Article

Studying "Mixed Race": Reflections on Methodological Practice

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Abstract

In this article, I reflexively consider how three experiences from conducting an interview project with Canadian young adults of mixed race can lead to questions about methodological practice in "mixed race" research. These three experiences also have implications for theorizing mixed race identity. First, in the study, respondents complicated their hailing (Althusser, 2000) as mixed race through responding to a recruitment ad that used that term, but revealed in the interview that they did not actually self-identify as mixed race. Second, the space of the interview enabled me to ask respondents probing questions to "think through" the operation of race in their everyday lives. Third, the complex dynamic of "insider/outsider" between the respondents and myself (through my own identity as mixed race) was foregrounded throughout the research process, signaling *complex commonalities* between the researcher and research participants.

Keywords: mixed race identity, hailing, recruitment, interviews, insider/outsider, complex commonalities

How methodological insights from researcher experiences can themselves be research findings are encapsulated in various definitions of reflexivity and in the qualitative methodology literature (Caballero, 2014; Dunn, 2009; Finlay, 2002; Markham, 2005; Mahtani, 2012; Song & Parker, 1995). In this article, I reflexively consider three methodological insights that stem from conducting a study of young adults of mixed race, which enabled me to consider what can and cannot be assumed about mixed race research, and assisted in theorizing mixed race identity itself. In other words, methodological and research findings are intertwined. The methodological insights presented are a reflection on insights garnered from conducting an original research study. The insights reflect how my understanding as a researcher was changed through the research process, which can also inform the field of study of mixed race identity itself.

The first methodological insight stems from using a term that is perceived with ambivalence by study respondents in the recruitment ad, which complicates how respondents are "called into being" research participants. In the interviews it became evident that participants often do not directly identify with or deploy the term mixed race, even though they had directly responded to a call for participation for mixed race people**.** This seeming contradiction led to insights about the relationship between recognition and repudiation of mixed race as an identity category. Second, the situation of the interview worked as an open invitation to respondents to "think through" what is behind the questioning people of mixed race are subject to from others in their everyday lives (i.e., "what are you?"). A rationale that "others are just curious" (what I term the *curiosity narrative*) was drawn on by respondents to explain (and dismiss) this questioning. Yet the ability to ask respondents probing questions, enabled by the space of the interview, encouraged respondents to "think through" the normalization of questioning and racialized power dynamics at work in their lives. This probing space helped to theorize the operation of race discourse in Canada through people of mixed race and their own discussion of race (or lack of) in the interview. Third, the complex dynamic of "insider/outsider" between respondents and myself (when we reputedly share a common identity of mixed race) was highlighted throughout the research process, from respondent recruitment to our interactions during the interview. From this finding I argue for a recognition of *complex commonalities* between mixed race researchers and mixed race respondents, extending the theorization of a commonality of experience among people of mixed race, while moving away from the dichotomous approach of theorizing the researcher as insider/outsider.

This article will explore the three methodological insights in the order described above, but first I will provide a brief description of the study that was conducted and the methods behind the study from which the methodological insights stem.

Study Background and Research Method

Race discourse is a complex area. For the purpose of the project I use the term mixed race to refer to people who are of a mixed racial background, which I define as people whose biological parents are from different racialized groups, meaning, "socially defined racial groups" (Streeter, 1996, p. 316). For example, this could be a person who has one parent who is socially marked as White and one parent who is socially marked as non-White, or a person whose parents are both socially marked as non-White, but from different racialized groups (while recognizing that the very idea of a "racialized group" is historically and socially variable—context dependent and contested). The use of the terms White and non-White may be objectionable to some. For instance, it could be argued that by using the term non-White one privileges the term White, making it the norm against which all other groups are measured (James, 2001). However, by using White it is not my intention to privilege the term. The term White, which has been used in mixed race scholarship as a point of reference, in that research on mixed race identity has been largely focused on individuals with White and Black parentage. It is my intention to disrupt this and capture a more diverse range of experiences. Furthermore, other scholars have argued that

