

Mixing It Up: A Categorization and Analysis of 8 Films about
Mixed-Race People

by

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There are many minority groups who are just now beginning to have their stories told on the big screen, and one of these groups is people of mixed-race. This thesis analyzes and categorizes 8 full length films with theatrical release that feature and are about mixed-race characters. The films are categorized by common themes, and then analyzed further within their categories. After the analysis there is a short original screenplay about being mixed-race that features themes in common with the in films to in the paper, and some themes unique to the screenplay itself. The goals of this study are to examine what cinematic representation has looked like for mixed people up until now, and to see where it could go.

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Introduction

*Too proper for the black kids, too black for the Mexicans
Too square to be a hood (expletive), what's normal anyway?*

For me, these lyrics from R&B artist Miguel's song "What's Normal Anyway" perfectly describe what it feels like to be a person of mixed race. In my experience, to be mixed is a constant feeling of unbelonging. I cannot identify either as fully white, or fully Laotian because I am both, but I also never feel like I am a perfect balance of the two. I have always felt a lot of pressure to establish and claim a strong and clear-cut identity, and that is a difficult thing to do because I'm not always sure what or who I am. There is constant division within me.

I am mixed race, and I am also a filmmaker, and a lover of movies. I have loved watching movies since I was a very young child but growing up I didn't often see myself in the characters I was watching on-screen. This does not mean that I never identified with characters, because of course there are other personal attributes besides my ethnicity that make me who I am. However, I never really felt represented in a film until my late teens when I watched Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia*. In the film, there is a character named Nullah, who is both white and Aboriginal. Throughout the film, he struggles with his identity, and to find his place in a world where he is only accepted by some. I may not be half Aboriginal, and I certainly have never been in danger of being taken away from my parents just for being mixed, but the historical and geographical context in which the film was made was irrelevant to me at the time. I felt something special, something so personal and precious watching Nullah and understanding what he was going through trying to find himself. There was also something special about knowing that many other people watched that very same film, and understood a piece of

me, even if they didn't realize it. That is probably one of the first times that I understood the importance of representation in film.

Representation is a popular topic of conversation in the film-industry today, and it is extremely important and multifaceted. There are many marginalized groups in the U.S. and beyond who have only just started to get the representation in film that they deserve, and even those upward trends are wavering. According to Annenberg's "Inequality in 1,100 Popular Films Report" from 2007 to 2017, films with prevalent characters of mixed race on screen had only risen 3.8 percent. That rise was no steady incline, it wavered over the decade. Furthermore, that number is not exclusively mixed-race people, it is a category called "other" that also includes people coded as Middle Eastern, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Annenberg, 17). Unfortunately, according to this report, mixed-race film is not prevalent enough to have its own category now.

While those percentages are startlingly low, the positive is that the numbers are indeed growing. The global audience is now beginning to experience stories of people of color, women, LGBTQ people, etc., which is imperative. It is imperative for a mass medium as influential and far-reaching as film to portray the world and *all* the people in it as they truly are, because, as Horkheimer and Adorno put it:

The world is passed through the filter of the culture industry. The familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production. The more densely and completely its techniques duplicate empirical objects, the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema.

Now of course, this chapter about the Culture Industry in their "Dialectic of Enlightenment" is not arguing about representation. Horkheimer and Adorno are explaining how mass media (in the 1940's) has become just another commodity created to be consumed, and to dumb-down the general population. They are writing this in the aftermath of World War 2, in which they experienced how fascism can be spread about the airwaves and infiltrate minds just as easily as an entertaining radio show. "Dialectic of Enlightenment" is weak in that it assumes that every average person is but a cog in the machine of capitalism, and when they get home they consume banal and standardized entertainment like zombies. It is important to consider the elitism with which this piece was written. Truly people consumed media, the content they were consuming was far less diverse as it is today, and much of the time they were in fact simply looking to be entertained, but to assume that only a wise few had the ability to synthesize and create their own opinions about what they were consuming was erroneous.

However, there is a broader point to Horkheimer and Adorno's statement that is undeniably true. Especially now, with the volume and speed at which humans consume media on a daily basis, we shape many of our perceptions about the world through the lenses of television, social media, and of course film. A movie-goer can experience characters and stories that they might have never even considered being a part of their world if it hadn't been for the film. Someone in Oregon can sit in their living room and watch a cheetah hunt in 4K without having to take a step out their front door. More applicably, a midwestern teenager could watch a film to learn about apartheid in Africa, something they would have never experienced here in the U.S.. Additionally, when

people like myself get to see themselves in films, there is a kind of validation of existence in the vast universe of cinema, a universe that is fictional but also, as the statement above suggests, mirrors reality. Every time a person watches a film, it adds a little piece to their perception of the world around them, and that is why it is important to make films as colorful and rich as life is.

So taking all of that into consideration, my goal with this project is two-fold: I aim to briefly look at how films made this far have portrayed people of mixed race, and to create a script that reflects what I would like to see in mixed-race film in the future.

Methodology

At first, I didn't know how to formulate and organize this paper, I must confess that this is something that I often find challenging. I have changed my topic many times over, from representation of Southeast Asian Americans in film, to Laotian representation to mixed-race representation. Whenever I thought I had a grasp on what I was writing, it would slip away from me. After I finally came to the decision to look at mixed-race representation in film, I wrestled with all the ways of the ways that I could approach the research. I tried to look through books and journals for some sort of methodology or framework through which I might look at how mixed people are represented onscreen but could not find anything that quite fit what I was looking for. What sources could I use when my options were so limited? Ultimately, I decided it would be most beneficial for me to simply start my research with what I do best: watching movies.

The first step was finding lists of films about, or that featured multi-ethnic characters, and that was a challenge as there are not very many. I searched a few film databases in the UO library catalogue for a "mixed-race" category, but found that either the category didn't exist, or was too broad and numerous to whittle down. Fortunately, with the advent of the "cinophile" (a person with a passionate interest in film) in conjunction with the internet, there is a popular trend to curate niche subject lists of films in both articles published by popular websites and personal blogs alike. Knowing this, I simply went online and searched "Lists of films about mixed race people" and found a few results that suited my research. While browsing various lists, I realized I was seeing a few of the same titles repeated, indicating that those films are popular with

the general public and across different platforms. Popularity was an important attribute when finding films to analyze for this project because although there are many good indie films, short films, and television shows with the content I was searching for, theatrically-released feature films tend to reach the largest audiences, and therefore have the most widespread influence of representation.

