



Cognitive Dissonance in the Self-Identifying Processes of Multiracial People

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ABSTRACT: This essay discusses the effects of internalized racism on multiracial people, specifically those who claim a mix of white and non-white. The paper first establishes the opposing representations of whiteness and racialized groups as well as the historic and modern disenfranchisement of racialized people in Canada. I argue that cognitive dissonance, the unpleasant mental state that occurs in people when conflicting thoughts and feelings are present, is triggered by belonging to different racial groups when structural hegemony and socialized whiteness require race to remain immutable. The cognitive dissonance propagates internalized racism as the mixed-race person attempts to rid themselves of these conflicting feelings. The paper draws on Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Franz Fanon's concept of the inferiority complex. While also acknowledging that non-mixed racialized groups are impacted by internalized racism due to the disenfranchisement and marginalization of their groups as a whole, Said and Fanon's theories are applied to half-white mixed-race people in this essay to further analyze the form that internalized racism takes and how it impacts the way in which they identify.

Canadian citizens take for granted that they live in a just and multicultural society. People point to the country's diverse population and multicultural policies as evidence of the egalitarian nature of Canada. A widely touted fact to support this notion of Canada is a thirty-three percent increase in the number of interracial marriages since 2001.¹ Half-white mixed-race people are celebrated and held up as evidence of Canadian multiculturalism. Despite the claims of equality for all, however, systems of oppression still exist. Although the thirty-three percent statistic appears progressive, the reality is that only four percent of all married and common-law couples in Canada are interracial, up from three percent in 2001. As Canada is continuously framed as a haven of opportunity for partner diversity, the discourse around mixed races seeks to exoticize the mixed-race body and lifestyle. This narrative, therefore, hinders the ability for mixed-race people to self-identify or create a cohesive identity. Contradictory representations of different racial mixes complicate notions of identify and the amount of privilege people receive from being partially white. This essay explores racial self-definition and its complications when navigating cognitive dissonance in half-white mixed-race people (hereafter referred to as simply mixed-race people).

This essay is inspired by my own positionality as a mixed-race woman of Lebanese and Italian descent. Although the two nations do not have contemporary intertwining histories, my struggle to identify comfortably with both has been met with resistance from the Western dominating lens throughout my life. By "Western lens," I am specifically referring to living in Canada yet being seen as not necessarily fully Canadian, due to being a visible Muslim and of Lebanese decent. I draw on my own experiences of being read as a white body or as a racialized body. At one point, I dissociated myself with Lebanon in order to emphasize being Italian, a quality I was denied due to my visible Lebanese background. At other times I attempted to emphasize that I was from two different groups, only to be pressured to identify as one or the other. Requiring mixed-race people to identify with a single race, an

1 Statistics Canada, "A Portrait of Couples in Mixed Unions," Government of Canada, 20 Apr. 2010, Web, 8 Mar. 2016, <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2010001/article/11143-eng.htm>>.



act known as micro-aggression, is a common social process that occurs so others do not have to confront what it would mean to be from two groups, often constructed as contradictory to one another.

Cognitive dissonance, the unpleasant mental state that occurs in people when conflicting thoughts and feelings are present, is not an inherent quality that is genetically inflicted when two people of different races have a child together. Rather, the thoughts and feelings that cause cognitive dissonance are a result of produced knowledge and representations of the marginalized in a society.² Cognitive dissonance can obscure identity by complicating the thought process behind how a mixed-race person identifies. Theories by Fanon (1967) and Said (1995), which are typically discussed in relation to monoracial people, provide insight into how internalized racism can be prompted simply by how two races are positioned opposite one another in a racial binary. Cognitive dissonance fuels the dehumanization of people of color by colonizing these groups in order to justify their oppression. By dehumanizing people of color, the guilt of abusing a fellow human being disappears; one no longer has to consider themselves hurting a person but rather an animal or object. The West has a long history of manipulating information and representations to promote its own agenda while avoiding the inconsistencies that such representations can create. This manipulation of representation can cause cognitive dissonance in mixed-race people, resulting in internalized racism. As a result, mixed-race people begin to view themselves and their communities through the hegemonic Western (white) lens and thus adopt racist ideas about their own communities that are reinforced by the actions of the hegemonic group. In this way, internalized racism and cognitive dissonance maintain and produce one another in the colonial system.

