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Rachel Dolezal's Drag Race: A Critical Psychoanalytic and Cultural Analysis of Post-racial
Melancholia and the Racial Passing Narrative

Introduction: Racial Politics and Mixed-Race Identity

In the eyes of some Americans, the election of the mixed-race figure, Barack Obama, to the White House has symbolically served as both the inauguration of the first Black President and the beginning of the so-called “post-racial era.” In a popular line from his presidential speech, Obama claimed: “There's not a Black America and White America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America” (Ciliza). Obama's speech reflects the growing belief in the United States that we are moving into a post-racial society: a time in society where everyone has an equal opportunity for success and the divisive labels of race can be laid to rest.¹ However, the problem with Obama's claim that there is just one “United States of America” is that labels of race still divide our society and are often used inconsistently to identify others and ourselves. For instance, many people see Obama as mixed-race, but most

¹ NPR reporter Daniel Schorr comments that, in some ways, Obama's election signaled the post-racial era: “The post-racial era, as embodied by Obama, is the era where civil rights veterans of the past century are consigned to history and Americans begin to make race-free judgments on who should lead them... The Economist called it a post-racial triumph and wrote that Obama seemed to embody the hope that America could transcend its divisions.”

Black Americans see him as Black.² Journalist Chris Cillizza writes that, in David Maraniss' biography on Barack Obama, Obama saw himself as insecure about his racial identity growing up; Obama felt "completely at home in neither race. The different path he saw for himself was to rise above the divisions." Obama's perspective as a mixed-race person became his source of motivation to bridge divisions between racial identities throughout his life; however, Obama's hope to rise above the divisions that racial labels produce was somewhat contradicted by his decision to choose Black on the 2010 U.S. Census.³ Obama's decision to identify as Black, as opposed to mixed race or nothing at all, stands in contrast with his belief that there is a united community of people living in the United States.

Therefore, it seems unrealistic to believe that we are living in a post-racial society because we still hold onto labels of race so firmly. As we saw with Obama, stories and narratives surrounding mixed-race people have captured our attention in popular culture because they seem to speak to our deepest insecurities around the seemingly obvious nature of race, and they provide a symbol of hope to move beyond our racially divided past. Rebecca Walker, a mixed-race writer, states that mixed-race people are "poster children for globalism, hybridization, humanism...and you can't help but conclude: "It's more than cool to be mixed, it's downright relevant" (14). Mixed-race people are seen as relevant today because their identity has forced us to think about the potential of living in a post-racial society. Mixed-race people are at the

² Washington Post Journalist, Chris Cillizza writes that "according to data in a fascinating new Pew Research Center study, a majority of Americans describe the president as "mixed race," while just more than a quarter (27 percent) call him 'black.'" Furthermore, he writes that a majority of people who believe Obama is Black also identify as Black.

³ Mark S. Smith writes that Obama "may be the world's foremost mixed-race leader, but when it came to the official government head count, President Barack Obama gave only one answer to the question about his ethnic background: African-American."

forefront of political organizing in the United States, and they are also at the center of popular culture as we see in film and literature. They have become central to our understanding of what it means to “live beyond race.” Some hope that the mixed-race individual is the keystone needed to move into a post-race society, but the presumptuous nature of this belief seems to replace material change with representational change. Simply making mixed-race people “poster children” and symbols for the future erases the way that racial labels and racism affect mixed-race individuals on a material level and replaces the actual change needed to move beyond race with mere representation.

The desire to “live beyond race” has been reinforced, Silk A. Dagbovie-Mullins writes, with the recent establishment of three different kinds of mixed-race identity organizations that are attempting to change the way that our country thinks about racial identity (77). Dagbovie-Mullins is a literary scholar who analyzes the development of mixed-race identity in the Black community. Dagbovie-Mullins writes that one organization is primarily focused on educating others on behalf of multiethnic people while challenging legislation to “allow individuals to claim multiple racial categories, particularly on the U.S. census form” (78). However, the first organization’s trust in the U.S. Census form has not gone unchallenged, as some scholars believe that the U.S. census data has no practical use for the identity of mixed-race.⁴ On the other hand, there are multiracial advocates who call for a “dismantling of racial categories altogether... claiming that ‘racial’ categories breed ‘racism’ instead of fighting ‘racism’” (78). Indeed, the racial category of mixed-race seems counter-intuitive to the purpose of racial labels which is to

⁴ Michele Elam writes about the political repercussions involved in box checking: she claims that the U.S. census was “an economic tool that was never meant as—nor should be—a site for self-expression” because of the impact census data has on community resource allocation (13).

separate people through the categorizing effect of language. Lastly, there is an organization that wants to develop a separate “mulatto community”:

The Mulatto People claims that their organization differs from other multiracial organizations, which, they think “seem to focus on ‘freedom to identify as whatever they choose’.” They “strongly discourage any racially mixed person, be they mulatto, hapa, mestizo, meti, or haole from choosing a monoracial race to identify as.” (78)

The *Mulatto People* may forcefully advocate mixed-race people to deny a monoracial identity because of the systematic cultural erasure of mixed-race people in society. These three potential solutions to the problem surrounding the lack of understanding around racial identity reveals a powerful truth—there is no unified conception of how we should understand race. There are many possible solutions: we can educate others on the perspectives of mixed-race people and fight for legal recognition through the Census, encourage everyone from identifying in any way and end racism in a post-racial utopia, or encourage mixed-race people, specifically, to embrace their identify as mixed-race and exist outside of the realm of normative mono-racial categories.

Behind and prior to mixed-race identity political movements, is the political movement of “Multiculturalism,” which stresses tolerance of difference and the celebration of the diversity of human existence, and it has been developed as a potential solution to the division of labels. Multicultural advocates often deploy the analogy of the “melting pot” to describe the American multicultural identity. The melting pot analogy is somewhat problematic when it is utilized to ignore the socially created differences and interactions between racial identities. Sociologist Joan W. Scott uses Nathan Glazer’s argument against multiculturalism to explain how the collapse of many identities into one label “creates a dangerously divided reality...by asserting the essential

unity of the identity of ‘American,’ it underplays the extent to which processes of difference and discrimination have structured (and continue to structure) American life” (14). Multiculturalism blindly celebrates difference without ever acknowledging difference—it refuses to look back while blindly rushing into the future.

Ever since race has been recognized as a social construct rather than a biological fact by UNESCO and the academic community, scholars of identity have had to question the ways that race is socially constructed yet an undeniable part of daily life.⁵ The socially constructed nature of race has wrongly encouraged believers in a post-racial society to ignore the existence of race entirely. In contrast, many scholars and critics of identity, particularly those in the fields of sociology, literary studies, and cultural studies, have attended to the issues of racial-identity and post-racial thought by considering the way that the individual recognizes and develops their identity in a political and social context; also, critical theorists like Anne Anlin Cheng have used psychoanalytic theory to broaden our understanding of race as a psychological identity; furthermore, political and cultural theorists like Omi and Winant, Michele Elam, and Dagoberto Mullins have made significant contributions to the way that we understand race as a political and social identity. Race could best be understood as a multifaceted identity that is developed through its existence in all three realms: the personal, the political, and the social.