I decided on eight films in the end. They were a mix of movies that I found on the lists, as well as a couple I already knew of from my own movie-watching experience. All the films were released theatrically (minus two that were released through Netflix but were viewed by millions of people upon their release) and additionally were a diverse sample of what the mixed-race genre has to offer. By diverse I mean they span over 7 decades, deal with many points in history, and present different facets of being mixed-race.

The 8 films that I ended up watching were:

-*Pinky* (1949)

-*Imitation of life* (1959)

-*Blood In Blood Out* (1993)

-*Australia* (2008)

-*Belle* (2013)

-*To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2018)

-*Where Hands Touch* (2018)

-*To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You* (2020)

I took notes while viewing the films, hoping to find thematic ties through which I could organize them. Although there are many categories and subcategories that these,

and many other mixed-race films could fall into, four stood out that would serve the purpose of this paper well:

- Early Films about “Passing”

- Historical Films about Policies that Affected Mixed-Race People

- Films wherein the Main Character is Mixed-Race, but that is not a Main Theme

- The Mixed-Race Experience in the U.S. Post 1967 (Loving V Virginia)

Not only do these categories serve to organize the films through thematic similarities, but they also provided this project with a loose chronology.

While analyzing these films contextually within their respective categories, I also tried to consider a few common themes that showed up throughout the whole sample. Namely, dealing with choosing an identity, different derogatory terminology used to define mixed people by a socially constructed space, and relation to two culturally different parents. What I found that I liked about the films is that they all told unique stories, while maintaining a kind of unity, which I believe is reflective of the mixed-race experience.

My framework and categorization certainly have their flaws. One being that 8 films to represent a whole genre is certainly lacking, and to remedy this I intend to continue this study in order to make the list and categories more rounded, and hopefully the pantheon of mixed-race films continues to grow and develop as well. Another is that this paper is written through the lens of U.S. identity politics, which are very polarized and limiting. Unfortunately, this is a bit unavoidable because many of these films are American, and therefore the mixed-race experience being presented, and U.S. identity politics are intertwined. Additionally, I the author have grown up in America, with

pressure since birth to prioritize finding a clear-cut definition of my ethnicity as one of the most important pieces of my personal identity. However, it would be valuable to look at these, or other films through the lens of a nation with a different and looser socio-political concept of identity.

A separate aspect of self-identifying that I have debated on for this project is terminology for mixed-race people. There is a plethora of terms that are generally accepted, however each term (biracial, multi-ethnic, mixed-race, etc.) comes with its own critiques and problems. I have chosen to use the terms I have most widely heard used and use myself. Interchangeably throughout the paper I will use mixed-race, mixed, multiracial, and multi-ethnic.

A couple of other shortcomings of this project include not featuring any films that address being non-white mixed (i.e., two different parents of color), and not discussing colorism in depth. These are two very important subjects, and subjects that I believe have complete studies of their own. Even calling mixed-race film a genre is problematic because these films are so interdisciplinary. Not only are these movies about multiraciality, they are also romances, period pieces, even gangster sagas.

Taking all these issues into consideration, I would like to restate my project's goal. Because I could not find a satisfactory study on mixed-race representation in film, I wanted to create a good starting point. This project is a novice sample of a few different kinds of films about being mixed race, their historical context and common themes. My hope is that myself and others might use this as a place to branch out from, to continue studying, and give the mixed-race film genre the recognition it deserves.

Post film analysis, I took time to reflect on what I related to in the films I watched, as well as what parts of my experience I didn't see in any of them. Taking my observations and reflections into account, I attempted to translate my experience into a short-film screenplay.

The logistics of the screenwriting process for this project are unique because it is not a feature length film, and because it is based in fact. Some aspects of writing were easier than they would have been if I were creating a completely fictional story. I did not have to develop any characters from scratch because the characters are real people, and there was no agonizing over the plot because it already existed. The biggest challenge was narrowing my life into a few filmable scenes and choosing what I thought were the most necessary themes to include.

I decided early on that I wanted to divide my script into a series of abstract vignettes, because that is always how I have viewed my life. I've been a part of so many different families and outrageous situations that as I look back, I see my life in pieces. Vignettes read well that way. Because it is a short film, it does not necessarily have the space to follow a normal plot progression, however I tried to stick to the commonly used 5 main plot points as well I could. The script loosely includes a beginning, rising action, middle, climax, and ending. More than focusing on hitting specific plot points, the goal was to create what felt like a myriad of memories that paint a picture of the past, because that is what this script is.

This is a script that I've been trying to start for years. I have bits and pieces of it in various documents on my computer and even in some notebooks, but to sit down and write it out was highly personal and, in many ways, a healing experience.

I hope to someday turn this into a full-length script, but for now I am very content with the story that it tells.

Mixed-Race Films Categorized by Theme

Early Films About “Passing”

The first category in my mixed-race film queue also happens to feature the pair of films that came first chronologically. Both Elia Kazan's *Pinky* (1949) and Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life's* (1959) main conflicts surround a phenomenon called passing, when mixed people can and do present as only white. Passing was a popular theme in U.S. film and literature in the first half of the 20th century, because it was happening often in communities that were discriminated against based on their physical attributes. Strict segregation laws and terrible racism created an environment where pretending to be white was much safer and comfortable than claiming any black heritage, or any other heritage that was not accepted by general society. The “One Drop Rule” is a rule that states that if someone has even one drop of black blood, then they are black (Hickman, 1163). Back then, the one drop rule was a means to outcast and discriminate against mixed African Americans both legally and socially. As a result, mixed people who could visually pass as white often did in order to assume a less difficult or even privileged life.

Pinky is a story wherein the film's main character Pinky Johnson (played by Jeanne Crain) is a mixed black woman who passes as white for many years in order to go to medical school in the Northern United States. She comes back home to the South to visit her fully black grandmother, Dicey (Ethel Waters) and ends up staying longer than she expected when Dicey's elderly white friend Miss Em falls ill. When Miss

Emdies, she gives her property and fortune to Pinky, who must decide whether she wants to sell it and continue to live as a white woman in the North, or to stay in the South and claim her black heritage. She chooses the latter and uses Miss Em's home to open a hospital.

