised in the GTA, including North York, Scarborough and Mississauga, and the central Toronto area.

As a researcher, the experience of conducting these ten interviews was both rewarding and challenging. During some interviews, it took very little in terms of questions or probing on my part to get the participants to speak at length about their experiences. In general, they seemed eager to discuss their identities, and several of them reported that the interview was a positive experience and that they were happy to speak with someone who was interested in hearing about their lives. Most mixed race people do not know many other mixed race people, and perhaps this contributed to their willingness to share information with me. Several of the participants asked me what the other participants were like (in terms of mixed race ancestry) and if their answers were 'normal' or similar to what the others had said. Some of the participants also asked me more direct questions about identity formation, like 'do you think that people usually take on the racial identity of their mother?' or 'is it normal for me to feel more Black than White?'. In these cases, I would tell them that I was really interested in knowing what they thought, and that I would make a note and we could discuss my views after the interview was over if they wanted. In most cases, we did continue the discussion, as they had many questions about what research exists about mixed race people and what that research says about multiracial people.

The biggest challenge was in discussing gender with the participants. It seemed that they were unaccustomed to thinking about gender or masculinity, and the fact that I am a woman clearly posed a limitation on the kinds of discussions they were willing to have with me about gender. Many times, it was clear that the participants were censoring their speech: for example, they would struggle between words like 'girl', 'chick', finally settling on 'woman' when describing a girlfriend or partner. I have little doubt that if I were a male interviewer, these kinds of changes in speech would likely have not have been present. At times, it was as if there was a silent agreement that as I woman, I would not understand their 'male' experiences. Perhaps the gender difference between the participants and I contributed to why the conversation always turned to race when gender was discussed. Nonetheless, there were clear differences between the multiracial Black men and the other men in terms of how race and gender influence their

experiences. The masculine parts of their identities were not something the participants were used to thinking about, and as a result it was difficult for them to find things to say. Perhaps the participants think about gender less because they are male and therefore part of the dominant sex. Like White privilege, male privilege operates in a way that allows the dominant group to remain unaware of their sex and gender roles, and how they impact themselves and others. On the other hand, they had much to say about race and mixed race topics, and this showed that they consider these topics in everyday life and have given them much thought.

Chapter 4

4 Multiculturalism and Mixed Race Men in Toronto

In this chapter, I will use the participants' interviews to describe their understandings of Canadian multiculturalism and to examine the role that these understandings play in the creation of their multiracial identities. I set the stage for the analysis that follows by providing a brief summary of the critiques of multicultural policy, since these critiques are well established among Canadian scholars and provide a valuable context for understanding the analysis of the interviews. Over the course of the semi-structured qualitative interviews, participants spoke about the contradictions in the multicultural policy in their day-to-day lives and the impact of race and racism.

In different places in Canada, multiculturalism means many things to many people. In order to understand how multiculturalism applies to the everyday lives of multiracial men, we must first differentiate between conceptualizations of multiculturalism as social policy and multiculturalism as a description of diverse social environments and as lived reality for the participants. This point will be addressed in section 4.1.

There are three important themes for the participants that I identify in this chapter. In section 4.1, I will look at some of the tensions that exist between the tenets of official multiculturalism and the lived realities of the respondents, who speak about racism and other experiences seemingly incongruous with multiculturalism in Canada, which aims at promoting egalitarian values like fairness, equality and justice (Henry and Tator, 1994).

Section 4.2 will look the social construction of mixed race, including the 'what are you' question, mixed race in the media, and the advantages that participants see to being multiracial.

In section 4.3, the participants identify how Toronto's focus on multiculturalism and its diverse population help multiracial men to feel a strong sense of belonging in the city. This section will discuss how participants feel that non-White identities are normalized in Toronto and that race is openly discussed and considered salient to others in their lives. The centrality of race in Toronto contributes to multiracial men's sense of belonging in the city. As a whole, this chapter will provide a picture of some of the most important aspects of the complex relationship that

multiracial men have with multiculturalism as it plays out in their lived experiences in the city of Toronto.

There are many critiques of the official policy version of multiculturalism in Canada. Critiques of multicultural policy by scholars such as Fleras (2002), Fleras and Elliot (1992) Bannerji (2000a, 2002b), and Kobayashi (1993) focus largely on aspects related to how multicultural policy in Canada has been uninterested in political goals such as achieving social justice or taking an anti-racist stand. Any discussion of multiculturalism in Canada takes on the challenge of dealing with many different understandings and opinions of official policy. As well, there are a range of meanings associated with the related concepts of diversity and racism, and each comes with its own politically charged discourse. My analysis aims to tease out the meanings that the respondents in my study associate with multiculturalism and these related ideas. To this end, I wish to separate the idea of multiculturalism as official policy and as the legal Act enshrined in the constitution, and the idea of multiculturalism as a lived social reality for the respondents.

Walcott (2003) refers to ‘everyday multiculturalism’ or ‘popular multiculturalism’ as the daily interactions that take place in cities like Toronto, where people are engaging in a crossing of cultural barriers, cultural translation, and re-making themselves in relation to the other people and institutions in their lives. Over the course of the interviews I conducted, it became clear that when the multiracial men in this study referred to multiculturalism, they were often using it as a descriptor of their social realities in Toronto rather than discussing policy. They spoke about their schools, neighbourhoods, their peer groups, and the public in Toronto as being ‘multicultural’, and they often paired this with discussions of how racism still exists, especially outside Toronto. As Wilmot (2005) states, given the contradictions present in how official policy has played out, multiculturalism is best used as a term that describes the population mix in Canada. The participants never explicitly discussed multicultural policy, but there were comments from participants about festivals, food, and cultural practices as examples of multiculturalism. Through this section, I will clarify whether participants are using the term ‘multicultural’ as a descriptor of the population, or as an umbrella term for the kinds of programs and policies that exist in Canada, such as government–funded cultural programming. While the mixed race men I interviewed were very positive when they talked about multicultural populations, especially in Toronto, they were generally negative when they referred to multicultural programs. These ideas will be further expanded upon below.

4.1 Multiracial men, multiculturalism, and contradictions in Toronto

According to my interviews, mixed race men are troubled by the discontinuities between the ideology of multiculturalism and the realities of racism in Canada. As Levine-Rasky (2006) and others (Bannerji, 2000a) point out, there are tensions between the official Act as enshrined in the constitution, which promotes liberal democratic values such as equality and fairness, and the persistence of discrimination, intolerance and racism in Canada. This section will look at how mixed race men think about these discontinuities as they experience them in Toronto, in order to understand how they experience multiculturalism in their everyday lives and what meaning they ascribe to it.

Santo, a participant in his mid-twenties who described himself as Jamaican and Italian, discussed how multicultural programming in school strengthened his connection and knowledge of his cultural background. In this context, he states that multiculturalism was an important part of his school experience:

Santo: "...culturally, I learned lots of it [culture] through, like, Black history month at school, or by going to Caribana, or at my friends houses. My family never did that stuff that much. So multicultural programs helped me learn about my own background, I guess."

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of a multicultural program that you thought was useful?

Santo: "Well, like, we never talked about slavery (at home). I learned that at school, and that like Canada had slaves, and that it's a really racist history. Multiculturalism was a big part of what we did at school."

In his comments, Santo refers positively to aspects of multicultural programming, like Black history included in school curricula, or attending Caribana, a large annual summer festival in Toronto, now in its 42nd year, that celebrates Caribbean culture through music, dance and food. It remains one of the largest and most popular summer events in Toronto. Although Santo commends the educational component of multiculturalism as funded through policies, he later

shares his frustration with multiculturalism when it is commodified and consumed by mainstream (White) Canadians.

Santo: “The whole multicultural thing can get cheesy, you know, like people who think they’re all worldly because they like sushi, or ‘cause they go to festivals and listen to African music, but they don’t actually have any Black friends. That annoys me.”

The most persistent criticism that the participants raised about multiculturalism was that, despite it being a very prominent feature of Canadian identity, racism continues to persist. Santo also expresses frustration that White people can purport to be fans of multiculturalism when they do not actually integrate with Black people in their everyday lives (his reference to “no Black friends”). While I did not ask about multiculturalism specifically, but there were specific questions about whether the participants had experienced racism or discrimination related to their mixed racial backgrounds. Interestingly, the topic of multiculturalism as policy or programs most often came up in conjunction with thinking about racism in Canada, evidence of the importance of these topics to the participants, and indicative of their concern about some of the discontinuities between the two. Damien, who describes himself as mixed Black, brown and White, and culturally West Indian, says:

Damien: “Canada isn’t really multicultural outside Toronto, and even though everyone thinks they’re so accepting, racism still completely exists. It’s just nicer or something here, like people won’t look at you as hard, but you know they’re judging you the minute you walk into a store. And like, they’ll ask me to leave my bag at the front, and I then if a White person comes in next, they’ll ask them too, but like, if I wasn’t there first, do you think they would have?”

There are several aspects of Damien’s comments that are worthy of closer examination. First, he notes the difference between Toronto and other places in Canada. A number of participants made similar comments, referring explicitly to the contrast between urban and non-urban environments, or, more importantly, between communities where people of colour are a significant part of the population versus communities where people of colour are also visible minorities among a mostly White population. This distinction is important, and will be discussed in greater detail in the context of a discussion on belonging in Toronto. After Damien’s comment

about the rest of Canada being less ‘multicultural’, he gives a description of racism in Canada as being ‘nicer’, but says that he still knows that he is being racialized as a non-White male. In the interview, Damien said that he thinks that most often people read his race as Black, and that because of his being perceived as Black, he has experienced racism in a particular way. Anti-Black racism will be discussed in Chapter 5; the multiracial men who were racialized as Black seemed to have experienced the most incidences of racism and were the most concerned about racism and prejudice in their lives.

Damien says that racism is ‘nicer’ in Canada, and then he gives an example of how storeowners treat him with suspicion because of his race. He also says that he thinks that if a White person were to walk in after him, they would likely also be treated with increased suspicion, but he implies that this takes place as a cover for racist behaviour – he says that he thinks that if he (a Black male) had not come in first, it is unlikely a White person would have been asked to leave their bag at the door. This kind of behaviour is what Henry and Tator (1994) discuss when they refer to ‘aversive racism’, or, similarly, ‘symbolic racism’. These concepts are very helpful for understanding non-overt (covert) forms of racism, and they also help to make sense of these kinds of comments from mixed race men. When describing ‘aversive racists’, Henry and Tator (1994) state that

[S]uch individuals are prejudiced but do not act out their beliefs in actual discriminatory behaviour. Some aversive racists avoid contact with Blacks and other minorities but when contact is unavoidable, they assume a demeanor of formal politeness. (Henry and Tator, 1994)

These authors also refer to the set of attitudes and other behaviours that go along with aversive racism as ‘symbolic racism’, the actions that are justified using criteria that is non-racial, but which works to maintain the status quo, and which may also contribute to negative views about particular groups. An example of ‘symbolic racism’ could be people organizing to protest against progressive social policies that are meant to bring about social justice, such as affirmative action policies. Some Whites may take part in symbolic acts, such as picketing, because they believe that affirmative action goes against the principles of fairness and equality, not because they have an overt desire to maintain inequality and the status quo. Their largely symbolic act, which seemingly has nothing to do with race per se, can end up contributing to and reinforcing the

societal view among the dominant group that Blacks are making unreasonable demands (Henry and Tator, 1994).

When discussing whether racism is still present in society, Greg, who describes himself as Black/Portuguese and West Indian, states:

Greg: "... I hope people don't think that it's (racism) all fine and good now, cause that isn't the case. And like we say we are a multicultural society, but it's not shown. It's not. I mean we are, in Toronto, but not elsewhere.... Maybe it's just gotten more subtle. And sometimes you just know, but you can't put your finger on it, but you just know. And that's the worst type, 'cause the other one is fine, it's overt, you know what you're dealing with. And that's when racism actually happens for most people, it's like your boss or something, and you just know. And it's about power."

In this statement, Greg conflates multiculturalism as policy with multiculturalism as social reality. First he says that racism is still present, and then counters it by bringing up multiculturalism. When Greg says that multiculturalism 'is not shown', he means that racism and discriminatory practices and beliefs, which are seemingly at odd with multiculturalism, still exist. He then differentiates between Toronto and 'elsewhere', now referring to multiculturalism as a description of the population, and perhaps also hinting that there is more continuity between the multicultural ideal and the racist reality in Toronto as compared to 'elsewhere'. When he says 'elsewhere', Greg is referring to communities where the population is less visibly diverse than in Toronto, a place where non-Whites are now the majority compared to Whites. Greg is also frustrated at the 'more subtle' form of racism he sees in Canada, and states that it is harder to respond to because it is not overt. He then gives an example of structural racism in the work environment, and links racism to power. What is of interest to this thesis is that Greg and other participants demonstrate that they have in-depth understandings of the complexities of racism in Canada and show that they have thought about it at length, and are troubled by some of the ways that racism continues to persist.