As a result, we need to pay attention to the construction of race rather than look for the “biological truth” behind racial identity. Race is such a common part of our daily life that we

⁵ Robert Wald Sussman writes about the social construction of race: “In 1950, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued a statement asserting that all humans belong to the same species and that ‘race’ is not a biological reality but a myth. This was a summary of the findings of an international panel of anthropologists, geneticists, sociologists, and psychologists.”

don't think about it until someone or something disrupts our common-sense understanding of race. As social constructionists, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, claim, race is such a "common-sense" concept, a basic part of social life and identity, that most people take it for granted (3).⁶ We see race everywhere we look, but some conservatives have claimed to follow a "color-blind" ideology, an ideology that states that if we just act like racial differences no longer exist then we can solve the problems of racism. Despite the conservative belief that race is an illusion, Omi and Winant have encouraged the academic field to consider the "racial formation process":

The main task facing racial theory today, in fact, is no longer to critique the seemingly "natural" or "common sense" concept of race... Rather, the central task is to focus attention on the *continuing significance and changing meaning of race*. It is to argue against the recent discovery of the illusory nature of race; against the supposed contemporary transcendence of race; against the widely reported death of the concept of race; and against the replacement of the category of race by the other, supposedly more objective categories like ethnicity, nationality, or class. (4)

In other words, Omi and Winant want us to consider the way that the concept of race evolves and functions over time within a political and cultural struggle. Omi and Winant's appeal to the academic community to study the racial formation process emphasizes the way that racial categories are unstable and open to change in an ongoing political struggle.

⁶ Edouard Machery and Luc Faucher write that: Social constructionists propose that the concept of race—i.e., the belief that a classification based on skin color and other skin-deep properties like body shape or hair style maps onto meaningful, important biological kinds—is a pseudo-biological concept that has been used to justify and rationalize the unequal treatment of groups of people by others (1208).

Omi and Winant's appeal to us to consider the importance of the "racial formation process" necessitates an investigation into the way that the identity of mixed-race has been the subject of conflict and change throughout history. Michael C. Thornton, Professor of Afro-American studies, writes, "Race is a social and political tool not meant to reflect the range of experience or the diversity found within any group to any great extent. By definition, racial labels are tools used to categorize and to separate and/ or exclude" (325). Racial labels rely on the ability of a subject to reject the attributes of other racial categories: race itself relies on an either/or dichotomy that precludes the existence of the intersectionality of racial identity. Mixed-race identity, therefore, provide an exception to the ideology of race as a method of categorization because of the intersectional nature of mixed-race identity. Because mixed-race identity poses such a threat to the categories of mono-racial identities, the political system of the United States enforced anti-miscegenation laws on a legal level. For example, anti-miscegenation laws did not disappear from many states until 1967 because there was a racist biological/ideological rationale behind them. In 1896, Justice Brown argued in *Scott v. State* why interracial marriage must continue to be illegal:

The amalgamation of the races is not only unnatural, but is always productive of deplorable results. Our daily observation shows us, that the offspring of these unnatural connections are generally sickly and effeminate, and that they are inferior in physical development and strength, to the full blood of either race.

Brown's argument reflects the ideology of the eugenics movement that dominated the courts in his era. In some ways, this racist ideology that mixed race people are lacking in physical or psychological power has persisted until today. Mixed race people are often represented as

tragically torn between two cultures and are subject to unsolicited sympathy and condemnation; this is partly why the tragic mulatto genre seems so prevalent in art and literature.

The overturning of anti-miscegenation laws has undoubtedly created a sense of hope that mixed-race people and families could somehow be an optimistic symbol of the future. Mixed-race people have always existed, but now the genre of the tragic mulatto, the mixed-race figure who must perish, has been re-imagined in some ways yet perpetuated in others. Now, mixed-race people represent an increasingly large population that must be attended to by the scholarly field.⁷ The recent celebration and interest around mixed-race identity in art and culture reflects the current political desire to live in a post-racial society. This essay will critique the seemingly “common sense” understanding of racial identity by critiquing the authority of personal identification with a racial identity and the way that the interpolation of our identity by others limits the subject’s autonomy; furthermore, it will critique the existence of a post-racial identity by exploring the role of racial performativity and melancholia in the racial subject.

The Rachel Dolezal Syndrome: Volunteerism versus Determinism

Perhaps, the individual who has most made us question if we are really in a post-racial society, even more than Obama, is Rachel Dolezal, a former civil rights activist and African studies professor who lived her life as a self-identified Black woman, until the secret behind her identity became a national scandal in June 2015 when her parents revealed images of her as a young White girl and claimed that Dolezal had no Black ancestry. After being asked, “Are you an African American woman?” on the Today show, Dolezal claimed that “I identify as Black”

⁷ Mic journalist Zak Cheney-Rice writes, “The Wall Street Journal reported a few years back that 15% of new marriages in 2010 were between individuals of different races. Also, in 2010 nearly 9 million U.S. census respondents identified as multi-racial.”

even though her parents both said that “she’s clearly our birth daughter and we are clearly Caucasian—that’s just a fact.” During an interview on *The Real*, she cited that we all have ancestral origins in Africa to support her claim of Black identity. During the same interview, she also claimed that she doesn’t “put on blackface as performance” because she doesn’t choose to present herself as White some days and Black other days. Although Dolezal’s parents attempted to appeal to the common sense notion of race, Dolezal doesn’t believe her identity can be reduced to a biological phenomenon. Dolezal doesn’t believe in a singular definition of Blackness because there is no single “Black experience.” While she does not identify as mixed-race, Dolezal faced many similar struggles that mixed-race individuals face when she was outed as a White woman on the public stage.

Dolezal’s decision to cross racial boundaries has generated some positive support from those who believe in a “social constructionist” understanding of race because they recognize that biological explanations of race are made with highly ideological motives. TIME magazine columnist, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar reflects on the morals of people who believe Dolezal has no right to proclaim her identity as Black:

As far as Dolezal is concerned, since there is technically no such thing as race, she merely selected the cultural group with which she most identifies. Who can blame her? ...does it really matter whether Rachel Dolezal is black or white? Dr. King said we should be judged by the content of our character rather than the color of our skin...” (26).

