

April 2024

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Recommended Citation

Wakimoto, D. (2024). "What are you?": Multiracial Library Workers' Experiences in Libraries. *Urban Library Journal*, 30 (1). Retrieved from <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ulj/vol30/iss1/1>

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Cover Page Footnote

The author would like to express gratitude to every library worker who completed the online survey and special, deep appreciation to each library worker who spoke with the author about their experiences. Without each of you, this research would not be possible. This is for us.

“What are you?”: Multiracial Library Workers’ Experiences in Libraries

by Diana K. Wakimoto

Abstract

While increasing attention, research, and writing have elevated issues faced by library workers who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), multiracial library workers are often, if not always, left out of the conversation around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The work around DEI in the library profession often erases the lived experiences of multiracial library workers. In turn, this erasure silences our experiences of racism and microaggressions, as well as our unique views and experiences.

This paper shares the findings of an exploratory mixed methods study, consisting of an online survey of and interviews with multiracial library workers from across the United States who work in different library contexts and at different positions in the libraries’ administrative hierarchies. The study looks at the intersections of identities, focusing on multiplicities of multiracial experiences to provide visibility to our community of multiracial library workers. It is also hoped that this research is an invitation to move the library profession towards ensuring that multiracial library workers’ voices and lived experiences are valued in the movements for equity and justice in libraries.

Keywords

Multiracial, mixedrace, library workers, monoracism, intersecting identities, biracial

Biography

Diana K. Wakimoto, PhD (she/her), is an academic librarian and archivist at California State University, East Bay. She identifies as mixed race and multiethnic. Her research interests include the lived experiences of multiracial library workers, advocacy for multiracial individuals, graphic design and communication in libraries, and labor issues in archives.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

While multiracial (a.k.a. mixed race) individuals—i.e., individuals identifying as having heritage from two or more socially constructed races—have always existed, they have not always been able to identify as such. In fact, it was not until 2000 that individuals could check two or more races on the United States Census. On the 2020 Census, with all its problems, 33.8 million people chose to identify as being of two or more races. This figure represents a 276% increase from the number identifying as having mixed racial heritage in 2010 (Jones, et al., 2021). While race is a social construct, it has very real consequences in life and these consequences extend to library work.

While the study and implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, curriculum, and projects in order to create just and equitable working environments and services for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) have exploded within the library and information science (LIS) field, these activities rarely—if ever—explicitly include multiracial library workers (Kendrick & Damasco, 2019). Nor do studies or programs focused on DEI issues or BIPOC library workers include the acknowledgment that multiracial library workers may have different experiences than monoracial library workers. Because of this omission, those who identify as multiracial are often overlooked in, if not excluded from, DEI work and programs. This oversight needs to be rectified.

Literature Review

The literature on multiracial library workers is practically nonexistent even though the fields of Multiracial Studies and Critical Mixed Race Studies (CMRS) have been in existence and thriving fields of research and practice since the 1990s (Leopardo, et al., 2021). Within LIS, there has been movement towards diversification in the field and also greater focus on DEI issues and research (Alabi, 2015; Kendrick & Damasco, 2019); however, this improvement has not translated into a focus on mixed-race library workers.

LIS Literature on Multiracial Library Workers

Few published articles include multiracial library workers and only a handful focus specifically on the experience of a multiracial library worker. Lacey (2022) wrote an article reflecting on her experience as a multiracial instruction librarian. In an article containing first-person essays on how professionals experience race within the LIS field, there are two accounts by individuals who identify as mixed-race (Chu et al., 2017). These writers note how people try to guess their race and/or ethnicity if they perceive them as racially ambiguous and how important it is to have an environment and colleagues who create a space of belonging and inclusion.

While other research articles may include multiracial library workers as participants—for example Alabi's (2015) survey, Kendrick and Damasco's (2019)

interviews, and Kumaran and Cai's (2015) survey—these participants are incidental to the overall studies and no differentiation is made in reporting results from multiracial versus monoracial individuals (see also Kandiuk, 2014). This lack of research focusing on multiracial library workers is particularly stark when compared to the voluminous and growing body of research on BIPOC library workers and DEI initiatives within libraries (Acree et al., 2001; Alabi, 2015; Kendrick & Damasco, 2019; Kumaran & Cai, 2015). These studies highlight the challenges faced by BIPOC library workers, along with ways to counteract these systemic issues. However, they do not specifically address the potential differences in how multiracial library workers may experience work in the LIS field.

