

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: MIXED-RACE OSTRACISM BY THE MINORITY GROUP IN
LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *CEREMONY*, MATT DE LA PEÑA'S *MEXICAN WHITEBOY*,
AND HEIDI DURROW'S *THE GIRL WHO FELL FROM THE SKY*

by

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In the three texts that will be discussed, the authors chose young protagonists who come to terms with the contradictions their background creates. In some ways, each of the novels presents the idea of mixed-race as being a problem to overcome. However, the authors' representations of the problematic nature of growing up between cultures and trying to fit in also highlight the mono-racial community of colors' perception of mixed-race individuals. Bi- or multi-racial individuals may be ridiculed by their own mono-racial family members and peers for a perceived inauthenticity to an established racial norm. The authors of the three texts share the experiences of bi-racial individuals on journeys of self-discovery, as the main characters untangle the intersection of cultural differences to construct their own identities.

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by

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INTRODUCTION

“What’s it like being in your family? It must be so interesting.” It’s a vague memory, but probably the first time I realized my family was somehow considered different. I couldn’t even tell you how old I was when this question was posed, but I had to be in late elementary or middle school. At first, I remember feeling confused by the question. For the life of me I could not fathom how my boring home life could be considered interesting. My response is lost in the fog of time, but the memory of feeling somehow strange in the eyes of this classmate lingered. I had never considered myself to be exotic, nor my family to be thrilling. This individual on the outside of our family could only see the shallow exterior of our varying skin colors. How can something experienced from birth, the only family that I have known, be considered a novelty?

It was like a shade was lifted that exposed the ugliness of racial categorization all around me. The dawning realization that I was being gazed upon by strangers in the restaurant, not because of some inherent cuteness, but because I was trailing my Black father and my White mother behind me. I was growing to understand that my family was apparently unusual, but not necessarily in a positive way. My family could be considered exciting, or dangerous even. This outward perception of my family conflicted greatly with my internal view of myself and of the close-knit nature of my relationship with my parents.

I finished my high school career in Charlotte, North Carolina. My appearance and my perpetual shyness identified me only as some sort of unidentifiable “other.” Mostly, I blended in with the mainstream, happy not to stick out at all. Blending in did open me up to being privy to seeing the ordinarily hidden racial bigotry of others who assumed I was White, or at least close enough. However, I struggled more with the attention from other minorities. There was something about me that irritated many of the Black students I encountered. I was told I “acted

white,” and accused of thinking I was better, apparently because of my lighter complexion, the way I dressed, and the activities in which I participated. For the life of me, I couldn’t see what they saw. I was being the only *me* I knew how to be. Even in my teenage insecurity, I felt authentic to myself, but within the Black community at school I was seen as an imposter.

When I began taking courses within the Multiracial and Transnational Literatures program at ECU, I was drawn to novels that dealt with multi-racial identity. I found that much of the literature and critical analysis focused on an internal racial identity struggle that I never experienced. However, on the periphery of the discussion of personal identity, I noticed some of the same negativity coming from the minority community in which the bi-racial individuals lived. I became taken with the idea of studying three different texts to find how the bi-racial characters are viewed, how the characters make sense of their feelings of living in between cultures, and how they ultimately move beyond categorization to express their own true selves.

Literary criticism on the depiction of bi- or multi-racial characters in the United States frequently presents mixed-race individuals in relation to the dominant White society, while overlooking possible negative reception by the minority communities within which they may reside. Exclusion from the dominant group based on perceived racial or ethnic identity can be experienced in greater and lesser degrees by all within the respective community of color. While racism is unquestionably damaging to all who experience it, the shared experience of living under the shadow of racism can also serve as a unifying force for those regarded as belonging to the same mono-racial community. However, bi- or multi-racial individuals may also be shunned by their own mono-racial family members and peers for a perceived inauthenticity to a racial standard. Mixed-race individuals may feel caught between two distinct cultural realities; while

they cannot be considered a member of White society, concomitantly they are not fully accepted by members of the mono-racial minority group. Works such as, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (2006), Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008), and Heidi Durrow's *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* (2010) present bi-racial protagonists who feel isolated from their respective minority communities due to the group's perception of their difference.

The discussion of mixed-race requires a brief theoretical establishment of and definition for racial boundaries as they are understood within American society, since as Jonathan Brennan asserts in *Mixed Race Literature* (2002), "... it is also important to address the creation and conception of the idea of 'race,' without which, one imagines, the idea of 'mixed race' wouldn't exist" (6). Despite the captivating vision of a colorless world, where all people are truly viewed as part of one single humankind, historical colonialism and its accompanying devaluing of brown skin color, established a White to non-White binary which carries on today. Distinctions based on skin color can be considered absurd and based entirely on a relational perspective. Werner Sollors humorously states in *Beyond Ethnicity* (1986), "from a Martian point of view, earthlings are boringly endogamous, because they more or less invariably mate with other earthlings" (71-72). While from afar humankind is all one species, imagined differences based on external attributes led to the idea of distinct racial categories. Racial categorization was established on the erroneous belief that humankind was divisible into separate and distinct biologic differences, most visibly skin color. To complicate the idea of a racial categorization, cultural signifiers that sometimes accompany racial identification also gave rise to the concept of ethnicity. According to Sollors, the term ethnicity most accurately describes the cultural environment that defines racial categorization and therefore, "... it is most helpful not to be confused by the heavily charged term 'race' and to keep looking at race as one aspect of ethnicity" (39). Despite the use

of “mixed-race” and “bi-, or multi-racial,” the societal phenomena these terms elucidate is primarily cultural and not biological or hereditary. While assignation to a mono-racial community through a parent’s racial category may identify one as part of that community, it is the underlying cultural traditions that define the community and the individual.

The terms mixed-race, interracial, multi-racial, and bi-racial carry with them the perception of being somehow less than a whole person, or partial and incomplete. Referring to oneself as half-this and half-that presents an inaccurate presentation of genetic background and reduces cultural influences down to meaningless measurements. However, modern terminology attempts to capture the diversity of a person’s background, while increasing the distance from negative terms associated with the blending of cultures and avoiding archaic terms such as, “mulatto,” “half-breed,” or “mestizo.”

Fears of miscegenation leading to the loss of control drove the creation of laws to deny the validity of interracial relationships and demonize the offspring of such unions. While the word “mulatto” is offensive, the definition is merely someone who has both Black and White ancestors. As explained by Werner Sollors in *Interracialism : Black-white Inter-marriage in American History, Literature, and Law* (2000), the negative connotation of the word arose based on society’s view of mixed-race individuals as being inherently immoral, since “the product of difference was a monster ultimately deviant and inferior. He was deviant from and inferior to the black, who was already defined as deviant and inferior. The mulatto monster was therefore doubly deviant, the other of the other (*Interracialism* 77). The term “mulatto” encapsulated the idea of the impurity of the races and served as an example of the possibility of the future blending of races with the resulting loss of White social superiority in American society.

Therefore, the term “mulatto” became a disparaging word to describe a person who did not belong within the society at all, based on their supposed racial impurity. As Werner Sollors shares in *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (1997), “the supremacist Henry Hughes” in 1852 uses the term “mulatto” to describe those of uncertain or mixed-race:

The preservation and progress of a race, is a moral duty of the races. Degeneration is evil. It is a sin. That sin is extreme. Hybridism is heinous. Impurity of races is against the law of nature. Mulattoes are monsters. The law of nature is the law of God. The same law which forbids consanguineous amalgamation forbids ethnical amalgamation. Both are incestuous. Amalgamation is incest. (298)

The term “mulatto” was used pejoratively as a warning that the blending of races could only lead to further degradation for all people. The “mulatto” did not blend more easily into White society, but was further maligned, since their very presence signaled the illicitness of the union from which they were created. In the South, “colored people were divided ... into two classes, designated by law as Negroes and mulattoes respectively. The term Negro was used in its ethnological sense, and needed no definition; but the term "mulatto" was held by legislative enactment to embrace all persons of color not Negroes” (*Interracialism* 38). The term “mulatto” served as a catch-all term to ensure that no one considered racially impure moved into a position of privilege. The idea of the “tragic mulatto” grew from the belief that the mixed-race person could not be accepted by either White or Black society, and therefore, felt isolated from all of humankind.

Mixed-race Native Americans have been referred to as “half-breeds”, “mixed-breeds”, and “mixed-bloods,” which alludes to the idea of a scientific measurement or quantifiable amount of blood that would determine racial composition. Thomas Ingersoll in *To Intermix With Our White Brothers: Indian Mixed Bloods in the United States from Earliest Times to the Indian*

Removals indicates that attempts at categorization have served to limit the upward mobility of those who are considered to be “other” in relation to White society:

Naming distinctions is natural for humans, but fraught with danger for citizens, especially in the revolutionary and unstable United States after 1776. It had an inherent tendency to confirm stereotypes white people held of “the other,” and the popular “halfbreed” hobgoblin had a special and dangerous power by 1830. It allowed white policy makers to develop particular legal strategies that would formalize and perpetuate the otherness of mixed bloods, in order to remove all Indians from the American white mainstream, and to satisfy several political needs. (xiii)

With the negative terms affixed to their person, those who were mixed-race Native Americans were discriminated against based on the idea of having a certain quantity of Native American “blood.” Just as the “mulatto” was considered to be a dangerous move toward racial blending, Native American “half-breeds” were used as examples of decaying morality within American society. The negative depiction was easy to encourage since the mainstream looked at every possible indiscretion as proof of the degeneracy of mixed-race Native Americans (81). Those in positions of power sought out evidence to support the view of the Native American “half-breed” as being a scourge on society.

In contrast to mixed-race individuals in Black and Native American contexts, those known as “meztizos” were considered to be part of the expansion of conquered lands. In “Métis, Mestizo, and Mixed-Blood,” Jennifer Brown and Theresa Scheenck explain that the mestizos occupied an essential role in the society:

Just as métis developed wherever the French had contact with native people, and the mixed-blood or half-breed arose wherever the English penetrated, so also did the mestizo come into being wherever the Spanish conquered. In contrast with the English, however, the Spanish colonial system needed native people for its population base and as a major source of its labor. Spanish authorities therefore encouraged, or tolerated, miscegenation. (333)

Despite the blending of races, “meztizos” too were considered to be less than those who were mono-racial. The “meztizos” were aligned with the indigenous Mexicans and were considered to be inferior to the Spanish colonials.

American racial categorization is inseparable from American history and the atrocities of slavery, the shifting of borderlands, and the stealing of native lands. According to Herbert J. Gans in “‘Whitening’ and the Changing of the American Hierarchy,” “the currently evolving hierarchy is better described, at least for now and for the country as a whole, as a tripartite one, with Whites as well as Whitened Asians, Latinos, and some others at the top and African Americans at the bottom, together with others perceived by Whites as Black, including Latinos and Caribbeans” (272). Racial hierarchy in America is based on the limitations placed on upward class mobility as established with slavery. As an attempt to protect and secure power, the one-drop rule was created to severely restrict Americans who were considered Black. Brennan explains that even today “most mixed race people have been categorized according to the prevailing mode of hypodescent, a policy that assigns mixed race individuals to the race that has been saddled with the lowest social status” (2). Based on this concept of racial purity, to those on the outside looking into a particular community of color, mixed-race individuals are considered to be minorities. However, this same contradiction applies when determining the authentic identity of the mixed-race individual from the perspective of their specific community of color. The mixed-race individual may be subject to mistrust and accused of attempting to access the privileges of being White over the challenges of being part of the minority group. Despite being seen from the outside as a member of the minority community, the mixed-race individual may be viewed as an inauthentic member by those who identify mono-racially.

In essence, racial categorization is based on heredity and cultural background. It is the combination of specific external attributes and the presence of cultural characteristics that give birth to the perception of categorical difference. In the article "Beyond "Difference": Examining the Process and Flexibility of Racial Identity in Interracial Marriages," Stephanie Afful, et al. explain the relationship between race and ethnicity:

“Race” categorizes people into groups based on perceived physical appearance (e.g., skin color) that creates a dynamic of power and social status and thereby justifies oppression of those deemed less valued or privileged. “Ethnicity,” meanwhile, refers to common cultural experiences, including but not limited to language, traditions, and ancestry that many—but not all—members of a group often share and from which they draw a sense of identity and pride—tools that are often valuable in resisting the oppressive categories of “race.” (661)

While race is often the first descriptor to be used when attempting to define different communities of color, it is often the cultural aspects of the community that are being spoken about by bi-racial or multi-racial individuals. When an individual identifies as mixed-race, that person is usually not emphasizing the heredity of physical characteristics, although this might be a defining feature for inclusion in or exclusion from that minority community. Instead, the person speaks to the identifiable cultural characteristics that are part of a racially categorized community.

On this conceptual racial hierarchy, it is between the oppression felt from above and the lack of fraternity from the non-White community below that multi-racial individuals may struggle to make sense of their identities. This is the space often written about by authors who identify as mixed-race. It is frequently depicted as a difficult, if not impossible, place to be. Sollors describes that “Mixed marriages of all sorts, and especially marital unions between whites and Indians or whites and Afro-Americans, often appeared dangerous in American literature, the offspring of such unions doomed. The mulatto and half-breed themes were

inevitably tragic or horrifying” (224). Historically, the biological offspring of an intermarriage would have been seen as deficient, and this dated view still permeates literature and the public’s imagination. The modern and historical versions of this deficiency depict the multi-racial individual as being unable to successfully fit into the community, but the modern manifestation is more often described as an internal struggle instead of a literal lack of status in society. The imagined deficiency predicts mixed-race individuals will fail unless they are able to “pass” as White, or seamlessly identify themselves as part of the mono-racial community. The supposed tragedy of mixed-race individuals is the inability to internally reconcile two distinct and discordant cultural influences. The external rejection of a mixed-race body purportedly mirrors an internal self-hatred experienced by the mixed-race identity.

This would be tragic indeed, if the only option for mixed-race individuals would be to live forever misunderstood in isolation. The answer lies in the assertion of mixed-race, or bi- and multi-racial, identification in the first place. Mixed-race individuals identify themselves as such because their experiences are unlike those who are part of a somewhat mono-racial community. Whereas people who identify mono-racially experience belonging to the cultural traditions of a single community, mixed-race individuals experience (at least partially) the culture of two or more distinct cultural environments. The idea that a mixed-raced person must reconcile between these two cultures is one placed on s/he externally, not internally. Those two cultures can and do exist apart; it is the mixed-race individual who can travel between the two.

In some instances, of course, there may be little or no connection to one of the communities with which the mixed-race individual identifies. Likewise, the mixed-race individual truly may wish to be identified mono-racially, but due to physical characteristics or family history is unable to claim this “full-blood” identity. Even if a mixed-race individual

cannot be connected or feels distance between part of his or her culture, this too can be acknowledged as just another aspect of being multi-racial. As the novels' protagonists interact with the mono-racial community, it is apparent that the negative views of bi-racial individuals have little to do with the individual. The unraveling of tight communities, disparity based on racial categorization, the need to stick together against ongoing racism, and a resistance to the ongoing hierarchy that reinforces the value of white skin over brown, creates an obligatory rejection of the mixed-race body while simultaneously admiring the individuals' White features.

Mixed-race individuals are often depicted in fiction as struggling to achieve a solid sense of identity through an epic journey. In the three texts that will be discussed, the authors chose young protagonists who come to terms with the contradictions their background creates. In some ways, each of the novels presents the idea of mixed-race as being a problem to overcome. However, the authors' representations of the problematic nature of growing up between cultures and trying to fit in also highlight the mono-racial community of colors' perception of mixed-race individuals. The authors of the three texts represent the experiences of bi-racial individuals on journeys of self-discovery, as the main characters untangle the intersection of cultural differences to construct their own identities.

The protagonists use the fluidity of their multi-ethnicity to form a new self-identity that hinges on neither race but includes elements of both. In his collection of critical essays *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois provides the concept of "double-consciousness" to describe a state of self-awareness experienced by Black Americans:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (2)

Du Bois indicates that the conscious discernment of one's place in society is an injurious weight to endure. Everyday existence is negatively influenced when one continually perceives both the deliberate and the unintentional bias from the dominant society. However, the skill of complex observation through a dual lens can also be considered an advantage. Despite the repugnant foundation for the development of double-consciousness, this self-awareness can positively affect how a person navigates within the society. As the bi-racial characters in the three novels interact with various societal groups, their personal identity is solidified by their heightened awareness of how they are perceived by those around them. The mechanism of double-consciousness allows the characters to navigate between two seemingly contradictory worlds, as they accept or discard the external view of their identities.

The first chapter will discuss the negative reactions toward racial diversity by the communities in which the mixed-race individuals live. For example, Kevin Concannon relates that there can be a perceived cultural clash, where any mixing of traditions is viewed through a negative lens and the established mono-racial community refuses to completely accept the bi-racial character. Concannon in "Deer-hoof Clackers and Coke Bottles: The Construction of the Postcolonial Nation in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*" shares that Silko's Tayo:

feels "dizzy and sick" as he surveys the hogan, not because the objects of Western civilization and Indian culture should not or have not been mixed, but because history shows him they cannot mix in a meaningful or positive manner ... Nothing make sense for Tayo in the hogan because he is experiencing what, from a colonial perspective, cannot be recognized – himself. (3)

As with the characters in the other two novels, Tayo's life does not feel authentic. He exists on the periphery of the community's spiritual and social activity, and generally feels physically and emotionally isolated from the rest of the community. Moments of inclusion are often tempered by the character's lingering outsider's perspective.