Both Damien and Greg recognize that racism in Canada is complex and hard to identify because it is not overt, but rather is embedded in social structures (Greg's reference to racism in the workplace) or hidden behind social behaviours that mask it (Damien's story about the store

owner). Displays of racist or discriminatory beliefs are, in almost all social circumstances in Canada, widely considered to be socially taboo. In order to understand how these experiences fit into the multicultural social fabrics of mixed race men's lives, we need to understand more fully how racism works in Canada. Henry and Tator's (1994) work on the ideology of racism offers an additional concept, closely related to 'aversive / symbolic' racism, that they say is especially useful for considering the Canadian case. The authors say the following about racism in Canada, which they term 'democratic racism':

White Canadians tend to dismiss easily the accumulated body of evidence documenting racial prejudice and differential treatment. [...] There is a deep attachment to the assumption that in a democratic society individuals are rewarded solely on the basis of their individual merit and that no one group is singled out for discrimination. [...] "Democratic racism" refers to an ideology which permits and sustains the ability to justify maintaining two apparently conflicting values. [...] One set of values consists of a commitment to a democratic society motivated by egalitarian values of fairness, justice and equality. Conflicting with these liberal values are attitudes and behaviours which include negative feelings about people of colour and which carry the potential for differential treatment or discrimination against them.
(Henry and Tator, 1994)

Also written in 1994, Charles Taylor's often-referenced essay entitled "The Politics of Recognition" links the foundations of multiculturalism with what he calls the "politics of equal respect" (Taylor, 1994, p.68), based in liberal humanist thought. Given the discontinuities between the expressed values of official multiculturalism in Canada and the persistence of discriminatory practices and attitudes, it is not surprising that the mixed race men in this study expressed confusion and frustration when discussing racism, as Greg does in the following passage:

Greg: "Black is what I identify with, good and bad. It's also the first thing that they see, but I also realize the world that we live in, at least here in Toronto, it's changing – so I don't want to say I identified with the negative side [of being Black], but also, you can't escape it, it's the way you were treated, and so it becomes the way to see yourself in the world. But at the same time, it's so mixed now, that it also, it's all – my answer must be very confusing."

Interviewer: “No, it’s ok, it’s complicated stuff, I know. Do you think people always read you as Black”

Greg: “Well, it’s weird now [...] I say ‘I’m Black and Portuguese’, and now there’s more Portuguese coming out to my shows, and there’s also this weird kind of racism in it, with like, ‘Oh, you’re ok now, you’re on of us!’ kind of deal, and it’s like, ok...but I think that’s just people’s reaction, and the whole thing about stereotypes.”

In his first comment, Greg says that, because others usually identify him as a Black male, he is often subjected to negative stereotypes; however, he also specifies that in Toronto, ‘it’ (racism and negative stereotypes) is changing. He also links positive social change to the increasingly ‘mixed’ nature of Toronto. This is relevant to the discussion later in this chapter on the salience and presence of race in Toronto, and how participants feel that being among diverse people, with a large number of non-Whites, has had a positive effect on them and made them less likely to experience racism. In the second passage, Greg goes on to talk about how he is treated differently once he has identified himself as an in-group member to the Portuguese community. He also labels this as a ‘kind of racism’: since, as a mixed race man who can pass for Black or Portuguese, he also experienced what it was like to be identified as an outsider.

The participants discussed multiculturalism and racism together because these concepts, and the conflicting experiences that arise from them, have played significant roles in shaping the multiracial participants’ relationships with multiculturalism, and this has provided a lens through which they view their experiences of racism in Canada. They are supportive of increased diversity and policies that aim to advance multicultural policy, but they are frustrated with the continuing evidence of covert, subtle and structural forms of racism in Canada. Minelle Mahtani, a mixed race scholar who has looked at the links between multiculturalism in Canada and multiracial women’s identities, states:

Multicultural policy, where ethnic identities are celebrated as a backdrop for Canadian identity, often ensures that forms of institutionalized racism are rendered invisible. (Mahtani, 2002a, p. 475)

Multiculturalism's strong influence in Canadian society has helped provide mixed race men with a solid foundation upon which to build their Canadian identities, despite the fact that racism and discrimination still also play a role in their lives. The following section will look at how the mixed race men I interviewed feel about how their identities are socially constructed.

4.2 The social construction of mixed race identities in Canada

This section will deal with the social construction of multiraciality for the participants in Toronto. The main findings that will be discussed are:

- a. that mixed race men in this study are not upset or bothered when people ask them about their race;
- b. that multiracial men report generally positive understandings of what it means to be mixed race, and they identify more advantages than disadvantages to their mixed identities; and
- c. that the participants feel that others socially construct mixed race as a positive attribute, but that at the same time, participants are also uncomfortable with some assumptions that are made about multiraciality.

Most current social science literature agrees that the social construction of race always changes over time. Most North Americans can recall that within the last century, the social construction of groups like the Irish, Jews, Italians, Latinos, and Asians have changed over decades. In some cases, groups once racialized as non-White are now socially constructed as White, even though they may still suffer from stereotypes, oppression and 'othering'. In other cases, groups that were once negatively stereotyped are now slightly higher in the racial hierarchy than they once were (and this is often linked to other factors, such as socioeconomic class or the history of a particular group's immigration to Canada). This chapter addresses multiracial men's perceptions of how mixed race identities are socially constructed in Canada, and how multiracial men feel that their identities are understood by others, in order to illustrate the complex ways that mixed race men make sense of social construction of their identities.

4.2.1 Responding to the ‘what are you?’ question

I am interested in looking at how mixed race men perceive the social significance of their multiracial identities because it is connected to how they think about themselves. In my discussions with mixed race men about their experiences of racialization, they all talked about instances in the course of their everyday lives when they are asked about their race, ethnicity or cultural backgrounds. The frequency and regularity of this experience tells us something about the degree to which ethnoracial categories are still part of our everyday framework and how we understand each other. The ‘what are you’ question is also frequently discussed in the literature on multiracial experiences as an important experience that mixed race people across different groups seem to share. Maria P. Root discusses it on the very first page of her 1996 anthology, while authors Mahtani (2002a, 2002b), Williams (2004), Streeter (1996), Thompson (2007) and Ray (1996) have each written specifically about this question. What most authors thus far have agreed on is that the ‘what are you’ question can, and often is, experienced as emotionally difficult for mixed race people. As these authors point out, the ‘what are you?’ question can be used to ask someone to declare allegiance with a particular group, or to categorize oneself into a high or low-status race. Depending on how one answers the question, their declared identities may be challenged, exoticized, further scrutinized, or the answers may bring on more questions about their personal lives.

Given the many scholarly articles on this topic, I expected that the mixed race men I interviewed would report similar feelings and experiences. However, I was surprised to find that in general, their collective response was more of a ‘who cares?’ than any expression of discomfort or any sign that they were upset by the ‘what are you’ question. For them, it was part of everyday life, and they did not think they were asked about their ethnoracial background any more often than were their monoracial friends, so it did not have any negative effect on them. In fact, because they generally got positive and interested reactions from others, it was portrayed almost positively; participants used the words ‘interesting’, ‘neat’ and ‘funny’ when talking about the ‘what are you’ questions. Some participants even made a sort of game out of it, playfully asking people to guess their backgrounds, or trying out different answers to see how people react. Amal states:

Amal: “You know, here [in Toronto/Scarborough], people meet you, they always want to know ‘what’s your background?’. It’s one of the common questions you hear. Because here, you know, it’s so diverse, they want to know – so I get that question a lot. People don’t really know, they can’t tell what I am, so they want to know. And I ALWAYS,I never tell them. I ALWAYS ask people to guess what I am. And I have never, ever, gotten someone to say I’m Indian. Not in my lifetime.”

In this statement, Amal indicates that in his everyday life, it is commonplace for someone to inquire about another person’s ethnoracial/cultural background, and Amal says that he thinks this is just because there is so much diversity. His ambiguous racial appearance means that he is not easily categorized into any particular group. In his encounters with people who want to know about his race, he sees a chance to learn more about how people racialize him. He tells me that he is most often racialized as Latino, middle eastern or European (Spanish, Portuguese, Italian), but as he says in this above statement, no one has ever guessed his actual racial background. His response was almost joking, incredulous, and amused; he was not upset by this, but rather curious to discover what it is that people see in him, how they classify him based on appearance, and how his identity is read differently by different people. Amal uses these moments to learn firsthand about how others racialize him.

Another participant, Ahmed, who describes himself as Irish and West Indian (in his words, “brown”), states:

Ahmed: “People want to know more [about my racial background], and if I give them more, it’s because, you know, I’m proud of my mix, I’m not ashamed of it at all. People, they usually will prod and ask, because they are curious as to what that mix is. I just think people are generally curious.”

Ahmed and other participants reported that they often had people inquire about their ethnoracial backgrounds, but they did not feel negatively towards this inquisition. In part, this is because they did not perceive it as a threatening question, in part because they see race and the racialization process as a normal part of everyday life in Toronto. Others shared Ahmed’s view that it is not a problem that people ask about their racial identities and that the motivation is just ‘curiosity’.

In order to understand the participants' reactions, we need to carefully consider the context in which the question is asked. In the interviews, participants were asked to situate themselves in Toronto. Many of the questions related to where they grew up, to their childhood and school experiences, and one of the qualifying criteria I set for participants was that they must have lived in Toronto for at least the past 5 years. The participants were from various ethnoracial communities that are well represented in Toronto, and they described their social environment and peer groups as being very ethnically diverse. In some cases, the participants specifically pointed out that Whites were the minorities at their schools and among their peers, in their families, or among their co-workers, while so-called 'visible minorities' were in fact the numerical majority. These aspects of context are important to the discussion at hand, because when we discuss the 'what are you' question, it is important to consider who is asking the question. Lawrence Hill (2001) has also noted the importance that context makes when you are dealing with questions of race and identity.

I asked about participants' interactions with family and friends, and stranger during the conversations, so it is reasonable to assume that when we discussed how they experience the 'what are you?' question, they may have been imagining that the question was being asked by any of the people they interact with during their everyday lives in Scarborough, Toronto, Brampton, or Mississauga; it is also very likely that these imagined question-posers would be people of colour.

As important anti-racist scholars, such as Frantz Fanon (1952) state, race and power are at play in every interpersonal and institutional interaction. When a White person asks someone about their racial background, the person who is non-White and who must answer that question may fear alienation, racist treatment, or being 'othered'; perhaps the White person is asking in order to exclude the non-White person from the category of Whiteness. When a White person asks a mixed race person their background, the literature says that they may feel pressure to choose allegiance to one group over another, or they may fear being challenged, questioned, and excluded from Whiteness. They may also worry about the consequences of answering a particular way, which will influence how they are racialized.

When a non-White person asks another non-White person about ethnoracial status, people of colour are more likely to relate to each other as minorities in relation to the (White) majority.

Through shared non-White status, they may establish a shared experience or group membership, and helps build a rapport between people. In other words, Whites may ask the question in order to exclude, while people of colour may ask the question in order to include.

In the interviews I conducted, it is important to note that participants' answers might have been influenced by the fact that they were asked to situate themselves in Toronto. Therefore, when they think about the 'what are you' question, they imagine that it is being posed in Toronto, where most of the people they know are non-Whites. This changes the power dynamic of White/non-White that is implicitly or explicitly present in much of the literature on this topic (Ifekwunigwe, 2002).

Dante's reaction to the 'what are you' question is similar to Ahmed:

Dante: "Race is something that comes up pretty frequently. I mean, everyone always wants to know. I mean, I don't see what the big deal is, it's not a big secret. What's wrong with revealing what you are?"

Dante, who is mixed race of West Indian/Black and White descent, also says that he does not feel negatively affected when people question him about where he is from or about his racial background.

When the participants talked about being asked the 'what are you' question in their everyday lives, many reflected on the fact that their answers to this question change depending on context. Santo, whose father is a mixed race Black/White man from Jamaica, and whose mother is Italian, talks about how the perceived intention of the question will change his answer:

Santo: "People always want to know. Cab drivers will always ask, so will girls. Just people in general, I guess, but it doesn't bother me."

Interviewer: "Does your answer still change, depending..."

Santo: "Yup. Sometimes, if like they're really asking cause they want to know if I'm Black, that's the real question, then I'll be like 'I'm Italian', except obviously I don't look like it. And they'll be like 'naw...', and I'm like 'yes, my mom's Italian'. But mostly I say I'm mixed, and I think then it's pretty obvious or

whatever. Sometimes they want to know what, but usually, like now there's more mixed people, so if I just say 'mixed' people know what that means. Sometimes they're like, 'oh yeah, my aunt married a whatever guy, and my cousins are mixed'."