using the term White is useful in that it denotes the existence of power relations at work in our society. For instance, Mukherjee (2001) states: "I use the term 'non-white' in order to talk about the binary relationship of power in which 'white' is the dominant term" (p. 214). Some may argue that studying mixed race reifies the socially constructed category of race and essentializes racial identities. Thinking about "mixedness" and considering it as a topic of study is fraught, in that the very phenomena of study ("mixing") takes on meaning through socially constructed and historically informed categories. It is racialized imaginaries that give "mixedness" meaning and also impact how people who are positioned as "mixed" according to these racialized imaginaries themselves understand and narrate their identities. Additionally, the politics of identity in Canada are formed in an officially multicultural context, and race is socially produced in relation to multiculturalism, which a well-established literature addresses and theorizes (Bannerji, 2000; Elliot & Fleras, 2002; Mackey, 2002).

Within Canadian multicultural discourse, there are constant slippages between the terms race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and blood. These different forces are often read next to each other, stand in for each other, and become implicated in one another. Race, ethnicity, and culture are represented in particular ways in the Canadian context, and this in turn mediates how people come to understand their own and each others' identities. As Mahtani (2002a) states, "within the Canadian context, the concept of racialised ethnicities (as opposed to race) has figured largely regarding questions of identity for Canadians" (p. 71). This is reflected in how this study's respondents narrated their identities and how others approach and question the study respondent's identities.

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 19 young adults of mixed race in a Western Canadian urban context between the fall of 2009 and the fall of 2010. This article is focused on three methodological insights stemming from this study, for which I will now provide a brief background description. The study was focused on considering the experiences of mixed race people when asked the question "what are you?" in their encounters with others (co-workers, customers, teachers, friends, and strangers), and how they narrate their identities during these interactions. The study theorized these "everyday" interactions as signaling processes of racialization by the external racial gaze based on the frameworks of Fanon (1967) and Hall (1990) and phenomenological and everyday racism frameworks (Alcoff, 2006; Essed, 2002). The original project received approval through the ethical review board of a university and informed consent was obtained from interviewees. All names have been changed, except for participants who were adamant that their names be used to represent their narratives. In these cases extra care was taken to ensure no harmful information was shared.

The 19 research participants were recruited through word of mouth and snowball sampling, as well as through various university department, student association, and student organization e-mail lists. Recruitment ended once data saturation was reached in the interview narratives. Respondents ranged in age from 21–32 and were Canadian born. This helped to manage the range of the study, in that interviewees were from a particular historical cohort: one that grew up in an officially multicultural and increasingly diverse Canada. The interviews were semi-structured in format. This model enabled me to ask the questions that I wanted to, but was flexible and open ended and allowed respondents to talk about their experiences in whichever way they felt comfortable.

As I systematically coded the interviews for themes, I found particular patterns: first, how respondents did not self-identify (respondents did not identify as mixed race despite this being the term used in the call for participants); second, I found patterns in how respondents thought about the "what are you?" question (respondents talked about the questioning that they experienced as stemming from others' "curiosity"); and third, I found patterns in interactions between myself and the interviewees (the importance of my identity to interviewees varied). Complexities within and

between our various social identities were also evident. While there are longstanding debates in the qualitative methodological literature on the politics of "who can speak for who" and how race operates within this debate (Bulmer & Solomos, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2003; Widdance &Warren, 2000), this is not the focus of this article. Instead, this article is a reflection on the dynamic of who I am and who my respondents are in a particular study context. Rather than focused on whether or not my identity as a person of mixed race impacted the validity of the findings, this article explores how in a study of mixed race young adults, mixed race identification had particular effects that shed light on interactions in the interview, between the interviewer and interviewees, and on mixed race identity itself.

Recruitment and Hailing Research Subjects: Mixed Race Ambivalence

In the recruitment material, I used the term mixed race to describe the population I was recruiting. It read:

> Are you of a mixed racial background? Do you identify as 'mixed' or 'mixed race'? Do you identify with a mixed racial identity?