The second chapter will discuss the individual's internalized response to existing on the periphery of the minority community and the actions taken by the mixed-race individual to resolve the conflict internally, as well as externally. Each character develops a conscious racial monologue and coping mechanisms in order to make sense of his or her identity within the social context. For example, Danny, in de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy*, chooses to remain silent. He attempts to lessen his pain during social interactions by digging his fingernails into the flesh of his arm. In Durrow's *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*, Rachel disassociates from herself and her pain by creating an alternate persona: "They have a language I don't know but I understand. I learn that black people don't have blue eyes. I learn that I am black. I have blue eyes. I put all these new facts into the new girl" (10). All three bi-racial protagonists in the novels believe that they are in some way guilty of transgressions that make them unworthy of being full members of the minority community. As Swan explains, Tayo's internal conflict not only manifests in his own body and mind as illness, but extends to personally blaming himself for his community's destruction:

Tayo's universe is founded on a "world made of stories." Consequently, he construes his words as causing the drought afflicting his people and their environment. His illness is cultural. It reflects the deprivation brought on by voicing his destructive thoughts, making him in part responsible for his state of alienation. (45)

The negative reception of mixed-race characters in these novels by their respective communities distorts their perception of reality. The mixed-race character may demonize himself or herself, or project feelings of anger upon family members, the community, or on the oppressive dominant group. As a result of the internal conflict, the individuals produce a variety of negative behaviors and modes of thinking in an attempt to ameliorate their pain. Yarbrow-Bejarano explains that reaching a harmonious balance between cultural realities is possible. From Gloria Anzaldúa's

autobiographical perspective, she conceives her own space through her craft as Anzaldúa “explicitly articulates her project: ‘belonging’ nowhere, since some aspect of her multiple identity always prohibits her from feeling completely ‘at home’ in any one of the many communities in which she holds membership, she will create her own ‘home’ through writing” (13). By carving a new path that neither denies nor wholly accepts all aspects of each cultural tradition, there is the implication that the mixed-race individual has solved the problem of not fitting-in by rejecting the idea of being accepted altogether. Each of the three novels presents the individual as having found resolution to their inner conflict in the personal acknowledgement and acceptance of their multi-ethnicity, allowing each to forge deeper connections within their respective communities.

CHAPTER ONE: WHO DECIDES WHAT RACE LOOKS LIKE?

The Perception of Mixed-Race Individuals by their Minority Communities

Belonging to a community can be taken for granted, since for the most part it is a natural part of being human. People are born into a family, a community, and a country. Despite generational and experiential difference and varying interests, those who are considered to be mono-racial are generally accepted as part of their respective communities. However, at a societal level the idea of claiming (or rejecting) a racial identity in America can be muddled by the idea of purity. Bi- or multi-racial individuals will be considered minorities by the dominant White society, but may also be identified by the mono-racial minority community as lacking minority authenticity based on their outward appearance, or by acting in ways that are considered antithetical to the community, i.e. “acting white,” or visibly lacking essential cultural knowledge. Multi-racial individuals can feel out of place within their own communities. In "Mixed-Race Women and Epistemologies of Belonging," Silvia C. Bettez observes that the inclusion of the multi-racial individual is a “complex, dialectical relationship between those who wish to belong and those who have the power to sanction or dismiss belonging” (156). The minority group has the capacity to deny the legitimacy of the multi-racial individual for not fitting into the community. The rejection of the multi-racial person by the minority community may exist under the surface, or it may be glaringly visible as others ridicule differences.

In the three novels to be discussed, each of the bi-racial individuals live within a minority community. The White parent is notably absent, as are any real connections with the world outside of the community. Amina Chaudhri and William H. Teale identify in "Stories of Multiracial Experiences in Literature for Children, Ages 9–14" that the absence of the White

parent is not merely a literary device to advance the plot, but can highlight the existing bias in America against the propriety of interracial marriage:

Solitary protagonists are common in children's literature and support an individualistic ideology, so this finding was perhaps not surprising. However, interracial relationships described as failing because of "racial incompatibility" echo and sustain segregationist notions. Biracial characters either speculated about the notion that racial or cultural differences were the likely reason that their biological parents were not together or were directly told so. (365)

Durrow's Rachel witnesses the disintegration of her parents' relationship and her mother's suicide. De la Peña's Danny chooses to spend the summer in National City to avoid spending time with his divorced White mother as she experiments living with a new White boyfriend. Silko's Tayo never knows his absent White father and is abandoned by his single mother, who tragically dies when Tayo is a young boy. Each of the minority communities has taken in a bi-racial child. However, the apparent differences between the characters and their assumed mono-racial communities chip away at each protagonist's sense of self-identity.

Many of the feelings of isolation experienced by the bi-racial characters are the accumulation of small, seemingly inconsequential remarks that devalue their connection to their respective minority communities. As Kevin L. Nadal notes in "Microaggressions within Families: Experiences of Multiracial People," each reference to some variation from a cultural norm builds upon the next until the bi-racial individual feels "isolated not only in their communities and by their peers but also by their family members. Such experiences may lead to feelings of disapproval and loneliness, which may also have an impact on their self-esteem and well-being" (192). The comments are often veiled compliments, or at least jealous remarks, regarding their appearance. Assumptions are frequently made about the bi-racial characters' pride in their White features, such as straighter hair, light eyes, and paler skin. Since people of color are commonly devalued within American society, having White traits within a minority

community can be seen as positive. Hephzibah V. Strmic-Pawl in "The Influences Affecting and the Influential Effects of Multiracials: Multiracialism and Stratification" reports that even "in today's society, people considered to have a light skin tone still receive social preferences such as being deemed more attractive" (65). Despite the overwhelming admiration for White characteristics, the bi-racial characters struggle with being accepted and with being viewed as legitimately part of the minority community. The same characteristics that are held in high regard, are the same features that separate bi-racial characters from other minorities in their communities.

While valued within the minority community, White features can also prevent desired acculturation. Multi-racial individuals can be seen as prideful of the unavoidable aspects of their outward appearance and their visage can be used as evidence that they are not authentic members of the community. Strmic-Pawl explains that White characteristics can act as a barrier for multi-racial characters acceptance within their respective communities:

A primary challenge for White/non-White biracials with light complexions can be developing an affiliation and closeness with their non-White side. They encounter an "ethnic authenticity" issue, wherein multiracials' loyalty to their minority racial status is questioned (Espiritu 2001; Hunter 2007; Yancey and Lewis 2009). Black multiracials can be criticized for not being "Black enough" or Latino multiracials for not being "Chicano enough." Moreover, sometimes not being "Black enough" is also extended to "wanting to be White" or "acting White" (Strmic-Pawl 2012; Hunter 2004, 2007). Such multiracials who are deemed as being too distant from "the Black experience" are not fully accepted by Black communities. (66)

Over time, the bi-racial characters in the novels believe the rhetoric. The mere fact of their existence points to the dilution of the community. Their lives cannot mirror the experience of authentic mono-racial members of the community because of the perception that they appear to be on their way to being deracialized. Gans describes the process of dilution as the "whitening," of minority communities, "which begins when one group ceases to stigmatize the phenotypical

distinctiveness of another, continues when that group no longer views the other as a race, progresses as the group, which does not think of itself as a race, ceases to pay attention to the other's phenotypical differences, and culminates when the first group eventually stops noticing these differences" (270). As multi-racial individuals' characteristics move them further away from their respective group's stereotype, their outward appearance signals a lack of connection within the minority community. Bi-racial individuals are considered to be less authentic because they are seen as benefiting from attributes that may elevate them out of the minority community to be accepted within the dominant White society.

"I am light-skinned-ed. That's what the other kids say. And I talk white" (Darrow 10).

Bi- or multi-racial individuals may be physically separated from their minority communities. In Darrow's *The Girl Who Fell From the Sky*, Rachel is a girl who has literally and figuratively fallen into the Black community from out of nowhere. Her mother, a Danish immigrant to the U.S., was separated from Rachel's father when she inexcusably tries to save her children from racism by attempting to take all of their lives. Rachel is the only survivor. As a survivor, she is brought into her father's family home and will be raised by her paternal grandmother and aunt. From the beginning, Rachel is aware of her difference and the feeling of being out of place. She has a tenuous connection to her father's family and far less experience within the Black community.

Without an existing connection, the minority community may be viewed as foreign and antithetical to the bi- or multi-racial individual's sense of the world. Instead of Rachel growing organically from the ancestral family tree, her grandmother acknowledges a difference between her own roots in the South and Rachel's eclectic roots from elsewhere. Her grandmother

explains, “They got better roots down there-- better dirt for making a root strong” (4). The implication is that Rachel’s upbringing thus far is insufficient, and her roots are far too shallow. The grandmother’s comment emphasizes a regional concept of ethnic identity, where the South is the true home to the Black community. The southern region grows good roots, because there is a tight community and a long history. Sollors explains that there is a “yearning for a vision of America as a structured society composed of neatly defined ‘ethnic regions’” (179), which carries with it the ideology of the right way of being authentically Black. The roots Rachel’s grandmother refers to are those planted in the right soil, the “dirt” of a shared community that Rachel has not experienced. As Sollors continues, “... we are accustomed to separating ‘sectionalism’ (bad) from ‘regionalism’ (good), and ‘ethnocentrism’ (bad) from ‘ethnicity’ (good). This moral polarization is sometimes made overtly and sometimes covertly, but it pervades literature of regionalism and ethnicity to a surprising degree” (179). Rachel’s grandmother reveals that there are levels of attachment and ties to an ethnic history, which she believes are more achievable in the South. Not only are the roots better, but those roots create a stronger, more unified Black community. Not only does Rachel lack the foundation of the Black community, the fact that her mother was White only further reduces Rachel’s connection to her grandmother and to the imagined deeply-rooted Black community.

When viewed through the lens of the concept of racial purity, bi- or multi-racial individuals may be encouraged by minority family and peers to deemphasize the influence of the White parent. Given the tragedy caused by her mother’s actions, it is not surprising that Grandma chooses to omit Rachel’s mother from the family history. As Rachel is folded into her father’s family, references to Rachel’s mother and her life before are not made in Grandma’s house. Rachel shares that “on the dining room mantel are photographs of me and Pop. Of me and

Grandma. Of me and Robbie. Of me, but none of Mor, that's mom in Danish" (5). Her mother is not mentioned and has literally been deleted from photographic evidence in Grandma's home. Rachel is not only expected to forget her mother, but also the language and cultural ties she formed before her mother's death. Discarding images of her mother, or never displaying one to begin with, serves to emphasize the mono-racial environment she is now expected to blend into. Sollors asserts that "the dream of the ethnic purist is the eternal likeness of all after-generations to his or her own image; on a global scale it is the eternal perpetuation of the boundaries between races or stocks or groups that have been classified and organized hierarchically to the advantage of the purist" (224). Rachel's inclusion in the mono-racial Black community reinforces the cultural boundaries that bind and define belonging; the exclusion of her White mother serves to distance Rachel from identification with her White-Danish background.

The complexity of a bi- or multi-racial individual's background can be over-simplified by the mono-racial community. Although Rachel has never considered herself to be Black before, she is now considered to be Black to the exclusion of her mother's cultural influence. Grandma gives Rachel a gift on their first evening together. Rachel reveals, "[I will] make my first deals with myself. I will not be sad. I will be okay ... 'Thank you,' I say and pull out two black Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy dolls" (5). While the presentation of the gift can be read at a simplistic level of a grandmother wishing to ease her granddaughter's pain, the selection of Black dolls can be seen as a subtle attempt to assimilate Rachel into Grandma's household and her new way of interacting with the world. Annie Stopford's article "Psychoanalysis and Interraciality: Asking Different Questions" argues that "In the US ... black discourse frequently ignores, denies, derides or downplays interraciality" (213). Grandma does not acknowledge the vastly different cultural environment from which Rachel has arrived. Accordingly, Grandma gives

Black dolls to her bi-racial granddaughter, because she does not see Rachel as anything other than a Black girl. While it is unlikely Rachel's grandmother intentionally denies Rachel's multi-racial background, the gift of the Black dolls can be seen as a demonstration of the single-race view of the multi-racial individual encouraged by Grandma and the community in which Rachel now lives.

Bi- or multi-racial individuals' external attributes are frequently seen as unique qualities that separate them from the rest of the minority community. For example, there is much uncomfortable focus on Rachel's exotic appearance, especially regarding the color of her eyes, her skin tone, and hair texture. Shortly after arriving at her grandmother's home, her Grandma criticizes the wildness of her hair. Grandma says, "Your Aunt Loretta will help you. Bet she know how to do something better with that mess of hair than what you had done before. You're gonna go to school Monday and be the prettiest girl there'" (5). Grandma assumes that Rachel's hair was uncared for by her White mother, who would not know how to handle Black hair properly. Even though Rachel has what is considered to be good hair, e.g., straighter, longer, and less coarsely textured, and despite knowing Rachel's hair comes from the combination of her parents' physical traits, Grandma categorizes it as Black hair that needs a Black woman to control it. Grandma's implication that her hair will make her the prettiest girl there elucidates the value of White features within the Black community. Rachel's multi-racial attributes set her apart as being special and more attractive.

White qualities deemed attractive may cause further division between the bi- or multi-racial individual and the minority community. Being in possession of features which can be attributed to Rachel's White mother can act as a double-edged sword with peers and family members. Even though she is considered Black, Rachel is accused of being overly proud of the

characteristics that set her apart. So, when Tamika says, “I’m fixin to kick your ass after school. You think you so cute with that hair” (10), she identifies the high value of Rachel’s good hair and assumes that Rachel is aware of, and proud of, the difference. As Jennifer Freeman Marshall points out in the article "In Search of Heidi Durrow within a Black woman's Literary Tradition: On Reading *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*," Rachel “is not only recovering from the trauma that brought her to Portland, she’s adjusting to living in a community where her relatives, neighbors and peers find her outward appearance remarkably different and potentially vexing” (28). While this new Black community is drawn to her unique qualities based on a multi-racial appearance, at the same time she is maligned for an appearance that is closer to the White ideal. Rachel is assumed to feel that she is “so cute with that hair,” because how could one not be proud of an attribute that is highly valued within the society?

A minority community may continue to adhere to the idea of mono-raciality, despite the existence of physical traits that show otherwise. Rachel’s eyes tell their own story. While Rachel believes that she has her mother’s eyes, Rachel’s grandmother asserts that the genetic predisposition for blue eyes comes from her own ancestry. As she peers into her granddaughter’s eyes, Grandma explains to her friend, “You know Roger’s granddad had blue eyes. Something about like this” (15). Rachel’s grandmother diminishes Mor’s influence on Rachel’s genetic makeup. Based on purely genetic reasoning, the indication that Roger’s granddad had blue eyes points to the hybridity of his own background, and should make Rachel even less genetically Black, if raciality was indeed based on fractional numbers. Instead, Rachel’s grandmother uses the information to stake further claim on Rachel’s descent from Black ancestors and downplay the influence of her mother’s Danish genetic influence, even though Roger’s granddad could himself be considered multi-racial.

Skin color can be the most identifiable characteristic for bi- or multi-racial individuals.

Rachel's skin tone sets her apart from her new community more than any other external feature.

Rachel shares:

I am light-skinned-ed. That's what the other kids say. And I talk white. I think new things when they say this. There are a lot of important things I didn't know about. I think Mor didn't know either. They tell me it is bad to have ashy knees. They say stay out of the rain so my hair doesn't go back. They say white people don't use washrags, and I realize now, at Grandma's, I do. They have a language I don't know but I understand. (10)

Rachel learns that the external has very little to do with being considered a Black person. Even though she is "light-skinned-ed" and she "talks white," and possesses the incongruent blue eyes, these are not characteristics that would prevent her from being considered Black. Brian Bantum explains in "'A Future Unwritten': Blackness between the Religious Invocations of Heidi Durrow and Zadie Smith," that "the various particularities—language, food, religion—serve to stabilize the visual hermeneutic. Rachel is caught in the disjuncture of this hermeneutic, looking black but "being" another (Danish? immigrant?)" (662). Even though many of Rachel's outward characteristics can be considered to be inherited from her White mother, it is primarily the cultural element that points to her difference.

Bi- or multi-racial individuals may feel pigeonholed by existing racial categories. There appears to be no room for the dual racial identity Rachel feels inside, since externally everyone will view her mono-racially regardless of what she wants. Her aunt's boyfriend Drew gives Rachel the book *Black Skin, White Masks*. She shares: "Then there's page 173: 'Wherever he goes, the Negro remains a Negro.'" That makes me think of how the other black girls in school think I want to be white. They call me an Oreo. I don't want to be white. Sometimes I want to go back to being what I was. I want to be nothing" (148). The alternative she seeks is to be seen as without race, which is no longer a viable option due to the racial consciousness of her new

community. Agata Lubowicka in "I Want to be Nothing": Challenging Notions of Culture, Race and Identity" explains that "if we all are mixed, then there are no oppositions any longer and all notions of race, culture and identity are useless. 'Being nothing' becomes in this way a new possibility to stop seeing things and people as eternally contrasting with each other" (80). Her mother, an immigrant unaware of the racial hierarchy in America, raises Rachel without an understanding of racial categorization. Placed in a racialized environment, Rachel can only see what she is not supposed to acknowledge, but what should already be part of her cultural knowledge.

In response to negative reception by their minority communities, bi- or multi-racial individuals may choose to reject or distance themselves from the White mainstream. In order to retain an uncontested position within the mono-racial Black community, Rachel feels that she cannot be seen as being connected to White society. Not only does she withhold her mixed-race identity from others, but she also refrains from being caught associating with anyone who is White. Rachel says, "I don't ever mention that I'm related to white people. And most of the time I try not to let the black girls like Tamika see me talk to Tracy, because Tracy is a white girl. And the way they say that - white girl - it feels like a dangerous thing to be" (28). Over time, Rachel views the portion of her identity associated with her White mother as a deficiency among her peers. To admit her mother was White would be to admit she can be considered something "dangerous." Rachel shares that her grandmother criticizes Rachel's Aunt Loretta for being "High Falutin' and then she calls it 'white' - like the kids at school" (33), but Grandma also encourages "Pop and Aunt Loretta to know white things ..." (28), in order to gain access to the perceived privilege these "white things" can bring. Rachel's delayed arrival in the Black community puts her in a position to recognize the incongruity between attempting to avoid the

perception of acting white and the value of possessing certain qualities that are considered White.

