

**Locating Mixed Race Belonging for Multiracial Nikkei Women
in Canada in a Time of Rising Anti-Asian Racism**

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in International Development and Globalization

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Abstract

This exploratory study draws from six semi-structured interviews with multiracial Nikkei women living in Canada to investigate their experiences of mixed race belonging. After establishing belonging as intrinsic to the very nature of how multiraciality and Asianness have been historically constructed and are presently experienced in Canada, three areas relevant to how the interviewees experience mixed race belonging are then considered: multiracial name modification (MRNM), the nation and Canadianness, and Japaneseness in Canada. This study also considers how the recent racial climate of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism has potentially impacted how mixed race belonging is experienced by the interviewees, which reveals two additional areas of interest: the amplified experience of multiracial dysmorphia (MRD) during this time and the emergence of pan-Asianness in Canada as a potential new site of belonging. As captured, issues of mixed race belonging arise in various spheres of the interviewees' lives because of the very ways in which multiraciality and Asianness have been constructed and maintained in the Canadian social landscape. In doing so, this study hopes to drive home how issues of mixed race belonging speak more to the problematic nature of "race" itself than of mixed race people themselves.

Glossary

Haafu: This now well-established and recognized Japanese term, derived from the English word “half”, is used to refer to multiracial people and is now considered a category of identity for these populations.

Hapa: A Hawaiian term, derived from the English word “half”, used to refer to someone who is multiracial and has (controversially) come to be used among people, outside of Hawaii, who are of Asian/white mixture.

Issei, Nissei, Sansei, Yonsei: Japanese diasporic terms used to specify generations of Japanese immigrants and their descendants. Respectively, first, second, third, and fourth generations.

JC: Common abbreviation for Japanese Canadian.

Mixed Race / Multiracial: Like “race” (see below), “mixed race” and “multiracial” are used interchangeably and should be read with assumed quotation marks throughout this study to connote its socially constructed nature.

Nikkei: A Japanese-derived term used to refer to all Japanese emigrants from Japan, and their descendants, residing outside of Japan.

Race: The use of this term should be read with assumed quotation marks throughout this study to capture the socially constructed nature of race, wherein which certain groups have racial meanings arbitrarily ascribed to their phenotypical features.

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Figure 1: *[Portrait of my Family]*



Preface

In her book, *Mixed race amnesia*, Minelle Mahtani writes, “In sharing the following story about myself, I admit to some anxiety because I think this approach can teeter into a form of narcissism” (2014, p. 9). I was relieved to know I am not the only researcher of multiraciality to have felt this research can sound too self-involved. And yet, the field of critical mixed race studies (CMRS) has been developed *because* of scholars who are themselves mixed race and the visibility of the researcher has become a common feature of multiracial research (Mahtani, 2014). Notably, this very feature has guided me in transforming my own perspectives and experiences of multiraciality into something meaningful. I cried while reading Taylor’s dissertation, *Re-imagining mixed race: Explorations of multiracial discourse in Canada* – my first introduction to the field of CMRS (2008b). Beyond providing solace, it validated and legitimized my interest in critically investigating multiraciality. As the following study emerged from my own experiences as a self-identifying mixed race Nikkei woman, I offer a few pivotal stories to highlight my own knotty relationship with race and multiraciality throughout my life.

My mother was born to a tea-farming family in a small town in Shizuoka, Japan. My father to a military family of European descent in Ontario, Canada. After meeting in Japan, they moved to Canada, where my mother eventually became a naturalized Canadian citizen and had two children – my little sister and me. As a foreign service family, we moved internationally every four years or so. My inability to fit in anywhere, racially speaking, often left me confused, a feeling that became increasingly pronounced as we moved from place to place. The operations of race differ across space, and since geography plays a large part in identity formation for mixed race people, I have often wondered what this might mean for the identity formation of mixed race, transnational kids who move a lot. Throughout my childhood I went to school at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), where I was often one of few racialized people in my immediate friend group. Racially charged words and slurs, like chink/y, gook/y

(“get out of our country”), and fob (“fresh off the boat”), were thrown around jokingly by my friends in Australia – sometimes with me in ways I thought were endearing, sometimes directed at other Asian and racialized students in ways that felt hurtful. Not wanting to be treated like “them”, I internalized being Asian as a bad thing and subconsciously leaned into my whiteness, as I thought should be possible being half white. This looked like throwing away my bento lunches packed by my mother, hiding my Japanese middle name, Mitsuru, and wishing I had a “white” one like my sister, protesting Japanese language school on Saturdays, refusing to speak Japanese with my mother, and constantly finding reasons to hate my mother in favour of my father for reasons I could not yet fully comprehend. All the while, I struggled to find stability in my multiracial identity. Despite my desperation to be white like my friends and my father, I regularly faced reminders suggesting otherwise. It often felt like concepts like “home” and “belonging” were just out of reach. I suspect that the beginning of my decades-long internal conflict with my own multiraciality can be placed somewhere during these early years.

When working my first job at age sixteen in a small chocolate store in Ottawa, an elderly white man came in one day and my boss, Louise, alerted to me that he was the store’s landlord. When I served him, he immediately asked me the all-too-familiar question faced by racially ambiguous multiracial people – “What are you?” (Paragg 2014; Mahtani 2014). Sensing that this interaction may not be innocuous, I answered politely with a smile, “I am Canadian”. Unsatisfied, he prodded, “What are you *really*?” and I eventually gave him the answer he was looking for – “I’m half Japanese, half Canadian”. His face fell instantly, and he hissed, “You must be at war with yourself” – a reference to the war declared between Canada and Japan during WWII (although I did not know this at the time). With disgust, he told me I was too dirty to serve his food and motioned to Louise, who was in ear-shot, to serve him instead. She did. This interaction repeated itself a few times before Louise, without apology, started sending me to the back when she saw him entering the store. I worked there for two years.

This pivotal experience taught me many things in my journey to understand my multiracialized identity. To start, his comment that I must be at war with myself stayed with me for some time since it was so specific to my multiracial/multi-ethnic makeup, and eventually drove me to learn more about the history of JC internment, which was never meaningfully covered in school. Further, while I nervously laughed through these incidents, it did not escape me that these were explicit displays of racism. I quickly realized that white adults would not interject to protect me. My parents were shocked when I relayed the story to them, but that was all that became of it. This taught me how normalized such experiences of racism could be. I became less inclined to share what was not considered “noteworthy” by others. Lastly, this experience confirmed to me that my mixed appearance was enough to potentially trigger explicit racism. In a roundabout way, by putting my years-long attempts of trying to be white or embody whiteness to bed, this experience forced me to finally begin accepting my Japaneseness.

During my last year of high school, my sister and I formed the “Thousand Paper Cranes Campaign” to raise money for the victims of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Shortly after, I double majored in psychology and East Asian studies as a way of trying to better understand my deep-seated questions about identity and Asianness. After graduating in 2015, I volunteered for the Japanese Canadian Community Centre of Montreal (JCCCM) where I was given a writing assignment on a play about Japanese Canadian internment, *The Tashme Project*, for their community paper. When *Nikkei Voice*, a Toronto-based JC newspaper, picked up my article for their cover piece, my short bio read, “Kaitlyn Mitsuru Wilkin is a recent graduate of McGill University with a degree in East Asian studies and psychology. She proudly embraces her Japanese Canadian identity and hopes to remain actively involved in the Japanese Canadian community”.

A few years later, I attended an annual *mochitsuki* (“rice pounding”) festival put on by the Ottawa Japanese Community Association (OJCA) with my mother and sister. Sitting down at a table at

the back of the banquet hall, we excitedly ate traditional foods, such as sweet and savoury mochi, sushi, udon, and daifuku, while performances of folk dancing and taiko drumming took place on the stage. At some point, the kids at the table in front of us caught my attention and I immediately recognized them as haafu. They looked like me when I was younger. I scanned the room and noticed the hall was filled with children running around, almost all of them haafu, and was suddenly overcome with emotion. I turned to my sister and her teary eyes met mine. She had also noticed. We sat in silence for a while, observing. It was a touching moment filled with yearning, some sadness, but, most of all, hope. For most of our lives, the only haafu people we interacted with were each other. Since my sister and I rarely talked about race, trying to make sense of my mixed race identity had felt like a one-person journey without a map. It dawned on me that these haafu children might have each other as a fellow point of reference and representation. This experience emphasized to me how much a sense of “we-ness” matters.

While this thesis project was initially going to look at the experiences of haafu women in the Japanese workplace, the COVID-19 pandemic’s arrival and travel restrictions required me to pivot. As I turned my focus to haafu women in Canada, the issue of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism emerged. The familiar throb of racialized pain was suddenly amplified as my social newsfeeds became inundated with new accounts and images of anti-Asian hate and violence on a near-weekly, sometimes even daily, basis. In short, I was not okay, and neither were many of my Asian friends. At the same time, my struggles with multiraciality, although always present, were resurfacing in new confusing ways. At the heart of it all was the same feeling of unbelonging, of feeling out of place, further spurring my interest in issues of belonging for this specific population. When I saw the following comic strip by multiracial Japanese American artist Christine Mari, it confirmed for me, *there must be something here*.

Figure 2: [Comic Strip on Asian American Identity]





Note. By Christine Mari, 2021, comic strip, sourced from Instagram on Mari's account @christinemaricomics.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Anti-Asian racism is not a new phenomenon in Canada but, rather, a core part of the nation's past and present. Yet, despite its prevalence across time and space, racial discrimination of Asians has often been dismissed in broader discussions of racism in Canada (Eligon et al., 2021; Pillai et al., 2021). In recent years, however, the issue of anti-Asian racism has been foregrounded by a racialized pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic's alleged origins in Wuhan, China, people of Asian descent have found themselves associated with, and scapegoated for, the pandemic's onset and ensuing anguish. This revival of yellow perilism has contributed towards reanimating anti-Asian racism across the globe, with reports documenting an alarming rise in anti-Asian incidents ranging from racist rhetoric to hateful displays of violence (Jeung, Yellow Horse, & Matriano, 2021, 2021; Kong et al., 2021; Pillai et al., 2021). This rise in anti-Asian racism, as well as the emergence of Stop Asian Hate (SAH), an antiracist movement inspired by Black Lives Matter (BLM) and protesting anti-Asian racism, have contributed towards visibilizing the long overlooked and obscured issue of anti-Asian racism within conversations of race, racism, and antiracism in Canada. However, despite a year of rising anti-Asian incidents, it was not until the first quarter of 2021, when a string of extremely violent anti-Asian incidents, including the Atlanta spa mass shooting, were reported, that this issue finally reached mainstream coverage and wider societal consciousness (Zhou, 2021a). As Angela Hsu, an Asian American lawyer, asserts, "There's a tendency to not believe that violence against Asian-Americans is real...It's almost like you need something really, really jarring to make people believe that there is discrimination against Asian-Americans" (Eligon et al., 2021, para. 9). While acknowledgement of this issue may offer some belated relief, the impacts of anti-Asian racism – including its recent rise during the pandemic – are detrimental for the Asian diaspora in Canada. As Avvy Go, clinic director of Toronto's Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, laments, "Slash by slash, wound by wound, each one of these incidents takes away from

all Asian Canadians our sense of safety, robs us of our basic dignity, and ultimately undermines our sense of belonging in a country that we have every right to call home” (Kestler-D’Amours, 2021, para. 7). The omnipresent threat and incidence of anti-Asian racism serve as reminders to Asians in Canada of their historical and present-day positionings outside the boundaries of racial belonging in this nation.

Notably, the past few years have seen issues of race, racism, and antiracism brought to the forefront of national conversations in Canada in several intertwining ways. While the pandemic was characterized by some as “the great equalizer,” it was not long before reports showed racialized people as bearing the brunt of the pandemic, facing disproportionately poor pandemic-related health outcomes as compared to white populations due to underlying socio-economic disparities (Cadet, 2020; *Color of Coronavirus*, n.d.; Leach, 2020; Lourenco, 2020; Subedi et al., 2020). Such revelations have contributed to relativizing the issue of “systemic racism” in Canada, a subject receiving increased attention in the past few years (Neuman, 2021). Considerations of systemic racism have also been shaped by BLM, which regained significant momentum in the U.S. in 2020 and also saw traction in Canada (Jackson, 2020; Wortham, 2020). Conversations of race in Canada have also historically grappled with the issue of state violence against Indigenous peoples. In recent years, events such as the Wet’suwet’en protests, the Fairy Creek blockade, and the ongoing revelation of thousands of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at former residential schools have further vivified national conversations about Canada’s colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples, the continued impacts of forced cultural disruption and erasure, and the current reality of anti-Indigenous systemic racism in Canada (Kestler-D’Amours, 2020a, 2020b; Larsen, 2021; M. Lee & Parkhill, 2022; Xue Luo, 2022). At the same time, right-wing extremism and white nationalism are also reported as having grown in the U.S. and Canada during the pandemic, revitalizing explicit displays of racism and an emboldened opposition to racial justice movements (E. Thompson, 2021). As studies show, Canadians are among the most active in online

right-wing extremism (Russell, 2020; E. Thompson, 2021). The interplay of all these events has also steered Canadian society into a climate energized by issues of race, racism, and antiracism. It is helpful to situate the rise in anti-Asian racism and the foregrounding of Asianness in Canada within the context of this current racial climate.

Mixed race people – those whose biological parents are from differently socially defined racial groups – also find themselves frequently overlooked within such racial discourse since they do not fit neatly into the racial categories defining contemporary understandings of race (Paragg, 2014). While “Up until the 1990s mixed race was either not discussed at all or mentioned incidentally,” considerations of multiraciality have made their way into the margins of popular culture and, to a lesser extent, academia, often highlighting the experiences and challenges faced by mixed race people due to their positionality that are distinct from those of monoracial people (Taylor, 2008b, p. 74). Some common experiences identified by mixed race people include confusion regarding racial identity, frustrations around being placed into rigid racial categories by others, social pressures over having to “choose” one of their racial groups, disapproval and discrimination from their respective racial groups, frequent feelings of loneliness, isolation, and being misunderstood, and – as is of particular interest to this study – issues of belonging (C.-Y. Cheng & Lee, 2009; Vox, 2021). As Joanne Arnott, who self-identifies as a Métis/mixed blood writer and activist, writes, “Possibly the most difficult issue for people of mixed heritage is that of belonging, and a part of that is safety: constantly testing the waters to see how I am seen, and what the perceiver’s response to their perceptions might be” (Camper, 1994, p. 267).

If issues of belonging are experienced by both Asians and mixed race people, how, then, is racial belonging experienced by those who live at the intersection of this identity? This thesis project aims to map the contours of “mixed race belonging” as experienced by mixed race women of Asian descent while also considering how the recent rise in anti-Asian racism has further influenced such experiences.

A case study approach involving interviews with self-identifying multiracial Nikkei women living in Canada is employed to support this study's exploration of mixed race belonging as experienced by multiracial Asian women in Canada.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Mixed Race Studies

Critical Mixed Race Studies (CMRS) is a multidisciplinary field of inquiry, which has emerged in the last twenty years to examine the understudied phenomenon of multiraciality (as opposed to the default of monoraciality). This focus illuminates the experience of “living *differently*” (Taylor, 2008b, p. 119). It also offers a uniquely positioned vehicle for interrogating race as “The rethinking of ‘race’ through ‘mixed race’ disrupts the certainty of a social category central to the organisation of modern societies. For the notion of ‘mixed race’ thwarts the ideal of pristine, pure ‘races’ with the undeniable historical truth of mixture, while simultaneously highlighting the inescapable contemporary fact of racialization” (Parker & Song, 2001, p. 17). Many of CMRS’ core tenets are informed by critical race theory (CRT). Like CRT, CMRS strives to reveal race as a social construct, advocates for racial anti-essentialism, exposes and confronts the universality of whiteness and power, centers the voices of those made marginalized, and considers personal experiences as valuable and legitimate (Taylor, 2008b, p. 75). CRT posits that race itself is not innate – it is not something one *is* or *has*. Rather, race is a non-scientific, non-biological social construction arbitrarily assigning culturally produced meanings to certain bodies based on phenotypical characteristics. Despite its fictional foundations, however, the lived reality of race is very real for those who are racialized by it. CMRS similarly approaches multiraciality as socially constructed from racist myths but with significant social and material impacts (Daniel et al., 2014; King-O’Riain & Small, 2014; Root, 1990). Like CRT, CMRS also draws from Kimberlé Crenshaw’s analytical framework of intersectionality, which argues that single-axis frameworks like

feminist theory and antiracist theory erase the lived experiences of those who exist at the intersection of race and gender (e.g., Black women) (Crenshaw, 1994, p. 140). Intersectionality is especially appealing in its applicability to the nature of multiraciality, which implies two or more racial identities within one person. This study focuses on the *experiences* of mixed race Nikkei women, so as not to fall into the trap of essentializing race, and draws from intersectionality in its consideration of a demographic socially positioned along multiple axes of identity – race, ethnicity, and gender.

Theorizing “Mixed Race Belonging”

The concept of belonging is central to this thesis. I draw from Yuval-Davis’ politics of belonging and Antonsich’s theory of place-belongingness to situate what belonging is, why it matters, and how people belong. To start, belonging is a sensation one *feels*. It is “about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). Belonging is also a relational social process arising through interactions between an individual and the social sphere (Halse, 2018). People can be simultaneously enmeshed in multiple sites of belonging operating at various scales (e.g., the home, the nation, global communities) and modes (e.g., public, private) (Halse, 2018). Belonging is contingent and changeable (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 15). The processes of belonging can facilitate social cohesion based on shared commonalities and alignments and contribute to the formation of social groups, solidarities, and collectivities (Halse, 2018). The field of psychology understands belonging as a “fundamental human motivation” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Satisfying this desire for belonging is seen as significant to the quality of one’s life because,

Many of the strongest emotions people experience, both positive and negative, are linked to belongingness. Evidence suggests a general conclusion that being accepted, included, or welcomed leads to a variety of positive emotions (e.g., happiness, elation, contentment, and calm, whereas being rejected, excluded, or ignored leads to potent negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy, and loneliness). (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 508)

Belonging is always juxtaposed against the possibility or state of unbelonging. Approaching belonging as a determinant of one's emotional well-being speaks to why people want and seek out belongingness.

To organize our understanding of where and how belonging is constructed, Yuval-Davis offers a tripartite analytical framework of belonging. "Social locations" refers to positionalities within and across social categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, nationality), "which, at each historical moment, have particular implications vis-à-vis the grids of power relations in society" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). In recognizing how one's "social location is constructed along multiple axes of difference," Yuval-Davis' framework captures intersectionality – as is important for this study's exploration of how belonging is experienced at an intersectionally specific social location (2006, p. 200). Secondly, belonging can be understood as reflections of people's "identifications and emotional attachments", or the "narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)," which function to "relate to the past...be aimed at explaining the present and, probably above all...function as a projection of a future trajectory [or who they want to be]" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). In this way, belonging is also a kind of performance, whereby "Specific repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behaviour, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 203). This study is interested in the identifications and attachments mixed race Nikkei women in Canada partake in, as these are where issues of belonging likely arise (after all, there is no sense of belonging without, first, a desire to belong). Lastly, "ethical and political value systems" considers how these social locations and identity narratives/emotional attachments are valued, judged, and contested as this is where the boundaries of (un)belonging are often drawn (Crowley, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This brings us to Yuval-Davis' "politics of belonging", which imagines "what is required from a specific person for [them] to be entitled to belong, to be considered as belonging, to the collectivity" (2006, p. 209). The

imagined nation, for example, constructs and confers belonging to people through mechanisms like citizenship, entitlement, membership responsibilities and requirements (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 204). As is relevant to this study, some requisites of belonging, like ethnicity, race, and place of birth, are less permeable than others, like language and culture, which could allow for assimilatory access to belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis' framework allows us to consider the interactions of belonging and power in how mixed race belonging is experienced.

Building off this, Antonsich further unpacks the emotional dimension of belonging and how it generates what he calls "place-belongingness", which "stands for a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment" (2010, p. 646). Exploring how this feeling of "rootedness" interacts with the "personal, intimate, existential" processes of self-formation, he identifies the five factors as contributing to a person's sense of place-belongingness:

1. Autobiographical factors, such as personal history, experiences, relations, and memories (often involving one's childhood upbringing), attaching someone to a given place.
2. Relational factors, "or the personal and social ties that enrich the life of an individual".
3. Cultural factors, such as language, religion, cultural traditions and practices (e.g. food production and consumption), fostering a sense of community and a "warm sensation";
4. Economic factors, regarding the safety and stability of one's material conditions, and how integrated and invested one feels in a given economy.
5. Legal factors, such as citizenship and residency permits, which formally shape one's security and access to belonging. (2010, pp. 647–648)

According to Antonsich, these factors contribute to "a life that is meaningful, a life worth living", while their absence produces a sense of "loneliness, isolation, alienation, and displacement" (2010, p. 649).

Place-belongingness considers the more personalized dimensions of belonging, while Yuval-Davis' framework considers the broader social context in which such notions of belonging are immersed. This study considers both, for, as Antonsich notes, "The risk of focusing only on one of these two dimensions is to fall in the trap of either a socially de-contextualized individualism or an all-encompassing social(izing) discourse" (2010, p. 1).

Research Objectives and Questions

Locating Mixed Race Belonging in Canada

The central research question for this study asks, *how is racial belonging experienced by mixed race Nikkei women living in Canada?* Where in their lives do issues of belonging arise and what is potentially happening in these spaces? As the next chapter will show, the social location of this group exists at the cross-section of multiple racialized boundaries of belonging. To ensure a timely exploration, this thesis also asks, *has the rise in pandemic-related anti-Asian racism further impacted how mixed race belonging is experienced by multiracial Nikkei women?* This ancillary research objective is interested in the potential impact of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism on how racial belonging is experienced by this group. While monoracial Asians are more often the primary targets of anti-Asian racism, this study focuses on a subset of the population, mixed race Asians, who often find themselves at the margins on multiple fronts since both Asians and multiraciality are often overlooked in matters of race and racism. It is assumed that such compounded marginalization affects how racial belonging is experienced by mixed race Asians throughout their lifetimes and especially in today's climate where Asianness and anti-Asian racism have been foregrounded. This study seeks to acknowledge and give voice to this specific subset of the Asian diaspora in Canada during what has been a considerably challenging and overwhelming period.

Methodological Framework

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

This study operates from the methodological framework of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative research design with theoretical underpinnings in phenomenology primarily concerned with how participants make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA creates space for analyzing deeply personal, abstract, and complex conceptions (such as belonging) by giving priority

to personal perspectives and interpretations of lived experiences. Epistemologically, subjectivity is valued as a form of knowledge and interviewees are “perceived as the experiential expert on the subject [who] should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell their own story” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 59). As is also common for mixed race research, this study asks participants to describe and analyze their experiences of multiraciality in depth (Paragg, 2014). IPA is especially powerful for uplifting marginalized voices and challenging structural and normative assumptions, and, as such, is suitable for a demographic that is intersectionally marginalized (Paragg, 2014).

In keeping with the inductive nature of IPA, my research question is broad and without a predetermined hypothesis. That said, I recognize the impossibility of being free of any biases or preconceptions, especially as a member of my studied population. Recognizing the need for reflexivity at all stages of the research process as a mixed race researcher of multiraciality, I was open about my positionality, experiences, and perspectives during the interview process, as I am throughout this thesis. This is in keeping with IPA, a research design intended to account for subjectivity and double hermeneutics, whereby the researcher is making sense of the participant’s sense making. In assuming a central role in interpretive analysis, the IPA researcher is often made visible “in the ‘frame’ of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer” (Paragg, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2003). It is also not uncommon in CMRS for researchers to be multiracial themselves, and there can be some advantages to this, especially during interviews, such as building rapport, reinforcing a connection, reassuring understanding, and creating a safe space. Essentially, the spirit of interviewing moves away from a curious and othering gaze towards one of co-production. This is captured in Mahtani’s following reflection, which is similar to my own experience during interviews:

I soon discovered that the process took on less of a question–answer format and more the form of an exchange during moments in the interview. I felt some responsibility to discuss my own mixed-race experiences with these women, given the seeming therapeutic atmosphere I was creating for them to divulge these deeply personal stories. Confiding such personal matters

established a level of personal involvement which I did not want to ignore. I found myself engaged in conversation at points during the interview because I wanted to establish a rapport between us. (2012, p. 164)

This dynamic, however, should not necessarily be translated as “insider research”. Reflecting on methodological practice in CMRS, Paragg argues for the recognition of “complex commonalities” between mixed race researchers and participants. As she explains, “Although there is a commonality of experience between people of mixed race, there is complexity within this [e.g., variations in racial phenotype, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, place of origin, language, etc.], 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” (Paragg, 2014, p. 356). Recognizing complex commonalities accounts for variations of experience resulting from, for example, differentiating racial phenotype, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, and place of origin. Similarly, Mahtani also problematizes this insider/outsider dualism in mixed race methodologies, describing it as “Not the same difference” (2012, p. 156). So, while the IPA research design is intended to account for double hermeneutics, as a multiracial Nikkei woman myself, I also have to consider how my interpretations of my own experiences colour my interpretations of the participant’s interpretations of their experiences – a tongue-twisting dynamic of triple hermeneutics that I believe IPA is capacious enough to account for.

Methods and Sampling

Using a case study method, this thesis focuses on mixed race Nikkei women living in Canada. Today’s revival of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism is heavily rooted in sinophobia and is mostly affecting East Asians who are considered as sharing similar phenotypical features (Kong et al., 2021). Due to the diversity within the Asian demographic – which can be understood as including East Asians, South Asians, Southeast Asians, West Asians, and Central Asians with a myriad of diverse ethnicities

comprising each – narrowing the scope and focusing on one ethnic group also allows this study to remain feasible and nuanced in its analysis. Therefore, to consider the impacts of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism on mixed race belonging, this study focuses on Japanese multiracials in Canada. This choice is also informed by my own positionality as a multiracial Nikkei woman. My own experiences of mixed race belonging in Canada, including how the current racial climate has impacted my experiences, therefore, further contribute to my interest in researching this population for this study.

