BRANDING BLASIANS: MIXED RACE BLACK/ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE CELEBRITY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

BY

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DISSERTATION
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Abstract

Contemporary multiracial discourses rely on two overarching frames of mixed-race: mixed-race as uniquely new phenomenon and mixed race as resistant to dominant paradigms of race and racism. Both have been necessary for multiracial activists and the mixed race movement, and have served as the foundation for much of the current research in mixed race studies. This dissertation posits that a third frame exists, one that neither sees mixed-race as new or unique, nor as a racial salve to move the United States past the problem of the color line. This third paradigm is pluralistic, fluid in its ambiguity, and allows for the potential of ambivalence and contradictions within mixed-race. This paradigmatic shifting view of race rearticulates what it means to be Black, Asian, Other, and results in the creation of multiracial/other subjectivities which can become a formidable obstacle to the racial order of the United States. Importantly, this dissertation argues Blasians trouble the logic of existing U.S. racial classifications, without establishing their own. Blasians (mixed-race Black and Asian people) are challenging the hegemony of race constructed around the lives of not just Blacks and Asians, but all members of U.S. society, as we are all embroiled in the illogical (and contradictory) discourses framing our identities. I do not offer Blasians as a racial salve, as resistant to or prescription for either race or racism through virtue of their mixed-race bodies. Instead, I have used this dissertation to describe the emergence of Blasians, not to add to the research that divides monoracialis from multiracialis, but to muddle the lines between them. The analyses of these celebrities acknowledge that to understand what is a Blasian, means to first understand, and then complicate, hegemonic notions of race as it applies to both Blacks and Asians. Contextualized against those dominant discourses, Blasians explode the narrow boundaries of authenticity.
around racialized categories. Blasians, as I discuss them in this dissertation do not escape race, or erase race, but they do force the reconstruction of normative instantiations of identity.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When Hines Ward, #86 for the Pittsburgh Steelers, became the MVP of Super Bowl XL in 2006, his recognition as the first Korean-American to receive that honor barely registered as more than a blip in the news coverage about him in the United States. Stories instead focused on him as an “elite player” (Miklasz), his selflessness and skill as a football player, and his “ear to ear grin” (Micco). Some of the news stories mentioned he was mixed-race in passing, mainly to explain the tattoo on his arm, his name written in Korean above an image of Mickey Mouse in a Heisman pose, and the Asian woman he hugged in pictures - his Korean mother. Even after he announced he was keeping a vow he had made to his mother to return to Korea, on a homecoming trip of sorts, few media outlets picked up the story. The stories that did appear confusedly questioned how a Black American football star could be a hero in a country where less than .02 percent of the population watches the sport (Kang). In another article the reporter marveled at how “Super Bowl MVP Hines Ward [had] become a hero in a most unlikely place. [The article suggested] Ward is now a household name in South Korea, a country that has little knowledge of pro football” (Borges, par. 1). It was not until CBS aired a Super Bowl Today lead-in piece to the 2008 Super Bowl that Hines Ward’s struggle as a Blasian was directly addressed in a mainstream news outlet. That story later re-aired on ESPN in 2009 with the addition of a follow-up interview with Ward about the treatment of biracial Koreans and the death of then president, Roh Moo Hyun.

Despite South Koreans not being familiar with U.S. football, Hines Ward mania gripped the country in 2006. There was an extraordinary amount of fanfare surrounding Ward during his Korean visit, with the press following him everywhere. This media melee included visits with
politicians and celebrities, countless interviews and photo opportunities, and endorsement meetings, all culminating in a ceremony making him an honorary Korean citizen. The Korean news media focused most stories on Ward’s identity as a multiracial Korean, an inverse of the U.S. coverage. Only a small part of the coverage focused on his MVP status and starting position on the Pittsburgh Steelers. Korean news stories reemphasized the nation’s inclusion of him: “Ward is Korean, Ward is one of us” (Choe, par. 9), surprising considering Ward’s comments in an interview where he said, “To hell with Korean people. They didn’t accept me, they didn’t accept my mom, I had that anger for the longest time” (ESPN Sportscenter).

During that homecoming trip and subsequent return visits, Ward worked to set up the Helping Hands Foundation “to help mixed race children like himself in South Korea where they have suffered discrimination” (“Ward New Charity”). He came to accept his Korean citizenship by distancing himself from his previous shame and publicly identifying himself as Korean. His appointment to the Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by President Obama served as further acknowledgment that his public identification as Asian in the United States had been noticed.

This opening vignette about Ward suggests his identity in media is racialized, and narratives about him focus on sport, nationalism, politics, and philanthropy. Ward is framed as Black according to a hegemonic understanding of race and sport in the United States, Korean for the purposes of creating a new national identity for South Korea, Asian according to the White House, and Blasian (mixed race Black/Asian) in his self-directed efforts to help other mixed-raced people like him. This dissertation attempts to explain how Blasian, a concept and a term likely still unknown to many today, went from being undefined to taking a significant place in popular media culture. Today, it is not just an identity Black/Asian mixed race people can claim,
but also a popular identity with meaning within the industry and a relevance that works in productive ways. This dissertation also explores the transformation of Blasian from being an illegible and unmentioned category, to a legible classification that is then applied to other Blasian figures in media.