> This project is being conducted for a Master's thesis in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. The purpose of the project is to explore a whole range of perspectives and experiences, and the multiple ways that 'mixed race' can be understood. Male and female participants between 20-30 years of age, who are of 'mixed racial' parentage and who grew up in Canada are being recruited, including those who have two minority group heritages.

> Interviews will be conducted with participants, and will take approximately one hour. If you would like to be part of this study, please contact Jillian at paragg@ualberta.ca or if you know of someone who may be interested in participating, please pass this message on to them.

Although the recruitment ad called for participants of a "mixed racial background," who identify as "mixed" or "mixed race" or who "identify with a mixed racial identity," when I asked respondents "how do you self-identify?" in the interviews only 2 of the 19 respondents stated "as mixed race." The disjuncture between the recruitment ad wording, who responded, and how they self-identified afforded me a methodological insight. By using a term that respondents perceive with ambivalence in the recruitment ad, the recruitment of respondents itself became part of the research and analysis process.

For instance, this quote from an interviewee, Veronica, highlights how participants felt uncertain about the term mixed race as an identifier for themselves: "I don't really use that term [mixed race] … but yeah, I am. I am mixed … but I don't use it specifically." While all of the research participants responded to an ad that used the term mixed race, the majority did not directly and consciously claim an identity based on that term. This simultaneous recognition yet non-claiming of mixed race as an identity signaled and helped theorize the complexities of social identification processes for the respondents.

McLean and Campbell (2003) discuss how recruitment is shaped by the very terms of identification. In their study, ethnic identification impacted who responded to their recruitment materials, as well as who was recruited through varying recruitment material formats. As established in mixed race literature, the self-identification of mixed race people may not be compatible with the identity that is prescribed to mixed race people, by those who read them (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). This study's interviews suggest that respondents were aware and recognized mixed race to some extent as a term by which they are socially identified or identifiable—a term that socially positions them—but at the same time expressed an ambivalence toward the term's usefulness for their self-identification. In this sense, respondents complicated

their hailing (Althusser, 2000) by responding to the recruitment ad, but not necessarily self-identifying as mixed race. The act of hailing, being interpellated or "called into being," refers to how people are discursively and materially positioned as certain kinds of subjects (Althusser, 2000). Treharne (2011), focusing on gender and sexuality, discusses how identities are reinscribed or interpellated through recruitment. Building on this insight, I argue that while respondents were hailed into participating in the study through the recruitment ad, the hailing of them as subjects in the research study only works because such hailing is already at work socially, enabling them to "recognize" themselves in the term mixed race. At the same time, however, there is complexity, because the recruitment ad does not reify the term for them or to them. While mixed race is a term that is employed within discourse to describe how they are socially situated, they may not claim it for themselves.

The uncertainty and impossibility of mixed race as an identity for the respondents potentially signals the ambivalence with which they are socially identified by others. While the majority of respondents were reluctant to directly and consciously claim the term mixed race as an identity, respondents did express an awareness that they are engaged in a constant negotiation with the external racial gaze, in that others are unable to place them within their own racialized schema and ordering of the world (Fanon, 1967). Those who responded to the recruitment ad cross and challenge dominant racial binaries (Bannerji, 2000), and are socially situated in a space of racialized ambivalence (Anzaldua, 2007). Racialized ambivalence has particular consequences for respondents and exposes them to particular experiences, which I will expand on in the following sections. In turn, these individuals recognize that mixed race is one way they are named. Respondents could and did respond to the recruitment ad because of their recognition of the identifier mixed race as part of what they experience and negotiate in their everyday lives.