THE MIXED-RACE OTHER

Edward Said wrote *Orientalism* as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience.”³ The Western experience is hegemonic and therefore defines the Orient as its opposite, everything the Occident is not.⁴ Orientalism manifests in cultural and political discourses that have been used to justify colonialism and war.⁵ Tools used to “other” people of color such as stereotypes ensure that anyone seen as being from the Orient can be painted with a single brush, leaving no space for complexities. The link between the binary that Orientalism creates and internalized racism becomes a way to understand how cognitive dissonance is perpetuated. Identifying with both sides of the binary creates a contradiction because Orientalist discourse does not allow space for a medium to exist; one is either from the Orient or from the Occident. With no space in which to exist, mixed-race people are compelled to identify as monoracial to validate their experiences and claim space. Orientalism juxtaposes many positive characteristics, which makes the Oriental/Occidental binary so contradictory for mixed-race people. For example, modernity is a common manichaeism, which, in this context, means positive characteristics are reserved for in-groups (whites) only and negative characteristics are attributed to out-groups, thereby helping to maintain

2 Thomas Gilovich et al., *Social Psychology* (3rd ed., New York: W.W. Norton, 2013) 245.

3 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 1995) 1.

4 Said, *Orientalism*, 38.

5 Said, *Orientalism*, 41.



Orientalism.⁶ People living in the Orient are represented as traditional, backwards, and old-fashioned, while the Occident positions itself as modern, innovative, and open-minded.⁷ Due to their conflicting natures, modernity and backwardness cannot exist in the presence of each other. The opposing nature of these characteristics creates cognitive dissonance in the mind of the person that embodies both. The following passage from *Orientalism* presents one type of representation of people from the Orient that leaves no space for mixed-race people:

Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, “devoid of energy and initiative,” much given to “fulsome flattery,” intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are “lethargic and suspicious,” and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race.⁸

This representation poses a predicament for a mixed-race person, a choice between identifying as a person of the Occident or as a person of the Orient. Choosing to simply identify as white can carry material rewards; however, the option is only available if the person’s body can be read as white. Thus, one does not really choose which side they identify as—an identity is assigned to them, an external decision. If the body cannot be read as white, the resulting option is to simply exist as though white by behaving as a “saved” person of the Orient. A “saved” person of color feeds the white savior narrative constructed by white supremacy, a narrative Said claims is commonly used when discussing Eastern and Western political and social relations. Self-identification does not have to be a conscious decision but can occur in the way the mixed-race person views the Orient; if they view their home country through the lens of Orientalism, they have chosen to assume the position of the European superior. This viewpoint is on display when a mixed-race person visits one of their ancestral countries in the Global South and behaves like a tourist by trivializing significant cultural symbols or exotifying those around them. (Note that this behavior is not unique to the mixed-race person and can also be seen among the diaspora.) When a person positions one of their races above the other, specifically their European/white roots, they are acting on the basis of an internalized racism. This elevation of one race can also cause the split in critical consciousness that Said discusses in which we are unaware of how our perspective subjugates others.⁹ A mixed-race person may not realize that taking on the role of a saved person of color further subjugates and reaffirms the notion of the Other.

Cognitive dissonance in the mixed-race person can also take the shape of a colonizer versus colonized dynamic. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi discusses the colonizer who feels conflicting emotions when refusing to be a colonizer.¹⁰ The colonizer is conflicted because he sympathizes with the colonized and therefore must leave in order to stop contributing to systematic

6 Said, *Orientalism*, 42

7 Said, *Orientalism*, 57–58.

8 Said, *Orientalism*, 38.

9 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993) 37.