While Pinky is the main character and storyline of her film, Sarah Jane (played by Kohner), the passing character in *Imitation of Life* shares the spotlight with a few other characters and storylines. For the sake of the paper, we will focus only on Sarah Jane's storyline. Sarah Jane is a white-passing character who is determined to completely do away with her blackness, and along with it her black mother, Annie (Juanita Moore). Throughout the movie, Sarah Jane is constantly trying to escape her identity, by moving around, working in nightclubs, and changing her name. Her mother, Annie is constantly trying to find her, and is very hurt by her daughter's resolve to cut her out of her life. As Annie becomes depressed and physically weakened by the rejection her daughter inflicts upon her, she goes to visit Sarah Jane one last time, which results in an iconic and emotionally compelling scene. Annie confesses her undying love for her daughter and says that she will always be there for her, and when Sarah Jane's roommate shows up, Annie spares her daughter by pretending to be her old maid. By the end of the film, Annie is dead, and Sarah Jane can do nothing but breakdown in remorse for how she treated her mother.

These two films, along with the phenomenon of passing, bring up a very important issue in mixed-race discourse. Often mixed people feel that they can only belong to one side of themselves at a time, or as LeiLani Nishime puts it, "Loyalty is measured by how absolutely the character rejects either world" (Beltran, 298). Now

granted, Nishime is talking about themes of multi-raciality in *The Matrix*, but it applies here and in almost every other category in this paper as well. In most of these films there is a moment of either renunciation of one side of the mixed character's identity, or acceptance of it. There are even films where the character has both. In *Pinky* and *Imitation of Life* we see rejection of black self throughout the film, simply in the way the characters live their lives. Pinky's has a moment of acceptance at the end of *Pinky* when she confronts her would-be white fiancé, saying, "I'm a Negro. I can't forget it, and I can't deny it. I can't pretend to be anything else, and I don't want to be anything else." She claims and accepts her blackness in this moment.

Contrarily, Sarah Jane continues down a road of denial of her blackness. We see her rejection develop over time. For example, in the beginning of *Imitation of Life*, as a young girl she speaks with a heavy Southern African American dialect. As the film progresses, and Sarah Jane grows older, her speech becomes more "refined", like that of the white people who surround her. Sarah Jane rejects her blackness completely, again when confronting her white boyfriend who physically abuses her after learning she is black. Sarah Jane says, "I'm someone else. I'm white, white, white!". In these early films, rejection of self is starker because of the historical context. It is apparent that both Pinky and Sarah Jane feel that they can only exist as either black or white, there is no in-between. In some of the later films, there is a more acute rejection. Rather than completely casting off pieces of themselves, characters are trying to reconcile two sides of themselves. Either way, in most mixed-race film there is a rejection of some sort, because in all of these films the character is mixed with white. The films show how it can be difficult for a mixed person to reconcile their identities because long histories of

colonialization and racism make it so that their two sides are fundamentally opposed to each other.

Something that *Imitation of Life* addresses that *Pinky* does not is parental guilt. In many of these films where circumstances for their mixed children are dire, parents (mainly mothers) show guilt for bringing their children into the world. Sarah Jane's mother Annie expresses this by saying, "we just come from a place where... where my color deviled my baby". Annie's guilt for having Sarah Jane is so severe that she summons satanic imagery, one of the vilest of evils. This indicates the magnitude of ostracization and unacceptance that mixed children went through in these days.

These two films are good side-by-side case studies because the two characters move in completely opposite directions. Pinky ends up coming back to her black heritage while Sarah Jane reviles it until her mother dies, and even then, she is resentful. The films share an important lesson in how two people faced with the same circumstances aren't always going to have the same story. Additionally, these films are an important marker about where films about mixed-race people began.

Historical Films about Policies that Affected Mixed-Race People

The most common type of film I watched were films that addressed policies at certain volatile points in history that negatively affected mixed people. Two of the films feature policies that are products of World War II, while the third addresses the slave trade. None of these films are set in the U.S., which I think is advantageous. Rather, the films

work together to begin to create an international tapestry, placing the histories of mixed people into the broader context of the world, and into relation with one another.

The first film, *Where Hands Touch*, came out in 2018 and was directed by Amma Asante. This film's main character, Leyna (played by Amandla Stenberg) is what Nazis in Germany called a Rhineland Bastard. This term was coined to refer to German children who were the offspring of white German mothers and French Black soldiers that occupied the Rhineland after World War I. Leyna's harrowing tale is a bit outlandish, but Amma Asante tried to base it in historical fact. The main storyline of the film is Leyna falling in love with a Nazi named Lutz (George MacKay), who is presented as "different" from his peers. He is more sympathetic to the humanity of Jews and Leyna who is black, and his main claim to Nazism is not his racism, but his desire to fight for his homeland on the battlefield. This is very problematic of course, but it is not beneficial to try to unpack Lutz's character now.

Throughout the film, Leyna, who clings to the very German nationalism that wants to see her demise, is at odds with her white mother who tries to teach her children that what the Nazis are doing is horrendous. Leyna's mother does not express the kind of reviling guilt that Annie in *Imitation of Life* does over having a mixed child, in fact she often reveres Leyna as a symbol of the love she had for Leyna's black father, who is not present in the film. However, Leyna's mother does express that she wishes for Leyna to "be like everyone else", which is quite impossible since Leyna has dark skin and black features.

Throughout the film Leyna also expresses a need for conformity, while she her words and actions do not explicitly show that she wants to be white, they do show that

she deeply looks for acceptance as a German. She dresses and does her hair like all of the other German girls, wishes to walk with the Hitler Youth in one of their parades, and even exhibits anti-Semitism by using derogatory terms and writing them off as other.

Some characters in the film instill otherness in Leyna by using various expletives to refer to her. She is called things like “mulatto”, which is a common term in many of these historical mixed-race films, as well as “negro” and “monkey”. These are used to outcast Leyna and used as a constant reminder of her differentness. Leyna’s own anti-Semitism could be an outward projection of this. She feels that by calling Jew’s rats she not only has solidarity with the German public, but also as a reminder to herself that at least she isn’t the lowest of the low

An aspect of *Where Hands Touch* that is not addressed in any of the other films is half-siblings. Leyna has a fully white half-brother, and her relationship with her brother is strong in the beginning of the film, but it becomes strained as he joins and is indoctrinated by the Hitler Youth. In the beginning her brother tells her that she is very precious to him, but during the height of the film’s action he has resentment toward her saying even that he hates her. While most sibling relationships aren't this extreme, I can attest by experience that being a mixed child with fully white half siblings is indeed an important issue to address. Siblings are a strong marker of family relation when they look and act like one another, so it is a unique and sometimes tumultuous relationship that evolves when one sibling looks starkly different and has different mannerisms and habits from the others. By the end of the film, Leyna and her brother's relationship is healed.