In this excerpt from my interview with Erin, she discusses what led her to want to participate in the study and how she self-identifies, demonstrating how she recognizes her hailing as mixed race through the recruitment ad, yet complicates this through her discussion of her self-identification in the interview. Our discussion in the interview helps to give nuance to her negotiation of the external racial gaze's hail or interpellation of her:

> I: You mentioned that you saw the email, or the posting on a website. I'm just wondering when you saw it, what got you interested in wanting to participate.
>
> E: Well for myself, my father was from Pakistan and my mother was second generation Canadian, she was British, I grew up not ever questioning my identity. I went to a school that was mostly South Asian kids, and my parents were never married. But, my father was still a big part of my life and, so, it was just really not a question until my mother passed away, and then suddenly, who I was going to live with was suddenly being questioned and based on my race, and there was all these things about "well, she's Indian" and I was like "Pakistan?" "India?" "Indian?" "Aboriginal?—suddenly I was questioning all these things when I never had to before, and it was really not the best way to have to question them for the first time.
>
> I: And, so how do you self-identify?
>
> E: How do I self-identify? If people ask me my "background," I sort of explain to them, "well my father was from Pakistan and my mother was [inaudible] generation" but I don't necessarily self-identify with Sikh culture or religion—or Pakistan because I don't know the languages. Most of my friends when I was growing up were from that culture, and I grew up eating the food, but now it's been so long and having lived in so many different families that shape me, I feel so disconnected from it, but at the end of the day it's who I am. So, I mean like the longer piece of the story is all those other cultures that

influenced. But, that's primarily how I identify. *And then, yeah…as "mixed"* [emphasis added]. I'm not really one or the other, but it's not really two, it's like six [laughter].

I: That word "mixed"—would you use that, would you say "I'm mixed" or is that just kind of —that "mixed race" is this word that's out there to describe you ...

E: I actually haven't used "mixed" very much. Depending on the circumstance …. I've never really—"mixed"… I don't know. The thing is I feel so shy about saying it a lot of times because other people decide for you: "oh, no, no, you're white."

I decided to use the term mixed race in the recruitment ad because it is becoming widely used and recognized in academic literature, popular culture, media, and public discourse to describe the population of interest (Caballero, 2014; Mahtani, 2002b, 2012). I did not assume that the population I was interested in talking to would necessarily identify with the term, but I thought that they would likely recognize that they were being hailed. Within my own identification, which will be discussed in greater detail later in the article, I also have an ambivalence toward being named as mixed race and self-identifying with the term, while at the same time knowing very well that mixed race is how I am named or categorized by others (in everyday life, in academic discourses and literature on mixed race and in popular media discourses). Asking whether respondents were of a "mixed racial background" and asking "do you identify with a mixed racial identity?" in the recruitment ad were also attempts to reach out to respondents who did not explicitly identify as mixed race.

The recruitment ad worked as part of the discourse, in that respondents recognized themselves in the term mixed race. Simultaneously the situation of the interview provided a space to speak to the ad and complicate it. Although research participants were hailed, interpellated, or reproduced as mixed race by responding to the ad calling for mixed race participants, in the interview space context was given to that hailing.

The Interview Space: Inviting Respondents to "Think Through" the Curiosity Narrative

As a researcher I reproduce the questioning that people of mixed race experience in their everyday lives (i.e., "what are you?") (Bradshaw, 1992; Farjardo-Anstine, 2010; Gilbert, 2005; Nakashima, 1992; Root, 1998; Song, 2003), through the questioning interaction of the interview itself. The interview context replicated the "interview culture" in which respondents live (Briggs, 1986), especially as mixed race people. Yet, this allowed me to dig into this very facet of their lives. As Haritaworn (2009) noted while conducting interviews with people of mixed race, "the interview was clearly a repetition of something that had gone on before" (p. 118). I argue, however, that the context of the interview itself was shaped differently than how the context of the "what are you?" question is shaped (a momentary interaction imposed onto people of mixed race, often without their consent). Interviewees agreed to be interviewed, and knew that I would be asking them questions about their racial identity and experiences. In this sense, our relationship was already centered on race. Through our mutual agreement to be in the interview space—to be talking about race and identity—respondents and I already existed relationally within a different power relationship than the everyday "what are you?" encounter.