10 Albert Memmi, “The Colonizer Who Refuses,” *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: Orion, 1965) 63.



injustices.¹¹ According to Memmi, the colonizer has two options if he does not leave: to reject the self as a colonizer or to accept. By accepting, the colonizer becomes a colonialist; by rejecting, the colonizer becomes a colonial who must endure conflicting emotions.¹² For mixed-race people, this sort of cognitive dissonance can manifest itself in a similar way. Depending on how their body is read, a multi-racial person must decide how they want to approach the issue of systematic privilege and systematic disadvantage. The treatment they face, in contrast to the treatment their racialized counterparts face, as well as the privileges the half-white person may receive, creates a conflicting emotion similar to that encountered by the colonizer. The half-white person, realizing their privilege comes from the disadvantages of others, begins to question their identity, leading eventually to cognitive dissonance. As Memmi observes, the thought process becomes complicated:

What he is actually renouncing is part of himself, and what he slowly becomes as soon as he accepts a life in a colony. He participates in and benefits from those privileges which he half-heartedly denounces. Does he receive less favourable treatment than his fellow citizens? Doesn't he enjoy the same facilities for travel? How can he help figuring unconsciously that he can afford a car, a refrigerator, perhaps a house? How can he go about freeing himself of this halo of prestige which crowns him and at which he would like to take offense?¹³

The privilege that was invisible is no longer unseen. The colonizer is able to understand the mistreatment of those he has colonized and can no longer validate these systems of power. A similar idea is prompted using Orientalism, when one realizes that the manichaenisms that the West uses to describe the East are not objective and are methods of representation used to create and increase difference across understandings of race. An example is the sexuality of the Arab World, which at one point was seen as excessive, the opposite of the decent and composed women of the West. When it was no longer convenient for this representation to be maintained and women in the West began being labeled as liberated and free, the women of the Arab World were juxtaposed as being sexually repressed. This example highlights the impact of representation on mental processes that foster cognitive dissonance.

Under Said's theory of Orientalism, the different representations of Eastern and Western races leave little space for mixed-race people to exist, creating cognitive dissonance. When combining this with Memmi's notion of the colonizer that refuses, the mixed-race person is still left in a space of conflicting values and feelings by identifying with being part colonizer and part colonized. The privileges of being partially white lead the mixed-race person to feel a form of guilt.

THE INFERIORITY COMPLEX OF THE MIXED-RACE PERSON

Internalized racism caused by Orientalism is inflamed by racial micro-aggressions, which push the mixed-race person to identify with a single racial group. For example, when the white background is met with positive reactions while the racialized background is met with neutral or negative reactions, the mixed-race person is pressured to conform to the white standard of dress and behavior. Eventually

11 Memmi 69.

12 Memmi 65.

13 Memmi 35.



these micro-aggressions can cause mixed-race people to not disclose their mixed-race heritage in full to avoid complicated conversations. This concealment can result in the mixed-race person developing a dislike for physical indicators of the racialized group, such as a name or skin color.