Regardless of the film's questionable plot, this film addresses an important point in history. The Germans felt that people like Leyna were an infection to their master race, and would imprison anyone who did not fit in their specific ideal German mold, so it was vitally important for Leyna to try to act as German as possible, for her to assimilate. This heavily distorted her image of herself, which is portrayed well in the film. Leyna's story shows a unique side of being a mixed-race person. She is raised around only white Germans her whole life, she knows nothing culturally besides that, and yet she looks different. Leyna is a great example of what it is like to feel that you belong to a certain identity on the inside, but for that to be inhibited by what you look like on the outside.

The second film in this category also takes place during World War II, but instead of being set in Germany, it is set in Australia. Baz Luhrmann's 2008 film *Australia* is told through the eyes of Nullah, a mixed aboriginal child who is the product of rape. During World War II, Australia had a policy to collect mixed aboriginal children and place them in special locations (in this film Mission Island) to assimilate them. As pointed out in the opening titles of the film, children like Nullah became known as "The Stolen Generations."

The film follows Nicole Kidman's character, Lady Sarah Ashley, who comes from England to manage her late husband's cattle farm in Australia. Nullah, his aboriginal mother Daisy, and his aboriginal grandmother Bandy all work on Lady Ashley's plot of land called Faraway Downs. Lady Ashley comes to find out that her cattle has been siphoned off onto another plot of land, and so the first half of the film follows the epic journey of the lady, her houseworkers and The Drover (Hugh

Jackman), to get their remaining cattle to a port called Darwin so that they can sell the cattle to the army, and restore Faraway Downs.

Early in the film Nullah loses his mother Daisy to drowning, and Neil Fletcher, Nullah's father and the film's protagonist, denies him as his child altogether, wanting Nullah to go to a place called Mission Island where he will be taken in by the church and assimilated into white society. Daisy's death leads to Lady Ashley taking Nullah in as her own. Mr. Fletcher completely rejecting Nullah as his own altogether is quite a different dynamic than the parental guilt from past examples. In Fletcher's eyes, Nullah was a symbol of his disgrace, of his fraternizing with an Aboriginal woman. This does not so much affect how Nullah sees himself because he never indicates that he saw Fletcher as a father figure in the film, but it is a representation of how many children who are multiracial have a parent that sees them as lesser, or not their child because they look different. It is something I have seen within my own family.

After Lady Ashley takes Nullah in, and begins to raise him as her own son, Nullah struggles with trying to find a place with Lady Ashley and needing to go on a walkabout with his aboriginal grandfather, which is a ceremonial rite of passage for his people. He knows that Lady Ashley will care and provide for him, but he also understands the importance of participating in his people's ancient traditions. Nullah's struggle to reconcile his cultures is a struggle that many mixed people go through, and it is what makes his character's experience so relatable. Furthermore, there is a parallel in Fletcher's want for Nullah to go to Mission Island, and Lady Ashley's resistance to let Nullah go on walkabout. Though Lady Ashley's reasoning is to protect Nullah from all of the things that could go wrong during a walkabout, though her heart is in the right

place, she is still aiding in the rejection of Nullah's culture because she does not completely understand the importance of it. This is very nuanced, and also realistic.

Nullah's understanding of his identity and place in his world is a bit more secure than that of the other characters in this category. He understands that he walks a line between two worlds, and hestates so in the opening dialogue. Nullah says, "See, I not black fella. I not white fella either. Them white fellas call me mixed-blood, half-caste, creamy. I belong to no one." These sentiments are a clear indicator that Nullah, like many other mixed children, feel that they don't quite belong here or there. Once again it is clear that different derogatory terms are used as a constant reminder, a stamp to remind the barer that they are other, that they are mixed. The fact that Nullah says that he belongs to "no one" rather than saying "no race", or maybe "no culture" creates an image of loneliness. Sometimes being mixed can feel very solitary because there is no one around who is quite like you. However, unlike Leyna, and Dido Elizabeth Belle who is the main character of the next film, Nullah is raised in his Aboriginal culture, around people who look similar to him, and so he has a firmer grasp on his people's traditions and where he comes from.

The last film to fall under this category is the film *Belle* which was released in 2013 and also directed by Amma Asante. This film is based on a real woman, named Dido Elizabeth Belle (played by Gugu Mbatha-Raw), who was the child of a wealthy white merchant and a slave in the West Indies. The story begins as her father brings Belle to her uncle and aunt's house, where he demands that she be brought up in the aristocratic position she was born into, even though she is half black. Her father dies in a shipwreck, leaving her all of his fortune, and she is left in the hands of her uncle and

aunt. They love and raise her as they love and raise her white cousin Elizabeth Murray (Emily Watson), but there are certain rules that apply to her that serve as constant reminders that she is lesser.

The main conflict of the film is that her uncle is the judge in a very important legal case (that actually existed). It was the case of the Zong Massacre, which was presented in the 1783. In this case, a slave trade ship threw the bodies of diseased slaves overboard, and tried to claim insurance money for their bodies, labeling them as cargo. Belle's uncle must rule on whether the claim is legitimate, or insurance fraud. Belle learns of this case from John Davinier (Sam Reid), a lawyer under her uncle's tutelage, even though her uncle has tried to hide it from her. Throughout the film, Belle begins to learn more about the case, and pleads for her uncle to understand that these slaves are people, that they are her people. In the end she falls in love with John Davinier and her uncle rules that humans should not be considered cargo in any case, which is an important step toward the abolition of slavery.

Both of Belle's parents are absent in the film, save for the few minutes at the beginning in which her white father is present. Her father does not reject her as Fletcher rejects Nullah. Instead, much like Leyna's mother, he speaks about how much he loved Belle's mother and how Belle reminds him of her. In this film, there is no parental rejection or guilt. However, Belle does claim that in the world she lives in her mother's only crime was being born "negro", and that Belle herself is evidence of said crime. In the moment that she says this, she is empowering herself against an oppressive and racist marriage, however there is a self-deprecation to calling yourself evidence to a crime that is indicative of these films.

Belle's aunt and uncle, who become her guardians after her father's death, follow their society's rules of propriety, and in that we there is a certain rejection of Belle's blackness. Even as early as eight minutes into the film, when Belle first arrives at her aunt and uncles home with her father, her aunt begs the question "Where should her color be placed? Above or below the Murray bloodline?" The discussion of Belle's place continues into her older years as is not allowed to eat in the dining room with guests. When Mr. Davinier observes this, Belle comments that it is offensive that he, a clergyman, is allowed at the table while she, a lady of the house is not. He asks, "Is that a reminder of my place Miss Lindsay?", and Belle responds, "No, it is a statement of mine." Throughout the film, Belle becomes increasingly aware of herself and her differences, and much of the reason is accredited to how she is treated by her family, even though they love her.