Through the questioning interaction of the interview itself, I witnessed one rationale assigned to the "what are you?" question. I asked respondents "why do you think people question you in your everyday lives?" and interviewees consistently responded stating, "people are just curious." For example, Jess responded stating, "sometimes people are just curious [laughing] and they just— their curiosity gets the best of them." I refer to this rationale as the *curiosity narrative*. I position it as a strategy that respondents deploy in order to explain the "what are you?" question, as they attempt to make sense of the external racial gaze on their bodies that is manifested, produced, and

exposed through this question. The interview situation also allowed me to ask probing questions about this narrative.

I suggest that the "what are you?" question is a reflection of the external racial gaze. Through questioning, the gaze attempts to produce the person of mixed race in the schema of its ordered world, which in the Canadian context operates within a binary of White/non-White (Bannerji, 2000; Mackey, 2002). It is an attempt on the part of the questioner to hail people of mixed race into particular narratives (Althusser, 2000). By asking respondents to elaborate on why they think people are "curious" about their identities, I sought to enable respondents to "think through" the curiosity rationale, which they so readily assigned to the operation of racialization in their everyday lives. The ready assignment of the curiosity rationale by respondents also helped to theorize the operation of race discourse in Canada, through mixed race people's own discussion of race in the interview.

As a person of mixed race, I, like the respondents, experience continuous questioning about "what I am" in my everyday interactions. However, as a researcher of mixed race, who works on mixed race, I am also invested in thinking about how race and power are at work in my life, as well as in the lives of the respondents. I wanted to encourage respondents to think about how power and race discourse operates in their lives. The curiosity narrative is demonstrative of how normalized questioning is in the respondents' lives (and how they themselves normalize it), and says much about the extent to which the external gaze is built into the operation of race in Canada. The curiosity narrative foregrounds the messiness of race discourse in the Canadian context, particularly in an era of "official multiculturalism." I theorize that the curiosity narrative stems from a post-race or color-blind multicultural discourse where the rhetoric is that "everyone is equal" and "people do not see race" (Mahtani, 2002a; Taylor, 2008). In this context, race and racialization are positioned as insignificant to people's life experiences, resulting in the denial of racialized power dynamics at work in the "what are you?" question by respondents in their framing of the question as stemming from "mere curiosity."

The curiosity narrative was predominant in the majority of the interviews; yet, our exchange in the space of the interview enabled me to ask probing questions about respondents' positioning of questioning as mere curiosity, inviting them to "think through" the normalization of questioning and racialized power dynamics at work in their lives. It did not, however, take much more than me asking "why do you think people are curious?" for respondents' understandings of how the "what are you?" question signals the operation of race discourse in the Canadian context to come out. Perhaps this was enabled because the situation of the interview is more than a chance encounter with someone; it is a space where "thinking through" can happen and is invited. In some cases, this may also be a matter of trust in that respondents could go beyond the dismissal of the "what are you?" question as benign curiosity because of the invitation in the interview space to do so.

In our interaction in the interview, I asked Sarah probing follow-up questions when she expressed the notion of others' curiosity as the reasoning behind the questioning she experiences. My curiosity—a characteristic of the semi-structured interview—helped to probe the complexities of what seemed to be, at first, a nonchalant explanation that people question respondents because they are "simply curious." However, it did not take much "asking back" on my part for Sarah to relay her reading of the connection between curiosity and the need of the external racial gaze to categorize bodies it perceives as racially ambiguous. It was right under the surface:

> S: [Discussing why others ask mixed race people the question "what are you?"] I just
> think that they're curious because they think that they're beautiful or something. And so,
> by judging from why I know they're asking, I don't think other people are trying to pass
> judgment. They're just curious, that's what I think.

I: Right. And where do you think that curiosity comes from? [probing question]

S: I think it's because they can't classify you into a specific group. And they say "oh, well she's Asian but not really," you know? There's something—"she has freckles" and, you know, my brother's got dark black hair and a bright red goatee. And people are like did you dye your hair? And he's like "why would I do that?" you know his goatee—"did you bleach it?" and [he says] "no," something like that and it's like "something's not quite right with them." You know, they want to know what it is, or what combination made you like that.

The probing space of the interview (as a space of critical curiosity) allowed for the gaze to be named, especially as racial. Discussing how people perceive him, Michael talked about how people react to him:

M: "You seem white, but maybe with something extra." Most people don't even bring it up, they just don't care, some people are just curious.