If Santo thinks that he is being asked about his ethnoracial background because the person wants to know if he is Black or not, he resists this attempt to classify him with a low-status racial group and perhaps expose himself to hearing negative stereotypes or being discriminated against.⁴ After Santo says that he is mixed, he describes a more positive shift in his interaction with the imagined question-poser, who goes on to tell him about a multiracial family member.

Doug, who is a multigenerational mixed race man in his mid twenties, of Venezuelan and Trinidadian descent, says the following about how he deals with the 'what are you' question:

Doug: "When people ask, I always go with Spanish. Just because it's easier to um, solidify based on my language and where I was born, which is easier."

Interviewer: "by 'solidify', so you mean..."

Doug: "like I can back it up. Let's say I say I'm Trinidadian – people would always question that... so it's easier if I say Spanish."

In order to avoid having his membership to the group 'Trinidadian' challenged by others, Doug says that he is 'Spanish', which he feels more comfortable with because of his physical appearance and because he is fluent in the Spanish language. It is interesting that he chooses to identify with the language more than with the country of origin (Venezuela).

Amal sums up how he reflects on these experiences, and shows that he is very conscious of processes of racialization as they are occurring:

Amal: "Usually people don't know what I am, so usually people can't judge me. Maybe they'll think I'm something, because of the way I dress, or the way I act, or

⁴ This has profound implications for my discussion about the shifting colour line in Chapter 5.

how I, I carry myself. And I'll question what their perception of me is, so it allows me to be very mobile."

As Ifekwunigwe states:

Constructions, performances and practices of ethnicities as ethnic identities are relational, dynamic, negotiable and not necessarily primordial. The extent to which an individual or a group can exercise ethnic options is frequently determined by majority versus minority status as well as by to what degree the oppositional construct of 'race' operationalized as 'racialization' is at the heart of the myth of nation formation. (Ifekwunigwe, 2002, p. 326)

The mixed race men I spoke to gave many examples of when and how context played a role in how they answered the 'what are you' question. Many scholars discuss the fluid, shifting, flexible and contextual nature of multiracial identities (Barn and Harman, 2006; Ifekwunigwe, 2002; Mahtani, 2002a, 2002b). The main difference between my participants and the literature was that the multiracial men I spoke to were largely indifferent or responded positively to these incidents, and they rationalized them as a normal part of everyday life in Toronto.

4.2.2 Participants' perceptions of being mixed race

This section describes the many different ways that the participants have seen their identities socially constructed throughout their lives, and their reactions to it. Part of this was first explaining their responses to the 'what are you' question. Now I will discuss the participants' understandings how multiraciality is understood in the larger social context, where they discussed strangers' reactions as positive, and identified a number of advantages they believe they have because of their multiraciality.

When discussing instances where his mixed racial background is revealed, Jamal, who describes himself as mixed Chinese and Anglo-Saxon, and is in his mid-30's states:

Jamal: "I don't necessarily look mixed race. So either, like some people say Mediterranean, or Portuguese, and it's surprising, but people who kind of catch it are usually also mixed race. And that's never a problem for me. In some ways it's neat, like it's a novelty, like people will say, 'oh, your last name is 'Chan', are you Asian?'. So that's good, and it's been good for business sometimes, especially

on the Chinese side, because the Chinese group like to deal with Chinese, so it's an advantage, right, but at the same time, I can bridge to the Anglo-Saxon, right. So that's been kinda neat."

Jamal comments that his ambiguous physical appearance is not usually identified as racially mixed, and he says that he is often misidentified, but that he has no negative feelings about this. He goes on to state that his identity can be an advantage, because it allows him to forge a common identity with two groups of people, which can benefit his business. Jamal's mixed race identity allows him to call upon his membership in more than one group and to create a rapport with potential clients based on ethnoracial ties. He also says that people's reaction is that they find his identity to be 'neat' or 'novel'.

In general, the participants reported that people are generally positive and interested in their identities, and that people in their peer groups think it is 'cool'. They also commented that some people make the assumption that they must therefore have interesting lives or stories to tell. For example, Manuel, who is of mixed Chinese and Italian/Dutch descent, says the following:

Manuel: "When I say what I am, people are usually just like 'oohhhh', like they look at me again and now it makes sense. But Asian people love the mixed thing, there are all these stars in China who are mixed. So I find people are like, interested in it and stuff. Sometimes they want to know, 'oh, is your mom or your dad Chinese? Do you speak it?'"

Manuel shows that among Asian people, mixed race Asian/White people are considered higher status, and are made the objects of sexual desire and exoticized. I discuss the 'hierarchy of mixed race' in Chapter 5, in the context of anti-racism and Whiteness. Manuel's comment is important because it shows how people's reactions are generally positive and it is typical of the kinds of reactions that the other participants reported as well.

One of my semi-structured interview questions asked participants about any perceived advantages and disadvantages to being multiracial. I used the terms 'good/bad', 'advantage/disadvantage', 'benefit/drawback', and 'positive/negative' interchangeably with the participants, and their answers tended to conflate these terms as well. Almost unanimously, the mixed race men I interviewed said that they experienced their identities as positive, and they

identified several benefits and advantages. On the other hand, they had difficulty thinking of any disadvantages, and the examples they came up with tended to be related to racism and being racialized as non-White and male in Toronto. Those who were racialized as Black men had the most to say about these kinds of experiences. In their 2008 study, Crawford and Alaggia found that two of their eight multiracial participants reported a positive self-concept and said that they did not feel marginalized. These two participants also happened to be male, and the authors speculated that gender might play a role in the experience of being racialized and of mixed race (Crawford and Alaggia, 2008). Perhaps this is because societal structures and institutions and Western European culture privilege maleness, so mixed race men experience less discontinuity between their identities and the world they live in, and occupy a privileged social identity compared to women of mixed race. The difference between male and female identities, and how they interact with power, privilege and oppression may help account for some of the gendered differences in multiracial experiences.

Many of the participants said that ‘open-mindedness’ and other like personality traits were an advantage to being multiracial. The participants felt that they were more accepting of others and less judgmental, because they were from mixed backgrounds. Amal, who is French-Canadian and Catholic on one side and Indian/Hindu on the other, says:

Amal: “The number one advantage to being mixed race is what I talked about earlier, like, being able to navigate different cultures. I think we’re predisposed to learning new cultures, being open-minded, accepting and even just trying new things, because you’re less likely to judge.

He then explains why he is less likely to judge others:

Amal: “Number one is just having an open mind, and not judging. Because, if you’re going to judge another culture... I’m two different cultures – it’s like a White person judging a brown person. I can’t do that because that’s me judging myself. So I think that applies for all other cultures too – I can never judge another culture because it’s like, I remember, I could be judging myself.”

Multiracial people simultaneously experience belonging and exclusion through their fluid and changing identities. Amal is talking about how, through these experiences, he has gained a more

nuanced understanding of how difference is constructed, and finds it impossible to judge others based on ethnicity or race, because he is the product of two cultures or races, and two religions, that each construct each other as ‘different’.

Damien, who is mixed race and of Trinidadian decent, agrees with Amal that mixed race people share some common personality traits, such as being open-minded:

Damien: “I think mixed people are more open-minded. We know what it’s like to be different, but for a lot of different reasons, and we all had to find our own way. There’s no uh, mixed race group to associate with, so you are always moving through groups that are the same as you, but different than you, at least in some way, right?”

In the second half of his comment, Damien refers to moving through different groups, who may share part of his ethnocultural identity, but because he is mixed race, he is never with any group of people with his exact ethnoracial background or identity. The facility that the participants say they have comfortably navigating through different social contexts was mentioned by most as a positive or beneficial aspect of their identity. On this topic, Dante says:

Dante: “I’m rarely uncomfortable around any people, in most situations, like I don’t have a problem really going to any country, and trying any food, I don’t feel uncomfortable because of my race at all.”

Dante’s comment is representative of what most of the participants said in their interviews: that they are comfortable in familiar and unfamiliar cultural situations, that they adapt easily, and that they are less judgmental than other people because of their mixed race experiences.

Ahmed, who is mixed Guyanese and Irish, talks about ‘fitting in’ as one of the advantages of being multiracial:

Ahmed: “I definitely think it’s been advantageous [being multiracial]. I can really fit in easily with a whole bunch of crowds, and whoever I’m with, like I just fit in – like if I’m with a bunch of brown people or Spanish people, or whatever, as long as I don’t open my mouth or say anything, they might think that I’m one of them. I can pass easily, as a lot of things. I like it.”

Ahmed and other participants liked that they could use their ambiguous racial appearances to fit in with different groups of people. Physical appearance was important to the multiracial men I spoke to, and there were other comments similar to Ahmed's. Greg, for example, talks about 'blending in', but links this to how he can use his identity to counter stereotypes, and about his freedom to move through different categories:

Greg: "You blend in, but you're not just one thing. And sometimes it confuses people, cause you're not supposed to speak this way, or you're not supposed to talk about those things, or you're supposed to do this, do that and it's just like, and it's all about people's beliefs, and once you shatter people's beliefs, they get really upset. So you travel through all these things, and people put these different labels and categories."

Several participants had given a lot of thought to how their race was interpreted and were cognizant that at times, racial stereotypes were applied to them because someone thought they were 'Black' or 'Latino' or 'Asian'. Further, the participants were aware that they could challenge these stereotypes or challenge racist behaviour by choosing when and how to reveal different parts of their identities. Santo, who is mixed Jamaican and Italian, states:

Santo: "Sometimes if someone doesn't realize that I'm Black, or that my parents are immigrants, or they're saying bad stuff about Jamaicans, I just let it happen, because...it's like being a spy, or a fly on the wall, you get to hear stuff that lots of us never really hear...the really weird racist shit, cause they don't know who they are talking to. And then if I say 'actually, I'm part Jamaican', they back up real quick! But it doesn't bother me, because in the end, they're the ones who look like jerks, and they're embarrassed."

Santo's comment reveals how multiracial people strategically use their identities in situations when it would be considered socially taboo to say anything racist in the presence of a non-White person. In Santo's example, anti-Jamaican statements are made because the speaker does not know there is a Jamaican person present. Santo is empowered because he can choose to reveal this and expose the person, and perhaps this is why he says that these kinds of incidents do not bother him. To some degree, he feels like he has power to control the situation or outcome,

because he possesses knowledge that will change the context in which the racist comments were made by revealing that he is Jamaican.

Doug, a participant in his graduating year of a progressive social sciences program at a Toronto-area university, made an insightful comment that related to the political climate under multiculturalism and how the social construction of mixed race, in this context, could be helpful to him.

Doug: "...people and institutions are, I find, going towards a more diverse route, with multiculturalism and all, and that to me, is very much an advantage, for me – I'm from different backgrounds and I speak different languages, and I can relate to different people easily."

Doug understood that the political climate in Canada is supportive of multiculturalism, and that in many situations it meant that he would think more carefully about his identity and how he presented it to others. I asked him for examples, and this is what he said:

Doug: "Recently, in my master's application, there was a question on diversity and I was able to say that my multiculturalism was very, um, pertinent, to Toronto and it's cultural diversity. Cause I identify with a lot of demographics."

I am especially interested in the relationship between social constructions of mixed race and multiculturalism in Canada, because the participants seemed to think that the multicultural context in Toronto was one of the reasons that the discourse on mixed race is changing and becoming more positive. Yet, critical mixed race scholars have written extensively about the fact that mixed race identities have traditionally been constructed as psychologically damaged, confused, and/or out of place because of their stigmatized racial identity. In Ifekwunigwe's 2004 anthology on mixed race, an entire section of the book is devoted to exploring the history of this kind of thought, which shows that negative constructions of mixed race began in the 18th and 19th century through scientific studies that treated race as a biological category, and were themselves rooted in White racist ideology and Eurocentrism (Ifekwunigwe, 2004). Ifekwunigwe pays close attention to how the eugenics movement influenced modern thought about racial purity and racial mixing and she refers to this period as the 'Age of Pathology' for multiracials (Ifekwunigwe, 2004, p.9). Mahtani also writes that mixed race identities were "traditionally

marked by relentless negativity” (2002a, p.470), and Balataguci (2004) writes that the “negative perception that mixed race people are the embodiment of an inherent internal division” (Balataguci, 2004).

Many scholars also recognize that, especially given the Canadian multicultural context, the social construction of multiraciality is shifting. More recent discourses posit multiracials as the culturally hybrid solution to racism, and they are sometimes celebrated as a sign that the future will be race-less, colour-blind, and free from racism and racial categories (see Mahtani, 2002a).