This study draws on data yielded from in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with six individuals who self-identify as mixed race Nikkei women and were born in Canada or moved to Canada during their teenage years. The latter parameter allows this study to examine how the Canadian context informs their understandings and experiences of mixed race belonging, since “the geography of a mixed race individual plays a large role in identity formation” (Mahtani, 2014, p. 68). There were no other restrictive parameters during the recruitment process based on age, sexual orientation, or city of residence. However, these dimensions (and others) are considered in the findings when relevant. The allotted time frame for interviews was 1.5 hours but averaged between 2-3 hours due a keenness to converse until a natural end. Recruitment was conducted through network sampling and primarily yielded results through Instagram. While I had not met any participants prior to interviews, I was already “following” several of them due to similar interests and various connections. Snowball sampling was possible, with some participants offering to reach out to their contacts. However, the recruitment of six women was enough to satisfy this project’s objectives. Small sample sizes are common in both IPA and CMRS (Paragg, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Contributions

This study speaks to several topical gaps within existing literature. To start, the current field of CMRS primarily consists of scholarship from the U.S. and the U.K., and such findings are not easily

transferable to the understudied Canadian context (Taylor 2008; Mahtani 2014). For example, the racial binary in the U.S. is widely understood as white/Black (as opposed to Canadian/Other in Canada) and, for this reason, U.S.-based multiracial studies often focus on Black/white racial mixtures (Mahtani 2014). By extension, not only is the Canadian context understudied in the nascent field of CMRS, so, too, is the mixed Asian demographic. There is also little academic research on multiracial Nikkei people in the Canadian context, with available literature often examining either multiraciality in the Japanese context or monoracial JCs in Canada (De Souza 2018). Yet, this demographic is particularly relevant when considering the history of anti-Asian discrimination in Canada, particularly that of JC interment and postwar dispersal, and how these events interact with contemporary formations and experiences of Japanese multiraciality. For example, postwar dispersal can be linked to an “absence of propinquity”¹ within the postwar JC community, which contributes to a remarkably high rate of out-marriage for JCs (much higher than any other ethnic group in Canada) and a higher prevalence of mixed race offspring (Milan et al., 2010; Statistics Canada, 2011; Tanaka, 2005). Multiraciality has become an observable feature in the JC community, and haafu is considered a well-established category of identity within Japanese social circles (De Souza, 2018). While there are some studies on the haafu identity in the Japanese context, mixed race members of the JC community remain an understudied demographic (De Souza, 2018). This social trend, transforming the face of the JC community in a literal sense, is another reason for selecting mixed race Nikkei people for this study.

This study also aims to contribute to the feminist tradition of visibilizing the experiences of racialized women, whose lived experiences are impacted by the intersection of race and gender in ways that are complex, compounded, and cumulative, and ensuring their historically marginalized voices continue to be heard (Crenshaw, 1991, 1994; D’Cruz, 2019). Asian women face particular forms of

¹ This phrasing, used throughout this thesis, is borrowed from Tanaka’s dissertation (2005) exploring the absence of propinquity within the Japanese Canadian community due to postwar dispersal and its continued impacts on ethnic identity.

racialized sexism and sexualized racism that are largely rooted in colonial discourses of Orientalism, which manifest in their continued fetishization, exoticization, objectification, and hyper-sexualization (Go & Lee-An, 2021; Pillai et al., 2021). This is especially relevant today with reports consistently showing Asian women as disproportionately affected by the rise in pandemic-related anti-Asian racism (Go & Lee-An, 2021; Jeung, Yellow Horse, & Matriano, 2021, 2021; Kong et al., 2021). Yet, the intersection of sexism and racism as experienced by Asian women in Canada remains understudied (Go & Lee-An, 2021). This study strives to contribute to this topical gap by creating intentional space for multiracial Nikkei women living in Canada to share their experiences.

It is important to note that a case study method in combination with a small sample size means this study's findings cannot be generalized on multiple fronts. A study on mixed race Nikkei women is not representative of, and therefore, not generalizable to the larger population of mixed race women of Asian descent. The experiences of multiracial Japanese also cannot be generalized with those of their monoracial counterparts. Further, while this was not a demographic requirement, the recruitment process yielded only participants with white/Asian mixtures, and, therefore, is not representative of the diversity of experience within the multiracial Nikkei population. With that said, research on pandemic-related anti-Asian racism is still emerging, and how this context has been experienced by multiracial Asians has yet to be considered. While the ancillary focus on pandemic-related anti-Asian racism was not originally part of this project, as 2020 and 2021 unfolded, it became clear that not including this new emerging context would be a missed opportunity and oversight in a project exploring racial belonging.

This thesis also uses the phrasing “mixed race belonging” throughout to highlight how issues of belonging are built into the conception and experience of multiraciality itself. Belonging is often taken up in multiracial research. Take, for example, the following titles: ““Canadian-First”: Mixed Race Self-Identification and Canadian Belonging” (Paragg, 2015), “Mixed-Race Women and Epistemologies of

Belonging” (Bettez, 2010), “Who Belongs? Exploring Race and Racialization in Canada” (Taylor et al., 2007). Yet, since belonging seems rather self-explanatory, it remains largely under-theorized within CMRS. In considering theories of belonging, this thesis attempts to bring two disparate fields together to further unpack what belonging is, where it arises, how, and why, in relation to race and multiraciality.

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. The following chapter strives to highlight how issues of belonging are intrinsic to how both multiraciality and Asianness have been constructed, maintained, and experienced in the Canadian social landscape. Drawing from data retrieved through interviews, Chapter 3 considers three main themes pertaining to issues of mixed race belonging – multiracial name modification (MRNM), Canada and Canadianness, and Japanese Canadian society and Japaneseness. In considering the recent context of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism, Chapter 4 then explores the experience of, what I call, “multiracial dysmorphia” (MRD) and its amplification during the pandemic, and, lastly, the emergence of pan-Asian identity in Canada as a possible new site of mixed race belonging.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter opens with an introduction to the phenomenon of multiraciality before tracing the history of mixed race research, the colonial construction of “race” in Canada, the knotty relationship between multiraciality and Canadian multiculturalism, and how these subjects can be understood through a lens of belonging. The second section considers Canada’s historical legacy of anti-Asian racism, linking these to contemporary manifestations of anti-Asian racism and contextualizing recent pandemic-related anti-Asian racism, to show how the Asian experience in Canada has always been defined by a precarious and contingent sense of racial belonging. This historically attentive approach is critical to this research objective for several reasons. Firstly, Canada’s colonial and racial legacies have contributed to contemporary formations and experiences of multiraciality today (Mahtani, 2014). According to critical mixed race studies (CMRS) scholar Minelle Mahtani, multiraciality, as an identity, phenomenon, and field of study, is devoid of meaningful acknowledgement of historical racisms and is, therefore, mired in “the present tense” (2014, p. 255). The resulting “multiracial amnesia”, she argues, contributes to the reinforcement of colonial and racial legacies by ignoring how history and place have contributed to the forging of multiraciality (2014). This study’s incorporation of a historical angle heeds Mahtani’s call for CMRS to more deeply engage with the historical legacies informing contemporary racial formations, such as multiraciality, so that it may be truly decolonial and antiracist (2014). Secondly, while often framed as such by wider society and mainstream media, anti-Asian racism is not a new phenomenon in Canada and, instead, is connected to a long historical tradition of anti-Asian racism and the overall racial hierarchy in Canada. To allow for a fuller understanding of current manifestations of anti-Asian racism and its implications on notions of mixed race belonging, a connection should be drawn from the past to the present to demonstrate the deep rootedness of racism in Canada and bring visibility to its continued social and material effects.

Part 1: Multiraciality Across Time & Space

The Phenomenon of Multiraciality

Influenced by globalization, the movement of people worldwide has increased opportunity for new forms of racial blending, and “increasing social acceptance of mixed cultural identities (both individual and collective) across the world,” has also generated new readings of what mixed race means in contemporary society (King-O’Riain & Small, 2014, p. xi). For example, in 1993, Time Magazine’s cover in 1993 featured an image of a multiracial woman digitally generated from the faces of people from various races to preview the arrival of “The New Face of America. How Immigrants are Shaping the World’s First Multicultural Society”. In recognition of growing diversity in Canada, a 2004 Statistics Canada report framed mixed unions as “an engine for social change” moving Canada towards a society characterized by racial sameness (Milan & Hamm, 2004). A 2013 National Geographic article featuring portraits of multiracial people asked – “What is it about the faces on these pages that we find so intriguing? Is it simply that their features disrupt our expectations, that we’re not used to seeing those eyes with that hair, that nose above those lips?” (Funderburg, 2013, para. 1). Also in 2013, the Toronto Star asked “Will Toronto be the world’s first post-racial metropolis?” and suggested this “exponentially expanding cohort promises a future where everyone is mixed” (Hune-Brown, 2013).

These examples capture a growing fixation on multiraciality in the global North over the last several decades and the belief that multiraciality is the approaching new norm. Mixed race people are also increasingly positioned as embodying social progress towards a post-racial society. It is assumed that the often racially ambiguous appearance of mixed race people reduces the ability for onlookers to racially categorize them, and, by extension, racially discriminate against them: “if we can’t slot people into familiar categories, perhaps we’ll be forced to reconsider existing definitions of race and identity, presumptions about who is us and who is them” (Funderburg, 2013, para. 11). In other words, by

problematizing established racial categories, mixed race people have been problematically framed as living proof of the declining significance of race and a natural solution to racism.

The framing of multiraciality as a novel phenomenon, however, requires closer inspection. As Leanne Taylor notes, “One of the central premises of multiracial discourse is that multiracial people are “on the rise” and increasing in numbers. This premise ... suggests that mixed race is now in need of our attention, and categorization, in ways that it was not previously” (2008b, p. 50). Yet racial mixing is not new, nor did it start in the era of globalization. Instead, “for as long as modern humans have populated the earth and migrated within and across continents, intergroup mating and marriages have been inevitable and commonplace” (Ifekwunigwe, 2004, p. 3). Perhaps it is more so that, “Mixed people have always existed, but what is new, we argue, is the expanding populations of mixed people, as well as the increasing recognition and visibility of mixed people and identities within contemporary society” (King-O’Riain & Small, 2014, p. viii). Who, then, is included and excluded from contemporary multiraciality? Some scholars find the mixed race label privileges certain computations of multiraciality over others. For example, the claim that Toronto could become the first post-racial city in the world reveals a highly Eurocentric view. Yet, “in spite of relentless journalistic reports from the global North celebrating mixed race futures in modern liberal democracies”, as Minelle Mahtani asserts,

Mixing has occurred in the global South for generations, including Latin America (see Twine 2000a) and India (see Blunt 2003), yet mixing there is not seen as equally newsworthy. No one is racially pure, of course, but some people experience the privilege of being perceived as mixed more than others. As Elam (2011, 6) reminds us, the question should not be, “Why are there more mixed race people now?” – instead, we ought to ask, “Why do we see more people *as* mixed race now? (2014, pp. 6–7)

If racial mixing is not novel and racial purity is a myth, what does it even mean to be mixed race? To better understand the phenomenon of multiraciality, let us consider the component of any racial mixture – race. Biologically, the social designation of race is of “statistically insignificant genetic variance” (Ifekwunigwe, 2004, p. 4). Despite being “an arbitrary social construct,” however, myths of scientific

racism continue to be “a salient feature in the public imagination” due to the cultural hegemony of whiteness (Mahtani, 2014, p. 24). Paul Kivel defines whiteness as “a powerful fiction enforced by power and violence. Whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white” (1996, p. 19). Race, racism, and whiteness dictate the boundaries of belonging through processes of racialization, “a social process producing racial difference in relation to whiteness and assigning inferiority to those racialized in relation to the superiority of those deemed to be white” (Oikawa, 2012, p. 7). The collective acceptance that humans are dividable into static racial categories determined by phenotypical differences, which are then imbued with sociopolitical meanings of superiority and inferiority, ensures this mode of division remains a central axis for social organization – with whiteness firmly on top (Mahtani, 2014). So, *race only exists insofar as racism does*, and racism informs the way certain bodies are racialized, which then has material consequences in the lives of racialized peoples.

How would one then define multiraciality if the racial categories comprising it are not real? In the same way “race remains deceptively difficult to discuss,” this is also true of multiraciality (Mahtani, 2014, p. 23). Some scholars suggest any thinking about multiraciality inadvertently reifies race itself, for, “To describe the process of mixing is at the same time to define the entities that existed before mixing” (Yu, 2003, p. 1407). Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe dubs this the “ultimate paradox of ‘mixed race’ studies,” where “popular and academic interest in the idea of ‘mixed race’ persists – and in fact continues to grow – despite the fact that ‘biological’ explanations for ‘racial’ differences have long been discredited” (2004, p. 4). Others also suggest mixed race is not so much a universally fixed category of identity, but more so a shared experience of racialization for people so situated (Mahtani, 2014). As Mahtani claims, defining mixed race is tricky because “There can be no clear agreement about what

constitutes mixed race in a global arena because mixed race cannot be pinned down to a single semantic definition. It can be understood only by relating its shifting meanings and contours to historically and geographically located processes” (2014, p. 31). Since race is ultimately constructed and reconstructed by the cultural hegemon in ways that always “promote its own self-interest,” mixed race bodies have also been made legible in various ways throughout time and space (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 155).

The History of Multiracial Research

Ifekwunigwe imagines multiracial research as having three ages: pathology, celebration, and critique (2004, p. 8). The “age of pathology”, borne from nineteenth-century biological theories of evolution, approached racial miscegenation as a pollutive threat to the racial categories used to legitimize and uphold oppressive and exploitative social systems, such as slavery, in favour of the white race (Mahtani, 2014; Taylor et al., 2007). Within this framework, mixed race people were considered, at the very least, a concerning cautionary tale and, at the very most, an abomination (Billinger, 2013; Mahtani, 2014). Mixed race people, situated as inferior to monoracial people, were characterized as genetically deficient in terms of attractiveness, physicality, intelligence, morality, and capability, and also confused and rejected due to their racial fragmentation (Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Mahtani, 2014; Taylor, 2008b). When compounded by gender, mixed race women were seen as “flighty, exotic, erotic, dangerous, tormented and even pathetic” (Mahtani, 2002, p. 470). The mixed race subject is ultimately a product of this fiction of racial pollution and the imagined social pathology of multiraciality – and mixed race people are still made intelligible through remnants of this narrative today (Ifekwunigwe, 2004).

Mixed race people began defying this narrative during the 1980s-90s by centering reflections of their multiraciality in literature, discussions, and activism, which shifted the field’s emphasis towards “the agency of racially mixed people and on their liberation from, as opposed to their confinement by, the oppressive hierarchy of racial categories” (Mahtani, 2014, p. 38; Olumide, 2002; Taylor, 2008a,

2008b). Maria P. P. Root reframed mixed race struggles as responses to environmental factors (e.g. racism), rather than inherently determined by race or mixture – a significant contribution to the social constructionist understandings of multiraciality (Mahtani, 2014; Root, 1990). Considerations of multiracial identity also underwent major transformations through theories of cultural hybridity challenging rigid racial binaries. As opposed to fixed, static, and deficient, new readings of multiraciality saw mixed race identity as fluid, flexible, shifting, contingent, situational, paradoxical, and complex (Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Mahtani, 2014; Taylor, 2008b). These developments represent the onset of the age of celebration in mixed race scholarship (Ifekwunigwe, 2004).

Many mixed race publications operate within a celebratory framework, positioning the “racially complex bodies” of mixed race people as inherently progressive, antiracist, and “capable of transcending race” (Taylor, 2008b, p. 40). Mixed race people have found themselves exalted, praised, privileged, exoticized and commodified as evidence and the shepherds of a post-racial colour-blind society (Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Mahtani, 2014; Parker & Song, 2001; Taylor, 2008b). This narrative “mired in neoliberal optimism” is problematic for several reasons (Mahtani, 2014, p. 45). For one, “the impossibly burdened figure of the biracial child cannot conceivably do the work of utopia that we repeatedly impose upon her” (Ochieng’ Nyong’o, 2009, pp. 174–175). Further, “Mixed race people do *not* possess special talents or abilities simply because they call themselves racially mixed” (Mahtani, 2014, p. 6). Other critiques are that this narrative reinforces, re-biologizes, and re-essentializes race and multiraciality, obscures multiracial people’s lived experiences, overshadows or dismisses the experiences of other racialized populations, and upholds existing power relations within the white-settler colonial regime (Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Mahtani, 2014; Taylor, 2008b). Such analysis of multiraciality points to the third age of critique and the nascent field of critical mixed race studies (CMRS). The term “critical” is deployed in similar ways to its predecessor, critical race theory (CRT), which, for example, confronts

whiteness and power, centers the voices of those made racially marginalized, advocates for anti-essentialism, incorporates intersectionality, and values personal dimensions as legitimate (Mahtani, 2014; Taylor, 2008b). By bringing together these considerations but with a focus on multiraciality, the term “critical” in CMRS is meant “to indicate both a new direction and to bring together the various tributaries of the field in a new light, one that is recursive and self-reflexive” (Daniel et al., 2014, p. 7). As Taylor notes, the “interweaving of all of these discourses culminates in what individuals call their “experience” ... of living as a racially mixed or racialized person in this society” (2007, p. 157).

The Colonial Construction of “Race” In Canada

Multiraciality has also been differently taken up across space. To unpack the specific operations of race in Canada and, thereby, situate multiraciality in this social landscape, I start at the birth of Canada as a white-settler colonial nation – for “mixed race people have been made intelligible in ways that maintain not only racialized and gendered hierarchies but also *colonized* ones” (Mahtani, 2014, p. 31). Canadian settler colonialism is understood here through Patrick Wolfe’s logic of elimination theory as a continued system, rather than a time-bound event of the past, dependent upon the ongoing processes of colonization to maintain its legitimacy (2006). Coloniality continues to be embedded in Canada’s legal, political, and economic structures, requiring the continued privileging of whiteness derived from dual European roots (British and French) at the expense of all “others” (Mahtani, 2014; Wolfe, 2006). Herein lies the groundwork for the racial binary in Canada – Canadian/Other, or white/non-white (Bannerji, 2020, 2000; Mahtani et al., 2014; Taylor, 2008b). It is worth highlighting here that this binary intentionally obscures the presence of Indigenous peoples on this land, either ineptly allocating them as Other or erasing Indigeneity from consideration entirely. This binary informed many of Canada’s nation-building efforts to produce and sustain a favourable racial social order (or, in former immigration minister and prime minister Robert Borden’s words, a “white Canada”), such as immigration policies

enacted to deter and restrict the movements of non-white people to Canada (Bannerji, 2020; Taylor et al., 2007, p. 158). Such practices also sought to limit miscegenation through exclusion as racial mixing was thought to threaten the purity of Canadian whiteness (Billinger, 2013). This binary continues to inform how groups, including mixed race people, are differently racialized in the Canadian social landscape. Mawani suggests groups are differently temporalized to support the logic of colonialism in Canada, with Indigenous people seen as “first but vanishing”, white European settlers as “second and permanent,” and Asian migrants as “last and temporary” (Mawani, 2012, p. 375). This bolsters Mahtani’s argument that “certain combinations and computations of mixed race hold different value” to support the ongoing colonial project (Mahtani, 2014, p. 16). The privileging of specific forms of mixing as “new and different,” especially those involving white mixture, over others contributes to the ongoing project of colonization in Canada (Mahtani, 2014, p. 54). Multiracial identity in Canada is thus “a product of colonial formations” with the racial category of mixed race seen as appealing and progressive for a “modern white-settler society imagined as a liberal, multicultural democracy” *because* of the distance it creates from colonial, racial, and diasporic histories (Mahtani, 2014, p. 3,20). In this way, the Canadian/Other racial binary can be understood as a means of delineating the boundaries of belonging.

Canadian Multiculturalism & Multiraciality

The Canadian/Other racial binary continues to be enforced by the project of Canadian multiculturalism. Considered globally unprecedented at the time of its institutionalization in 1988, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was enacted to invite, preserve, support, and celebrate ethnocultural diversity, contributing to Canada’s optimistic envisioning as a liberal, democratic, meritocratic, immigrant-friendly, and multicultural society both domestically and internationally (Mahtani, 2014; Mahtani et al., 2014). These tenets have come to be uniquely incorporated into what it means to be “Canadian” (Kymlicka, 1995) and, in addition to informing national identity, also provide “the lens

through which many Canadians come to engage with cultural diversity as well as understand, experience and articulate their racial and ethnic identities” (Taylor, 2008a, p. 85). The nation-building project of Canadian multiculturalism can, therefore, be understood as an policy, social practice, ideology, and demographic reality (Mahtani, 2014; Mahtani et al., 2014; Wood & Gilbert, 2005). Yet, the term “race” is noticeably absent in Canadian policy. Instead, Canadian multiculturalism operates through “the concept of racialized ethnicities” with ethnicity and culture often conflated with or used as stand-ins for notions of race (Mahtani, 2002, p. 71; Mahtani et al., 2014; Paragg, 2014; Taylor et al., 2007). Race is intimately implicated within Canadian multiculturalism and in ways that are often at odds with its outward facing image. Canadian multiculturalism strategically reinforces Canada as a primarily white nation by positioning some racial groups, particularly those with English and French heritage, as “more Canadian” than others (Bannerji, 2000).

Canadian multiculturalism was also constructed as a colonialist strategy to neutralize Quebec’s separatist aspirations and maintain the colonial dominance of an English Canada (Bannerji, 2020, p. 370). By claiming to embrace cultural diversity and identities, Canadian multiculturalism is levied as a unifying ideology between the dual colonial powers to solidify the bedrock of Canada’s foundations (Bannerji, 2020). Within this framing, “visible minorities²” (non-white people living in Canada) occupy a precarious sense of belonging due to a “fundamental unease with how our difference is construed and constructed by the state” (Bannerji, 2020, p. 367). As Bannerji notes, this ideology,

places us, on whose actual lives the ideology is evoked, in a peculiar situation. On the one hand, by our sheer presence we provide a central part of the distinct pluralist unity of Canadian nationhood; on the other hand, this centrality is dependent on our ‘difference,’ which denotes the power of definition that ‘Canadians’ have over ‘others’. (2020, p. 371)

² As Bannerji writes, the notion of race/colour “was translated into the language of visibility. The new Canadian social and political subject was appellated “visible minority,” stressing both the features of being non-white and therefore visible in a way whites are not, and of being politically minor players.” (2000, p. 30)

Canadian multiculturalism's necessity for Others, therefore, produces and minoritizes difference. Visible minorities are a "category produced by the multiculturalist state" and this conversion of difference into diversity allows Canada to mitigate, trivialize, and obscure the colonial power relations underpinning its foundations (Bannerji, 2020, p. 368). Canadian multiculturalism, therefore, "rigorously elides both race and racism and, hence, any historical consciousness" (Srivastava, 2013, p. 117). Visible minorities are used as pawns within an ongoing colonial war between the English and French through an emphasis of difference – all the while still maintaining Canada as a primarily white nation (Bannerji, 2020).

Take the language of Canadian multiculturalism where the "pervasive normalcy of whiteness" is prevalent (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 10). The favoured use of the term "visible minorities" within Canadian multiculturalism sidesteps explicit mention of race while still plainly implying "non-white" (Taylor, 2008a). The United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination contested Canada's use of this term in 2007 for being racially discriminatory and promoting whiteness as the national standard – yet Canada maintains its usage of this term (Grant & Balkissoon, 2019). The language of Canadian multiculturalism also creates for racialized people a "burden of hyphenation where one is seen as not solely 'Canadian' but 'Canadian and fill-in-your-ethnic background'" (Mahtani, 2002, p. 19). While some see the ability to claim hyphenated identities as liberating, others note how Canadian multiculturalism "position[s] people who do not identify as English or French as outside of Canadian identity through the use of a distancing hyphen" (Mahtani et al., 2014, p. 308).

Canadian multiculturalism also "translates poorly into social justice for racialized minorities" (Mahtani et al., 2014, p. 315). This is demonstrated by the profound discrepancy between the values claimed by Canadian multiculturalism, such as equality, fairness, diversity, and tolerance, and the persistence of inequality, discrimination, intolerance, and racism in the lives of racialized populations. By imagining itself to be an open and meritocratic social system while, at the same time, thoroughly

evading both race and racism, the fantasy of Canadian multiculturalism not only obscures the social reality for racialized people but does little to intervene and course-correct. In short, multiculturalism is not really *for* racialized people. As a reflection of how Canadian multiculturalism is formulated and operates, Canadians often feel uncomfortable talking about race and racism unless it is framed as a celebration of Canada's accommodation of racial diversity (Mahtani et al., 2014). Some argue Canadian multiculturalism encourages the commodification of ethnocultural difference through superficial celebrations of "the three F's" – fun, food, and festivals (Mahtani et al., 2014). Such practices constitute as "contact" with "other" cultures and become absorbed into the framing of Canadian identity as benevolent, progressive, and antiracist (Mahtani et al., 2014, p. 250). However, "these kinds of commodified multicultural practices often occur in the absence of meaningful social interactions with members of racialized groups (and therefore do not help to combat racism or cultural prejudice but instead reinforce the maintenance of the status quo)" (Mahtani et al., 2014, p. 250).