I: I'm just wondering where do you think that curiosity comes from? Or why do people care at all? [probing question]

M: There's an element of Orientalism going on there, I think like the "exotic Other" type thing …. I think definitely I feel it applies … it's just, it's also like conversation stuff too. Right, like … you can only ask so many people how the weather was yesterday, you know. There's other interesting things that people can talk about, and I think that's part of it …. and there's an element of—as soon as you recognize that there's something there that you don't know about, people are curious naturally.

Discussing the identity narrative that she gives when questioned, Monica states that she gives a particular identity narrative when she is questioned if she perceives the questioner as "genuinely curious."

M: It's not like there's a formula, it's kind of a feeling that I go on. If I feel like [the questioning] is coming from a place of genuine curiosity and sincerity, and consciousness I guess to, like an awareness of racism and Othering and other things, then I am happy to—'cause it is a part of who I am. And it's obviously something that I've—I'm interested in and talk about and identify with, then I'm happy to talk about it. If I feel like it's coming from a place of—that kind of ignorance—even if they're trying to be nice. Or they don't *mean* [emphasis added] it, you know, they don't mean to be Othering in that sense, I have a different kind of response. And then if they're being obviously kind of racist or whatever, then I don't even … respond [laughter].

I: And so you mentioned that people were curious, when they ask, I guess I'm just wondering why do you think that they're curious, or what makes them want to know? [probing question]

M: I think that … it's how important race is. Even though it is a social construct, that doesn't make the consequences of the effects any less real. And I feel like that's how pervasive that still is. Like the idea of race, so that if people don't know "where I come from" they don't know how to—all the kind of unspoken stereotypes and all the stuff, they don't know how to judge me before they even talk to me for once.

Here, when I asked Monica to "think through" others' curiosity in our interaction in the interview, she positioned is as stemming from a dominant race discourse that requires the categorization of people into its particular racialized landscape. While the initial response of "it's just natural curiosity" signaled the operation of post-race, color-blind race discourse, asking back through probing questions in the space of the interview assisted in unmasking the operation of the

racial gaze and post-race discourse. Respondents recognized that they are asked to position themselves within an ordered racial schema in their everyday interactions.

While the curiosity narrative went in multiple directions (some embraced it, some tolerated it, and some worked to undo or rejected it), the situation of the interview enabled me to encourage respondents to "think through" the narrative. The space of the interview enabled interactive moments between the interviewees and myself where I asked respondents to elaborate on what was behind their go-to rationale of why others question them. Building on this, my own positionality as mixed race also needs to be considered for analyzing the dynamic in the interviews. If I was not also mixed race, would respondents respond to me asking them to "think through" in the same way?

Mixed Race Interviewer and Interviewee Negotiations: Complex Commonalities

There is a strong tradition in qualitative research of disclosing one's positionality as a matter of ethical practice (Rapley, 2007). Caballero (2014), reflecting on the emotive aspects and methodological implications of conducting research on "racial mixing" as a person with a mixed race identity, found that there is often a negotiation between disclosing and not disclosing one's identity as a researcher in the research context. While my own identification may have mattered to opening the interview space up, my identity as mixed race also rolled in and out of the interview context across the interviews, which I will expand on more below.

During the interviews I disclosed my identity for a number of reasons. In some interviews it took respondents time to ease into the conversation and talk about their experiences, and I disclosed my identity in order to reinforce our connection, in order to show respondents that I could potentially understand where they were coming from, that this was a safe and non-judgmental space, and to invite them to elaborate on their experiences. For example, during the interviews, I would at times disclose how I self-identified, and share my own experiences if respondents were relaying a story and I had a similar experience that I wanted to share. Throughout the interviews, respondents were able to share their experiences and talk about their identities in whatever way they wanted to. Therefore, the interviews themselves worked as a context through which the respondents could have their identities validated, and could make meaning of their experiences. However, this did not solely work one way: The interviews also provided me with the opportunity to share my experiences with other people of mixed race, as Mahtani (2012) also found in her interviews with women of mixed race. Similarly, Haritaworn (2009) found through interviews conducted with people of mixed race that there was a "co-production" of "collective narratives" in the interviews (p. 124).