In the interviews I conducted with multiracial men, it was clear that they are much more cognizant of more recent representations of mixed race than they are of older, more negative constructions of multiracial people. While it is clear from the literature that multiracial identities used to be pathologized, and while this may still persist in some contexts, the mixed race men in this study did not feel negatively affected by any stigma related to being racially mixed. When we talked about disadvantages, the participants related stories about when they dealt with racism based on being identified as a male of colour, but not of mixed race. When Isaac, a mixed Jamaican/White man in his mid-20s, was asked about stereotypes and racial categories, he stated:

Isaac: “I don’t think there’s any stereotype about being mixed – it’s more about how Black you are. Then you get all those stereotypes.”

Isaac states that he does not know of any stereotypes that are specific to being mixed race. This is evidence that at least in Toronto, the old rhetoric about the racially confused, psychologically distressed multiracial person is less well known. However, Isaac reminds us that Blackness as a racial category still carries stigma, and that depending on how ‘Black’ one is, they will be subjected to negative stereotypes. Isaac brings up the messy topic of how ‘Blackness’ is constructed, and in the course of our conversation, he referred to skin colour, hair texture and colour, hair style, clothing, class, country or origin, accent and geographic location aspects that made up his perceived ‘degree’ of Blackness. In Isaac’s life, he has been negatively stereotyped and discriminated against based on being perceived as Black, but not for being mixed race.

Damien also reports that he is aware of racial discrimination and that in his experience, it would likely be connected to his being racialized as Black.

Damien: “Well, so I look Black, right, or so most people think that anyway. So most often that’s what I get – the treatment that I’m maybe like a drug dealer (laughing), or I’m gonna steal something. Some of my friends have been like, harassed by cops, and I’m always careful, looking out for them [police], if I’m like walking at night or something. I know I’m more seen [noticed], because I’m Black, right? It’s just the way it is here.”

Damien refers to racial profiling of Black men, which was a problem that remained very much in the public eye through the 1990’s and early 2000’s in Toronto, when a number of news stories and investigations looked into racial profiling by Toronto Police services, especially towards Black men (http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/racial_profiling/ retrieved May 4, 2009). This supports the argument I make in the next chapter about the shifting colour line in Canada, where a Black/non-Black distinction is increasingly more important, while the White/non-White division is losing relevance, especially in Toronto. This is taken up in further detail in Chapter 5, but it is important to understand that this plays a role in how multiracial men understand their identities and the processes of racialization they experience.

When I asked Greg, who is Black and Portuguese, what his mixed race identity means to him, he begins by saying:

Greg: “...the stereotypes aren’t there. Like I don’t know how you feel, but I don’t have the stereotypes that people look at you, and think – like I feel I’m not defined by those race stereotypes, to live in any one box.”

Greg feels that his mixed race identity and ambiguous phenotype frees him from racial stereotypes. He does not mention any stereotypes specific to being mixed, but he also talks in his interview about being racialized as Black and about discrimination based on his Blackness. He follows by talking about his physically ambiguous appearance, which has allowed him to ‘fit in’ in many different places:

Greg: “And even in Europe, you could be from anywhere. But the places I lived in, especially Markham, I always felt like an outsider. I sort of thought about race, but not really – it was like I could fit in anywhere, but not feel like I fit in at

all. It's like a 'pass' and a burden all at the same time. But having a 'pass' is probably stronger than it being a burden."

After reading the literature on multiracial experiences, I was expecting that more of the participants would speak about having difficulty fitting in or feeling comfortable in some contexts, but as Greg's comment shows, the participants seemed to feel that the advantages outweighed any disadvantages they experienced from being multiracial. Amal, a multiracial man in his early 20s of Indian and French Canadian descent, states:

Amal: "I don't think people really care, or that it's a big deal – race, or mixed race – in Canada. The context in the [United] States is so Black and White. We have less of that. It's not as strong. I didn't grow up in that kind of context. For Canadian culture, we pride ourselves on having different people come and immigrate, and on being diverse. Where I live and work and stuff, it is really diverse, and there's never like, serious tension or anything. People all get along. Or at least when we fight, it's not over race. And it's totally normal for people, like at school and stuff, to date people from another race or culture. I don't think we care or even think about it."

Amal makes several important points here. First, he says that being mixed race, or even race in general, is not of any great significance in Canada. He describes living in Scarborough, a large suburb east of Toronto's downtown core where in many neighbourhoods, people of colour are the majority, and there is a wide range of ethnocultural backgrounds. One of the things that Amal was most interested in was why, at his university, which is very diverse and where Whites are the minority, people still tended to socialize primarily with people from their own ethnoracial/cultural background. Amal is an active member of student organizations, and he had noticed that at many school groups were based on shared culture, language, religion or country of origin, and he was concerned that people being taught to socialize primarily with people from their own groups. Yet, he said that he did not think of this as 'racism'. It was clear that he had given this a great deal of thought, and part of his motivation to be involved in student affairs is bringing people together based on shared interests and values rather than race or culture-based commonalities.

4.2.3 Participants' reactions to media representations of mixed race

Another area of concern for the participants is the way that mass media is socially constructing mixed race. DaCosta's recent book (2007) dedicates a chapter to marketing, advertising and recent interest in multiracials as consumers and as marketing tools. DaCosta states that since the 1990's, racially ambiguous people have been used in advertising in order to appeal to a wider audience, and that multiracials are considered new, current, youthful, and urban (DaCosta, 2007, pp.156-167). The participants in my study had mixed feelings about how the media uses mixed race: on the one hand, they felt objectified and tokenized, but on the other hand, there is evidence in other parts of their interviews that as a whole, they agree that mixed race people do have many of the traits that the media tries to emphasize, such as open-mindedness, and the ability to relate to people across racial and cultural boundaries.

The participants were very concerned about the persistence of racism in Canada, especially subtle and institutionalized forms of racism, and they were concerned that media's use of multiracial people was making racism harder to see and harder to talk about. Manuel, a mixed race Chinese/Italian man in his early 20's, says:

Manuel: "I've noticed that they use mixed faces in ads all the time, and sometimes I'll even see a mixed couple on a car ad or something. I think it's good. It makes it more normal...but sometimes it can remind me of like, war propaganda. You know like, big posters that say 'everything is fine', 'look, we're all living in harmony'. But it's not true. I think we have to remember that it's still the media – everything looks perfect, but it's not real."

Manuel is concerned that the media is using multiracial people to portray a society where racial harmony exists, and falsely promote the idea that 'everything is fine' when it is not. There were a number of participants in my interviews who agreed that multiracial identities are advantageous and that the media contributes to a positive social construction of mixed race, but they were also concerned that the media's use of multiracial people in the creation of unrealistic images of a problem-free society where racism no longer exists.

Mixed race men generally share many of the well-articulated criticisms that are evident in the scholarly literature on Canadian multiculturalism. Yet, it has provided them with a basis for

forming a veritable ‘Canadian’ identity, because it embraces and promotes cultural diversity, and multiracial men see that the social construction of their identities are also linked to these ideas. However, media and advertising increasingly tend to trivialize their identities by equating multiracial people with the end of racism and holding them up as literal proof of racial harmony and integration. This has had both positive and negative effects on the participants, who say that they feel frustrated when people deny that race is still an important marker of difference in Canada. Here is what Greg, who is Portuguese and Black, had to say about how the media used multiraciality:

Greg: “...and like we say we are a multicultural society, but it’s not shown. It’s not. I mean, we are [multicultural], in Toronto, but in the media, it’s tokenism. It’s like, the media using mixed race, it sounds like it’s like, ‘look, everything is ok, everything’s fine, look at all these mixed kids.’”

Greg is critical of how the media uses multiraciality to cover up continued inequality in society, presenting instead an image of Canada where inequality is less relevant because the focus is on mixed race people and what they represent. Doug’s analysis looks at why he thinks ambiguous faces are more common in the media than they used to be:

Doug: “I think that there are more mixed looking people in the media – cause they [the media] want to reach as many people as possible, and so you know that personal vibe you get with people, where you connect on the ‘you’re one of us’ kind of feeling, so using mixed people just increases the number of people that you can reach.”

His analysis is consistent with DaCosta (2007), who cites examples like the Benetton Company, one of the first to use multiracial people in advertising to create a specific message about race and society. As DaCosta states:

[T]he multiracial body has served as a resonant symbol for Americans’ racial anxieties. At times multiracials have been vilified as harbingers of the death of particular cultural communities, depicted as manifestations of the degeneracy of human populations, or as evidence of their parents’ traitorous disloyalties. They have also been celebrated as “bridges”

of racial harmony and unity, possessors of an inherent disposition against prejudice, and as a maverick, new people. (DaCosta, 2007, p.163-164)

DaCosta (2007) refers to older representations of multiracials that were very negative, and contrasts it with newer images such as those that the participants of this study were most familiar with. Dagbovie (2007) writes about multiracials stars and the media, and states the following about the media's use of mixed race faces:

In a popular context, biraciality “works” for people who do not really want to confront racial issues when it exploits difference under the guise of celebrating diversity. The “new” faces of America have no racial responsibilities, loyalties, or obligations. People admire them for their beauty, celebrate them as America's future, and envy their “cool” multiracial status. However, old masks lurk alongside interpretations of what new faces represent, namely racial stereotypes. Until power relations equalize, any celebration of mixed race needs to recognize those who are not benefiting from America's longtime fascination. (Dagbovie, 2007, p.233)

The topic of how media is currently using mixed race is complex, because it draws on increasingly popularized notions of mixed race people as cultural “bridges”, and these notions are in fact reflected in multiracial men's understandings of their shared personality traits, and the perceived advantages that they spoke about. Although the mixed race men seemed to agree that multiracials are less likely to be judgmental and are more open-minded, they also recognize that race and racism are important determinants of social realities, and they are resentful of the media's use of mixed race people when it serves to mask the persistence of racism.

4.3 Mixed race and belonging in Toronto

In this third section of the chapter on multiculturalism and mixed race, I will focus on examining the participants' sense of belonging in the City of Toronto. In order to set the stage, I will first describe some of the most salient aspects of Toronto's context, such as its political and social focus on multiculturalism, and the diverse demographics of its neighbourhoods. I then link the participants' strong sense of belonging to two things that almost all of the participants discussed: a) that their physical appearance is important to them, and they feel that they fit in better in a diverse population, and b) that race and racial identity is important to them, and they feel that in

their social circles, race is ‘normalized’ and easier to talk about, and this increases their comfort level and sense of belonging in Toronto.

4.3.1 Physical appearance, belonging in Toronto, and the centrality of difference

According to the Canada’s Census data from 2006, visible minorities make up 16.2% of the national populace. The proportions has been steadily increasing since the 1980’s, and is up from 13.3% of the national populace in 2001. The vast majority of these visible minorities, 96%, live in metropolitan areas. Over half of Canada’s visible minorities live in Ontario, and most live in Toronto. When it comes to mixed marriages in Canada between a visible minority person and a White person, or between two people from different visible minority groups, they are most likely to occur in cities like Toronto, where people are more likely to meet partners from different groups. This also means that multiracial children are more likely to be born and raised in cities, although Statistics Canada does not track the number of mixed unions who have children. The number of mixed unions increased from 2001 to 2006, when it was recorded as nearly 4% of all Canadian couples. The percentage of mixed unions in cities are relatively much higher, since this is where most of these couples would likely meet (Statistics Canada, 2008).

The City of Toronto comprises several large municipalities that were amalgamated into a megacity, what is now called the ‘City of Toronto’, in 1997. The city’s motto is ‘Diversity Our Strength’, and multiculturalism is an important part of how the city markets itself to international tourists as a ‘Global City’. According to Statistics Canada in 2006, Toronto has the largest number of visible minorities in the country, which was 42.9% of the city’s total population. However, 94% of these visible minorities lived in only 6 municipalities, with Markham and Brampton having the highest proportion of visible minorities in the country, at 65.4% and 57% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2008).

The diversity of Toronto’s population is an important part of the context of the interviews I conducted with multiracial men. The City of Toronto is a social and political climate that supports and celebrates diversity and multiculturalism. Many of the city’s largest festivals and events are festivals that are rooted in visible-minority cultures, like Caribana, which brings a large number of tourists to the city. The participants I spoke to are active members in many different visible minority communities, and many of them participate in more than one

ethnoracial community group, club, class, or have done so at different points in their lives. One of the key differences I noticed between my participants and other participants in other studies is that the multiracial men I interviewed said that most of the people they interacted with on a daily basis were people of colour. This was important to them, as several participants made specific note of it. For example, Isaac says:

Isaac: “I think I’m lucky that a lot, most, of the people I grew up around were Black or some other minority. I always had a lot of positive people around me that I looked up to, and Black was a good thing in our family.”