There is a heavy theme of colorism in *Belle* that is presented by both Belle herself and other characters. Because Belle is mixed, and has lighter skin and softer, more familiar European features, she is fetishized by a wealthy aristocrat's son Oliver Ashford. Belle is described as "rare and exotic" by Oliver and his brother. This fetishization happens often with multi-racial women who are half white. While they look different, or what as some men would describe as "exotic", many times their white heritage affords them to look familiar enough for their differences to be off-putting. These phenotypical categorizations and socially constructed ideas of beauty are very dangerous and damaging to women of color.

Finally, there is an important moment toward the end of the film between Belle and her uncle where they discuss representation. At this point toward the end of the

film, Belle has been on a journey, cultivating herself and her identity, and her uncle sees her reading a book. When asked, she explains that it is Thomas Day's work, an author who believed in equality and fought for the abolition of slavery. The story she is reading is about a slave who marries a white aristocrat, and when Belle's uncle asks if she sees herself in Day's writing, she responds, "I don't know that I find myself anywhere." Her statement is reminiscent of Nullah claiming he belongs to no one, and is the entire reason for this project. Belle not seeing herself, or the culture and people from where she came growing up made it difficult for her to understand certain aspects of her being.

Like Nullah, Belle fights to find where she fits in society. She is in a unique position because she has inherited wealth, and she is educated, but she is still constrained socially by the color of her skin. She takes a journey in self-realization as she learns more about the plight of slaves, and how many people who do not share her privilege are being treated. Ultimately Belle takes her experiences and enters into an age of self-sufficiency and empowerment. She marries the man of her choosing and continues to fight for human rights.

All three of these historically based films have an unfortunate habit of romanticizing terrible policies and situations, and many of them also rely on a white-savior narrative. However, they are important in that they highlight some otherwise invisible historic events. Furthermore, the historical contexts in which the films are set create environments where unique nuances of being a mixed person can be explored.

Films in which the main Character is Mixed, but it is not a Main Theme

The Netflix original films *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2018), and *To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love you* (2020) have taken the teen romance genre by storm over the last couple of years. They are unprecedented in that the main character and love interest in the film, Lara Jean Covey (played by Lana Condor), is an Asian American girl. The movies, based on books by Jenny Han, explore her everyday life, and her awkward experiences with the boys that she has crushes on.

In the films it is clear that she is mixed. Her deceased mother was Korean, and the father who is raising her and her sisters is white. There are only a couple of brief mentions in the first film *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, where her mixed heritage is addressed. The main is when her father tries to cook Korean food for her sister's college going-away dinner and fails miserably at it. The girls express that they appreciate the sentiment, but it does not taste as good as when their mother used to cook it.

In the second film, *To All the Boys P.S. I Still Love You*, there is a whole scene in which her father takes Lara Jean and her little sister to their Korean family members' home to celebrate the Korean New Year. When they are first getting ready, Lara Jean and her little sister are trying to learn how to tie their hanbok (traditional Korean dress) on but need the help of their older sister. The tying of the hanbok might be considered what Kevin Escudero calls a "test of cultural competency." In his piece "Multiracial Male Masculinity: A Critical Mixed Race Analysis of Brian AscalonRoley's *American Son*", Escudero describes how *American Son*'s mixed Filipino main characters are constantly trying to adapt to their situation, to either fit in with white people, or Filipinos. Escudero claims "Tests of cultural competency such as the ability to speak

Spanish are viewed in this instance as more thorough and legitimate than phenotypical appearance or behavior” (Escudero, 83). Though more nuanced, this is what Lara Jean is going through as she is trying to tie her sister’s hanbok. If she is culturally competent enough to do it correctly, than that is more legitimate a validation to her Koreanness than her Korean facial features are.

After the girls and their father arrive at their Korean family’s home, you see that they are the only ones dressed in traditional clothing. The fact that they, two mixed Korean girls, are being overly formal when the rest of their family, who are fully Korean, are not could be described as an over-compensation of culture. Lara Jean and her sister aim to prove their Korean-ness by being as traditional as possible, perhaps to make up for the fraudulent feelings that come with being half white.

Lara Jean's mixed-ness is never explicitly relevant to the plot of the films, save those couple of scenes. I think films like these are equally as important as films that are explicitly about multi-raciality, because they normalize mixed children growing up in a stable and loving household. These two films show a healthy household in which a father neither rejects or regrets having them, he simply tries to embrace Korean culture for the sake of his children. Lara Jean is seen as just another American girl with a crush, because she is.

Mixed-Race Experience in the U.S. Post 1967

The experience of mixed-race people in the U.S. within the last few decades is different from the early days of policy-justified discrimination and passing. After anti-miscegenation laws were abolished by the supreme court with the Loving vs Virginia

case in 1967, there has been a boom in mixed-race children, because there has been a boom in mixed-race couples. Films about passing are no longer adequate, because the challenges of growing up mixed have changed greatly since the first half of the 20th century. This is where Taylor Hackford's 1993 Chicano Gangster saga *Blood In Blood Out* (alternate title *Bound By Honor*) becomes relevant. This film follows three Chicano cousins who have to navigate L.A. in the late 70's and early 80's. Paco is a young ex-boxer who struggles to find his way in life. Cruz, Paco's stepbrother, is an artist, who after a life-threatening incident finds himself addicted to painkillers. Miklo is their "milkweed" cousin. He is mixed, but he looks very white, and he fights throughout the whole film to be accepted by his Mexican peers. Miklo's story is one of the only examples I could find which presented a more updated (than the passing films of the 40's and 50's) account of what a mixed person might go through growing up in the U.S.

It is important to note that there are certainly Mexicans who are pale, blond headed, and blue eyed. This film, however, is one that is a product of American Identity Politics, and so the conflict presented by the film results from Miklo presenting as white-European in contrast to his darker counterparts. If the film was not fundamentally driven by this dichotomy which is indicative of the U.S., then the idea of a white Mexican would not be abnormal, however the film's plot is built on the idea of white presenting vs. brown-presenting.