Citing Dr. King, Abdul-Jabbar reminds us of the double standard that critics of Dolezal hold: if Dr. King’s post-racial hope was that we would judge others based on the content of our

character, then who are we to judge Dolezal's actions on the "color" of her skin—whether it is White or Black on the surface?⁸

Understandably, many people were upset with Dolezal's decision to identify as Black and they felt like she was deceiving the Black community. Some critics argue that Dolezal should not be able to choose to identify however she wants because she was born White and her parents are White. However, their argument that she isn't biologically Black speaks against the claim backed by UNESCO that there is nothing inherently biological about race. Rob Lon, television writer and producer, argues against Dolezal's choice to identify as Black because he equates the image of ourselves that we want to present to the world as distinct from our "true self," or the self that we *actually are*. Lon explains that people who cross between identities like Dolezal will "always be a white girl who acted black... There isn't, in the end, much you can really do about your true self. That fleeting glimpse we get in the mirror...the one that makes us say, 'That isn't me! That can't be me!'—well, it is." (26). Lon equates the outward image of ourselves that we see in the mirror with our true selves and rejects the internal, psychological image of ourselves that we carry and attempt to present to the world. Lon's argument reflects the biological determinist belief that biology is destiny, or the belief that we are fated to experience life in a certain way from the moment we are born.

Another critique of Dolezal was that she was speaking from the viewpoint of a White woman on behalf of the Black community, and she could not have any authentic experience of

⁸ Abdul-Jabbar makes his claim based on the good characteristics of Dolezal. He points out how she has benefited the African American community through her leadership in the NAACP and through her role as a professor of African-American culture at Eastern Washington University. In this sense, he believes that the goodness of her deeds should overrule her decision to lie to the African American community about her ancestry (26).

being black. On *The Real*, one of the interviewers asked Dolezal if she ever experienced racism since she isn't authentically Black. The question reveals how many people in America are obsessed with racial authority, a belief that being part of a certain racial-identity enables one to speak as an authority figure on behalf of that community. However, this belief confuses individual's subjective opinions with objective information: one person's experiences are filtered through their own individual experience and subjectivity, which means that we cannot expect that person to speak on behalf of a whole community. Sociologist Joan W. Scott explains that we give too much authority to others based on the identity group that they identify in: "The fact of belonging to an identity group is taken as authority enough for one's speech; the direct experience of a group or culture that is, membership in it becomes the only test of true knowledge" (18). Under the logic of racial authority, there is no room for the experiences of people who lie outside of normative understandings of racial identity. Mixed-race people, people who grew up with families that do not share the same racial background as them, and people who choose not to identify with any racial category are rendered voiceless because they exist between the margins of racial categories rather than within them. Racial authority creates a divided reality where labels like Black and White are fetishized as markers of an authentic experience. By arguing that there is only one way to be Black, White, Latino, Asian, or any other racial category, we fetishize racial labels by providing them with a power that they do not have.

Psychoanalytic Perspectives: Subjectivity and the "Mirror-Stage"

The argument behind a social constructionist or a biological determinist understanding of race in Dolezal's case reveals the intersection between individual subjectivity, objectivity and post-racial politics. The cultural conflict surrounding Dolezal's racial identity should be seen as

an entry into a conversation about subjectivity and objectivity. Dolezal's decision to identify as Black is backed by those who believe that subjectivity defines our view of society (and therefore, the category of race is merely a subjective, social construction), and her decision is opposed by those who believe that she is objectively, indefinitely, White (and therefore, all categories of race exist in an objective, static world). The main fault of believers in biological determinism is that they believe that there is such thing as an objective, real self that exists outside of, as Lon wrote, the "fleeting glimpse we get in the mirror." Using Psychoanalytic theory, we can explore the modes of being that we exist in that go beyond the realm of biological determinism. Oftentimes, in western culture, we have an obsession with uncovering the "truth" behind subjective phenomena, and we want to use scientific proof to make definitive statements on reality. Ian Craib, psychoanalytic theorist, explains that we are always looking for ways to think or feel that we really exist, that we can have some grasp on "reality"; as a result, we falsely convince ourselves that we have achieved authenticity in a mode of being Sartre calls *bad faith* (155). By tracing our development into human beings through psychoanalysis, we can see how subjectivity limits our understanding of objective reality.

Living in *bad faith* could be thought of as one consequence of living in the realm of the imaginary. As French Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan writes, through our psychic development in the "mirror stage" at a young age, we come to falsely identify with the reflection of ourselves in the mirror, our reflection, an object external to us that we falsely identify as being a part of us, our entry into the imaginary realm. As a result of our entry into the world of language and society, we cannot access objective reality—or better said, there is no objective self that we can access outside of the imaginary. Craib writes, "I think of the imaginary as often involving an

intense desire to be recognized as something by another person [the ‘Other’]...the one who looks at us and for whom we should perform” (158). We tangibly feel this sense of detachment in our interactions with others. This is what makes it so difficult to communicate our own experiences and identities to each other. Lacan undermines the authority of ‘the Subject’ by revealing the ways that our psyche, and the language that we use, limits our ability to access and express our authentic selves, our *real* selves. As a result, we must recognize that the identities that we are philosophically left with, our imaginary selves, are filtered through our social relations. Post-racial politics sympathizers seem to believe the opposite is true: they want to pretend that there are no forces that govern and constrain our perceptions of ourselves and that we are all free-willed individuals that are able to choose to identify (or not to identify) in any way we like.

Dolezal’s self-reflective, “free-willed” choice of her own identity urges us to question our own belief of in the free racial “Subject.” As we saw the mirror-stage, there is a division between our ability to express our real selves and the selves that we wish to present to the world. Judith Butler is a feminist scholar who writes on the potential freedom of the subject with the aid of Lacan, Foucault, and other French theorists. In her book, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Judith Butler claims:

If, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject...power imposes itself on us, and weakened by its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms’.

‘Power, that first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity. (2)

Butler utilizes Foucault’s theory of subjectivity to show how we come into being as subjects through our relation to systems of power, and it is in our subjection that we internalize and

accept the power that subordinates us. While Butler isn't necessarily writing about the way that power produces an internal understanding of race, we can draw from her argument that we are socialized into our identity as racial subjects through our experiences with the political and physical dimensions of racism.

These social constructionist theories may make it seem like we have no individual agency at all, and that subjectivity is a myth created to let us believe that we have some control over our destiny. However, Butler goes on to claim that there is a performative function to identity as well by providing us with the lens of gender performativity. Butler has argued that the subject is "opaque, unknown to itself, characterized by what she calls 'unbearable relationality' to the other, which means that... 'we are ethically implicated in the lives of others'" (Salih 2). In other words, as subjects we lack the ability to be self-reflective because of the opacity of the human condition; furthermore, we have an ethical responsibility to one another because of our human condition. Butler draws her theory of gender subjectivity from both the philosophy of ethics and Friedrich Nietzsche's argument that "there is no 'being' behind doing, acting, or becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction imposed on the doing—the doing itself is everything" (45). What she says is that there is no conscious thought that precedes our performance of identity. Therefore, we are unknowing victims of *bad faith*: we believe that we consciously produce our own identities through self-reflective thought when our identities are actually a product of repeated practice. Therefore, identity isn't something like an outfit, or a hairstyle, that we change into in the morning and take off at night: it is the result of the repetition of this *bad faith*, an imaginary identity that we continue to internalize. Butler's radical insight draws from a variety of theories like Althusserian interpellation, and Austinian performativity to show how the individual is

retroactively called into being. Butler provides the example of the phrase “it’s a girl!” to show how the individual is hailed into a gendered identity. Butler’s theory is particularly interesting in relation to racial politics because of the way that ideology produces the social construction of race.