It is the contradictory relationship between valuing attributes that are considered to be White for the access to power and privilege and rejecting individuals with those same attributes for being inauthentic to a mono-racial community that is the absurd plight of the multi-racial individual. The contradiction exists because bi- or multi-racial individuals possessing White, or whiter, attributes may be accused of wanting to “pass” as White. Once Rachel has been somewhat accepted as part of the mono-racial Black community, Rachel realizes that expectations for her future are limited by her grandmother’s narrow perspective of possibility. “The way Grandma paints her dream for me, there’s a low sky ... Grandma’s dreams come from hearing about Up North when she was growing up in Texas on a farm, on a road that had no name. Grandma’s dream is bigger than her life” (149). Grandma’s reality of possibility was formed within a mono-racial community, tied to the regional idea of the South and the opportunities afforded to communities of color in the mythical North. While some of her grandmother’s perspective varies based on generational differences, casting a “low sky” over Rachel will keep her from flying away from the established community ties that have been formed. However, as Lubowicka explains, “Rachel feels she wants more and she is more than the black community around her wants her to be” (78). It is not Rachel’s multi-raciality that will open doors closed to those who are Black, but her capacity for imagining the future that can propel her beyond her grandmother’s shallow dreams.

Striving to achieve beyond her grandmother’s idea of success places Rachel’s character directly in line with the trope of the tragic mulatto. In “The Mulatta as Cultural and Political Text, Or It can’t be Too Easy to be One of a Kind,” Tracyann Williams explains that “the

melodrama of the generic passing plot is also characterized by the ‘tragic mulatto/a,’ a key narrative figure in passing fiction. According to the fiction, the tragic mulatto/a is torn between the sweet, simple ways of the black community and the intellectual strivings of the white middle class” (15). Rachel’s consideration of the alternatives outside of her grandmother’s perception of opportunity breaks her already tenuous ties to a mono-racial Black community. To move beyond expectations and pursue a limitless future potentially damages her place in her Black community but opens pathways to construct a new version of herself in the world.

“A full shade lighter. Albino almost ... Less than” (de la Peña 2).

For some bi- or multi-racial individuals, the desirable outcome is to be seen without racial ambiguity by their minority communities. Danny Lopez, a teenager whose father is Mexican and mother is White, has not fallen uninitiated into the culture of his father’s family, but wants nothing more than to be considered a part of his father’s Mexican American community. Unlike Rachel’s unexpected introduction to raciality in America, Danny is already well aware of the cultural divisions presented by his bi-racial identity. When Danny arrives to spend a summer with his father’s family he “cringes at how different he must seem to his cousin’s friends. They’re all dark chocolate-colored, hair sprayed up, dressed in pro jerseys and Dickies, Timberlands. Gold and silver chains. Calligraphy-style tats. Danny’s skin is too clean, too light, his clothes too soft” (3). Danny primarily lives with his mother in an affluent neighborhood, but he has been dropped for visits to his Mexican-side of the family for holidays. Danny sees the visible signs of economic prosperity where he normally resides as a marker that sets him apart from the streetwise style and authenticity of his father’s town. Danny feels he is an

outsider to the well-defined Mexican American community, as well as being an outsider to the privileged White environment from which he comes.

The way bi- or multi-racial individuals are viewed hinges on the environment in which they find themselves. Similar to Rachel's experience within the mono-racial Black American community, Danny finds that his racial identity shifts depending upon his audience. He is subject to the concept of hypodescent when he is in a primarily White town, while within the mono-racial Mexican community he feels his skin color distinguishes him as an outsider. Danny describes himself: "Brown. Half-Mexican brown. A shade darker than all the white kids at his private high school, Leucadia Prep ... But whenever Danny comes down here, to National City - where his dad grew up, where all his aunts and uncles and cousins still live - he feels pale. A full shade lighter. Albino almost ... Less than" (2). Even though his skin pigmentation is dark enough to identify him as a Mexican within the White community, Danny believes his skin color is not dark enough to sustain a Mexican identity in his perceived view of the mono-racial Mexican community. In Monika Kaup's anthology *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues* (2002), Kaup explains that it is "an emphasis on a Mexican context in understanding Chicano mestizaje leads to a kind of litmus test for ethnic identity. The somatic manifestation of "Indianness" becomes the marker of one's identity" (165). Indigenous Mexican "Indian" features, including a darker skin tone, signify belonging to the community, while lighter skin takes away from Danny's feeling of being authentically Mexican. Paired with Danny's insecurity over language and cultural deficiencies, Danny's physical deviation from commonly considered Indian traits increases the alienation he experiences.

The diversity of a mono-racial minority community can sometimes be falsely reduced to a simplistic stereotype. Danny sees a version of himself through the lens of those in the Mexican

American community of National City. He uses a metaphorical yardstick to measure his external visage against what he views as the standard of authenticity to be a member of the community. Bettez explains that “although by government delineation Latino is not considered a race, Latinos often view themselves and are treated as peoples from a distinct racial category” (142). De la Peña’s novel shows a homogenous Mexican American community in National City, a place of distinct cultural identity and language. Danny’s experience of the cultural environment within the Lopez family, the visual cues and the importance of a common, shared language, supports the idea of a distinct mono-racial community.

Bi- or multi-racial individuals may feel they lack essential skills that are needed to be an authentic member of their minority community. While he focuses on the feelings that arise from his immediately apparent external differences, Danny also struggles with other aspects of community authenticity. Since Danny has had limited contact with his father and his father’s family, he has not acquired the language. Danny’s father “mostly spoke Spanish, but Danny never learned. All he had was his mom’s English. And he didn’t want that anymore. Up in Leucadia it was easy. Nobody paid him any attention anyway because he was Mexican ... down here, where everybody’s skin is dark, everybody seems to be coming at him” (16). While with his mother at home, Danny’s racial difference renders him invisible, but in National City he is singled out because of his difference. Danny explains his failed attempts to perform a neighborhood ritual when “Raul and Lolo try to run him through a neighborhood handshake and laugh when he fumbles it three straight times” (13). Danny believes that his actions should flow as naturally as those who have grown up in the Mexican American community, despite the fact that he has not had the same firsthand experiences. Kaup explains how external appearance and cultural knowledge can work together to form ethnic identity: “The test of ethnic identity can be

tied to one's linguistic skills— fluency with code-switching, bilingualism, slang— one's clothes, one's taste in music, economic condition, place of domicile, nationality, etc. Chicano/a ethnic identity becomes essentialized, premised on meeting quite specific physical or social conditions” (165). The community members' easy demeanor are only expressions of lifelong immersion in that particular society. In the absence of social competence, the bi- or multi-racial individual feels that s/he fails to demonstrate the group's ethnic identity.

If language is viewed as a crucial aspect of acculturation, bi- or multi-racial individuals who cannot speak the languages of the minority group remain isolated from the community. While Danny's outward appearance and shaky grasp of social expectations set him apart immediately, it is his lack of Spanish fluency that builds impenetrable walls between him and those around him. He feels sharply the inability to fluently switch between English and Spanish, to follow the pattern of discourse as his family and peers naturally move from one language to another. Danny feels excluded from essentially every social interaction. At a family gathering, Danny says that “all his tíos and tías and cousins are cracking on each other,” but “since their snaps are a random mix of both Spanish and English, Danny gets only half of every joke. Not enough to laugh. But he laughs anyway” (46). In a cruel twist, Danny understands portions of the conversations, but the intelligible segments result in a fractured view of the information. The partial comprehension causes Danny to feel he needs to provide a response to be involved. When Danny reacts to a joke at the family gathering, he can tell that “they know he doesn't quite have the whole picture ... And he knows they know ... This is why sometimes he feels as out of place at his grandma's as he does at Leucadia Prep” (46). Danny sees himself as he believes his family must view him. The Spanish language has become a secret code for Danny to break. Language is

the key to understanding the cultural elements to which he has not been exposed. With only part of the picture, a mere sliver of understanding, Danny is stuck on the outside.

Just as the lack of essential skills can separate bi- or multi-racial individuals from their minority communities, proficiency in attributes typical to the mainstream can also cause divisions. It is not just a matter of Danny speaking and understanding Spanish fluently, but being locked out from belonging to a community whose culture and language is devalued by the English-speaking society. Danny is only able to speak the language of the people who are at the top of the racial hierarchy in America. Even within the mono-racial Mexican community, the devaluing of the Spanish language in preference to the dominant English language serves to highlight Danny's otherness.

Family members and peers may inadvertently humiliate bi- or multi-racial individuals when their social standing is elevated based on their racial difference. For example, the family's view of Danny as special or more likely to be successful in the world only reinforces his feelings of exclusion. Even when he is treated as the distinguished guest at his grandmother's table, it only further elucidates his outsider status. The unspoken classification of value at the mono-racial family dinner table places Danny at the top of the hierarchy due to his bi-racial identity. The typical hierarchy based on the elevation of rank on advanced age or perceived power within the family is overshadowed by the external societal influence of the dominant White society. Danny observes that even his grandmother is "almost ashamed of being Mexican," (46) which she demonstrates by rewarding her grandson's bi-racial identity with the first hot tortilla. Kaup explains that "within the various Chicano and Mexicano communities from which ethnic identities emerge, the devaluation of the indigenous, of the racial Other, carries with it a potent charge" (174). When Danny's grandmother shows she is "almost ashamed," she recognizes her

position on the hierarchy and wishes to elevate her grandson to be closer to the supposed White ideal.

The minority community in which the bi-racial or multi-racial individual lives may believe that mainstream knowledge will promote upward mobility. In contrast to Durrow's Rachel, who feels held back by the low expectations her grandmother has for her future, Danny's family sees his bi-raciality and access to White society as the key to achieving his dreams. Danny speculates that "they all genuinely want him to succeed, to rise above the family history ... But at the same time, he bets they subconsciously resent him, too" (48). His family is aware that Danny's access to White society is something that they themselves can never achieve. The family can see the advantage of Danny's background. Danny's situation can be compared to the Mestizos who were able to navigate between both the European and Mexican communities. Strmic-Pawl explains that historically, "the Spanish had relationships with indigenous Mexicans whose descendants came to be known as 'Mestizos.' Mestizos, in their society, were considered to be more inherently successful and socially adept (Hunter 2004)" (65). The Mestizos had privileges that the native Mexicans did not, since the Mestizos' cultural knowledge and outward appearance made assimilating into the dominant culture possible. Danny occupies space in the mainstream and Mexican communities that his relatives and friends cannot access.

Members of minority communities may believe that they have nothing in common with bi- or multi-racial individuals. While the family's respectful treatment reinforces Danny's feeling of being an outsider, the peers he encounters in National City only exacerbate his feelings of racial insecurity by pointing out how out of place he is in this environment. When he first meets his cousin's friends, his differences are what they notice. Uno observes that if "he saw this private school cat at his school, he'd walk right on by. Think he was just some damn

skateboarder or something. A kid he'd have nothing in common with" (143). Danny does not fit into Uno's understanding of what a person should look or act like within the National City, Mexican American environment. Uno makes the assumption that the two would have "nothing in common" based upon the idea that Danny must be affiliated with the Whites he resembles. Uno essentially writes off Danny as a feasible friend based upon a perceived lack of cultural authenticity. Although Danny would be considered to be Mexican in Leucadia with his mother, in National City he is not. Shane T. Moreman in "Memoir as Performance: Strategies of Hybrid Ethnic Identity," observes that cultural performance augments personal authenticity when "we repeat a category of identity and therefore provide a socially recognizable performance of that identity. If there is no recognition, then we risk invalidation and alienation by our surrounding community" (352-353). In a sense, Danny sees that the others believe him to be a fraud. Each interaction with a member of the community is fraught with the realization that he is lying about his legitimacy.

In the manner of Du Bois' "double-consciousness," (2) bi- and multi-racial individuals may be consumed by the thought of how others view them. Danny sees himself through the lens of the community members as they wonder about the cultural knowledge he lacks. At a party, Danny is approached by three girls: "'He doesn't even speak Spanish,' one of them says. 'Told you he was a halfie. You could tell 'cause how he dresses'" (152). He has been maligned as being a "halfie" for the dilution of his Mexican cultural knowledge, as well as his lighter complexion and his inability to speak Spanish. The girl can tell he's a "halfie," because he lacks the credibility of a true Mexican, i.e., one who speaks Spanish and reflects the cultural norms of the community. Miri Song and Caitlin O'Neill Gutierrez in "'Keeping the Story Alive': Is Ethnic

and Racial Dilution Inevitable for Multiracial People and Their Children?” explain that the sum of a person’s cultural knowledge can form an individual’s identity:

Knowledge of and interest in one’s ethnic or racial heritage can be experienced as deeply personal, manifested perhaps in everyday identity ascription as it is informed by family ancestry, but it may also be public in the sense of a collective or political racial/ethnic group affiliation or ‘imagined community’ identification through knowledge about past heritage (Anderson, 1983). (680-681)

The “imagined community” of National City is formed by the shared history of language and traditions, but also the insult of being barred from privilege, hidden from view, and maligned by a negative view of their collective potential.

The perceptions of others within the minority community may reinforce the bi- or multi-racial individual’s feelings of being an outsider. Danny finds himself on the outside looking into the Mexican American community. While he considers the lives of his family and friends in National City to be preferable to life with his mother in the affluent Leucadia, Danny’s idealized version of the community borders on the picturesque. Danny’s limited perspective prevents him from seeing the reality of the Mexican American experience within National City. Uncle Ray speculates on why Danny’s father might have not taught Danny Spanish: “What I don’t get, D, is why your old man never taught you Spanish ... I think maybe he didn’t want you to be a Mexican. You know he gots a big-ass chip on his shoulder ‘bout that, right? He gets pissed off about how Mexicans get treated. Maybe he didn’t want it to happen to you” (87). Uncle Ray acknowledges that Danny is not truly Mexican. One can surmise that Uncle Ray has also been upset “about how Mexicans get treated,” since he shares this perspective with Danny. Unlike Danny, Uncle Ray is part of the mono-racial community that excludes Danny based on his bi-raciality. While Uncle Ray provides this information to Danny in a complimentary tone, this information only underscores how vastly different Danny’s experience is from Uncle Ray’s or

his father's. The underlying impression is that the bi-racial experience is inherently separate from the minority community.

“There he is. He thinks he's something all right. Because he's part white. Don't you, half-breed?” (Silko 52-53).

Bi-racial or multi-racial individuals may be rejected by their minority communities altogether. In Silko's *Ceremony*, Tayo is punished for his mother's sins against his Laguna Pueblo tribe. She leaves the reservation, becomes a prostitute, and gives birth to her illegitimate son, Tayo. Auntie reveals that the source of the trouble began “when Little Sister had started drinking wine and riding in cars with white men and Mexicans, the people could not define their feeling about her. The Catholic priest shook his finger at the drunkenness and lust, but the people felt something deeper: they were losing her, they were losing part of themselves” (63). The other transgressions might have been forgiven if Tayo's mother had not gone off with “white men and Mexicans,” because leaving the reservation shows that she had broken away from the community. Unlike the subtler experiences of Rachel and Danny, Tayo is openly ostracized by family and peers. While Rachel is primarily considered to be a Black girl and Danny's social position within his Mexican American family is elevated, Tayo's bi-raciality blocks him from being considered an authentic member of his community. Especially by his aunt, Tayo is viewed as the visible break from the traditional Laguna. Even though Tayo is defined by his life on the reservation, he is made to feel that he not there legitimately.

The minority community may view the bi-racial or multi-racial individual as a hated reminder of past persecution and continued suffering. Tayo's experience of living on the emotional and physical outskirts of his community begins when he is a young boy. He resides

with his aunt and uncle, but his position within the family is degraded by the memory of his mother's shame. The family has a difficult time seeing Tayo as a person separate from the decisions his mother made before he was born. In the past, his aunt tries to mitigate the damage done to the family's reputation by his mother's actions, but Tayo's presence is a constant reminder of her younger sister's indiscretions. Tayo wonders how her contempt at his presence will next be revealed:

Many years ago she had taken him to conceal the shame of her younger sister. Now she stood over the bed and looked at him, and if he opened his eyes, he knew he would see her probing for new shame, the anticipation of what she might find swelling inside her. What would it be this time? (27)

From the moment Tayo arrives, his aunt views him as an outsider. Since he is visibly bi-racial, she cannot see beyond his external image to see the influence of the community upon his developing sense of self. She awaits further confirmation of Tayo's otherness and additional affirmation of her value as an authentic member of the community. The more she distances Tayo from the core of the Laguna, the more she affirms the purity of the tribe. The further she pushes Tayo to the outside, the less damage she feels is inflicted by her sister's sexual relations with the White men who represent the source of all Laguna trouble. Sollors asserts that "mixed [relations] of all sorts, and especially marital unions between whites and Indians or whites and Afro-Americans, often appeared dangerous in American literature, the offspring of such unions doomed. The mulatto and half-breed themes were inevitably tragic or horrifying" (224). Since Tayo is the result of this supposedly damaging union between a Laguna woman and a White man, Tayo's place in his society is untenable. While Durrow's Rachel is absorbed into the mono-racial identifying Black community and de la Peña's Danny is elevated to a higher social standing within his family and among his peers, Tayo is not accepted as a community member because his very presence serves as a reminder of the tribe's oppression.

The minority community may openly ostracize bi- or multi-racial individuals and show favoritism towards other “full-blooded” members. For example, although Tayo has known nothing but life on the Laguna reservation and he has been raised in his aunt and uncle’s home alongside his cousin Rocky, it is Rocky who is favored above the “mixed-breed” Tayo. The two boys have only limited experience with the outside world. Within the isolated environment of his Auntie’s home, Tayo is continually reminded of his inferior status when compared to the rightful place Rocky occupies in the home and the Laguna community. Auntie makes sure to reward Rocky’s Laguna status while simultaneously making Tayo’s position as an outsider more pronounced:

When she was alone with the boys, she kept Rocky close to her; while she kneaded the bread, she gave Rocky little pieces of dough to play with; while she darned socks, she gave him scraps of cloth and a needle and thread to play with. She was careful that Rocky did not share these things with Tayo, that they kept a distance between themselves and him. But she would not let Tayo go outside or play in another room alone. She wanted him close enough to feel excluded, to be aware of the distance between them. (61-62)

Auntie wants Tayo to feel that he is an outsider to the community. She not only ensures that Rocky will not share his playthings, but that Tayo must suffer in the presence of the disparity between the two children. She does not want to hide her favoritism but wishes to call attention to Tayo’s inferiority in her eyes. Edith Swan in "Laguna Prototypes of Manhood in *Ceremony*." explains the juxtaposition drawn by Tayo’s aunt in her relationship with the two boys: “Tayo appears as the converse of Rocky, hence he may serve as a counter for his brother ... Auntie treats the boys differentially, even though both stand in a relationship where each would call her "naiya" or mother” (44). Even though Auntie raises both boys under her roof, Auntie wants Tayo to know that his bi-racial background will always exclude him from being a whole participant in the family and within the Laguna community.