I contend in this dissertation that Hines Ward and other Blasian celebrities were the focus of racialized media discourses, and through media coverage of them, augured a transformation of racial identity and multiracial identity in narratives about them. I use the term Blasian to refer to the celebrities and stars in this dissertation because they self-identify with these socially constructed racial/ethnic categories of Black and Asian. Of course, Blasian joins a number of other labels used to describe multiracial individuals, labels like hapa, mulatto/a, mestize, half-breed, creole, biracial, hybrid, and colored, among others. I chose Blasian over those terms because the historical meanings and the common sense understandings of all of them are directly dependent on whiteness. For example, *hapa (haole)* carries with it a history of violent White colonization of indigenous Hawaiians (Dariotis). Though it has been appropriated since then by Asian Americans to refer to mixed-race Asians, implied is Asian and White racial intermixing. The terms mulatto/a, colored, half-breed, and biracial, common terms in early literature on mixed race, carry similar connotations, but instead of White and Asian mixtures, those terms refer to Black and White racial mixing and speak to, again, the history of colonizer violence against indigenous people, and also in the United States, slave violence. While it is sometimes used in other ways, biracial has primarily come to stand in for those who identify themselves or are identified as Black and White, excluding those of other racial mixtures. There are also biological implications of sterility and superiority tied in with labels like mulatto, half-breed, and hybrid. Mulatto and half-breed have historically circulated the idea that mixing ‘breeds’ will result in a
new breed that will be sterile and subsequently unstable because of that sterility (Morton). Hybrid’s mooring in biology carries with it the idea that (racial) mixing produces a biologically superior end result (Stross), one that is stronger, more attractive, and all around better than the individual components (Carter). Using the term Blasian allows me to talk about a particular subjectivity while avoiding making Blackness the default racial position, as hypodescent does when terms like mulatto or biracial are used. There are other terms, reflective of the multicultural 1990s, terms like Amerasian and Eurasian, meant to refer to mixed race Asians, especially those who are a result of U.S. military interventions in Asian countries. I remember one conversation with my dad after moving to the United States from Korea, when I asked him what I was supposed to call myself when people ask. His reply was “I guess Amer-Asian, even though it would be more like Afro-Amer-Asian.” For this dissertation Afro-Amer-Asian is entirely too unwieldy, though it is more appropriate to my identity than the existing terminology I have just suggested, it is less a term with which one might desire to identify or be self-defined as; so, in addition to historical and theoretical reasons, I chose Blasian because it is appropriate for me personally, and also has the potential to gain public attention and acceptance.

Used interchangeably with the label Blasian is the term mixed-race. Mixed-race, like some of the other aforementioned labels, can be criticized for giving the impression that multiracial people are “mixed-up,” or confused and/or unstable because of racial mixing. It has also been criticized as a label for people because it privileges the idea that race must be essentially pure, and mixed-race then has connotations of racial impurity. However, given that race is socially constructed and does not derive from biology, within this dissertation the terms mixed-race, racially mixed, and multiracial are used interchangeably as they all signify the dynamic nature of racial classification. Additionally, I still find it to be a useful term because
mixed-race people use it to describe themselves. Mixed-race does not carry with it the racially exclusive connotations that labels and descriptors like biracial, hapa, mestizo/a, colored, Eurasian, or mulatto/a all do. Also, mixed-race is a label that allows people who categorize themselves as such to divulge their particular mixtures, or not, conferring on multiracial folks a small amount of agency in determining how they identify. Mixed-race as a descriptor also enables multiracials who identify as such, to become part of a larger mixed-race community. So, while all multiracial people do not use mixed-race to describe themselves, many do and it is one of the most recognizable terms both inside academia and outside in the multiracial community and in the spaces where those two worlds overlap.

Acknowledging that the meaning of mixed-race changes depending on location, history, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and other important factors, I use it to discuss people with parents of two different races/ethnicities, where Whiteness does not explicitly comprise part of that mixture. When researching or discussing mixed-race people, often highlighted is the need for mixed-race people to label themselves, rather than be labeled by others. Self-identification is especially important for the Blasian celebrities featured in the case studies. As people of color, who are often labeled according to their phenotypic markers, their self-identification strategies point to the fluidity and multiplicity of identity. What is centered or erased racially in interviews, television shows, movies, endorsements, and so on by or for the celebrity can vary from one medium to another.

As with the term mixed-race, there are some who might find the term Blasian to be problematic because it stems from superficial color/racial designations, but despite the problematic branding aspects of using the term and the less than satisfactory identity-producing dimension of it, I use the term here to signal the need for language that breaks out of old and
outdated racial schema. Blasian also allows me, despite criticism to the contrary, to acknowledge the terms Black and Asian refer to a diverse population of people; yet, despite diversity, the racial structure of U.S. culture classifies each group according to some socially constructed conventions centered mostly on phenotypical markers. Additionally, the constructed nature of race and how individuals interpret its meanings are crucial to how we understand race in this country. I do not put quotations around the term race, despite the fact that it is socially constructed and without any real biological moorings—as it has very real power, which is deployed unevenly and oppressively and has a very real impact on the lives of people everywhere (Delgado & Stefancic, hooks, Jenkins et al.).

Like many, but not all, multiracial people, Blasians attempt to trouble the notion of hypodescent in the way they accept being racialized as people of color, who are oftentimes, but not always also, Black. While other researchers have discussed whether or not biracial people really challenge the one-drop rule (Sexton; Spencer; Spickard; Zack; Root; DaCosta Remaking; Daniel), Blasians—without the benefit of Whiteness, a point that I will develop later—are an unavoidable test of the one-drop rule. Blasians shift discussions of multiracialness from being a threat to whiteness, or being anti-Black, and/or functioning as a racial salve, to strategically using Blackness and Asianness (sometimes in combination, other times singly) to assert a particular subject position that has its own benefits and advantages. As multiracial people who do not acknowledge Whiteness as part of their mixture, I posit there may not be the same tendencies to protect Whiteness as in the case of White + other racially mixed people. While research has addressed the “whitening” of multiracial people by virtue of their mixed-race status, I argue the Mobius strip of their co-existing Black and Asian identities in large part keeps them from benefitting from those whitening strategies and entitlements in the same ways. Blasians are
part of the shifting discourse because the branding strategies framing their particular mixture position them as an emergent group, even within the multiracial movement. This dissertation is an attempt to answer these over-arching questions: (1) How does the discursive regime of U.S. popular media create, define, and represent Blasians?; (2) Why and how are Blasians availing themselves of branding strategies to further destabilize (or not) the discursive practices of popular media?; (3) How do Blasians change race for other groups?; and (4) What critical insights can be applied to other multi and monoracial groups, in U.S. society by analyzing the experiences of Blasian celebrities?