My own identity and experiences likely affected the context of the interview, in terms of the "social relationship" (Bornat, 2007) formed between myself as the interviewer, and the interviewees. For instance, because of my identity, respondents may have been further motivated to share their experiences with me (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This relates to the concept of "insider credentials" or working as an "insider researcher" (Mohan & Venzant Chambers, 2010; Watts, 2006). Working as an "insider" refers to the notion that if a researcher shares something in common with their participants, as insiders they may have an advantage compared to "outsiders." It may make it easier for the researcher to recruit and reinforce their connection with respondents. This, in turn, may impact what information researchers receive and their ability to interpret this information.

Mohan and Venzant Chambers (2010) have argued that the qualitative research insider/outsider literature and the terminology it employs does not capture the experiences of scholars who are of mixed race who conduct research on people of mixed race. They seek to challenge previous assertions of those who have addressed methodological issues of conducting research with people of mixed race who do claim insider status (Root, 1992). Mohan and Venzant Chambers (2010)

have argued that mixed race researchers' status as insiders is problematic because they may not share any of the same experiences as their respondents. For example, phenotypically they could be very different from one another, resulting in differences in others' perceptions, and therefore treatment, of them. They also note the likelihood of sharing other characteristics with respondents that shape experiences, such as age, gender, socio-economic status, religion, or sexual identity, is small.

Mohan and Venzant Chambers' (2010) discussion exemplifies that it is problematic to assert that it is possible to be an insider or outsider exclusively, which sets up a mutually exclusive, false binary, which many social researchers would problematize. Extending Mohan and Vanzant Chambers (2010) I argue for the recognition of *complex commonalities* between mixed race researchers and their mixed race respondents, first, through a consideration of the variations across experience resulting from different racialized, gendered, sexual, and class identities, and second, through my identity being simultaneously important, not important, and tested over the course of the research project. In other words, I was "hailed" (Althusser, 2000) into and out of identifications throughout the recruitment and interview process.

Mahtani (2014) usefully has argued that what mixed race people have in common is a similar set of racialized experiences (for example being subject to the "what are you?" question). I further this argument through my discussions of how mixed race is used to hail (Althuseer, 2000) both inside and outside of the interview recruitment context, and the expression of the curiosity narrative by the interview respondents. A hailing through mixed race is something people of mixed race have in common, as a moment of social relation negotiating race discourse. The curiosity narrative is a way that the respondents manage the gaze, even as the interview allows its simple veneer to be lifted, in part because of my own positioning relative to the interviewees. I argue, however, that while there may be a commonality between mixed race researchers and mixed race research participants, there is also complexity within this commonality. People of mixed race are read and racialized differently, and this intersects with readings of their gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status, among others. For example, in the study I had an interest in whether the respondents had experiences with the term *exotic* and what their feelings were toward the term. My interest in this term stemmed from how it is a term that is racialized, as well as in part through my own encounters and experiences with the term. None of the male respondents, however, had any experience with being positioned as exotic. A sentiment the male respondents did express was that others' positioned them as "different," connoting that others read them as having a sense of "mystique." However, this does not have the same Othering connotations as exotic (Root, 1997) and was not predominant in their experiences like "exotic" was for the female respondents. Although there is commonality of experience between people of mixed race, there is complexity within this, and which is foregrounded in the interactions between mixed race researchers and mixed race respondents, moving away from the dichotomous approach of theorizing the researcher as insider/outsider. In addition, although some respondents felt they could really identify with me, to others my identity was not important, while others tested my identity, which I will expand on below.