Where, then, does multiraciality fit into Canada's multicultural framework? On the one hand, multiraciality has been imagined as compatible with Canadian multiculturalism. As Thompson notes, the enumeration of mixed race people in the 1996 Canadian census, which allowed respondents to claim multiple visible minority groups, "made multicultural sense, aligning well with the (re)conceptualized ideal of Canadian multiculturalism that acknowledged and endorsed racial diversity" (2012, p. 1421). By positioning multiraciality as part of the multicultural project, mixed race people become "emblematic of multicultural success" (Mahtani et al., 2014). Yet, multiraciality is fundamentally incongruous with Canadian multiculturalism because,

In Canadian society, racial identification and the related experiences of 'mixed race' individuals are predicated on attempts to place them in the pre-existing racial and ethnic categories framed by the discourse of multiculturalism by which skin colour [and other phenotypical features] is used to identify individuals as Canadian or "Other". (Taylor et al., 2007, pp. 153–154)

Since race functions as a way of determining belonging in a multicultural context, the very presence of mixed race people challenges the regulatory functions of race within Canadian multiculturalism. As Taylor et al. note, “difference is antithetical to fundamental values, norms, ideas and processes that are necessary in order to sustain society’s hegemonic structures and ideologies. As such positions of hybridity and mixed-race identities are disruptive to the signifiers of race on which individuals have historically relied” (2007, p. 157). As Mahtani et al. conclude, Canadian multiculturalism creates an environment where mixed race identities can be “superficially celebrated as living proof of the success of multiculturalism and, in turn, a supposedly inclusive Canada,” while still also positioning them outside Canadianness by spotlighting their non-whiteness (2014, p. 323,308). The following studies demonstrate how mixed race disruptions to the colonial racial binary underpinning Canadian multiculturalism are often “resisted, challenged, and subordinated because of the challenges they pose to the status quo” (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 157).

Let us return to the hyphen in the language of Canadian multiculturalism. According to Taylor et al., the discursive emphasis Canadian multiculturalism places on ethnic and cultural categories presents layered complications for mixed race people wishing to claim an identity with multiple ethnic heritages *and* racial backgrounds (2007). For multiracial people to “become visible” they must adopt “identities that makes sense within society’s dominant cultural logic ... people are left having to adopt a series of monoracial identities that are strung together with hyphens” (Taylor 2008a, p. 44). The white (English) settler becomes the normative standard in the colonial context and those outside whiteness become hyphenated. Fred Wah, a mixed race Canadian poet of Chinese descent, describes the hyphen as,

...the operable tool that both compounds differences and underlines sameness. Though it is in the middle, it is not in the centre. It is a property marker, a boundary post, a borderland, a bastard, a railroad, a last spike, a stain, a cipher, a rope, a knot, a chain (link), a foreign word, a warning sign, a ‘head tax’, a bridge, a no-man’s land, a nomadic, floating magic carpet, now you see it now you don’t. The hyphen is the hybrid’s dish, the mestiza’s whole wheat tortillas

(Anzaldúa 194), the metis' apple (red on the outside, white on the inside), the happa's egg (white out, yellow in), the mulatto's café au lait. (2000, pp. 72–73)

The hyphen disregards the complexity of multiracial identities situated outside of or between racialized ethnic categories (Mahtani, 2002; Mahtani et al., 2014). In a documentary exploring multiraciality in Canada, mixed race participant Karina Vernon critiques how “multiculturalism was never really designed to imagine me” (Nakagawa, 2005). Taylor claims that the oversight and exclusion of the hyphen contributes to feelings of being “doubly different, doubly strange, and doubly foreign,” which then impacts how belonging is experienced by multiracial people in Canada (Taylor, 2008b, p. 86).

If the colonial operations of race in Canada and Canadian multiculturalism rely on ascribing people into available racial categories, multiraciality complicates this. As Mahtani claims, race is “particularly potent for people who identify as mixed race, as their bodies can become a minefield of racial marking” (2014, p. 23). One shared experience often referred to by mixed race people is the “What are you?” question. According to Paragg, this all-too-common question indicates a process of racialization by the external racial gaze³, whereby “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” (2014, pp. 349, 353). Illegibility, however, does not equate to invisibility. Paragg suggests that racially ambiguous, mixed race people 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” (2014, p. 351). Mixed race bodies being read in ambivalent, inconsistent, and contradictory ways is a common marker of the mixed race experience (Paragg, 2015). Lawrence Hill, who dubs this line of questioning as “The Question”, describes the experience as follows:

Canadians have a favourite pastime, and they don't even realize it. They like to ask—they absolutely love to ask—where you are from if you don't look convincingly white. They want to know it, they need to know it, simply must have that information. They just can't relax until they have pin-pointed, to their satisfaction, your geographic and racial coordinates. They can go

³ The concept of the external racial gaze is inspired by the frameworks of Fanon [1967] and Hall [1990] (Paragg, 2014).

almost out of their minds with curiosity, as when driven by the need for food, water, or sex, but once they've finally managed to find out precisely where you were born, who your parents were, and what your racial makeup is, then, man, do they feel better. They can breathe easy and get back to the business of living. (2002, p. 173)

Rather than offering invisibility, illegibility heightens salience. Unresolved racial ambiguity has been shown to negatively influence white people's interactions with racially ambiguous persons, while resolving ambiguity improves them (Gaither et al. 2018). While this question might be well-intentioned and harmless (when "asked at the right time, when it results from genuine interest in you as a person, and when the person asking the question actually accepts the answer"), Hill believes this question "positions mixed race bodies outside the national framework of belonging" (2002, p. 174; Taylor, 2008b, p. 136). Hill also describes the sense of entitlement underlying this line of questioning as indicative of implicit racism ("Since you're clearly not Canadian, and I am, I am within my rights to ask you just exactly where you're from") (2002, p. 176). Vernon believes that "the result of those kinds of questions is it revokes my Canadianness. To say, 'what are you', 'where are you from', it implies, it really implicitly implies that you can't be from here. Nobody who looks like you is from here" (Nakagawa, 2005). For many mixed race people, The Question effectively "launches one immediately into the realm of 'other'" – or outside the realm of belonging (Taylor, 2008b, p. 137). Paragg argues The Question is often framed within a "curiosity narrative" supported by Canadian multiculturalism, which effectively minimize issues of race and racism as innocuous, insignificant, or nonexistent by suggesting these interactions stem from "mere curiosity" (Paragg, 2014). In another study exploring the "(in)ability" for mixed race individuals to claim Canadian identities, Paragg reveals how the term "Canadian" is employed in three overlapping ways: asserting themselves as "Canadian-first," an understanding that "Canadian means white," and actively and strategically appropriating the term "Canadian" in their interactions with others (2015). In this way, while race may not be explicitly named

by Canadian multiculturalism, and multiraciality largely overlooked by Canadian society, the external racial gaze is always present within the Canadian multicultural context (Taylor, 2008b, p. 139).

Canadian multiculturalism envisions “dominant notions of Canada as enabling belonging,” but the racial binary of Canadian/Other underpinning it highlights how “such a belonging necessitates containing and controlling difference and otherness” (Taylor, 2008b, p. 135). While multiraciality is superficially celebrated as progress within Canadian multiculturalism, since multiraciality threatens its underlying mechanisms, mixed race people are often positioned outside of (white) Canadianness. The pervasiveness of the external racial gaze in how mixed race bodies are read not only contradicts the celebratory reading of mixed race people as a natural solution to race and racism, but the “constant interrogation” of mixed race people’s racial makeup is also a “key factor” reinforcing the colonial racial binary of Canadian/Other by suggesting “foreignness, outsidership and inferiority” (Taylor, 2008b, p. 138). Recalling Yuval-Davis’ framework, Canadian multiculturalism is a political project of belonging.

Part 2: A Continued Legacy of Anti-Asian Racism

This section aims to demonstrate how the Asian experience in Canada is a story born on the outskirts of national belonging. A brief look into Canada’s historical legacy of anti-Asian racism shows us how Asianness in Canada was initially imagined through a lens of “undesirable otherness”. This history of anti-Asian racism continues to shape how Asian bodies are racially made legible within Canadian society today and, therefore, the experience of being Asian in Canada today. In approaching current manifestations of anti-Asian racism with a historicized sensibility, we can then situate the recent rise in pandemic-related anti-Asian racism as just the latest threat to belonging for Asians in Canada.

The History of Anti-Asian Racism in Canada

Asian immigrants contributed to much of Canada’s nation-building efforts, particularly during the nineteenth century with cheap labour was in high demand (Yao 2021). However, “their status was

monitored through racialized discourses that named them as outside the nation then in formation, as the “undesirables”. These “undesirables” would translate over time into “Asian Canadians” (Miki, 2000, p. 50). The discursive racialization of certain subjects as “undesirable,” a term used in the 1906 and 1909 Immigration Acts and eventually incorporated into state policy, “prevent[ed] Asian migrants from becoming part of an emerging Canadian national identity, which was forcefully established as white” (D. Goellnicht & Ty, 2016, p. 226). Racist narratives, such as yellow peril, fed into the constructed undesirability of Asians in Canada during this time as a means of justifying anti-Asian discrimination.

The racial colour-metaphor of yellow peril is a white supremacist narrative perceiving Asians as “nameless hordes of barbarous yellow people” posing a sociocultural, economic, moral, health, and existential threat to the white race (S. Lee & Hong, 2020; Odijie, 2018, p. 359). Fears of yellow peril emerged in Canada as a response to the imagined dangers of Asian immigration and settlement for Canada’s white settler society, such as disease, immorality, and economic competition (S. Lee & Hong, 2020; Odijie, 2018). Sexual anxieties over interracial relations and multiraciality also contributed to a general disdain for Asians and their framing as sexually immoral and corrupt (Go & Lee-An, 2021; S. Lee & Hong, 2020). The “[s]exualization of Asian women and the fetishization of Asian women’s bodies (tied to colonial discourses of Orientalism) constructed Asian women as exotic sexual objects with the potential to disrupt the “biological reproduction of the white nation”” (Go & Lee-An, 2021, p. 4). Fears of yellow peril contributed to various anti-Asian legislation enacted to appease white Canadians that their government, while still exploiting cheap Asian labour for nation-building purposes (D. Goellnicht & Ty, 2016; Taylor et al., 2007). Such policies include: the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, which placed head taxes on Chinese immigrants (once their labour was no longer needed for the Canadian Pacific Railway) and was the first legislation to restrict immigration based on race and ethnicity (Chan, 2016, 2017); the 1908 Hayashi-Lemieux Gentleman’s Agreement restricting Japanese

immigration, which was formulated following the Vancouver anti-Asian riots in 1907 attended by thousands, with some holding signs reading, “For a White Canada”, and initially organized by the Asiatic Exclusion League of which Vancouver’s mayor and city councillors were founding members (Yao, 2021) (Sunahara 2011; Laurier 2020; project 1907); the 1908 Continuous Voyage policy, which effectively thwarted South Asian immigration (Johnston 2006); and a revised 1923 Chinese Immigration Act (also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act) barring Chinese immigration altogether and deporting non-English speaking Chinese people (Chan, 2017). Japanese immigration was also outright banned once JCs were declared as enemy aliens during WWII. In this way, “Through a shifting series of exclusions and inclusions, these apparatuses (re)produce and manage Asian subjects, who have been defined variously (and often simultaneously) as sources of labour, threats to the white mainstream, sexualized bodies, bearers of capital, and so on” (C. Lee, 2008, para. 14).

Canada’s internment of JCs during WWII, which involved their “uprooting, confinement, dispossession, deportation and dispersal”, is particularly important for the ways it has shaped present-day experiences of belonging for Japanese-descended people (Oikawa, 2012, p. 5). Despite baseless accusations of JCs being a national security threat, anti-Asian lobbyists and politicians, particularly on the West Coast, applied pressure on the government to act after Japan allied itself with Canada’s wartime enemies. Anti-Japanese hostility quickly culminated in the passing of the Order of Council PC 1486 in 1942 authorizing the removal of all “persons of Japanese racial origin” (Sunahara, 2011). Some 23,000 people of Japanese descent, the majority of who were Canadian-born or naturalized citizens, were racialized as the enemy and forcibly interned – the operations of which were funded by the seizure and sale of JC-owned property and assets (Fukuda, 2017; Oikawa, 2012; Sunahara, 2011). Prior to WWII, JC communities had developed flourishing social, cultural, and economic infrastructures and networks despite their exclusion from larger Canadian society, which were then destroyed and prevented

from post-war recovery (Sunahara 2011; Fukuda 2017; Miki 2004). The post-war dispersal policy, inspired by lingering anti-Japanese sentiment, scattered JCs across Canada and banned any gatherings beyond the nuclear family unit, preventing the rebuilding of communities and postwar connections – supposedly in favour of assimilation into the Canadian social fabric (Miki 2004). Any sense of Japanese community has remained fractured following WWII (Oikawa 2012; Miki 2004).

Contemporary Manifestations of Anti-Asian Racism

The perpetual foreigner stereotype and model minority myth are often referred to when trying to capture the Asian experience today and, “[while] seemingly opposite stereotypes ...are closely related and mutually reinforcing stereotypes that work to marginalize Asian Americans [and Canadians]” (S. Lee & Hong, 2020, p. 165). The perpetual foreigner stereotype is “a contemporary expression of the yellow peril stereotype” and posits that Asians will always be cast as unassimilable Others by dominant society and denied acceptance as equal citizens of the nation (S. Lee & Hong, 2020, p. 166). Within this framing, Asians are viewed as foreigners whose cultural values and practices are incompatible with the North American way of life and, even more than that, as threats to Canadian society (Lou et al., 2021, p. 281). For example, Chinese and Asian people were viewed as sources of disease like smallpox and leprosy in the early 19th century and also carriers of the 2003 SARS⁴ epidemic (Lou et al., 2021). With COVID-19, Asians are once again characterized as a public health threat. The racializing of COVID-19 can be understood as a resurgence of yellow perilism and the perpetual foreigner myth, which continue to position Asians outside of Canadianness and, thereby, outside of national belonging.

The “model minority” was coined by William Petersen in 1966 to characterize Asian Americans (particularly Japanese Americans) as examples of a successfully assimilated racial minority and a testament to the American dream (E. S. Lee, 2019, p. 231). In this light, Asians are imagined as quiet,

⁴ Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

well-behaved, educated, hardworking, entrepreneurial, politically silent, law-abiding immigrants. While a seemingly positive stereotype, the politically motivated reasons for its emergence and traction, as well as its negative impacts on the Asian diasporic population, suggest otherwise: “the Model Minority Myth is too inaccurate to be a truth and too harmful to be an error; rather, it is a tool of social stratification or political domination. In fact, it may be one of the greatest of the most recent inventions of White supremacy as a political system” (Kim, 2014, p. 110). The model minority myth emerged during the civil rights movement in the U.S, seen as a national threat to the status quo of white supremacy. Pointing to the success of Asians bolstered the myth of equal opportunity for all races and dismissed systemic racism by implying that “minority populations who experience difficulty advancing economically [are] solely culpable for their “failure”” (E. S. Lee, 2019, p. 232). Continued leveraging of the model minority myth has also promoted intraminority conflict, particularly between Asian Americans and Black Americans, by obscuring the common role of racism and further fortifying the white supremacist racial hierarchy (E. S. Lee, 2019). This myth has been similarly absorbed into Canadian consciousness, “fus[ing] with Canadian multiculturalism in a way that erases anti-Asian racism” (Yao, 2021, para. 3).

The racializing of Asianness is also gendered, as captured by The Dragon Lady and Lotus Blossom tropes emerging from Orientalist depictions of Asian women in Western film in the late 1800s to early 1900s, which feed into cultural portrayals of Asian women today, and the social phenomenon of Yellow Fever (Rajgopal, 2020). The Dragon Lady is the cinematic embodiment of the sexual anxieties of yellow perilism, painting the Asian woman as a hypersexualized, deceitful, ruthless, and emotionless villain who seduces and destroys the virtues of white purity and civility (Rajgopal, 2020). This trope can also be understood as an imagined threat of multiraciality, as

Miscegenation laws were still in effect all over the country, and no Asian actress could play a lead role opposite a White man. Thus Asian American actresses played only negative roles, such as the evil henchmaiden to the Asian villain. This pattern has continued to this day, for the Dragon Lady stereotype remains alive ... (2020, p. 396)

On the other hand, “If the Asian woman is not a cold and dangerous villain, she is a mindless, simpering doll” – often referred to as the Lotus Blossom trope (Rajgopal, 2020, p. 397). This trope paints the Asian woman as fragile, docile, domestic, pretty, coquettish, and “eager to please their White lord and Master” (Rajgopal, 2020; Zheng, 2016, p. 405). While seemingly opposite, both archetypes reduce Asian women to sexualized bodies disconnected from their own emotions. As “mass culture and cinema in particular plays a crucial role in constructing the categories that reinscribe racial hierarchies”, these onscreen depictions continue to impact the offscreen experiences of Asian diasporic women – as is perhaps best captured by the social phenomenon of Yellow Fever (Rajgopal, 2020, p. 393). Yellow Fever is a derogatory term referring to a racial fetish for Asians, typically Asian women, by non-Asian men, and is widely considered to be a paradigm example of racial fetishization (Zheng, 2016, p. 401). This racist pun not only draws from racist color terminology but also frames a racial fetish for Asians as a disease. While some dismiss Yellow Fever as harmless flattery, many Asian women recognize it as foreshadowing harm to their person because, despite “the passage of yellow peril (Asiaphobia) to yellow fever (Asiaphilia)”, “coming from fear and going towards desire does not spell progress for the Asian American, but just a different basis for Othering” (Doromal, 2007, para. 9). A 2002 study found Asian women to be overrepresented in violent pornography, often depicted as rape or torture victims while the perpetrators are white men (Gossett & Byrne, 2002; Woan, 2008). The top-searched porn category in Canada in 2021 was “hentai” and the fourth was “asian” (Pornhub Insights, 2021). The Atlanta spa shootings in 2021 brought renewed attention to the impacts of Asian fetishization when the gunman confessed he had a “sex addiction” and that the spas were a “temptation ...to eliminate” (Holcombe et al., 2021, sec. 4). These sociocultural portrayals reducing Asian women to sexual bodies devoid of humanity continue to have dire effects on the lived experiences of Asian women.

Anti-Asian Racism in the Current Racial Climate

Let us now turn to the racializing of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of rising anti-Asian racism to set the stage for this study's ancillary research objective of determining the impacts of the current racial climate on how mixed race belonging is experienced by multiracial Nikkei women living in Canada. Due to COVID-19's alleged origins in China, and contributing ignorance and misinformation, the pandemic quickly became racialized through sinophobic and anti-Asian narratives accusing Chinese and Asian people of being COVID-19 carriers and responsible for the pandemic's global dissemination and any associated anguish (e.g., lockdowns). The revival of yellow perilism fuelled a frenzy of anti-Asian rhetoric in the public sphere during the pandemic, especially in online spaces, as several studies show, which can be partly attributed to the stigmatizing language used by conservative media outlets and figures such as former U.S. President Donald Trump ("e.g., Wuhan virus", "kung flu") (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Ditch the Label, 2021; Hswen et al., 2021; Light, 2020). A sharp rise in anti-Asian hashtags was documented in the weeks following Trump's tweet about the "Chinese virus", following on the heels of the World Health Organization's reminder not to attach locations or ethnicities to human infectious diseases to minimize the risk of exacerbating existing prejudices and violence against a particular group, as has previously occurred with other diseases (Hswen et al., 2021; WHO, 2015). The rise and spread of inflammatory anti-Asian rhetoric provided the necessary kindling for fueling anti-Asian sentiment, incidents, and violence in Canada, the U.S., and overseas, with reports of rising anti-Asian racism in Italy, Russia, New Zealand, the U.K. and Australia culminating in an "unrelenting timeline of global anti-Asian violence" (Haynes, 2021, para. 1).

The rise in anti-Asian rhetoric sounded immediate alarm bells for the Asian diaspora in Canada. In response, several community organizations set up online reporting centers to track incidents of anti-Asian racism. CCNC Toronto's initial year-in-review report, which pulls data from multiple reporting

centres (Fight COVID Racism, project 1907's online reporting centre, and EliminateHate⁵), reported 1,150 anti-Asian incidents across Canada between March 2020 and February 2021 (Kong et al., 2021). By September 2021, the updated number was 2,265 incidents (project 1907, n.d.). The latest national report published in March 2022 reported a 47% increase in reports in 2021 compared to 2020 (CCNC Toronto & project 1907, 2022). Notably, these numbers only capture a fraction of the anti-Asian incidents that have likely occurred⁶. Further, while these numbers suggest a sudden surge in anti-Asian racism, confirming this is difficult as many apparatuses used to record such incidents were erected at the beginning of the pandemic. While pre-pandemic data shows a 37% rise in police reported hate crimes in 2020 from 2019, with racially/ethnically motivated hate crimes nearly doubling and hate crimes targeting Asians rising by 301%, according to The Canadian Anti-Hate Network, police found less than 1% of 223,000 perceived hate crimes in Canada during 2019 (Statistics Canada, 2021). Therefore, while an increase is signalled, the disparity between the number of police-reported hate crimes and self-reported hate crimes suggests that the former also does not capture the full scale of rising anti-Asian incidents. In terms of prevalence, for example, a public opinion survey published in 2021 concludes that more than one-in-two Asian Canadians have suffered anti-Asian incidents over the past year, with more than one-in-four experiencing such incidents often or all the time (Angus Reid Institute, 2021).

Several significant trends have also emerged over the last few years. The majority of reported incidents in Canada and the U.S. impact East Asians (CCNC Toronto & project 1907, 2022; Jeung, Yellow Horse, & Cayan, 2021). The most commonly reported type of anti-Asian incident is verbal harassment, followed by physical assault (including being coughed or spat on) (CCNC Toronto &

⁵ Fight COVID Racism was set up by the CCNC Toronto, Chinese Canadian National Council Social Justice, Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, and Civic Engagement Network – Society of Canada. EliminateHate was set up by the advocacy arm of the Vancouver Asian Film Festival and in partnership with project 1907.

⁶ As noted, "Reported incidents represent only those who knew about the online reporting tools, had time to report, made an effort to report, had access to technology, and were digitally literate" (CCNC Toronto & project 1907, 2022, p. 11)

project 1907, 2022; Kong et al., 2021). The site of incidence has overwhelmingly been in public spaces with a significant number occurring in food sector businesses such as grocery stores and restaurants, as “is in line with both the realities of living under COVID-19 conditions and the extensive research that has demonstrated how racism is significantly about denying racialized communities equal and full access to public spaces” (CCNC Toronto & project 1907, 2022; Kong et al., 2021, p. 17). Ontario and B.C. account for the most reported anti-Asian incidents, with Vancouver and B.C. reporting the most incidents per capita of any North American city, province, state, or territory (Go & Lee-An, 2021; Kong et al., 2021). After Vancouver saw a 717% increase in police-reported anti-Asian hate crimes during 2020, several media outlets even dubbed the city as the “anti-Asian hate crime capital of North America” (Cecco & Baylon, 2021; Pearson, 2021). Reports also consistently show Asian women as overrepresented in reported incidents by nearly two thirds (CCNC Toronto & project 1907, 2022; Jeung, Yellow Horse, & Matriano, 2021, 2021; Kong et al., 2021). This finding points to the intersection of oppression faced by Asian women, namely racism and sexism, resulting in their “unique vulnerability to violence” (CCNC Toronto & project 1907, 2022, p. 13). One report points to five contemporary manifestations of racialized sexism/sexualized racism experienced by Asian women as contributing to their disproportionate targeting: the obscuration of Asian women’s struggles through the model minority myth, the perpetual foreigner myth, the constant fetishization and hypersexualization of Asian women (e.g., the Lotus Blossom and Dragon Lady tropes, Yellow Fever), the continued exclusion of Asian women through gendered immigration policy, and the impacts of criminal and immigration law on Asian women involved in service and sex work (2021). Lastly, according to the latest national report, nearly 75% of reported offenders have been men and white (CCNC Toronto & project 1907, 2022).

A Threatened Sense of Belonging

For the Asian diasporic community in Canada, whose nativity has always been in question, the recent rise in anti-Asian racism during the pandemic can be understood as a reminder that belonging in this nation is conditional. Two areas where this reminder has surfaced include the impact of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism on the mental health wellbeing of Asians living in Canada and the heightened salience of the perpetual foreigner trope. With racism being a significant determinant of mental health, the effect of rising anti-Asian racism on the current and future psyche of the Asian diasporic community is of mounting concern (Paradies et al., 2015). The first quarter of 2021 saw reports of Asian people in the U.S. and Canada being spat on, dragged, punched, kicked, beaten, attacked with acid, hit with objects, pepper-sprayed, stabbed, slashed across the face, run over, and shot (*NextShark - Asian American News*, n.d.; Nguyen, 2021). While comprehensive research has yet to surface in the Canadian context, U.S.-based reports on the mental health repercussions of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism show that those who have personally experienced it display heightened symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and physical complaints, and at clinically elevated rates higher than pre-COVID estimates (Saw et al., 2021). One-in-five Asian Americans who experienced pandemic-related racism display signs of racial trauma, which can include symptoms of “depression, intrusive thoughts, anger, hypervigilance, somatic symptoms and physiological reactivity, decreased self-esteem, and avoidance or numbing” as well as a “loss of security and increased perception of the world as dangerous” (Saw et al., 2021, p. 3). In fact, many cite anti-Asian racism, as opposed to the pandemic, as the main reason for changing their pre-pandemic routines and being apprehensive about leaving their homes (Angus Reid Institute, 2021; Healy, 2021; Lou et al., 2021). The negative health impacts of anti-Asian racism should not be ignored or minimized as the unprecedented mental health issues currently faced by Asian

communities place this population at greater risk for developing long-term mental and physical health issues (Saw et al., 2021).

The rise in anti-Asian racism has also rendered the stereotypical reading of Asians as perpetual foreigners more salient. As Avvy Go laments,

As Asian Canadians, our lives have been taken over by a constant sense of paralysing fear...Asian-Canadian women like myself face an even greater risk of attack and regardless of whether we're a newcomer or fifth-generation Canadian, our sense of security has been shattered...Slash by slash, wound by wound, each one of these incidents takes away from all Asian Canadians our sense of safety, robs us of our basic dignity, and ultimately undermines our sense of belonging in a country that we have every right to call home. (cited in Kestler-D'Amours, 2021, paras. 5–7)

Go's statement speaks to the revival of this longstanding and racist stereotype of Asians. According to one U.S.-based study, the perpetual foreigner bias against Asian Americans, despite a steady decline between 2007 and early 2020, dramatically increased following the use of racially charged language surrounding COVID-19 (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 870). Another U.S.-based study shows that awareness of the perpetual foreigner stereotype is a significant predictor of identity conflict and lower sense of belonging for ethnic minorities, as well as lower hope and life satisfaction for Asian Americans (Huynh et al., 2011). According to the Angus Reid Institute survey, most Asian Canadians believe that, even after the pandemic has subsided, the associated rise in anti-Asian racism will require generational change to subside (2021). Therefore, with Asian diasporic communities becoming increasingly aware of the perpetual foreigner bias levied against them, especially as it manifests in rising anti-Asian incidents, their present and future sense of belonging in Canada has likely been jeopardized.