Butler walks the fine line between volunteerism and determinism and fears the deployment of essentialist notions of identity as a political practice. She argues that we need to seek out the instabilities of discourse, language, and the constitutive terms of identity in order to force them into epistemic crisis and reinforce the opacity of the subject. Along the same lines, she emphasizes the psychic power that individuals have in resisting Althusserian interpolation. By exceeding the rules of subjectivity, individuals can dismantle them as socially constructed and produce a politics of discomfort. Language limits our ability to communicate because we are trapped into giving *Empty speech*, the speech of the ego, the speech of the imaginary, the speech that is merely a “request for confirmation and support in what I imagine myself to be, and what I want others to see me as being” while we need to actively engage in *Full speech*, the speech filled with meaning, the speech that contains desire, the speech that comes from the unconscious, the speech that gives us some insight to the real (Craib 159). In this sense, we are powerless in some sense to the grasps of the imaginary, but we can have some glimpse into the real through carefully paying attention to the way that we must actively perform our identities. By reading art and literature as performances, we are given some insight to the speech of the unconscious.

Literary Analysis: Exploring the Potentials of Racial Passing in *The Non-Babylonians*

Wayde Compton’s short story, *The Non-Babylonians*, exemplifies how the artistic form can be used to destabilize essentialist notions of race. In Compton’s story the protagonist, Riel, a

racially ambiguous individual, reads a newspaper article about a mysterious immigrant found in a shipping container on the Vancouver dock. Within an incoming shipping container, workers find an ethnically ambiguous woman who is speaking frantically in an unidentifiable language. The newspaper comments that workers believed that she was “probably Asian” but also “looked ‘Arabic’” and didn’t speak Chinese (Compton 237). The mysterious woman elicited a variety of negative responses and someone wrote that “she should be stuffed back in the container they found her in, locked up, and sent back to Hong Kong with ‘return to sender’ painted on the side” (239). Many of the negative attitudes that the woman faced were a result of tense disagreement on Chinese illegal immigration in Canada. However, what the woman may have received so much hate because of her lack of a stable, mono-racial identity. Where Butler writes that there is a risk of violence for transgendered subjects, and others “who live, or try to live, on the sexual margins,” racially ambiguous people and mixed-race people face certain risks in living outside of our typical conceptions of racial identity (254). To present one’s identity as something other than concrete and stable is to produce a variety of unwanted assaults.

Riel feels sympathy for the woman in the shipping container and feels empathy towards the way her ethnic ambiguity is treated. Later, Riel meets the woman from the shipping container who calls herself Versajna. She explains that the entire story was an artistic hoax created by her to collect reactions and perceptions about her. When Riel asks Versajna where her name comes from, she explains that she refuses to answer his question as part of her artistic project (Compton 246). Versajna’s ability to appear as racially ambiguous provides her with an uncanny ability to challenge our perceptions of her racial identity. Versajna’s performance draws attention to the intersection between performance, identity and subjugation. Her performance is backed by a

post-racial political ideology that embraces cultural and ethnic ambiguity as a site of political protest. Her performance forces us to consider the political possibilities of existing outside of racial boundaries and passing fluidly through the boundaries.

There is some dispute over the effectiveness of passing and theories of racial performativity. In *Autobiography of an Ex-White Man*, Walter Benn Michaels argues that passing is impossible because social constructionist models of racial identity are inherently invested in essentialism and race itself is an “impossibility” (143). Michaels argues that passing is impossible because race is already an illusion. In contrast, Elam writes that claiming race is an illusion distracts from the richness of racial aesthetics: “the so-called illusoriness of race is a red herring, and that to treat race as a philosophical dead end is itself a game of sophistry” (101). The disruption that the act of passing has on normative beliefs of racial identity would be overlooked if we were to assume that race is purely an illusion. The act of passing or performing an ambiguous identity reflects Judith Butler’s belief that the individual has some agency over the norms that subject him/her. While we don’t always have control over the way that we perceive ourselves and the way that others perceive us, there is hope that by recognizing the ways that racial ideology shapes and defines our lives, we can have some ability to change and reshape those ideologies.

Butler’s theory of drag provides useful insight into the way that drag performance and race crossing reveals the imitative nature of subjectivity. Salih writes that, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains how drag performances reveal the imitative nature of gender: Butler believes that the drag queen is seen as an imitation of “femininity,” but this thought disguises the fact that

“femininity” itself is merely an ideal that one strives to imitate (253). By revealing the imitative nature of gender, performativity promises a deconstruction of the stability of the normative categories of gender. However, Salih encourages us to go beyond this simple understanding of performativity by considering the way that melancholia structures performativity:

If melancholia in Freud’s sense is the effect of an ungrieved loss, performance, understood as ‘acting out,’ may be related to the problem of unacknowledged loss. If there is an ungrieved loss in drag performance, perhaps it is a loss that is refused and incorporated and incorporated in the performed identification, one which reiterates a gendered idealization and its radical uninhabitability. (253-254)

Melancholia, in Freud’s sense, is a pathological disorder where the subject and the object become indistinguishable from each other. It is an act of mourning where the object that is loss is incorporated into the ego rather than being laid to rest. The way that we perform our identities, therefore, gives us insight to the ungrieved losses that we hold with us. This melancholic tendency plagues the mixed-race performance because the story of mixed-race identity is one of tragedy, albeit this mixed-race narrative is still one of hope.

Visual Analysis: The Mixed Race Figure as a Cultural Symbol

The depiction of mixed-race people within art and popular culture enable us to explore the potential of the mixed-race individual to exceed the rules of subjectivity that constrain the identity of race. However, this claim does not mean that mixed-race people are special in some way because of they have a different “biological makeup” than mono-racial individuals because biology doesn’t prove useful to analyze the complex psychological aspects of identity. By understanding race as a product of our psychological development, rather than a product of

biology, we can peer into the illusory nature of racial categories. Some of the most potent illustrations of the “imaginary” (in Lacanian terms) nature of race are found in the mixed-race passing narratives that reveal the way that the social construction of reality limits our ability to claim that there is anything essential or “real” behind the identities that we say are absolute.