Libraries are known as spaces that defend the right to read, rally against book bans, and profess the values of justice, equity, and dismantling white supremacy (American Library Association, 2021a, 2021b). However, the LIS field, at least as represented by the published research, marginalizes multiracial library workers. This marginalization is in contrast to the vibrant and growing field of Critical Mixed Race Studies.

Critical Mixed Race Studies Research

Critical Mixed Race Studies (CMRS) is a growing field that traces its roots in Ethnic Studies (Leopardo et al., 2021) and continues to evolve. CMRS research centers the experiences of multiracial individuals and applies a critical lens to the conceptions of race, intersectionality, and the structural power differentials that cause inequity in many different facets of life. Much of the research has focused on students at the university level; however, there have been recent calls for the field to continue expanding research into other population groups (Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2021).

Much of this literature explores both 1) the ways that mixed-race individuals have been excluded as they are seen as exotic or divergent and 2) the ways in which mixed-race individuals form and choose to identify racially. Numerous studies note that stigma has existed and continues exist around identifying as mixed-race (Norman & Chen, 2020; Tsai et al., 2021). Exclusion can show up in the policing of racial boundaries, by both white and BIPOC individuals (Norman & Chen, 2020). While monoracial and multiracial individuals often face racism, there is a difference in how it is enacted. Monoracial individuals rarely deal with policing and exclusion due to not being “enough” to be welcomed in spaces. The dreaded question of “What are you?”, considered the Ur (original) question, is still being used as a way to other mixed-race individuals (Norman & Chen, 2020).

The choice of how to identify has always been a contested and liminal space for mixed-race individuals and is another area of extensive research and critique in Critical Mixed Race Studies (DaCosta, 2020; Wijeyesinghe, 2021). As monoracial individuals do not have to consider how to identify since they fit neatly within a prescribed racial box, the concept of choice in how to identify racially may be an uncomfortable concept for monoracial individuals. However, it is seen as a key part

of the multiracial experience (Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2021). Mixed-race individuals may identify as explicitly mixed, may identify with only one of their racial ancestries, may identify fluidly depending on context, or may reject racial categories altogether. However, none of these ways of identifying is more valid than another (Wijeyesinghe, 2011). There are different models that emphasize various factors that influence how multiracial individuals identify (see Wijeyesinghe, 2021, for an overview of the evolution of these models) and these models continue to be critiqued and revised as more research is completed (Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2021). Recent research has analyzed how parents can support healthy identity formation in their multiracial children through validation of experiences, including experiences of discrimination, and through understanding and talking about race (Atkin & Jackson, 2021; Csizmadia & Atkin, 2022). This research adds to the more voluminous literature on college-aged multiracial students (Renn, 2008; Wijeyesinghe, 2021).

As more people identify as multiracial, there is now also the question of who counts as mixed, especially since there are more second- and third-generation multiracial individuals. (A second-generation multiracial individual is one who has at least one parent who is also mixed.) This issue brings up many feelings within multiracial communities as it harkens back to the blood quantum laws (aka “one drop rule”) that were used for violent discrimination in the United States against individuals with Black ancestry (Song, 2021). The growing use of personal genetic analysis tools, such as 23andMe, also raises questions about who is and can be considered mixed-race (Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2021). The use of such tools may suggest a novel way of enforcing racial boundaries and may reify racial categories. While these are new complexities in the multiracial experience, the experience of racism is not new. There is also a growing body of literature on racism as experienced by multiracial individuals and how this racism may be different in some ways than racism faced by monoracial individuals (Johnston & Nadal, 2010).

While increasing attention, research, and writing have increased the visibility of issues faced by BIPOC library workers, multiracial library workers are often, if not always, left out of the conversation around DEI. This erasure silences our experiences of racism and microaggressions, as well as our unique views and experiences. This study is the first to explore multiracial library workers’ experiences and analyze critically the intersections of identities. It hopes to bring visibility to these writers within the library field and enable them to bring their full selves to work in hopes of creating beloved, inclusive communities.

Methodology

This study used mixed methods in order to capture a measure of the breadth and depth of experiences of multiracial library workers. As this was an exploratory study, using both an online survey and semi-structured interviews allowed for the collection of information from a number of library workers without a geographical

limitation. This study was granted Institutional Review Board approval by the author's university.