At the beginning of the film, Miklo, who is a minor on probation, runs away from his racist white father in Vegas, returning to his Mexican family members in L.A. He is reunited with his cousins, and immediately begins trying to be initiated into the local gang. As an antithesis to characters like Pinky and Sarah Jane, Miklo resents his

whiteness with a fervor. Although he is pale and blond, he speaks and understands Spanish fluently, an indicator of his cultural competency, he and seems most at home in his Chicano community. His character's main drive throughout the film is to prove that he is Mexican enough. Like Nishime's earlier statement claims, Miklo tries to show his loyalty to his cousins by completely rejecting his whiteness.

Miklo's need to fit in and his desire to join a gang eventually leads him to killing a man in self-defense, which gets him imprisoned. He is separated from his cousins and must start over to prove to the Latino gang inside the prison, called La Onda, that he is not in fact white. "I'm white on the outside, but brown on the inside to the bones.", he states, further solidifying his rejection of his whiteness. Miklo is eventually accepted by La Onda, but he gets out of prison on probation toward the middle of the film. He comes home only to find that Paco has become a police officer, and Cruz is hopelessly addicted to heroin. Miklo cannot stay out of trouble, and it is Paco who ultimately has to put him back into prison for an attempted robbery. This creates an interesting dynamic. The family that Miklo tried so hard to be accepted by turned and, as he saw it, betrayed him.

Blood in Blood Out presents a very important idea. Miklo's complete rejection of his whiteness is understandable, because of the cruelty and racism he faces from his father. In the beginning, Miklo is rejected by his white father like Nullah is rejected by Fletcher. His dad refers to Miklo's Mexican family as "wetbacks" and saying that he should "never take the side of a Mexican over his father." This is the only film in my list that portrays a character that hates being half white, and it is also the only film wherein a parent's dialogue is explicitly racist.

Taking it one step back from the extreme of Miklo's situation, I would say that many mixed children these days struggle with the embarrassment of being half white. There is a lot of popular culture among people of color on social media that perpetuates the rejection of white people and “white culture” as a whole, coding it as inherently racist and embarrassing. This can lead to a sort of shame for mixed youth who are trying hard to relate to their family of color. This is something that even I struggle with. I experience shame or guilt for being half white, because of the inequities experienced by people of color, but I also feel ashamed of feeling that way, because I was raised exclusively by a very supportive and loving white family for the first half of my life.

A recurring phrase used throughout the film is "Vatos Locos Forever." The three cousins use this mantra to promise each other that they will always be by each other's' side. However, by the end of the film Miklo goes back into prison and becomes the leader of La Onda, and Paco has to save Cruz from a spiral after their young brother dies from injecting some of Cruz's heroin. One of my favorite lines comes at the end of the film, as Cruz and Paco reflect about the last few years of their lives. Cruz is dancing around and yells to Paco, "We have something better than a lucky rabbit's foot homes; we've got familia." I've always found this line touching, but also ironic because earlier in the scene they have labeled Miklo as hopeless. They don't believe they can save him from the gang life. Miklo was never fully accepted at the beginning of the film for being white, he spends the film trying to pass cultural competency tests that he seems to set up for himself, to prove to no one in particular that he is Mexican enough. As Cruz makes a strong familial declaration at the end, Miklo is still not completely included, because he is now a criminal.

Each category above is necessary to create a larger mosaic of what it means to be mixed race. There will never be a definitive film or group of films that defines this, because every person is going to have a new story to tell. The best we can do is to continue to add mixed-race films in hopes to create the most comprehensive and inclusive picture possible.

A Reflection

When I began my journey into the pantheon of mixed-race movies, I did not expect to get as much diversity in content as I did. I never expected to see a character with a fully white half-sibling like I have. Never in my wildest dreams did I think there was a period drama, one of my favorite genres, about a mixed-race woman, and the icing on the cake was that she actually existed. The fullness I felt spending a week watching movies solely about people like me was unparalleled. That is why this project is important to me. There are many themes in these films that I would like to address in my own screenplay. These themes include looking inside myself for an identity, trying to decide how much of one culture I have to reject in order to be accepted by the other, and navigating the world as someone who was raised white, but presents as a person of color. Some unique experiences that are specific to me are being introduced into my Laotian family for the first time as a teenager, reconciling my Christian upbringing with the Buddhism that is heavily intertwined with Lao traditions, and not being able to speak Lao. These cultural nuances that I want to infuse into my screenplay are part of the importance of producing films about mixed Asian-Americans, and why I hope to be able to see my script to fruition in one way or another within the next few years.

Conclusion

In the future, I hope to focus more in depth on each category, but I thought it necessary for this paper to create a general and brief summary of a diverse sample of Mixed-Race films, since mixed-race film scholarship is still developing. Mixed-race films are out there, sometimes the themes are defined by historical context, and often they include common tropes, such as searching for identity and feeling the need to reject one culture to be accepted by another. I believe it is time for a new wave of films about the mixed-race experience now, because so much has changed over the last few decades. I would like to see more movies about people who are mixed Asian or Latinx. I would like to see more stories where the two sides of the family are not completely at odds with each other, or at least wherein the divisions are treated with a little bit more nuance.

There is so much diversity within the mixed-race population. There are so many variables that can combine to create a multitude of important, deep and wonderful stories. These stories could make some beautiful films that I think would help more of us mixed people feel like we are seen. Films that would help mixed kids and adults alike realize that there are others out there struggling with trying to find a sense of belonging, how we look on the outside versus how we feel inside, what to call ourselves etc. This is the importance of representation in film, because while mixed people have a myriad of lives and circumstances, and while they may not *completely* relate to any given film, they can sit down and watch a movie with someone similar to them in it and feel encouraged that others like them exist. They can know that others watching these films who might not have thought much of them before are also seeing them and

starting to subconsciously place mixed people into their understanding of the larger context of the world.

The world, as they say, is indeed getting smaller, and cultures and ethnicities are certainly not at risk of abruptly reversing their course of converging. In other words, as the world shrinks, its populations continue to become more and more mixed. Since that is now the reality in which we live, it is time to dive deeper into mixed-race conversations, because understanding mixed-race discourse is a way to preemptively understand future generations.

The Screenplay

All Mixed Up

By

Carynn Bratton

INT. DAY. BRATTON HOUSEHOLD

The scene opens with the camera focused on an early 2000's family photograph in a golden frame, hanging on a white wall. There is a young white mother, a young white father, one young white daughter and one young daughter who is brown.

CARYNN (V.O.)

My mom told me I was half adopted
when the inevitable question arose.

