Is It Really the Best of Both Worlds? Exploring Notions of Privilege Associated with Multiraciality

Marc P. Johnston-Guerrero
Ohio State University

Vu T. Tran
Michigan State University

Abstract

This study explores the experiences of privilege among multiracial college students guided by two research questions: (1) How do multiracial students define and identify privilege? And (2) In what ways do multiracial students see experiences of privilege influencing their sense of racial identity? Through interviews with 16 college students at a large, public university in the U.S. Midwest, three themes were found: (a) naming privilege without much ownership or connection to race; (b) identifying and accessing various forms of multiracial privilege; and (c) reflecting on the responsibilities that come with privilege. The findings provide advancements in theory regarding multiracial students' experiences with privilege toward creating new practices that educate students on the complexities associated with understanding privilege in relation to multiracial identity.

Keywords: Multiraciality; Privilege; Identity; College students

Marc P. Johnston-Guerrero is an associate professor in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at The Ohio State University and is also affiliated faculty with the Asian American Studies program. He completed a Ph.D. in Education (emphasis in Higher Education and Organizational Change) at University of California, Los Angeles.

Vu Tran is a scholar-practitioner who has been engaged in numerous social justice education leadership roles including the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations, the Social Justice Training Institute, and American College Personnel Association's Commission for Social Justice Education. He received his Ph.D. from The Ohio State University's Higher Education and Student Affairs program, where his dissertation examined adultism within various contexts of higher education.

It has often been said that multiracial[1] people, or those who claim membership or heritage across two or more racialized groups, have an inherent benefit of being able to navigate multiple cultures and contexts (Olumide, 2002; Stonequist, 1937). Yen (2012), quoting sociologist Daniel Lichter, stated succinctly how mixed-race individuals "often interact with others on either side of the racial divide and frequently serve as brokers between friends and family members of different racial backgrounds" (para. 3). In theory then, a multiracial person could seamlessly transition from one racial context to another. However, is this "benefit" something that can be considered a privilege? If so, is that something that multiracial college students claim as a type of privilege? Moreover, are there other types of privileges that come with being multiracial? The thought exercise of examining privilege of multiracial people in itself is somewhat of a conundrum, as mixed race individuals have often been considered as oppressed based on systematic consolidation of People of Color (Goodman, 2011), as well as the pressures of being forced to choose to identify with one group and rarely have the ability to claim their multiracial identity as salient (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Renn & Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). However, exploring the potential privileges of multiracial people can help offer more nuance to a historically oversimplified discourse about race and racism in society.

We invite readers to join our curiosities of multiraciality and privilege by engaging in a provocative thought exercise to introduce our empirical investigation, which may or may not be consistent with their prior knowledge and experiences regarding multiracial people. First, consider Peggy McIntosh's (1988) assertion that there are two types of privileges: unearned advantages and conferred dominance. A proposition that multiracial people are privileged would inquire whether they have unearned advantages or are considered superior to other groups due to their multiracial identity. Second, because oppression exists in multiple dimensions (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007; Reynolds & Pope, 1991), an examination of privilege also requires an acknowledgement of its impact across individual, group, and systemic levels. At an individual level, multiracial people may claim that they have certain benefits or are considered superior just because of who they are. At a group level, they may claim that multiracial people are privileged, or perhaps that there are privileges attached to feeling singular belonging to one group or another. And at a systemic level, they may acknowledge that the privileges of being multiracial are connected to larger, systemic patterns that reinforce the benefits and dominance of multiraciality. Some of these statements may bring various readers discomfort, which can sometimes be an important starting point for learning (Baker & Taylor, 2016). Again, we do not claim that these propositions are true, but they help ground us in conversation about whether and to what extent multiracial people are privileged.

We also acknowledge that privilege and oppression are not experienced in isolation. In the case of multiracial college students, the dimension of race can serve both as an oppressed and privileged social identity. For example, these dynamics can be seen in popular claims about multiracial people having "the best of both worlds" (privileged) or being "forced to choose" (oppressed), which are common in the

literature on multiracial individuals (Crawford & Alaggia 2008; Csizmadia et al., 2012; Hermann, 2004). Further, multiraciality has been argued to be both a source of oppression (due to monoracism; Hamako, 2014) and privilege (due to whiteness and/or the ability to identify situationally; Guillermo-Wann, 2010). Such dynamics may be connected to whether the multiracial individual includes whiteness as part of one's racial identity or backgrounds. But is there privilege in multiraciality outside of potential accessing of white privilege?

This paper comes from a larger study that explores these dynamics of privilege and oppression among a sample of 16 multiracial college students. Although the role of oppression in college student development has recently gained more scholarly attention (e.g., Howard-Hamilton & Hinton, 2016; Patton, Harper, & Harris, 2015), we focus specifically on privilege in this study due to its lack of attention in the scholarship on multiracial college students. Two research questions guided this study:

(1) How do multiracial students define and identify privilege for themselves?
(2) In what ways do multiracial students see privilege influencing their sense of racial identity?

In investigating these questions, this research moves toward advancing theories and practices that can better capture and support multiracial students' experiences with privilege and oppression toward their racial identity development, which is a key factor for student adjustment and achievement (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arrellano, 2012).

Social Privilege Theory

The concept of privilege has been examined by scholars across humanities fields (e.g., Perry, 2001), as well as applied fields such as higher education (e.g., Ashe, 2012; Cabrera, 2012; Ropers-Huilman, Winters, & Enke, 2013; Watt, 2007). In writing about white and male privilege, McIntosh (1988) explained that there are five components to privilege:

(1) Privilege is a special advantage; it is neither common nor universal.
(2) Privilege is granted, not earned or brought into being by one's individual effort or talents.
(3) Privilege is a right or entitlement that is related to a preferred status or rank.
(4) Privilege is exercised for the benefit of the recipient and to the exclusion or detriment of others.
(5) A privileged status is often outside of the awareness of the person possessing it.