Internalized racism is also exacerbated by being explicitly subcategorized by those in the dominant group. Subcategorization occurs when a person does not fit a stereotype assigned to their out-group and therefore a single category is made for individual discrepancies.¹⁴ In the case of the mixed-race person, they can even subcategorize themselves by rooting their identity in whiteness and attributing their positive characteristics to their whiteness. Some may go further, ascribing their negative characteristics to their racialized background. The subcategorization becomes an internalized manichaeism that creates greater difference between the multiple groups. If a mixed-race person finds themselves to be successful despite a stereotype stating otherwise about their racialized group, they might subcategorize themselves and view their whiteness as the reason for their success and therefore never have to attribute a positive characteristic to their racialized identity. Subcategorization thus allows a mixed-race person to see their own identity through an Orientalist lens, never confronting the stereotypes they have about their racialized identity.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon discusses an inferiority complex that arises due to the juxtaposition of black and white, which he labels “a massive psycho existential complex.”¹⁵ Through the dehumanization of black people by colonizers, a racist status quo is maintained and used to justify the subjugation of the colonized. This status quo reinforces the inferiority complex of the colonized people to ensure they cannot achieve success or liberty. One might assume that a mixed-race person would not suffer from an inferiority complex due to their ability to claim whiteness. Following the rule of hypodescendency, under which one drop of black blood is all that is required to be considered black, and the way in which the opposing representation of black and white function similarly to Orientalism to create cognitive dissonance, a mixed-race person would face a similar inferiority complex. A mixed-race person can strive for closer proximity to whiteness as their fully racialized counterparts do in order to climb the social hierarchy. Marlon Simmons discusses a similar phenomenon in diasporic peoples who lactify their cultural performances as a result of socializing behavior.¹⁶ Lactification is the process by which non-white people attempt to make themselves and their culture palatable to the dominant group by whitening their identity. A mixed-race person would have an advantage because they are already further along the racial binary of black and white than a person who is not partially white. However, the rule of hypodescendency means that a mixed-race person will never be able to escape being partially racialized despite being partially white. Fanon describes a scenario of partner selection as a way of increasing whiteness:

First of all, there are two such women: the Negress and the mulatto. The first has only one possibility and one concern: to turn white. The second wants not only to turn white but also to avoid slipping

14 Todd D. Nelson, *The Psychology of Prejudice* (2nd ed., Boston: Pearson Allyn and Bacon, 2006) 41–42.

15 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Paris: Grove, 1952).

16 Marlon Simmons, “Concerning Modernity, the Caribbean Diaspora, and Embodied Alienation: Dialoguing with Fanon to Approach an Anticolonial Politic,” In *Fanon and Education: Thinking Through Pedagogical Possibilities*, edited by Marlon Simmons and George Sefa Dei (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).



black. What indeed could be more illogical than a mulatto woman's acceptance of a Negro Husband?

For it must be understood once and for all that it is a question of saving the race.¹⁷

This form of internalized racism generates a single goal: to avoid disclosing blackness to the hegemonic white system. Fanon illustrates one of the ways in which this operates, through partner selection. Partner selection can be key to positioning on social hierarchies for both men and women; the social status of one directly impacts the social status of their partner, be it positively or negatively.

Fanon later discusses another manifestation of the inferiority complex, language usage: A mixed-race person who cannot speak in their racialized language is not seen as lacking anything important as long as they can speak the language of the dominant tongue. Ng g Wa Thiong'o discusses how language is used as an imperial tool for isolating racialized people from their cultures and eventually erasing the culture altogether.¹⁸ He describes how language is a means of forming identity: "The choice of a language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe."¹⁹ Language has been used to signify a sense of "lacking" in racialized people; avoiding said language increases social standing. Think of how racialized people with accents are seen as incapable beings even if they speak English fluently. In the case of a mixed-race person, the choice of language is similar to the racialized body choosing to speak the dominant tongue. Although many no longer live under direct colonization and therefore do not have to make an explicit decision anymore, mixed-race people may encounter this decision when learning languages. Mixed-race people may simply choose to speak in the language used by the dominant group. The following excerpt by Fanon shows how this process works:

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.²⁰

Language can thus create social advantage, even among mixed-race people who are not partially white. According to Fanon, the Senegalese were learning Creole while the Antilles were learning French, both as a method of displaying whiteness. As the Senegalese were lower in the social hierarchy than the Black Antilles, they were able to achieve status by speaking Creole because it positioned them closer to Europe.²¹

If a person is mixed or has multiple racialized identities, they can identify as the race that has closer proximity to whiteness as a means of social advantage. It is in racialized communities that have endured colonialism and still struggle with internalized racism that this identification can become advantageous or beneficial. For example, in areas that have adopted white beauty standards, having a