INT. DAY. HONDA CIVIC

The mother from the picture, Brandy, is driving a small blue Honda Civic. She has short blond hair, blue eyes, and she is very young and pretty. In the back you can see the two girls from the picture in their car seats. Danyka is still a baby, around 1 year old with light brown hair, pale skin and grey eyes. Carynn is four, she has brown skin, hair, and eyes.

YOUNG CARYNN

Mom, why isn't my skin fluffy
like everyone else's?

BRANDY

(Glancing in rearview)
Fluffy...?

YOUNG CARYNN

Yeah. You have fluffy skin,
grandma has fluffy skin.

BRANDY

Do you mean white?... Well you're
half adopted. You're half Laotian.

Young Carynn looks content with this answer and proceeds to look out the window.

CARYNN (V.O.)

And that was that. It must've been a satisfying enough answer for me, even if I didn't fully understand it.

TITLE CARD:

"The

Truth"Cut

to:

INT. NIGHT. BRATTON HOUSEHOLD KITCHEN

The family is praying around the dinner table in a very small but well-kept house. There is a theme of daisies throughout the kitchen. The camera pans around the dinner table in order to show each of their faces.

CARYNN (V.O.)

I never felt different from the rest of my family, I was just vaguely aware that I looked different. But my mom's "half adoption" story kept me from asking any more questions for a long time. Until...

EXT. DAY. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND

It is a very normal dreary Oregon day; many little kids are running about on the playground in various coats and hats. There is a light blue school in the background, and Carynn is sitting next to another little girl on the swings. Carynn is a little bit older now, around 7 years old.

LITTLE GIRL

Are you adopted?

YOUNG CARYNN

No.

LITTLE GIRL

Your mom did reading group with us today.

YOUNG CARYNN
Yeah...

LITTLE GIRL
She's white.

YOUNG CARYNN
So?

LITTLE GIRL
Is your dad white?

YOUNG CARYNN
Uhuh.

LITTLE GIRL
And your sister is too,
huh?

YOUNG CARYNN
I look just like my
mom.

LITTLE GIRL
No you don't.

CARYNN (V.O.)
This was the first of many times I
would have this particular
conversation with someone.
Sometimes it's hard for people to
recognize my mother's face in me,
they can't seem to get passed the
fact that it isn't the same color.
So I relented.

YOUNG
CARYNN ... I'm half
adopted.

MONTAGE:

A flurry of short clips and photographs of Carynn at various family functions where she is the focal point surrounded by many white people. Christmases, birthdays, Easter, etc.

CARYNN V.O.

It wasn't something that I'd thought of for a long time, but that girl's questions kept nagging at me. What made me brown while everyone else was white?

Montage continues, now showing shots of a scrapbook, and photos of Brandy in the hospital for both Carynn and Danyka's birth.

CARYNN (V.O.)

I couldn't possibly be adopted. Besides my complexion, I looked exactly like my mom. I'd seen scrapbooks my mom made for me and my little sister, Dany. There were pictures of her at the hospital having me.

INT. EVENING. BRATTON HOUSEHOLD DINING ROOM

The family is sitting around the small dining room table eating once again. We see young Carynn look up at her parents and ask something, and they look stunned. They look at each other in contemplation.

CARYNN (V.O.)

So I went home that night and asked how I was half adopted. That night is one of the most vivid memories I have from my childhood.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT. BRATTON HOUSEHOLD LIVING ROOM

Carynn and Brandy sit on a flowered couch in an olive-green living room. It is very small and there is a white, brick fireplace opposite them, unlit. Brandy has tears in her eyes and Carynn looks very contemplative.

CARYNN (V.O.)

That night, after Dany went to bed, my mom gave me a PG version of the sex talk. I don't think either of us

were ready for it, but it was important for me to understand how I was made in order to understand how I could be-

BRANDY

*Half*adopted. I'm your mom, you were in my tummy and I had you. But your dad adopted you. He met you when you were a baby and he decided he wanted to raise you. To be your dad.

CARYNN (V.O.)

With this statement came a revelation: there was a whole family of people out there who were related to me that I didn't know. A father who I could go to a store with and the cashier would say "Is this your daughter? Wow, she looks just like you."

INT. NIGHT. BRATTON HOUSEHOLD MASTER BEDROOM

Carynn and her young dad, Stephen, are sitting on a bed with a plaid bedspread. The room is by no means fancy, definitely the bedroom of a young couple, clean and simple. Stephen is holding Carynn and crying, she doesn't look like she knows what to make of the situation.

CARYNN (V.O.)

That was the first night I ever saw my dad cry.

STEPHEN

You know I'm alwaysgonna be your dad no matter what, right?

YOUNG CARYNN

(Nods)

Yes.

STEPHEN

I've loved you ever since the first time your mom let me hold you. I've never thought of you as

anything but my daughter, just
like Dany.

YOUNGCARYNN
I love you too.

STEPHEN
Just don't forget Rynn, anyone can
be a father but it takes work and
love to be a dad.

CARYNN (V.O.)
I suddenly felt very guilty for
having another father out there. For
even mentioning him when I had a
great Dad right here who chose me
when the other hadn't.

TITLE CARD:

"Exposure"

INT. DAY. HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY

A 16-year-old Carynn and her best friend Marisa, a short Mexican girl with curly brown hair, are sitting in Springfield High School's rather depressing brick library. There is a bay of computers, and drab brown bookshelves line the walls. They giggle as they sit at a table, hunched over old yearbooks.

CARYNN (V.O.)
I felt so guilty that I didn't ask
about it again for years. Not even
after I got into high school and
met some other Laotian kids. Not
even after my parents got
divorced.

MARISA
(Pointing at a picture of young
Brandy)
Oh my God, look at your mother's
hair.

CARYNN

It is at maximum capacity... oh
my goodness look! It's uncle
Trevor.

The camera focuses on a yearbook picture of a young boy in
the 90's. He looks like Brandy

MARISA

This guy's last name is
Mydoanchanh, do you think he's
Tony's uncle?

CARYNN

Definitely, he looks just like Tony.
I think some of my uncles should be
in here... they all went to high
school here around this time.

MARISA

Do you know any of their
names?

CARYNN

I know the last names. My
biological dad's last name is
Savath, and I have some cousins
with the last name Philivanh.

MARISA

Cool.

Both girls search the books intently, and Marisa holds up a
picture of a young girl who looks very similar to Carynn.
Her name is ChintanahPhilivanh.

MARISA

She looks just like you dude. Carynn looks up with
an expression of utter surprise

CARYNN (V.O.)

Huh... never been told that
before.