Several of the participants described having mostly non-White friends, and they describe that many of their peers at work and school as being non-White. This was especially true for undergraduate university students, who made up 5 of the 10 men I interviewed. As a whole, the multiracial men that I interviewed noticed that the social contexts they traveled through were not White-dominated in terms of demographics and visibility of non-White people, and they felt that this was a good thing. Manuel describes growing up in Markham, where most of his family and friends were Chinese:

Manuel: “Actually, I always knew mostly Chinese people, because my dad wasn’t part of my life really, and we lived in Markham, and pretty much everyone we knew at Church, in our neighbourhood, at school, all my mom’s friends, they were Chinese. They knew I was mixed but no one really talked about it. It didn’t matter, because that was our community, and that’s where I belong. I think it was good, I guess. I don’t know – I wouldn’t feel like I would fit in with all-White culture, but I don’t know it. My dad was Canadian, but I’m not sure if he does Dutch things, or Italian things. I don’t really feel that connected to that part of myself, but I don’t deny it either. So maybe it would just be normal if that’s how I grew up. But it just worked out that I look Asian and that’s how I was brought up.”

Manuel brings up a number of interesting points. In other parts of his interview, he established that he has a positive self-identity and feels proud of his mixed race identity. He relates this to having grown up around many Chinese people in a diverse city. He remarks that his mixed racial heritage was never a secret, but that he was never ‘othered’ because of it. He says that he would

not fit into ‘White’ culture, referring to his dad’s side of the family, but he is unable to articulate what ‘White’ culture consists of exactly. His father was a White Canadian of Dutch and Italian ancestry, but Manuel knows little else about his father. He is unsure what ‘White’ culture is, and says that he does not feel very connected to this part of his identity (a deeper exploration of Whiteness and White identity is discussed in Chapter 5). His final comment links his physical appearance to his racial identity and his upbringing. In his comment, Manuel implies that if he had grown up in a majority White environment, he might have felt differently, but since he looks Asian and was brought up in a Chinese community, his identity and his physical appearance seem to mesh, and so he feels that he belongs in Markham, in the Chinese community, and in Toronto. Amal relates a story where in elementary school, he feels uncomfortable in Hindi school because he notices that his skin colour is different from everyone else’s:

Amal: “...at a young age, in elementary school I started to go to Hindi school, to learn Hindi. So I remember feeling out of place there. And it wasn’t about people treating me differently. I just looked around, and I felt different. Because of the colour of my skin. And I don’t know why, but I did, and so I quit that school.”

Amal feels uncomfortable solely because his physical appearance is different from the others and this makes him stand out in a class of monoracial South Asian Hindi students.

Later in his interview, Manuel reiterates this sense of belonging in Toronto and says that he is glad he lives there:

Manuel: “I feel...good, or proud, I guess, of being from Toronto. There’s definitely stereotypes out there about different groups, and racism is still really bad, especially for some groups, but I’m really glad that I grew up here and not...I don’t know, like in ah, the country, or even in another country where it’s all one kind of people. I think that some groups are not as respected, maybe, as the Chinese, but like, I always felt like I could do Asian things, but still also be with lots of other kinds of people, and that it was never a problem. Like no one thinks I hate Canada because I go to Chinese church. Everybody has their own thing, and then we also mix and for the most part, there’s no issues. Like at school, almost everyone in my program is ah, South Asian, Chinese, Persian, or I whatever, I don’t even know. There’s not a lot of White, like Canadian, people.

But I think it's what Canada is now, you know, and people are getting used to it, at least, that is my experience in Toronto, I would say."

Many of the comments about their sense of belonging in Toronto related it to the fact that the participants felt that being non-White and talking about race was normal in Toronto, and many of them said that they appreciated that in their social realities, race and racism was not taboo, but was not a particular source of stress or tension either. Many of them talked about living among so many other cultures and ethnicities that difference became normal, and that this has increased their sense of belonging in Toronto.

Ahmed states:

Ahmed: "Where I grew up was really multicultural. I liked that."

Interviewer: "You mean at school?"

Ahmed: "Yeah, in my neighbourhood, at school. Even the White kids were immigrants. I like the fact that Toronto is so multicultural. I feel like because I am mixed race and I live in a multicultural city, maybe I fit in better. Like I said, I don't know how it would've been growing up somewhere really small, that isn't multicultural, but because I grew up here and it is so multicultural, things have been a lot easier for me. And I'm able to identify with the city I live in easier because we're so focused on that in Toronto."

When Ahmed says that in Toronto, 'we' are so focused on 'that' (meaning multiculturalism) in Toronto, he is referring to the social and political climate that I discussed earlier: one that is focused on promoting Toronto as a multicultural city, on promoting multiculturalism as what defines Toronto, and on making diversity the feature of the city that makes it stand out internationally. Further, multiculturalism promotes cultural harmony and inter-cultural relations, and Ahmed and other participants talked about how they were representative of multiculturalism because they embodied racial mixing and cultural sharing. They felt very comfortable in Toronto, and two participants, Santo and Greg, specifically expressed that part of this was the freedom from having people try to categorize them racially, because in Toronto, there are so

many possibilities that people are less compelled to have to fit multiracial people into specific ethnoracial categories. Santo, who is mixed Italian and Black (Jamaican), says:

Santo: “I can’t see myself ever leaving Toronto. I feel lucky that I was born here. I think for the most part, race has never been problem for me, and I always saw lots of different kinds of people, so I didn’t think of myself as different, or well, I knew I was mixed, but everyone was something, so it was normal. When I look around on the subway, for example, I can’t tell what everyone is or where they’re from. I don’t worry about it. They’re from Toronto. So I guess people think the same of me – I’m something, but it doesn’t really matter what. People see me as Black, but I could really be from anywhere. Maybe I open my mouth and I’m as Canadian as...whatever, your typical White person. Or maybe I have an accent, from Jamaica, or I’m Trini. Maybe I speak Spanish, or like I could be from Europe or Africa for all they know. So just don’t worry about it. We’re all from somewhere else. At least I think in Toronto, it’s not as bad with the stereotypes as it is like, in...with a smaller place, like in small towns.”

Greg says the following:

Greg: “My friend and I talk about this all the time – Toronto...in our shows, we would much rather a mixed race audience, not more one thing or the other – everybody. It’s just more comfortable, it’s what I’m used to. I grew up with Italians and Greeks and Indians and Asians, and everyone, so it’s more of a mellow, relaxed thing for me to be in a more mixed race group. If there’s like mostly one kind of person, not just White, but whatever, or it’s like only 2 or 3 kinds of people, like in lots of places in the States, then I feel less comfortable, cause people are like trying more to figure out what you are, right?”

Both Greg and Santo remark that one of the reasons they feel comfortable in Toronto is because they blend in better. The theme of ‘fitting in’ was brought up over and over again. As I stated in Part 1 of this chapter, there is ample literature on multiracial experiences of passing and fitting in. The emphasis for the men I interviewed was on the fact that in Toronto, they could remain racially ambiguous and/or their specific racial identity did not matter as much since so many

people are visible minorities, and that this freed them from the stress that people of colour feel when they are scrutinized or ‘othered’ because of non-White (or ambiguous) racial status.

In the above quotation, Greg begins by talking about Toronto, and then says that he feels most comfortable in Toronto, and that he is most comfortable in a group of people that is diverse, and where there are many different ethnicities and racial backgrounds represented. In this context, there are more possibilities created in terms of where Greg might fit, and so he has noticed that people are less likely to need to racialize him. He compares this to his experiences in the United States (U.S.), where he says, if there are only a small number of ethnoracial groups, people are more likely to want to know which one of them he fits into.

Greg’s comment was one of many that contrasted Canada with either the U.S., or with rural communities outside of Toronto. The participants construct Canada in relation to the U.S. in terms of how they see race relations and racism, and they construct Toronto in contrast to rural communities that are less diverse and where most people are White.

In my conversation with Ahmed, a multiracial man in his early 20’s of Guyanese and Irish descent, he links positive self-identity with having grown up in a multicultural community. He contrasts this with how he imagines it would have been to grow up in rural Ontario:

Ahmed: “I think it has a lot to do with where you grow up. I think it would’ve been really different if I grew up in a small place, like some places in Northern Ontario. Like my cousin had a wedding there this summer, and everybody there was White. And my sister and I noticed, and we said ‘Can you imagine growing up here?’” We were just like, wow, things would have been really different. You just notice that people notice you – maybe it’s not bad or whatever, but you feel noticed, I don’t know. And since I am already different from everybody else, it would have been hard I think, to just know I was different.”

Ahmed has little experience in a small town, but he and his sister notice that physically, they would stand out as different (non-White) more than they would in Toronto, where the main difference is that they are mixed race, while their friends and family are diverse but monoracial. Greg agrees with Ahmed:

Greg: “There’s no place I’m not comfortable, at least here in Toronto. I could show up to any Portuguese thing, any Chinese place, whatever, and it’s all good. The only place I really feel uncomfortable is in small towns, and even then it’s not that bad, yeah. I think most people of colour are uncomfortable in small town, but I’ve been working for a long time, so. It’s just no a place you want to be – it can be terrifying sometimes.”

Earlier, Greg contrasted Canada with the U.S., and now he compares feeling comfortable in Toronto with feeling uncomfortable in small towns, which he says can be ‘terrifying’.

Doug, who is Venezuelan and West Indian, agrees with Greg about feeling comfortable in Toronto, and he links this to the number of different communities that people can be a part of, and says that people are generally very accepting of others in Toronto.

Doug: “I feel very at home in Toronto – and in the 'Western' culture – I mean I think it's cliché to say it's a melting pot, but there are a lot more communities here that you can go to, and they're also very accepting, whether they be a White demographic, or other. Um, a lot of people here I think just consider themselves to be Canadian. Because of my rich cultural heritage here, personally, I feel Canadian but I also feel like my rich heritage is what makes me even more Canadian.”

Doug also links his feelings of being ‘at home’ in Toronto with feeling Canadian, and he says that his ‘rich heritage’ (his multiracial background) makes him feel even more Canadian. Because the participants’ notions of ‘Canadianess’ includes the positive promotion of diversity, their own mixed backgrounds are constructed as contributing to the diverse people in Canada, and thus can be understood as socially progressive and consistent with the kind of Canada that multicultural policy aims to create.

A common theme in the participants’ analyses was the feeling that because there is so much visible difference and diversity in Toronto, their particular difference is less pronounced. As Isaac stated:

Isaac: “[In Toronto] we’re all different, so we’re all the same in that way.”

One of the ways that multiculturalism works to increase multiracial men's sense of belonging in Toronto is that places difference at the centre; difference, diversity, non-Whiteness and 'otherness' have become the shared experience of so many people that these are no longer considered marginal experiences. They are increasingly constructed as quintessentially Canadian, as Doug shows when he says that he thinks of himself as 'more Canadian' because of his 'rich cultural heritage'.

4.3.2 Race and non-Whiteness are normalized in Toronto

In Greg's most recently quoted comment, he began by saying that he is very comfortable anywhere in Toronto, and then moves to contrasting it by saying that he is uncomfortable in small towns. Later in the interview, he talks about why he feels less comfortable outside of Toronto:

Greg: "You know, I guess in the all-White environment, it's because you stand out. You're the elephant in the room, and no one can really address it, or ask about it."

In this comment, there are two key points worth noting. First, Greg links his discomfort with being in a White-dominated environment. As we recall, Greg said earlier that being in any homogenous environment places his non-Whiteness and mixed race status as difference, and this makes it harder for him to fit in and feel comfortable. Second, Greg points to the fact that in majority-White environments, race is often unspoken, a topic that is high-risk, politically-charged or socially taboo. While I argue that multiculturalism in Canada (both official policy and diverse social realities) has made it socially acceptable, rewarding even, to talk about diversity in a celebratory and positive manner, speaking directly about race and racism is uncomfortable for many Whites. As George Dei states (2007), the denial of race can be dangerous, for it can lead to a failure to acknowledge racism. In other words, if we do not talk about race, we cannot effectively address racism. For the participants, who all shared with me troubling experiences of racism in Canada, these experiences are made more bearable and less painful because race and racism are acknowledged in Toronto.

Several participants talked about how being non-White, difference and diversity were normalized in Toronto, and that this was something that helped them feel more comfortable. As Greg states,

in environments that are White-dominated, race can become an uncomfortable topic to deal with, and it is often avoided. As Greg points out, among non-White people, when race is discussed, it is not necessarily a loaded political topic. It is just part of everyday life, and an important part of most people's identities, so it is more likely to come up in a casual manner during everyday conversations. As I pointed out in the section about participants' responses to the 'what are you' question, the race of the 'asker' matters; Greg and other participants contrast White-dominated and non-White dominated environments, and in the latter, they say that race and racism are normalized, and that this makes them feel more comfortable.

Dante: "The race that I feel most uncomfortable around in groups is White people...I feel like they're the most uncomfortable around us, so I feel uncomfortable around them as well."