Figure 3: "Delayed"



Note. By R. Kikuo Johnson, 2021, award-winning cover of the April 2021 issue of The New Yorker, sourced from Johnson's portfolio at www.rkikuojohnson.com. Johnson, who is himself a mixed race Asian man, skillfully depicts a quiet moment of tension capturing the fear and anxiety permeating the Asian diasporic community amid a rise in anti-Asian racism and violence. Resonating deeply with the Asian diasporic community, this powerful image was shared widely on social media after its release.

Figure 4: "We Belong"



Note. By Emily Hanako Momohara, 2021, billboard series, Columbus Ohio, part of the For Freedoms AAPI Heritage Month, photo by Sarah Pfeiffer, sourced from For Freedom's Instagram (@forfreedom). The billboards feature Nissei and Sansei Japanese American children from the 1940s and 50s to "challenge the pervasive "forever foreigner" attitudes towards AAPI communities".

Chapter 3: Locating Mixed Race Belonging in Canada

With issues of belonging implicated in how both multiraciality and Asianness have been historically and presently racialized in Canada, issues of belonging unsurprisingly emerged in various areas over the course of my interviews. Following a brief introduction of the interviewees, this chapter opens with what I call “multiracial name modification” (MRNM). Exploring what the interviews prefer to call themselves offers an entry point into how they understand themselves in relation to race and how they experience and negotiate the boundaries of mixed race belonging. We then move into how mixed race belonging has been experienced at two sites – multicultural Canada/Canadianness and the JC community/Japaneseness in Canada.

Introducing the Interviewees

Catherine “Sachi” Kikuchi (34⁷) self-identifies as a mixed race Japanese and Canadian woman. Her father is a first-generation Japanese immigrant from the Tōhoku region, and her mother is a white Canadian of European descent. Sachi was born and raised in a bicultural and bilingual (Japanese and English) household in Toronto. Returning to Toronto after moving to Japan for four years, Sachi co-founded both Kokoro Communications, which offers English and Japanese language teaching and translation services, and Japanese for Nikkei, which is centered around Japanese people who want to reconnect with their heritage.

Nicole Yukiko Sukiya (32), born and raised in Calgary before moving to Vancouver at age 22, self-identifies as a “mixy” (a playful twist on “mixed race”), yonsei JC woman. Her mother is a white Canadian of European descent, and her father is sansei JC. There is a history of internment on her father’s side of the family, who were forcibly relocated to Alberta to work on a sugar beet farm to keep

⁷ Age at the time of interviews, which were conducted in October and November of 2021.

their family intact. Nicole is acutely aware of how this history continues to affect her identity, life experiences, and the broader JC community today, and attributes this awareness to her passion for community involvement and activism.

Kano Shimpo (23) self-identifies as a half Japanese, half Canadian woman. Her mother, who moved to Canada at 18 years old, was first-generation Japanese, while her father is white Canadian. Kano was born in Vancouver, B.C. and raised in the small town of Nelson, B.C. She felt quite removed from her Japaneseness growing up and hoped to find some sense of Japanese community in moving to Montreal five years ago. Since moving to Montreal, Kano uses her late mother's last name, Shimpo, in informal settings as a way of honoring her mother's memory (in lieu of her father's last name, Major) and to signal feeling more connected to her sense of Japaneseness.

Lia Kurihara (26) is a full-time musician who self-identifies as a fourth-generation, mixed race/*hapa haole* (a Hawai'iian term for "mixed with white") Japanese American woman. Born and raised in Maryland, US, and moved to Canada at age 16, Lia is now in the process of obtaining permanent residency in Canada. Her ancestors immigrated to the US in the early 1800s to work on sugarcane plantations for citizenship. As her Japanese grandmother was born in Hawai'i and her Japanese grandfather moved to Hawai'i from Japan, Lia identifies with a Hawai'iian sense of Japanese Americanness. Although her family was not forcibly interned during WWII, she feels this legacy continues to affect her family and her distanced connection to a Japanese self-identity and community.

Caroline "Aki" Matsushita-Guertin (31) self-identifies as a second-generation, biracial, Japanese-Canadian woman. Her father is French Canadian and her Japanese mother emigrated from Japan to Canada in 1987. Aki was raised in a bicultural household in a rural town on the outskirts of Ottawa, Ontario. Taking more of an interest in her Japaneseness during her university years, Aki conducted a graduate thesis on Japanese post-war theater, which, as she notes, "was my hook into really

examining my own identity”. She describes her relationship to her mixed race identity as an “arc of ...rejection, acceptance, and then embracing it”. Today, Aki works at the National Theatre School.

Yuki Kasai-Paré (27) self-identifies as a first-generation, haafu/mixed/biracial Japanese and Canadian woman. Her father is Japanese from northern Japan and her mother is French Canadian from Montreal. Her parents met and married in the small city of Miyazaki, Japan, where Yuki was born and raised. At age 15, Yuki moved to Montreal with her mother, who wanted Yuki to receive a Canadian education. Yuki was placed into immigrant classes during high school and then attended McGill University where she studied anthropology. Today, Yuki freelances as an English-Japanese translator and photographer.

What’s in a (Modified) Name?

The process of modifying one’s name to find something that feels representative of one’s multiraciality was a significant recurring theme in four of six interviews. While not initially an area of interest for this study, it became clear this was an important site of negotiated mixed race belonging for the interviewees. This realization was likely influenced by my own experiences with, what I have started referring to as “multiracial name modification” (hereafter, MRNM). Throughout my life I struggled with settling into my full name, Kaitlyn Mitsuru Wilkin. During my rejection of Asianness, I guarded my middle name fearing it would somehow “give me away”, longing for a fully white-sounding name like my sister. I also felt like an imposter wearing a Western name in predominantly white spaces, asking myself, “Do I look white enough to carry this name?” Kaitlyn also felt too feminine and formal. There was no winning with me! At home, my mother and sister called me “Kaichan”, pronounced Kei-chan. “Chan” is a Japanese suffix often attached to names as a sign of endearment. I tried this pronunciation of Kai with my friends for a while. Then, moving to Ottawa from Montreal, people mistakenly pronounced Kai as “Kye”. I grew to love this version as it somehow hybridized my sense of Japaneseness and

Canadianness. Kai is not an entirely foreign name to Canadians, so it does not feel *too* othering. It is also a recognizable Japanese name (although more commonly used for men). I had also embraced my middle name around this time, including it in email signatures, resumes, introductions, and more, despite knowing how this could negatively affect me. Studies show that non-Anglo names on resumes can negatively affect chances of employment due to racial discrimination in Canada (Banerjee et al., 2018; Oreopoulos, 2011). As one study calls “the Asian-name disadvantage”, jobseekers, particularly women, with Asian names (including those with partly Anglicized names such as an English first name and an ethnic last name) receive 20 to 40% less interview callbacks due to their name (Banerjee et al., 2018). Regardless, I continue to go by Kai Mitsuru because it finally feels authentic to me. My name captures my love for my *obaachan* (grandmother), Mitsuru Tanaka, and the work I have put in to find pride in a name I felt socially conditioned to reject as a child. My name subtly alludes to my multiraciality, allowing me to feel seen in ways I have not before and negotiate a sense of belonging across settings. It is my small but empowering form of resistance.

I was unable to find any literature on this process of name modification as engaged by mixed race people themselves. One study exploring how and why interracial couples choose names for their mixed race children includes a section entitled “Children’s own perceptions of their name” offering two examples (Edwards & Caballero, 2008). In one case, a father recalls his children identifying their Arabic names as the reason for their experiences of racial prejudice (“Their names, that’s all they told me. ‘Oh, people can’t pronounce our names’ or ‘why was I called Inaya, no one knows the name Inaya’. That’s what they say”) (2008, p. 53). In the other, the eldest son chooses to go by the name his racialized mother had wanted to call him at birth, Kareem, that his father’s family had vetoed in favour of Kevin. While Kareem still uses his father’s family name, his father perceives Kareem’s modification of his first name as a rejection of affiliation (2008, p. 54). Kareem’s choice is seen as a “signaling of another side of

his collective kinship, ethnic, and religious identification”(2008, p. 55). These examples point to the utility of MRNM but with a focus on the parent’s understandings and experiences of this process. This section explores how name modification occurs from the perspective of mixed race people themselves and as a negotiation of mixed race belonging. As the epigraph in the study above reads, “We use names to create boundaries between belonging and not belonging” (Davidoff *et al.*, 1999:92, cited on page 39).

Apart from Lia, who has always loved her first and last name (with a slight aversion to her middle name Bonnie, which she feels sticks out aesthetically), all other interviewees have modified their names to some extent. Lia’s settledness in her name may be because it could be considered, as Yuki puts it, a “good ambiguous haafu name”. Bringing up my preferred name, Yuki informed me,

It’s funny cus, except for cases like Kai where it is really ambiguous, it’s really hard to find a name that is also as ambiguous as we are. Yuki is so Japanese. And throughout the years I was like, ‘Hmm, maybe there’s a way to make it haafu’. Because there’s a lot of kids in Japan who have typically haafu names. Like Emma. Aya. Anne, pronounced An. And other names that are as Japanese as they are English. Emi. Names like that. I know a *lot* of haafu people in Japan now somehow, and they *all* have ambiguous names.

It is possible Lia has not felt the need to modify her name because it feels adequately representative of her multiraciality. While Nicole experimented with her name by choosing to omit her surname, she named family dynamics, particularly a challenging relationship with her father’s side of the family, as the driving motivation for this (“It was specifically because I wanted to honor that matrilineal lineage and I didn’t want to support the patriarchal lineage”). Since then, she has “kind of chilled out on that a little bit” and leaned towards reclaiming her surname (“We’re kind of making our own sect of this family”). That said, Nicole has always felt very connected to her middle name, Yukiko, and feels it is especially representative of her authentic self, saying,

I’ve always loved my middle name. I was named by my great grandmother. I was named because I was born in a blizzard. Like “Snow Child” [the literal English translation of Yukiko]. So, I have a lot of affinity to that. I also, just as a person, feel very matriarchal about the world anyway. The idea that my great grandmother, who died when I was 3 or 4, gave me that name, it’s just such a beautiful story to me. I really, really identify with it.

While Nicole has not engaged in MRNM per se, she has modified her name for reasons still rooted in negotiations of belonging – particularly familial belonging.

Sachi and Aki have chosen to go by their Japanese middle names in lieu of their given first names (Catherine and Caroline, respectively). Kano mentioned one of her friends, who is multiracial Japanese, also uses her Japanese middle name as her preferred name. Although Sachi feels she is “very white-passing”, she has always identified more closely with her “Japanese side”. When I asked if it was important to her to be recognized as mixed race by others, she said, “Yes. Yes, it is. And I think the main reason for that is that by being seen as mixed or multiracial by other people I feel seen. I feel recognized for what I actually am, not just what people assume I am”, which highlights the disconnect between how others racially assign mixed race people (ascribed identity) and how mixed race people themselves racially identify (self-identity). It appears Sachi engaged in MRNM to mitigate this disconnect and assert her felt connection to her Japaneseness. “I know that this can be very confusing for some people,” she chuckled, explaining, “One of the main reasons that I use Sachi as my preferred name is to *force* people to acknowledge my identity upfront before we have any other conversation”. When I suggested this could be a “soft demand to be seen”, she responded, “If anything, I might suggest that it’s not so soft of a demand. It might be more of an explicit demand? Because I will sit there and force people around me to acknowledge at least some aspects of who I am”. In this way, Sachi uses her preferred name to assert her Japaneseness and ensure this part of her identity is recognized by others despite how she is racially read. On the other hand, Aki was very adamant she is not white-passing throughout her interview, sharing,

There was always a relationship of ‘the Other’ because I am not white-passing. My sister is much more white-passing than me. And so, it was always – that’s the first thing you see. That’s the first thing I get asked. And it’s often followed by ‘Aha! I thought so!’

Aki's process of MRNM occurs within this framing of constant racial othering. Aki has modified both her preferred name and surname as a way of embracing her Japanese identity. Her shift towards "Aki" was inspired by her "students with really cool names" and her realization that,

*I was given a very cool name! I love the character. So, why not embrace it? Cus when we were little, we both *really* hated it – my sister and I. Both of our Japanese legal names are our middle names in Canada. So, my full Japanese name, Aki Matsushita, is my middle name.*

This statement alludes to Aki's relationship to her multiraciality over time, which followed "an arc...of rejection, acceptance, and embracing". Aki shared that her sister does not feel any association with her Japanese middle name, which reflects her sister's relationship to multiraciality overall. For instance, she told me, "My sister has expressed that she feels like a racial imposter since she doesn't look Japanese, and people don't believe she's Japanese". It is possible that her sister's white-passing appearance informs why she feels more removed from her Japaneseness in a physical sense, while perhaps still feeling Japanese in an ethnocultural sense (the latter was alluded to but not explicitly). When asked where her connection to her name comes from, Aki said, "For me, it's definitely in this kind of digging". Arguably, Aki's non-white-passing/often racially ambiguous/but sometimes East Asian appearance (for lack of a better phrasing) has rendered her Japaneseness and Asianness more salient in her life, requiring more "digging" on her part (than her sister) and prompting a deeper connection to her Japanese middle name and the desire to put it forward. This sentiment was echoed by Nicole, saying,

*People clock me as being, 'There's some Asian thing going on with you', more often with me [than her sister who is also more white-passing]. And I think because of that, I've had to maybe do quite a bit of work to, like, *really* figure out where that part of me – where that lives, and where that culture lives within me. And, you know, what are my connections to it? What parts of the culture do I connect with? What parts maybe I don't? Just because I feel like, visually, I've had to ask – been asked a lot of questions.*

Again, there is a connection made between presenting as racially ambiguous/but sometimes East Asian, and being othered as such, which then requires more "digging", and results in a deeper felt connection to one's Japaneseness or Asianness. Returning to Aki's process of MRNM, Aki also modified her last

name, Guertin, by hyphenating it as Matsushita-Guertin during graduate school as a way of honoring her late Japanese grandfather. As she notes,

I have a very difficult relationship with my father and his side of the family. And, so, I was like, ‘No, no, my academic achievements cannot really reflect him and his name’. We’re just girls in my family. So, presumably, the Matsushita line ends with us. So, it’s kind of like an homage to him and his contributions to my life.

Like Nicole, Aki also brought up complicated family dynamics in relation to name modification.

However, Aki named race and multiraciality as playing a part in such family tensions. In other words, name modification is not only a possible vehicle for negotiating a sense of racial belonging within one’s family/families, but also a possible way of emphasizing a sense of familial *un*belonging. Notably, Kano has also engaged in MRNM with her surname for familial reasons. Since moving to Montreal, Kano has begun using her late mother’s last name, Shimpo, in informal settings and in lieu of her father’s name, Major. As she explained to me, this modification is a way of both honoring her mother’s memory and feeling more connected to her sense of matrilineal Japaneseness.

While Kano has maintained use of her first name, her feelings towards her first name have shifted throughout her life. As told me, “I used to really not like my name. I think I felt...it’s not that I didn’t like my name as a sound, it’s more what it represented [her Japaneseness]. I felt detached from it”. As Kano shared, her Japanese mother passed when she was young, which has likely contributed to the distance she felt from her sense of Japaneseness growing up, and, at times, continues to feel. Kano also grew up in a “very white” community (as is also true for myself, Sachi, Lia, Aki, and Nicole following elementary school) and “didn’t have a lot of friends of color growing up”. Kano once experimented with trying on a more white-sounding name as a child:

I have an English middle name because my dad’s obviously white. So, my middle name is Anne. And I’m not really fond of the name Anne either – sounds like an old person’s name [laughs]. But when I was younger, I used to want my name to be Angela. Me and my white best friend, when I was really young, whenever we would play games, I’d be like, ‘Call me Angela! Call me

Angela!’ [laughs]. Now I look back on that and it doesn’t really suit me [laughs]... I think I started to appreciate my name more as I got a bit older.

Kano tried on a white-sounding name to try and fit in by leaning into her whiteness and because she felt somewhat distant from her Japaneseness. Yuki also tried to on a shortened version of her middle name, Emma for Emmanuelle, to try and assert her Canadianness when she immigrated to Montreal. “I was like, this is going to be my Canadian alter ego!” she laughed. While neither of these names stuck, these early experiences are indicative of MRNM. Kano started to feel more connected to her name once her late mother’s friend taught her its Japanese meaning. As she told me,

When I learned that it was – it’s a bit more delicate and specific – ‘*from the flowers*’. Sounds a lot nicer than just ‘flowers’, which is kind of basic. So, I was like, ‘Oh, that feels special actually’, and I started to identify with it more. I think I really like my name now.

Understanding the meaning of her name has facilitated Kano’s closer identification with it (as was the case for Nicole’s connection to the name Yukiko). Kano confirmed she is now happy to have a Japanese front-facing name, telling me,

I feel like because we’re multiracial, and sometimes who we are and how we present to people can be a bit ambiguous, having a name that kind of really cements – it’s Japanese – is nice to be able to, like, present something. Or, like, before someone even talks to you there’s an indication that you’re likely Asian.

This statement speaks to the potential utility of MRNM for multiracial people. Kano frames MRNM as a validating and empowering tool for mitigating the othering experiences one can endure when mixed race and racially ambiguous. For Sachi, who feels she is more white passing, the utility of MRNM is in asserting her multiraciality and sense of Japaneseness where it might not be physically recognized. Kano shared with me a particularly invalidating incident involving her name while working in a Japanese ramen shop in Montreal, saying,

I feel like I had an identity crisis when I moved here and started working there. Because, I actually remember, one of my managers, she was Japanese – like fully Japanese – and she asked me my name and I told her my name. And she didn’t understand me. And then she told me that I was mispronouncing my own name! And that was *really* embarrassing for me, and I felt so

insecure! But it's because growing up in my hometown, people always mispronounce my name. So, I always enunciate it in a really specific way to avoid the extreme mispronunciations. So, I was used to pronouncing my name in an incorrect way – but it's *more* correct. I pronounce my name Kano [like 'aw' sound in 'awning'] but it shouldn't be so deep. It should be Kano [like 'a' in 'apple']. She was being critical, I guess. But the reason I say Kano so deeply is because people always say Keno or Kayno. So, when I was younger, I would always be like, 'It's *Kano*' to correct people. And all the time, when I was younger, I would *always* correct people whenever they would say my name.

Kano's efforts to ensure any butchering of her name's pronunciation is minimized inadvertently has resulted in its overcorrection in terms of its "correct" Japanese pronunciation. While this overcorrection is Kano's way of protecting the integrity of her first name (like Sachi, who also spends time ensuring people say her preferred name correctly), it also led to an awkward and invalidating interaction with someone who, as Kano says, is "fully Japanese". This is exemplary of the "in between" dilemma that multiracial people can find themselves in when trying to navigate two or more racial and ethnic groups – sometimes feeling as though they fall short regardless. Of course, Kano's name is her own and any pronunciation she deems right should be considered the "correct" one for her.

As she grew up in Japan before moving to Canada at age 15, Yuki's process of MRNM looks slightly different from other interviewees. That said, her experience of MRNM is similarly rooted in a negotiation of racial belonging. Yuki modified her last name upon moving to Canada – "When I moved here I was Yuki Kasai, like fully. And then when I was in CÉGEP, my mom added Paré. She added that but until then I had just two names and it was Japanese". For Yuki, her experience of MRNR was to the effect of trying to assert and embrace a sense of Canadianness, rather than Japaneseness like the other interviewees. While this may appear to be to the opposite effect, Yuki's process of MRNM is similarly rooted in a negotiation of racial belonging in Canada. As an immigrant, she sought to put forward her Canadianness by modifying her name to include her Canadian last name, which can be construed as meaning, "I belong here too". Yuki also spoke on her experience of her name in the Japanese context. As she recalled throughout her interview, growing up haafu in Japan was particularly challenging:

There was a certain point in my life where I thought too much about my mixed identity – specifically when I was in Japan. And it was this *huge* thing. Especially when I was in Japan. Especially when there were no other mixed people. It was like, this is *such* a burden. Everyone called me ‘the haafu girl’. No one really called me by my name.

While Yuki was hesitant to describe such experiences as racist, she believed her experience as haafu in Japan to be one of racial othering. Regarding her relationship to her name, Yuki told me,

I only started liking my name once I moved [to Canada]. Because, the thing is, there was like five Yuki’s in my class. So, I felt really basic and I didn’t really like it. A lot of people thought I should have had sort of a more European name. Like Emma. You know what I mean? Like *those* [haafu] names. But I did find I was really happy that I had a Japanese name when I was young. Especially my family name. Because, you know, they call your name everywhere. And my last name was Japanese. So I didn’t feel othered by my name. Compared to my Korean classmate who had a fully Korean name. He experienced serious bullying, serious racism. It was really bad. I didn’t get bullied based on my mixed culture other than being called haafu, gaijin [‘foreigner’], etc.

...

But yes, it was a *whole* thing with my name, I guess!

...

Then I sort of feel like it’s special because there were no Yuki’s here. The experience would probably have been *totally different* if I had grown up here with Yuki though. Cus, at 15, 16, you start to be a little bit more secure with yourself?

This points to a running theme throughout many of the interviews – mixed race children wanting to fit in racially/ethnically during their early childhood and their names being one important factor for doing so. For Yuki, although others felt she should have a haafu name, having a Japanese first name and surname felt beneficial to her because it meant one less opportunity for racial othering. For those in Canada, having a white-sounding name may have felt similarly beneficial. Aki, who went by Caroline while growing up, expressed that her and her sister really hated their Japanese middle names when they were younger (like myself). Echoing Yuki’s sentiment above about fitting wanting to fit in, Aki told me,

I think when we’re young we don’t want to be different. We don’t want to stand out. We want to be status quo. But the reality is how you’re perceived doesn’t allow you to do that. And, so, accepting it, and kind of leaning into it, at least over here...it’s kind of like leaning into the curve. Everyone others me. I have never been Canadian enough in Canada. So, my relationship to my Canadian identity is through the lens of an “Other”.

With age, the interviewees became more accepting of their racial alterity and they either settled into their Japanese given name(s) or chose to modify and put their Japanese name(s) forward. As Aki describes, the salience of her racial alterity forced her to embrace her Japaneseness, including her name, in a roundabout way. Like Yuki and Kano expressed above, all interviewees expressed that they now felt grateful to have “unique”, “special”, “uncommon”, or “cool” names in the Canadian context.

Figure 5: [Portraits of my Little Sister & I]



I recently spoke to my sister (left) about this concept of MRNM. While once envious of her white-sounding full name, Andrea Myrtle Wilkin, as I grew older, I learned to embrace my Japanese identity and felt comfortable enough to start asserting my Japanese middle name. Andrea, however, has not had the option of a Japanese name to experiment with – something she has felt the absence of as she has gotten older. While Andrea feels connected to her Japaneseness in an ethnocultural sense, she is unable to assert this connection through her name. Andrea sometimes also grapples with whether she is

white-passing, which has also made her feel somewhat disconnected from her Japaneseness in a physical sense (while still feeling very connected in an ethnocultural sense). This is where, for example, Sachi, who sees herself as white-passing, negotiated a sense of belonging by putting forward her Japanese name. For my birthday this year I gifted myself a pendant of the characters for my middle name and my obaachan's name, Mitsuru (美鶴). Andrea instantly wanted one too. Recognizing where this desire might be coming from, I researched the Japanese translation of her middle name, Myrtle (our paternal grandmother's name). The translation for Myrtle reads "yamamomo" (山桃), which directly translates to "mountain peach". I gifted my sister this pendant with a card reading, "You now have a Japanese name that is your own and no one else's". Her face immediately crumpled into tears, and, within weeks, she considered making it her artist's name because she finally has a name connecting all facets of her mixed race identity. Having such a name, one that both captures and conveys her multiraciality, was extremely and immediately important to her.

I believe that the various perspectives offered by the interviewees, my own experiences, and that of my sister's, point to the utility of MRNM for mixed race Japanese people in Canada. More research is required, however, to examine whether and how this phenomenon may or may not apply for mixed race people of other ethnicities. For example, I recently asked one of my friends who is a mixed race Canadian of Filipino and Czech background about MRNM. While she spoke on the colonial origins of her Spanish last name, the concept of MRNM did not resonate with her in the same way. That said, it is common for monoracial people who are multicultural to engage in a form of name modification as a way of capturing their various cultural ties. The reclamation of one's ethnic name could also be considered a form of racial name modification. EliminateHate, for example, launched a project called "ReClaim Your Name" in 2021 (in the context of rising anti-Asian racism) inviting "anyone who identifies as Asian Canadians and people of Asian descent to participate by sharing the story of their

name – all versions of it” as an “opportunity to reflect on the pressure many Asian people feel to westernize their names to be accepted, and the growing movement to reclaim our birth or ethnic names” (*ReClaim Your Name*, n.d.). That said, in considering how race and multiraciality are socially constructed to be rooted in physicality, perhaps there is a distinction between name modification in an ethnocultural sense and name modification in relation to multiraciality. As was explored above, MRNM interacted in various ways with the felt and perceived *physical* visibility of one’s multiraciality as either white-passing or racially ambiguous. As we have seen, many of the interviewees tried on various versions of their names with the goal of landing on one that not only represents who *they* feel they are, but also facilitates how others may see and receive them in a way that feels desirable (i.e., more Japanese, more mixed, more Canadian, more white). The process of experimenting with one’s name offered many of the interviewees – including myself and, eventually, my sister – with a tool for negotiating a sense of belonging while navigating multiple racial groups, ethnicities, and cultures. In this way, one’s name can be considered a site where one’s sense of mixed race belonging is experienced and negotiated in the Canadian social landscape, as seen through the vehicle of MRNM.