17 Fanon 54–55.

18 Nguñgi Wa Thiong o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: J. Currey, 1986) 14–15.

19 Ngu gi 14–15.

20 Fanon 18–19.

21 Fanon 18–19.



lighter complexion than is common among a racialized group can be advantageous. Many communities adopt shadism, a hierarchy that ranks skin shade from light to dark. Having a lighter complexion than what is visually expected from one's racial group would provide material benefits both within and outside the community. Thus, as the mixed-race person moves closer to whiteness, be it through partner selection, language, skin shade, or other means, the cognitive dissonance they experience becomes temporarily less distracting even though it is ultimately becoming stronger, perhaps eventually reaching a breaking point that leads to "fragmentation."

FRAGMENTATION AND MULTIPLICITY

Maria Ong discusses ways that young women of color engage in body projects as a method to create or maintain a position in the science world, space where they are told they do not belong.²² Body projects are a form of manipulating the way one is perceived by others such as by altering hair, clothing, voice, tone, and any other physical aspect of the body. This "fragmentation" of the body is a form of violence as it requires people to break pieces of themselves in order to fit into the dominant culture.²³ Termed "assimilation," the violence of removing one's own identity is a survival tactic required of racialized people to make a living or be socially accepted. This term has been used to discuss entire racial groups, but I propose that a similar effect occurs with mixed-race people. Fragmentation might seem advantageous for those of mixed race due to micro-aggressions that influence them to identify as being from only one race. Ong describes this fragmentation as follows:

Fragmentation is a process of temporarily splitting oneself to minimize cultural differences between oneself and other members of a community. In the context of their local physics communities, women of color often engage in common and typical strategies of racial and gendered passing, which may result in fragmentation. These strategies force women of color to emphasize ways in which they match or approximate the image of a standard, generic physicist.²⁴

Thus, fragmentation allows people to assimilate into the Western white dominant image; it becomes a way to increase proximity to whiteness and move up the social hierarchy. Mixed-race people would therefore downplay indicators of racial difference. Visible examples are attempting to lighten one's skin tone to literally increase proximity to whiteness or "tame wild hair" to achieve a white standard of beauty. Although body projects are a way to move past racial stereotypes, they do not actually break stereotypes. People (mixed and non-mixed) engaging in body projects are simply seen as exceptions, accounted for through subcategorization.

The opposite of fragmentation is multiplicity, putting all elements of one's identity on display. This form of body project may seem the ideal way for mixed-race and monoracial people to present themselves. Ong states, "A person who practices multiplicity displays all of her social, cultural, and professional identities at once, without apology; ideally, because she would not feel forced to hide parts

22 Maria Ong, "Body Projects of Young Women of Color in Physics: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Science," *Social Problems* 52.4 (2005): 593

23 Ong 600.

24 Ong 600.



of herself, she would more likely feel comfortable and encouraged to excel.”²⁵ Thus, mixed-race people could display their backgrounds, and monoracial people could display intersections. Yet Ong’s description of multiplicity includes risk: The person engaged in multiplicity may not be allowed to succeed or get a job if they are rejected by the peer group. In the situation of a mixed-race person, multiplicity would not allow them to confront their cognitive dissonance unless all stereotypes about their racialized group and the power relations between races no longer exist.