Goodman (2012) added that privileged groups experience themselves as normal and superior, while having access to cultural and institutional power. While McIntosh's work has been instrumental in catalyzing academic and social discourse to focus on dominant groups, Black and Stone (2005) argued that explorations of privilege have historically focused on race and gender. They propose a more all-encompassing term called "social privilege," which they describe as "any entitlement, sanction, power, immunity, and advantage or right granted or conferred by the dominant group to a person or group solely by birth-right membership in prescribed identities" (p. 245). This conceptualization of privilege expands beyond race and gender to include additional domains such as sexual orientation, social class, age, ability, and religion. Using their proposition of social privilege, Black, Stone, Hutchinson, and

Suarez (2007) developed a social privilege measure, which incorporates multiple dimensions of identity. Given that an exploration of multiracial privilege breaks bounds of traditional conceptions of racial privilege as white, we also find it relevant to draw upon the concept of identity salience and Jones and McEwan's (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI).

Identity Salience and Multiple Dimensions of Identity

The MMDI has been a widely used framework in higher education literature and is helpful in depicting an individual's conception of identities at any given point in time. The model begins in the center with a core, which represents a person's "inner self" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 82) and characteristics that are unique to that person. Surrounding the core are multiple social identities that are shown as intersecting rings, like portrayals of atoms. Each social identity has its own distinctive ring around the core. On each ring is a dot that represents the saliency of that identity, with dots that are closer to the core indicating a higher degree of identity salience. Finally, the model recognizes the impacts of contextual influences on an individual's conception of multiple identities. Context can refer to a person's immediate environment, history, or even broader sociohistorical occurrences.

In an application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to the MMDI, Jones, Abes, and Quaye (2013) proposed a version of the MMDI that centers race as core and salient to individuals' identities, and racism as a key context and filter for meaning making. Similar to the original MMDI, the CRT-MMDI also conceptualizes race as a singular ring, which may not capture the complexities of race for multiracial students.

Applied to multiraciality, we argue that multiracial identity is its own distinct ring in MMDI. For example, a person who is Asian and white may have two separate rings for each identity, and a third distinct ring that represents the person's multiraciality.

The degree to which that person's Asian, white, or multiracial identity is salient is dependent on the specific context and immediate environment that they are in. In this study, the examination of social privilege is intended to focus intently on that multiracial ring and distinguish it from monoracial rings that have historically been perceived as privileged or oppressed.

While this study aims to explore a potentially new form of privilege in multiraciality, past research on white privilege and male privilege can help provide identity analogies (Tran & Johnston-Guerrero, 2016) to support the understanding of less understood identities. This section offers a brief perspective on prior conceptualizations of privilege as invisible, about dominance, and contextual. Studies have also focused on developing awareness and responsibility on a part of those who hold privilege.

Privilege as Invisible, About Dominance, and Contextual

Numerous past studies on white privilege in the collegiate context (e.g., Ashe, 2012; Cabrera, 2012; Ropers-Huilman et al., 2013) have drawn upon McIntosh's (1988) depiction of privilege as an "invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks" (p. 1). Individuals who experience white and/or male privilege are seldom conscious of the ways that they benefit from social, political,

and economic systems that favor them, often because they rarely have to think about their race or gender. Even from a young age, white youth minimize their race and often identify as cultureless (Perry, 2001), which is likely to carry over into the collegiate context.

This minimization of race has been found to be the case for college students. For instance, race was an insignificant factor before and during college for white students at Catholic women's colleges (Ropers-Huilman et al., 2013). These students mainly understood their whiteness in relation to interactions with those who are not white. Given such dynamics of race for white students, it may be possible that multiracial people follow similar patterns regarding their multiracial identity. Multiracial students may potentially view their race as an insignificant factor in their lives (Johnston, Pizzolato, & Kanny, 2015), and are also potentially making sense of their race in relation to their interactions with other racial groups.

This sense of lacking culture among white students may not adequately capture all perspectives, as the minimization of race for white college students may just be a cover for deep-seeded racism. Cabrera (2014) found that white, male college students in his study often heard and told racist jokes, rationalized such jokes as not racist, and only told these jokes among other white people because they believed People of Color to be too sensitive. Given the ways that multiracial people negotiate their racial identity amongst different racial groups, these moments may serve as points of conflict for those who may be able to pass as white (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). They may not always be seen as a racial-other, and thus be exposed to white racism that specifically exists within white in-groups.

Therefore, although passing as white can be viewed as a form of privilege for multiracial people, it can also be a source of marginalization in these contexts. Furthermore, they may even find themselves participating or condoning such racist behaviors.

Engaging in oppressive behaviors can be considered a display of dominance and superiority, which extends into dimensions beyond race. In Martin's (2012) study of college students at highly selective, private universities, they found students at such institutions typically came from affluent upbringings but were often masked through cultural and economic class fractions. These students tended to be able to spend more time on social and recreational activities compared to middle- and lower-income students who needed to work part-time jobs to financially support their education. Because class is often seen as an indicator of privilege, it may be something that multiracial students' reference when asked about privilege.

The institutional context also plays an important role in shaping how students experience privilege. In Renn's (2004) ecological investigation into multiracial identity, multiple contexts were key factors, including how porous racial group boundaries were on campus, as well as the existence of a critical mass of mixed-race students on campus. In Bowman and Small's (2010) study exploring Christian privilege, the authors found that Christian students primarily benefited in greater spiritual development if the institution they attended aligned with their own religion. Christian students at secular institutions did not experience any difference in spiritual development compared to religious minority students. This study speaks to the importance of the context of the immediate

environment as proposed by the MMDI. Contexts where multiraciality is more prominent may help make multiracial identity more salient for students, which was evidenced in Renn's (2004) multicampus study of mixed race students.