In some instances, bi- or multi-racial individuals may be considered too flawed to succeed within the mainstream world, while those who identify as single-race may be encouraged to move beyond previous impediments. For example, the limited experience of the world outside of the Laguna community is enough for Rocky to decide that success can only be off of the reservation. Rocky's trajectory will take him well beyond the limited means on the reservation and out into the conspicuously lucrative White society. Despite Rocky's mono-raciality, his Laguna family believes he will be the most successful in White society. Rocky has the benefit of everyone supporting the idea of a "future he had lived for since he first began to believe in the word 'someday' the way white people do" (67). It is a contradiction that Rocky is encouraged to move beyond the reservation and into the White world, when the bi-racial Tayo is prevented from establishing his own identity beyond the one that is tied to the reservation. Tayo wants to move beyond the circumstance of his birth, "but Auntie stared at him the way she always had, reaching inside him with her eyes, calling up the past as if it were his future too, as if things would always be the same for him" (27). Tayo's mother's indiscretion with a White man and her untimely death prevent Tayo from fully participating in tribal life. He is stuck without the benefit of moving beyond her death or the finite prospects on the reservation.

There is fear behind the acceptance of children resulting from mixed racial relationships because there is the feeling that the community will be disrupted by the influx of the non-native into a mostly mono-racial environment. Sollors says that the fear resides in the visibility of the bi-racial individual, and as such, "were not to be viewed as architects of their own fates. In the American imagination, mixed bloods were the culmination of the fear of losing generations" (226). Tayo serves as a constant reminder of the continued oppression on the reservation and of the desperate acts that some in the tribal community choose to make in an attempt to expand

upon their limited options. Since Tayo's mother has a child from a White man, Tayo's presence in the community is not only viewed as an insult to the Laguna tribe, but his body is the physical manifestation of the community's loss of cohesiveness. The tribe had already lost Tayo's mother, and now they are confronted with a daily reminder of the reasons why they are stuck on the reservation and living without hope. Within this perspective, Tayo is also seen as incapable of achieving any level of success on or outside of the reservation. He is stuck between the world of the reservation and the opportunity in White society.

The presence of bi- or multi-racial individuals can establish the precedent that there is the need to police racial boundaries and protect the tenuous nature of the pure, mono-racial community. Despite Auntie's embarrassment over Tayo's unwholesome birth, his racial difference elevates her status within the community as a continual sufferer. "Those who measured life by counting the crosses would not count her sacrifices for Rocky the way they counted her sacrifices for her dead sister's half-breed child" (27). In Auntie's view, caring for the bi-racial Tayo is unlike the normal sacrifice a mother makes for her child, and in her sanctimony, she is justified in viewing her minimal acceptance of him as enough. He represents everything that is incongruent between the two cultures and she believes she must be vigilant in her watch against his impurity. Tayo knows "she had always watched him more closely than Rocky," (27) knowing that whatever mistakes he made would reflect badly on her role as his guardian. He is not considered to be wholly part of the family, but the Laguna community would know that Auntie permits him to live in her home. From the time Tayo is abandoned by his mother, he is atoning for her sins under the watchful eye of his aunt. As Kaup mentions, historically "persons of mixed Indian and European ancestry who, for whatever reasons, are not regarded as either Indian or white are referred to, often pejoratively, as 'halfbreeds,' 'breeds,' 'mixed-bloods,'

‘Métis,’ ‘michif,’ or ‘non-status Indian.’ Collectively, they are characterized by an almost universal landlessness and an oppressive poverty ...” (185). Tayo is not brought into his aunt and uncle’s home as a true member of his family. Even though he has been raised since a young boy by Auntie, nothing he does can include him in the community inheritance. He lives on the reservation without feeling that he belongs on the land or in Auntie’s home. Tayo is essentially homeless and dependent upon the charity of his family for support.

Some mono-racial communities may view bi- or multi-racial individuals as continued proof of the disintegration of traditional life and values. Auntie’s need to vigilantly watch Tayo’s influence on the family is based on the fear she feels as she watches her Laguna dwindle before her eyes. Since she is so aware of the swirling gossip on the reservation, she believes that the shame brought on by Little Sister’s bad choices has irreparably damaged the heart of the Laguna community. She tries to fix the injury inflicted by the exodus of young Laguna and minimize the impact of Tayo’s visible bi-racial presence. However, Auntie feels the only remedy can be to push away the inferior Tayo and try to find a original and pure Laguna. She tries “desperately to reconcile the family with the people; the old instinct had always been to gather the feelings and opinions that were scattered through the village ... But now the feelings were twisted, tangled roots, and all the names for the source of this growth were buried under English words, out of reach” (64). Not only does Tayo represent the entanglement of the White with the Native American, but the mixture of the two cultures prevents clear communication that could bring the community closer together. As with de la Peña’s Danny, Tayo is also trapped outside the community based partly on the inability to understand and communicate in a native language. However, despite the appearance of a mono-racial Laguna community, as Brennan points out, “most Native Americans are mixed bloods (the 1910 census reported ‘full-blood’ Indians at 46.3

percent); the process of hybridization began centuries ago and continues today” (11). Auntie believes that the spirit of the Laguna has been corrupted by the intrusion of White society upon the singular body of the one Laguna people. However, the infiltration of outside cultures has already undermined the supposed purity of the people.

It is not only the existence of mixed-race individuals within the purportedly single-race environment of the reservation that dictates the outsider status of individuals like Tayo, because there has already been cultural blending: “[T]he vast majority of Native Americans are mixed blood (and only partially racially Indian), and where the measurement of Indian blood quantum cannot possibly be the determining factor in tribal affiliation; cultural and political affiliations are likely to become the prevailing factors in determining ‘Indianness’” (Brennan 11). Despite the circumstances surrounding Tayo’s birth, he could have been presented by his family as an authentic “Indian,” reinforced by his mother’s cultural inheritance. As a prominent person within her community, Auntie had the influence to cast Tayo as an legitimate member of the family, but she decides instead to distance him from the culture within which he is immersed. She holds Tayo at arm’s length. Auntie actively prevents Tayo from learning the ways of the Laguna and blames him for the destruction of the old ways of life.

Despite growing up within the minority community, bi- or multi-racial individuals may be prevented from inheriting essential cultural knowledge. When Tayo is incapacitated from the illness brought on by the White man’s war, his grandmother suggests that they take him to a medicine man to cure his malady. Auntie responds to old Grandma: “Oh, I don’t know, Mama. You know how they are. You know what people will say if we ask for a medicine man to help him. Someone will say it’s not right. They’ll say, ‘Don’t do it. He’s not full blood anyway’” (30). Not only is Tayo prevented from being seen as fully Laguna, Auntie also believes that he should

not benefit from their cultural traditions. Since Tayo has been viewed as an outsider from the beginning, it would be inappropriate for him to receive the healing power from the traditional medicine man. It is in the cultural rituals of the Laguna that Tayo can find healing and fully become part of the community. He needs to understand the culture that has been kept from him. Concannon explains “to help him further this understanding of the world, Tayo's Grandma calls for the help of the traditional medicine man, Ku'oosh, grounding Tayo's growth in terms of past rituals (2). It is in the cultural traditions and the language of the Laguna that Tayo can find the key to joining the community from which he has been wholly excluded most of his life. When Tayo reluctantly visits the Ku'oosh, the medicine man, with his uncle, Tayo is made aware of his ignorance of traditional knowledge:

Ku'oosh continued slowly, in a soft chanting voice, saying, ‘Maybe you don’t know some of these things,’ vaguely acknowledging the distant circumstance of an absent white father. He called Josiah by his Indian name and said, ‘If he had known then maybe he could have told you before you went to the white people’s big war. (32)

Tayo’s lack of cultural knowledge prevents him from seeing the whole picture before him. He is unable to make good decisions, because he is not aware of the traditional knowledge that would have been passed down to him from his father. His uncle, who would have been the next relative to teach Tayo the traditional ways, does not share this information.

Individuals who identify as a single-race may fear the unknown future that bi- or multi-racial individuals represent. The fear of losing generations makes Auntie unable to see the genuineness of Tayo’s spirit, as he fights to heal himself and his community from the damage that has been done after generations of abuse. He is the most oppressed among the Laguna people. When Tayo visits a woman who shares the distinction of “Mexican eyes,” and who also

lives on the outside of the assumed to be mono-racial reservation and White societies, she shares that their bi-racial presence makes the community:

afraid, Tayo. They feel something happening, they can see something happening around them, and it scares them. Indians or Mexicans or whites - most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children have the same color skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing.' She laughed softly. 'They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves. (92)

In the distraction over purity, Auntie does not see that the world has already changed around them. Auntie's own Christian faith is in direct opposition to the traditional Laguna view of the world, but her own wandering is not seen as betrayal. However, the mixed-race body represents the treachery of a community under attack by the loss of a relevant cultural presence. Auntie cannot accept her bi-racial adopted son as an authentic member of the community, because to do so would be to acknowledge that traditions change. Sollors indicates that is "the purists' own unwillingness to accept the mixed after-generations as theirs is seen as the 'loss' of the children ..." (224). Auntie's refusal to see Tayo as a legitimate member of the Laguna tribe can be blamed on her own inability to adjust with the changing times. She already viewed Little Sister as lost to the people, but she could have regained Tayo as part of the Laguna.

Bi-racial or multi-racial individuals may be subject to verbal abuse that reinforces their inferior status within the society. Tayo is most obviously influenced by his Auntie's rejection, but he is also limited by his own feelings of inferiority based on the perspective of peers within the Laguna community. Just as Durrow's Rachel has to tolerate the assumptions of peers, Tayo is accused of believing he is better than the other Laguna who identify mono-racially. His constant antagonist Emo taunts him saying, "There he is. He thinks he's something all right. Because he's part white. Don't you, half-breed?" (52). Tayo wants nothing more than to blend into the community, but his outward appearance is a constant reminder of his difference and of his

family's shame. He is considered less than the others because he is an illegitimate orphan with a nameless White father. Tayo is the target of vitriol, because the White society represents affluence that is not available for those on the reservation. Even though Tayo's bi-racial status does not offer him any additional opportunity within the White society, which views him as mono-racially Native American, it is assumed that Tayo believes his bi-raciality elevates him above the others. Conversely, Tayo is considered to have acquired negative generalizations of the Native American, but nothing that would qualify him to be considered a true Laguna. Emo further taunts: "You drink like an Indian, and you're crazy like one too - but you aren't shit, white trash. You love Japs the way your mother loved to screw white men" (58). Tayo is censured for drinking heavily and acting crazily after returning from the war. He is considered to be a traitor to the Laguna, based on his mental illness brought on by battle fatigue. It is assumed that his mother "loved to screw white men," when the reality is that the men and women who flee the Laguna reservation and are caught up in disreputable activities are attempting to survive in a society set up to oppress them.

As depicted in the novels, despite being unrecognized as members of their minority communities, bi- and multi-racial individuals may demonstrate a deep understanding of their cultural history. Emo does not identify the ways in which Tayo follows more closely the traditional Laguna life that Emo has shunned. Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter in "Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*: Healing Ethnic Hatred by Mixed-Breed Laughter" asserts that "[Emo] slanders [against] Tayo's best qualities as an Indian, for he loves caves and pictographs which are connected to the traditional religion (34-35, 231), recognizes his bond with the Japanese people (62, 124), he works hard to secure and care for the family cattle (184-197, 224), and loves women in a fully sacred, sexual way that Emo has no notion (98-100, 176-181, 227)"

(Evasdaughter 90). Tayo is much closer to the positive Laguna archetype than Emo could ever strive to be. Despite being cast as an outsider within his community, Tayo exhibits Laguna values. Since Tayo is trapped by his circumstances and limited by the low expectations of others, he is in the position to absorb the cultural heritage others have lost by seeking their fortunes off of the reservation.

In the three novels, minority family and peers establish overwhelming obstacles that prevent the bi-racial characters from feeling included as authentic members of the community. In a myriad of ways, all three protagonists are confronted with an external view of themselves with which they do not agree. While Durrow's Rachel is accepted as the single-race "new girl" by her grandmother and aunt, her peer group finds her White features to be disturbing. De la Peña depicts Danny's family as having internalized the stigma attached to being Mexican in America, preferring to believe that Danny's bi-raciality will help to propel him to a better fate than what he can find in National City. In response to Silko's Tayo, family members and peers torture him with the prospect of always existing on the periphery of his society. Through their double consciousness, the three protagonists are painfully aware of the fraudulent images of authentic community members they present. However, instead of accepting the external view of their bi-raciality as an impediment to belonging, the young protagonists move beyond the preconceived notions of their difference by choosing to redefine themselves in relation to the mainstream and their minority communities.

CHAPTER TWO: SELF DISCOVERED

Mixed-Race Individuals Choosing to Define Their Own Racial Identities

While the bi-racial experience is only one part of the complex protagonists in all three novels, each finds racial difference prevents him or her from being accepted by their respective communities. Separation from the community can intensify the need to establish a solid identity of one's own, thereby establishing a situation where solidifying a racial identity is a problem that requires a solution. When bi-racial individuals are not recognized as belonging to their minority community, they may struggle to find a way to interact with authenticity from the place of difference. Amina Chaudhri and William H. Teale establish the concept of "In/Visibility" in their article "Stories of Multiracial Experiences in Literature for Children, Ages 9–14" to explain the bi- and multi-racial individual experience of being conspicuous and simultaneously irrelevant within their communities: "We labeled this category In/Visibility (rather than Invisibility or Visibility) because it captures the concurrent state of being both highly visible—owing to a racially ambiguous appearance—and at the same time marginalized because of it" (366). The communities in the novels being discussed call attention to individual divergence from group norms and define the bi-racial character by these differences, but at the same time refuse to acknowledge the bi-racial protagonist's position within the minority community. The characters are cognizant of how they are viewed externally but find that their efforts to change the community's perspective are met with resistance or can even amplify the negative feelings toward them. The protagonists are not seen for who they are, whether it is being viewed mono-racially or as an outsider.

The protagonists are determined to fit into their respective communities in a way that reflects their own sense of racial identity. However, the problem of their identity lies not within themselves, but within society's stringent perception of raciality. The tragedy of their lives is only in the lack of acceptance from the outside. In his autobiographical novel *The Color of Water*, James McBride shares his mother's reaction to the idea of mixed-race individuals being doomed to live lives of obscurity and unhappiness:

One afternoon I came home from school and cornered Mommy while she was cooking dinner. "Ma, what's a tragic mulatto?" I asked.

Anger flashed across her face like lightning and her nose, which tends to redden and swell in anger, blew up like a balloon. "Where'd you hear that?" she asked.

"I read it in a book."

"For God's sake, you're no tragic mul--What book is this?"

"Just a book I read."

"Don't read that book anymore." She sucked her teeth. "Tragic mulatto. What a stupid thing to call somebody! Somebody called you that?"

"No."

"Don't ever use that term."

"Am I black or white?"

"You're a human being," she snapped. "Educate yourself or you'll be a nobody!"

"Will I be a black nobody or just a nobody?"

"If you're a nobody," she said dryly, "it doesn't matter what color you are." (91-92)

His mother's anger stems from the possibility that McBride will concede to the limitations that the outside world wants to place on his ability to achieve success and happiness. If the young McBride accepts the attitude of fateful misery based on his racial background, a tragic life is inevitable for him. McBride's mother refocuses his attention on the importance of growing internally and ignoring the false perception of inferiority put forth by society. In "Being and Being Mixed Race," Ronald R. Sundstrom explains that:

people are expected to be only one of these categories. Those who do not fit into this nation's racial typology are social anomalies, and are unwelcome reminders to society that race is fluid and that taboos against miscegenation have been

transgressed. It is difficult enough to make one's way through life in this society's racial categories; not clearly to belong to any of them is to compound anguish and alienation on an already challenging situation. (285)

All three protagonists discover that they cannot change the perspectives of those around them, but they can adjust their own ways of viewing their places in society. By carving a new path that neither denies nor wholly accepts all aspects of each cultural tradition, there is the implication that they have solved the problem of not fitting-in by rejecting the idea of being accepted altogether. Each of the three novels presents the individual as having found resolution to his/her inner conflict in the personal acknowledgement and acceptance of their multi-ethnicity, allowing each to forge deeper connections within their respective communities.

“Sometimes I think Grandma and Mor are two sides of the same coin. They are two sides of a coin that I can hold in my hand at the same time” (Darrow 149).