In her study of mixed race women, Mahtani (2012) found that interviewees expressed a connection with her in that they perceived her as having similar experiences to them, making statements throughout the interview such as "'you know what I mean, Minelle,' followed by a knowing glance or smile" (p. 158). This was also my experience in some of the interviews. Even though the appearances or phenotypic characteristics of respondents and myself differed, some respondents often concluded that we likely had similar experiences. Some respondents felt they could identify with me and that I could understand their experiences because I was mixed race. I was seen as having, to some extent, "street cred" in the eyes of respondents, in that I had an

understanding of their experiences, through my own. For example, an interviewee, Anne, stated in the interview:

> You probably have the exact same kind of … you can identify kind of with the same things that everybody else has been saying … I bet you probably—you associate, you understand what I'm saying with all my answers.

In contrast, with other respondents my identity never came up in the interviews, and it did not seem important to them; they were willing to share their story, and a discussion of my identity was not necessary in order to persuade them to speak with me or to have them share their experiences in the interview. My identity was not always important to respondents opening up to me. Perhaps these respondents read my appearance or racialized me in a particular way and concluded that I too was mixed, but it was not important for them how I identified. Conversely, other respondents attempted to test me before agreeing to be interviewed, likely to see if I could understand their experiences. For example, I had the recruitment ad sent to an email list of an anti-racism group in the community. I received an email in response from someone on that email list, but all it said was "what's your racial make-up?" I emailed back asking if they were interested in participating in the project by being interviewed. I then received a response that said, "Your answer to my question determines my answer to yours." My reading of the situation is that this particular individual was likely trying to find out if I was either a White researcher, stemming from a history of stories being appropriated into the power dynamics of race when an interviewer was White, or if I was mixed (Mohan & Venzant Chambers, 2010). I emailed the respondent stating that "I self-identify with the term *biracial,* which I consider to be a mixed racial identity. In terms of 'racial make-up,' my father is from Trinidad and Tobago and my mother is White." This response placated the inquirer. Although this particular individual ended up being outside the age range I was recruiting for, they expressed an interest in participating in future projects, and also asked if I would be willing to be interviewed by them for a non-academic project. This suggested to me that their interest in my identity also involved an interest in whether I was "mixed".

When I attempted to recruit respondents to engage with me in an interview, my own positionality as mixed race brought out what might be held in common, or was thought to be held in common between people of mixed race. My positionality as a person of mixed race led some respondents to position that I understood their experiences, in a way that White or "non-mixed" researchers may not; yet, other respondents did not need to know how I identified in order to participate or open up in the interview.

Conclusion

While I am cautious of claiming that I am an insider conducting this research because I am a person of mixed race, I would argue that the findings discussed in the first two sections of the article—a (non) claiming of mixed race and dealing with others' curiosity—are negotiations that I have an understanding of as someone who faces these same negotiations in my everyday life. My own positionality as mixed race also plays on the tension in respondents' (non) claiming of mixed race, and assists in further understanding nuances in the space of the interview. When I was putting together the recruitment ad, I decided to use the term mixed race because it is becoming widely used and recognized in academic literature, popular culture, media, and public discourse to describe the population of interest (Caballero, 2014; Mahtani, 2002b, 2012), which itself takes on meaning through socially constructed and historically informed categories. I used this term because of its presence and ubiquity in other studies of mixed race, but also because it is one way that I am hailed or named by others in my everyday life.

Similarly, from a lifetime of being questioned because of my "racially ambiguous" appearance, and a lifetime of having my own questions about what was behind the question "what are you?" I

anticipated that respondents would also likely have experiences with being questioned, and would also likely have thought about what was behind the question "what are you?" This was evident in how few probing questions I had to employ in the interaction of the interview in order to invite respondents to unpack others' supposed curiosity. My own positionality as mixed race also impacted the project because it influenced how the respondents and I negotiated each other within the context of the interview itself, as well as during the recruitment process. However, extending the theorization of a commonality of experience among people of mixed race through my experiences as a researcher, I argue for a consideration of *complex commonalities* between people of mixed race through a consideration of the variations across experiences resulting from different racialized, gendered, sexual, or classed identities (Mahtani, 2014; Mohan & Venzant Chambers, 2010), and through my identity being important, not important, and tested in the research project.

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