Developing Awareness of Privilege and Teaching Responsibility

While racist thoughts and behaviors are still prevalent amongst white students, there are also those who have demonstrated an awareness that with white privilege comes the responsibility and ability to affect social change. Ropers-Huilman and colleagues (2013) found this in their study, as several of their white women participants engaged in discourses of responsibility and transformation. Similarly, Cabrera (2012) found that some white college men were able to acknowledge the negative impacts of race, identify their white privilege, and even take action steps to work towards racial justice. For developing students, it is likely their collegiate experience that activates this sense of personal responsibility and connects it to the ways that they hold privilege in the world. As Ropers-Huilman and colleagues (2013) articulated, "awareness of whiteness is invisible until prompted" (p. 46).

One approach that has been found to help develop an awareness of privilege is college curricula. Case (2007) found that students who enroll in diversity and women's studies courses experienced an increased awareness of male privilege and support for affirmative action. Similarly, intergroup dialogues on religion have been found to increase students' thinking and learning on Christian privilege (Hoefle, 2014). Ford and Malaney (2012) found that multiracial students participating in inter- and intragroup dialogues gained more pride

in their racial identities, partially through identifying systems of privilege. As Cabrera (2012) noted in his study, one of his white, male participants cited his communications major as a source of white racial awareness development. Through the participant's studies, he became conscious of the ways that media can reinforce negative racial stereotypes and was able to become a more critical consumer of media. These studies invite us to consider a "chicken and egg conundrum." If multiracial students are not exposed to different questions about multiraciality, how likely is it that they will be able to articulate perspectives on multiracial privilege when asked? However, if they do, it would be important to capture where their ideas and beliefs come from.

Methodology

Although this study built upon previous, larger studies on college student identity development in line with theoretical sampling and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), the current study looks specifically at a sample of 16 multiracial college students or recent graduates and the role of privilege in their constructions of identity.

Sample

We recruited the sample of 16 multiracial students using email and flyers from student organizations, cultural centers, and various listservs at one large public research university located in the U.S. Midwest. The campus was predominately white and had a large undergraduate student population (over 30,000). During the time of data collection, the campus was in the beginning stages of developing a new mixed-race student organization, after a former organization dissolved several years prior. The campus has a prominent multicultural resource center with varied

levels of engagement of multiraciality within its programs and services, somewhat dependent on whether a staff member identified as multiracial and desired to incorporate this population into their role. Interested students responded to recruitment for a study on "multiracial experiences with privilege and oppression." Of the 16 multiracial participants who responded and conducted the interview, 13 were women and 3 were men, including 2 first-years, 6 sophomores, 4 juniors, 3 seniors, and 1 recent graduate. Participant pseudonyms and demographics can be found on Appendix A.

Data Collection

The interviews followed a semi structured interview protocol where the same stem questions were common across participants, while allowing flexibility to follow certain leads individually. The interviews began by asking participants to talk about their postsecondary educational history and experiences, then we asked students to engage in a model-construction activity (see Johnston et al., 2015, for more information) to represent their multidimensional identities as college students, including sorting through terms representing identities, relationships, and contexts common in identity models (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Following construction of their models, we asked the participants to describe their models with follow-up questions to investigate meaning making and elicit further information. We also asked students to reflect upon why certain terms may not have been used in their models. This protocol allowed for an emergent understanding of students' conceptions of race, privilege, and oppression, in line with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). All participants received a $10 gift card as an incentive for participation in the

interviews, which lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

Data Analysis and Epistemologies

Data analysis consisted of three phases. First, we coded transcripts and models for (a) whether or not privilege was included; and (b) how race related to this inclusion of privilege in their models. Second, we developed a coding scheme that was grounded in the experiences and perspectives of our participants and updated the scheme accordingly using constant comparative analysis. Third, we reviewed our codes to consolidate and group major codes into three overarching themes. In this phase we also incorporated components of Critical Mixed Race Studies (Daniel, Kina, Dariotis, & Fojas, 2014) and Multi Crit Theory (Harris, 2016) into our analysis to complicate further where multiracial people fit within larger systems of racial privilege. From this perspective, we felt it was imperative to recognize the legacy of mixed-race people having a privileged social position and that current identity claims by multiracial people may have ramifications for others. It is not enough to say that multiracial people are oppressed, as there must also be a recognition and critical perspective taken to how multiracial people may perpetuate racism (particularly anti-Black racism) and the maintenance of white supremacy (Osei-Kofi, 2012; Spencer, 2011). This critical stance may stand in opposition to our constructivist approach, yet recent scholarship has advanced the possibilities and potential of utilizing both constructivist and critical perspectives in data interpretation (Abes, 2012). Here, we used the tensions between honoring students' words (constructivism) and interpreting them through the lens of critical mixed-race perspectives (critical) as a creative space to generate new knowledge,

particularly in this undeveloped area of multiraciality and privilege.

We also acknowledge how our identities as researchers have influence over both data collection and interpretation. While both authors are Asian American men, they have different ethnic backgrounds (Filipino and Vietnamese) and differ in their identification with the population of interest for this study, with the first author identifying as multiracial (white and Asian) and the second author as monoracial. This aspect of their racial identities may have influenced how participants responded to questions about race and privilege. For instance, participants likely read the first author as an insider when sharing their views on multiraciality. Although the second author is monoracial, he relates into the experience of navigating multiple worlds from a bicultural perspective of being Asian and American. We share this piece of our positionality statement to build in transparency of interpretations. Other methods for assessing the "goodness" of this qualitative research include adhering to our epistemological (constructivist and critical) and methodological (grounded theory) assumptions and working toward consensus as we moved from description to interpretation of the data (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).