Mixed Race Belonging & the Nation

In this section, we draw from Paragg’s study considering whether and how mixed race people claim “Canadian” when the ability to do so and also be recognized as such is racialized (2015). Paragg finds the term Canadian is deployed in three ways by interviewees: “by expressing a sense of being “Canadian-first”, by stating that there exists an understanding that “Canadian means white,” and by strategically using the term “Canadian” in their interactions with others, signaling an active appropriation of the term” (2015, p. 21). These readings allow us to organize the interviewees’ understandings of Canadianness in relation to themselves as mixed race Nikkei people living in Canada. The Canadian means white reading was especially significant throughout all interviews. Several

interviewees also engaged in an active appropriation of Canadian, which can be linked back to challenging the synonymy of Canadian with whiteness. I was unable to locate a “Canadian-first” sensibility (i.e., expressing one is Canadian *before* offering any other identity narrative), which I suggest is due to a shifting racial climate in recent years. Two additional readings, Canadian means colonial settler and Canadian in nationality only, were also identified. By delineating how the interviewees understand the parameters of Canadianness we begin to see how the contours of mixed race belonging are experienced in this space.

Canadian Means White

Most interviewees explicitly stated or alluded to an understanding that “Canadian means white”. At times, this reading pointed to their own lived experiences of having tried to claim “Canadian” and coming up short. Aki has always felt positioned outside of Canadianness, saying, “I have never been Canadian enough in Canada. And so, my relationship to my Canadian identity is through the lens of an Other” and “I’ve never been Canadian. They were *just* Canadian. I’m always a hyphenated one”. For Aki, “they” refers to white Canadians, underscoring her felt positioning outside the national framework of racial belonging. Aki also feels othered by the discourse of Canadian multiculturalism producing hyphenated identities – a feature of the multicultural hyphen identified in Mahtani’s study (2002). Like Mahtani, Aki believes it further positions racialized people outside of Canadianness. Interestingly, Sachi, finds this feature of Canadian multiculturalism to be somewhat accommodating, saying,

I can be Canadian and still be Japanese at the same time. But if I am Japanese, I can no longer be Canadian. So, the Japaneseness can exist within the Canadian identity, but if I am Japanese, because of the way the culture works, and because of, you know, citizenship rules, and the way they view identity, and then being mixed. The standard Japanese perspective of being mixed in any way is very, very different. So, if I identify as Japanese, I can no longer be Canadian.

Using the example of Canada’s allowance of dual citizenship, which is, for the most part, disallowed in Japan, Sachi feels there is more room to be Japanese in the Canadian multicultural context than vice

versa. This speaks to Antonsich's place-belongingness, particularly how legal factors formally structuring one's access to security can play a part in one's sense of belonging (2010, p. 648). This flexibility by comparison contributes to *some* sense of mixed race belonging in Canada for Sachi. Yuki also expressed feeling "an easier sense of belonging" as mixed race in Canada than in Japan. Notably, however, the interviewees seemed doubtful about whether they even want to be considered Canadian – especially if Canadians means white. When asked if the term Canadian applies to her, Sachi shared,

That's a very difficult question to answer. My simple answer is I don't know. I mean, as I mentioned earlier, being Canadian allows me to be Japanese. In that sense, I guess the label of Canadian does work for me or it applies to me? But I also am very much aware that, you know, the sort of standard understanding of Canadian is, like, white Canadian. That is often the default. And...I don't want to be in that category. I have whiteness in my ancestry but yeah...that's hard.

While Sachi is often, but not always, perceived as white-passing, she is conflicted on whether she wants Canadian to apply to her when she feels more strongly connected to her sense of Japaneseness than Canadianness. Nicole also linked Canadianness and whiteness throughout her interview, which she framed as having contributed to her "aversion" towards claiming a Canadian identity. While, at first, Nicole described herself as white-passing on rare occasion, she later realized "I would be kind of choked [upset] if someone did assume that I was completely white" and "it's never really happened to me". Both Sachi and Nicole express an aversion to being categorized as white because what this category represents does not align with who they feel they are, including their views and beliefs. When I asked Sachi whether "visible minority" applies to her she was similarly unsure, sharing that she has also struggled with this for many years ("And I mean, like, I know what I am, but I am also aware of how most people outside of my head tend to see me..."). Sachi struggles with pinpointing which racialized identifiers apply to her, aligning these identifiers with how she feels inside, and managing the disconnect that exists between while living as mixed race. Canadian feels too white to apply to her, but she simultaneously feels too white-passing to consider herself a visible minority. Interestingly, Aki, who is

adamant she is not white-passing, has also struggled with knowing whether the “woman of colour” identifier applies to her. That said, Aki now sees herself as such, which aligns with her experiences of racial othering throughout her life. This conundrum highlights how reliant the discourse of Canadian multiculturalism is on othered, non-white physical characteristics. As the excerpt below shows, for example, Aki attributes the salience of her racial alterity to Canadian multiculturalism, which has then informed her strained relationship with a sense of internalized Canadian identity:

There’s this presentation of acceptance, of inclusivity, but it’s not rooted in that. And it’s not coming from us. I think it makes people feel less badly about the darker histories of their country, of their land, of their people. Because now we’re super accepting! And we love everyone! ... That type of interaction just feeds into, like, this toxic positivity around multiculturalism in Canada and how it’s all positive. ... I feel like there’s a slickness to it? Cus the fact that like, what’s being said around multiculturalism, yes, it *should* make me feel included and *should* make me feel like I’m a part of this mosaic that is Canada. But, like, my entire life, you’re fed this information about what multiculturalism is and why it’s so good. But it’s all in service of how Canada looks and how Canada is perceived. It doesn’t really focus on the actual lived experiences of racial Canadians or multicultural Canadians. And so, they’re very much at odds with each other. Because, yes, I grew up in the height of multiculturalism, but that very concept is what made me feel othered, not included. And it was, like, inherently, everything that’s different and othered of me is what’s ‘good’ because that’s what I’m bringing to the table. That’s what I’m contributing. I’m making Canada look more diverse. But my lived experience of it is that it was never really for me.

Like Aki, every single interviewee identified a major disconnect between the façade of Canadian multiculturalism and how it is materially experienced by racialized people, which contributed to their understandings that Canadian means white. Several spoke positively about Canadian multiculturalism as a demographic reality but were highly skeptical of it in terms of policy, ideology, and social practice. As Aki notes above, Canadian multiculturalism relies on our minoritizing difference, which speaks to Bannerji’s framing of Canadian multiculturalism, where, “On the one hand, by our sheer presence we provide a central part of the distinct pluralist unity of Canadian nationhood; on the other hand, this centrality is dependent on our “difference”, which denotes the power of definition that “Canadians” have over “others”” (1996, p. 109). Therefore, as Aki understands, Canadian multiculturalism is ultimately

for white. Nicole touched on this when asked if Canadian multiculturalism was designed with multiracial people in mind, saying, “No, I don’t think so... Which is why I don’t like the mosaic thing actually. Because there’s divisions in mosaics and there’s borders and there’s not cohesion. So, I felt like multiculturalism creates othering”. Lia found the othering function of hyphenated identities frustrating, albeit in the U.S. context, saying,

I think what bothers me about ‘Japanese American’ is that it’s an ethnicity and a nationality, and if it was to be more accurate, it would be Japanese, German, Irish, French, Norwegian, you know? But because my white ethnicities are not considered other than American ...those identities end up just being cast aside. Whereas, like, ‘Oh, but *Japanese American*’. So, I think that’s what bothers me about it. Where it’s like ...my nationality is not Japanese. And my ethnicity is not American. So why are these two terms being sandwiched together? It’s clearly because your ethnicity makes you appear as a racial other ...And I’m just realizing, like, my great grandparents on both sides of my parents came to North America at the same time. So, why is my Japanese side needing to be specified but not my white side? Even though both sets of ancestors have been on this land the same amount of time?

Lia’s critique is also relevant to the production of hyphenated identities by Canadian multicultural discourse, which similarly encourage the use of an ethnocultural guise to indicate when one’s ethnicity carries a *racialized* otherness. As we can see, the interviewees’ recognition of the disconnect between what Canadian multiculturalism purports and how it is materially experienced by racialized people contributes to their overarching understanding that Canadian means white, which impacts their own sense of belonging within this political project of belonging.

A Historicized Approach to Canadian

Interestingly, several interviewees indicated that a shift has occurred in the recent strength and validity of Canadian multiculturalism’s cultural stronghold. Nicole used air quotes for Canadian multiculturalism, saying, “I’m not even really sure if it’s a valid term anymore”. Aki shared, “I’m not sure today what we can call multiculturalism”. Sachi expressed, “I think that, especially in the past year or two, the branding of modern-day Canadian multiculturalism is starting to – or maybe already has – shown its shadow to the rest of the world”. She then referenced “residential school truths coming up and

people within and outside Canada figuring out that, ‘Oh, Canada is not exactly what they try to appear as’”. It is possible Paragg’s reading of “Canadian first” is less prevalent, especially among racialized people, due to the current racial climate highlighting the historical legacy and present-day realities of systemic racial inequality in Canada and, thereby, exposing the façade of Canadian multiculturalism and the core values it espouses. This has then contributed towards how the interviews feel they fit into the Canadian social fabric as mixed race Nikkei women. Nicole told me,

I think [my sense of Canadian pride] changed for me maybe recently too? The more I’m like becoming more aware of things. It’s like, you know, the idea that we’re Canadian first. And I know that there’s lots of issues with that and like, you know, language not being passed down to generations because of the anticipation that that would make you more Canadian somehow.

While Paragg’s “Canadian first” is evident here, Nicole only uses it to problematize it with the reality that Canadianness is often read as synonymous with whiteness. When asked if she identifies with the term Canadian, Nicole shared,

I would say up until like...five years ago? But I think I definitely have gotten to the point now where I feel like being Canadian is just, like, such a nebulous, weird thing. And I also just, like, have an aversion to it also. Because it feels so colonial to be, like, patriotic. Patriotically Canadian just feels uncomfortable for me now.

Within this framing, overt pride in the Canadian identity is read as inherently colonial by Nicole.

Perhaps “Canadian means colonial settler” offers an alternative reading of Canadian – one that is more historically attentive. When asked, all interviewees indicated they view Canada as a continued settler colonial project. Nicole later clarified, “And, you know, whether I’m uncomfortable with the idea of patriotic Canadianism, it is part – I mean, that is where I am from. As far as, until something changes, we are calling this “country” “Canada” [using air quotes]. It’s the country I was born in.” While Nicole has an aversion to an internalized sense of Canadian identity, she accepts her Canadian nationality in a practical sense, but without losing sight of Canada as a continued colonial project. She also understands herself to be a settler on this land – although with some nuance for racialized settlers coming to Canada

from Japan, saying, “they didn’t have the same privileges as, you know [early white settlers in Canada] ... There were benefits for some of those early settlers that I don’t think the settlers who were of Japanese descent had going for them”. Nicole conscientiously positioning herself outside of Canadianness due to what it represents, while still understanding that she is “Canadian” in a legal sense. Aki expressed a similar sentiment regarding her Canadian nationality, saying,

... what I feel inside, that I identify to, might be this ambiguous like, okay, “Canadian”, but, like, actually what I’m rooted in is a lot of my Japanese upbringing and connection. But in the legal sense, I speak English, French, pay taxes here, I’m a resident here. And so, how I function in society, I can’t help but identify to a geographic Canadianness.

Aki accepts her Canadian nationality because of her formally accepted physical location, but she does not feel close to an ethnocultural Canadian identity. She identifies as Canadian in nationality only.

Several interviewees pulled from history to understand their experiences of national belonging in the present. It is within this historicized approach to Canadianness that Paragg’s third reading was most apparent. Nicole and Aki spoke of JC internment as impacting their current sense of national belonging.

Aki: ... knowing that [internment] was a reality, definitely, I think, amplified my feeling of otherness. Because, just because of the way I looked, not that long ago, people were interned and treated differently. And this is what happened to people that looked like me or that have the same papers as me. And I think the impact of that kind of contributed to me to kind of shun or not even acknowledge my Canadianness or whiteness. Y’all wanna think I’m Japanese? Okay. Like, everyone sees me as Japanese. And so, accepting that, and knowing that my country – my country that I’m a citizen of – actually had this relationship with another part of me, another part of my identity, even before I was born, it seems like it was written in the stars that there’s something that’s othered, and that’s separated, or that makes me different than a full Caucasian Canadian. ... So, it’s inherently, like, you knowing that information, even though it’s historical, you realize like, Oh, this wasn’t allowed. I wasn’t supposed to happen in that time. And to be born out of that kind of makes you question your place and how accepted you *actually* are in society ... Like the act of us. We’re the face of a union that was not allowed.

Aki draws a link between the history of JC internment and continued issues of national belonging for Nikkei people living in Canada, including her own sense of national belonging. This also arose during her discussion of dual citizenship laws in Canada, saying,

Just the fact that dual citizens can have their citizenship revoked and deported⁸ – obviously in extreme circumstances – but just the fact that, like – my Canadian friends don’t understand that. Where they’re like, ‘Well, you’re never going to do a crime like that so why do you care?’ And I’m like, ‘Well, I’m a Canadian citizen. You are a Canadian citizen. The fact that I have ties somewhere else makes it so that we don’t have the same rules of engagement in society. You could do the exact same crime as me, but you’ll be in a Canadian prison. I would be deported. That’s the difference. That’s the root systemic difference. Which ties back to internment. Where because you have ties, it doesn’t matter. If you just look Japanese, and you don’t even – like, it’s been five generations you’ve settled in Canada – because you have those racial ties you were put in an internment camp and you have all your assets taken away by the government and put up for auction. It’s fucked up because it can go back to that.

The phrase “I’m a Canadian citizen” is subverted here to highlight different rules of societal engagement between racialized Canadians with dual citizenship and non-racialized Canadians. Drawing from Canada’s past of JC internment to politicize the present and her positionality within it is exemplary of Paragg’s third reading of actively appropriating Canadian. This maneuver was also present when Aki spoke more directly about belonging in Canada, saying,

So, in the past, I would say I didn’t feel like I belonged. I felt very transposed from like – somehow, I ended up in this country. Just how I was raised was very Japanese so that culture clash was always there. Now I would say I found my own way into identifying to my Canadian identity *through* that translation. I’m always translating. Culturally, language, circumstances. So, I feel like what I’m putting into the world is informed by that otherness and that is inherently needed in Canadian society. [*Me: “Do you see Canadianness as allowing you to do that?”*] I don’t know if it’s even there yet. I think being mixed race makes me carve out that space. Like, by really acknowledging and owning the fact that, okay, I might not look Canadian, they might not feel that I’m Canadian enough, or they might not assume I’m Canadian, but I am. Because I’m contributing in this way and expanding what we know Canadian to be.

Acknowledging the shortcomings of how Canadianness operates, Aki names her multiracial alterity as a vehicle for challenging how Canadianness is racialized in Canada. This is an attempt to renegotiate the boundaries of national belonging by subverting and reclaiming them on her own terms. Nicole engaged in a similar process. Drawing from her own family history, Nicole framed the claiming of Canadian and JC as an act of resistance for Nikkei people in Canada, saying,

⁸ Aki is referring to a Canadian law (Bill C-24) that makes it possible to revoke Canadian citizenship for dual citizens who have committed a criminal offence and who will not become stateless when their citizenship is revoked (CCLA, 2015).

I think because of the education and the work I have done surrounding internment, for me, it is important that the state knows that I'm Japanese Canadian. Because I feel like it's an act of resistance to even exist, in spite of the hard work that they did to make it so I didn't exist. So, like, if I'm filling out a census form, I'll put in on a census form. Because I feel like I want them to know that I'm here and I fucking live in Vancouver now. Like yeah, it didn't work ... It makes me feel really – today – really, really proud of [being JC] because I do see the existence of Japanese Canadians in Canada as an amazing sign and act of resistance.

While Nicole personally leans away from claiming a Canadian identity, she sees the continued presence of Nikkei people in Canada, including herself, as a political act of resistance. She also sees the presence of multiracial JCs as inherently political, saying,

...especially because, you know, the dispersal was to try to, you know, disconnect us from our communities. And then it was, you know, picking places that no one wanted to go so that they could just maybe go out there and just die by themselves. But instead, we intermarried. And, like, you know, found other ways to continue to survive ... I would say, like, a mixed person existing is showing that the whole plan backfired.

Nicole understands her sense of racial belonging in Canada as a mixed race Japanese woman through this historicized framing of resistance. This is also true for Yuki, who shared that becoming more aware of historical and present movements of resistance in both Canada and Japan has been integral to her sense of Canadianness and Japaneseness. As she explained,

I started actually celebrating my Japaneseness once I learned in university [in Canada] about the counterculture, revolutionary side of Japanese history that I was not taught – sort of like, all of the radical movements, mostly leftist or women's liberation movements that happened in Japan – and I never actually learned those in Japan. ... And, also, just like any other anti-military, anti-colonialist, anti ... There were so many movements that happened in the 60s and 70s that I was *never* taught. ... Once I learned about *that* then I started feeling an attachment to Japanese history. And I *never* in my life had any form of attachments to these "states". Like, what is "Canadian" or "Japanese"? And then once I learned that they were also fighting for my rights – because a lot of mixed kids were being discriminated against in the 50s and 60s, like, all the kids born during the war. ... And the fact that these groups were fighting for my rights ... suddenly I felt a sense of belonging when I'm not even living [in Japan] anymore. ... And then I guess the same kind of process happened to my Canadian identity. Once I learned more about – I never had any attachment to, like, Quebecois or, like French Canadian culture – but once I learned more about what the Indigenous communities are working towards... that's when I was like, 'Okay, this land has such beautiful values attached to it', that are, you know, that surpass the, whatever, 150 years that "Canada" [air quotes], like this "country", has been. So, yeah, I guess learning about history ... if it wasn't for that, I don't think I would even identify the way I do.

Yuki indicates a sense of unbelonging within broader Canadian and Japanese society and names multiraciality as a contributing barrier to such belonging. However, learning about counterhegemonic movements in Canada and Japan allows Yuki to feel as though her own marginalized identity is “seen”, which then contributes to a newfound sense of identity and belonging in both places, even retroactively and from afar. Yuki’s understanding of Canadian, therefore, is a historicized appropriation of the term and this subversion can be considered a negotiation of racial belonging in the nation.

The discussions above reveal the contours of how mixed race belonging is experienced by the interviewees within the nation and Canadianness, which, for the most part, are characterized by a sense of nonbelonging. The interviewees not only feel largely positioned outside the national boundaries of belonging, but are also unsure of whether they want to belong in this space. Even still, as most interviewees expressed, they still value and are searching for a meaningful sense of racial belonging.

Mixed Race Belonging & Japaneseness in Canada

As speaks to the quintessential mixed race experience of not feeling accepted by either, or any, of the groups comprising one’s racial mixture, issues of mixed race belonging were just as significant for the interviewees in relation to Japaneseness and the JC community as they were in relation to the nation. Lia shared, “I’m sure you’ve felt this too, like, when you’re with your Japanese side, you don’t feel Japanese enough or when you’re with your other side, you feel like you are viewed like the most ethnic person in the room”. Aki similarly shared, “...it really hit me where I’m like, Oh, you can be put into this category of Other your entire life, but then be lacking or not fully that Other as well in others times of my life”. Several factors contribute to interviewees’ experience as mixed race Japanese women, including the importance of ethnocultural socialization as Japanese during one’s upbringing, the impact of communal propinquity, a perceived centering of prewar JCs and their descendants, and the continued prioritization of monoraciality in how Japaneseness is imagined.

Ethnocultural Socialization as Japanese

As previously covered, parental racial socialization positively impacts racialized youth, but is not often provided to multiracial youth in meaningful ways. Nevertheless, “Parents engage in cultural socialization more than any other racial socialization (Hughes & Johnson, 2001), and cross-ethnic findings suggest that this is a normative component of parental socialization for minority parents (Hughes, 2003)” (Rollins & Hunter 2013, p 142). For interracial couplings with minority/majority parents, the minority parent is still likely to offer ethnocultural socialization. Many interviewees alluded to the presence or absence of ethnocultural socialization during their upbringing as a key factor contributing to their internal sense of Japaneseness, which informs whether one sees themselves as deserving of belonging, the desire to be seen as belonging by others, and experiences of belongingness.

Sachi and Aki expressed feeling deeply connected to their internal sense of Japaneseness, which they attributed to their childhood upbringings. Sachi shared, “...I have always identified more strongly to my Japanese side than my not-so-Japanese side. ...Because of the way that I was raised by my parents, and probably also personality, I *feel* more Japanese”. Aki shared, “...the combination of Japanese Canadian and bicultural is how I best identify because the bicultural aspect informs more of my upbringing, my worldview, what context I was raised in”. For both, the importance of Japanese language ability in supporting and maintaining one’s connection to an internal sense of Japaneseness was a recurring theme. If you also include recognition of its absence, language was perhaps the most mentioned example of ethnocultural socialization by the interviewees. Sachi shared that “for a really long time, my biggest fear was losing my ability to speak and use Japanese” but ““I don’t fear it so much anymore, in part because I’ve built my life around it”. For Aki, Japanese has been valuable “because it was my only bridge into staying connected to my family over there” and because of the worldviews and philosophies built into the very language itself. She offered the example of *gaman*, a

valued trait in Japanese culture that can be understood as “bearing the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity” (Ide, 1997, p. 6). Interestingly, gaman has been linked to how JCs (and Japanese Americans) endured internment during WWII (Hirasuna & Hinrichs, 2005; Ide, 1997; Lorenzi, 2011).

Yuki also referenced language as integral to her sense of Japaneseness, saying,

There was a certain point in my life where I thought too much about my mixed identity, specifically when I was in Japan. ...And it was like a huge thing. Especially when I was in Japan. Especially when there were no other mixed people. It was like, this is such a burden. Like *everyone* called me the haafu girl. No one really called me by my name. ...The whole city knew about me too. ...It's funny, that process kind of ...was being like, 'I am Japanese now. I have a right to say that I'm Japanese' ... 'I only grew up here, this is my language, the only culture I've known, so I am Japanese'.

This reveals the process of identity Yuki underwent in claiming her Japaneseness despite objections she encountered due to her multiraciality. For several others, the absence of Japanese language ability was seen as an obstacle to feeling Japanese enough to claim Japaneseness. Nicole shared she does not use the terms haafu or dabaru, saying, “I think that it's probably partially feeling like a little bit of imposter syndrome. Of like, feeling not Japanese enough to even – because like, I don't know the language in general”. Kano and Lia, who also do not speak Japanese fluently, also expressed feeling distanced from haafu for this reason (Sachi, Aki, and Yuki identify as haafu when in Japan or in Japanese circles). Kano and Lia also feel required to “prove” their Japaneseness because of their multiraciality. As Kano shared, “It's like you have to *prove* you're Japanese ...there's more work involved.” Similarly, Lia offered,

I think the kind of like, dilution of my race or of my ethnicity made me more motivated to try and get closer to it. Versus like, my dad who's just like 100% [Japanese]. Because I feel like, in a way I need to prove that I am Japanese. One of the first questions I always get asked is, “Do you speak Japanese?”

In the absence of “looking” fully Japanese, Lia is often tested to see if she “sounds” Japanese. There was no opportunity to learn Japanese in the home as her father does not speak Japanese – nor does he identify as Japanese. Kano also partly attributes a lack of ethnocultural socialization during her

upbringing to her mother's passing, recognizing how these circumstances interrupted this ethnocultural conduit in her family lineage and informed her felt distance from her Japaneseness growing up, saying,

I actually didn't really, like fully realize my identity until I was in high school. ...I would say 'I'm half Japanese' but it felt like, robotic. Like, I didn't feel like I was embodying it for a really long time. And then when I was in high school, I kind of started to realize like, 'Oh my god, I'm half Japanese'. Like, that's actually who I am.

Without certain indicators, like language, Kano has been made to feel as though she lacks the right ethnocultural evidence to be considered Japanese. Her felt distance from her own sense of Japaneseness can be partly understood as a reflection of what others feel Japaneseness should be. However, she challenges these reflections of ascribed identity through the external racial gaze, or the boundaries of belonging in this space, by dismissing the necessity of such ethnocultural indicators. Notably, beyond language, certain behaviours, practices, and inclinations were also considered by several interviewees as examples of ethnocultural socialization. While sometimes feeling "not Japanese enough" due to language inability, Nicole cited examples like packing a rice cooker and a jar of chopsticks to move in with roommates and the comfort of Japanese food as making her realize, "Oh, there is something that lives within me, which are just like little things that every now and again are sprinkled into my life, and I'm like, 'Oh, wow, yeah, okay, it's there'". While Yuki was hesitant about whether Japaneseness even exists, she also offered some possible examples of Japaneseness, saying, "to me Japaneseness is like, yeah, like food, cooking Japanese food, watching Japanese TV shows. Sort of daily little things like appreciating Japanese literature. Like there's obviously that. But yeah, Japaneseness is such a huge, like, term." Lia also associated certain practices and inclinations with a sense of Japanese identity, saying,

A sense, yeah. A sense, for sure. There's little things. I mean, even just being hyper independent and clean, and like, loving good design, and I meditate, love to go forest bathing. I'm slowly learning vegan Japanese food. ...I love Studio Ghibli films...

These can also be considered as examples of ethnocultural socialization informing one's sense of connection to an internal sense of Japaneseness. In summary, we see how the presence or absence of ethnocultural socialization plays a role in the interviewees' connections to their internal sense of Japaneseness and whether they could/should belong in this space as mixed race Japanese.