In this dissertation, I provide case studies of Blasian celebrities, including Kimora Lee Simmons, the aforementioned Hines Ward, and Tiger Woods, because their mixed-race status has been used to brand them in specific ways in order to gain more popularity, yet they all represent an oft-ignored segment of the multiracial population by both academe and the multiracial movement. With the exception of a few scholars (Kich, Hall, Thornton, Thornton & Gates, Hasu Houston, Ono, Bullock), Blasians have been left out as meaningful category of people in academic research, despite an extensive history of Black and Asian interactions within the United States and abroad. The mixed-race movement is dominated by white + other biracial members, while minority + minority mixed-race people are only now moving into positions of leadership and gravitating toward the center of the movement. My dissertation reveals that even though Americans have mixed in every way possible, racial mixing is talked about in certain ways (which seems to almost always involve Whiteness) and not others. What little discourse exists about the racial mixing of Blacks and Asians with each other reveals there are some different tensions and issues about this particular mixture that do not arise when talking about White + other racially mixed people. It also reveals, unsurprisingly, that media discourses about
Blasians follows the path of least resistance – meaning they mostly follow along with hegemonic scripts already created, reproduced, and familiar to their audiences about monoracial Blacks and Asians, and mixed-race people as post-racial salves, to frame them in very particular and recognizable ways.

Blasian celebrities are invaluable to my dissertation, because these mixed-race stars have come to represent “the multiracial neutral in that their images sell the idea of racial pluralism and freedom, and yet their images remain other, available for audiences and consumers of all racial backgrounds to claim or own” (Dagbovie 232). The multiraciality of Blasian stars, and other mixed-race celebrities, allows media to use whatever component of those stars they wish, to serve whichever end they choose. Though media stories discussing these Blasian stars are many and varied, my project finds they are mostly incapable of addressing these celebrities as wholes, instead choosing to foreground and commodify particular dimensions of their identity. This has resulted in the idea that mixed-race stars are fragmented, unclear about who they are, and confused, when in reality it is media that have disaggregated and disarticulated Blasian identity in such a way that a complete picture of these Blasians, as with other multiracial stars, are impossible. I also find that Blasian celebrities differ from biracial stars in that their marketability is not wrapped up in racial ambiguity they cannot approximate. Unlike a star like Vin Diesel, Blasian celebrities may not allow audiences to see themselves reflected in the stars. Blasians, despite offering a multiracial neutrality, are not always able to stand in for “every body.” This dissertation ultimately reveals that, despite the best attempts by media and audiences to fit these stars into familiar frames, it is impossible to squeeze the entirety of their Blasian identity into recognizable categories all of the time. The representations of these celebrities do not always fit
into hegemonic expectations, including mixed-raceness, and not of singular identities like Blackness or Asianness.

In other words, my dissertation attempts to contextualize some of the material and historical conditions that both enable and constrain Blasian engagement with popular culture. How those conditions have led to this current moment in which the stars (or most likely their team of managers, agents, publicists, family, and friends) have access to sundry representational apparatuses, such as social media and technology, as a means of reaching out to fans and audiences alike, allows for more than one image of these stars to exist simultaneously in the popular imaginary. It is here that Blasians become useful in charting the evolution and intersection of both branding and celebrity studies. Now that branding studies have become more popular, some of the key questions for my project will be to examine how Blasians as a group become legible, and how they (as a brand) are imagined within public spheres.

Are Apples Tigers?

I use branding studies to frame the emergence of Blasians, because legibility is essential to branding. Making sense of, say, Apple MacBook Pro computers requires knowing what a computer is to begin with, having need for a laptop computer, being convinced of the utility of a laptop, and being familiar enough with computers to know that there are differences in laptops, such as degrees of user friendliness, size, attractiveness, input and output slots, and the availability of useful software applications. Unless one has an awareness that these things matter, then Apple's brand of laptop is essentially meaningless. Similarly stars like Kimora Lee Simmons have meaning only within the bounds of specific racialized narratives, which work metaphorically to brand bodies so that some bodies have more (or different) value than others. This dissertation theorizes not computer brands but the branding of people, their celebrity
personae, and racial identity. The theory developed here explains how mixed race subjects, specifically Blasians, come to gain cultural, social legibility. While commodities like laptop computers can be easily emptied of their actual meaning (a machine designed to do specific tasks) and replaced with a myriad of messages, meanings, and values, people, especially of color, are not as effortlessly divorced from hegemonic meaning or history, but commodity processes try nevertheless. In this dissertation, I ask, "If Blasians have no meaning, experience a kind of invisibility or cultural illegibility, what processes are required for them to gain social meaning?" In essence, I am asking how Blasian becomes a brand, a label, and an identity that has currency (albeit different levels of currency) beyond the specific group of Blasian people.