Findings

Three themes were found to answer the research questions: (a) naming privilege without much ownership or connection to race; (b) identifying and accessing various forms of multiracial privilege; and (c) reflecting on the responsibilities that come with privilege.

Naming Privilege Without Much

Ownership or Connection to Race

Thirteen of the 16 participants created models of identity in which the term "privilege" showed up in their model. Therefore, participants were naming privilege as important for their sense of who they are; yet this naming of privilege was (a) disconnected to race, or (b) without much ownership. This has been the case with privileged identities being least aware/salient when considering multiple identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000). For instance, Joy discussed how she went through a "privilege walk" type of activity in one of her classes and shared a reflection:

> *It's easier for us to point out our areas of oppression. Like I can sit all day and think about how I'm a Black woman. And, like, all these different things that I would consider oppression. But it's harder to point out your own privilege, so it was helpful for me to be able to see those areas of privilege that I wouldn't really think about, because we always, or I always think about, like, the areas where I'm oppressed.*

Later Joy shared that "I am privileged. I do speak English. I do live here. I do, I am in school. I have the opportunity to receive an education." Similarly, when Joe discussed privilege, it was exclusively in relation to his male privilege. For Joy and others, privilege entered their models of identity but was not necessarily associated with race.

Ellen (Korean/White) mentioned not including the term "privilege" in her model because "I don't feel really privileged in many ways, so I guess I didn't really put that down.… I don't think you can call me

privileged mostly because I don't feel like I've been given anything extra that I didn't earn or deserve, maybe in that sense." Even for those who did include privilege in their model, their awareness of privilege was not always fully formed. As Kiarah shared, "I personally don't really have like the experiences of oppression. So, I would say that I'm privileged in that sense. Not because of race or anything but just because of like socioeconomic status of my family." Similarly, Jamie, who also included privilege in her model, reflected upon the difficulty in identifying what privilege meant for her. She explained that:

I'm surrounded by so many white people and I'm treated the exact same. I don't think that I've felt the need to not feel that privilege. But again, like, privilege is that kind of thing where you don't feel it…. Um, so it's kinda hard to, like, pinpoint exactly how much. I mean, I definitely have access to it, but at the same time, I don't think that anybody's going to come off the street and say, yes, you are 100% white.

Jamie's discussion of having access to white privilege but not necessarily feeling it is an example of how privilege manifests outside of the awareness of the individual.

Like Jamie, Amaya identified this sense of privilege being attached to having access to white privilege. After discussing how in the media, "just like being lighter is better, a lot of people think. Like I see on Instagram and things," Amaya shared:

I do feel like there is a privilege [in being mixed], like with me in the African American community because I'm not fully African

American. So, which makes me kind of sad, like that I am perceived to have that privilege because it's like this whole being light ... lighter is better, the whole "oh you have to be lighter than a brown paper bag" thing.

Here, Amaya brings into scope colorism within the African American community, which she describes as "sad" because of the automatic assumptions of what privileges she has based on her skin color. Yet, this identifying of others ascribing this privilege to her still disconnects her from owning any lighter-skin privilege. These participants demonstrated the naming of privilege in different forms, but the difficulties in owning that privilege.

Identifying and Accessing Various Forms of Multiracial Privilege

Amaya's quote above connects to the second theme focused on how participants identified various forms of privilege attached to multiraciality. For most participants, these forms took on either (a) accessing white privilege due to their multiracial background, or (b) having the "best of both worlds." Moreover, these forms of privilege were discussed in how participants accessed them, often only temporarily.

Temporarily accessing white privilege. When white privilege was discussed, it was largely in terms of phenotype, or how one looked physically. As Anna described, "I'm not white but I, well, I am white, but I do get white privilege. It's just that weird, like I don't know how to describe it, but I do get white privilege that's up at the top [of the model] because once again just looking at me that's

easy to tell." This sense of white privilege being attached to how one looks was echoed by Sara when she explained:

> *I feel like a lot of the issues that we see from white privilege is the fact that you get it if you look it. So even people who aren't like European, if they look white, they still get called white and get white privilege, but then like there is us who are mixed who don't necessarily look more European, so we wouldn't automatically be boxed into like the whole white privilege category. Like, I'll have jokes with my roommate about like, like her white privilege, and like we're joking, it is not like any animosity, but then she'll, I'll be like, "Oh, but I can't have that, because like I'm not blond-haired, blue-eyed," kind of thing. So, yeah, I definitely feel like you have to look the part to get the privilege, which not very fair.*

Sara, who identified as Asian and white, recognized these dynamics of how some multiracial people can look white, but that she did not have white privilege because she herself did not look white. There was no middle ground in her explanation. You either have white privilege or you don't.

However, other participants identified the effects of differential racialization and how privilege attached to skin color operates differently within various communities, particularly in relation to anti-Blackness and for those who are dual minorities. Jessica discussed how, "in the Black community, being mixed is considered better. Anything farther from being coal and black is considered better."