By 'us', Dante means non-White people like him and myself and other multiracials. In other parts of the interview, Dante talks about feeling very comfortable in Toronto, and feeling comfortable in many different ethnic, racial and cultural groups. He then contrasts that with the above comment about being uncomfortable in all-White groups, because he perceives that White people are uncomfortable around non-Whites. When race is not openly discussed, when it is made 'the elephant in the room' and socially taboo, it creates discomfort for people of colour.

The question of Whiteness and how it impacts social interactions for multiracial people will be further taken up in the following chapter. Also, it is apparent that many of the participants experience racism and discrimination related to race, but that their masculinities (Black, Asian, Latino, etc.) complicate this and that their experience of race is very gendered. This topic will also be taken up in the following chapter. This chapter focused on various elements of multiculturalism and how the mixed race men I spoke to in Toronto felt that this was connected to their lives and to their identities. I did not intend to elicit responses pertaining to multiculturalism, but through the interviews, it was obvious that this is a key part of the context of these men's lives in Toronto. They see themselves as representative of multiculturalism, since they are from mixed racial backgrounds, and their parents married across religious, cultural, language, ethnic and racial lines. At the same time, multiracial men are frustrated with media and with policies that sing the praises of multiculturalism without also acknowledging how racism affects the lives of people of colour. The men I spoke to had strong positive feelings toward

Toronto, and some said they could never live anywhere else. Despite that fact that most of them had spent most of their lives in Toronto, they often contrasted Toronto with rural Canada, which they characterized as more racist and majority White. They often contrasted race relations in Canada and in the U.S., and their perception is that there is more overt racism and more institutionalized inequality in the U.S. We now move to the next chapter, which examines how masculinities and Whiteness were discussed in the participants' interviews.

Chapter 5

5 Topics in Anti-Racism and Multiraciality

This chapter will explore three topics from the position of anti-racism with a focus on Whiteness and White racism. I had planned to ask participants about their notions of gender and their experiences masculinities in order to explore how this aspect of their identities plays a role in how they make sense of race and racism. I soon discovered that the mixed race men I interviewed had little to say about gender and masculinity apart from race. Therefore, I have placed the discussion of gender and race together, because it is impossible to understand the mixed race men's constructions of masculinities separate from how they are racialized.

A second topic of importance in this chapter is Whiteness and how it affects the participants' identities. Some of the participants had a White parent, while others were non-White on both sides, but nonetheless, Whiteness and White racism was raised by all the participants in their interviews as an area of concern.

Thirdly, this chapter will look at notions of a changing colour line, as discussed in the Literature Review chapter; for many participants, a Black/non-Black distinction was more salient than a White/non-White distinction, and I will show some of the evidence of this from the interviews.

5.1 Masculinities and race for mixed race men in Toronto

In this first section, I will describe how the participants experience gender. In the interviews, I asked questions to try and tease out where and why gender matters to the multiracial men I interviewed. There are two main reasons that I highlight in the methodology chapter as being important in making sense of this challenge: the fact that I am a woman, and also that they were told the interviews were about their multiracial identities. This meant that there was a clear difference between us when it came to gender, and it was hard to create a rapport based on shared experience, and also that the participants were somewhat unprepared for questions about gender. I found that participants were uneasy discussing gender in general, and that they could not discuss gender without race; these two aspects of their identities are intertwined, and in this

section, I give examples from the interviews to show how race and gender are inextricably fused for multiracial men.

The multiracial men I interviewed experience their gendered racialized identities through their mixed race. When they talked about race and racialization experiences, gender did not enter the conversation unless I brought it up. In other words, when the participants think about racism, they are not necessarily relating it to being male; they are focused on the racialized part of their identities. The absence of any mention of gender when multiracial men discuss race is not surprising: race is very salient and can many times become the central aspect of focus in one's identity, especially when racism and discrimination enter the picture. What I want to call attention to here is that when gender was the focal point of the discussion, the participants' responses to questions about gender or masculinity still focused on race. Here is one example, from my interview with Isaac, who is mixed Jamaican/White:

Interviewer: How do you think about gender, male or female-ness... do you think it's an important part of your life, or of your identity?

Isaac: "Well, being a Black guy, even though I'm light, is really different. I was lucky – I had really great role models, Black people, that I always knew, so I didn't take in all of the negative self-concept stuff that I know lots of Black people have to deal with. I think it just comes from everywhere – the media, and like people have some pretty bad stereotypes about Black guys, so it can be hard to get away from that."

Many social scientists write about how race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of one's social identity are experienced as a whole (the intersectionalist model, overlapping systems of oppression) (Levy, 2008; O'Toole, Schiffman and Edwards, 2007), and not as individual or separate identities, but it is worth noting that the men seemed unable to separate gender from race, while they did talk about race without naming gender.

Here is how Manuel, who is in his early 20's and of Chinese and Dutch ancestry, explains the importance of gender in his life:

Interviewer: What about your gender? How do you think it affects your everyday life?

Manuel: “Hmm. I don’t really think about it. I guess, though, it limits the dating scene for me. I’m young, I’ve only had a couple of girlfriends, but like, I notice that White girls, and Black girls too, actually, don’t really look at me. Mostly only Asian girls, or sometimes brown girls, want to date Asian guys. Depends, though – not everyone sees me as Asian, so it depends.”

Interviewer: How would it change things if they see you as Asian vs. not Asian?

Manuel: “Uh, well, I don’t know. I don’t know how people see me, but I just know that like, I feel like I have more negative stereotypes about me if I’m Asian, versus, like if they think I’m a Spanish guy, then....I don’t know. Like I think if I talked to a White girl in like a club or something, she would say I was Spanish, just because she wouldn’t think a Chinese guy would talk to her. And if race comes up, well, ...maybe if she learns I’m not Spanish and I’m Asian, she would be like, ‘oh’. I don’t know if it would change things, but I think if they know up front, it makes a difference.”

The participants demonstrated that their gender was often experienced through their race, and so they have a collapsed construction of gender where race is ever-present. In Manuel’s comments, he illustrates how men of different racial backgrounds are differently constructed; he says that by simply approaching a White girl in a club, he is more likely to be constructed as Spanish (or Latino), because there is a perception that Asian men would not approach a White girl, whereas Spanish/Latino men would.

All of the men had difficulty talking about gender, and four of the multiracial men I interviewed said they could not think of any way that their gender influenced their life experiences. However, if they related gender to race, they were able to give me many examples of cases where being constructed as Black and male, or as a visible minority and male, clearly had profound implications in terms of how the participant interpreted the situation. The multiracial Black men had the most examples to talk about, as Dante’s story illustrates. Dante is a multiracial Black and

White university student in his early 20's. In these comments, he is discussing his relationship with his girlfriend, Linh, who is Asian, and her family:

Dante: They [Linh's family] had never met me before, but they heard that I was half Black, and they automatically assumed that I was like (pause) like the majority of young Black guys from Scarborough. Which I'm not. I'm not even from Scarborough. So...they own a [small business], and they dealt with a lot of...the darker... or the more negative stereotypes... of Black people you could say, and so I guess they had a ...painted a picture of Black people... and assumed that that's what I was. I mean, they didn't take into account the fact that I'm a student, I have a job, and I don't sell drugs, and I don't fall into those stereotypes for the most part.

Dante does not want to be disrespectful to Linh's family, but he admits that they hold negative stereotypes about Black men, and that this was reinforced through their experiences in Scarborough. It is unclear by his statements whether Dante is implying that they actually had negative interactions with Black men and that their discriminatory beliefs were based in some kind of personal experience that was then generalized and socially reinforced, but Dante clearly links negative stereotypes about Black men to the geographic context of Scarborough. In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Scarborough is often perceived as having higher crime rates than the rest of Toronto, when in fact, the crime rate there is lower than in other parts of Toronto, according to the City's Police chief, Bill Blair, in 2008 (<http://www.insidetoronto.ca/News/Scarborough/article/45840>). However, there were a number of high-profile incidents involving gang-related violence, and media across Canada began running stories characterizing Scarborough as crime-ridden and unsafe (e.g. <http://www.torontolife.com/features/scarborough-curse/?pageno=2>). The issue of gang violence in Toronto is racialized, where the term 'gang' implies non-White males.

Dante is aware of the perception by Linh's family that because he is a Black male and he lives in Scarborough, he is more likely to be involved in crime. He points out that he does not fit those stereotypes. He says that he is not like "the majority of young Black guys from Scarborough", which implies that he maybe has internalized some of these beliefs about young Black men himself. He makes it clear that he is employed and a student, and that he does not fit these

stereotypes. Next, he explains how he dealt with Linh's brother, who is a head figure in the family:

Dante: "He's the one who really instigated the thing of like 'my sister is not going to be dating a Black guy', so (pause)... it's not like they said 'don't come to our house', but I'm like, if I do go to your house, I don't want to have to like fight your brother in his house. I'm not going to disrespect your house, so I'm just not going to go at all."

Dante described how he stayed away from Linh's house for many months, but that slowly, as he and her family got to know each other more, they began to accept him despite their seeing him as Black. Dante did not feel that being part White was of any importance or of any benefit in this situation: he was racialized as Black, and when Linh's family, especially her brother, finally accepted him, it was not because they racialize Dante as less Black or as more White, but because he was 'an exception' to the stereotypes about young Black men in Scarborough. Over time, they learned about his work and study habits, and saw that he was not involved in crime or in activities they disapproved of, and got to know him personally. Dante states:

Dante: Now it's all ok, everyone gets along, and they know that I'm not one of 'those guys', I'm alright, you know. I don't worry about it, I'm just glad it all worked out.

Linh's family racialize Dante as Black, and when they first began dating, he experiences discrimination based on being a Black male from Scarborough. In his interview, Dante was unable to discuss what his experience of being 'male' was like except when he related it came to being a Black male. Through his Blackness, Dante experienced discrimination, and he relates this to being seen as Black AND male. These two aspects of his identity are equally important in terms of how others, like his girlfriend's family, treat him.

Another participant, Damien, who is mixed Black and Brown (Indian/Hindu background) from Trinidad, answered as follows when I asked him about the significance of his gender:

Damien: "I don't know what it's like to be a female, so it's hard to say what my gender means to me. I guess, you know, there's a lot of stereotypes and beliefs

that Black men are a certain way, and in Toronto, like I find if you dress a certain way, people will assume that you're a drug dealer or that you're poor, that you live in the ghetto. You know, my dad always says 'Black men are an endangered species'. Like, it's easier to fall into that if you're Black, because people expect that, and so I think some guys just give in, because if people are just going to assume anyways, then you might as well give them what they want. Also it makes us mad, Black people, so it's easier to end up an angry person. But I think my way of making up for it is like, I'm always afraid that people are like, thinking the worst of me, so I try to be extra nice, to show that like, I'm not like that. Like I work with kids a lot, and I think it's important to role model for them that we're not all gangsters, that that's just the media."

Damien first notes that he does not know what it is like to be female, and so comparatively, he is unable to say what it means to be male. He then begins to tell me about the difficulties of being Black and male. He points to the low expectations and stereotypes people have about Black men, and he points out that this can contribute to anger and to Black men internalizing these discriminatory and negative beliefs, which may increase the chances that someone will turn to violence and crime. Damien states that he is worried that people will perceive him negatively, and that he makes efforts to be extra nice in order to prevent being treated with prejudice. Damien's mannerisms were very gentle, he spoke with a very calm voice, and he smiled a lot when we were speaking.

As this previous passage suggests, part of this demeanour might be a kind of racial performance that is deliberately aimed at countering racial stereotypes about Black men.

The other multiracial men I interviewed also spoke about masculinities in relation to gender; others were racialized as Asian (as Manuel's example in section 4.3.2 illustrates) or as Latino, Middle Eastern, or other ethnicities. I have focused on the Black multiracial men's comments because they had the most to say, in part because of the particularities of being racialized as Black and male in Toronto; these men experienced more racist behaviour and discrimination based on race than non-Black participants. They represented 5 of 10 of the participants, and this may have also contributed to the rich data I collected on the subject of masculinities, as they are understood through race for multiracial men.

5.2 Multiracial men and constructions of Whiteness

Multiracial identities are often changing, ambiguous and fluid. These themes are reflected in Ifekwunigwe (2004), Mahtani (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) and Root (1992, 1996, 2004), all of who have written a number of articles and essays on the topic. All of the participants I spoke to talked about the contextual nature of their identities, but what remained constant was that they identified as non-White. This section will examine how the participants construct Whiteness, given that one of the reasons they may choose to identify as non-White is that they have rather negative or bleak constructions of Whiteness.