Blasians are not the first to make use of branding strategies, which have become popular as an area of research, as a tactic for gaining visibility and building community. Branding, originally a business marketing term, was popularized by Naomi Klein in No Logo where she characterized brands as the “core meaning of the modern corporation” (5). Adam Arvidsson extends that notion of brands and describes them as “mechanisms that enable a direct valorization (in the form of share prices, for example) of people’s ability to create trust, affect and shared meanings: their ability to create something in common” (236). Catherine Johnson moves the corporate brand into the realm of television by examining the relationship between branding and television networks. She used HBO as a case study to show how a network can successfully create a brand identity through its programming. Muniz and O’Guinn introduced the idea of a brand community, a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (412). Elizabeth Hirschman analyzed how brands came to be a popular topic for research outside of marketing and consumer

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1 E.g. Apple users are cool, young, and/or hip, while users of other brands that rely on Windows OS are none of these things.
behavior research (568). She also expanded on the research by Muniz and O’Guinn on brand communities from something “external to the consumer” to “brand communities built around one’s genetic ancestry” (577). Aroncyzk and Powers offer an in-depth summary of the expansion of branding literature from traditional branding research that typically examines the way products are marketed to consumers, to its application across multiple forms of “political, social, and cultural expression and organization” (2).

Branding means coming up with a memorable label or identity around which particular meanings, references, and connections cohere, often for the purposes of selling something. However the concept of a brand is no longer centered on its material markers (trademarks, logos, packaging, etc.…), nor is it limited to being merely about economic transactions (purchasing products), now branding scholars are beginning to analyze how brands establish and create social relationships (Banet-Weiser, “Brand Cultures”). Banet-Weiser has deemed brand culture as the “deliberate association of products and trademark names with things like ideas, concepts, feelings and relationships” (“Brand cultures”). Branding scholarship now addresses in detail politicians and political parties, organizations, celebrities, institutions, trends, movements, religious groups, nations, and even public policy.2

The development of branding scholarship has expanded from consumers relating brands to “people, places, things, and other brands” to the converse, that the “meaning of things, places and people is created through their linkage to brands” (Askegaard, 83). The focus on the symbolic function of brands is a crucial turn in the branding literature, as it enables linking brands to identity construction, meaning making, and self-branding strategies. Additionally, branding scholarship has evolved to address the neoliberal political economy in which the United

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2 For more research on brands and branding see: Askegaard (2006); Banet-Weiser & Lapsansky (2008); Hirschman (2010); Smith & French (2009), Schroeder & Salzer-Morling (2006); Arvidsson (2006); Lury (2004); Holt (2002); Moor (2003); Olins (2002)
States finds itself and “how our lives are organized within brand culture” (Banet-Weiser & Lapsansky, 2; Askegaard). Banet-Weiser notes the language of the market has so permeated society that using the word brand is “unremarked upon,” and this normalization of branding signifies the contemporary moment (“Brand Cultures”). Banet-Weiser links the normalization of branding to late-capitalism’s focus on the individual. This suggests a crucial neoliberal shift, a willingness and acceptance of self-objectification, and evidence that neoliberalism is not just an economic policy approach or style, but a personal one. She then lists the five elements that must exist in order for something to be considered a brand: history, creativity, spirituality, politics and self-identity (“Brand Cultures”). Three of Banet-Weiser’s elements are especially important as I conceptualize Blasians and their brand, history, spirituality, and self-identity. She defines history as the story of a brand beyond the material marker, spirituality becomes loyalty beyond reason to the brand, and self-identity is defined as how we understand ourselves within the language of the brand (“Brand Cultures”). Banet-Weiser begins to use branding as a way to talk about identity, but she does not talk about race, nor does she use branding as a mobilizing mechanism. Though it is becoming more and more appropriate to talk about branding for things other than material products, it has yet to be applied to racial identities, which is where I diverge from the scholarship of Banet-Weiser and the other aforementioned researchers.

Pitt, Watson, Berthon, Wynn and Zinkhan’s definition of brands as being either open or closed is useful in theorizing how audiences derive meaning from Blasian stars. They note open brands are "heterarchical," meaning multiple, differing, and possibly contradictory relationships exist, and allow for the participation of consumers in creating meaning around the brands, meanings that are always evolving. With open brands we see consumers transform into what Jenkins terms “prosumers” (producers + consumers), or Holt refers to as "producerly
consumers." Whereas closed brands are hierarchical, their meanings produced by those meant to manage the brands, except with closed brands controlling the meaning is not as simple as it looks. At best what closed brands manage to do is define the boundaries around meaning, and hope audiences do not deviate too far from those meanings. Arvidsson refers to consumption as immaterial labor in reference to the work that goes into the meaning making of brands, and subsequently brands possess immaterial capital. Though according to Arvidsson that immaterial labor only happens when it “utilizes a common ability to interact and socialize, and a common symbolic framework, a set of shared knowledges and competences, to produce a social relation” (241).

Here, branding also has more general meanings. For instance, ranchers still brand cattle to signify their ownership over their animal property. Similarly, and grotesquely, slave owners sometimes branded slaves--suggesting the degree to which humans were dehumanized, treated like property, rendered objects, and made to signify the power of the master's control. The increase in branding research is no longer limited to corporate products or endorsements of those products per se, but has started to trickle down to individuals and their personal brands. Traditional branding is used to differentiate products or identify a good or service; personal branding is slightly different, because there may be no tangible service or functional benefit, though people have become (perhaps have always been within capitalism) commodities. I use branding, because the representations of the stars I use as my case studies operate more like products than not: like goods for sale they can be “discontinued, modified, withdrawn from the market, relaunched and repositioned or replaced by improved products [celebrities]” (Fan, 6-7).

3 Historically humans have been branded, either to distinguish them from free people or to distinguish them by owner. Branding was used as a “means of socially and visibly branding slaves, which is especially significant [because] there was no very marked difference of racial or sub-racial type” (Macleod 139).
Because they are people, celebrities may be mistaken for companies that own products. And, certainly, there are celebrities that both have companies and operate like them. However, there are key dimensions of their identities as products that emerge within the branding process that make them more like products than like companies. Unlike companies that own products, celebrities may have little control over how their images are used. While they may be involved in the branding process, and while they may introduce their identities into the market, they do not own what happens to their brand. When one factors in the role of consumption, they do not own their brand.