Recently, mixed-race people have been seen as a beacon of hope and symbols of the post-racial era for a society filled with the anxiety of dealing with a history of racial inequality. However, images of the mixed-race individual have proved to be highly problematic because of the way that they falsely credit the manipulation of exterior appearance and images, things that all exist within the realm of the “imaginary,” with a reconstruction of our objective reality, the parts of our society that people have confused with “the real”. One scene from Warren Beatty’s film *Bulworth* (1998) exemplifies the hopeful belief that we simply need to change our exterior appearance to solve the issue of racial inequality. The protagonist, Senator Bulworth, believes in “procreative, racial deconstruction” where “Everybody’s fuckin’ everybody else till you can’t tell the difference.” By eliminating differences of color through reproduction, Bulworth believes we can end many of the economic and social problems created by racial identities. However, the character’s belief in procreative, racial deconstruction is backed by biological determinism and the belief that visible characteristics are the foundation for racial discrimination. Bulworth’s desire to eliminate visual difference by making everyone look the same is not as revolutionary as some may believe because not everyone has the same idea of what a mixed-racial society looks like. While Bulworth believes the problem of race lies in skin color, he ignores the possibility that racism is more than skin deep. The reality is that even if we all woke up looking identical tomorrow morning, the endless consequences of a history of racial discrimination would still

persist. A closer look at how the mixed-race individual has been imaged over time reveals the problematic implications that our hope in the mixed-race individual represents.

Furthermore, the imaging of mixed-race people tends to equate mixed-race with a combination of White and “other” which is seen as the integration of non-normative racial identities with that of the hegemonic norm, White identity. In other words, mixed-race people are seen as the product of transforming non-White peoples into normative, White subjects. This is



the melancholic tendency of the mixed-race individual in popular imagery: in order to be accepted by a White population, mixed-race individuals must continuously mourn the aspects of their identity that are lost in their representation. On the 1993 *Time* Magazine cover, there is a digitally produced photo of a light skinned woman followed by the caption “Take a good look at this woman. She was created by a computer from a mix of several races. What you see is a remarkable preview of... The New Face of America: How Immigrants Are

Fig. 1 The cover of a special issue of Time Magazine featuring a digitally created image of a mixed-race woman; Thai, Ted. “The New Face of America” Time Magazine. 18 November 1993. Web. 20 February 2016

Shaping the World’s First Multicultural Society” (see fig. 1). Looking at the image of the

woman, she appears to be fair skinned, with natural beauty, mostly straight hair, and appears visibly palatable for white consumption. Her light skin and straight hair put her in contrast with real images of mixed-race people and other people of color. The cover of TIME magazine attempts to present as beautiful because she represents the future of multicultural America, but possibly, she is presented as beautiful because she represents an Anglicized, tame version of the diverse people living in America. She represents the image of the mixed-race individual who excludes the aspects of her identity that make her mixed. This whitening of outward appearance is the melancholic performance of mixed-racial identity in popular culture. Anne Anlin Cheng is a Professor of English and African American studies, who defines “the ‘good’ cultural melancholic *par excellence*: one who longs after a vision of herself that excludes herself” (51). The melancholic mixed-race individual must be imaged/imag(in)ed in a way that excludes the very real aspects of her identity that exist in conflict with normative racial identity. We see this happen in our daily lives, in racial gatekeeping, a process where people are excluded from communities based on perceived racial identity. When mixed-race individuals claim to be part of a certain racial community, they might have to reject the aspects of their identity that exist outside of that community, or risk the danger of being too White, too Black, too Latino, or too X race, to be another race. The melancholic mixed-race individual is a necessary byproduct of the move into post-racial society, a society where the problems of our racially divided past have healed themselves:

This pathological euphoria, however, merely assents to the dream of multiculturalism: a utopian no-place where the pathologies of race and gender miraculously heal themselves.

The very idea of the melting pot serves to celebrate assimilation while continually remarking difference. (Cheng 52)

Thus, as Cheng powerfully states, we arrive at the central problem that lies at the heart of multiculturalism and post-racial politics. To be multicultural, or to be post-racial, relies on the individual's ability to continuously mourn the parts of their identity that do not fit into the narrative of society.

Literary Analysis: "Racial Authority" and Psychic Trauma in *Effigies*

Lucinda Roy's short story, *Effigies*, serves as a testimonial that racial labels provide no useful method to understand identity and warns us of the dangers of racial melancholia. The protagonist, Samuel Bernard Monroe, Sam for short, a man from a biracial background whose father was Nigerian and mother was Irish, serves as a Distinguished Professor of Africana Studies at a university. Sam is light skinned—so light skinned that he could pass for white—but partly develops his racial identity as Black, from his thick hair that resembles "Frederick Douglass's" hair. Sam claims that "he owed his hair a debt of gratitude; it had granted him passage into his race in a way that nothing else could have" (Roy 49). In his eyes, Sam's hair provides him with the "passport" that he uses to cross from his appearance as purely White to an appearance as a Black man. Sam falsely credits this external object, his hair, as the source of his identity, and by returning to Lacan's conception of "the mirror stage," we can foresee the danger of self-identification with an external object: the problem is that this intense *desire* to be recognized as Black has no power. While the story first appears to be a narrative about racial passing, akin to the story about Rachel Dolezal, *Effigies* illuminates the dangers of existing in the "imaginary" and the way that concrete, lived experiences can provide a true source of identity.

Sam attempts to perform his identity as Black through the use of his hair, but the fragile image of himself, the image in the mirror, is shattered by the end of the story, when Sam believes that his coworker, Sherrie, a new Black Feminist Professor at the University, created a plot to undermine Sam's authority within the Africana Studies department by revealing that he isn't authentically Black.

While the main conflict in *Effigies* arises from the mystery behind Sam's racial identity, the story reveals the ineffectiveness of racial labels to understand identity. Sam believes that Sherrie hates Sam and his identity, because she said, "I don't believe in interracial dating, Sam" during a University party (53). Sam feels like her "comment had been utterly demeaning," and felt that "She was accusing him of being white, telling him he'd sold out" (53). Sam believes he is Black and he thinks that Sherrie's desire to erase that aspect of his identity is part of her hatred of him, but his identification as Black only paints a partial image of his identity. Later in the story, when an unknown vandal carves the "n word" into University President Trencher's Mercedes, Sherrie explains to the University board that the vandal may have actually been trying to target Sam because Sam used to own a car like the University President's Mercedes. Because Sam believes that Sherrie thinks he isn't authentically Black, the vandal's decision to carve the "n" word into the Mercedes takes on a symbolic meaning. Symbolically, Sam must accept and prove that the vandal was targeting him because he was Black, or he has to question whether or not he is actually Black. The "n word" in this story serves as a functional form of ideology that operates similarly to the theory of interpellation that Louis Althusser proposes. Althusser argues that "all ideology hails or interpolates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning category of the subject" (130). In other words, we are "hailed" by the call of

ideology into subjects with limitations and arbitrary rules on our subjectivity. The vandal's writing of the "n" word on the car attempts to "hail" Sam into the category of the mono-racial subject, but Sam doesn't recognize that the "hailing" was actually aimed at him. Sam's decision to resist the call of interpellation proves Althusser's thesis. Sam doesn't see himself as just Black. This might be because Sam is worried that Sherrie "was accusing him once again of being an Uncle Tom" (Roy 56). Perhaps, Sam sees himself as a sell-out for the Black community, someone who plays a subservient role in the oppression of their own kind. Sam's paranoid belief that Sherrie's intends to "out" Sam as being un-authentically Black, and his inability to recognize that the vandal might have been targeting him, reveals that there may be an internal conflict within Sam's psyche to reconcile his identity through the use of the labels of race.