Survey

The survey consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions (please see Appendix A) and was distributed online in November 2021. The call for participation was sent via the following listservs: PubLib; ACRL College Libraries; ACRL University Libraries; Spectrum Scholars; and ACRL Members. The survey also asked if participants were willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview; otherwise, individually identifying information, such as name of work organization or specific city/town, was not collected. When a survey response is referenced, a number will be used to maintain the confidentiality of the responses.

Interviews

Because of the pandemic and the fact that the participants lived all over the United States, conversations were held either by phone or on Zoom. Appendix B lists interview questions. Interviews were conducted in January through March of 2022. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the author took detailed notes during the interviews and wrote research memos immediately after each interview (Saldaña, 2009). Interviewees covered their journeys both to their current racial identities and to working in libraries, discussed support and discrimination/racism within the library, by both patrons and colleagues, and often talked more broadly about being mixed-race.

When quotes from the interviews are included, a number is used to maintain confidentiality. Identifying information and information that the interviewees asked to be held in confidence are not shared.

Data Analysis

Because convenience sampling was used for soliciting participation and participants were self-selected, descriptive statistics and content analysis were used for analysis of the survey results. Survey responses were reviewed multiple times before coding for recurring themes (Saldaña, 2009). Descriptive statistics were calculated for the quantitative data collected.

Content analysis was also used for analyzing the interviews. The interview transcripts, as well as the research memos, were reviewed for recurring themes and differences among those interviewed (Saldaña, 2009). The results from the interview analysis were compared with the results from the survey analysis to determine areas of overlap as well as difference.

Author Positionality

Positionality refers to a person's position in relation to what is being studied, usually incorporating multiple dimensions such as race, ethnicity, gender, and so on. Knowing an author's positionality is important for understanding how it may impact the study (Colón-Aguirre & Bright, 2022). The author identifies as a mixed-race Asian/White individual with multiethnic Japanese/German/Danish ancestry, as *yonsei* (fourth-generation *Nikkei*) and as a cis femme. She comes to this work as a partial insider, claiming a multiracial heritage and identity. She is first-generation mixed (i.e., has two monoracial parents) and has a second-generation mixed child. This positionality allowed both empathy and understanding that may not be as readily available to monoracial individuals. She also acknowledges that her positionality can lead to bias in analyses and in what interviewees did or did not disclose to her. She maintains that this research is still important and that it follows in the tradition of “nothing about us without us” from indigenous and other BIPOC community research and learning.

Results and Discussion

This exploratory study was successful in gathering information about the lived experiences of multiracial library workers and beginning to make visible these experiences. A total of 55 usable survey responses were collected (i.e., responses of participants who self-identified as mixed-race, multiracial, or biracial) and 17 interviews were conducted with mixed-race library workers. Please note that not all survey participants answered all questions, so that some of the responses to specific questions do not equal to 55.

Overview of Survey Respondents

There was an almost even split between the survey respondents who worked in public libraries and academic libraries, with only a few who worked in archives or special libraries at the time of the survey (Table 1). Most library workers had worked in another type of library (36 respondents) and most respondents were classified as librarians rather than staff, administration, or student workers (Table 2). The average time that respondents had been working in libraries was 10.8 years with a median of 7 years. Fifty-four respondents worked in the United States and the remaining respondent worked in Canada.

Table 1. *Type of Library Currently Working In*

| Type of Library | # | % |
|-----------------|----|-------|
| Academic | 24 | 43.6% |
| Archives | 1 | 1.8% |
| Public | 28 | 50.9% |
| Special | 2 | 3.6% |

Table 2. *Job Classification of Survey Respondents*

| Classification | # | % |
|----------------|----|-------|
| Administration | 5 | 9.1% |
| Librarian | 36 | 65.5% |
| Staff | 13 | 23.6% |
| Student Worker | 1 | 1.8% |

Overview of Interviewees

All 17 interviewees were working in the United States at the time of their interviews. There was an almost even split between interviewees who worked in public libraries (8) and those who worked in academic libraries (9). The majority of interviewees were classified as librarians, rather than administration, staff, or student workers (Table 3). Table 5 shows both the interviewees' racial and ethnic self-identities.

Table 3. *Job Classification of Interviewees*

| Classification | # | % |
|----------------|----|-------|
| Administration | 4 | 23.5% |
| Librarian | 10 | 58.8% |
| Staff | 2 | 11.8% |
| Student Worker | 1 | 5.9% |

Racial and Ethnic Self-Identification

Racial self-identification for multiracial individuals can be complicated and contextual (Wijeyesinghe, 2021). This complexity was demonstrated by the heterogeneity with which respondents identified and explained their identification. In this section, the language (including capitalization) that the survey respondents and interviewees used is presented in order to not homogenize the responses and not reinscribe monoracial categories and discrimination.