My use of brand and branding differs from earlier research in a few significant ways. First, even as scholars address the symbolic function of brands, they still refer back to a physical or tangible product. Blasian is not a product that can be bought: there is not a BLSN stock of which shares can purchased, nor is there a premium price to be paid for a Blasian good; and there is no single Blasian lifestyle being sold for consumers to pay or be a part of. In other words, buying a Tiger Woods’s branded golf club, or a dvd of Kimora Lee Simmons’s reality show does not make one Blasian. Secondly, the branding research refers to how the meaning making of brands has created boundaries around identities. I am arguing here that identity is the brand, not part of the brand, or the brand community, or part of the symbolic function of brand which consumers coalescence around – it is the brand itself. Lastly, because identity is the intangible product that is being branded here, it allows me to bring in race, gender, sexuality, class, and other identity markers, as I talk about the way Blasian has emerged as a legible and popular brand. Additionally, the focus on identity supports the use of celebrities in tracing out the process of branding an identity. It is not so important what these stars do, but rather what meanings are drawn from their representations.
Part of the rise in popularity of the personal brand can be attributed to the increase in user-generated content on the internet. For example, MySpace user Tila Tequila has parlayed her web presence into featured spots on reality television shows, merchandise, media notoriety, and her own spin-off websites, hence becoming a celebrity brand by way of the internet (Nakamura). Moreover, schools like Syracuse University have taken measures to ensure their students benefit from the accessibility and openness of the internet with increased awareness of how they present themselves by pairing them with the online reputation management platform Brand-Yourself (SU News Services). This dissertation is part of this moment that finds theories about and the branding of people becoming a viable topic of interest in multiple disciplines and useful conceptually as a way to understand the meaningfulness of Blasian celebrities in contemporary culture. Jonathan Gray notes “branding is a process that creates textuality” (310), the process that the Blasian stars undergo and the discourses that emerge as a result of that process is analyzed in this dissertation.

Expanding branding theory to look at Blasians is chosen over other theories because it allows me to look at the intersections of identity categories, the multiple and contingent relationships, power, and materiality; it is essentially a combination of the theories most effective in analyzing race, celebrity, and discourses. The theories as separate entities would allow for the analysis of Blasians, but without all the nuances I try to capture in this dissertation. Framing theory, articulation, and racial formation theory, could all be used to examine discourses around Blasians. Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory is useful because I label Blasians an emergent racial formation, however a major limitation of the theory is that it situates race as the “central axis of social construction” (62). In the 1994 edition the authors do acknowledge the importance of class and gender as well, but, as these case studies all point out, the crucial and
critical component lies in examining the points in which these categories (and many others) intersect. Framing theory, or the process of presenting and defining an issue, by what Gitlin terms “symbol-handlers” (7), provides one of the best alternatives for understanding the emergence of Blasians. However framing theory is ultimately not as useful as the branding theory develop here because there is no one organizing idea, or frame, from which to make sense of Blasians. I argue throughout this dissertation that part of the process of making Blasians legible, is the fact that media are seemingly unable to coalesce around, and uniformly present the same elements of, each case studies’ identity. Lastly, articulation is also suitable for analyzing Blasians, since as Mouffe and Laclau posit, “identity is relational” (113), but those connections are neither absolute nor necessary. Using articulation, I can relay how the intersectional elements of Blasian identity (and celebrity) come to be established together in order to form a discourse (Hall). Additionally, articulation allows me to look at this very specific moment in which Blasians are emerging. However, articulation also allows for the making and remaking (and remaking) of what it means to be Blasian, which can differ from person to person, moment to moment. Branding as a theory allows for the possibility that two (or more) people can, and do, indeed understand Blasians the same way. Thus subsuming these theories within branding theory is an effective means of looking at not just intersections, relations, and complex structures of culture and identity, but also at emerging formations and disparate media themes.

Prior to branding theory, scholars might have turned to celebrity and star studies to understand their subject. Celebrity and star studies look at the mechanisms that produce stars and often use linguistic and/or psychoanalytic theories to read celebrities through examining the
significations ascribed to their work.\textsuperscript{4} Celebrity studies is useful for talking about people who become famous in the moment, and star studies is especially useful for talking about representations beyond the screen. For example, Richard Dyer’s excellent analysis of Paul Robeson analyzed the different racialized discourses from a variety of texts, including Robeson’s films and articles written about him, as a way to contextualize and explain the crossover possibility of his stardom. The way I approach it here is similar to the way celebrity studies, fan studies, and star studies scholars might examine it, but I combine the approaches in order to talk about unknown (or little-known) identities, how they have become popular, and what that popularity means.

Using what Maureen Orth first called the "celebrity industrial complex" to analyze the mechanisms at work together with semiotics to read the celebrities themselves as texts, I am able to discern meanings of both those mechanisms and their own work. In her book \textit{The Importance of Being Famous}, Orth refers to the relationship among the celebrity, media, corporations and entertainment industry, all of which are involved in creating, producing, and promoting a celebrity or an aspect of celebrity. The celebrity can then benefit from that media attention, whether through continued attention or as a platform to promote themselves or their products. While Orth’s definition of the celebrity-industrial complex considers it a mechanism for “a more drastic kind of reinvention,” it is extended here as something even more than a tool for reinvention (65). I examine popular cultural discourses, tracing the way particular Blasian figures, unknown initially, transform celebrity status into legibility. In addition to them, specifically, as stars, I am interested in the way their racial identity as Blasians, initially confused by media that either read them monoracially or simply did not interact with the specificity of