If an individual is not accepted within their respective minority community, an obvious response may be to withdraw or avoid connecting with others. When Rachel first arrives at her grandmother's house, she stills suffers from the shock of losing her mother and siblings. Recovering from her emotional tragedy, Rachel initially withdraws from those around her instead of becoming acclimated to her new environment. Rachel's outward appearance causes turmoil wherever she goes. She disassociates herself from the praise of traits unusual within the Black community by attributing them to a separate persona she names the “new girl.” It is not Rachel who receives the attention, but the new girl who does not fit in to the established norm of the community. Rachel sees the reaction her uncommon eye color has on others, but the attention only demonstrates that she is not accepted as being part of the mono-racial group. When she boards a bus in town with her grandmother, the bus driver comments: “Well, aren't those the

prettiest blue eyes on the prettiest little girl,” and Rachel feels then that “the new-girl feeling comes back and I smile” (3). Even though the bus driver compliments her features, he selects a feature that is tied to her difference. In fact, the compliment causes Rachel to withdraw back into her new-girl persona, a persona created as a way to distance herself from the memories of her mother and perform her new (and inauthentic) role within her grandmother’s household. Rachel disengages from real interactions with the community by creating the new girl to absorb the impact of not knowing how to fit in. Each positive or negative interaction is plastered onto her new girl framework until she has constructed what she sees as an acceptable version of herself: a Black girl who will hopefully have the skills and external bearing to navigate seamlessly through this new Black community. Rachel is dropped into a community fully formed but experiences the difference as being a type of rebirth into the new girl. A new girl who can learn how to be the person she is expected to be.

Bi- or multi-racial individuals may feel the need to present an inauthentic version of themselves while attempting to conform to the expectations of their minority communities. Rachel creates the new girl persona to remove herself from the confusion presented by her mother’s suicide, but also in order to place herself within an already established family and community. She has not been conscious of racial categories before, but within her new family she feels that “the new girl has no mother. The new girl can’t be new and still remember. I am not the new girl. But I will pretend” (6). The new girl can be constructed of new qualities but cannot draw from her past. Rachel remembers her White Danish mother, but the new girl must be completely immersed in the Black Southern community. Rachel initially chooses to toss aside her previous self, a child without racial consciousness, in order to be accepted by her new family. As Lubowicka points out, Rachel knows that it is self-deception: “It is obvious that Rachel is not

a 'new girl'. But the fact that she keeps saying that underlines the gap between Grandma's image of her and her own self-reflection (78). Rachel indicates that she will "pretend" to be the new girl, because she knows her grandmother expects her to move beyond her past and allow herself to become part of the community in which she now lives. As Rachel becomes more accustomed to her environment and its expectations, Rachel abandons the new girl persona. She finds that she can operate within the contradictions presented by being the Black girl with White features, as everyone seems to see her.

An option for many bi- and multi-racial individuals is to simply identify mono-racially with their minority community, if the inclusion is already generally established. As Rachel grows up within her grandmother's home, she establishes the belief that belonging to the community is inextricably tied to a purely homogenous Black identity. Rachel's primary role model is her Aunt Loretta, who demonstrates an untenable bond with the Black community while also asserting a strong sense of personal integrity. Rachel sees the example of Aunt Loretta as the only realistic option for her. Rachel comes to the conclusion that she will conform to expectations: "I guess I'll be someone like Aunt Loretta. Aunt Loretta is a black woman - the kind of woman I will be" (98). Rachel feels that she has to choose an identity, to select the option of being a "black woman," because it is not possible to assert her claim of bi-raciality without simultaneously separating herself from her community. Bantam explains that "Rachel is caught in the disjuncture of this hermeneutic, looking black but "being" another (Danish? immigrant?). As such, Durrow's invocation of history to make sense of Rachel's personhood aims to diffuse the totalizing effects of a racial dichotomy that is predicated on a constant interpretation of skin to make sense of one's cultural belonging" (662). Rachel recognizes that others view her from a mono-racial perspective, but she does not possess the collective history to make that identify feel

credible. The assumption is made that Rachel is a black woman, because she is being subsumed into the Black community through her relationship with her father's family. The fraudulent feelings that arise from her interactions encourage Rachel to continue to seek another option apart from considering herself to be mono-racial.

While the cultural component to Black (or Mexican, or Laguna Pueblo) identity may seem fixed, the required elements may shift with no clear rationale. Rachel is acutely affected by the illogic of racial categorization. Since she has had little interaction with her father's family before, Rachel is aware of raciality when others who are immersed in the community are nearly blind to it. Rachel observes the absurdity of categorizing by racial differences when she begins school in her new community: "Mrs. Anderson is homeroom and language arts. She is a black woman. I think about this and don't know why. It is something I'm supposed to know but not think about. Mrs. Anderson is my first black woman teacher" (9). Rachel attempts to make sense of this new environment around her. She realizes that the external marker of dark skin color has a significance that she should see as a natural, intrinsic part of a person; however, due to her transnational background and her mother's near raceless perspective, Rachel fixates upon the supposedly homogenous Black community in which she finds herself. Rachel reports that "[t]here are fifteen black people in the class and seven white people. And there's me" (9). She sees the distinct mono-racial categories of Black and White, but she feels that she cannot be so easily sorted into one or the other. Rachel's categorization would include variations between Black and White. Rachel's classification system would include the complexity of racial background that is overlooked in the Black community.

The finite definitions for racial categorization can limit bi- or multi-racial individuals' ability to find an identity that feels comfortable within the community. As Rachel attempts to

establish a solid sense of self within her new community, she finds that at the simplest level she is unable to begin. Both rejection by the minority community or “[b]elonging in human relations is connected to identity, both self-identification and identification with others” (142). Rachel does not see where she can be included, because she does not see anyone like herself. Even though there is another student who appears to be bi-racial, this student only adds to Rachel’s confusion because she identifies mono-rationally. Rachel remarks that “[t]here’s another girl who sits in the back. Her name is Carmen LaGuardia, and she has hair like mine, my same color skin, and she counts as black. I don’t understand how, but she seems to know” (9). Rachel identifies the inconsistencies she sees within the categorization of people in one racial group or another. Although Carmen essentially looks like she does, Rachel feels that she is missing some component that would allow her to also identify as part of the supposedly mono-racial Black community. Chaudhri and Teale explain that the idea of mono-raciality can serve to reinforce feelings of inadequacy for bi- or multi-racial individuals:

MRI/V [Mixed Race In/Visibility] books typically presented biracial characters in seemingly monoracial settings with monoracial characters who did not suffer identity crises because of their racial heritage ... Such a depiction reinscribes false notions of racial homogeneity and further locates the “problem” of being mixed within the character rather than in society. (366-367)

Rachel does not understand the attributes necessary to classify a person as belonging to one racial category or another, because she has not grown up in a racialized environment. She understands that there are unspoken differences, but she cannot apply a common set of rules to establish who belongs and who does not. Williams agrees that “the arbitrary nature of race reinforces the necessity of policing boundaries ... One good example is how Americans still apply a form of the one-drop rule to American blacks and mixed-race blacks but must find more creative ways to discriminate against immigrant groups (3). When evaluated using the “one-drop

rule,” Rachel would be considered to be wholly part of the mono-racial Black community. However, due to her unfamiliarity with the way racial categorization works, she sees the incongruity of Carmen identifying as Black when Rachel does not feel she meets the qualifications for either racial category. When Rachel looks around her classroom, the “external definitions by racial categories persistently interfere with individual definitions from the inside” (Sollors 192). Rachel rejects the either/or, Black or White sorting for herself, because it does not reflect the internal understanding of her background and the complexity of her familial relationships. Even though she is viewed as mono-racial by the Black community, Rachel does not feel that this singular view is an authentic representation of her background.

Bi- or multi-racial individuals may refuse to be categorized by the existing divisions but may not yet understand there are options outside of single-race classifications. For example, despite feeling that she does not belong to the mono-racial Black community, Rachel continues to try to make sense of the environment and her place within it. She finds new ways to think about her racial background, instead of being drawn as either Black or White. Rachel shares that she sees “people two different ways now: people who look like me and people who don’t look like me” (9). Rachel continues to question the established qualifications for being Black. Since Rachel does not see the logic of the classifications, she instead questions the categories that lack gradation. Bettez expands on the types of questions that arise when one begins to try to unravel the idea of being legitimately part of a community:

For women of mixed heritage to claim particular identities, questions about what constitutes “legitimate” identities must be asked. For example, what constitutes black identity? Is it skin color and phenotype? Does one have to “appear black” to claim a black identity? If so, who decides what black looks like? Can black identity be formed and claimed through culture, and if so what is black culture? (157)

While Rachel is considered to be Black by her family and peers within her Black community, she possesses qualities that make others question her mono-raciality. Rachel's confusion over Carmen's claim to mono-raciality demonstrates a cultural component to Blackness whose defining points are unstable. Based on this cultural component to race, it is not surprising that Rachel does not identify fully with her Black family and community, since she was raised away from that environment.

Existing social structures that serve to bring community members together may have the opposite effect on bi- or multi-racial individuals. Rachel feels that she is fraudulent in her interactions with others in her community. Nowhere is this more obvious than within the AME Zion Church. Rachel describes feeling disconnected during the religious service:

We stand. We sit. We sing. We sing and I only pretend sing. I can't make those big sounds that Grandma can make, or the smooth high sounds the girl who looks like Tamika can make when she does her solos. We stand and sit. And all the time, if I keep my mouth going, no one notices that no sound is coming through my lips. (99)

Rachel cannot "make those big sounds" her grandmother makes when she sings. The other members of the congregation can also sing naturally. All appear to Rachel as authentic members of the community. Rachel can only pretend to sing along with everyone else. She is concerned that others might discover she is a fraud and pointedly lip syncs, so that she can carry on the illusion. Bantum notes that "[i]n Durrow, religion is one pole in a dichotomous racial space. Religion is a vestige of an essential cultural mode of being. The Christianity of Rachel's grandmother is bound to a narrow way of being black in America and thwarts the fullness of personhood she seeks" (671). Rachel only sees the community gathered at church as an empty ritual that holds no intrinsic value for her. Rachel's only option is to follow along with the sitting and standing and singing without being connected to the heart of the service. This religious

gathering is for her grandmother and for the others who are authentically part of the community. The absence of a genuine voice at church pushes Rachel further to the periphery.

Shared cultural experiences between members of the same mono-racial community creates fraternity that may not be easily attainable by bi- or multi-racial individuals. Rachel feels removed from the church that represents the core of the Black community. She sees the way that others interact and yearns to be included. When she hears a version of “Amazing Grace” sung by her grandmother and another teenager, Rachel remarks:

They finish the song with pitch-perfect harmony ... I want to be Lakeisha. She’s hugging Grandma, getting the sad stuck feeling out of her with a song. I am fourteen and know that I am black, but I can’t make the Gospel sound right from my mouth. I can’t help make Grandma’s feelings show. They hold hands and Grandma hugs Lakeisha again. I can see what Grandma sees in Lakeisha. It is a reflection. (120)

As Rachel begins to relate more closely with some aspects of her Black family, she is frustrated by the limitations to belonging that she still faces. She sees the connections that are easy for others within the community to make, because they are based on shared experiences. Bantum notes that “Darrow invokes religion as a cultural artifact, as an aspect of her grandmother’s blackness that Rachel cannot replicate in her own life” (663). Rachel feels that she cannot possibly “make the Gospel sound,” but that it is a core connection between her grandmother and Lakeisha. Rachel cannot fabricate the cultural ties that bind Lakeisha and her grandmother together, despite the fact that Rachel is related to her grandmother biologically. Cultural experience solidifies the boundaries of the imagined community and may override other more significant differences (i.e. economic status, age).

When asserting the diversity of their racial background, bi- and multi-racial individuals may receive harsh social penalties for resisting a single-race identity. As Rachel grows up, she begins to unravel the seemingly illogical sets of rules that determine cultural belonging. She

knows all of the right answers to the questions that are asked, but it is clear that the answers do not reflect who Rachel believes she is. Rachel shares that “[i]n high school I still don’t have a best friend, even though I know how to answer the questions differently now. I’m black. I’m from northeast Portland. My grandfather’s eyes are this color. I’ve lived here mostly my whole life. I’m black. I’m black, I know” (148). She understands that she should not complicate her racial makeup within her community. Even though she does not feel that the one-dimensional answers to the questions are authentic, to claim her bi-raciality would be seen as a betrayal.

Brennan maintains:

[F]or many mixed race members of marginalized communities, their attempts to assert a mixed race identity are often met with concern or derision because the marginalized community believes (often rightly) that it cannot afford to lose additional members in the face of centuries of sustained genocide (or allow unknown potential members to join), and that because the vast majority of the members of Native American and African American communities are of mixed race, such an assertion might lead to the disintegration of their communities (and/or nations), and to a disruption or dissolution of their cultural traditions, social fabric, and political power. (3)

Rachel is unable to present her racial background as she honestly sees it, because to assert her bi-raciality would be to reject her position within the Black community. Rachel learns the expected answers to the questions she is asked, so that she can belong. However, the predictable answers for others only leave her pondering the fluidity of her own self-perception.

While racial categorization is commonly discussed, bi- or multi-racial individuals may not have the benefit of mixed-race models on which to base their own racial identity. Rachel has little exposure to the complexity of raciality. From her raceless nuclear family headed by her White mother, Rachel sees only the homogeneity of the Black community. Until one day, she finds that “there’s a new black literature section. It’s four whole shelves. I found one book of poetry about a girl who has a white father and a black mother. I have never read anything like

that before” (148). Rachel becomes aware of the fact that her racial difference is something that is shared with others. Within the tiny Black Literature section in the library is an even tinier part that is dedicated to the bi-racial experience. As if to mirror her own relationship to the Black community, the poetry book is tucked under the umbrella term of “Black Literature.” The location of the book reveals the perspective that the mixed-race experience is merely a subset of the Black experience in America. Just as Rachel has already experienced, despite the physical attributes that point to her bi-raciality, she is considered to be Black. The categorization of the bi-racial Rachel as single-race demonstrates the concept of hypodescent. The mixed-race experience is one racial identity, but it is still subject ultimately to being subsumed by the Black community versus being viewed as a separate racial category. Sundstrom notes that a pervasive view is that individuals who insist on identifying as multi-racial are actually deceiving themselves:

One of the first criticisms offered against mixed race is that such identities represent attempts, whether conscious or subconscious, to escape blackness or darkness - to escape being a person of color. These critics argue that mixed race is impossible in the U.S. racial politic, because race in the U.S. functions by the principle of hypodescent. The U.S. racial system does not admit of gradations; thus, those who claim such an identity are being inauthentic, and are engaged in self-deception. (286-287)

While Rachel is surprised to find a text that more closely demonstrates her racial reality, she understands that the experience of being multi-racial will still be viewed as connected to the broader minority experience.

Those who choose to identify themselves as bi- or multi-racial, or mixed-race have determined that the single-race identity does not adequately describe their racial identity. Over time, Rachel begins to understand that she does not have to stick solely with the mono-racial view of herself that others insist upon. She does not have to deny her mother existed to maintain

stability within herself or with her family. Although she is “caught between the insufficiency of her grandmother’s parochial (read: primitive) paradigm, one that can never quite comprehend the Danish in the veneer of blackness that is her granddaughter” (Bantum 662), Rachel visualizes her bi-raciality as two distinct realms that together make her whole. Rachel explains: “Sometimes I think Grandma and Mor are two sides of the same coin. They are two sides of a coin that I can hold in my hand at the same time” (149). Rachel is not merely one side or the other, and both parts of her cultural heritage are essential for her identity. Even though her family members and peers may not validate the intricacy of her racial background, she can hold both parts of her identity in harmony as she navigates through society.

From a purely cultural perspective, one could contend that Rachel is more accurately mono-racial before moving into her Black community, since she has primarily been exposed to her mother’s Dutch culture. When Rachel first arrives at her grandmother’s house, she knows very little about her new community. As Rachel becomes more familiar with the culture around her, she begins to see that her own identity is influenced by immersion into her new community. As she permits herself to experience elements that are specific to her community, she feels a new sense of belonging that was missing before. At an Etta James concert with Aunt Loretta’s boyfriend, Drew, Rachel relates: “The last song, which is an encore, is a long, slow song. I clap and clap. And stand and clap. I want to say this the way Grandma would if she agreed: I like me some Etta James! It feels like it’s the only way to say it to make the meaning good” (165). Rachel discovers that the dialect used by her grandmother can communicate feelings that are inexpressible in any other way. In contrast, when she first arrives at her grandmother’s house, she is critical of the way her grandmother speaks. Rachel says she wants “her to put s’s on the ends of her words and not say ‘fixin to’ when she’s about to do something” (9). While she had

been critical of her grandmother's speaking style, she now realizes that the language reflects the community around her. When at first Rachel shares that her family and peers "have a language I don't know but I understand," she is speaking about the cultural knowledge behind the words that she cannot decode until she has spent time within the community. Sollors notes that "writing in dialect is one formal strategy by which ethnic writers can play with double audiences ..."

(251). Rachel's wish to use her grandmother's expression to concisely describe her feelings about the music demonstrates how much more a part of the community Rachel has become. Durrow moves Rachel from criticizing her grandmother's colloquialisms to indicating her speech patterns are the only way she can possibly communicate a joyous feeling.

As depicted in the novels, at some point it becomes apparent that the problem with being mixed-race resides primarily in the unjust perceptions of others. Rachel may want to use her grandmother's words to express overwhelming joy, but her newfound confidence within the community also allows her to stand up to those who question her place. Rachel finally stands up to Tamika, her frequent antagonist at school:

She talks real loud as I stand in line for my free lunch. "She a ho. Think she all cute. She fast like those white girls" ... And the part of me that wants to stop being sad, and to stop being hurt and not cry, turns around so quick - like I didn't even know myself - and says "FUCK OFF," and punches Tamika so hard that she stumbles back. So hard that her nose bleeds. (170)

Rachel realizes that the problem lies not with her, but with the people around her who do not accept her as being part of the community. Instead of solely focusing on reconciling Rachel's internal feelings, Durrow addresses the negative reception of the individual by the minority community. Chaudhri notes that multi-racial characters often "were depicted as having to internally resolve emotional conflict about their racial identity, while critique of racist environments was completely missing. MRI/V books reflect stereotypic master-narratives about

dysfunction and trauma as inevitable in the lives of biracial people” (367). Rachel can see Tamika’s abuse for what it is: Tamika’s frustration over trying and failing to categorize her racially. The problem was always Tamika’s inability to see Rachel honestly, not that Rachel had to figure out where she belongs.