For many mixed race men who are ambiguous-looking, racial identity is a choice that is influenced by a myriad of factors. It is important to understand why so few wish to take on White identities, even when they can pass for White and especially since Whiteness is historically associated with higher social status, power and privilege. I found that the participants construct White identities, Whiteness, and White culture as oppressive, prejudiced, and discriminatory, and also as common, bland, meaningless and empty. As I noted in Chapter 4, participants often compared rural, majority White communities to Toronto when they were discussing racism. When they discussed culture and identities, they were often unable to articulate what White culture consists of exactly, as Isaac's comment illustrates:

Isaac: "Jamaican culture is really rich, and that's what is...the focus in my family. I don't really know what White culture would be, but I can't say we have any of that."

Most participants spoke about having strong connections to their non-White cultures, but they were unable to articulate what White culture was, except in the context of White racism, where they talked about feeling uncomfortable in all-White or majority White environments.

Greg: "You know, I guess in the all-White environment, it's because you stand out. You're the elephant in the room, and no one can really address it, or ask about it."

It is interesting that Santo, who is Jamaican and Italian, did talk about having a connection to Italian culture, but he makes a distinction between ‘White’ and ‘Italian’.

Santo: “Italians have culture and traditions and stuff, I guess, in Toronto, because there’s so many, like, it’s such a big group. But to me, it’s Italian – it wouldn’t fall under what I call ‘White’. To me, that’s more like, the Canadians who have been here a long time, and who don’t really have a specific culture because they wouldn’t say they were British anymore, right? It’s just kind of generic. I don’t know many ‘plain White’ people like that. I guess they don’t live in my neighbourhood. I know Greeks and Italians and Portuguese, but I wouldn’t call them ‘White’, they’re.... Greek, or whatever, and that matters more. I never say I’m White and Black – I’m Italian and Jamaican, and I have both. But White culture is just, I don’t know, what is that? White power? That’s the only time you really hear about it.”

Santo’s construction of Whiteness links it to White power, which is about White racism and oppression. He constructs Whiteness negatively, and therefore, Italian culture does not fit into his construction of Whiteness because it has distinct cultural practices and traditions that can be articulated, and because it is a positive part of his identity.

Among my participants, seven were White/non-White mixed race men, and three were mixed but non-White on both sides. Of the part-White participants, four described their White side using specific ethnocultural labels: Ahmed said he was Guyanese and Irish, Manuel said he was Chinese and Italian/Dutch, Santo said he was Jamaican and Italian, and Amal said he was Indian and French Canadian. The other three part-White participants simply described their White side as ‘White’. The three participants who said they felt connected to their White sides were Ahmed (Irish), Santo (Italian) and Amal (French Canadian). In all three cases, their White parent was either a first generation Canadian, an immigrant, or in Amal’s case, a non-English speaker who moved from Québec to English Canada. In each case, the participants’ White parents had a strong cultural connection to Ireland, Italy or to French Canada and language and culture were a part of their upbringing. The other four participants who were part White did not specify their White backgrounds, and had little to say about it.

Frances Winddance Twine (1996a) published a study that looked at how young women of mixed race, who are of part-African American descent, can take on White identities in suburban, middle-class environments, where they grew up having little contact with Blacks or with poor people. Twine explains that the mixed race women she spoke to saw themselves as White, which they constructed as neutral and invisible, but that their identities shifted to non-White when they moved to environments where there were many more politicized people of colour. Twine's participants link Whiteness to being middle-class or upper class, and in the case of her participants, this was the main basis for them forming White identities. As Twine states:

The importance of material consumption cannot be overstated in its ability to confer an identity that makes residents of any racial background culturally invisible and acceptable members of the community. (Twine, 1996a, p.213)

In other words, Twine stresses the importance of socioeconomic class, where middle class equals Whiteness, and where definitions of 'White' exclude poor Whites. Twine reminds us that Whiteness also implies individualism, so the tendency is for people with White identities to think of themselves as individuals first, rather than as members of any racial group. In a middle class environment, racial identity is not important because it is not stigmatized. Social class is more important, and when everyone has middle or upper class backgrounds, non-Whiteness is less pronounced.

Most of my participants described their family's social class as working class or poor, and five were now students, and four were working class, employed in restaurants and as performers/artists. Only three men said they grew up middle class, and two of them grew up in neighbourhoods that were mostly non-White and where there were many immigrants; therefore, it is hard to compare most of my participants with Twine's (1996a) findings. However, one of the seven part-White participants in my study, Jamal, stood out as different from the rest because he had not formed a strong non-White identity and did not feel he had experienced any discrimination in his lifetime. In fact, he felt that some people of colour were overly sensitive when it came to language around race and identity.

Interviewer: "What do you think about racial categories"

Jamal: "I think they're fine. It's never bothered me. I know some people are very sensitive about it, but to me, it's never been a problem. I'm just very rational. Yeah. Like I know, for instance, I said to a friend, oh, Obama's mulatto, I didn't know if like the mulatto term was like, passé, it was like a derogatory term or something like that, and I was like 'get real', like I found that a little too sensitive"

Jamal described himself as Chinese and Anglo-Saxon, and he is different from the other nine participants in that he was the most highly educated, holding two graduate degrees, and he described himself as having grown up 'middle class' in a diverse neighbourhood where most families were of similar social class. Jamal has a fulltime job in the financial industry and was in his 30's, and I speculate that his age, level of education and social class influenced his sense that his racial identity was not that important and that issues like racism, prejudice and discrimination had little impact on his life. The stark difference between Jamal and the other participants begs the question of just how much social class influences one's self-identity, and there are clearly links between race and class that could be explored in future research.

Jamal did not identify as White or as non-White; he said he was 'uncategorized' and did not feel he needed to declare an identity other than saying he was 'mixed race'. Like other participants, he found that a mixed race identity was generally regarded positively by others and that it was somewhat of a novelty that came with benefits, like fitting in easily, and being able to act as a bridge between cultural groups.

Other participants identified more definitively as non-White, even though their identities shifted and changed depending on context. Storrs (1999) and Perry (2001) both examined how White identities are constructed, and my findings reflect the conclusions of each of these researchers. Perry (2001) compared how White identities are constructed in a majority White school and in a multiracial school, and found that White identities are constructed in both environments as cultureless, normal, and as lacking in tradition and culture. She also found that at the multiracial school, non-Whiteness was labeled as 'cultural' and 'ethnic', while Whiteness was seen as lacking in these features (Storrs, 1999). This reflects the dominant power that Whiteness holds, where non-Whiteness is 'othered', but Whiteness is normalized to the point of invisibility, and it

is so hegemonic that the students in Perry's study, and in mine, are unable to articulate what Whiteness is, except to refer to White power, oppression and White racism.

Storrs (1999) interviewed women of mixed race in order to explore why they reject White identities. She found that her participants stigmatize Whiteness while they embrace non-White identities.

Women talk about their non-White parents' history, culture, heritage, and how this plays out in their own lives without a similar discussion of their White ancestry until I explicitly ask about it. This pattern reveals the declining significance of ethnicity among fourth, fifth, and later generation Whites. Due to extensive assimilation, later generation Whites find little meaning in their ethnic ancestry from which to forge their identities. (Storrs, 1999, p.195)

Storrs' findings with mixed race women are very similar to what I found with mixed race men in Toronto. As I stated in Chapter 4, multiculturalism in Canada provides a context where non-White cultures are celebrated and promoted as contributing to the diversity of Canada, which is positively constructed. Whiteness on the other hand, while still hegemonic and invisible, is not similarly promoted, and when European cultural groups hold festivals and events, it is not labeled as 'White', but as Italian, Portuguese, Jewish, or another specific ethno-cultural term.

Whiteness has always been a topic of extreme importance to mixed race people. In North America, multiracial people have historically been excluded from the category of Whiteness and from the privileges that come with it. My focus here is on how the mixed race men I spoke to constructed Whiteness: as negative, hard to define, cultureless, and ultimately, undesirable. As I have said in Chapter 4 and in the Literature Review, multiracial people are often constructed as non-White. In the case of my participants, they relate this to their visible non-White status and to experiences of racism and discrimination that made them feel excluded from Whiteness. Many aspects of their identities contribute to how they are racialized as non-White: the neighbourhood they live in, language or accent, country of origin, clothing, who they associate with, and the geographic location where they are racialized all play into how others will categorize them. My point here is that their visibility as non-White men as well as their construction of Whiteness both play contributing roles in multiracial men taking on and preferring non-White identities.

Perry (2001) looks at how youth construct Whiteness as ‘cultureless’ identities, but reminds us that ‘culturelessness’ is also constructed as the norm, and therefore serves to maintain White supremacy over others. Given these, it is understandable that some mixed race people may want to identify as non-White; Whiteness appears to offer little in terms of meaningful cultural practices or traditions, while non-White cultures are, especially through multiculturalism in Canada, constantly being held up as desirable, consumable and steeped in tradition.

5.3 The changing colour line: Black/non-Black

Mixed race identities are always constructed in relation to Whiteness; it is always the measuring stick we use for comparison. By examining the racialization experiences of mixed race people, we can see that the boundaries of Whiteness are always shifting. Lee and Bean (2007) write about the shifting colour line in the U.S., observing how Whiteness is achieved (as opposed to prescribed) and how groups such as the Irish, Italians and Eastern European Jews have achieved White status. Lee and Bean (2007) also address the case of Asians in America, who have gone from being “almost Black to almost White” (p.566). To exemplify their claim, they refer to the Mississippi Delta, where large numbers of Chinese immigrants “made conscious efforts to change their lowly racial status by achieving economic mobility, emulating the cultural practices and institutions of Whites, intentionally distancing themselves from Blacks, and rejecting fellow ethnics who married Blacks as well as their Chinese-Black multiracial children” (p.566). By adopting the anti-Black sentiments held by Mississippi Whites, the Chinese accepted and assimilated to the existing racial hierarchy and secured a slightly higher socioeconomic status for their group. Today, Asians are constructed as the ‘model minority’, a far cry from the ‘Yellow Peril’ of the past. While it can be tempting to think that this may be a positive change for Asians, so-called positive stereotypes like the ‘model minority’ stereotype reinforce the idea that oppressed groups can be divided and ranked, thus creating ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ categories of non-Whiteness.

Other authors who are examining the shifting colour line, such as Warren and Twine (1997), who point out that some immigrant groups, like Asians or Latinos, are occasionally achieving White status, often in conjunction with higher social class and other aspects of social identity that conform more closely to Whiteness. Zhou (2004) examines how the label of “White” is being used to describe Asian Americans, who are ‘honorary Whites’ because of career and financial

status equated with Whiteness. However, even as they constructed as higher on the racial ladder than Blacks or other groups, Asians are still constructed as different. Zhou's (2004) criticisms of so-called positive stereotypes, like the 'model minority' stereotype of high achieving Asians who are successful and complicit in assimilating to White culture, could be applied to the changing constructions of multiracial people as they are presented as objects of desire in the media (DaCosta, 2007). Zhou (2004) points out that a 'positive' stereotype "reinforces the myth that the United States is devoid of racism" (p.33), and promotes the idea that those who fail to achieve do so because of poor individual choices. It implicitly portrays Asian (or multiracials) as different, and normalizes the practice of judging others according different standards from Whites.

However, the boundaries of Whiteness still exclude some groups: namely, Blacks. The old White-nonWhite divide is becoming closer to a Black non-Black divide. This is very important to my analysis, since it sheds light on how some mixed race identities are becoming privileged, especially in the media (DaCosta, 2007), and it also speaks to why there is sometimes tension between mixed race people and anti-racist scholars. Blackness continues to be the lowest ranked, while multiracials are increasingly constructed as desirable. These trends, coupled with the changing boundaries of Whiteness, will result in increasing the distance between the groups who are all still, let's face it, confronted by the same ongoing problem of being subject to racialization in social structures still dominated by White hegemony.

My interviews with multiracial men in Toronto, as well as other research on multiracial identities, supports the hypothesis of the shifting colour line; studies found that mixed race Black/White children are usually perceived as Black (Twine, 1996; Barn & Harman, 2006), while mixed race Asians and Latinos are equally as likely to be perceived as Asian or Latino, as well as White. In terms of their internal sense of self and racial identity, mixed Asian or Latino youth are equally likely to identify as White as they are likely to say they are Asian or Latino (Lee & Bean, 2007). The implication is that shifting boundaries of Whiteness have allowed some mixed race people more freedom to choose their identities than others, while mixed race Blacks are still consistently excluded from Whiteness and continue to have their identities prescribed and regulated by social constructs of non-Whiteness.