The investigation of the hate crime eventually leads the University President to discover that Sam is not who he appears to be. During the investigation, President Bill learns from *African American Activism* reporters that Sam's mother, who was committed to a nursing home for senile elders, had claimed that Sam's father was White. Sam walks into University President Bill's office, Bill regretfully informs Sam that someone is alleging that he isn't Black. Bill says "I'm not the one who's raising objections. I think your work is valid even if you're not... well, I think it's valid no matter what. But others may feel you may have... misrepresented yourself. The African-American Student Caucus has asked us to investigate (59). In response to the allegation that he isn't Black, Sam says "Bill, you can't do this to me. I'm biracial. Black! Look at me! My work—all of it. You think I could have written those things if I hadn't got some insight into what it's like to straddle two different cultures?" (59). Sam tries to communicate that his identity and work arises from his personal experiences, not his external appearance, but the Caucuses' belief

in racial authority leads to the dismissal of Sam's work simply because his identity is undeterminable. This development produces two conclusions: visual markers of identity, like Sam's hair, have little narrative power for people who claim to identify as mixed-race, and the reduction of knowledge to identification within a certain identity group, or Racial Authority, leads to the dismissal of the mixed-race experience and may prove to be a source of psychological conflict.

Sam rushes to his mother's nursing home and asks her why she told the reporters his father was white. She explains why she told the reporters that his father was white:

You put me here, you bastard... You put me in this shit-hole and left me to die... You were never kind to anyone... You treat women like dirt. Carly loved you. You spat on her; you spat on me. So many betrayals... all those women, all those young college girls. I love black men, but I don't love you, Sam. Not one bit. Your father would be ashamed. . . . (61)

While we should keep in mind that Sam's mother is committed to an institution for senile elders, we might still draw from her statement that Sam does indeed come from a mixed-race ancestry, and his mother only wanted to get back at Sam for the way he treated her. In response to her, Sam stands above his mother and shouts, "Tell them about my father, you *stupid bitch!*" (61). Sam's mother never tells the reporters the truth, and Sam is left to be labeled as White by his peers forever. The ambiguity that the narrative creates around Sam's racial identity reflects the ambiguous nature of race and the way that our existence in the "imaginary" limits our access to the real.

The cause behind his emotions and mental state becomes clearer after we learn about an incident that occurred when he was younger. After leaving the nursing home, Sam is reminded of a warm Brooklyn summer evening when he was fourteen, when he was attacked by four drunk white men for no apparent reason than appearing as a symbol of Black youth culture. His skin was dark that summer, and one evening, he was walking down the street with a boom box when a man said, “Come here Nigger... An’ give us that nice big music machine. A donation of sorts” (62). At first they appear to just want to rob Sam, but another one of them says, “How ‘bout we run our hands through that gorgeous, girly hair you got? ... Tie it up in some pretty bows, make you feel like a natural woman” (62). The act of robbery turns into a form of sexual assault against Sam after “one of the others had shoved him against a wall and rubbed up against him as if he were some whore” (62). In a racist ideology materialized, this traumatic experience, an act of violence and objectification, formulates Sam’s identity even more than the texture of his hair and shade of his skin. Sam says that he didn’t want his mother to know what happened to him because he knew she wouldn’t understand:

She was white; she wouldn’t get it. In those days, it wasn’t the kind of a thing a boy talked about. He’d sealed it up inside himself. And that was when he’d been born into something different, something set apart. And until now, he’d clung to that, drawn upon it as a rite of passage. But what value did it have if he weren’t black? What did all that mean if he’d been duped from the start? IF it was a farce, all of it” (62).

It might be concluded that this was a crucial moment where Sam had experienced racism firsthand, and this experience may be the source of Sam’s racial angst. This experience had a profound effect on Sam’s psyche because he sealed it up within himself. From a psychoanalytic

perspective, we might view his recollection of this past event as a signal of an unmourned trauma. The past event was unable to be grieved by Sam and it became internalized in his ego; his fixation on his hair as the source of his Black identity might be unconsciously linked to this traumatic experience. Sam's lived experiences shaped his identity, but most people in the story do not realize it from their perspective. His colleagues chose to label Sam as White not because he experienced life as a White person, but they chose to do so because that was the "common sense" answer behind his racial identity. If Sam's mother said that he was White, as Rachel Dolezal's parents said she was White, then that was the truth, period.

The experience that Sam faced has to, once again, "be sealed up inside himself," as he chooses the latter of two conflicting narratives: he could have acknowledged that he is Black because he had this traumatic experience, but he feels forced to believe that his experience has no value if he isn't actually Black. It doesn't matter whether or not Sam is actually Black, White, or mixed-race; the forces within the story, the forces of racism, have cornered Sam into a position where his complex identity has been reduced to the constraints of mono-racial labels.

Sam's final act symbolically represents his attempt to mourn the loss of his multidimensional identity, for his peers will always know him as the White man who acted Black. Sam rushes home, grabs his scissors, and cuts off his curly hair, the very "passport" that enabled him to perform his Black identity: "A few minutes later, his beautiful hair lay in long swirls on the bathroom floor. He stared at them. The strands seemed to writhe under his gaze, then they became still" (62). The hair, the object that Sam internalized as the source of his identity, symbolically loses its power as it becomes detached from Sam's ego. However, the process of mourning is not necessarily complete, as Sam realizes that he has become the cultural

melancholic, someone who must continually grieve his loss. In an attempt to grieve, he calls his ex-girlfriend, Carly, and he tells her:

Carly, they tried to kill me. I ran, but they caught up. Been running all my life... I never turned back. Not once. Turn to salt if you look back—too many tears. I loved you Carly, Did you love me once? Or was I always a pompous ass? (63).

Sam's explanation that he has been running all his life provides evidence to prove that he held onto the feeling he felt when he was attacked throughout his life, and that he has been unable to deal with the trauma. His reference to the story of Lot's wife, the story where she turns into a pillar of salt for looking back at God's destruction of the city of Sodom, provides an excellent allegory for the process of racial melancholia, and perhaps, it provides a haunting image of the future of post-racial America. Sam attempted to outrun the trauma of the past, but "they caught up" and he, once again, pays the price for his mixed-racial identity.