Rachel’s relationships with her peers help her to make sense of the new identity she constructs that is not from her past nor from her current circumstances. She begins to understand that there may be a time in the future when race may not hold as much weight for her as it currently does. There may be situations where race does not factor into the conversation. Rachel explains that “when Jesse and Brick talk, I can forget that Jesse’s white, and I can forget that Brick’s black. Or Brick’s something like that. I don’t ask Brick what he is. Brick is light-skinned with golden colors in his brown eyes. He could be black or Mexican or mixed like me. He’s twenty-five and maybe at that age it doesn’t matter” (202). While Rachel cannot remove her new racial consciousness from her interactions, she holds the hope that one day race may factor less. She does not want to lose the complexity of her racial identity behind simpler terms. Rachel has a “‘new,’ an acquired, or an achieved identity, located between the ancient narrowness of a hierarchical old-world orientation ... and the dangers of homogenization by total assimilation ...; or, in [Sollors’] terms, between an identity based exclusively on divisive descent and one primarily founded on bland universalist consent” (Sollors 191). Rachel is afraid of losing the part of her identity that is connected with her absent mother, but likewise does not want to jeopardize her new connection with her adopted Black community. Rachel expresses: “I don’t want being Danish to be something that I can put on and take off. I don’t want the Danish in me to be something time makes me leave behind” (205). Rachel’s identity is based on the entirety of her racial background. Despite the option of claiming a single-race from within the Black

community, Rachel insists upon the value of both cultural influences. To do otherwise would be to deny the importance of her deceased mother's role in her life.

Individuals who choose to identify as bi- or multi-racial are challenging the idea that living between cultures is a tragic fate. As a young adult, Rachel views the tragedy of her mother's plunge from the roof as a desperate act to save her children from the evils of a society she feared would never allow them to be anything but "tragic mulattos." Rachel remembers her mother that day:

She says:
"We will always be a family this way."
And I believe her.
We take small steps toward the edge. Closer. Closer.
The way people look at us. The things that people say.
She will protect us from these things too. We are closer still.
We fall.
Robbie, Mor, Ariel. Then me.
As a family, we fall. (260)

Rachel knows the lens through which her mother's detractors viewed her. Rachel's mother realized that her love would not be enough to protect her children from the racism they would face. Within their bubble, their family was complete, but "although love may feel colorblind for individuals and couples in interracial marriages, they do not have the privilege of racial invisibility in their social worlds, and love does not dismantle the process of racial classification" (Afful 664). However, Rachel knows her mother was wrong. She can move beyond the fate determined by society and into a new realm where she does not have to choose one or the other identity.

Rachel is positioned to gain a new racial understanding of the difficulties presented by being multi-racial and also the challenges of being part of an interracial family. She considers her father's position as the only Black member of her original nuclear family, and realizes that he

might have felt “alone, right in front of us, his family. No one knew how to cut his hair - he had tight black curls like other black people. And maybe he even had ash on his elbows and knees sometimes. He never told us he was black. He never told us that we were” (80). Roger married a woman who was unaware of the racialized America, an environment which was Roger’s cultural heritage. Sollors puts forth that “it is the contrast with people who are not considered ethnics which often shapes the delineation of the various ethnic groups; and both sides are contrastively homogenized in the process” (178). Rachel wonders if her father felt that he was outside of his own family, but the love in the family masked some of the potential problems. As an adult, Rachel wants to be seen for more than her internal struggle to reconcile her racial identity and more than the tragedy of her past. When she is with her friend Brick, Rachel realizes that “when he looks at me, it feels like no one has really seen me since the accident. In his eyes, I’m not the new girl. I’m not the color of my skin. I’m a story. One with a past and a future unwritten” (264). After the struggle to define who she is within her community, Rachel discovers that she can let go of the struggle. The trope of the tragic mulatto ends when the bi- or multi-racial individual refuses to allow others to make a social tragedy of his or her life. Rachel finds it is possible to define herself as she wishes, despite others who might see her differently.

Certainly most mixed-race individuals do not literally fall into the minority communities of which they are a part. The racialization of bi- and multi-racial individuals is much less obvious than it appears in Rachel’s unique situation. A multitude of mostly unconscious choices and external pressures present themselves to mixed-race individuals as their sense of identity is formed. Rachel has the benefit of evaluating herself as the “new girl” who can consciously break apart one-dimensional labels in order to begin to adequately reflect her all aspects of her racial identity.

“‘I’m not like Uncle Ray’ ... ‘I’m like me,’ Danny interrupts again. ‘I’m just myself. That’s it’” (de la Peña 241).

Comparable to Durrow’s Rachel’s “fall” into the Black community, de la Peña’s Danny is certain that his feelings of detachment from the Mexican community are related to the fact that he has a White mother and lives in affluent Leucadia. He views the social interactions he experienced when growing up as contrasting greatly with what he sees as an authentic style that he wishes he could emulate. Danny connects negative stereotypes of what he believes reflects Mexican authenticity within his Mexican American community:

That’s when he wishes he didn’t get such good grades. When he wishes he lived even closer to the border than they did, in a one-room shack in the worst barrio this side of Tijuana. Dirt floors and no running water. When he wishes he got in more trouble at school, maybe a suspension on his record for fighting or bringing a switchblade to class. Maybe he could cuss out one of his private-school teachers in the hall during lunch: “I ain’t gotta listen to you, white bitch!” (47)

Danny does not see the Mexican community as it really is. He has created a romanticized version of the hardships his family and peers face. Danny longs to be part of what he has idealized as a modest existence on the Mexican side of his family, whose struggle he identifies as being related to being genuinely Mexican. Growing up outside of National City, Danny feels that he was “subject to societal norms where ethnic heritage and distinctiveness were suppressed by pressures to blend into the White mainstream as much as possible” (Song 685). Danny sees the differences between his upbringing and the kids in National City as a barrier to being considered Mexican. He daydreams of acting out in ways antithetical to the essentially mono-racial White society in Leucadia, which would then prove his allegiance to his father’s Mexican community.

Within an idealized version of a minority community, bi- or multi-racial individuals may only see how they do not have a clear place within their sentimentalized depiction. As Danny

daydreams about an alternate reality, where he is born and raised in National City, he continues to idealize what it means to be Mexican. Danny ruminates over his situation:

He's thinking about the fact that he doesn't speak Spanish. He only speaks English. And it really starts to make him angry. He wishes his dad had never even married a white woman. Then he'd have grown up down her like everybody else in his family. In National City. He imagines how much different his life would be. How much better. (88)

Danny is only able to see the racialized imaginary community. As an outsider looking in, Danny observes one cohesive culture that depends upon a certain level of authenticity he is missing. He is blind to the differences between members of the community, because he only sees the elements that he lacks. Erika Aigner-Varoz in the article "Metaphors of a Mestiza Consciousness: Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*," explains that "metaphors are imposed upon the individual by the collective unconscious, powerfully influencing the individual's construction of her/himself" (49). Danny carries with him a picture of authenticity for membership to the community that is based on language, cultural knowledge, and external attributes. He is unable to place himself within this idealized portrait of legitimacy. Danny cannot consider himself a member of the community, because he only detects how he is different from the established norms.

However, a bi-racial or multi-racial identity does not preclude the development of relationships based on aspects outside of racial identification. For example, Danny dreams of establishing a close relationship with his absent father. During his summer in National City, he feels that he is getting closer to him through his connection to the neighborhood and family. Even though his father has not appeared, Danny feels that he would be proud of who he is becoming. Danny shares that "sometimes he plays a little trick on his mind. When he sees a hawk soaring around in the sky, he pretends it's been sent all the way from Mexico by his dad.

To look after him. And then it goes back to Mexico to report what it sees. He knows it's just kid stuff, but he does it anyway" (113). It is interesting that Danny's way of seeking what he believes will be his father's approval is through training with Uno to hustle other baseball players. Danny sees his activities as being more aligned with the day-to-day struggles he sees within the Mexican community. Kaup asserts that "within the various Chicano and Mexican communities from which ethnic identities emerge, the devaluation of the indigenous, of the racial Other, carries with it a potent charge. The struggle against this devaluation represents one of the sources of Chicano anti-authoritarian contestation (174). Through his illicit activity, Danny feels that he is moving closer to his idealized version of authenticity. He hustles alongside Uno, who despite also being bi-racial has also had the benefit of growing up within the culture. Uno tells Danny that as long as he does not speak "for all he know, you just another punk Mexican kid from National City. One of my boys" (115). Even though on the surface it seems that Uno counts Danny as one of his "boys," Uno also implies that Danny only appears to be connected to him but is in fact something more than that. When affiliated with Uno, bi-racial Danny counts as Mexican because he has been absorbed by the negative stereotype of "just another punk Mexican." Just as Danny initially generalizes the Mexican community, the mainstream often fails to see the diversity within the Mexican community.

Since they may be discouraged from learning parts of their cultural heritage, some bi- and multi-racial individuals may experience deficits in their cultural knowledge. Danny cannot speak Spanish, which he views as a major obstacle to finding his place within the Mexican community. Since he can only speak English, Danny chooses not to speak at all. Ghiso and Campano explain that since Danny cannot speak in the language of his choice, "at the beginning of the book, he is literally silent ... It does not represent a lack of proficiency or confidence, but is intentional and

perhaps a form of resistance to ideologies that see mixed identities as unintelligible” (50). Danny chooses to remain silent in the face of speaking the language of the dominant society. He views the inability to speak Spanish as further evidence that he does not belong. Danny withdraws into himself, tears at his skin in silent rage, and remains mostly mute around his family and friends. He would embrace being “a real Lopez, though - that’s what he’d pick. A chip off the old block. One of the cousins from el barrio (47). He does not want to be cast as the visiting cousin, an outsider from mostly White Leucadia, so Danny chooses a silence that he hopes will cover his ignorance of the Spanish language (and culture).

Conversely, the acquisition of knowledge stemming from the mainstream can further invalidate claims to minority status. Danny’s sophisticated knowledge of the English language obstructs his belonging to the community. Since he has grown up only speaking English, Danny’s fluency and vocabulary is more advanced than even the adults in his family. However, Danny believes his ease of using English signals his outsider status. Moreman notes that “the binary of Latina/o versus white is often manifested through an either/or polarity of English usage and Spanish usage. The hierarchy of Latina/o under white is manifested by the incidents in which Spanish always lies below English both in preference and in privilege” (352). Danny sees his knowledge of the English language as proof that he is not really part of the Lopez family. When he defines the word “holistically” for his Uncle Tommy, Danny berates himself for his inability to fit in:

Talkin’ like that to grown folks. What he should’ve done was act like he’d never even seen that word before. Stared at it just as perplexed as his uncle ... But it was too late. The damage had already been done. And when his uncle went back to the rest of his article, the rest of his beer, Danny went back to the rest of his life - seemingly on the inside of la familia de Lopez, but really on the outside (48).

Danny believes that by possessing knowledge of an English word that “perplexed” his uncle it demonstrates he is part of the dominant White society. He thinks he is unable to reconcile the family with his differences, and he criticizes himself for being unable to quickly pretend he shares the same ignorance of the English word. Since “issues of language cannot be disentangled from identity and social positioning” (Ghiso 49-50), Danny believes he has stumbled over another glaring example of being on the outside of his Mexican family. If he had only feigned ignorance, Danny would not have called attention to the difference between his uncle and himself. Not only does Danny not speak Spanish, he speaks English with a native proficiency that he feels pushes him further away from the Mexican community.

Competence in mainstream pursuits may push bi- or multi-racial individuals further away from feeling that they belong to the minority community. While Danny knows that helping his uncle should bring them together, the language divide actually highlights the difference between them. He is the bi-racial nephew who only speaks English, while he desperately wishes he could be like his Spanish-speaking uncle. Ghiso and Campano describe the connection between language and the acceptance or rejection in communities:

Language signals affiliation—how Danny is read in relationship to particular communities, as well as his agency in crafting his own identity. These issues must be contextualized within power relations: the colonization of the Southwest, the history of the border between the United States and Mexico, the banning of non-European varieties of Spanish in U.S. schools, and the profiling and, at times, criminalization of non-White Americans; for example, Danny is labeled a “wetback” in school. (50)

When he is at school in Leucadia, he is derisively assumed to be the Mexican he wants to be, but among his family and peers in National City, he is limited linguistically to being affiliated with the English-speaking White society. Since Danny does not speak Spanish, he does not feel that he can be considered part of the community.

Bi- or multi-racial individuals may escape some of the negative stereotyping that prevents mono-racial individuals from being able to define themselves within the broader mainstream society. Danny begins to realize that even though others see him as not entirely part of the community, he has some hidden advantage that is viewed as a positive attribute. Uno believes he is unable to work within the same circles as Danny, because he has been forced into a single category. Uno feels unable to break free from the stereotype he has internalized but sees in Danny the ability to take advantage of his racial difference. Kaup explains the difference between choosing a mono-racial identity, versus the fluidity of mixed-race identification:

Unlike the typically binary notions of identity within a U.S. racial paradigm (choose black or white), a focus on *mestizaje* allows for other forms of ethnic self-identification, other types of cultural creation, other means of social struggle. So for Chicano/a ethnic identity, a reliance on *mestizaje* becomes a way to articulate subjectivity outside dominant paradigms of identity. (166)

Uno expects Danny to outperform in both the Mexican and the mainstream communities, using both sides to stand up and be noticed. Before hustling baseball players at another high school, Uno says to Danny: “Now, you ready to go show some fools what a Mexican could do in a pair of Vans?” (150). Danny begins to realize that he does not have to choose a singular identity, but that both sides of his cultural identity can coexist. He can be something new and unexpected.

As with Durrow’s Rachel, bi- or multi-racial individuals may feel that their interactions within the minority community are fraudulent when employing their own understanding for racial legitimacy. Since he grew up primarily outside of the Mexican community and apart from his absent father’s influence, Danny feels that he is an imposter in his own family’s home. Just as Rachel worries about being labeled an “Oreo” (148), Danny describes himself as he believes others see him: “He’s Mexican, because his family’s Mexican, but he’s not really Mexican. His skin is dark like his grandma’s sweet coffee, but his insides are as pale as the cream she mixes

in” (90). Danny is certain that he has inherited some biological characteristics from his father’s family, certainly enough to identify him as Mexican within White society, but he believes he is missing some essential element. Sollors writes that this formulation of bi-raciality as reflecting authenticity has been apparent as:

a series of recent slurs, often hurled by some in-group speakers against people who threaten the fixity of mental boundaries based on race, scolded blacks as Oreos, Asians as bananas, Indians as apples, and Chicanos as coconuts - all with the structurally identical criticism ‘they’re white inside!’ The warning had no specific cultural content but served as an interchangeable exhortation to maintain boundaries. (28)

Even though Danny possesses external attributes that connect him to his Mexican community, he still feels that he hides an interior life that does not allow him to be considered Mexican. His bi-raciality is an impediment to belonging. Danny has not had enough exposure to his relatives and peers in National City to feel that he is genuinely part of the community. He feels that despite appearing to be Mexican in some ways, others will see that he is really “white inside.”

Bi- or multi-racial individuals may conclude their racial ambiguity prevents them from forming connections within their minority communities or the mainstream. Whether he is living with his mother in Leucadia or visiting his relatives in National City, Danny always feels like an outsider. Instead of viewing his bi-raciality as the key to access both communities, Danny feels that it is a handicap preventing him from belonging to either. Danny concludes: “I’m a white boy among Mexicans, and a Mexican among white boys” (90). Wherever Danny is, he feels that he is missing a crucial part of himself. He is an outsider merely observing the social activity around him and he cannot find an authentic manner in either community. Ghiso and Campano note that “[b]ecause of his biracial heritage, Danny finds himself between two worlds, in some ways an outsider to both” (50). In order to mask the pain he feels, Danny engages in self-harm. Whenever he is in an uncomfortable situation, he digs into his skin where others can’t see. Danny copes

with the discomfort of not fitting into the Mexican community in National City by surreptitiously cutting himself with his fingernails. When Danny is introduced to his cousin Sofia's friends: "Danny gives her [Flaca] a polite smile, but inside he's shrinking. He's trying to suck back into his shell, like a poked and prodded snail ... Behind his back he grips his left wrist, digs his fingernails into the skin until a sharp pain floods his mind, makes him feel real" (3). Danny can viscerally sense the difference between himself and the group of teenagers. He is painfully aware of his appearance and his inability to speak Spanish. Danny attempts to diminish his emotional pain by distracting himself with physical discomfort. Kaup and Rosenthal emphasize the importance of culture on developing a strong sense of identity within the Chicano/a community:

Within an essential nationalist discourse, Chicanismo is measured by the color of the skin and the details of physiognomy. Clearly, this position can easily translate into other non-racialized areas: the test of ethnic identity can be tied to one's linguistic skills— fluency with code-switching, bilingualism, slang— one's clothes, one's taste in music, economic condition, place of domicile, nationality, etc. Chicano/a ethnic identity becomes essentialized, premised on meeting quite specific physical or social conditions. (165)

When he meets his cousin's friends, Danny endures the torment of awaiting the discovery of his cultural deceit. Even though Danny feels out of place, he wants to belong so badly to his cousin's circle of friends, his father's family, and the Mexican community. Despite being his father's child, he has grown up with limited contact with his Mexican American family and peers. Danny feels that he is merely feigning membership to the Mexican community.

Feelings of inferiority may arise for bi- and multi-racial individuals who are insecure about how others see them. Just as Silko's Auntie fears the possible racial dilution of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, Danny's fear arises from the possibility that his Mexican community will believe he is responsible for the dilution of their culture. Danny is convinced he has caused his father's continued absence from the family. When writing a letter to his father, Danny presents his life as

he wishes it to be within his Mexican American community. Danny writes: “You were sick of living in a city with so many white people, with a white wife, with two kids who were half white. You wanted to be around more Mexicans. Your real family. But what I wanted to tell you, Dad, is how much I’ve changed since that day. How much better I am. How much stronger and darker and more Mexican I am” (27 - 28). Danny is sure that his father has disappeared because he is ashamed of his bi-racial son. Danny sees only the option of being White or being Mexican; the idea of bi-raciality does not seem plausible to him. Moreman explains that “[t]he difficulties of wording this hybrid identity occur as Latina/o-white hybrid individuals seek to use their agency to resist the bifurcating discourse of whiteness versus Latina/ness, but often find themselves caught in an either/or understanding of their own identity (348). Danny cannot see that he can be authentic in both environments. Instead of feeling that he can navigate one or both of the communities, Danny feels that he will always be considered an outsider. As Danny spends more time with his father’s family, he becomes more aware of the deficiencies in his Mexican cultural consciousness.