Jessica explained further how:

> *mixed Black people get the good side of everything, they're automatically considered more beautiful. In relation to jobs ... they're half white, so it must be better than someone who is more Black ... in the system of America anything closer to white is better.*

However, Marc shared how even though he was mixed, he did not have the same access to white privilege. He reflected upon how his experiences with oppression were:

> *rooted from being mixed African American. Because if you have like a mixed kid who's let's say white and, I don't know, like white, Puerto Rican ... he's not going to get treated the same within society just because the way society is structured, and the way we judge people, and treat people based on their skin color. And obviously like his skin color is not going to be the same as someone, let's say, like me who's mixed with Black and Indian.*

Skin color seemed to be the mediating factor establishing whether someone believed they had privilege attached to race. However, as Marc's quote shows, you can be multiracial without being white, or gaining more access to whiteness. The uniqueness of being multiracial and having privileges outside of whiteness was connected to the trope of having the "best of both worlds."

Accessing multiple cultures and viewpoints. When participants discussed privileges associated with having the "best

of both worlds," it was distinguished as an individual level of privilege and not something more societally given/granted. Kendra shared:

> *I would say, to mixed people there is [privilege], because we have kind of the best of both worlds in some cases. ... Depending on who it is, like I said, I'm mixed with white, so I kind of get that kind of privilege of being white, but also the diversity in culture of being of a minority background.... I think that's kind of nice to be able to see both viewpoints either way, especially on these arguments that seem like they're pitting the two against each other, and I can kind of see both sides, kind of see what's going on even though most people are like, "oh, oh no, the white people are doing that, and the Mexicans are doing that.*

For Kendra, this individual privilege was in her own ability to navigate multiple worlds and see from multiple perspectives. Similarly, Sara shared how she benefited in terms of diversity:

> *I think there is a lot of privilege in being mixed in terms of you learn from like the start about diversity, and inclusion kind of. I mean, again, that can just be from like my specific background, but I know, um, like I could relate a lot better to, um, or a lot more to people of just even different cultures because I grew up understanding that there are two, like at least, at the minimum, there are two different cultures, and they can co-exist*

kind of thing. So, I think there is a lot privilege in terms of that. In terms of societal privilege, I don't think there is too much, but like self-privilege.

Sara specifically names this "self-privilege" as distinct from societal or systemic forms of privilege. Yet the notion of "best of both worlds" remains.

These claims about both worlds were connected to culture and, to a lesser extent, ideas about gene pools associated with human groupings. Like the examples shared by Kendra and Sara above, Joe discussed about how much he appreciated having two cultures from his mother and father when he shared, "my mom is West African, and my dad is African American. … I was brought up with both cultures." Yet, Sara took it one step further by connecting the "worlds" to genetics:

> *The one thing I was going to say… about like privilege in terms of being mixed, the first thing that came to my mind was like, genetic privilege because there is the whole like science-based part of like how being mixed is like the best of both worlds because your genetic like, your DNA is just like more spread out. ... I don't know how to put this more scientifically, but like you get genes from both sides so like you're more protected against like diseases and like all like those kinds of things that you see a lot of, I guess particularly in like solely like one ethnic-based like, or racial based, um, culture. There's that.*

These notions connect to antiquated and problematic ideas of "hybrid vigor" (Daniel et al., 2014), yet the jumbling of race, ethnicity, and culture in Sara's final statement demonstrate the difficulties in trying to identify in which types of human populations specific genes are predominantly found.

Reflecting on the Responsibilities That Come with Privilege

The first two themes related to the difficulties in owning privilege and whether those privileges were associated with whiteness or mixedness, which connect to the third theme. Similar to past studies on white privilege (Cabrera, 2012; Ropers-Huilman et al., 2013), participants reflected differently on the responsibilities that came with privilege, even though it was not always related to race. Those who saw privilege mostly in terms of social class, nationality, or being college educated, saw any responsibilities to either the self or to society broadly. Alice demonstrated this most clearly when she shared her focus on self-development:

I know there is that one, not proverb, but you know… it just says, "Know Thyself." And I just consider that very important. … I just try to know what type of person I am, and I consider like my personality traits or like what I believe in or like the things that I choose to do as more telling than like what–like not stigmas, but like certain things attached to being a certain race.

Alice associated privilege with her parents paying for her study abroad trips and how "there are so many people, even among my friends, who are privileged that don't

have that opportunity." Further, her inclusion of privilege in her model of identity spoke directly to her study abroad experiences in South America and China where she was able to recognize her privileged lifestyle and freedoms as an American. These experiences influenced her decision to pursue a career in international relations.

Those participants who discussed privilege in relation to whiteness and identified how they gained from white privilege felt a responsibility to educate others. Anna shared how she joined a multicultural sorority where:

We've had a couple of things, where we were just trying to educate people on white privilege. We are like, "yes it isn't something that like people want, but you can't change the way it is" just because I can do certain things because I look white. Like, I'm not going to get shot just because I'm like in a dark alley like with my hook-up, especially with Ferguson, it's something we've been having active discussions about this because, yes, we don't know what happened, but that is a very like real thing.

Anna further described how people tend to "clam up" or "get super awkward" in these kinds of conversations, and how "that's what I want to understand. I want to be able to have an open conversation."

This sense of responsibility was taken to the next level by Sarah, who named the obligation she felt multiracial people have to advocate for their less privileged group. As she expressed:

Those who have privilege are obligated to use that privilege to further the part of them that is not and the part of the group that they belong to that is not, have that same privilege. So, like it's harder for people who are mixed minorities because that's just like a double like you're kind of, that's like, that's sucks kind of almost because like there is no part of you that like has a foothold in that like majority privileged group. Um, unless of course you're in a, unless you're in a situation in which one of your minorities is privileged.

Although Sarah was an outlier in this sense of responsibility, it is clear that the multiracial student participants were thinking not only about where they fit within larger racial hierarchies but also what they should do with that placement.