\textsuperscript{4} See: Adorno; Barthes; Braudy; Gail Collins; Corner & Pels; DeBord; deCordova; Dyer; Fouz-Hernandez & Jarman-Ivens; Gamsson; Gledhill; Guilbert; Marshall; Monaco; Negra; Rojek; Shickel; Turner; Turner, Bonner & Marshall; Valdivia; van Zoonen; Witkin;
their identities, comes to be a part of their social meaning as celebrities. The advantage of my branding theory is the explicit treatment of celebrities as commodities whose personae act as material markers for Blasians, while also acknowledging there are also intangible assets/aspects built around their racial identities that are understood (or not) by a diverse audience. Because as Denzin and Lincoln note, a marker of good qualitative research means “attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” (3)

This, then, is a media theory, but it is also a racial theory, for it not only theorizes the means by which media discourse functions to produce both celebrities through their identities, but it also illustrates how racial identities gain social and cultural legibility and, thus, how racial identities become public, and through their publicness, politicized. The emphasis in this dissertation is on what I call negotiated branding. Readers might be familiar with Stuart Hall's (1980) well-known concept of negotiated meanings adopted by spectators of dominant televisual texts, wherein dominant texts do not have just one reading for viewers who negotiate meanings with those dominant texts. I use negotiation similarly to suggest that media do not simply control the identities of the Blasian subjects I study. They are not wholly determinant. Rather, Blasian celebrities participate in self-branding processes, along with their public relations intermediaries, sometimes effectively contesting and challenging media constructions of them and their identities. Erving Goffman (1959) referred to this process as impression management and noted it was a crucial part of the presentation of self.5 Thus this "negotiation" is in part a result of their social, cultural power, but power that facilitates their ability to participate in self-construction processes that interface, integrally, with media discursive regimes.

Blasians as a racial group have benefited from personal branding strategies by participating in the production of products and discourses that address their specific cultural

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5 See also Foucault’s (1990) discussion of self-monitoring
identities. They can play a Black character in a film, be mixed race during an interview, and then Asian while endorsing a product. Celebrities have found particular success in making the Blasian brand mean something other than simply a mixture of Black and Asian. Velina Hasu Houston, a Blasian playwright, is well known for saying that as a child, to explain her multiracial identity to her, her father took a carton of Neapolitan ice cream, mixed the strawberry for Native American, chocolate for Black, and vanilla for Japanese American together, rendering individual identities inseparable within her but necessary to who she was (Kilker 254). Being able to negotiate their various identities does not necessarily point to some sort of unhappiness or insecurity, but is instead an example of how effective branding strategies can be for multiracial people. What has happened with Blasians is what Klein predicted would happen with corporations: Their identities would no longer be found in corporate products but rather in “their attributes.” Like her, the goal of my dissertation is to understand “what brands mean to the culture and to people’s lives” (7). And like the use of Mac laptops by the Apple community, Blasians as a brand make the most sense for those within the community who possess the brand literacy to understand Blasians and Blasianness.

Partly due to the enforcement of the one-drop rule, multiracial celebrities have historically been pressured to pass as monoracial entertainers⁶ and distance themselves from their mixed race identity.⁷ The Blasian celebrities featured in my project have done neither. Instead of creating different ways to advertise themselves to different markets, Blasians as a brand “sell diversity itself, to all markets at once. The formula maintained the one-size-fits-all cost benefits”

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⁶ e.g.: Cameron Diaz, Raquel Welch, Lynda Carter, Ben Kingsley, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, Rob Schneider, Anthony Quinn, Keanu Reeves, Jennifer and Meg Tilly
⁷ e.g.: Barack Obama, Halle Berry, Russell Wong, Alicia Keys, Vin Diesel, Dean Cain, Kelly Hu, Bruce Lee, Slash, Rosario Dawson
Still, Blasians, a group marginalized within mixed-race studies and the multiracial movement, have become a commodifiable, increasingly visible, racialized brand. Indeed, some might argue, prior to the media frenzy around his storied sexual infidelity, Tiger Woods was the poster child for multiracial America.

Hollywood has begun to utilize multiracial stars and their ambiguity, more generally, as box-office attractions both for their broad audience appeal and to reflect the diversity of the audience, which is beneficial economically for celebrities and the entertainment industry (Beltran, *The New Hollywood*). As U.S. stars of color have become economically viable internationally, television and film have begun to trend toward using ethnically ambiguous mixed-race stars in their globally oriented projects. Beltran notes how this “new ethnically ambiguous protagonist embodies contemporary concerns regarding ethnicity and race relations with respect to the nation’s burgeoning cultural creolization and multiethnic population” (*The New Hollywood*, 50). She is joined by other scholars who argue that the fluidity of these hybrid subjectivities are ushering in a new U.S. racial identity (Anzaldua; Zack). Multiethnic ensembles have become profitable, partly because they appeal to an array of experiences and cultures and to younger audience members who are already familiar with both multicultural and multiracial narratives. What has been ignored in the discussion around the utility of a multiracial cast is whether that utility is present for all combinations of multiracial stars. This dissertation draws attention to the unevenness of utility, all mixed-race stars are not treated the same, and it shows in the way these celebrities are read. While the branding of Blasians has an effect on other mixed-race groups and makes them more legible, this is a one-way path. The current framing of multiraciality does not make Blasians more legible; thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to

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8 Valdivia extends this claim in her essay on “Latinas as Radical Hybrid” when she stresses the usefulness of “representational ambiguity” to late capitalism.
examine how Blasians are branded and how they may participate in that branding themselves. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the political economy of mixed-race stars traditionally allows for audience identification in large part because of the ethnic ambiguity of those stars. If we are to think about mixed-race people as consumers, and not just merely objects of the gaze as so much previous research on mixed-race has situated them (Beltran; Dagbovie; Weisman; Valdivia Mixed-race; Nakashima; Spickard The Subject; Williams), then it is absolutely necessary to acknowledge that Blasians as an audience would read and engage with a Blasian star differently than a monoracial Black or Asian would.