MARISA

What about this one?
SengduaneSavath? He looks like you
too.

Carynn pulls out her cell phone and takes a picture of the
yearbook.

CARYNN
I'm gonna send a picture
to my mom and see if that's on of my
uncles.

The girls search for a little bit longer, and then Carynn's
phone pings. She reads the message and looks a little
distraught.

MARISA
Dude, what is it.

CARYNN
That last picture, he's my
dad.

MONTAGE

The opening shot is the interior of Carynn's mother's new
house. It is just a small as the earlier home, but is a bit
more modernized, and is just as well kept. As the montage
progresses it is clear that Carynn, Brandy and Marisa are
getting ready for a party. Various Lao people begin to
enter the house, and there is a myriad of shots of a shoe
pile at the door growing. Each new person or family to come
in the door is like a mini reunion. They embrace both
Carynn and Brandy emotionally, as if they have just come
home.

CARYNN (V.O.)
Mom knew that my biological dad was
deep into drugs, that it wouldn't be
safe for me to meet him. She said
even his nephews wouldn't let their
kids be around him and his druggy
wife. But mom still had ties to the
rest of the family, and she decided
it would be a good time for me to

meet all of them. That was one of
the best summers of my life.

The montage continues, and the party hits full capacity. Lao food is being made, there is a group of men out by the barbecue; one of Carynn's uncles sneaks her a shot of Hennessy.

CARYNN (V.O.)

I learned a lot that summer. How my
uncles really respected my mom
because of how she always respected
them and their culture.

Brandy and the others are sitting at an outdoor table littered with plates and bottles. They are laughing and obviously reminiscing about the old days. Cut to a shot of Carynn smiling awkwardly as a bunch of her cousins laugh.

CARYNN (V.O.)

I learned what it felt like to be
left out of a joke because I didn't
understand the language.

Final shot closing the montage, mostly everyone has gone, Carynn is sitting at the outdoor table with her mom and two of her uncles. Carynn is listening intently as the other three sit and talk.

CARYNN (V.O.)

And I learned that my biological
father, Bec was his nickname,
didn't leave my mother and me. For
my safety, we left him.

TITLE CARD:

"The Fight"

Cut to:

INT.DAY.BIG KITCHEN

The scene opens on a 19-year-old Carynn sitting at a marble island in a nice big kitchen. There is a lot of natural light filtering in, and Brandy is busy cooking. This is Brandy's final and nicest home.

CARYNN

Hey mom, Carla messaged me again. She wants me to come meet Sengphet and my dad... she says they've been sober for six months now.

BRANDY

Baby, you are just like me. I know you want to trust them and that you want to meet your little brother, but they never stay sober for very long. Go ask your Uncle Souk.

CARYNN

So what, I'm supposed to just ignore her messages? I can take care of myself, I'm an adult now.

BRANDY

You're barely an adult, you are only 19 years old. You don't know what it's like, you've never been around addicts before. They steal things from the family.

CARYNN

Mom, I won't take anything valuable over. I will not tell them your address or my phone number. I'll only message Carla over Facebook.

BRANDY

No, Carynn.

CARYNN

(Frustrated)

Mom, I have waited for so long. It's not like I'm trying to make him my father figure, I already have a dad. I just want to meet them. I'll even take Marisa with me.

BRANDY

I'm looking out for your safety, honey. You have too big of a heart. You're going to go over there and see how they're living, and you're going to get roped in and taken advantage of.

CARYNN

Do you think I'm stupid?

BRANDY

(Voice is raising)

No, I just know that you don't understand.

Carynn has tears in her eyes and quietly leaves the room.

MONTAGE

Carynn pulls up to a run-down home with Marisa and they take a deep breath before going up and knocking on the door. A skinny white woman, Carla, with a toddler on her hip opens the door. The toddler looks like Carynn in boy form. He has a messy shirt and a runny nose.

CARYNN (V.O.)

Eventually my mom caved and told me it was my decision. I decided to be well guarded, but to take a chance on Dad and Carla.

Carynn and Marisa sit on the couch and play with Sengphet, her little brother, while a movie is playing in the background. Carynn's father, Bec, comes in the front door. His head is shaved, and his features closely resemble Carynn and Sengphet's. Carynn gets up and they hug.

CARYNN (V.O.)

I found out a lot of things that day. Carla was sober 6 months, but Bec was not. He was not technically supposed to be at the house. He

loved movies just like me. And
Carla wanted me to come teach her
how to make papaya salad sometime.

TITLE CARD:

"The Funeral"

Cut to:

INT.DAY.BIG KITCHEN

Carynn walks calmly into the nice big kitchen where Brandy, Danyka and Brandy's mother Grandma Fran sit. They are all doing busy work and look up as she enters.

CARYNN

I have to go to Mae-thoo's
house. She's only got a few
more minutes.

INT. DAY. SMALL SUV

Carynn is driving a small SUV in a small lower-class neighborhood, looking pensive.

CARYNN (V.O.)

I spent time with Bec and Carla when
I could. They both got sober, and
have stayed that way. Carla got all
of her other kids back, and
sometimes I would go visit Mae-thoo,
Grandma, with Bec. At some point,
even though it didn't mean the same
thing as it did when I was talking
about my dad who raised
me, I started calling Bec dad.

INT. DAY. SMALL ROOM

Carynn and Bec enter a small room filled with various family members with swollen and tear stained faces. They are all surrounding a small hospital bed, in which a frail asian woman is lying. She is no longer breathing. Carynn walks to Mae-thoo's feet and bows three times, touching her forehead to them.

CARYNN (V.O.)

They asked me to be one of the white women for the funeral. I had to dress in a white skirt and shirt, take off all of my makeup and jewelry, and become a monk for the day.

Carynn and a few of her female aunts and cousins are squished into her Grandmother's room which is now completely void of furniture. There are mats on the ground, and a few altars set up. A bald monk in an orange robe is chanting, and they are repeating his chant.

CARYNN (V.O.)

The whole time I was in that room I was wondering if this was all okay. I wondered if God would understand that I did the Buddhist ceremony to honor my culture and my grandmother, and not because I was no longer a Christian. I'm sure he understood.

EXT. NIGHT. BACKYARD

The camera moves about a backyard filled with people. Brandy looks through yearbooks with Carla, Carynn's uncles are sitting around a table taking shots. Carynn chases little kids around in the grass.

CARYNN (V.O.)

I don't know if I'll ever completely feel like I belong anywhere, I suspect I probably won't. I just kind of exist where I can, and I'm content with that.

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