Cultural ties are not fundamental to the individual but must be nurtured through the development of relationships within a community. Danny meets a bi-racial girl who has come to National City to learn more about her father, and by extension, learn more about her American heritage. Danny calls that “irony. This is what his teacher meant when she’d talk about that word. Liberty’s come to National City to be more American. And he’s come to be more Mexican” (187). Through Danny’s relationship with Liberty, he begins to understand that cultural belonging is not inherited but can only be achieved symbiotically by living within the community. When he first begins spending time with Liberty, he still believes he is only an imposter. He pours out his feelings to her, even though she cannot understand English:

I'm so happy right now. Being here with you. In National City. I came here because sometimes I feel like a fake Mexican. And I don't want to be a fake. I wanna be real. I love my dad's family. And I love the culture and the language and everything my gramma cooks and the way they live. I've always wished I was more like them. But it's twice as bad since my dad left ... I wish I could tell you how pretty I think you are in Spanish. But I can't. Because I never learned. (188)

Even though Danny loves his Mexican “culture and the language,” he believes that he is not really like his family. He begins to identify that the fraudulent feelings about his ethnicity have more to do with a lack of exposure, not that he is missing an intrinsic quality. Danny begins to find ways that he can feel closer to his family. He shares that he is “so happy right now,” because he no longer believes he has to stay silent and withdrawn. He no longer has to be apart from society, even though he still feels different from the others. Danny speaks to Liberty in his native English, which he knows she values as an English language learner. Even though she cannot understand him, or maybe because she cannot understand him, Danny is no longer devastated by his inability to communicate in Spanish. He attempts to relay his feelings through the use of English, hoping that through his inflection and his gestures, Liberty will understand the gist of his point. He is no longer ashamed of his hybridity, because he can see its reversal play out within Liberty. Danny's happiness comes from his ability to accept his identity as being a valid way of being within the community. Danny has become part of his family's life and “by this point in the summer he knows everything that's going on throughout the house” (200). Although the family and community life is still idealized in Danny's mind, he can anticipate the cultural traditions as they are performed every day. Danny feels at home with the cultural elements that surround him. He begins to let the details become part of the mundane in everyday life.

As depicted in the novels, bi- and multi-racial individuals can exist in a variety of forms. Over time, Danny becomes conscious of the irrelevancy of his desire to fit into the Mexican

community. Instead of attempting to emulate his family members and friends, which leads to feelings of inadequacy and falseness, Danny realizes that he can act in a way that is particular only to him. When Uno shares the story of Danny fighting, Danny's cousin compares him to his uncle:

Sophia turns to Danny, wiping her hands on her napkin. "So, now you're a fighter, cuz? Mr. Tough Guy like Uncle Ray?" She turns to Liberty, starts explaining the whole thing over again in Spanish, but Danny interrupts her.

"I'm not like Uncle Ray," he says.

Sophia laughs a little, says: "Nah, cuz, I just meant that -"

"I'm like *me*," Danny interrupts again. "I'm just myself. That's it." (241)

At the beginning of the summer, Danny would have relished the comparison to his uncle. He understands that while his external actions might have been typical of his uncle, Danny knows that he is a very different person from him. In her article "Shifting Subjectivities: Mestizas, Nepantleras, and Gloria Anzaldúa's Legacy," Martina Koegeler-Abdi contrasts the idea of being mixed-race "mestizaje" with the idea of being a dynamic "nepantlera," who forges a unique path between cultures. Gloria Anzaldúa developed the concept of nepantlera, one who lives in between, to contrast with her previous concept of mestizaje, one who thrives with multiple contradictions (72). Koegeler explains: "Rather than merging its parts into a mestizaje, to become a nepantlera it may even be necessary to move away from one's connections to a specific ethnic community. In so doing, one makes a leap of faith into a new state of being free of internalized oppression" (82). Danny begins to see the possibility of navigating between cultures to achieve his own definition of his identity. Instead of feeling stuck on the outside of his two communities, Danny can intentionally occupy the space in between.

Just as Durrow's Rachel's "new girl" fades as she becomes more confident in her self-identification, Danny's need for harmful coping mechanisms also recedes. The pain he felt when working through feelings of exclusion is replaced with a newfound confidence in himself. Danny

sits alongside his friend Uno and “touches his fingers to the part of his sleeve that covers the cut he made on his arm. He can’t imagine what was going through his head when he did it. Feels miles and miles away from that now” (246). Danny’s perspective has shifted so drastically, he can no longer imagine the intensity of his feelings. Danny learns that he can contain aspects of his Mexican cultural tradition, alongside the characteristics from his upbringing that make up the essence of his identity. In the essay “How to Tell a Mestizo from an Enchirito®: Colonialism and National Culture in the Borderlands,” Michael Hames-Garcia asserts that the “Mestiza[o] consciousness is something that one resists at first because it involves questioning oneself, giving up old ways of seeing the world, and synthesizing new ones” (115). It is only through the trauma of exclusion and after the difficulty of learning a new path that Danny discovers the validity of his own individual identity.

Throughout the summer in National City, Danny wrestles with feelings of inauthenticity based on a superficial understanding of his Mexican community. However, as he spends more time within the community, he dispels the misleading generalizations that made up his idealized version of his family and peer group. As he begins to establish stronger attachments with members of the community, Danny’s definition of belonging expands to allow for racial difference.

“He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time” (Silko 229).

The concept of racial purity engenders fears of cultural blending and the eventual disintegration of a community’s tradition and values. Wishing to heal her community, Tayo’s Aunt suffers for the imprudent actions of her sister, forcing Tayo to forfeit his life in payment for

his mother's sins. Auntie reflects, "The things Laura had done weren't easily forgotten by the people, but she could maintain a distance between Rocky, who was her pride, and this other, unwanted child" (60). Auntie feels it is necessary to separate her son, who symbolizes the purity of the Laguna Pueblo, from the tainted Tayo's half-blood presence. In contrast to Danny's family in de la Peña, who hold the belief that his bi-raciality will boost his success, Tayo internalizes his Laguna people's view that his bi-raciality is an evil that threatens the stability of their entire community.

The existence of bi- and multi-racial individuals indicates change within a mono-racial community. As de la Peña's Danny is afraid his bi-raciality dilutes his Mexican identity, Tayo fears that the Laguna view him as the source of the disintegration of their tribe. Tayo shares his feelings as interloper with Night Swan, wishing he could change his heritage, erase the actions of his mother and the heritage stemming from his white father, and become complete. Tayo says, "I always wished I had dark eyes like other people. When they look at me they remember things that happened. My mother" (92). The "other people" to whom Tayo refers are those who are considered full members of the Laguna Pueblo, those whose Pueblo blood flows from both mother and father. When people on the reservation, most significantly his aunt, look into his green eyes, they see something they interpret as being outside of themselves. Night Swan responds to his wish with the foundation for the people's reaction. Tayo is an outsider because the people are afraid of the changes to the Pueblo. Night Swan asserts, "They are afraid, Tayo. They feel something happening, they can see something happening around them, and it scares them ... They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves" (92). As change comes to the Pueblo, fear of

losing the tribal identity encourages a paranoid refusal to accept anyone who is different, since the unique also signals potential loss in the community.

In the face of active rejection by their minority community, some bi- or multi-racial individuals may accept that any claims to their cultural heritage are not valid. In an attempt to mend the family's association with change seen as destructive to the tribe, Auntie forces Tayo to the outside of the immediate family unit. Swan notes, "Kinship protocol would have Tayo and Rocky address each other as 'tiume' or brother, but in Ceremony Auntie explicitly prohibits this term of reference, insisting on the Anglicized concept of 'cousin'" (44). Instead of recognizing their special relationship, Tayo's Aunt only seeks to divide the brothers, fearing the outsider will bring continued misfortune to the family and the Laguna Pueblo. As the half-blood outsider, Tayo wishes he could be accepted by his family. When Tayo's Aunt changes his bedding while he is sick, Tayo falls unwillingly into Rocky's vacated place. "He [Tayo] felt the old mattress then, where all the years of Rocky's life had made contours and niches that Tayo's bones did not fit: like plump satin-covered upholstery inside a coffin, molding itself around a corpse to hold it forever" (28). As Tayo attempts to press his form into his cousin's place, he finds that his shape cannot ever fit the contours of Rocky's being. The irony of Tayo attempting to squeeze his essence into the place Rocky vacates is rooted in the blind acceptance of the validity of the white culture over the Laguna Pueblo culture. Certainly Rocky is the less authentic of the two cousins. Before the war, Rocky's immediate concerns were to dispose of the Pueblo and assimilate into the dominant white culture, while Tayo chooses to continue to carry on with tribal traditions.

Similar to Rachel's military father in Durrow's novel, who abandons her to be raised by her grandmother, and Danny's father in de la Peña's novel, who is absent due to being incarcerated, the death of Tayo's mother eliminates Tayo's source for cultural validity. Tayo

accepts that due to the circumstances of his birth, his role in his family is as a foil to Rocky's full-blooded privilege. When the boys decide to enlist in the Army together, at first Tayo remembers that he promised to stay on the reservation to help Josiah. Tayo watches as:

Rocky walked on without him; Tayo stood there watching the darkness descend. He was familiar with that hollow feeling. He remembered it from the nights after they had buried his mother, when he stuffed bed covers around his stomach and close to his heart, hugging the blankets into the empty space of loss, regret for things which could not be changed. (67)

Tayo suffers the loss of a mother who would have legitimized his position within the tribe. His mother's absence not only brings about his isolation, but also severs the ties he has to the Laguna people. Tayo is left hanging on to formless blankets, instead of the warm body of his mother and the unbreakable bond to his people.

Of course, bi- and multi-racial individuals do not have to be directly taught by a parent in order to become part of their community. Tayo suffers from the fear that he is not truly part of the Laguna Pueblo people. However, as he heals from his battle fatigue, he is reminded of the cultural knowledge with which he was raised. His grandmother made sure he learned the stories of his tribe. Tayo "never lost the feeling he had in his chest when she [old Grandma] spoke those words, as she did each time she told them stories; and he still felt it was true, despite all they had taught him in school - that long long ago things had been different" (87). Unlike some of his peers, Tayo listens to the stories of his elders and applies their wisdom. These stories join him to a rich tradition that many of the other "full-blooded" Laguna choose to ignore or have forgotten. Evasdaughter emphasizes the importance of the cultural inheritance Tayo receives from a portion of his family:

The Laguna medicine man attempts to convince Tayo that he would have received more complete religious training had he had an father (35), but in reality Tayo's maternal grandmother and his maternal uncle have formed the little boy perfectly. They are the people ancient custom would have preferred as his teachers. While

they told him stories and explained their beliefs, Tayo always listened with love and a desire to learn more. (87)

Tayo believes his actions have severely damaged the balance of the universe, but he never forgets the lessons of his youth. When Tayo is a young boy, his Uncle Josiah teaches him respect for all aspects of the earth: “This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees ... But the wind and the dust, they are part of life too, like the sun and the sky. You don’t swear at them. It’s people, see. They’re the ones, the old people used to say that droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave” (42). Nothing done in one place can fail to cause a reaction somewhere else. Even though an immediate result may not appear, the world is fragile. Tayo absorbs this message and applies it to the experience in the war.

So, when Tayo carries Rocky through the blinding rain and he curses against the onslaught of the raging torrent, Tayo desperately wishes for dryness to aid the rescue. Tayo is convinced that his foolhardy request to calm the weather has resulted in a neverending draught for his people. Recalling the time, Tayo decides, “So, he had prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry; the grass turned yellow and it did not grow. Wherever he looked, Tayo could see the consequences of his praying” (13). Tayo’s belief in the interconnectedness of the world stipulates a personal responsibility to reverse the negative results. Old man Ku’oosh only supports Tayo’s certainty in his duty: “The old man only made him certain of something he had feared all along, something in the old stories. It took only one person to tear away the delicate strands of the web, spilling the rays of sun into the sand, and the fragile world would be injured (35). Ultimately, Tayo’s belief in the power of the traditional stories and old-time rituals, both to tear apart and rebuild his world, guides Tayo’s completion of the new type of ceremony and a new way of viewing his place in society. Because Tayo is “haunted by his experiences in World War II and alienated by his ‘half-breed’ status in a tribal society that places a great deal of value

on 'pure' bloodlines, Tayo must find his way back to his community and his traditions in order to heal" (62). It is Tayo's reverence for the interconnectedness he was taught by his elders that leads him to reconcile not only his own personal pain, but also to show the Laguna a new path for survival in the modern world.

While bi- and multi-racial individuals may feel the stigma derived from their communities' view of their difference, their minority communities may also be reminded of the shame that brought about a divergence from the norms of the community. Tayo's internal conflict manifests itself in feelings of self-contempt and loneliness. Tayo is made to feel that he is the source of the family's pain, and a reminder of the damage done by the White dominant society to the Laguna people. When Auntie tells Tayo about his mother walking home naked: "She [Auntie] swallowed hard to clear the pain from her throat, and his own throat hurt too, because without him there would have not been so much shame and disgrace for the family" (64). Tayo is frequently reminded of his mother's transgression and feels that he is solely responsible for the family's reputation within the community and the decline of the tribe.

Chaudhri and Teale explain that bi-racial characters in children's fiction often:

felt incomplete because they lacked connections with an absent parent who they imagined would fill a racial/cultural gap. Those connections were described in terms of complexion, language and/or traditions. Since most of the characters felt the absent parent left because they could not accept their children, the implication is that the biracial subject is the cause of isolation and thus they were doomed to a hopeless lifelong quest to seek acceptance. (371)

Tayo's life is restricted by the limitations others place on him. He sees himself through the eyes of those who believe his difference curbs his potential. He has been exposed to the cultural life of the Laguna but has been forced to the periphery. Cultural knowledge was not passed down directly to him, but instead, Tayo knows enough to believe he is unworthy of enlightenment. His aunt asserts: "'Rocky is different,' she kept saying, 'but this one [Tayo], he's supposed to stay

here” (67). As a fractured representation of the Laguna people, Tayo is not considered healthy enough to succeed within the larger society. Despite the memories his presence brings, Tayo is subject to a type of imprisonment for being seen as less than authentic. The shameful part is that Tayo agrees with his community and is willingly imprisoned by their disdain.

As depicted in the novels, bi- and multi-racial individuals’ sorrow over separation from their communities may manifest itself in physical illness and self-imposed isolation. When Tayo returns from war, his illness accentuates his difference and intensifies his isolation from the Laguna people. Just as with Durrow’s Rachel’s “new girl,” and de la Peña’s Danny’s silence, Tayo chooses to withdraw from the society around him instead of confronting the community members who reject him. In response to his exclusion, Tayo fervently wishes that he could disappear. He describes the desolate feeling that accompanies his disconnection from the community around him:

The old feeling was back again. He wanted to fade until he was as flat as his own hand looked, flat like a drawing in the sand which did not speak or move, waiting for the wind to come swirling along the ground and blow the lines away. He could hear what Auntie would have to say; he could see her rigid face, her jaws clenched against the things which were being said about him in the village. He would let them take him - whatever they wanted, because they were right. They’d always been right about him. (98)

Tayo thoroughly accepts the perspective that he is to be blamed for the village’s gossip against the family. Afraid and weak from the effects of his illness, Tayo can only return to his aunt’s hostile house to recover. He believes that he embodies the negative racial image that has destroyed the Laguna people and that he cannot truly be healed. Tayo views his illness as a weakness that was anticipated by the others who are convinced that he will never be more than a broken “half-breed” subsisting on the charity provided grudgingly by his mother’s sister.

Tayo's rejection by his community leads to a negative perception of himself and his ability to be successful in the world. The sociologist Nadal relates that "multiracial people often report feeling isolated not only in their communities and by their peers but also by their family members. Such experiences may lead to feelings of disapproval and loneliness, which may also have an impact on their self-esteem and well-being" (192). Not only does Tayo's self-perception intensify the effects of his post-traumatic stress following the war, but he is unable to find curative support within a family unit. Tayo has internalized the negative perception of his bi-raciality and believes he is not worthy of affirmative attention from his family members or the community. In order to reduce what he sees as his negative impact on others, Tayo lives both in mental and physical isolation from others on the reservation. Chaudhri notes that often "depictions of racism are filtered through the targets' memories, dreams, diary entries, even as imagined moments. Their plight invokes our sympathy, but isolation comes across as a reasonable choice for them" (371). Since he cannot find his place, Tayo's only option seems to be to disengage from the hurtful community around him that only reminds him of his difference. Tayo goes into his shell to preserve the core of his being, but he still reflects on the impossibility of reconciling with community.

Bi- and multi-racial individuals may be in a position to gain greater perspective on the continued persecution of their minority communities. Upon his return to the reservation from his stint in the war, unlike his peers, Tayo is immediately cognizant of how he is perceived by others within White society. Tayo declares: "I'm half-breed. I'll be the first to say it. I'll speak for both sides. First time you walked down the street in Gallup or Albuquerque, you knew. Don't lie. You knew right away. The war was over, the uniform was gone" (39). While Tayo was among his fellow soldiers, the first thing the mainstream saw was his uniform. Tayo was classified as a

soldier first, before his racial background was even considered. However, once he returns from the war and the uniform is off, he is no longer considered whole by either White society or the Laguna. In the essay “Developing a Kin-Aesthetic: Multiraciality and Kinship in Asian and Native North American Literature,” Wei Ming Dariotis asserts:

Tayo’s mixed heritage causes him to intuitively understand the way in which flesh is made to stand for race as a form of racial stereotyping ... This recognition of the superficial nature of the differences ascribed to ‘skin color’ is complicated by Tayo’s situation as a Native American soldier for the United States: Tayo is by definition robbed of his nation by the nation-state he has been called upon to defend. (183)

Tayo sees how easily they were all absorbed into White society based upon their Army uniforms. However, once they are out of uniform, Tayo can no longer feel that he has any affiliation with either mainstream society or his Laguna people. While his peers try to extend their brief move up the racial hierarchy by reminiscing about the privileges they had while in uniform, Tayo can see it is only a mirage of equality. Based only upon his external appearance, he knows how fleeting this image of acceptance is.