Survey Respondents' Self-Identification

Of the 55 respondents, 50 chose to respond to the question of how they self-identify racially and/or ethnically. Their responses were categorized into five primary categories: 1) Mixed/Mixed-Race, 2) Multiracial/Multiethnic, 3) Biracial, 4) Half and Half, and 5) No umbrella term (i.e., only by race and/or ethnicity and not by a larger umbrella term as in the first four categories). Within these categories, there was great variation in how individuals identified their racial and/or ethnic heritage. Table 4 shows the number of respondents in each primary category.

Table 4. *Primary categories of self-identification*

| Primary Category | # | % |
|-------------------------|----|-----|
| Mixed/Mixed Race | 21 | 42% |
| No umbrella term | 11 | 22% |
| Biracial | 8 | 16% |
| Multiracial/Multiethnic | 7 | 14% |
| Half and Half | 3 | 6% |

Among the 21 respondents who identified as Mixed or Mixed-Race, there were 20 unique responses. The only identity with two of the same responses was Black and White. The other responses included:

- white and Asian
- European and South Asian
- Irish, Norwegian, Okinawan
- Asian and white (Chinese and Sephardic Jewish)
- Asian (Malaysian and white)
- Japanese and White
- Filipina American
- Black and Thai
- Indo-Trinidadian and Ashkenazi Jew
- African and American (Kenyan and Irish)
- African American and Caucasian
- African and Canadian
- Black/Nikkei(yonseï)/white
- Filipina/Asian American with white, Black, and Native heritage
- Native American (Omaha, Turtle Mountain Chippewa, some more mixed in there) and European
- Latina/Hispanic or Latinx
- Latinx and white
- Mexican and Irish
- Xicanx Mexican Latinx and Danish

As can be seen from these responses, there are many ways that people with mixed racial heritages self-identify, mixing racial and ethnic categories, along with generational and nationality information as well. For example, *yonsei* means fourth-generation in Japanese and is the term used by the Japanese diaspora (aka *Nikkei*) who name their generations outside of Japan.

Eleven respondents did not identify under a larger umbrella term such as mixed or biracial and instead listed only their racial/ethnic self-identities. All 11 responses were unique and included:

- African American and Caucasian
- African American and Italian
- Mexican American (Spanish and Mixtec ancestry)
- Hispanic/Mexican and white (Scottish/English)
- Caucasian and Mexican
- Hispanic/white/Chicano
- Part-blood Choctaw and White
- Black and Jewish (Eastern European)
- Asian
- Dutch/Indo
- South Asian and Caucasian

The respondent who identified as Black and Jewish (Eastern European) also wrote, “It depends how much detail I feel like giving.” This response was in line with many of the responses from interviewees, detailed in the following section, who noted that context played an important role in how they identified themselves to others.

Eight respondents identified as Biracial and each response was unique. These responses included:

- Black and white
- Indian (South Asia) and Irish American
- Asian and White
- Asian and Caucasian
- White and Asian
- Latina and African American
- African American and Filipino
- Black

Seven respondents identified as Multiracial or Multiethnic and all seven responses were unique. These responses included:

- Native American, Jewish, Scottish, German, British, Irish, and Welsh
- Latinx and Asian
- Latinx and Pacific Islander
- multiethnic Filipino and German heritage
- Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Caucasian
- Black
- Scottish, Spanish, German, Roma, African American, North African

Three respondents identified as Half and Half. These three responses included:

- half Asian, half White
- half Japanese, half white (hapa)
- half White, half Filipino

Note that *hapa* is a Native Hawaiian word that can be translated as “half” and is used by some, especially those with Asian heritage. However, some individuals avoid using the term because some Native Hawaiians consider its use to be a form of cultural appropriation. It is interesting to note that all three respondents in this category have Asian and white heritage.

It is important to note that there is no hierarchy of validity in how multiracial individuals self-identify (Wijeyesinghe, 2021). Because of the variation in how and why multiracial individuals choose to self-identify at any one time, it can appear to monoracial individuals that multiracial individuals are confused about their identities. However, this changing and fluid nature of self-identifying can be understood more fully in the historical context of multiracial people not being allowed to claim all their heritages and being forced into a monoracial box as well as the continued questioning of multiracial individuals’ claimed identities (Wijeyesinghe, 2021). Often, multiracial individuals’ self-identities are questioned or disbelieved by others, causing stress or anxiety and the hesitancy to engage or disclose one’s multiracial heritages in the future (Johnston & Nadal, 2010).