Absence of Propinquity in the JC Community

Lia described the behaviours, practices, and inclinations above as “small cultural gestures that have persisted even though there's been such an intent to distance from them”. By this, Lia is referring to the impact of anti-Japanese sentiment during WWII on her family. In addition to “being a fourth generation and being half”, Lia believes this history has also impacted her ability to achieve a secure sense of Japanese identity. As she shared,

[Internment] is part of the context of why I'm so distanced from my ethnic ancestry. ...And so, with that as a starting point, that's how he kind of explained why he doesn't speak Japanese, why he doesn't know ...many Japanese recipes, why, like culturally, we just don't really reflect Japan that much. And then that's kind of what shaped how I related to my ethnicity ... And so, I guess, for me, I've always been trying to get closer to it. Probably because also the people around me clearly see that I'm some kind of ethnicity besides white.

Lia links a lack of ethnocultural socialization during her upbringing to anti-Japanese sentiment during WWII interrupting the intergenerational transmission of ethnoculture in her family. Many interviewees showed awareness of how internment and dispersal has interrupted this ethnocultural conduit within the broader JC community by thwarting community building and forcing assimilation. Sachi's business Japanese For Nikkei recognizes this and teaches Japanese to Nikkei people wanting to reclaim and reconnect with their heritage. The interviewees also questioned whether, in the aftermath of internment and dispersal, a substantial and accessible JC community even exists to belong to.

This brings us to the absence of propinquity among Japanese people in Canada and its impact on how communal belonging is experienced. When asked if she feels a sense of Japanese community in

Canada, Lia shared, “No, I don’t have one ... I mean, now I know you [laughs]”. Yuki observed, “I always questioned that when I first moved here. It was like, ‘Where?’ [laughs]” and linked the current state of the JC community to dispersal, saying, “that would explain the way that the Japanese Canadian community is to this day”. Kano made a few Japanese friends in moving to Montreal but had expected to find more of a sense of community, saying, “I was disappointed by the fact that there’s a really small Japanese population in Montreal ...if there is any sense of Japanese community, it’s ...just very dated, I find”. Aki told me, “I couldn’t tell you [about the JC community]. I’m not immersed in it”. When asked if such a community exists, Aki shared, “No. I think there are spaces that are being out for it ...Well not for me, and I’ve never lived in Toronto or Vancouver” and expanded on this with,

I think for a lot of Japanese, especially after the internment after WWII ...like my mom came to a country ...that already had a relationship, a very difficult relationship with her people that she shares an identity with, before she even set foot here. And yeah, you can’t help but look at how, I think, Japanese communities have mostly, largely integrated themselves into wherever they choose to live ...like outside of their family, there’s less of a tight knit community I think. I can’t speak for Vancouver but for certain areas. And I think a lot of people after the war decided to really – like there’s a bunch of people who cannot speak Japanese because it was assimilation, have to fit in, can’t stand out, you don’t want to draw attention. So, there’s like that personal erasure of identity and culture.

While Aki feels connected to an internal sense of Japaneseness, she still feels externally disconnected from a sense of community in Canada. One way of making sense of this disconnect is through the continued impacts of internment and dispersal. Several interviewees attributed a lacking sense of JC community to location. Both Aki and Kano wonder if life would be different in Toronto or Vancouver where there are larger numbers of Japanese people and more community infrastructure to support them. According to the 2016 Canadian census, JCs are mainly concentrated in BC (42%) and Ontario (34%) and tend to live in major cities like Vancouver (31%) and Toronto (23%) (Statistics Canada, 2017). Sachi did not explicitly name Toronto as contributing to any sense of belonging to the JC community – although she has joined a Facebook group called “Young Japanese Canadians of Toronto”, which she

credits with exposing her to a more comprehensive history of internment. Aki, Lia, Kano and Yuki live in Montreal, which, according to the same census, is home to 5% of JCs (Statistics Canada, 2017). Aki grew up in Ottawa, home to 3% of JCs (Statistics Canada, 2017). As a reflection of this demographic reality, they feel JCs are few and far between and a sense of community is absent. Kano shared,

I mean, Montreal ...there's just not a lot of Japanese people here. I came looking for that and I didn't find it ...I've been to Toronto two times and each time – I was only there for a few days – and I heard more people speaking Japanese on the street there in a few days than I have my entire life in Montreal.

Nicole, who lives in Vancouver, is the only interviewee who feels she has found a meaningful sense of JC community and she herself understands Vancouver as having been integral in her search and locating of belonging within the JC community due to a closer proximity to a larger population of JCs. For example, after describing a childhood of unbelonging in predominantly white environments, Nicole said,

But then it was moving to Vancouver that I really, really feel like I found a community and a sense of belonging. And have a lot of people who have shared experiences as me and very, very similar family histories. And I can enter spaces now where I have people who know me, they know my story, and I don't have to do any sort of, like, racial dance about which version of myself I'm bringing to this because those spaces have allowed me to just *be*. Just be a person.

This sense of belonging that Nicole has found is what the other interviewees describe as wanting. The absence of propinquity in the JC community, which, as we shall see, has particularly interesting interactions with JC multiraciality, partly informs how the interviewees understand their sense of unbelonging in the JC community.

The Centering of Prewar Japanese Canadianness

Another factor informing the interviewee's sense of belonging is the imagined centering of prewar JCs and their descendants within the JC community and how JCness is generally understood. Nicole, who is fourth-generation JC, is the only interviewee with a family history of internment. While Lia is fourth-generation Japanese American and sees internment as having impacted her family, her Japanese family in Hawaii were not interned during this time. The remaining interviewees are post-war

Japanese immigrants and descendants, with Yuki being first-generation, and Sachi, Aki, and Kano being second-generation. Several interviewees spoke on how JCness is often imagined as centering those with internment in their family history while overlooking postwar immigrants and their descendants:

Aki: I'm looking for [community]! Like, I try to connect. ...I think part of it is that I'm building my own community? And I think my obsession with looking for Japanese Canadian people and finding my community was that? Like, yeah, okay, I don't actually fit into a Japanese community ...I have a different reality and a different history than with like, fourth and fifth generation Japanese Canadians that lived internment or internment is part of their personal history. And, so, I think I'm looking for my own community through that and realizing, like, we are all so different because of how vast "Japanese Canadian" is, and how that definition is not necessarily true to me or to my identity. And yeah, so I think the community that is offered or trying to survive is not necessarily a community that reflects my reality.

Yuki: ...sometimes I feel very disconnected from ...like Japanese Canadians because they're so – like their own personal history and their own personal identity is very much tied into the history of Japanese people in Canada. Whereas, like, I don't have that. ...So, I sometimes feel a disconnect between me and them. ...I see it as a completely different, like separate entity. I almost see that lineage as sort of like a thing of its own that should be celebrated but separate from the way I celebrate my own identity, you know?

Sachi: ...I grew up feeling ...I mean, even as an adult, I guess. Actually, yes, even now, the spaces that I perceived to be prioritizing Japanese Canadians who have internment in their history, I often feel like I do not belong there. I think there are a lot of different reasons ... I think the division caused by pain and anger that still remains for a lot of people is a big part.

Nicole: I will say that there is a bit of a distinction too, because I've done a lot of stuff through the Nikkei centre out in Burnaby and different events have different vibes. And some of the vibes are a little bit more like newer Japanese immigrants versus the people who are from prewar. So, I do feel like there is a bit of a divide between those two communities. And I guess that kind of makes sense ...

The interviewees are delineating the boundaries between prewar JCness and postwar Japaneseness in Canada and this perceived distinction impacts how they understand their own positionality in this space. For the postwar interviewees, this distinction is received as a felt positioning outside of what it means to be JC. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Nicole is also the only interviewee who feels very certain in her JC

identification. As she told me, "...more or less nowadays, I really just say that I'm Japanese Canadian. And that's the one I really gravitate towards a lot. ...Like I someone asked me the 'what are you?' question, I often will say I'm Japanese Canadian, just because ...it resonates with me a lot." This sense of belonging to Vancouver's JC community is significantly informed by "very, very similar family histories". The JC identity also resonates with Nicole because she sees it as politically charged:

I think because of the education and the work I have done surrounding internment, for me, it is important that the state knows that I'm Japanese Canadian because I feel like it's an act of resistance to even exist in spite of the hard work that they did to make it so I didn't exist. ...I'll put it on a census form because I feel like I want them to know that I'm here and I fucking live in Vancouver now. And yeah, it didn't work. ...I feel like it's been a journey for me to really sort of carve out my identity for myself, and I think that that's a pretty common thing in this demographic that really unites people. And it's just so nice to have conversations and be like, yes! That! Like, been there, done that, had that feeling. Because, you know, again, like the dispersal was very effective in a lot of ways. But it's amazing to come together and be like, I had zero contact with some of these people, and then when I look at my life history, my family's history couldn't be more similar. And it's just, that's a really exciting part I think of the community. And I'm excited to see where we go.

The resistance and perseverance embodied within the JC identity is closely linked to Nicole's sense of belonging in this space. Her use "we" lies in stark contrast to the other interviewees' use of "they" when speaking of JCs. As she shared, "It makes me feel, today, really, really, proud of [being JC], because I do see the existence of *any* Japanese Canadians in Canada as like an amazing sign and act of resistance". When prompted further about who "any" refers to, she responded,

In general! ...people continuing to choose to come here is amazing. And you are just adding to the experience of what it means to be someone living in Canada with this background as well. And I understand why someone might feel uncomfortable with that association if their family wasn't directly involved, but I just think that, you know, it's all net positive that there are people in our community. ...I do still think that like the experience of people who came here postwar is still extremely valid. And there's still a lot of connections that we can still make there. And it's not like, 'Oh, well your family wasn't here prewar so you guys didn't suffer, so you don't get to like, claim this' or something like that. I still think that it's like super valid and still part of our culture, and it's going to continue to grow hopefully.

Nicole believes in a JCness that is inclusive of all Nikkei people and sees this as integral to the continuing story of JCs. This aligns with several of the interviewee's hopes to see JCness expand and create room for all present and future postwar Japanese immigrants and their descendant, but, for now, this perceived distinction still informs their sense of unbelonging in this space.

A Continued Prioritization of Monoraciality

The desire to see the JC community become more inclusive was also raised in relation to the continued prioritization of monoraciality in how Japaneseness is imagined, which positions mixed race people on the outskirts of ethnocommunal belonging. Lia and Kano feel required to prove their Japaneseness because of their multiraciality. Yuki, who grew up in Japan and should have all the ethnocultural "credentials" to be considered Japanese, often felt she was denied entry into Japaneseness because of her multiraciality. While the ideal of "the white, western haafu" has become increasingly admired and celebrated in Japan, multiraciality was once considered a "moral, practical, political issue and a social problem" (a pathological framing) and "a reluctance to see [haafus] as Japanese remains today" (Törngren & Sato, 2021, p. 804). When transposed into the Canadian context, multiraciality is specifically relevant to the JC community – yet the continued prioritization of monoraciality remains.

As is now a relatively well-known and controversial statistic among JCs, the rate of outmarriage among JCs is the highest of all "visible minorities" in Canada with mixed unions reported to be almost 80% as of 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2011). This has been linked to postwar dispersal and the loss of sizable local JC communities, as intermarriage is more difficult in the absence of propinquity. The motivation to assimilate in the aftermath of anti-Japanese sentiment has also played a part in the rate of outmarriage for JCs. As a result, multiraciality has become an increasingly observable feature in the JC population today, with approximately 53% of JCs reporting multiple ethnic origins in the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2017). Sachi, Nicole, and Aki were previously aware of these statistical trends and

the controversy surrounding them. Kano, Lia, and Yuki were informed during interviews. Discussing this topic offered an entry point for the interviewees to consider themselves in relation to this trend and what multiraciality means for JCness and the JC population. Sachi spoke on the supposed “dilution” of Japaneseness, which has become a familiar talking point, saying,

I am also aware that some people believe that losing culture and language and stuff means that the Japanese Canadian population is like, “diluting” itself. And by having mixed race children it is like, losing the Japaneseness, which is like a whooole other thing to unpack there. ...I get really angry at people who think that Japaneseness is being diluted because of interracial child ...production. We are the product. We are not the cause.

Kano similarly shared, “I think if you’re discriminating or giving a hard time to mixed people who are just mixed – because you can’t control your identity – I mean, that’s obviously a problem”. Both feel that monoracism against multiracial Japanese people, which they have both experienced, is misguided since one cannot control the positionality they are born into. Discussing this topic prompted Aki and Nicole to consider younger children in their lives who are quarter Japanese:

Aki: But ya, thinking about my niece, and I’m like, I would hate for her to not feel like she *can* connect. ...Like, her blood is connected to my grandparents and to the land. And we want her to feel that. Like I think it’s my sister and I kind of trying to reconstruct our sense of identity into her. So, to me, like even referring to her as like “quarter Japanese”, how will she identify? I don’t know. ... And like, what does that mean, right? Like when the following generation of hafus who do associate or do have a relationship to their Japaneseness, how does that then expand so that quarter children are welcome? Like hapa 2.0 children are included? Yeah, I think that definition of community has to reflect its people. And I think in the last 10, 15, 20 years it’s completely changed and it’s a mix.

Nicole: It’s interesting, one of my cousin’s kids, her kids are quarter, and it’s really cool to watch her daughter starting to kind of claim her Japaneseness. Because she’s like blonde hair, blue eyes. But like, I saw her post [on Instagram]...this thing about anti-Asian racism, and then the next thing she posted was about like, Land Back, and I was just like, I love this girl! ...I still see her as like a totally valid part of the continued experience of Japanese Canadian people.

Such musings of racial fractions and who is “allowed” to claim Japaneseness demonstrate an awareness of how Japaneseness is intimately tied to notions of race. While Aki presents this as a question, Nicole feels that multiraciality is already a part of JCness because it is a product of its continued survival:

...one of the facts I learned recently was that Japanese are the most intermarried of any racial class. ...And I mean, I see that as a direct correlation between people wanting to – same thing as like, not learning Japanese. You want your kids to be Canadian. ...especially because, you know, the dispersal was to try to, you know, disconnect us from our communities. And then it was, you know, picking places that no one wanted to go so that they could just maybe go out there and just die by themselves. But instead we intermarried. And, you know, found other ways to continue to survive. ...I would say a mixed person existing is showing that the whole plan backfired.

Nicole’s view of multiraciality as a valid part of the continued story of JCs is likely facilitated by her strong sense of JC identity as a prewar descendant and her secure sense of belonging in Vancouver’s JC community. This becomes evident in her vision for the trajectory of the JC community. As she shared,

...I do think that our community has an opportunity to be meaningful allies when it comes to Indigenous reconciliation and all these things. ...I feel very optimistic about our community, honestly. And I think that by nature of people who are kind of in our generation learning about our history, I think it kind of turns people into activists in general because you start making these connections between other things. And you kind of can’t help but see these things as all connecting, because I think a lot of them do. ...I think that there’s a lot of opportunity for the Japanese Canadian community to do some good hopefully. I think it’s continuing to grow too.

Nicole is operating from a different starting point than other interviewees. For the others, intra- and interracial community building may seem out of reach when they themselves feel positioned outside the boundaries of JCness on multiple fronts. Their hopes for the trajectory of the JC community, therefore, focus on wanting to see JCness expand to reflect and include multiraciality. As Aki shared,

So, I think from now, to ensure longevity within the community or expansion within the community, defining the definition of that community has to shift. ... Japanese Canadians has to include mixed people because we’re the biggest demographic of outmarriages. And so, mixed Japanese – there are so many of us, but we’re not connected to each other. And, also, I think ...within these communities throughout Canada, there’s a sense of preservation ...of maintaining Japaneseness within this context here in Canada. But at the same time, the mixed community or

haafus are – like, we don't even share a cultural identity with either of our parents. Our reality is really blending two together. And [JCness] has to actually include our reality.

This brings us to the question, if multiraciality is fully accepted within the folds, what might this mean for Japaneseness, a social construct built upon monoraciality/ethnicity? As we have seen, the boundaries of belonging within Japaneseness/JCness is ultimately dependent on the physicality of race. However, we must remember race only exists insofar as racism does. Yuki was especially aware of this, saying,

...That's the thing. I think it doesn't exist. I feel like Japanese people are *obsessed* with Japaneseness. ...there's like all these ... stupid books about how, like, if your skin tone looks like ...So, it's all based in terms of like, what is Japaneseness put in contrast to the Korean or in contrast to Chinese people. So, it's all built around that. So Japaneseness is making sure that they're the superior Asians that deserve to colonize others. ...my personal view on what is Japaneseness is, like, basic racism. ... I would say that also, Japaneseness is rooted in the performance of it. ...every culture is, in a way, a performance.

So, what are the bonds of Japaneseness without the physicality of race? Is such a Japaneseness possible?

Several interviewees have already begun considering these questions.

Aki: I think we have to find other ways of engaging with our cultural or our racial identities without having to be based on physiology or physical features ... I think customs, culture ...And that's through the realization that my sister and I don't necessarily look super Japanese or people might not identify us as Japanese even in Japan. But everything that informs our choices, how we exist in the world, is rooted in what's been passed on. And it might not be the physical that's been passed on in some of us, but it's the mentality, the philosophy behind your upbringing.

Sachi: ...I understand that how people define what it means to be Japanese can really depend on the person. But in general, either you have an ancestor or parent who is Japanese or has Japanese descent – whatever. And, ideally, you have some aspects of the culture, and in culture I will include food ... I feel like if you have those then I would consider people to be Japanese, but I also know that the identity and experience of being Japanese is incredibly varied.

Kano: I think as long as you're ethnically Japanese, no matter what your involvement is culturally. ...I don't feel like I need to define it or make sense of it really. Like I'm half Japanese, and that's all I should really have to say.

Here, the interviewees are envisioning a Japaneseness/JCness that places less emphasis on racial presentation, which is informed by their own lived experiences of trying to situate their own

multiraciality in a space where monoraciality continues to be prioritized. This can be understood as a negotiation to expand the boundaries of belonging in this space. While the above explorations point to several interesting and revealing themes in relation to Japaneseness/JCness, what they also show us is the instability and amorphousness of race and ethnicity as highlighted by the presence of multiraciality.

Other Notable Findings

Two additional findings worth mentioning also emerged during interviews. However, both were not significantly explored enough during interviews to warrant their own sections and are requiring of further research. To start, the interracial family appears to be a site where mixed race belonging is experienced and negotiated for several interviewees. For mixed race people, who “rarely have the luxury of being raised by a parent whose racial identity and socialization processes are relevant to their experience,” family dynamics are often affected by “potential variations in physical looks, perspectives, shifting manifestations of racism, lack of parental understanding/support for what one might be experiencing, as well as internalized racism” (Rockquemore et al., 2006, p. 207; Taylor, 2008b, p. 124). In this way, the interracial family is arguably a “contact zone”, “a social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Pratt, 1992, p. 4). This can be especially true for interracial families where one parent/family is white, for, within the social construction of race, whiteness is a power construct that other races are subjugated in relation to. Kano and Aki both spoke on navigating and negotiating such racialized family dynamics due to the salience of their racial alterity on both sides of their families. This has also been my experience. If we understand racial belonging within the family as predicated on a sense of racial linearity passed down through generations, multiraciality disrupts this to reveal the family as an “unstable racialized site” (Taylor, 2008a, p. 124). The multiracial child can, therefore, be

understood as the embodiment of this familial racial disruption on both the matrilineal and patrilineal side, which can impact their sense of belonging in this space. It is useful to note here that,

...whether or not the issues of race are positive or negative within the family is, in some way, beside the point (although certainly it is important). The fact that respondents must think about how race shapes their relationships with family members is the point. It is the dealing with the manifestations of racial division, both subtle and obvious, in the context of relationships that are expected to be free of such concerns that form the ground of a common multiracial experience.

(DaCosta, 2007, pp. 118–119)

As you may recall, both Yuval-Davis and Antonsich liken a sense of belonging to the feeling of “home”. However, the home, thought to be a site of roots and community, is often not a racially neutral space for mixed race people in interracial families because of the proximity of racial difference at this site. I would love to see this topic area explored further.

Another particularly interesting finding that arose during almost all interviews was in relation to dating and desire as a mixed race Asian woman. Several interviewees related their experiences of Asianness to Asian fetishization. Yuki shared that her experience of racism has mostly centered around fetishization, sexuality, and desire, and that she is wary of the dating history of her prospective partners because of this. As she described, “With some people I could tell they were seeking the Japaneseness in me. Like, looking for it and finding that desirable. And sometimes it’s not that apparent at first and then you see it creeping up”. Yuki, as well as Nicole and Kano, mentioned liking anime a lot or mentioning anime when meeting for the first time as a “major red flag” in terms of dating. Porn preferences was also raised as an indicator of fetishization. Nicole shared that there have been times where men are disappointed because they are not receiving the “stereotypical, Madame Butterfly experience”. Nicole now omits her race and ethnicity on dating apps because of the lewd, racialized comments she would

often receive (“some really nasty, gross stuff about me being Japanese”). Like Yuki, Nicole admits that dating is the space where she experiences anti-Asian racism the most. Regarding Asianness and multiraciality, Yuki raised the issue of “half Asian fetishization” saying that it is “a really real thing that I feel needs to be talked about right now”. She described herself as a “gateway Asian for people” – a phrasing I have never heard before, but I immediately resonate with. Kano also touched on this saying she has received comments like “I normally don’t like Asian girls because their eyes are slit, but your eyes are big, so I like you” and “Oh, you’re the most beautiful half Jap I’ve ever seen”. It is interesting to consider belonging in terms of desirability. Yuki shared that she never felt desired growing up in Japan because of her multiraciality and that her first experience of desirability was in Canada when a boy showed interest in her. However, she was rejected with comments like, “she probably smells like sushi down there”. As she concluded, “from the get-go, it [anti-Asian racism] has always been tied to sexual. Lia has also wondered about past men she has dated, asking, “did they just have a thing for half Asian girls? ...just makes me think about how I present physically”. Her comment here speaks to racial depersonalization, as well as MRD. Such anecdotes reveal a darker underbelly to desirability when dating as Asian and mixed race. As Kano noted, “we want our Asian side to be seen, but we don’t always realize the difference between being seen respectfully and being seen in an objectifying way”. As Part 2 of Chapter 2 covers, there is a gendered dimension of how Asianness has been constructed and experienced in Canada. There is a worthwhile opportunity here for future research on the interactions between Asian fetishization and multiraciality.

Chapter 4: Mixed Race Belonging and the Pandemic

The rise of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism signals a new context in which racial belonging is experienced in the Canadian social landscape for Asian people. This study considers how the interviewees experiences of multiracial belonging have been impacted by this recent climate, revealing two areas of interest – the process and experience of multiracial dysmorphia and its amplification during the pandemic and the emergence of pan-Asianness in response to the pandemic as a possible site of racial belonging.

Figure 6: [Comic on Being Asian During the Pandemic]



Note. By MariNaomi, 2022, comic on being Asian during the pandemic, sourced from MariNaomi's Instagram (@marinaomiart). This comic by multiracial Japanese American comic artist, MariNaomi, speaks to the toll of rising anti-Asian racism on the wellbeing of diasporic Asians, societal disbelief that this is an issue, and the inconsistent and contradictory ways in which multiracial bodies are often read.

Then, What Do I Look Like?

Mixed race individuals are often “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” (Paragg, 2014, p. 351). As a result, ambivalent, inconsistent, contradictory, and incompatible readings of mixed race bodies are common markers of the mixed race experience (Paragg, 2015). I introduce the concept of multiracial dysmorphia (MRD) to suggest that the struggle to place one’s own racial

appearance due to inconsistent and contradictory readings of one's racial ambiguity can then be internalized by mixed race people to produce a sense of dysmorphia regarding how they see themselves racially and their sense of racial belongingness. After exploring how MRD has been experienced by the interviewees, we then consider whether and how the recent rise in anti-Asian racism has potentially heightened experiences of MRD. This is because, beyond impacting how interviewees perceive themselves racially and whether they feel they belong in certain racial and ethnic groupings, MRD also interacts with whether the interviewees have felt at risk of experiencing rising anti-Asian racism in the current racial climate.

The use of the word "dysmorphia" is borrowed from body dysmorphic disorder, a condition involving persistent distress due to a *perceived* physical anomaly resulting in repetitive behaviors and mental acts such as frequent mirror checking, reassurance seeking, attempts at hiding or fixing a perceived flaw (e.g., excessive grooming), and constant comparisons of appearance (Phillips, n.d.). It recently dawned on me that the feeling of body dysmorphia is also extremely familiar in my experience of multiraciality. I have obsessively asked others how they see me racially, stared in the mirror for hours trying to pinpoint my facial features, and often sat in the discomfort that I have little concept of how I present racially. Sometimes I will feel I am starting to understand what I look like to others and then a racial incident will surpass the threshold of my now-thickened skin and I end up feeling disoriented all over again. I have often found myself visualizing the mixed race experience as a literal race with me still flailing about at the starting line trying to figure out my racial identity, while my monoracial counterparts have found enough stability in theirs to move onto other things. Perhaps this is because, as Andrea Long Chu writes in an exploration of the way novelists write mixed Asian/white characters, "in many ways the mixed Asian still resembles a child, trapped in a state of perpetual immaturity by her failure during the critical window of childhood to inherit a clear narrative about her own racial identity"

(Chu, 2022). A lifetime of inconsistent and contradictory readings of my racial appearance has resulted in a shaky sense of what I truly look like. It is this experience I am naming MRD. I am less preoccupied with how I present racially than I once was, despite still receiving varied racial readings on a near-weekly (sometimes daily!) basis. I now recognize the likelihood that my relationship with my multiraciality will continue to shift throughout my life. This sort of flux has become a cornerstone of my experience with a multiracial identity. A notable point of difference, however, is I used to attribute and internalize this instability as a personal failing, whereas I now recognize it to be a feature of race itself. I say this to underscore that the concept of race is highly unstable, changing across time and space, and the ill-fitting experience of multiraciality has the capacity to reveal it as such.