Discussion

As we began our introduction to this study with a thought exercise on potential privileges attached with multiraciality, we begin this discussion returning to our original provocative questions: Is the ability to relate to multiple racial groups something that can be considered a privilege? If so, is that something that multiracial college students claim as a type of privilege? Moreover, are there other types of privileges that come with being multiracial? The findings from this study shed light on answering these questions but also prompt further questions. We explore these issues and connect to previous literature below.

The trope of having the "best of both worlds" was apparent for the multiracial

college student participants in this study, with several using that language verbatim. Yet, it was not always claimed as a "privilege." As the findings suggest, privilege was difficult to claim or own, and when it was claimed, it was often associated with privileges outside of race, specifically socioeconomic status, nationality and language, and being college educated—to name a few. The cultural currency gained by having access to multiple cultures or having had to take on multiple viewpoints early in life, was named as a privilege for several multiracial students, but this was distinguished as a self-privilege versus something at the group or societal level.

When we compare this to the components of privilege identified by McIntosh (1988) and Goodman (2011), the ability to access multiple cultures or see multiple viewpoints does not seem to align. Based on participants' perspectives, such privileges do not have a detrimental effect or disadvantage for those who are not multiracial, nor are multiracial people seen as the norm in society.

However, one form of privilege that was consistently discussed and aligns with the literature was white privilege. Therefore, we pose the question: Does multiracial privilege depend on having access to white privilege? Although several participants clearly mentioned how they could pass as white and they understood how they benefited from white privilege, there was less understanding of any specific form of multiracial privilege. These findings suggest various processes for sensemaking about what multiracial privilege could look like.

Recognizing multiracial privilege centered around two main types: (a) accessing white privilege for those that focused more on phenotype and its relation

to identity, and (b) accessing multiple cultures or viewpoints for those who focused more on cultural identity. Although culture also relates to white privilege, participants tended to see whiteness connected more to how one looks. These types of multiracial privilege related to how students reflected on their responsibilities but differed in terms of how they were educating themselves and others (in terms of white privilege) or building bridges across their heritage groups, since they seemingly had more access to the cultures to make such connections happen.

Additionally, participants were able to speak about white privilege whether such privilege was associated with their own skin color or physical appearance. Like Marc's quote in the findings suggests, multiracial people are diverse and include non-white multiracial peoples who will not have the same access to whiteness and white privilege as those multiracial people who have white racial identities. Recent scholarship has illuminated the unique experiences of non-white multiracial peoples (e.g., Rondilla, Guevarra, & Spickard, 2017; Washington, 2015, 2017). The findings from this study also bring into light the importance of identifying how differential racialization occurs and influences (or does not) students' understanding of (multi)racial identity (Harris, 2016). Although several Asian/white participants who could not pass as white identified how they do not have white privilege, they also did not identify how they benefit from anti-Black racism, or not being Black. This study complicates the common understanding about privilege being a zero-sum game, that you either have it or you don't. For participants in this study, privilege was often seen with temporality, including accessing various forms of privilege at different points in their lives and different situations.

Additionally, the MMDI (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000) adds another layer of depth to our understanding of multiraciality and privilege. Participants in this study bring attention to the relativity and temporality of identity saliency and the ways it affects students' awareness of privilege. Experiencing the "best of two worlds" connotes that students are navigating numerous spaces where the saliency of their identities constantly shifts. Multiracial students who have some degree of access to white privilege may have a dormant awareness of privilege in predominantly white spaces. However, it is more likely that multiracial students become cognizant of their Person-of-Color status in these settings, and perhaps are less likely to view themselves as privileged. Inversely, these same students may find their sense of privilege heightened when they are in Student-of-Color spaces. Moreover, multiracial students may be continuing to minimize their multiracial identity and finding themselves conforming to racial binaries, or monoracialism (Johnston-Guerrero & Renn, 2016). With multiraciality as an understudied concept, there remains a tendency for students to discuss privilege in terms of white identity, likely given its increasing focus in the literature and in diversity and social justice education.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

There are several limitations to this study that must be noted. The relatively small sample of multiracial students from a single, predominately white public research university in the U.S. Midwest who self-selected to participate in this study all influence the transferability of the findings to different populations and campuses. For instance, multiracial students that are not

involved on campus or those who claim a monoracial identity and would not have had access to recruitment materials might view privilege very differently. Additionally, multiracial students at other institutional types—for instance, community colleges or Minority Serving Institutions—might frame their identities and understandings of privilege from a more critical standpoint. The methods, while innovative for identifying how privilege manifests for multiracial students' multiple identities, included modeling procedures that took a broader rather than specific approach to the concepts of interest. We had limited time and attention to go into further depth about any identity when trying to capture them all. Future studies could more intentionally and deeply explore experiences with privilege among multiracial students.

As this study was the first that we could identify to specifically examine privilege within the multiracial experience, future studies could more deeply investigate and distinguish differences between white privilege influencing multiracial identity versus when multiraciality itself is a source of privilege. Potential areas for this line of inquiry include whether there is privilege in "looking mixed." As a recent blogpost argued, "[M]ost people have an image of what 'Mixed' should look like.… Those who don't fit that description may find our racial status in dispute.…" (Rosenberg, 2017, para. 2). Perhaps looking racially ambiguous allows one the privilege of claiming a multiracial identity without question. Further, asking critical questions like, "What is the source of multiracial privilege?" could also be an important area of future research. Instead of critiquing multiracial persons as benefiting from whiteness, perhaps the focus of future scholarship could explore the sources of

privilege emanating from both white supremacy and monoracialism.