Interviewees’ Self-identification

In the follow-up interviews with library worker volunteers, we were able to discuss racial and ethnic self-identification in more detail. Table 5 shows both the interviewees’ self-identification.

Table 5. *Racial and Ethnic Self-identification*

| Interview Number | Racial/Ethnic Self-Identification of Interviewee |
|------------------|--|
| 1 | Chinese and Jewish (POC and mixed race) |
| 2 | Half-Japanese and white |
| 3 | Mixed Asian American |
| 4 | Irish American and Indian |

- 5 Half Filipino and Half African American
- 6 Mixed-race, not POC
- 7 Mixed-race, Filipino and white, POC
- 8 Mixed or multiracial
- 9 Biracial, Half Japanese and Half white/ Half Asian
- 10 Biracial
- 11 Multicultural, biracial
- 12 White and Indigenous Asian
- 13 Mixed or biracial, POC
- 14 Prefers to state heritage rather than race
- 15 Indo-Trinidadian, mixed-race
- 16 Native mixed-race and European
- 17 Mixed person: Mixed and Mexican

As multiple participants noted, “It’s complicated” when trying to determine how to identify and how (and when) to share their identities with others. Multiracial individuals have to navigate a complex calculus of whether it is safe to assert their multiracial identity, whether they have the bandwidth to deal with all-too-common disbelief and pushback on their self-identification, and even whether they wish to engage at all. Multiple interviewees noted that their self-identities have changed as they aged and had more lived experience. As one interviewee noted, “It has evolved and I choose, when I can, white and indigenous Asian” (Interviewee 12). Note that not only is the evolution of self-identity present in this statement but also the challenge of being allowed to identify as she wishes, based on how other people and structures allow her to self-identify.

The issue of whether the interviewees considered themselves Persons of Color (POC) came up several times, occurring naturally during the conversation as it was not one of the interview questions. While some library workers specifically noted that they consider themselves a Person of Color (POC), at least one did not. One of the interviewees stated,

I'd say deciding to identify as a POC was a conscious political decision that took some time to come to, but was spurred by a friend, a woman who said she was “a woman of color,” and it was a political decision she was making. And that ongoing identification for me is not without the tension of my having doubts of whether I should call myself a Person of Color, but I haven't walked it back since I started saying it in my college years. (Interviewee 1)

Another interviewee stated, “I identify as mixed-race because, not a person of color, but I'm also not white...there's not just BIPOC and it's not just white, there is an in-between” (Interviewee 6). She noted that it was a “journey” to arrive at how she self-identifies and that her sibling does not identify as mixed-race. She further noted how external factors, such as people constantly challenging her by asking “What are you?” influenced how she incorporated her mixed heritage into her self-

identity. Outside factors and social interactions have previously been shown to impact how multiracial individuals self-identify (Renn, 2008; Wijeyesinghe, 2021).

Multiple participants noted the difficulties of navigating where and how they fit within various racial affinity groups and diversity initiatives at their libraries, difficulties corroborated by previous research (Harris, 2016). There is racial policing of multiracial individuals by all monoracial groups—i.e., having to prove to speak a heritage language, celebrating certain holidays, etc.—and the effects of colorism impact multiracial individuals as well—i.e., lighter skin being treated preferentially or, conversely, one not being the correct skin tone to fit into a monoracial space (Harris, 2016; Tsai et al., 2021). This issue of colorism, along with white passing and white presenting, is further explored in a following section.

Impacts on Library Work

The vast majority of the survey respondents and interviewees stated that being multiracial impacted their library work and experience in the library. Table 6 details the breakdown of survey responses.

Table 6. *Survey Responses to Whether Being Multiracial Impacted Library Work*

| Yes | | No | | Somewhat | |
|-----|-------|----|------|----------|-------|
| 45 | 81.8% | 3 | 5.5% | 7 | 12.7% |

Respondents who elaborated on why they felt that their multiracial heritage did not impact their library work thought that was because they were white passing and/or white presenting. Some who considered their multiracial heritage as impacting their work somewhat also noted that they were white presenting and/or white passing, but this meant that they felt they could not take part in BIPOC staff groups. Others believed that their heritage impacted them positively sometimes and not at all at other times. Yet other respondents noted that because they were phenotypically ambiguous, others assumed to know their racial and ethnic identity, an assumption which could be positive or negative.