REJECTING WHITENESS

Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory of contestation offers the rejection of whiteness as a potential means of confronting internalized racism.²⁶ She starts with the “forced cultural penetration, the rape of the coloured by the white, with the colonizers depositing their perspective, their language, and their values in our bodies.”²⁷ Anzaldúa then describes a resistance to hegemonic culture and ideas by finding an identity in the racialized culture and community. The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized can create the cognitive dissonance that causes the person in question to dissociate with whiteness. This detachment could also be a result of the rule of hypodescendency under which the mixed-race person feels they have no claim to whiteness anyway or simply the understanding that the power of whiteness operates on the basis of exclusion. Statistics Canada reported that children of interracial married couples more commonly identify similarly to their non-white parent rather than their white parent.²⁸ The limitations on claims to whiteness pose an interesting predicament for the half-white body, specifically the body that cannot pass as white. The ability to claim cultural elements or symbolic features of whiteness becomes the channel by which half-white people must claim whiteness. Their ability to claim whiteness often requires confirmation. Offering proof of whiteness through a reliable medium of whiteness, such as a fully-white relative, is the condition that must be met before a half-white person can begin to feel belonging, but even then, they continue to be the subject of questioning. Being partly from a racialized group limits the full claim to whiteness and creates a half-belonging. Anzaldúa discusses how identifying as the racialized group creates a form of community that one could join even though half-white. People who are only half-white may have certain privileges, but their claim to whiteness is limited and therefore they can still find community among their fully racialized counterparts.

A mixed-race person who identifies as white faces the effects of internalized racism caused by the cognitive dissonance that being part of two “contradictory” groups causes. Identifying as white and conforming to white values is also a mechanism that even non-mixed people of color take part in to secure jobs, education, and even safety. When a mixed-race person attempts to dissociate from whiteness, as Anzaldúa shows, it can also be a decision made for social survival, a way to ensure a place in

25 Ong 600.

26 Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute, 1990) 142–150.

27 Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul*, 142–150.

28 Statistics Canada.



the social in-group.²⁹ To call this move away from whiteness internalized racism would be incorrect due to the power relations between racialized people and white people. It is not racist to hate those who oppress you, but it would cause cognitive dissonance to know that you are both part of the oppressed and part of the oppressor. Malcolm X exemplifies this dilemma. In his autobiography, he describes his biracial mother's hatred of her white blood due to the sexual violence that her own mother endured at the hands of her rapist: a white man. This hostility extended to Malcolm, the fairest of her children. She strongly associated him with the whiteness she hated and was attempting to repress.³⁰ Understanding that your family faces disadvantages at the hands of a group that you are also part of can illicit a reactive defensive mechanism of denial or dissociation.

CREATING A COHESIVE IDENTITY

The theories of Fanon and Said make it difficult to imagine how a mixed-race person can possibly form a cohesive identity in a colonizing or colonized country. The cognitive dissonance that stems from the understandings and the representations of the colonized compels them to dissociate themselves from the racialized group. Anzaldúa shows how a mixed-race person may fare better in their communities if they dissociate from whiteness; she also provides a way to heal the cognitive dissonance created by being multiracial. In *Making Face, Making Soul*, Anzaldúa specifically discusses a way in which a mixed-race person can challenge cognitive dissonance, and she provides an option in which dissociation is unnecessary. She describes cognitive dissonance both literally and metaphorically in the following passage:

In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries.

The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behaviour; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death.³¹

According to Anzaldúa, identifying as monoracial is not beneficial to the mixed-race person. Yet balancing between cultural frames is difficult, similar to W.E.B. DuBois' concept of double consciousness.³² Rigidity in identification would only limit a mixed-race person and force them into a state in which they feel only a half-belonging. Similar to personifying multiplicity, Anzaldúa illustrates a new image of a mixed-race person who can display plurality in their personality. A mixed-race person, thus, would deal with cognitive dissonance by accepting the contradictions and differences of the two sides. This includes understanding that the two races are represented and viewed differently by each other and accepting the ambiguity of being in the middle. Similar to her essays and poems in *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa describes a border culture of two worlds merging to form a third group, a space where the mixed-race person exists.³³ When a mixed-race person can create a mixture to represent their identity, they are healing the cognitive dissonance without dissociation. Before this understanding can be reached, mixed-race people

29 Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul*, 142–150.

30 Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine, 1992) 3.

31 Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza/ La Frontera* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987) 11.