It is important to highlight this before we continue, so as not to frame MRD as an inherent pathological deficit. The use of the word dysmorphia is not intended to frame multiraciality as a physical defect or flaw. Instead, I turn to MRD as a way of pointing to one dimension of the multiracial experience, whereby external experiences are internalized to *produce* the feeling of MRD. Other wordings were considered, such as multiracial destabilization, multiracial disorientation, multiracial limbo, multiracial unknowing, multiracial distortion, and more, to try and avoid use of a medical term. Multiracial destabilization could also work here as inconsistent and contradictory readings temporarily destabilize one's sense of appearance. However, this term feels vague and does not necessarily capture the impact of this experience on one's perceived appearance in the same way that dysmorphia does. Further, many of the signs and symptoms of body dysmorphia, as we shall see, echo the signs and symptoms of multiracial dysmorphia. Perhaps the most convincing reason for choosing multiracial dysmorphia is that all interviewees presented with this phrasing immediately understood what it entails and resonated deeply with this concept, with Yuki even using the word herself unprompted.

MRD not only captures a feeling but also denotes a process. A necessary precondition for MRD is inconsistent and contradictory readings of one's racial ambiguity due to the ever-present external racial gaze, as these conditions are internalized to produce the experience of MRD. All interviewees (except for Sachi) spoke of experiencing this, particularly when speaking on The Question. Kano shared, "...people would *always* ask me. Like, my hometown is so white. People would always approach my dad and be like, 'Oh my God, your daughters are so beautiful', or would ask about our background and stuff". Lia used humour to undermine the othering impact of The Question saying, "And then, of course, just like random creepy older guys on public transit being like, 'Excuse me, I've been looking at you and I just can't figure it out. I just *have* to know'. Like, do you really? [laughs]". Aki told me, "That's the first thing I get asked. And it's often followed by 'Aha! I thought so!'". The interviewees touched on how they are often mistaken for other races, nationalities, and identities, ranging from Indigenous, Hawaiian, Italian, Spanish, South American, Thai, Hispanic, Russian, Filipino, and more. Several interviewees also demonstrated an awareness of how physical race is, and, therefore, how malleable it can also be. As Yuki shared, "Depending on the season too – I guess you too – but when I get more tanned, because I tan really easily, so if I'm tanned, people are like 'Oh, you're Spanish'". Nicole said, "I have different levels of passing depending on physical things I've done to myself" and "It's kind of crude joke, but I'll say like, sometimes it depends on how I do my eyeliner, how Asian I look." Both understand how nuanced alterations can influence how they're racially read. Yuki also shared,

People [in Japan] would be like, 'Oh my God, you're so lucky, you have a high nose bridge and big eyes', and I'd be like, 'Yeah, I feel fucked now 'cus you said that'. Like, I have dysmorphia now. Because I was constantly comparing myself to – I wanted to look Asian. I would put black eye contact lenses in when I was in Japan. Cus I was like, my eyes are too light.

Yuki explicitly uses the term dysmorphia here to identify the feeling of MRD. When asked more directly if she experiences a form of dysmorphia as a mixed race person, she responded, "Oh my God! *All the time*". Using contacts to appear "more Asian" in Japan can also be considered an attempt to

negotiate the undesirability of MRD. Kano also spoke on this idea that racial ambiguity is malleable, saying,

I think for me it depends. Like, before I thought it was more based off of like, if I dressed or styled my hair in like a more stereotypical way. Like I had bangs for a really long time ... I feel like it depends. ... Oftentimes, Asian people immediately see me as not Asian. Because I'm not full. I don't know, more recently though, I've been meeting some Asian people and like, they can tell right away that I'm Asian, but they can tell I'm mixed. But it's nice to hear. It feels validating for them to acknowledge that they see that I'm Asian right away. And I think, for a while, I felt like in order to be viewed as Asian I needed to have bangs or dress a certain way because I felt like, I guess, invalidated by a lot of Asian people. So, I felt like I need to be a certain type of way. But then I started to realize that regardless of how I present to people, I still experience racism. People still see me a certain way. And like, non-Asian people immediately, always – it's probably like 99% of the time people think I'm Asian.

While Kano felt that certain modifications made her appear more Asian, she eventually realizes that she is still consistently read as Asian by non-Asian people regardless. Kano also indicates that Asian people rarely read her as such (although perhaps more so lately). It is in this space of inconsistency and contradiction that MRD emerges. The discursive uncertainty here (“I feel”, “I think”, “I guess”) in considering how she appears suggests that such inconsistency and contradiction have likely been internalized. Nicole similarly speaks on the inconsistency and contradictory racial readings she receives through *The Question* and uses this vantage point to consider how she perceives herself (“*I think I present as being...*”) and the impact of MRD on her sense of belonging during her childhood. She recalls disclosing her identity off the top to avoid the spotlight of the racial gaze, which can be considered an attempt to negotiate the discomfort of MRD. MRD was also present when Nicole spoke of her experiences as an actor, saying,

I definitely would have lots of identity crises when I was in theatre because I'm like, ‘I have no control over [how others perceive me]’ ... Are they looking for the diversity hire? ... which part of me do they want? And never feeling like – never asking myself, ‘Do they want all of me?’. I was always considering, ‘Do they want the white part of me, or do they want the Asian part of me?’

Nicole is not only questioning “How are other perceiving me?” but also grappling with the internalized question, “Then, what do I look like?” This was also seen with Lia who shared,

I feel I'm seen and treated as a multiracial person? I mean, there are some people that don't realize that I'm anything besides white, but it's like, I don't know, I feel like it's half and then the other half can't even see that I'm white. So, then half of the people are always like, 'Where are you from?'. Like, you know, 'you're clearly not *just* American or Canadian'. And so, I've always been confused, because then I'm like, 'Okay, so what do I look like?' [laughs]

This really captures both the process and experience of MRD. Lia's attempts to organize and quantify the varied racial readings, which we also saw with Kano, can be understood as a way of trying to make sense of the disorienting experience of MRD. Lia also alluded to MRD regarding dating as a multiracial Asian and experiences of racial depersonalization – a topic that also surfaced in Yuki, Kano and Nicole's interviews. Lia shared, "just thinking about all the guys I've dated, did they just have a thing for half Asian girls? ...just makes me think about how I present physically". When asked if she relates to "dysmorphia as a multiracial person", Lia offered a firm yes. Kano responded,

Yeah! No, I have that with my face! ...like I don't know what I look like. ...Yeah, when I was younger, like when I was really young, and I still do this sometimes – not really anymore because I feel like I've just accepted myself – I would just look at myself in the mirror.

So, what does this say about mixed race belonging? If race is ultimately physical, and racial belonging is thereby predicated on physicality, and yet multiraciality is often characterized by racial ambiguity, it comes as no surprise that experiences of MRD raise questions about racial belonging. I suggest that the question "Then, what do I look like?" at the root of MRD naturally leads to "Then, where do I belong?". As is already apparent in many of the excerpts above, experiences of MRD can influence how racially ambiguous mixed race persons experience and navigate multiracial belonging. The struggle in trying to racially categorize themselves is another example of this. Recall Sachi's struggle between the terms "white-passing" and "visible minority", the latter of which Aki also struggled with, or Nicole's occasional use of white-passing to describe herself only to realize she has never really been mistaken as white. Take this interaction with Yuki:

...and that's mostly, I think, due to the fact that I am white-passing. Obviously.

So, when you say white-passing, do you get mistaken for white or is it just because people don't correctly guess that you're Asian?

I think it's more the latter ...I guess non-Asian-passing would be the correct term? [laughs] ...I have been mistaken as white, and so I guess that's why [I use that term], but more often than not people will say, 'What are you?'

Yuki is trying to pull from language readily available to her and, in a move that seems obvious, opts for white-passing to signal how she is not often read as Asian (i.e., Asian-presenting). Yet, when prompted further, it becomes apparent that she rarely passes as white. Neither is a true fit to her lived experiences of multiraciality. Due to a lack of readily available language, Yuki cobbles together the phrasing non-Asian-passing. This exchange captures the ongoing process of racial navigation and negotiation mixed people often undertake to locate a sense of racial belonging, to find a place for themselves within the racial landscape in Canada. Nicole specifically linked MRD to mixed race belonging when she shared,

It's funny. If I bring [my racial mix] up to people they'll be like, 'I've been wondering! I just didn't want to ask!'. But people clock me as being, 'There's some Asian thing going on with you', more often with me. And I think because of that, I've had to maybe do quite a bit of work to really figure out where that part of me lives and where my culture lives within me. And, you know, what are my connections to it? And what parts of the culture do I connect with? What parts maybe I don't? Just because, *visually*, I've had to ask – been asked a lot of questions.

Nicole is mulling over how multiracial ambiguity interacts with the cultural dimension of belonging, one of the five factors comprising Antonsich's concept of place-belongingness. Her use of "visually" is key here. Nicole feels the spotlight of the external racial gaze has rendered her multiraciality particularly salient in her life, which has prompted further investigation on her part so she might better understand the contours of her own sense of racial belonging. There is also a sense that Nicole sees her racial ambiguity as *requiring* her to determine these contours to define her claim to communal belonging – perhaps in ways a monoracial person might not have to. This speaks to Yuval-Davis' politics of belonging, particularly "what is required from a specific person for [them] to be entitled to belong, to be considered as belonging, to the collectivity" [2006, p 2009]. As entailed, belonging is relational. It is

shaped by both an internal belief of belonging and an external ascription of belonging by others, which may not always align for multiracial people. Nicole provided an illuminating example speaking to this:

There's a really interesting – it's like a stupid College Humor video, but it's basically like, 'Are You Asian Enough?' And it's like this tribunal trying to decide if people are 'Asian' enough. And this guy's like, 'Well, I'm only 1/8th'. And they're trying to decide, you know, what privileges does that give you. What stereotypes are you allowed to participate in and what aren't you. And really, really like dissecting all that. And then the next one is like, 'you have to clear out, the next people are coming in'. It's like this girl and she's like, 'Well, I'm 1/8th Black'. And then it's like a Black panel and they're like 'You're Black'. And they just have no issue like, owning her. And it's like, I feel that.

This recounting speaks to Nicole's understanding that belonging is not just negotiated by the subject but bestowed by the collective. For mixed race people, whose social location exists between racial categories, access to racial belonging is not given consistently. The disorientation of MRD has often led me to ask others, "What do I look like to you?", to try to resolve such ambivalence and understand what I look like and where I might "fit in". When I shared this with Yuki, she laughed, "I always ask that too". Later, she told me, "I feel like being mixed is a constant battle of trying to fit in". It is in this way that the impact of MRD on one's racial self-image interacts with one's sense of racial belonging.

Multiracial Dysmorphia and Pandemic-Related Anti-Asian Racism

The concept of MRD is particularly relevant when considering the rise in pandemic-related anti-Asian racism. As I thought might be the case, seeing as it was also my own experience, indications of MRD were particularly pronounced when interviewees spoke about rising anti-Asian racism. In trying to process and navigate a sense of heightened danger, several interviewees were forced to reconsider how Asian they appear to others to determine their own safety – as the following quotes demonstrate:

Aki: So, at the beginning of the pandemic, I could just *tell* because I was travelling in March 2020. I was coming back from the Dominican... So, I had lots of time in random airplanes at random airports and lots of time waiting in them. And you could just *tell* how Asian people were being treated versus non-Asians at the airport before it was declared a world pandemic. You could tell how uneasy Asian people felt. And I think at that time I was like, 'Oh'. Like those moments of kind of being like, 'Oh, how are people perceiving me right now?'

Nicole: As things started to get scarier, and things started to show up on the news, and, you know, viral videos started going around and stuff like that, I did get kind of freaked out. And, you know, it was already a scary time to leave your house anyway? And then I was like, ‘Oh, now there’s a legitimate reason to be fearful to walk down the street right now’. It’s not just like I’m having an anxiety reaction to something, which I have anyway (laughs). It’s like, ‘Oh, no, there’s an actual danger element, and these people are just existing’. So, there was a while where, definitely, I was afraid. And I was fearful because I was also like, I *feel* like the most Asian part about me is my eyes? And, like, that’s the only thing people are even going to see right now [with a mask]. Yeah, it was scary.

Kano: To be honest, I spent a *lot* of time inside during COVID ...I barely left the house ...I didn’t really experience much. I also don’t know. Maybe with my mask? I feel like my eyes are one of the things that look most Asian about me. But I don’t know, that’s what some people say. ...Yeah, and I think it’s just like, I know what my face looks like. But, to me, I don’t know how Asian I present.

Indications of MRD emerge for Aki, Nicole, and Kano as they recount their experiences of the pandemic and associated anti-Asian racism. Kano links how “some people” might perceive her to a sense of confusion on how she herself presents. There is discursive uncertainty when Kano and Nicole are considering what “parts” of themselves are the most Asian-presenting. While all interviewees said they were not directly impacted by this rise in anti-Asian racism, accounts of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism still emerged during several interviews. With that said, several interviewees situate the recent rise in pandemic-related anti-Asian racism as part of the ongoing pervasiveness of anti-Asian racism. Aki shared, “It was horrible to see but it didn’t surprise me. It didn’t shock me because I’ve lived it every day ... It’s super common”. Kano expressed a similar sentiment, saying, “I mean, at the same time, these things happen on a regular basis, so I forget so much of it because it happens on weekly basis”. While MRD was not overly present in Aki’s response, it was particularly pronounced in Kano’s recounting of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism and her perception of threat in this climate:

...I remember in the beginning, the very beginning of the pandemic, well, I was *really* cautious. That’s another reason why I didn’t leave the house, because I didn’t want to get sick. But I don’t know whether it was because I was wearing a mask and we were just starting to hear about COVID, or if it’s because I was Asian, but I took the bus, and *everyone* walked away from me. And I don’t know what it was. [*Me: “It was enough to leave you questioning whether it was racially motivated”*]. Yeah! Exactly. Because I’m like, I don’t know if I look Asian with my

mask on. I don't know if that's how people are seeing me. But I remember sitting on the bus and people moving away from me. ...The way I coped with it is I called my dad after, and I told him what happened. And I was like, I mean, I guess it's a good thing! 'Cus I'm not gonna get COVID [laughs]. ... [Me: "*Would you say that wondering whether people perceive you as Asian and rising anti-Asian xenophobia played a part in you not leaving the house?*"] Yeah. I was definitely concerned about that. But because I don't really know how I appear to other people, I wasn't sure what was gonna happen. But I was cautious. And like, I have pepper spray. I wanted to make sure that my girlfriends had pepper spray and stuff like that, and were not walking alone at night or, you know, in areas where they might be more vulnerable than they would typically be. But yeah, I don't know. I mean, I just took the regular precautions that I would and just hoped that nothing would happen. But I have friends that got spat on.

Instances of MRD are present throughout. She expresses uncertainty in how others see her, including an uncertainty of how she herself presents. Despite her demonstrated uncertainty, she shares the precautions she took during a rise in anti-Asian racism to ensure her own safety and that of her friends. There is also uncertainty in trying to understand her experience on the bus. Trying to discern whether an incident, particularly a microaggression, is racially motivated is a common experience for racialized people. However, for multiracial people, there can also be an added dimension of wondering how they were racially perceived. For example, during a pandemic lock-down, I was effectively told to "go back home" at my local grocery store. I spent the entirety of my shopping trip wondering if I am Asian-presenting and if this interaction was racially charged. I have since concluded that it was. When I spoke of the pandemic with Lia, she shared, "I heard of an incident with pepper spray right by my bandmate's house. He was part of my bubble, so I was going over to his place. And, so, I thought like, 'Oh, if that guy lives in that area, then I better keep my head down while walking'", which indicates that she was contemplating how Asian she appears in trying to navigate her own safety. When I asked her if she thought more about how she presents during this time, she responded with "Simple yes". Sachi also thought about her racial presentation due to the pandemic. As she told me, "Initially I was a little bit worried and thought I might need to [be careful], but basically I have not [experienced anti-Asian racism]". This is interesting because Sachi feels she is predominantly white-passing and there were little

indications of MRD present during her interview. Nevertheless, it appears that the current racial climate was enough to surface feelings of MRD for Sachi as well.

As the vehicle of MRD captures, the specific social location of these interviewees exists between established racial categories, which influences the nature of how the external racial gaze is experienced and subsequently internalized by mixed race people. This introduction of MRD is useful for capturing the emotional impact of inconsistent and contradictory external racial gaze on the interviewee's racial self-image and navigations of mixed race belonging. This can be seen discursively through uncertain language when describing how one racially presents to more explicit narratives and behaviours of MRD, such as mirror checking, spending more time thinking about how one racially presents, attempted negotiations of racial belonging through physical modifications, and identity crises. The concept of MRD appears to be especially relevant today, as experiences of MRD appear to have heightened for the interviewees in trying to determine the risk of experiencing the rise in anti-Asian racism in Canada. When understood through Yuval-Davis' tripartite framework of belonging, particularly that of social locations and its interactions with the politics of belonging, the resurgence of anti-Asian racism highlights the shifting contours of how racial belonging is politicized for certain groups. Having discussed MRD with a number of other mixed race people who are not of Japanese/white or Asian/white mixtures, it is possible that the naming of this experience could be useful for mixed race people more generally but this would require further investigation.

An Emerging Sense of Pan-Asian Belonging in Canada?

It never really occurred to me that "Asian Canadian", a term that has always felt underdeveloped in comparison to its more well-established U.S. counterpart, might be relevant or available to me to use – especially in my partial Asianness, which felt insufficient for such a seemingly "bold" claim. Am I really Asian enough to wear this term that I rarely even hear used by monoracial Asians in Canada?

Recently, however, I have heard this term used more frequently than ever in my lifetime, prompting me to reconsider Asian Canadianness more generally and in relation to myself. Asian Canadian has become particularly relevant for naming those affected by recent pandemic-related anti-Asian racism in Canada. It is, therefore, unsurprising that this social category has experienced more frequent usage in mainstream discourse. Beyond this, however, the term Asian Canadian has also come to be used as a signal of collective identity. In addition to the rise in anti-Asian racism and increased media attention on the issue, various organizing and awareness-raising efforts by members of the Asian diaspora, including that of the Stop Asian Hate movement (SAH), have contributed towards foregrounding the Asian community and identity. This has been particularly true of Asian Americanness. In the New York Magazine issue “At Home in Asian America: Who Are We Becoming?”, which delves into “the Asian American condition as it undergoes a series of profound transformations,” editor Michelle Leung Coleman writes,

Like so many Asian Americans, we spent the last two years watching the meaning of Asianness change in the public conversation as well as how Asian Americans themselves have struggled to adapt or have embraced new definitions. Asian Americanness has never felt so public, and with that comes a kind of identity crisis.

Has this also been the case for Asian Canadianness? According to Japanese Canadian poet and novelist Terry Watada, “In 1969 ... there was no such thing as an Asian Canadian. Japanese Canadians were the Japanese; Chinese Canadians were the Chinese. The generic term was “Oriental” (1999, p. 80). Prior to any sense of Asian Canadianness, people of Asian ancestry primarily identified with their ethnic group without recognizing commonalities or solidarities with each other, and a collective pan-Asian identity was not particularly obvious or compelling. In fact, the protracted emergence of Asian Canadian was preceded and influenced by “Asian American” – the latter of which was borne from radical roots inspired by the Black Power Movement of the sixties and seventies, and, alongside the civil rights movement, facilitated the institutionalization of Asian Americans and their inclusion in ethnic studies programs across the U.S. (Day, 2008; D. C. Goellnicht, 2000; Zhou, 2021b). In contrast, Asian Canadian

emerged as a social category in the literary sphere and remains largely understudied and underimagined (D. C. Goellnicht, 2000). Scholars attribute this to a lack of politically radical roots grounding Asian Canadian identity⁹, as well as how Canadian multiculturalism obscures race (Day, 2008; D. Goellnicht & Ty, 2016). Nevertheless, the term Asian Canadian has come to be included in mainstream language as a demographic marker for people of Asian ancestry much in the same way as Asian American. Beyond this, however, the shape of Asian Canadianness itself still feels somewhat slippery. As Iyko Day wrote in a 2008 article entitled, *Must All Asianness Be American?*, “it remains unclear to what extent Asian Canadian panethnicity exists as a social and political identity outside the academy” (2008, p. 45). While the utility of this term for Asian people in Canada remains somewhat ambiguous in the shadow of Asian American identity, perhaps this recent discursive shift signals the further development of a collective pan-Asian identity. Current manifestations of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism are impacting those who are read as Asian – particularly East Asians, but Southeast Asians, South Asians, and Central Asians have also been targeted (Kong et al., 2021). The resulting context has highlighted a sense of shared plight among diverse Asian ethnicities, which has provided fertile ground for the growth of a pan-Asian identity. As studies show, solidarity between marginalized groups can be built through the salience of shared disadvantage (Cortland et al., 2017). A clear and committed sense of racial identity is also known to provide a buffer against the harmful effects of racism and cultivate collective resilience (H.-L. Cheng et al., 2021; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2019; Zhou, 2021b). Belonging to a collective racial identity then becomes especially alluring in the face of collective threat. In this chapter, we explore whether the interviewees feel a sense of belonging as Asian Canadians.

⁹ This is not to say that Asian Canadians have not been historically involved in cultural production and activism. Read “Voices rising: Asian Canadian cultural activism” (Li, 2007) for more on this.

Multiraciality & Asian Canadian Identity

Let us start with whether the interviewees self-identify as Asian Canadian. When asked, many interviewees showed a sense of uncertainty in claiming this identity as mixed race people. Sachi shared,

That's another [term] I don't always know, and I will illustrate it with an example that happened very recently. There was an undergrad student who, I believe she said she is Korean ... she had this general post in one of the Facebook groups that I'm in looking for Asian women to interview ... about what it means to be Asian in Canada/Toronto. Like, experiences of race and ethnicity and how we present our cultural identity to the world ... Anyway, I saw 'Asian people in Canada', and I responded to her, and I was like, 'I don't know if I fit in your definition because I am only half. But if I do, then I would be more than happy to talk to you'. I've actually talked to [redacted name] about this a number of times, and I think he is at least aware of my struggle of whether I belong in Asian spaces or not. ... I wish I did, but I am also very much aware and at peace if I am not. ... if there are people who say that I do not belong in Asian circles, I am at peace with that decision that they make even though I do wish that I would be included.

Approaching this with the external racial gaze in mind and its interactions with her multiraciality, whether Sachi feels able to claim this label for herself is influenced by whether others view her as Asian Canadian. While she feels deeply connected to her Japanese identity, she feels less certain about her claims to an Asian Canadian identity because she is not often received as Asian by others, which informs her view that she is predominantly white-passing. Despite her wishful desire to be “seen” and, thereby, “included” as Asian, she feels indebted to other's varying definitions of Asian because she is “only half”. Sachi's conundrum of feeling Japanese enough to claim Japaneseness in an ethnocultural sense, while also not feeling Asian enough to claim Asianness in a racial sense, speaks to the complex ways in which multiraciality, including mixed race belonging, is experienced. This also highlights how dependent the term Asian is on the physicality of race – something which Kano demonstrated a keen awareness of when sharing:

...it's interesting because I think I identify more with the term Asian Canadian than Japanese. Maybe because Asian is just more broad, and I think I feel more accepted widely by Asian North Americans than specifically Japanese people. ... I think because it's more open and ambiguous. There's more space. Whereas, like, Japanese Canadians are more exclusive. It's like you have to prove you're Japanese. You don't have to prove you're Asian because you look Asian. With Japanese, I feel like you have to – there's more work involved.

Kano, who was the only interviewee to prefer racial identification over ethnic identification, feels farther removed from Japaneseness due to her upbringing and experiences of unacceptance, whereas Asian Canadian reads as having “more space” because it is not specific to any one ethnoculture. In this way, Kano understands the basis of Asianness as something physical with racial belongingness in this space dictated as such. While Kano feels she must perform and “prove” Japaneseness, she feels that claiming and being claimed as Asian only requires her to “look Asian”. As she shared many times during her interview, she is predominantly read as Asian (when asked how she fills out census-like questions on race, Kano said, “Well, ‘Asian’ because that’s how I’m seen, you know? Like obviously I am 50% white as I am Asian, but I’m read as Asian”). At the same time, Kano also used “ambiguous” to describe her physical presentation throughout her interview (“I think because we look so ethnically ambiguous...”, “I feel like because we’re multiracial and sometimes who we are and how we present to people can be a bit ambiguous...”). As explored through MRD, feeling that one appears both Asian and racially ambiguous can coexist for a multiracial person. Interestingly, one reason Kano finds Asian Canadian appealing is *because* she finds it be more “ambiguous” than Japanese Canadian and, therefore, able to absorb multiracial ambiguity more readily. For Sachi, however, who feels predominantly white-passing, this very ambiguity fuels her uncertainty in relation to Asian Canadian.

It might seem painfully obvious that a multiracial person who is predominantly read as Asian feels more comfortable identifying as such, while a multiracial person who is predominantly read as white feels less so. However, when remembering that readings of multiraciality are often inconsistent and contradictory, deciphering which racial identifiers one can and should claim (and, conversely, are claimed by) can require *years* of introspective work. The process of trying to make sense of one’s racial identity as a mixed race person, when race is ultimately an unstable social construct, is dependent on many individual and societal factors. This means weighing the ratios between being read as X, Y, or Z,

and trying to determine by who, where, when, how, and why, and what this means for oneself. This process, which mixed race individuals often undertake to understand where they “fit in”, is a cornerstone characteristic of how mixed race belonging is experienced. For the interviewees, Asian Canadianness is largely associated with unbelonging. Nicole, who experiences “different levels of passing”, shared,

...something me and my sister talk about is the idea of “passing” ...someone asked me to participate in a little program thing ...there was like an Instagram filter where it was like “Stop Asian Hate”, and I was kind of surprised to be included in that? Just because I wasn’t sure if like...And so yeah, being part of that was interesting. So, I was like, ‘Oh, wow, okay, I’m valid’, which was an interesting thought to have.