While he is cast as an outsider, Tayo discovers that the fascination with the external White society’s prosperity has been his community’s true downfall. Tayo finds that “[h]e wanted to scream at Indians like Harley and Helen Jean and Emo that the white things they admired and desired so much - the bright city lights and loud music, the soft sweet food and the cars - all these things had been stolen, torn out of Indian land: raw living materials for their ck’o’yo manipulation” (189). From his outsider perspective, Tayo begins to understand the effect of White society on the Laguna people. Even though Tayo feels that he is missing fundamental understanding of his native culture, his distance from the community releases Tayo from the obligatory loyalty that conceals the truth from the others. Sollors notes: “Ethnicization and modernization often go hand in hand. Any close reader of immigrant and ethnic writing who is

not looking exclusively for the loss of traditional culture must notice the persistent concern with the new and the modern” (246). As the Laguna fail to remember the old ways and respect the tribal traditions of the past, their own cultural heritage is homogenized by the encroaching modern world. Tayo is in the ideal position to confront the inconsistencies that are destroying the Laguna people. As he learns from the old traditions, he gains confidence from the past and his part in the ongoing story of his people. Instead of feeling apart from the ceremony, as Tayo continues make sense of himself, he can also rescue the loss of his culture. In the essay “The Mixed Blood Writer as Interpreter and Mythmaker,” Patricia Riley observes that “underlying this quest [for identity] is a sense of alienation that drives the seeker” (59). In his isolation from his community, Tayo can clearly see how the Laguna have opened the door for continued oppression from White society. In his search for personal direction, Tayo finds a way to heal his own people.

Filling in the gaps in the bi- or multi-racial individual’s cultural knowledge provides the grounding to move past the perceived cultural illegitimacy. In Durrow, Rachel’s “new girl” recedes into the background and de la Peña’s Danny finds his voice, as both spend more time within their minority communities. It is Tayo’s grandmother who determines he needs to know more of his heritage and so she “calls for the help of the traditional medicine man, Ku’oosh, grounding Tayo’s growth in terms of past rituals” (Concannon 2). Tayo has to overcome his feelings of inferiority, in order to acknowledge that his unique qualities can serve to repair the damaged world. At one point during his visit with Betonie, Tayo is overwhelmed by the items packed into the hogan. Concannon comments:

[Tayo] feels “dizzy and sick” as he surveys the hogan, not because the objects of Western civilization and Indian culture should not or have not been mixed, but because history shows him they cannot mix in a meaningful or positive manner ...

Nothing make sense for Tayo in the hogan because he is experiencing what, from a colonial perspective, cannot be recognized – himself. (3)

Tayo, as a reflection of the mixing of the Native American and the White societies, has always been viewed by the Laguna as the deterioration of their tribe. In the hogan and for the very first time, Tayo sees the strength and possibility in the intertwining of tribal traditions and the changing modern world. As Tayo completes his visit with Betonie, he comes to realize that he contains both the new and the old. As an outsider who has not been deceived by the misconception that the White society is superior, Tayo can revive the connection to the land that has been lost. According to Nelson, Betonie “tells him that the Ck’o’yo witchery has created these preconceptions and put them into circulation to blind Indians into believing that the land is a dead thing and that, to put it in mid-twentieth century terminology, White is Right” (Nelson). Although he has been considered an outcast due to being part White, Tayo chooses to reject the White society, in favor of a return to tribal traditions. Tayo is embarrassed by his lack of cultural knowledge, but the only way for him to heal is to learn the old ways. Even though he is considered to be less than an authentic member of the tribe, Tayo is aware that things must change for his tribe to be saved. Tayo understands that he must solidify his identity to help his tribe move into the future.

Bi- and multi-racial individuals can attain the necessary objectivity to view their minority communities practically. Tayo’s perspective from the outside of the community allows him to see the ways the tribe have destroyed their own culture. As he learns more about the Laguna, Tayo begins to make connections that others cannot make. Although Tayo’s half-blooded heritage diminishes his standing in the community, Tayo is compelled to preserve important rituals. Before the war, Rocky feels that it is necessary to detach from what he views as the past and move toward the contemporary White society. Tayo reflects, “Rocky understood what he

had to do to win in the white outside world. After their first year at boarding school in Albuquerque, Tayo saw how Rocky deliberately avoided the old-time ways” (47). Rocky fails to value a legacy that is entirely his right to claim. Although acknowledged to represent the most excellent of the Laguna Pueblo, Rocky rejects his birthright. Conversely, Tayo feels an intrinsic need to fulfill tribal obligations to the world around him. After Rocky kills the deer, Tayo “looked at the eyes again; he took off his jacket and covered the deer’s head” (46). Rocky chides Tayo for upholding this tradition, asking why Tayo performs this courtesy, even though both men recognize the significance. Returning with the carcass, “Tayo wrapped the liver and heart in the clean cheesecloth Josiah carried with him ... Tayo held the bundle tighter ... They said the deer gave itself to them because it loved them, and he could feel the love as the fading heat of the deer’s body warmed his hands” (48). It is not only from obligation that Tayo completes the necessary rituals, but from a sense of connectedness to the world around him. Of the imbalanced earth that needs settling, Swan asserts, “For the Laguna the fundamental feminine entity is the earth – it is a holy place. Tayo must, therefore, be reunited with the land. Harmony must be renewed, integrating nature and culture, the delicate balance shattered by his heedless words praying away the rain” (54). It is Tayo’s unwavering conviction that one person can change the entire world’s balance that underscores his deep-rooted loyalty to the rituals of his tribe and the land.

While remaining true to the traditions that bind an imagined community together, bi- and multi-racial individuals may still be able to apply a new perspective to old problems. Tayo’s completion of the ceremony is crucial to achieve balance in his life and the world, but Betonie warns Tayo of the difficulty he faces. Betonie says, “This has been going on for a long long time. They will try to stop you from completing the ceremony ... We all have been waiting for help a

long time. But it never has been easy. The people must do it. You must do it” (115). Those who will try to stop the ceremony are those among the tribe who have forgotten tradition, who have discarded tradition in favor of the culture that denies the importance of the earth. Tayo, despite his insecurity over being a “half-blood,” relies on his cultural knowledge to save both himself and his tribe. Tayo knows the importance of the stories that serve to maintain tradition. He also knows that the value of the stories is variable; in the culture of taking from the land, his stories are considered irrational. “[Tayo] knew what white people thought about the stories. In school the science teacher had explained what superstition was ... He never lost the feeling he had in his chest when [old Grandma] spoke those words [of magical things], as she did each time she told them stories; and he still felt it was true, despite all they had taught him in school” (87). Science has separated the study of nature from the nature itself and Tayo hates what “they did to the earth with their machines, and to the animals with their packs of dogs and their guns” (189). The fault lies not only with the white man’s disruption of the natural balance of the land, but also with the Pueblo who abandon the traditions of their people. Even as Tayo rewrites the ceremony, he accepts the role of traditional stories, the traditional words, that bring harmony to the world: “He repeated the words as he remembered them, not sure if they were the right ones, but feeling they were right, feeling the instant of the dawn was an event which in a single moment gathered all things together – the last starts, the mountaintops, the clouds, and the winds – celebrating this coming [sunrise]” (169). Even as he attempts to perform a traditional ceremony, Tayo’s doubts about his inauthenticity consume his thoughts. However, Tayo’s perseverance allows him to push aside his insecurity and try new ways of being in the world.

Just as Durrow’s Rachel benefits from the example of mixed-race provided in her library’s new Black Literature section and de la Peña’s Danny sees the converse of his own bi-

raciality in Liberty, Tayo learns from the multi-racial characters he encounters. Betonie's bi-raciality is significant in the context of Tayo's quest for his own identity. When he visits Betonie for healing, Tayo notices that:

All along there had been something familiar about the old man. Tayo turned around then to figure out what it was ... He looked at his face. The cheekbones were like the wings of a hawk soaring away from his broad nose; he wore a drooping thick mustache; the hairs were steel gray. Then Tayo looked at his eyes. They were hazel like his own. The medicine man nodded. 'My grandmother was a remarkable Mexican with green eyes,' he said. (109)

Tayo recognizes his own mutability within Betonie's traditional medicine man persona. If the "half-blood" Betonie can be considered a medicine man, Tayo can also reconcile what he has seen as an unsolvable problem. "Silko lets her special mixed-blood medicine man Betonie answer those Indians who oppose any change in traditional rituals while she herself modifies those traditional tales she includes in the novel" (Evasdaugher 87). The cultural traditions important to Tayo are also open to new interpretation. Tayo represents the changed tribe; he possesses the traditional knowledge passed down from his family, but as an outsider, Tayo can see the path that will lead to a new type of survival. In order for the tribe to adjust to the modern world without giving up on the fundamental soul of the community, Tayo must demonstrate a new way of interacting with the world. The "image of hybrid-colored eyes as a metaphor for the 'new breed' of life that postwar realities call for and for the new variety of ceremony that, according to Betonie, tradition always requires if it is not to wither away and die" (3). Tayo recognizes himself in Betonie's eyes, in which the light of hope shines for a future for himself and for the Laguna.

As he slowly realizes the help Betonie can give him, Tayo resists the urge to run away from the responsibility for his own identity and for his people. Just as de la Peña's Danny struggles with the pain of living on the outside of two worlds, Tayo believes it might be easier to

just give up, as he has done in the past: “He thought of running again; he was stronger than the old man and he could fight his way out of this. But the pain of betrayal pushed into his throat like a fist. He blinked back the tears, but he didn’t move. He was tired of fighting. If there was no one left to trust, then he had no more reason to live” (113). Tayo questions where he would go if he chose to abandon the effort to reconcile himself with the people. Even though he is frightened of Old Betonie and the change he represents, Tayo knows that he must carry on forging a new path in order to save himself. Riley proposes that:

Tayo and the other important mixed blood characters, Betonie and the Night Swan, represent the kind of adaptation that is necessary for survival in the face of contemporary reality. By creating a new ceremony, one that is inclusive rather than exclusive, she has also opened a road upon which the mixed blood can return home to ritual traditions that have fueled the endurance of tribal people for thousands of years and that now have room for him or her as well. (67)

Tayo allows himself to be influenced by Betonie and Night Swan, who have redefined the idea of being mixed-race. As he deals with the pain from living on the outside of the community, Tayo sees that he needs to follow their example that combines traditions of the past with the new reality of the modern world.

As illustrated in the novels, bi- and multi-racial individuals may be more capable of breaking away from tradition than those who identify mono-racially. For example, Tayo modifies the traditional ceremony, in the hope of healing himself. He begins with the cattle that were stolen from his uncle. As he tracks the cattle, Tayo depends on his tribe’s beliefs to help him along the way:

He went into the clearing where the mountain lion had stood; he knelt and touched the footprints, tracing his finger around the delicate edges of dust the paw prints had made ... He kept his back to the wind and poured yellow pollen from Josiah’s tobacco sack into the cup of his hand. He leaned close to the earth and sprinkled pinches of yellow pollen into the four footprints. Mountain lion, the hunter. Mountain lion, the hunter’s helper. (182)

In reward for his dependence upon the mountain lion and his dedication to the sacred traditions, the mountain lion's tracks distract the Texan cowboys from killing him. The mountain lion obeys the laws of nature, as does Tayo. In contrast, the cowboys take from the land without giving back, and therefore, do not own the land they believe that they do. Riley asserts that change is required to make the old traditions work again: "Silko is doing something very important. At the novel's center is the idea that what is needed is a new ceremony. By calling for this, she is functioning as what comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell called 'the secondary hero,' who breathes new life into ancient, sacred traditions so that they continue to function in modern times" (67). The mixed-race Tayo uses the traditional ceremony to honor the mountain lion and through his performance it allows the Laguna to be reinvented for the modern era. After the cowboys leave him behind to chase after the mountain lion, Tayo realizes that not only will the mountain lion be saved from the hunters, but Tayo's own tracks to the cattle will be obscured by the oncoming storm.

While originally he felt that he was left behind by the Laguna, Tayo realizes that he is the one who is forging ahead of the tribe onto a new path. Tayo's epiphany comes when he finally can see how the modernity without the bounds of responsibility has taken away humanity. Tayo:

cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together - the old stories, the war stories, their stories - to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (229)

The atomic bomb blast that created a huge fissure in the desert was evidence of the irresponsibility of mankind, but also of the interdependence of all things. The damage wrought in the desert would connect to people around the world in unimaginable ways. Evasdaughter comments that "being a half-breed never kept him from listening to his elders of both sexes,

from living with mind open to the natural world, or from wondering about the manner of life” (87). However, it is more likely that because he is a “half-breed,” he is possessed of a mind open enough to the natural world to see the changes that are necessary to make. From Tayo’s outsider perspective, he is in the position to be able to objectively see the damage that is being done to the Laguna and the entire world.

The characters in the three novels realize that two halves still equal a whole human person. The protagonists come to the realization that they were never missing anything at all. When Tayo views himself as only part of the cosmos, he can see that nothing can exist in its own vacuum. At the conclusion of his ceremony, Tayo looks up at the stars and believes “[h]e had arrived at a convergence of patterns; he could see them clearly now. The stars had always been with them, existing beyond memory, and they were all held together there” (235). He can understand that everything is perfect, nothing is fragmentary or incomplete, including himself. Tayo experiences the enlightenment of knowing that he has always been perfectly formed as part of nature. Concannon asserts that Tayo’s journey is “an unending process, one that underscores how the Pueblos are constrained by American imperialism and by their own tribal narratives that resist those who are in-between or beyond” (1-2). He must continue to perform new ceremonies and he must not be afraid to continue to change.

Tayo finds solace in fluidity of the past, present, and the future, which he so clearly understands from outside of the expectations of the Laguna. He can sleep with the knowledge that everything is interrelated, and nothing is wasted. Tayo “dreamed with his eyes open that he was wrapped in a blanket in the back of Josiah’s wagon ... Josiah was driving the wagon, old Grandma was holding him, and Rocky whispered ‘my brother.’ They were taking him home” (236). While the acceptance of his community is foremost in Tayo’s mind, his journey brings

him to achieve greater things. He has created a new way to exist in the world that is not hinged on being mono-racial or bi-racial, but that demonstrates the importance of modifying old traditions to meet new needs. Riley concludes:

a mixed blood in a mixed blood story is not so much an act of accommodation to the exotic tastes of a non-Indian audience as it is an attempt to move toward the creation of a new, mixed blood mythology that demonstrates one way for mixed bloods to become whole within the conflict they are born into. (66)

Tayo recognizes that not only is he complete in his mixed-race identity, but he is not alone. As Betonie insists, Tayo is the only one who possesses the combination of the old and the new to bring the Laguna Pueblo story into the future. At the conclusion of the novel, Tayo shares that he can finally see his place in the future history of the Laguna Pueblo. The Laguna Pueblo will exist as long as there are those who will continue telling the story and there is room for every type of story.

In the three novels, the protagonists are not only attempting to discover who they are, but are also working through the dichotomy established between how they see themselves and how they are viewed by their respective minority communities. Durrow's Rachel seeks to move past a one-dimensional approach to her identity, whether when defining herself racially or imagining the trajectory of her life. De la Peña's Danny begins to discover the possibility of diversity within his Mexican American community that includes room for his bi-racial identity. Silko's Tayo is in the unique position on the outside of his community to see the route to salvation for himself and his people. All three protagonists are positioned to re-write their own previously limited definition of what it means to be bi-racial.

CONCLUSION

The three protagonists in the novels discover their mixed-race identities do not repress their interactions with their respective communities, but instead their racial hybridity enables them to view their communities through a lens of objectivity. From their particular perspective, the characters can choose not to follow any previously worn path. Durrow's Rachel claims the right to her whole self, including her Dutch mother's legacy and the Black community into which she "fell" at a young age. De la Peña's Danny realizes that he can stand out and still be part of the Mexican community that he loves. Silko's Tayo leaves behind his identity as a tragic mulatto by rejecting the single-race view of tribal authenticity, in favor of a shift to change with the times. The protagonists in these three novels discover the true essence of themselves by choosing to uncover and display their beautiful complexity.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I have been privy to racist comments spoken without any hesitation due to assumptions about my racial background. As an adult, more often than not, I can anticipate the derailing of a conversation or the punchline of a joke before the offense fully occurs, thereby saving the person from careening face-first into an unsalvageable situation. This usually saves the friendship or work relationship but leaves me always questioning that person's true feelings. After I shared one such instance, my dad commented that he often wishes he could know how people really feel about him. In all situations his racial identity is the first thing people see and any of their biases are carefully hidden away.

As tempting as it might seem to be cognizant of racist beliefs, it is as scary as being a fly on the wall or the Invisible Man. Usually I announce to others, "I'm half-Black!" before the story continues. I see the shift in their eyes, and in their minds, as they stumble to change the course of their words. There have been many times that I wished I didn't have to explain who I was or try

to move conversations away from open curiosity about growing up in an interracial family. There is nothing in my upbringing to be ashamed of, but somehow my announcements always feel tinged with defensiveness.

My 9-year-old son has blond hair and blue eyes. Despite tanning very well in the summertime, there is nothing else that provides a hint about his racial background. We were lounging in bed one day talking and during the conversation I mentioned something about being “half-Black” and he said, “so am I.” In his beautiful innocence, my son understands that he does not need to exhibit some sort of external quality to include the diversity of his family within his personhood. He will likely have a lifetime of explaining in front of him, but I’m certain he will continue to claim the wonderful diversity of his background.

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