For the over 81% of survey respondents who felt that their multiracial heritage did impact their work and elaborated on why, the majority expressed that the impact was negative. They noted feeling isolated and in a liminal space, as well as not being taken seriously when speaking about DEI issues. They also noted both micro- and macroaggressions, the exhaustion of having their identities mistaken and, when mistaken as white, having to listen to colleagues saying things that they would not say in front of monoracial BIPOC colleagues. On the positive side, one respondent felt that their multiracial heritage allowed them to be more empathetic and see all sides. However, when taken together, these responses unfortunately corroborate previous research showing that multiracial people face microaggressions and racism at work and have their concerns minimized in DEI spaces (DaCosta, 2020; Tsai et al., 2021).

Responses from interviewees showed the same general patterns with regard to the impact on their library work. The more in-depth interviews allowed the collection of more details and feelings around these issues, particularly issues surrounding: 1) racism and microaggressions, which invalidate identity, 2) the devaluation of lived experience and expertise on DEI issues, and 3) intersecting identities and liminality. The interviewees also spoke about ways to ameliorate some of the structural issues faced, which will be detailed in a later section.

Issue #1: Racism and Microaggressions

Multiracial library workers, like their BIPOC colleagues, face racism within library settings. While there are, of course, systemic forms of racism baked into many policies and other structural elements of the library, this section will focus on the interpersonal racism that is enacted by fellow library workers and by the public served by multiracial library workers.

Multiracial library workers face the invalidation of their identities by both colleagues and the patrons they serve. This invalidation often stems from monoracism, which is not discussed in the LIS literature. The public, students, and others are sources of racist behavior, comments, and microaggressions that are directed toward multiracial library workers. As interviewees noted the ubiquitous “What are you?” question is often asked when they are at public service points. They are also often misidentified as being of another race or have people insist that they could not possibly be Asian or Latina or [fill-in-the-blank].

The library workers interviewed talked about how their colleagues did not acknowledge their multiracial identities even when told; how they faced monoracism as colleagues tried to fit them within one racial box; and the other microaggressions they had to deal with in their working environment. All of these experiences are documented and corroborated in previous research as well (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). One participant recalled a colleague saying that they did not see the person as multiracial and challenged them on their self-identification: “...that can be challenging because you're basically told... you don't know yourself this well” (Interviewee 6). This denial both invalidates their identity and should be seen as a form of racism, with some researchers classifying it more specifically as a microaggression (Johnston & Nadal, 2010).

White passing and white presenting came up multiple times in the survey responses and interviews, especially with the individuals who have white/European heritage and light skin and are often perceived as white presenting. To be clear, white passing and white presenting are two different phenomena, both of which rely on the perceptions of outside viewers. White passing is a choice by the multiracial or BIPOC individual to pass as white for many reasons. White presenting means that an outside observer decides that a BIPOC or multiracial individual is white, regardless of how that person self-identifies racially. It is important to recognize and understand that a multiracial individual's self-identity can, and often does,

differ from outsiders' racial identification of that individual (DaCosta, 2020; Rockquemore et al., 2009).

Some interviewees who have light skin and other phenotypic features seen as white by both white and monoracial BIPOC people may have had experiences where others saw them as white only. While this experience has often been framed as a form of privilege by being white-adjacent (Harris, 2016), and it can convey some temporary and always contingent privilege, it can also be the source of confusion and trauma. As one interviewee said, "I'm also very light skinned... my siblings aren't so... I'm the only one who can pass and so... sometimes I feel guilty that... I was afforded opportunities that they weren't" (Interviewee 3). The same interviewee also noted "I already struggle with like, who I am and then it's just like for people, not even to see me" and to assume that they are white is harmful and invalidating.

Another interviewee who identified as biracial felt like an "undercover brown person" as people often read them as white and would then make assumptions and racist comments in front of them: "it's happened so frequently that... I am having trouble... thinking of a specific memory" (Interviewee 4). Multiple interviewees noted that they had to decide whether it was safe for them to disclose their racial and ethnic identities or whether, for safety, they needed to remain silent. This reading of multiracial library workers as white by others led to the erasure of their identities and led to them having to hear racist statements, experiences which have unfortunately been corroborated by previous research (Alabi, 2015).