Kano also used similar language when telling me,

Oftentimes, Asian people immediately see me as not Asian. Because I’m not full. I don’t know, more recently though, I’ve been meeting some Asian people and like, they can tell right away that I’m Asian, but they can tell I’m mixed. But it’s nice to hear. It feels validating for them to acknowledge that they see that I’m Asian right away. And I think, for a while, I felt like in order to be viewed as Asian I needed to have bangs or dress a certain way because I felt like, I guess, invalidated by a lot of Asian people.

That moments of inclusion and validation are rare and surprising is telling. Both Nicole and Kano shared that white people often clock them as Asian while Asian people are less likely to do so. Racial belonging here becomes contingent on members of the ingroup – in this case, other Asians – seeing them as such. When the physicality of race dictates the parameters of belonging, belonging is rendered as variable and conditional for mixed race people. Since there is no sense of racial belonging without, first, a desire to belong, it is no surprise that rare moments of inclusion can feel validating for mixed race people, especially when set against the more-common drum of exclusion and invalidation.

Several interviewees also expressed uncertainty over the Asian Canadian term itself. Aki and Lia understood the use of the term for hailing Asians Canadians in a demographic sense but were unsure of what binds such disparate ethnocultural groups together beyond this. As Aki shared, “Asian Canadian, I think, connects us, and creates a larger sense of community, but that’s not actually based or rooted in commonality. ...When you think of the Asian diaspora in Canada, it’s so vast.” When she is expected to

partake in other Asian cultures in the name of being Asian (e.g., “getting invited to or celebrating Lunar New Year”), it can make her feel like an “imposter” because that ethnoculture “doesn’t belong to me”, and conversely, she does not belong to that ethnoculture. She, therefore, experiences some discomfort in identifying as Asian Canadian when this term is used to group diverse ethnicities together despite cultural differences that may exist. Lia also questioned this, saying, “what I find funny about the label of “Asian” is that there’s so many different ...cultural identities are still present and traceable. And so, I think that’s why there’s more division. And it’s harder to unite an Asian community for a cause. Or it’s taken longer...” Aki and Lia are probing at the questions – What does Asian Canadian mean? What, beyond geography, connects us as Asians? At the same time, Lia also shared,

I’ve been building relationships with people of Asian descent more recently. And it started before the pandemic, but then maybe strengthened a bit because of the violence against Asians? And I recognized how important it was to have a community that understood kind of the cultural underpinnings of family dynamics, and the way you interact with the world, and your preferences, and how you keep your home – stuff like that.

This list of cultural connections with other Asians suggests Lia subscribes to *some* sort of Asian “racio-culture”. Nicole spoke of some sense of Asian Canadian “kinship”, saying,

Um, I think I use [Asian Canadian] also? Especially if I’m kind of just speaking, sort of like, from a broad experience. And because connecting myself to the Japanese Canadian community has been so meaningful, and then I’ve met people, you know, like [name redacted], through my work there. And then it’s like, well, I feel like I have a kinship with [them]. And it’s like, what is that? We’re both Asian Canadians. And so, I feel like that connects me to that community...

Nicole identifies a felt connection with other Asian people and names being Asian Canadian as the basis for this bond. Rather than consanguineal (blood ties) or affinal (through marriage) kinship, Nicole is referring to some sense of racial kinship – a racial “we-ness” – as Asian Canadians. While it is unclear in this statement what Nicole views as the basis of such kinship beyond being grouped together under the same term of identity, perhaps her use of “broad experience” suggests a kinship rooted in an overarching sense of shared experience. But what might this sense of shared experience refer to?

Asianness as Racial Pain?

It is possible that the recent rise in pandemic-related anti-Asian racism, increased media visibility on the issue, and the SAH movement have highlighted anti-Asian racism as the most prevalent shared experience among the Asian diaspora in Canada – both past and present. This is in keeping with Lia’s recognition that a sense of racial we-ness has become more salient and important to her in the current racial climate of rising anti-Asian racism. So, what does this say about Asianness? During the height of the SAH movement, for example, social media was exploding with new Asian-centred platforms and groups. Sachi joined “a few different mixed people Facebook groups” like “Hafu Japanese”. Kano joined Clubhouse chatrooms for “Asians in Design”. Yuki joined “transcontinental” groups for “Japanese people who speak English” where they gathered to organize “online petitions, online forums, and discussions about anti-Asian sentiment and racism and crime...” As she shared,

I got to know so many more platforms and groups ...People were creating so many of those ...It was like oversaturated. And I was kind of like, “Okay, what’s going on? What should I be ...paying attention to?” ...gradually there was like a heightening or resurgence of that sort of questioning. Like, what is Asianness to me? And what is my space in the community? I was joining a lot of groups ...

Speaking on this at length with Yuki, I shared how a few friends and I created a similar group called Asian Pantry during this time, meeting about once a month to discuss rising anti-Asian sentiment and its impacts. While these meetings were an outlet for personal and vicarious experiences of racism, next steps were difficult to organize due to the challenges of online organizing, our own inexperience as organizers, and the collective burnout we were experiencing at the time from both the pandemic and increased visibility of anti-Asian racism. While I cannot speak for everyone, it sometimes felt as though these meetings amounted to “trauma dumping”, leaving us more deflated than before. Although this space to hold our collective grief and outrage was helpful after the Atlanta shooting (one of our last meetings), it was unclear if it was productive or healthy and the group was eventually dissolved. Yuki

shared, “Yeah, it definitely had the same kind of structure in terms of the life of that group. After the Atlanta shooting it was kind of like, Okay, no one feels like doing anything anymore”. As Yuki touched on, our group also kept coming up against what it even means to be Asian and trying to articulate why we were all meeting together outside of racial assignation and *outside of expressing racial pain*.

Terry Nguyen describes today’s version of pan-Asian collective identity as one that “feels sustained by a mutual sense of pain” (2021, para. 34). Is racial pain, which has been amplified and spotlighted in recent years due to the rise in anti-Asian racism, what binds us together as a group? What does it say about Asianness that this feels like one of the only shared experiences we can connect on?

Andrea Long Chu asks whether Asian America “can be anything *but* a kind of heartache”, writing,

... at the end of the day, Ng and Kang actually agree that racial identity can be bought only through racism ... But what this assumptions yields is a thing, abstract concept of Asian America, one that is so hostile to actual human beings that it recognizes them only when they are in pain. (2022, para. 20)

I am reminded here of an excerpt from Cathy Park Hong’s “Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning” asking,

Will there be a future where I, on the page, am simply I, on the page, and not I, proxy for a whole ethnicity, imploring you to believe we are human beings who feel pain? I don’t think, therefore I am – I *hurt*, therefore I am. (49, 2020)

Is this also true of Asian Canadianness? This is, after all, the feeling I was often left with after Asian Pantry meetings. While our goal was to build a space of communal belonging, we struggled to move with joy and hope because our primary reason for coming together was shared experiences of racism and trauma. Is this really the only way our Asianness can be imagined? And has this always been the case?

UC Riverside professor Karthick Ramakrishnan says, “What makes us Asian is a history of exclusion” (Zhou, 2021b, para. 16). He is referring to a shared and interconnected history of labour exploitation, exclusion laws, disenfranchisement, and internment as the common threads connecting the diversity of the Asian diaspora in the U.S. (Kandil, 2018; Zhou, 2021b). Such history is also true to the

Asian experience in Canada. While these topics, particularly JC internment, were discussed during interviews, connections between these histories and Asianness were not drawn. Perhaps this is because such histories are not widely known or taught. Instead, most interviewees spoke about self-educating themselves on the history of Asian people in Canada since it was not comprehensively taught in grade school. Almost all expressed they still have much to learn. While SAH has encouraged more awareness-raising on the history of anti-Asian racism in Canada, and several interviewees referred to SAH as part of their learning, it is doubtful whether such historical knowledge is, at this moment in time, pervasive enough to sustain a sense of collective identity. Interestingly, the very absence of such historical knowledge has also been named as what connects Asian Canadians:

What has characterized our experiences growing up Asian Canadian has been a sense of separation from all things Asian Canadian. We learned little about our ancestors, the pioneers who had made this land grow, “caught silver from the sea”, laid the rails that had bound BC to Canada. Our school books didn’t deal with the Vancouver racial riots of 1887 and 1907, or the WWII expulsion, incarceration and later dispersal of the Japanese Canadians, or the disenfranchisement of both peoples until the late 1940s. (C. Lee, 2008; quoting “Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology”)

Here, the Asian Canadian subject is described as one who is deeply alienated from their own history. In a roundabout way, however, this perspective is also arguing for a return to history as a way of fully realizing the self and the collective, and still revolves around a history of racial pain.

Nguyen suggests “the future of Asian American identity is being shaped online”, especially for younger, second-generation, and English-proficient Asians who are drawn towards a vision of pan-Asian identity (2021, sec. 4). Considering the internet’s porosity, this likely also holds true for Asian Canadianness. However, Nguyen, also finds this version of Asian identity is oriented around “the liberal language of diversity, representation, and recognition, which are heavily individualized”, thereby flattening nuances of gender, class, immigration status, and country of origin to allow for its mainstream consumption (2021, para. 34). Pan-Asian terms like Asian American and Asian Canadian, therefore, can

contribute towards obscuring diasporic diversity – especially by centering of East Asians who are often read as “more synonymous” with Asianness (Zhou 2021). This arose in several interviews, particularly when discussing SAH, as this is the version of pan-Asian identity (sometimes critiqued as “boba liberalism”) that found itself at the forefront of SAH:

Kano: [SAH] was kind of embarrassing honestly! I felt ashamed of it. It was cringy to be honest. Like, I think it started with good intent, but it was obviously very like – oh my god, I listened in on some [Clubhouse] conversations and it was obviously so East-Asian centered. ...I have some issues with the Asian community when it's *just* the East Asian community because they're so exclusive about what it means to be Asian. I think this is why, also ... sometimes I don't feel a voice in the matter, and I have to mask myself or something. Because a lot of it is so backwards. A lot of that stuff does not resonate with me because there's a lot of anti-Blackness and just general exclusivity that I don't agree with. That, mixed with the BLM movement, there was just this weird ...the energy for SAH was so entitled to me. Like, acknowledge me too. And it's kind of like, yeah, these are important issues to discuss, but it just felt like, 'Oh, this is our chance!'. ...It's like white feminism, but Asian [laughs].

Yuki: [SAH] was, in a way, a very interesting period of time to question and rethink about my Asian identity. ...I guess questioning a lot about “What is Asian” ...I guess I was questioning a lot about ... with any movement ... that sort of like, intersectional nature of it. And like, *who* is being defended? ...I don't want to say things that I thought was more lacking because I don't that that's for me to say. But in a way I was kind of wondering ...Where was that energy for people who are not East Asian? So, the concept of Asianness, I feel like *that* was what I questioning the most.

In taking issue with the centering and prioritization of East Asians by SAH, both are asking, who is included within Asian Canadianness?, and, reading between the lines, also appear to recognize how Asianness in the current racial climate is measured by pain. This, of course, makes sense when Asianness is being foregrounded by the collective rallying cry of “Stop Asian Hate”. When Kano says, “Oh, this is our chance!”, she is highlighting how the Asian community has felt the need to capitalize on this moment of racial pain to be acknowledged. “We hurt too” becomes a stand-in for “We matter too”.

Racial pain as the gauge and glue of Asianness also interacted with how the interviewees experienced their multiraciality in the context of SAH. Consider the following excerpts:

Aki: [Multiraciality] definitely played a part ...It's like, in this situation I'm faced with my two sides, let's say, or my two parts. I feel like they were very much in conflict. Not that every white

Canadian is inherently racist or holds anti-Asian sentiment. It's not at all that. But, like it or not, I could speak out against racism, but I need to examine my internalized whiteness, my internalized racism as well. And so, I think it was like a big reckoning that, like, I don't get a free pass from this discussion just because I feel part Japanese. I have to acknowledge all the parts of me.

Nicole: I don't think it's clear if someone mixed race is included in statistics, things like that, or even sometimes the conversation. ...someone asked me to participate in like a little program thing ...there was like an Instagram filter where it was like "Stop Asian Hate" and I was kind of surprised to be included in that? Just because I wasn't sure if ... like I also am aware specifically because the multicultural aspect of me is that I'm half white. And that white part of me is like really trying to check that privilege that I do have there and not like, take up space from, you know. For example, even in having conversations with Japanese Canadians, like, so much of the conversation about mixed people is the assumption that the other half is white. And like that whiteness gives me certain privileges as well. And so, checking that as well. And so yeah, being part of that was interesting. ...I mean, I think that there is [a place for multiracial people in SAH]. It impacts me. And I felt, you know, there were impacts that were going on with me with the way that things were going. I think kinda like any social movement, too, there's, like, you know, internal struggles as well – about, like, who has claims to these kinds of things as well. That I think maybe impacts people who are multiracial because like, I don't know, like, maybe if I was like – which I also hate cus it's like the idea of like, a blood quotient or something like that, which really bothers me – but like, you know, if I was a quarter maybe, would I maybe feel differently about that?

Sachi: That's another one where I don't know. I would like to think that I am [included in SAH]. In the sense of, like, the type of friends that I have, the type of people that I hang out with, the places I like to travel and visit, the fact that my life revolves around ... for the work that I do, I try to help people understand, like – by teaching Japanese language, I don't *just* do that. I really focus on allowing people to understand or trying to provide a catalyst for people to understand, Japanese culture and history, the pros and cons that comes with Japaneseness. Not *just* the language because you can't just learn a language and not learn anything else – that's not how it goes. So, in that sense I do think that I am involved through the way I live my life and the way I choose to run my businesses and Japanese classes and things like that. ...Yeah, so, from both of those perspectives I kind of feel like I might be. But, again, I'm not really sure. And I feel like it might depend on a specific person's or organization's *definition* of who is included and who is not....[SAH] has had an impact on how I perceive it. Like, some of the things that I maybe kind of noticed but wasn't able to identify or put words to, it has allowed those to surface and has allowed some of those feelings to – for me to explicitly state them and put words to them. It has also forced me to grapple with my whiteness, but from a different angle than I have in previous situations. It also continues to resurface my confusion about where I belong based on how other people define belonging and community.

Yuki: ... it's hard to stand for something when you are in the grey zone to start with. ...And so, when there comes times where I want to be there for other people, and my positionality is put into question, I never know how to be there. ... I mean, I was all in support of [SAH]. I didn't feel comfortable, like obviously, speaking in the name of it. Which like, I think some people were doing that. I think it's all a question of level of comfort and/or personal experiences. For

me, I wanted to just bring attention to those that are most relevant to the situation and that have personal repercussions around it. So, I guess I was closely following it, sharing whatever, reading about it, and doing the best I could.

As we can see, speaking of SAH in relation to themselves prompted several interviewees to consider their whiteness. While whiteness can be upheld by non-white monoracial people (e.g., the model minority), it is interesting how the current racial climate has rendered whiteness more salient for the interviewees as they consider their place in society as multiracial people who are partially white. To start, checking one's white privilege has been a major theme of the recent antiracist movement. As SAH is part of the antiracist movement, it follows that the interviewees felt especially compelled to further examine their own partial whiteness in this context. As Lia also shared during her interview, "...I think about it I think more than I did pre-COVID – of like, being aware of whiteness". That interviewees' use of the word whiteness shows an understanding of the difference between white, a racial category with no biological basis, and whiteness, a complex and systemic ideology of race, power, and privilege that encompasses much more than just being viewed as white. For example, Aki and Nicole, who feel they are predominantly racialized as Others still recognize their internalized whiteness. In addition to the "check your white privilege" call-to-action prompting interviewees to consider their whiteness, it also possible that, in a climate foregrounding Asianness, the interviewees are more cognisant of how their partial whiteness complicates their positionality within, for instance, SAH. For example, Yuki names her multiraciality as complicating her ability to fully involve herself in SAH. She was also hesitant to name any potential shortcomings of SAH, saying, "I don't want to say things that I thought was more lacking because I don't think that's for me to say...Because I don't experience Asian hate on a daily basis, so, you know, it's like, why would I be [at the forefront]?". Her reasoning of not experiencing anti-Asian racism as regularly as a monoracial Asian person brings us back to the idea that Asianness, as it exists in the current racial climate, is measured by racial pain. Recalling Hong's phrasing, "*I hurt, therefore I am*"

as the present-day barometer of Asianness, when it comes to multiraciality as it interacts with Asianness there exists some sense of “I hurt *too*, therefore I am” coupled with “But, do I hurt enough?” and “But, do I hurt the same?” Discussing one group she had joined, Yuki asked, if multiracial Asians do not experience anti-Asian racism to the same extent, or in a different way, as monoracial Asians, should they be part of a movement protesting it?

I question that so much. Basically, our group ...half of us were hafus and mostly were half white. And so, we talked a *lot* about that. We were kind of like, are we the ones who should be talking about this? Should we be doing this right now? And a *lot* of it ended up being about that – more than it was about actually doing anything. I think that’s also one of the reasons why it fizzled out ...after the mass shooting and everything, we were like, okay, we need to widen our spectrum of discussions, and we need to have more members, and then it kind of became too big. And we were like, okay, this has no purpose anymore ...And having that group of girls that were all also mixed ...it felt right but then I was like, okay, where are we going with this? You know? What are we trying to do here? Except for comfort. And like a sense that like, okay, we matter! We have a space in this. ...We’re doing something. And then we’re all just kind of there and we’re like, what are we trying to get to? You know? Whose voices are we trying to uplift? Is it ours? Is it a full Japanese person’s? And if it is ours, why? If it’s full Asian people, then why are we all here and we’re mixed? You know?

This thought process reveals how a sense of belonging in the Asian space for multiracial Asians can feel as though permission is required (recall Nicole’s description of the College Humor skit “Are You Asian Enough?”). If Asianness in the current racial climate is held together by racial pain, experiences of racism and subsequent racial pain become the “ticket” affirming belonging for its group members. Therefore, multiracial Asian people may feel like they have to offer their experiences of racism as “proof” that they, too, should belong. A multiracial person – whether they are received as white-passing or racially ambiguous – may not feel they have experienced as many explicit displays of racism as their monoracial counterparts. By this logic, racial belonging can then seem out of reach. Mixed race people may also struggle to decipher if an incident was racist because of inconsistent and contradictory readings they have received. Those firmly accepted within the ingroup may also question a multiracial person’s group membership because they consider them less likely to experience racism. However, as Chu writes,

“The question is not why a mixed-race person should “get” to qualify as Asian despite, for instance, never having been bullied at school or attacked by a stranger; the question is why we cannot imagine any other way to be Asian” (2022, para. 21). If experiences of racial pain and resulting trauma are the primary points of connection binding Asianness together, racial belonging within Asianness then becomes locked into a cycle of historical, present, and future moments of racism, exclusion, trauma, and pain. Must future Asianness require our further traumatization and marginalization? Can Asianness be imagined in a way that moves beyond this circular space of pain?

With all this said, I would be remiss if I were to conclude this thesis with such a dismal outlook on the future of Asianness, as this is not what lies in my heart. I am reminded here of the following Instagram post circulating at the beginning of 2021:

Figure 7: [On Waking Up to Racial Pain]



Note. By Jocelyn S Chung, 2021, infographic on waking up to collective racial pain, sourced from Chung's Instagram (@jocelynschung).

It is possible that this current sense of Asianness being held together by racial pain is because we are still on the frontend of recognizing our racial pain *as a collective*. In other words, there might be something beyond this point. Perhaps it is not whether we are the same, or what we experience is the same, but, more so, what we are working towards could be the same. Daryl Maeda, a professor and author of Asian American studies, asks Asian Americanness to consider moving beyond questions of common identity or common oppression and towards its original political roots – solidarity through a common cause:

‘Asian American’ ... rather than describing our personally felt identities or describing our family histories – expresses an idea. And that idea is that as Asian Americans, we have to work together to fight for social justice and equality, not only for ourselves, but for all of the people around us. (Kandil, 2018, para. 6)

While Asian Canadianness was not borne from political roots, has pandemic-related anti-Asian racism provided Asian people in Canada with enough reason to come together with a common sociopolitical agenda? Perhaps we need to turn to our collective hope for the future. As Day previously suggested,

[The] main issue that hampers the development of Asian Canadian panethnicity *in the social sense* is ... the absence of a political movement. ... It is this kind of social mobilization that may help give shape to a pan-Asian social identity. Social formations are not the result of any “natural” affiliation of groups but the outcome of interethnic mobilizing around shared political issues (p. 65)

In recognizing that “natural” racial affiliations do not exist (the trap of essentialist identity politics), perhaps we should place less emphasis on commonalities and create more space for differences in histories, hardships, and needs. This approach offers an avenue for rectifying the erasure of difference contributing to the tired and monolithic model minority myth. A justice-oriented Asian Canadianness could also allow for disparate ethnic groups to gain more social and political capital and, thereby, effect meaningful change (H.-L. Cheng et al., 2021; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2019; Zhou, 2021b). There were some glimpses of this during interviewees. While many felt SAH has lost steam, many also expressed a desire to see it continue with a revised trajectory. Despite her qualms with SAH, Kano said

she would like to see the movement “expand to see other Asian communities, not just the East Asian community, and also become inclusive of other people’s genders and sexualities... and also, acknowledgement towards, like, mixed Asian people who are Black, who are Indigenous, or who shared identities that are not *just* Asian”. As Lia shared,

I like the idea of minorities for minorities. And I think there’s a lot of power in that. And I think we started to see that more in Canada ... lifting up Black voices, Indigenous voices, lifting up Asian voices, and protecting these communities and people will only help reinforce the protection of the other community too. It’s all about creating a more equal society for everybody.

As you may recall, Nicole’s ideal vision of Japanese Canadianness was heavily rooted in meaningful allyship with the Indigenous community, owing to a shared history of dispossession and a common goal of social justice. Sachi expressed, “I do think there is a way forward. ...I am somewhat hopeful. I don’t know what it would look like, but I do believe that it is possible”. The interviewees have already begun reformulating Asianness as a collective means for building intraracial solidarity, interracial solidarity, and intersectional solidarity beyond race and ethnicity. Despite the uncertainty the interviewees feel regarding their own self-identification as Asian Canadian due to its incompatibility with multiraciality and the amorphousness of its meaning, both of which contribute to a felt sense of racial unbelonging, the interviewees are still hopeful that this space can expand to include them and become more meaningful in its purpose. They want to expand the parameters of racial belonging in this space. Multiracial belonging within the Asian Canadian space for the interviewees can feel somewhat precarious and conditional when Asianness turns inward to focus on “what makes us Asian”, since race is not something one *is* or *has*. Perhaps, however, if Asianness reaches outwards and across differences to unite in a common social and political objective, the experience of multiracial belonging for mixed race Asians in this space can also be positively transformed.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As emphasized throughout this thesis, issues of belonging are intrinsic to how both multiraciality and Asianness have been constructed and maintained in Canada, which has particular implications for how mixed race Nikkei women experience racial belonging in this social landscape. This study considers five areas of interest emerging from six qualitative and semi-structured interviews: multiracial name modification (MRNM), Canadianness and the nation, Japaneseness and the JC community, the experience of multiracial dysmorphia (MRD), and, lastly, pan-Asianness in Canada.

Considering what the interviewees choose to call themselves reveals that the majority of the interviewees have not only modified their names in various ways to better reflect who they feel they are as mixed race people, but also to negotiate how others see and receive them in a way that closer aligns to how they would like to be perceived. In this way, the process of MRNM can be considered a tool for negotiating a sense of mixed race belonging. On a more macrocosmic scale, issues of belonging for the interviewees were also implicated in their relationships with the nation and Canadianness. “Canadian means white” appears to be the most predominant understanding characterizing the interviewee’s relationships to belonging in this space. Most interviewees expressed they are still searching for a meaningful racial belonging in Canada, with many wanting to find this within the JC community. However, factors such as the absence of communal propinquity, the centering of prewar JCs and their descendants, and the continued prioritization of monoraciality in what it means to be Japanese contribute to a strained sense of mixed race belonging in this space for all but one interviewee. Turning to the more recent climate of a racialized pandemic and rising anti-Asian racism, this study introduces the concept of MRD to capture how inconsistent and contradictory readings of mixed race bodies by the external racial gaze can be internalized by mixed race people to produce feelings of racial dysmorphia and raise questions about racial belonging. Not only did all interviewees touch on instances of MRD throughout

their lives, but the pandemic also appears to have further heightened experiences of MRD in trying to determine if they are at risk of experiencing pandemic-related anti-Asian racism. Lastly, this thesis considers whether a sense of pan-Asianness has emerged in Canada as a potential new site of belonging for the interviewees and, if so, what such an Asianness might be. I propose that the *current* state of pan-Asianness in Canada may be held together by the shared experience of racial pain, which situates why the interviewees feel largely positioned outside of Asianness and are hesitant to claim the Asian Canadian label for themselves as mixed race people. If racial pain is the gauge of Asianness, their multiraciality complicates their ability to offer “proof” of racial pain mirroring that of their monoracial counterparts. However, Asianness as racial pain is dismal and problematic, locking future Asianness into an unjust and unhealthy cycle of marginalization and trauma. Instead, moving Asianness towards the idea of shared political goals may be more valuable and inclusive. It is my hope that these findings contribute towards illuminating several understudied areas within CMRS – particularly, multiraciality in Canada, Asian multiraciality in Canada, and Japanese Canadian multiraciality.

This thesis has been a personal journey for me, allowing time to address many of my lifelong questions surrounding my multiraciality, Asianness, Japaneseness, and Canadianness in the context of so-called-Canada. To know I am not alone in my experiences at this intersection of identity has been therapeutic, which I hope can also be true for the interviewees who participated in this study and those with a similar intersection of experience who may read this in the future. When I first set out, I thought I might find something I have long searched for – an arrival at “This is what it means to be mixed race!” – but, instead, I have learned something much more valuable. Multiraciality is not real, inasmuch as race is not real. And the same can be said for Asianness. These identities say much more about the contexts from which they emerge, the contexts that continue to shape them, and the contexts in which they are experienced, than they really do about you or me. What a liberating thought!

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