Implications for Practice

The multiracial college student participants in this study could identify several important contexts that helped them gain awareness of privilege. Similar to findings from Case (2007) and Hoefle (2014), classes like the one mentioned by Joy where a privilege walk activity was facilitated were helpful avenues for development. However, Joy mentioned that multiraciality was not a part of such activity. Practitioners need to actively include multiraciality in nuanced ways in these types of pedagogical practices, particularly around privilege. As more attention is paid to monoracism as a system of oppression targeting multiracial people, we must also make room for ways in which multiracial people may be privileged. A useful model for understanding how students explore privileged identities has been offered by Watt (2007). The Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) model (Watt, 2007) identifies eight defense mechanisms students may engage when put in situations to explore their privileged identities. Although the privileged identities identified by Watt were "racial (White) … sexual (Heterosexual), gender (Male), and abilities (Able-bodied)" (p. 118), more attention can be given to breaking down the "racial" privileges to incorporate multiracial students. For multiracial students, claiming a particular identity that places them in a position of advantage may provide an opportunity for increased awareness of a certain type of privilege associated with that dimension of their identity, perhaps for one of the first times. As students internally explore, negotiate, and choose their racial identities, there may be experiences of cognitive dissonance and induced feelings

about who they are or who they externally appear to be (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008). More of these spaces are needed in higher education toward dismantling the privileges that maintain racial hierarchies.

[1] We use the terms multiracial and mixed race interchangeably. There are also no agreed upon conventions for capitalizing racial terms.

Appendix A

Table 1: Participant pseudonyms and demographics

Participant	Race	Heritage	Sex	Year	Major
Alice	Black & White	Black/White	F	Sophomore	International Studies
Amaya	Black & White	Black/White	F	Sophomore	Accounting
Anna	Mixed Race	Black/White	F	Senior	Engineering
Derrick	Biracial	Black/White	M	Recent Grad	Communications
Ellen	Mixed	Korean/White	F	Senior	International Studies
Jamie	Taiwanese	Taiwanese, ½ white	F	Sophomore	Engineering
Jessica	Black	Black/White/ Native	F	Sophomore	Engineering
Joe	[blank]	Cape Verdean & African American	M	Sophomore	Sports Management
Joy	Black & White	Black/White	F	Junior	Social Work
Katie	Mixed	White & Japanese	F	First-Year	Pre-Nursing
Kendra	Mixed	Mexican/White	F	Junior	Communications
Kiarah	Biracial	Black/Asian (Filipina)	F	Senior	Entomology
Marc	Black-Mixed	Black/Indian	M	Junior	Economics
Olivia	Biracial	Black/White	F	Junior	Health Sciences
Sara	Asian & White	Taiwanese/British	F	First-Year	Psychology
Sarah	Mixed	Korean/Jewish	F	Sophomore	Communications

References

Abes, E. S. (2012). Constructivist and intersectional interpretations of a lesbian college student's multiple social identities. *Journal of Higher Education, 83*(2), 186 – 216.

Abes, E. S., Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2007). Reconceptualizing the model of multiple dimensions of identity: The role of meaning-making capacity in the construction of multiple identities. *Journal of College Student Development*, *48*(1), 1 – 22.

Arminio, J. L., & Hultgren, F. H. (2002). Breaking out from the shadow: The question of criteria in qualitative research. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*(4), 446 – 460.

Ashe, S. (2012). *Whiteness: A narrative analysis on student affairs professionals, race, identity, and multicultural competency* (unpublished dissertation, University of Southern California, Los Angeles). Retrieved from: https://search.proquest.com/docview/1288825528

Baker, A. R., & Taylor, K. B. (2016, November). *Examining the role of discomfort in collegiate learning and development*. Scholarly paper presented at the 2016 Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Conference, Columbus, OH.

Black, L. L., & Stone, D. (2005). Expanding the definition of privilege: The concept of social privilege. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *33*, 243 – 255.

Black, L. L., Stone, D., Hutchinson, S., & Suarez, E. (2007). The development and validation of the social privilege measure. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, *40*(1), 16 – 33.

Bowman, N. A., & Small, J. L. (2010). Do college students who identify with a privileged religion experience greater spiritual development? Exploring individual and institutional dynamics. *Research in Higher Education*, *51*(7), 595 – 614.

Cabrera, N. L. (2012). Working through whiteness: White, male college students challenging racism. *The Review of Higher Education*, *35*(3), 375 – 401.

Cabrera, N. L. (2014). But we're not laughing: White male college students' racial joking and what this says about" post-racial" discourse. *Journal of college student development*, *55*(1), 1 – 15.

Case, K. A. (2007). Raising white privilege awareness and reducing racial prejudice: Assessing diversity course effectiveness. *Teaching of Psychology*, *34*(4), 231 – 235.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Chaudhari, P., & Pizzolato, J. E. (2008). Understanding the epistemology of ethnic identity

development in multiethnic college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(5), 443 – 458.

Crawford, S. E., & Alaggia, R. (2008). The best of both worlds? Family influences on mixed race youth identity development. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice, 7*, 81 – 98. doi:10.1177/1473325007086417

Csizmadia, A., Brunsma, D. L., & Cooney, T. M. (2012). Racial identification and developmental outcomes among Black–White multiracial youth: A review from a life course perspective. *Advances in Life Course Research*, *17*(1), 34 – 44.

Daniel, G. R., Kina, L., Dariotis, W. M., & Fojas, C. (2014). Emerging paradigms in critical mixed-race studies. *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies, 1*(1), 6 – 65.

Ford, K. A., & Malaney, V. R. (2012). "I now harbor more pride in my race": The educational benefits of inter- and intraracial dialogues on the experiences of students of color and multiracial students. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(1), 14 – 35.

Goodman, D. J. (2011). *Promoting diversity and social justice: Educating people from privileged groups.* New York: Routledge.