There was also self-censoring that occurred when others perceived multiracial individuals as white presenting. Some of this self-censorship can be seen as an internal form of border patrolling, which is how monoracial people stake out racial territory and determine if a multiracial person is "enough" to belong to a particular racial group, as noted previously. Self-censorship came up often for multiracial individuals who did not speak the language of their BIPOC ancestors and felt that they did not belong or could not participate or were not fully accepted (Tsai et al., 2021). Another interviewee said, "... if you take away that part of me that is Hispanic, I'm not a whole person...then we get into that tricky territory of...what percent is enough, which isn't" (Interviewee 6).

Issue #2: Devaluation of Lived Experiences and Expertise in DEI Work

While not all of the multiracial library workers interviewed considered themselves People of Color, all had lived experiences that could serve to enhance DEI work in their libraries. Many of the interviewees also had expertise apart from their lived experiences, through training, education, and previous work on many aspects of DEI work. However, these experiences and expertise were often ignored or invalidated, unless they served higher administrators' goals such as burnishing the image of the organization.

Several interviewees noted that their accomplishments and work, as well as the work of their monoracial BIPOC colleagues, were often ignored unless someone else took credit for their work. One interviewee noted, “I have a couple of colleagues of color. I have one colleague who is Deaf. We have various identities here and these folks, like, have not been promoted, are not being paid justly” (Interviewee 3). She also noted that, “this university takes credit for all my achievements...[you] didn't even write my recommendation letters” (Interviewee 3). This acknowledgment of multiracial individuals' accomplishments, and even whole self, only when it benefits the organization is unfortunately common and documented in the literature (Harris, 2016; Harrison et al., 2017). Another interviewee noted that a supervisor took away their autonomy and organizing control for their vision of a “collective that centered queer and trans people of color” and gave de facto control to a white colleague (Interviewee 17).

This devaluation of multiracial library workers' expertise can also be seen as a symptom of monoracism and others' inability to acknowledge the complexities around identity and DEI work. Colleagues in the library field still appear to have issues with understanding that just because they perceive someone as white (“white presenting”) does not mean that that individual identifies as white or has monoracial white heritage. As one interviewee stated, “Well, I've been in, like, committee meetings and things where someone will say because we don't have, like, diverse representation, we need to be mindful of the diverse perspective. And then, one time, I actually did say, like, hold up” (Interviewee 3).

Issue #3: Intersecting Identities

Talking about any form of identity requires acknowledgement that identities are multifaceted and intersecting. In addition to these intersecting identities, multiracial individuals also embody liminality within these identities. As has been said, multiracial individuals live “betwixt and between” in the borderlands of race. These two themes were raised often throughout the interviews.

Acknowledging and understanding the existence of intersecting identities and the contexts in which these identity categories have been shaped historically are important to seeing and valuing people's whole being. This can be difficult when there are issues of trust in validating identities, as has been noted by many interviewees. It can also be difficult because, as one interviewee reflected, “Any person, at any given moment, there's usually only... a sliver of their identity being revealed at once” (Interviewee 4).

While this study looked specifically at multiracial identities, several participants noted how their intersecting identities of being queer and/or from poor/working class backgrounds also impacted their experiences in libraries. One participant said, “I think I have understood being mixed as a queer experience in and of itself. I think my queerness, my transness, and my mixedness I don't categorize them as, like, neatly separate things about myself” (Interviewee 17). This library worker

continues to do work at the intersections of these identities and noted how frustrating and hard it can be to do this work and have others undermine them. It is through support and trust of others who are mixed and share similar politics and values that they continue with the work. Multiple interviewees noted that they had not grown up middle class and that their colleagues assumed that everyone in the library was and had always been middle class. This discrepancy could be an isolating experience and serve as another marker of difference.

There is great precarity in having multiple intersecting identities that are seen to be outside the norm (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Wijeyesinghe, 2021). However, the interviewees also saw their intersecting identities and liminality as part of what gave them deep empathy, patience, and kindness in their interactions with others and steadfastness in their advocacy and work for change in the library.

Implications for LIS

While this study was exploratory, there are some emerging implications for the LIS field in terms of concrete actions to take and future research. As more research is completed on multiracial library workers' experiences, more detailed implications and actions can be formulated.

Recognition Is a Start

There needs to be and should be recognition of multiracial library workers. It is the 21st century and multiracial library workers are still not reflected in discussions of DEI and library work, demographics, or creation of a more representative library workforce. This lack, clearly, should change. We need to recognize our learning and growing edges and seek to fully recognize our colleagues as whole people—including multiracial library workers. Being seen, truly seen, is the first step towards creating trust and a more equitable work environment.