32 W.E.B. DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903) 4.

33 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 3.



must have their experiences validated as mixed-race people, not as a combination of the experiences of their unmixed counterparts. The inability to form a border culture leaves the mixture of cultures in what Anzaldúa calls the Borderland, an undetermined place caused by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. Although Anzaldúa is describing a literal state-sanctioned border, when using this concept to discuss mixed-race identity, it becomes a metaphorical space of existence.

Another possibility for reducing cognitive dissonance is to change the thoughts and feelings that are causing the unpleasant mental state.³⁴ Unfortunately, feelings and thoughts are societal constructs and thus difficult to eliminate because they are embedded in every element of life. These notions are embedded in the very creation of the nation-state. The white settler space relies on a divide between those who belong and those who are excluded. Canada's use of interracial people as a tool to promote the multicultural narrative exoticizes their bodies in a celebratory manner without allowing them to be truly seen as part of the dominant group.

The representations of different racial groups in discourse and the media create a consistent narrative that relies on characteristics of belonging or exclusion. Fanon calls this phenomenon the effect of collective catharsis, which is an outlet for the dominant members of a society to release aggression, typically upon those in the subjugated group. As an example, Fanon describes how the media portrayal of black people as savages who are repeatedly destroyed by white heroes can cause confusion for young black children who can either associate themselves with the white heroes or the black bodies.³⁵ Similarly, Edward Said discusses the disposability of Arab bodies in modern movies and their representation as people whose only method of understanding is through violence.³⁶ Because these narratives develop on an institutional level, they must first be altered at the institutional level, yet mixed-race people must deal with the effects at an individual level through dissonance reduction methods. In cognitive dissonance theory, the only solution available to a mixed-race person is to reduce the source of the dissonance.

CONCLUSION

The oppression that people of color endure is so deeply embedded in the way they are treated and represented that it has caused racialized people to internalize the racism that is inflicted upon them. Internalized racism is not a quality of whiteness, as white people have not had to endure subjugation the way racialized people have. As discussed in this essay, Canada has become a society in which, due to postracial claims, an increase in interracial couples has been celebrated. The interracial couples are displayed as being mostly part white and part non-white, playing into the diverse and multicultural narrative Canada projects. The half-white half-non-white children of these interracial couples have to face the cognitive dissonance of not having a "usual" racial identity: Their racial identity is split, as they are part racialized and part of the dominant group. These people continue to endure internalized racism, which increases their cognitive dissonance.

34 Gilovich 245.

35 Fanon.

36 Said, *Orientalism*.



Under Fanon's inferiority complex theory, it seems only logical for a mixed-race person to identify more as white as a means of securing social and materialistic rewards—the proximity to whiteness increases social standing, giving racialized people who are partially white an advantage. Applying manichaenisms and subgrouping the self, which can contribute to and stem from the inferiority complex, are forms of internalized racism that can be found in mixed-race people. The mixed-race person also may endure body violence, such as fragmentation, in order to increase proximity to the dominant group.

How then can we resolve the cognitive dissonance of mixed-race people who are forced to strive toward the white part of their identity, knowing they will never be fully accepted? The claim toward whiteness operates in the same way that the nation built a settler state: belonging on the basis of exclusion. The rule of hypodescendency encompasses all racialized people, regardless of how incrementally they are racialized. Simply claiming the racialized identity allows the person to have a form of community in which they belong, despite being partially white.

Cognitive dissonance can be resolved by allowing the mixed-race person to build an identity based on multiraciality. Similar to a border culture, allowing the cultures to mix both creates a space for the mixed-race person and decreases their cognitive dissonance. The larger-scale solution is to decrease the source of the conflicting thoughts and emotions, which would mean being rid of representation manichaenisms and fixing racism on the systematic level. Doing so would allow the treatment and representation of all races to be leveled with the dominant group; only then could society begin to remedy the internalized racism of mixed-race people. |



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