Obviously, Blasians and other mixed-race people are not new phenomenon, though the current rhetoric on multiracial people makes them seem so. Within the last decade a shift has occurred in the discourses about multiracial identity. Part of the shift is due in part to the changes made in collecting data for the 2000 Census, which was the first time respondents were able to choose more than one racial category and have them all be counted (Perlmann and Waters).\(^9\) Whereas before racially mixed-people denying parts of their racial makeup were met with cries of selling out, self-hatred, and/or white-washing,\(^10\) it is becoming more and more acceptable to play up (and down) all, none, one, or some portion of their particular mixtures.

This malleability of mixed-race identities highlights the political economic motivations that undergird the commodification of multiracialness and has made ethnic ambiguity trendy and

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\(^9\) The multiracial movement lobbied for one “multiracial” box to be included with the standing racial categories and the respondent would then check the two, three, or four of these racial groups they identified with. They settled for “check all that apply” option (Perlmann and Waters 13). There were 63 racial mixtures possible with the check more than one option, 126 when the Hispanic/non-Hispanic options were checked. The 2000 census counted 6.8 million multiracial people, but that number was later reduced to 4.2 million after adjusting for those who checked White + Other, with Other = Hispanic (DaCosta 2007). The reduction in number of mixed race people aligned with claims from critics of the 2000 census who felt the population of multiracial people were/are underreported.

\(^10\) Discussions on the politics of passing and covering can be found in Ginsberg’s *Introduction*, Nakamura, Piper, Amdahl, Yoshino, Squires & Brouwer, Goffman, Wang, Dyer.
extremely popular, particularly within the realm of popular culture. Using the popularity of various Blasian celebrities and rhetorics which accompany their representations, my project proposes that a multiracial subjectivity now exists which challenges the essentialization of mixed race people generally and Blasians specifically, offers a counter to limiting binaries which frame the current discourse on race/racial mixing, and helps break further away from a habitus of racial biologism. My goal is to use texts like advertisements, articles, television shows, films, music videos, and many other artifacts to help me understand how the Blasian brand is created, disseminated, and consumed. I also seek to decipher the meanings and discourses surrounding the representations of Blasians. The cipher, as theorized by Ono and Buescher is useful here as well, because the cipher is a “figure through which various commodities with multiple exchange values are marketed and it is a social concept that circulates like a commodity,” extending it to Blasians helps explain not just how they are represented and what those images mean, but also the “process by which images, representations, and products come to have meaning” (Ono & Buescher 26-27). The successfully branded Blasian is at its most fundamental level, a cipher, the brand has been imbued with meaning and acts as a commodity. The process involved in the meaning making of Blasians, their “branding,” is crucial to this project, because it relies very much on the power circulated throughout the celebrity industrial complex. U.S. culture and the uneven distribution of power has created a hierarchical racial order, which paired with the emergence of the celebrity-industrial complex\(^\text{11}\) as a realm for sense-making, makes popular culture an especially rich area for studying the circulation of ideologies.

\(^{11}\) Though Orth does not make the connection, both the military (comprised of the military, federal government, defense contractors, corporations who manufacture weapons and technology for war) and prison (made up of state and federal government agencies, politicians and lobbyists, prison labor contractors, corporations who manufacture technology and products for prisons, privately run prisons and companies who benefit from cheap inmate labor) industrial complexes provide a template for how mutually beneficial relationships are motivated by profit, growth or both. To use the phrase celebrity-
Despite Orth’s coining the helpful concept “celebrity industrial complex,” part of the title of my dissertation, celebrity reinvention is not new in the realm of entertainment: however, the public nature of their reinvention is. Whereas before celebrities, or perhaps more accurately their managers, agents, studios, labels, public relations representatives or other sundry handlers, managed their images away from public scrutiny, the development of the celebrity-industrial complex has significantly changed that. Much of that shift in control, at least in the 21st century, can be attributed to the internet through which social media, innumerable blogs, entertainment and gossip websites, and even mainstream media outlets allow celebrities unprecedented access to their own images and to fans, and most importantly, vice versa. It is important to note the popularity of digital media has not allowed these celebrities to create a new persona, or a chance to start from scratch with their identities. In fact a number of scholars (Nakamura, boyd, Sundén) have pointed out that being online does not remove bodies from the constraints of materiality. For these celebrities their digital representations are intimately linked to their embodied experiences. The Blasian celebrities I use as case studies are tethered to Blasianness, Blackness or Asianness, they cannot claim a White identity online if it is not available to them offline. For example, Kimora Lee Simmons’s tweets, and responses from fans are intimately tied to her particular performance of racialized gender. Additionally, as so many cultural studies scholars have argued, popular culture now, in the age of the internet, is as much about reception as production. As such offline and online branding strategies should match up so that these celebrities can make sure the management of their identities are consistent, but because they have little control over the reception of their images, and possibly only slightly more control over the production of their images, offline and online representations do not necessarily match up.

industrial complex is not to compare celebrities to prisons or the military and war, but to point out the occurrence of a similar profit-generating strategy.
Orth highlights why the celebrity-industrial complex has become valuable to media and entertainment industries and celebrities, because “familiar faces… not only attract large audiences; they provoke sympathy, trust, and identification” (21). Orth and Klein both stress the importance of brand building, which relies on almost unprecedented accessibility to and malleability of celebrities, both of which Blasians as a group have provided.