Mixed-Race Identity Formation: Fates and Ancestries in *Mrs. Turner's Lawn Jockeys*

In the magical realist story, *Mrs. Turner's Lawn Jockeys*, Emily Raboteau uses surreal literary devices to explore the way that the character Bernie, a young mixed-race boy, struggles to reconcile the conflicting parts of his mixed-race identity. Raboteau explores the boundaries of biological determinism and provides insight to the unconscious thought processes that shape our identity by using the fictional space of the story to allegorically explain our journey into selfhood. In the story, Bernie, a mixed-race, part Black, and part White boy, spends many of his weekends taking care of the lawn of the older White woman across the street, Mrs. Turner. One day the two black lawn jockeys on her lawn magically come to life and ask him to do a strange task: they ask him to paint their skin white so they can be free from the gaze of others. In a way,

the lawn jockey's face the same problem that Bernie and his family face. Bernie's mixed-race family makes him and his family the object of fascination for the primarily White community. Over the length of the story, Bernie's painting of the lawn jockeys becomes a metaphor for the development of Bernie's identity as a mixed-race individual.

The lawn jockeys serve as a metaphorical mirror where the readers can access the unconscious thoughts and desires of Bernie because of their physical placement on the direct opposite side of the street and their direct insight to Bernie's psyche. The jockeys provide Bernie with an opportunity to reconcile the internal conflict produced by his mixed-race identity. When Bernie first meets the lawn jockeys he is cautious of talking to them because his father said that Mrs. Turner should have put them away when their family moved in. However, the lawn jockeys manage to bribe Bernie into helping them out because they have a lot of "dirt" on him. One of the jockeys says, "we've got a lot of dirt on you, buddy... That pack of Kools you smoked? We saw you do it... That time you tried on your mother's lipstick and jerked off on your parent's bed? We saw that too. *Disgusting*" (71). After the Jockeys tell Bernie that they know his darkest secrets, secrets that we could read as the growing pains of a young adolescent, Bernie thinks, "I'm getting a creepy feeling, the same one I get about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." (71). He feels like the lawn jockeys are serving a similar position as MLK because they are watching him inside his consciousness constantly. The lawn jockey's full knowledge of Bernie's actions reveals an internal moral conflict in Bernie's mind. By reading this story through a Lacanian lens, Bernie appears to be attempting to reconcile the un-reconciled aspects of his psychological identity through a manipulation of symbols in the "imaginary" realm. Although Lacan sees our

identity development happening at a very young age, this story provides an example of the unconscious development of mixed-race identity in an adolescent's life.

In the short story, Bernie struggles to reconcile the aspects of his identity that are forced upon him and the way that he feels about himself. Bernie's identity develops through both a reflection on the history of his forefathers and the gaze of others. Because many people don't understand how he feels about his identity, Bernie feels like there are two aspects of our identity, "the one we talk about and the one we don't" (72). Bernie feels like the aspect of our identity that we keep inside of us is the most important but we never talk about it. Bernie carries the image of Martin Luther King standing behind him in the back of his mind because his dad told him it would help him remember to "honor his legacy" and do good deeds (71). Bernie is haunted by the expectations placed upon him by his father and the legacy of Dr. King: he feels a personal responsibility to identify as Black because of his relationship with his father and forefathers. Bernie's feeling connects strongly to Ian Craib's argument that our navigation through the imaginary involves an "intense desire to be recognized as something by another person [the 'Other']...the one who looks at us and for whom we should perform" (158) In this case, the 'Other' is MLK, who is both 'Other' and other to Bernie because MLK becomes the one Bernie consciously performs for, and he becomes representative of an image of "authentic blackness" that Bernie can never achieve.

Bernie's difficulty in reconciling his divided identity is reflected in his father's emotions who feels similar emotions as Bernie. Bernie overhears a fight between his father and mother getting ready for bed:

I can hear him fighting with my mom. He's saying he moved us here for the school system so we could have a good education. He's not saying he hates it here, but I know that's what he means. The fact is, sometimes I hate it here too. Everybody looks at us like we did something wrong (76)

Bernie feels like the community looks at their family like they did something wrong because of the color of their skin. Bernie also overhears his father say, "I just want him to fit in" (76). In other words, Bernie believes that his father wishes he would fit in with either the Black community or the White community instead of being forced into an intermediary position. The tension within Bernie's household becomes embodied in his desire to paint the lawn jockeys on Mrs. Turner's lawn. The lawn jockeys across the street become symbols of the way that external appearances do not always match up with the desired image of ourselves that we wish to present. The lawn jockeys are forced to stand immobile, trapped in their bodies, and have no ability to choose their own identity and the connotations that their identity carries. When the lawn Jockeys ask him to paint their skin white, Bernie says "That doesn't make any sense! Wouldn't you rather just have me take you somewhere with a better view?" (71). Bernie narrates that the lawn jockey "says I'm missing the point, which is that even if they were in a different place, people would still look at them in the same way and that would spoil it" (71). Bernie carries the same dilemma that the lawn jockeys do because even if he moved into a Black community, he would still stand out for being too White.

Bernie's desire to paint the lawn jockeys white serves as a metaphor for the way that mixed-race individuals must align themselves with one race in order to fit in. In an ironic literary moment, Bernie and his little sister sneak out at night disguised with black shoe polish on their

face, they put on “blackface,” to give the lawn jockeys “whiteface”. Bernie explains to his sister that the lawn jockeys are “stuck inside their bodies... They’re stuck inside the way everybody looks at them, and they want me to change it” (78). While Bernie claims that the lawn jockeys wish to be seen as White, his obsession with painting them can be better understood as his own desire to remove himself from the limitations of his body, to the chain that his racial ancestry and his visible appearance has created. Bernie sees a distorted image of himself in the mirror, which forces him to see his identity as either *Black or White*. This false identification leads to an internal conflict where Bernie feels compelled to re-signify the lawn jockeys, and himself, as White subjects in order to be free from the identity of blackness.