Guillermo-Wann, C. (2010, November). *A post-racial era? Multiracial microaggressions in the campus racial climate.* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Indianapolis, IN.

Hamako, E. (2014). *Improving anti-racist education for multiracial students*. (Unpublished dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst). Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/

Hardiman, R. & Jackson, B. (2007). Conceptual foundations for social justice education. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, & P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice,* 2d ed. New York: Routledge.

Harris, J. C. (2016). Toward a critical multiracial theory in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *29*(6), 795 – 813.

Herman, M. (2004). Forced to choose: Some determinants of racial identification in multi-racial adolescents. *Child Development, 75*, 730 – 748.

Hoefle, S. N. (2014). *Engaging differences of religious belief: Student experiences with an intergroup dialogue course* (Unpublished dissertation, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH). Retrieved from: https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/he_diss/56/

Howard-Hamilton, M. F., & Hinton, K. G. (2016). Oppression and its effect on college student identity development. In M. J. Cuyjet, C. Linder, M. Howard-Hamilton, & D. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Multiculturalism on campus: Theory, models, and practices for understanding*

diversity and creating inclusion, 2nd ed. (pp. 22 – 39). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Hurtado, S., Alvarez, C., Guillermo-Wann, C., Cuellar, M., and Arellano, L. (2012). A model for diverse learning environments: The scholarship on creating and assessing conditions for student success. In J. C. Smart & M. B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research, 27* (pp. 41 – 19). New York, NY: Springer.

Johnston, M. P., & Nadal, K. L. (2010). Multiracial microaggressions: Exposing monoracism in everyday life and clinical practice. In D. W. Sue (Ed.), *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact* (pp. 123 – 144). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Johnston, M. P., Pizzolato, J. E., & Kanny, M. A. (2015). Examining the significance of "race" in college students' identity within a "post-racial" era. *Journal of College Student Development, 56*(3), 227 – 242.

Johnston-Guerrero, M. P., & Renn, K. A. (2016). Multiracial Americans in college. In K. O. Korgen (Ed.), *Race policy and multiracial Americans* (pp. 139 – 154). Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Jones, S. R., & Abes, E. S. (2013). *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Jones, S. R., Abes, E. S., & Quaye, S. J. (2013). Critical race theory. In S. R. Jones & E. S. Abes (Eds.) *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity* (pp. 166 – 190). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
.
Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, *41*(4), 405 – 414.

Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues*, 2d ed. New York: Routledge.

Martin, N. D. (2012). The privilege of ease: Social class and campus life at highly selective, private universities. *Research in Higher Education*, *53*, 426 – 452.

McIntosh, P. (1988). *A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies*. Working Paper 189, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA.

Olumide, J. (2002). *Raiding the gene pool: The social construction of mixed race.* London, UK: Pluto Press.

Osei-Kofi, N. (2012). Identity, fluidity, and groupism: The construction of multiraciality in education discourse. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, *34*(5), 245 –

257.

Patton, L. D., Harper, S. R., & Harris, J. (2015). Using critical race theory to (re)interpret widely studied topics related to students in U.S. higher education. In A. M. Martinez-Aleman, B. Pusser, & E. M. Bensimon (Eds.), *Critical approaches to the study of higher education* (pp. 193 – 219). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Perry, P. (2001). White means never having to say you're ethnic: White youth and the construction of "cultureless" identities. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *30*(1), 56 – 91.

Pinterits, E. J., Poteat, V. P., & Spanierman, L. B. (2009). The white privilege attitudes scale: Development and initial validation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *56*(3), 417 – 429. Renn, K. A. (2004). *Mixed race students in college: The ecology of race, identity, and community on campus.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Renn, K. A., & Johnston-Guerrero, M. P. (2016). Biracial and multiracial college students. In M. J. Cuyjet, C. Linder, M. Howard-Hamilton, & D. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Multiculturalism on campus: Theory, models, and practices for understanding diversity and creating inclusion* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 186 – 207). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Reynolds, A. L., & Pope, R. L. (1991). The complexities of diversity: Exploring multiple oppressions. *Journal of Counseling and development*, *70*(1), 174 – 180.

Rondilla, J. L., Guevarra, R. P., & Spickard, P. (Eds.) (2017). *Red and yellow, black and brown: Decentering whiteness in mixed race studies.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Ropers-Huilman, R., Winters, K. T., & Enke, K. A. E. (2013). Discourses of whiteness: White students at Catholic women's colleges (dis)engaging race. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *84*(1), 28 – 55.

Rosenberg, L. (2017, April 6). Ask Lisa: Racial status in dispute [blogpost]. Retrieved from http://multiracialmedia.com/racial-status-in-dispute/

Spencer, R. (2011). *Reproducing race: The paradox of generation mix.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, Inc.

Stonequist, E. V. (1937). *The marginal man: A study in personality and culture conflict.* New York: Russell & Russell.

Tran, V. T., & Johnston-Guerrero, M. P. (2016). Is transracial the same as transgender? The utility and limitations of identity analogies in multicultural education. *Multicultural Perspectives*, *18*(3), 134 – 139.

Washington, M. (2015). "Because I'm blasian": Tiger Woods, scandal, and protecting the blasian

brand. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, *8*(4), 522 – 539.

Washington, M. S. (2017). *Blasian invasion: Racial mixing in the celebrity industrial complex*. Jackston, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Watt, S. K. (2007). Difficult dialogues, privilege and social justice: Uses of the privileged identity exploration (PIE) model in student affairs practice. *College student affairs journal*, *26*(2), 114.

Yen, H. (2012, February 16). Interracial marriage in the US climbs to new high, study finds. *The Huffington Post* [online]. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/16/interracial-marriage-in-us_n_1281229.html