Support for Multiracial Library Workers

There needs to be support for multiracial library workers, in their individual libraries and at the association-wide level. Support means different things to different people; so engaging in honest conversations is the only way to determine what support will look like in an individual library. However, some overlapping ideas came up across the interviews.

Support for multiracial library workers must center the experiences of multiracial library workers. This is not a time to play what one interviewee termed “grievance Olympics” (Interviewee 12); acknowledging and centering multiracial individuals in ways that support them is not to decenter or negate support for monoracial BIPOC individuals (Leopardo et al., 2021). Creating support for one does not necessitate not supporting others. Also, intersecting identities need to be attended to in order to ensure that everyone can bring their full selves to the library and not face daily microaggressions.

One library organization that interviewees mentioned a number of times as a supportive place for mixed-race library workers was APALA, the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association. Interviewees noted how they felt seen, accepted, supported, and fully engaged in APALA and found community within this organization. APALA can be a model for libraries and other associations in the support of all library workers.

Future Research and Limitations

As this study was exploratory in nature, its results are not generalizable (Atkin & Jackson, 2021), but it provides a starting point for understanding multiracial library workers' experiences in libraries. The author intends to conduct further interviews to understand more nuances and provide more breadth and depth about multiracial library workers' experiences. Future research comparing the experiences of multiracial library workers in other countries would also provide a better understanding of potential differences and similarities in experience as well as expand awareness and visibility of multiracial library workers beyond the United States' context.

Conclusion

Multiracial library workers deserve visibility, respect, and support in all library environments, as do all library workers. Moving forward, those in the LIS field must hold the two-pronged understanding that race is socially constructed and reconstructed, yet has profound impacts on individuals' daily lives and on systemic policies and power structures. Understanding and supporting multiracial library workers is not to reify race and racist structures but to acknowledge that there are complexities and beautiful identities that do not fit neatly into one box. If we move forward together, we can create libraries where truly all can thrive. As one interviewee noted, "...I guarantee that we will see the American Library Association release a statement in support of mixed-race communities. It's just a matter of time" (Interviewee 17). Until the rest of the library world catches up, we will continue to do the work to bring about a beloved, inclusive library space.

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Appendix A (Survey Questions)

Do you self-identify as biracial, mixed race, or multiracial?

- Yes (continue survey)
- No (exit survey)

What type of library do you work in currently?

- Academic
- Public
- Special
- Government
- Other

Have you worked in another type of library?

- Yes (if yes, next question)

- No (if no, skip next question and go to job title question)

What other type(s) of library have you worked in? (select all that apply)

- Academic
- Public
- Special
- Government
- Other

What is your current job title?

[free text response]

How is your current job classified?

- Librarian
- Library staff (not librarian)
- Library administration
- Other (please explain)

How long have you worked in libraries in total?

[please enter a number]

How long have you worked in your current library?

[please enter a number]

How do you self-identify racially and/or ethnically?

[please enter racial/ethnic identities]

Do you belong to any associations, roundtables, interest groups, etc. for BIPOC or mixed race/multiracial/biracial library workers?

[please enter names of groups]

Please tell me about the demographics of library workers at your library.

[Examples: Do you work with other BIPOC library workers? Are you the only biracial/mixed race/multiracial person that you know of at your library? Free text response]

Do you feel like your identity as a biracial, mixed race, or multiracial library worker impacts your experiences in the library? Why or why not?

[free text response]

Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview about communication and library employees?

If so, please enter your name and email below:

[space for entering contact information]

If you'd like to talk with someone to debrief after completing this survey, please see <https://www.opencounseling.com/hotlines-us> for information and phone numbers for counseling hotlines in your area.

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences!

Appendix B: Interview Questions

- Please tell me about yourself/background.
- Please describe your journey to work in a library.
- What led you to work in a library?
- Please tell me about your current work.
- Please tell me about your past work in libraries.
- How do you self-identify?
- Do you belong to any associations, roundtables, interest groups, etc. for BIPOC or mixed race/multiracial/biracial library workers?
- Please tell me about how your identity does/doesn't impact your library work? Experiences in the library?
- What does your library do (or not) to support mixed race/multiracial/biracial library workers?
- Anything else you'd like to add?
- Some themes I've heard you talk about are...Is this correct/not correct?
- Would you like information on counseling at this time?

Follow up questions:

- Could you expand on that?
- Could you clarify that point?

- I heard you say...Is that correct?
- How did you feel?