Bernie views his father’s anger towards the lawn jockeys as an anger directed towards their family’s black identity. During their mission late at night, Bernie’s sister notices their father standing in the kitchen across the street, and Bernie explains, “He’s thinking... He had a bad dream. Our dad is in four places at once... He’s thinking about who he used to be, who he is, who people think he is, and who he wants me to become” (79). Bernie extends the metaphor of a Du Boisian double consciousness into a “quadruple consciousness” that connects his father’s personal identity to his relationship to his son. Bernie makes this connection because family relations require an extension and analysis of what it means to identify as an autonomous being for both the child and the parent. French Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas explains that paternity involves a recognition that the child is an Other who is part of the self but is not quite a part of oneself (Bell 277). In other words, Levinas reverses the psychoanalytic focus on the role of the child’s identification with the father by focusing on the father who also experiences a moment of recognition where he sees himself in the actions of his son, who has a presence that is both

internal and external to his self. This identification with the son is more than just a physical one, it is a temporal one as it involves a looking backwards towards ones' ancestry and a looking forward to the future, the future that the child will inherit. Vikki Bell explains that "In paternity 'the future still refers to the personal from which it is nonetheless liberated: it is the child, mine in a certain sense or, more exactly, *me, but not myself; it does not fall back upon my past to fuse with it and delineate a fate*'" (39). While there is an identification of the parent with the son, there is a temporal and spacial disconnection between the two, an indeterminate fate created by the space between the father and the son. In this space there is a latent potential to break free from the continuity of ancestry.

It is in this space between Bernie and his father, where Bernie has the potential to break free from his past and choose to define himself. This is the power of youth: the ability to move beyond the limits that were placed on our forefathers. However, Bernie misinterprets his father's feelings towards him and attempts to solve the conflict of his mixed-race racial identity by painting the lawn jockeys white and symbolically attempting to identify as just one race. After Bernie goes to sleep that night, he has a dream that the bees who live behind Mrs. Turner's lawn are stinging his father as he goes down the train tracks of America:

In the night I dream about the bees...soon it's a whole swarm of bees stinging him. He doesn't stop walking. He's walking fast in a shell of bees. I can't catch him. I'm pulling a boxcar full of rocks behind me and I can hardly move. He goes away from me fast as a train, down into Mississippi, where he was born.

I wake myself up early in the morning so I can watch him. I scratch my face. I think there's something crawling under there, trying to dig out of my skin (Raboteau 79)

Earlier in the story, Bernie claimed that Mrs. Turner's backyard was filled with bees before Mr. Turner died, and that he didn't feel like her front yard and backyard went with the same house. In the same way, Bernie's concept of himself, his internal selfhood, didn't match his external appearance like the house seemed to be wrongly mixed. Bernie's dream proves useful because it shows the way that he feels a distance between himself and his father. These rocks, the burden of his mixed identity, pull him back and he feels like he cannot connect on the same level as his father. Even when he wakes up he feels like something is trying to crawl out of his skin, there is a disconnect between his self and his body. Bernie waits to see his father's reaction, and he hopes that it will be positive, but something unexpected happens. Bernie looks out the window to wave at the freshly painted jockeys, but they don't wave; he narrates, "I can tell they're free at last and aren't alive anymore, just plaster" (79). The magic disappears after Bernie paints the jockeys white, which may reflect the price that he must pay if he were to mourn part of his identity. Is it the fate of Bernie to re-enact the fate of the *tragic mulatto*? Bernie finally sees his father go outside to fetch the newspaper:

When he stands up he sees them. He drops the newspaper. The lawn jockeys are holding out their lanterns to him like they're giving him a New Year's toast. I can tell by the way my dad's shoulders go up and down, up and down, that he's laughing" (80).

The story ends here, but Bernie's father's reaction might reveal the way that Bernie had misinterpreted his father's wishes, or that his father's wishes for Bernie to identify as mono-racial were dispelled in this moment. The reference to the New Year's toast heightens the sense of change and renewal that the lawn jockeys transformation represents, and may signal the temporal discontinuity between father and son. Bernie's quest to paint the jockeys was certainly

fueled by a powerful internal conflict, and even if he stumbled (or even failed) in his quest to truly reconcile his identity, his father's laughter reflects the joy that we feel in watching, and perhaps reliving, the shortcomings and triumphs of our growth into human beings.

Afterward: Reflections on (Non) Mixed-Race Identity and Post-Race Society

By viewing the way subjectivity and the “imaginary” realm limits and shapes our understanding of racial identity, I lead us to the question that has remained unasked throughout this essay: can, or should, Rachel Dolezal identify as a Black woman? If we suspend our ethical and personal beliefs for a moment, and recognize that race only exists as the product of shifting political and social ideologies that are reinforced by both physical and social forces, then, the answer is that depending on the way that power, in its malevolent form (as in physical or psychological forms of violence) or in its so called “benevolent form” (as in the utilization of color-blind ideologies), is exercised upon the individual, and depending on the psychic development of the individual based on their relation to power, the category of racial identity is actually a shifting and unstable category—and therefore, it would be possible for someone to identify or (mis)identify with a certain identity regardless of the seemingly obvious or seemingly objective answer to their identity. Therefore, we can only understand how one comes into their identity as racial subjects through an analysis of the lens of ideology and its enforcers (the tangible effects of racism). Ultimately, to beg the question, “Is Dolezal Black or White?”, is a fallacy at best. Dolezal's decision to identify as a certain race has no objective value: we are already working within the limitations of the imaginary. Nietzsche's claim stands strong: “the ‘doer’ is merely a fiction imposed on the doing—the doing itself is everything” (Butler 45). The nature of subjectivity in the realm of the “imaginary” reveals the fictitious nature of the “doer”

behind the actions. To think of the 'doer' behind identity as someone who is free to identify anyway they want would be to disregard the complexity of identity formation and change.

As we saw throughout this essay, the human experience is too complicated for the constricting label of mixed-race, let alone the strictly limiting mono-racial identities. Furthermore, our current cultural and legal system was not designed for the needs and experiences of mixed-race people, and the categories of race produce both social and cultural forms violence. Attempting to constrain our understanding of identity to the confines of definitive racial labels should be seen as a symptom of living in *bad faith*, a failed attempt to come to terms that we have some grasp on objective reality. The psychic dimensions of racism produce profound effects on the individual in the melancholia of race, the splitting of our selves made possible by our existence in the imaginary. The concrete experiences of race are crucially more important than which labels we use to ascribe identity to others or ourselves.

If the experiences of the mixed-race people in the pieces of literature reviewed in this essay are any proof of the dangers of forcing people into boxes or erasing race, then we can see why mixed-race identity should not be seen a symbol of the post-race society. We cannot simply fall back upon post-racial rhetoric to solve the issue of race in America. Race can be understood through many lenses, as we have seen through the contrast between legal and personal conceptions of race. And most importantly, the fragility of race as a way of grouping and organizing experiences is most reflected in the experiences of mixed-race people. By looking beyond whether or not someone is actually, biologically, or certainly a certain race, we can better understand what it means to be human, and not simply a subject. By looking beyond the realm of certainty, and opening ourselves up to the possibilities that a cultural and psychoanalytic analysis

of the mixed-race individual in art provides, we can have some glimpse into, in Lacanian terms, the “real” that surrounds us. If race must perish in the flames of post-racial ideology, or if we must accept the loss of some sense of wholeness in racial melancholia, then we know that we cannot look back—turn to salt if you look back—for this non-existent utopia in the making, the post-racial society, has no room for the deepest wounds of our racial past.

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