In my interviews with ten multiracial men in Toronto, it was evident that the Black multiracial men had the most stories of racism to talk about, and they talked about being consistently

racialized as Black and what they meant to their everyday lives. The only participant who said that race had no negative impact on his life and that his mixed race status was exclusively positive was Jamal, a “Chinese and Anglo-Saxon” mixed race man in the highest socioeconomic class of all the participants I spoke to. I interviewed 5 participants who were multiracial Black men, and all of them spoke in detail about the inescapability of Black male stereotypes and discrimination based on race and gender. Others perceive them as Black almost all the time, and they expressed frustration over this. Santo sometimes resists being racialized as Black by challenging people; he defiantly identifies as ‘Italian’ as a form of resistance to those who want to know if he is Black or not. As Santo states:

Santo: “Yup. Sometimes, if like they’re really asking cause they want to know if I’m Black, that’s the real question, then I’ll be like ‘I’m Italian’, except obviously I don’t look like it. And they’ll be like ‘naw...’, and I’m like ‘yes, my mom’s Italian’. But mostly I say I’m mixed, and I think then it’s pretty obvious or whatever. Sometimes they want to know what, but usually, like now there’s more mixed people, so if I just say ‘mixed’ people know what that means. Sometimes they’re like, ‘oh yeah, my aunt married a whatever guy, and my cousins are mixed’.”

Evidence from the interviews I conducted shows that my participants’ experiences were divided along Black/non-Black lines; there are two specific arguments raised in the literature that support a changing colour line. The first is that non-Black people of colour (e.g. Asians, Latinos) in the U.S. intermarry with Whites at a much higher rate than Blacks do, and that higher rates of intermarriage among some groups suggests that non-Black people of colour have more social interaction with Whites, which results in higher marriage rates. This would imply that non-Blacks have categorically different experiences than Blacks when it comes to dating and marriage with non-Blacks. This holds true in Canada as well, where the group most likely to form a union with someone outside of their ethnoracial group are Japanese Canadians, followed by Latin Americans. Surprisingly, South Asians and Chinese were among the least likely to form a union outside their group (Statistics Canada, 2008), but among my participants and in everyday conversations, I have learned that the perception is that Asian/White partnerships, including Chinese and South Asians, are the most common. This is likely because there are so many more Chinese and South Asians in Toronto than there are other visible minorities; they make up 31.5%

and 22.4% of Toronto visible minorities respectively (Statistics Canada, 2008). This means that the raw numbers of mixed union couples involving a Chinese or South Asian person are in fact higher than for other groups, but that as a percentage of large communities, these unions appear much less common. So given that the resulting number of mixed union couples in Canada and the U.S. reflect more mixing between Whites and non-Black groups, it is fair to say that Blacks and non-Blacks have very different interactions with Whites than non-Blacks do (Lee and Bean, 2007).

A second central argument made by the authors is that multiracial people who are White and non-Black (e.g. Asian/White, Latino/White, South Asian/White people) are more likely to choose a White identity than Black multiracials, who are almost always identified by others as Blacks, and who seem to have less choice when it comes to racial identity than other multiracials do. This holds true among my sample, where the 5 Black mixed race men I spoke all said that they usually identified as Black. This would imply that in Canadian society, the general populace is more attuned to so-called Black features and Black phenotypes than they are to Asian, South Asian, or other groups, because any of the multiracial men I interviewed who were part Black (including multigenerational mixed race men who have mixed race parents) were almost always externally identified as Black. On the other hand, the multiracial Asian, South Asian, and Latino participants I interviewed were not consistently perceived by others as Asian, South Asian or Latino. It would seem that Canadians are socialized to pick up on any cues that a person may be Black or part Black, while they are less attuned to picking up cues about other racial groups. Here are two examples, from a Black multiracial participant and from a South Asian multiracial participant.

Amal is South Asian and French Canadian (White):

Amal: "And even though I have French Canadian, and I have a White side, I feel like, people, I'm not, people don't look at me like that. And that's not the only way I identify myself."

Amal talked about the many ways he had identified himself in his life, in different contexts and at different ages. He also spoke about the freedom to fit in with many different people because of his ambiguous racial appearance. Other participants also discussed fitting in easily, but the Black multiracial men had less freedom when it came to declaring an identity. Greg says:

Greg: "I say I'm Black and Portuguese, but I know that the world sees me as Black and treats me like it. In some places, it's more obvious, like in the States, but here too, I feel it."

As Greg illustrates, his Blackness is visible to others, and he feels he is treated as Black; earlier in Chapter 4, he talked about his experiences of racism, about being subject to stereotypes about Black men, and about feeling like "the elephant in the room". Greg does not experience the freedom that Amal does when it comes to shifting self-identity. He defines himself as Black and Portuguese, but he feels that his life experiences have been most strongly influenced by his Blackness.

My findings are well supported by the few scholarly articles that exist on this topic. Dagbovie (2007) is one of the few that looks at how mixed race people are racialized; Tiger Woods serves as the example that Blackness, Whiteness and Asianess are differently understood and that Asians have moved up on the racial ladder to sit firmly above Blacks. As Dagbovie (2007) points out, Tiger Woods is never considered Asian by Asians, and he is not referred to as 'Asian' in the media. By contrast, he is sometimes labeled 'Black', though he is no more Black than Asian, and he is often held up as a multiracial celebrity. Earlier in Chapter 4, I pointed to the changed social status of multiraciality in the Canadian multicultural context; participants felt that their mixed race status was a positive attribute that was not only socially accepted but also valued.

Dagbovie's work helps me to link that discussion with the present contention that the colour line is shifting, and that Blacks remain on one side of the divide while mixed race and other identities are more highly valued. As Dagbovie states: 'Whites' obsession with multiracial bodies allows for the 'consumption' of a more palatable form of Blackness, while still allowing Whites to distance themselves from from the supposedly less 'attractive' aspects of Black identity" (Dagbovie, 2007). Mixed race identities may be more fashionable than they once were, and research with multiracial people allows us to see how they are differently constructed within a context that continues to devalue Blackness. Hence, there are important reasons why anti-racists and multiracial people need to be aware of how the increased presence of mixed race people may be contribute to a colour line that disadvantages Black people. Ultimately, if people of colour are more cognizant of the tricky ways that race and racialization shift over time, we may be able to take a more dominant role in shaping the dynamics of change in our favour.

Chapter 6

6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how multiracial men living in the Toronto area understand their race, masculinities and identities. The study's ten participants were men who identified as mixed race, and who are between 20 and 40 years old. Given the complex and ambiguous nature of mixed race identities, and given that multiracial people make up an increasingly large minority in urban multicultural cities, it is important to consider how the participants see themselves as they learn to understand race, racism and racialization through their experiences as mixed race men.

In order to draw out narratives that were useful for an analysis of mixed race, masculinities and identities, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant in coffee shops, office spaces at the University of Toronto, and other semi-private spaces. The interview schedule asked the participants about their understandings of being mixed race. More specifically, I asked participants to relate to me incidents or experiences where they were aware of their race, or examples of how their mixed race identity influences a situation. We discussed their families, siblings and peer groups, and how they felt they fit into each of these groups. I also asked about gender and about how they understood their gender roles and masculine identities. We discussed dating and partnering as part of the discussion on gender, and we discussed racialized gendered identities. The Black multiracial men had much to say about the important impact that Black male identity has played in their lives. The Latino and Asian men spoke about stereotypes about their sexuality that were based on their perceived race.

The most significant findings to emerge from this research are:

1. Multiracial men in Toronto are interested in multiculturalism and the impact that diversity and multicultural policy has on their everyday lives. Participants are simultaneously critical of multicultural policy and supportive of it, and multiple participants spontaneously spoke at length about this topic, despite the lack of questions about multiculturalism in the interview schedule.
2. Multiracial men in Toronto experience racism and discrimination based on race and gender but are most commonly identified by others as monoracial (e.g. Black, Latino,

Asian, Middle Eastern), and therefore it cannot be said that they experience racism based on being assigned mixed race status per se.

3. Multiracial men are aware of how their race is perceived by others in different places and contexts and are cognizant of how various social markers of identity contribute to how their race is perceived by others.
4. Black multiracial men have more experiences of racism than non-Black multiracial men.
5. Black multiracial men are more consistently identified by others as 'Black' and are allowed less fluidity and ambiguity in their racial identities than non-Black multiracial men.
6. Mixed race men have positive constructions of mixed race identities and report that others react positively and are interested in their identities.
7. Mixed race men have slightly negative perceptions of white identities and whiteness.

For mixed race scholars who are committed to anti-racism, these findings have deep implications and raise critical questions. What does this mean to our understandings of white privilege, and how can mixed race people challenge the new racial borders? Issues of power and privilege were important in my study, and this study demonstrates how mixed race people engage in a critical analysis of racial hierarchies. Mixed race people often observe transgressions of racial borders because they are being misidentified or mislabeled. Multiracial men in my study showed that they were hyper aware of the effects of race on the ways in which people interact with one another, since they were often asked to identify themselves and have to constantly interact with people who are not from the same racial background as they are. Their unique position provides scholars with a better understanding of the way that racialization processes are currently enacted in Toronto.

There is clearly a special relationship between the participants and the city; in this case, participants were very positive and said they felt a strong sense of belonging in Toronto, and they related this to Toronto's multicultural social make up. I contend that other multiracial people would feel similarly about living in other large Canadian cities. There is definitely more that scholars could learn by looking at how multiracial people relate to large urban centers and

what kind of meaning this gives to their lives. Toronto, in particular, has a unique place in the minds of the participants, and it would be worth examining how other people of colour (former 'visible minorities') feel about the City.

It was challenging to find participants for this study. This is partly due to the fact that mixed race people are a minority, and that there are no explicitly mixed race spaces where it would be easy to find multiracial people together. Those participants who finally arranged to meet me for an interview all identified as non-white. Future research should examine the meanings attached to the terms 'mixed race' and 'multiracial', since a number of potential participants had very different ideas of what these words meant. For example, a few people emailed me to ask if they qualified, because although they were 'technically mixed race' they identified as Asian. Also, all of the participants who responded identified as non-White. This might be an indication that mixed race men who pass as White may not also identify with the term 'multiracial' or 'mixed race', and so would have been less likely to respond to my call for participants. A final reason that the meanings of these terms could be worthy of future research is that a number of women contacted me who were eager to set up a time to meet and discuss their identities. This happened despite my advertisements specifically saying that I was looking to interview men. Future research is needed to examine how men and women of mixed race understand and relate to various terms, especially 'multiracial' and 'mixed race'.

This study adds to the experiences of mixed race men in Toronto to the literature in critical mixed race studies. Multiracial men have shown that they have very different understandings of race and racism than multiracial women do; this makes sense given that racialization is a mediated by gender, and mixed race bodies are sexualized very differently than monoracial bodies. In addition, mixed race bodies can be gendered, sexualized and racialized as multiracial or as monoracial, and this changes the nature of racialization experience for the multiracial person, who is often left questioning how they are being perceived and if this is influencing how others interact with them. The Black multiracial men in this study demonstrated that they are subjected to racism and discrimination because they are perceived as Black more often than they are racialized or sexualized as mixed race. This is very different from the literature on mixed race women: in various studies women discuss the specific implications for being sexualized as mixed race women (Camper, 1994; DaCosta, 2007; Dagbovie, 2007; Mahtani, 2002b; Streeter, 1996; Twine, 1996a). They are constructed as exotic, and there is also literature from the U.S.

(Streeter, 1996; Root, 1992; Root, 1996) that discusses the Black/White mixed race experience, and how multiracial Black women are sexualized, exoticized and objectified. This parallels my findings, which show that Black multiracial men have very different experiences, but that they seem to be common across Black multiracial male identities.

The finding that Black multiracial men are much more restricted in the ways in which they can cross socially constructed cultural and racial lines, as compared to their non-Black multiracial counterparts, is perhaps the most significant finding here. It supports Lee and Bean's (2007) contention that the colour line is shifting, and that a Black/non-Black colour line (as opposed to the traditional divide of White/non-White) is increasingly relevant. This is an important area for future research: since the participants also spoke at length about multiculturalism as part of how they frame their lives in Toronto, it is critical that scholars understand the way the colour line and racial hierarchies are being constructed in large urban, diverse cities like Toronto.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Demographics:

How old are you?

What is your sex/gender?

What is your mixed race background?

What level of education have you reached and what did you study?

What is your class background?

Interview

1. What does being mixed race mean to you?
2. How do you identify yourself racially?
3. What do you think about racial categories?
4. Has the way you think about your racial identity always been the same or changed over time? Tell me about that.
5. What are the advantages of being a mixed-race (man/woman)? What are the disadvantages?
6. Do you think being a male mixed-race person is different than being a female mixed-race person, or not? If so, how?
7. In what groups, communities or settings do you feel the greatest sense of belonging, and why?
8. Has your mixed race identity played a role in dating and relationships? In what way?
9. Are you currently in a relationship and can you tell me about that?

10. Is there any particular type of men/women that you are not attracted to?
11. Has anyone ever assumed your racial identity? Can you explain/illustrate? What did you do? How did you feel about it?
12. Is there anything you would like add that we have not covered?