It is notable that the emergence of Blasians within popular culture takes place at the precise time that color-neutral politics have successfully saturated popular discourses. The narratives of a color-neutral and/or newly emergent post-racial society rely on bodies of multiracial celebrities who are used as “emblem[s] of racial harmony, the Great Multiracial Hope” (Dagbovie 232). The rhetoric of a color-neutral (Bonilla-Silva), or post-racial (Squires) society allows for discussions of race to be ignored under the guise of celebrating diversity. Importantly, part of the Blasian brand confronts this narrative head-on, because, whether they are rhetorically positioned as Black, Asian, or both, what is always present are their multiracial bodies. Additionally, using these celebrities as examples of how Blasians are represented provides examples of the discursive boundaries between racialized identities and what multiracialness has come to signify within contemporary culture.

12 Historically in the U.S., mixed race (read: Black/White) people were used as a buffer between superior Whites and inferior Blacks. Then they were more intelligent/attractive/talented than Blacks, they were not as intelligent/attractive/talented as Whites. Now, in a quest to move past “race”, mixed race people provide the perfect foil – they are the best of Blacks and Whites.

13 While the multiracial community is a not a homogenous group, much of the focus on the significance of mixed-race has been on those who identify as Black and White, or oftentimes White and Asian (Zack; Spickard; Senna; Sexton; Daniel; Dagbovie; Gilbert; Nakashima; Rockquemore & Brunsma; Ono Come See the Paradise). Very little attention has been paid to people who are a different combination of racial mixture (Hall; Kich; Thornton & Gates; Gordon; Ono Doubles). In fact, the multiracial movement, since the beginning, has dealt with suspicions that those behind the movement were merely “white parents of mixed-race bambinos bartering for a safety zone for their café-au-lait kids (Jones 55). Considering the co-founder and Executive Director of Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), one of the more effective and influential organizations within the multiracial movement, is a White woman, Susan Graham, who has two biracial children with a Black man, the suspicions does not seem unwarranted. DaCosta points out primarily middle and upper class, college educated people participated in the
It is impossible to discuss the popularity of Blasians without contextualizing the interracial relationships that have produced them, thus it is important to discuss such things as the laws and policies that isolated Chinese immigrants at the turn of the 20th century and forced them into Black communities, for instance (Moran). Chapter two of this dissertation provides some historical contextualization of the connections Blacks and Asians have made domestically and internationally, and the policies and politics that have brought them together, particularly since the groups have “a common and often overlapping diasporic experience, shared traditions of resistance and struggle have developed for liberation and equality” (Ho and Mullen 2). The chapter also includes analysis of the role of the U.S. military - which relies heavily on disenfranchised males from under-resourced, economically depressed areas, historically drawing on men of color for labor, and its presence in various Asian countries. The second chapter also examines the alarmist rhetoric depicting Black women and Asian men as the least desirable, least likely to marry, and most unlovable racial groups (Fryer Jr.; Moran; Root Love’s Revolutions; Pan; Feliciano, Robnett and Komale; Collins; Crowder and Tolnay; Jacobs and Labov; Qian and Lichter; Brown); and the flip side of that narrative which involves looking at the fetishistic obsession with hypersexualized Black masculinity and Asian femininity. This chapter focuses on interracial relationships between Blacks and Asians because while not about Blasians explicitly, examining the politics of desire and how desire is represented on television between these two groups of color reveals potential anxieties over racial mixing’s threat to the racial hierarchy in the United States. While the narrative of the United States as a bastion of post-racial ideology has become increasingly popular through its dissemination through countless media multiracial movement, especially in the beginning (Making Multiracials). Motivated possibly by parents wishing to distance their children from the reach of the one-drop rule, the movement fought to have multiracial people recognized as its own group, which some critics argued pushed it closer to Whiteness and away from Blackness (Tessman; Sexton; Spencer; Spickard).
outlets, the uneasiness of society over interracial unions comes out in popular culture. As a couple, Blacks and Asians on prime-time dramas are relegated to either having sex without love, or being in love without the sex (Washington forthcoming). Interestingly both storylines fall short of the heteronormative ideal for romantic couples on television - marriage and a baby. This chapter is helpful for understanding Eros and affect, and the ideal of race relations that is part of the production of Blasian babies. To study mixed race people it is necessary to look at interracial relationships, particularly because it provides both a foundation and frame for understanding the issues around sexuality, gender, race and mixed race.

Chapter three examines the progeny of the Black and Asian interracial relationships discussed in chapter two, Blasians and their emergence. This chapter begins with early Blasian stars in order to examine early representations of celebrities who were portrayed as either eschewing or utilizing Blasianness to the benefit of their career. The focus of the chapter then settles on Blasian women who have been featured prominently in music videos because of their valuable ethnic ambiguity (Beltran Latino/a Stars; Valdivia), and the importance of their commodification to Blasian branding. The chapter examines how Blasian video models have become an alternative to the biracial video vixen. When rappers and R&B singers mention “Black & Asian” women in their lyrics, they are always something separate from “light skinned” women. Blasians simultaneously challenge and reify the hierarchy of beauty by offering an extra level of exoticism, which is packaged and traded for featured spots in videos. This strategy has made them very popular, while also attempting to displace Whiteness as the ultimate signifier of beauty. This chapter traces out how popular media has created, defined, and represented Blasians, and explores some of the ways Blasians themselves are destabilizing those media discourses.
Chapter four uses the global success of Kimora Lee Simmons as a case study to show how her particular branding strategy and deployment of camp works to subvert hegemonic notions of race, gender, class and sexuality. Simmons emerges during a time in fashion when other Black models were gaining recognition, and whether it was to set herself apart from her competition, or to highlight her exoticism, or to explain why Karl Lagerfeld made her his muse, her Blasian status was often highlighted. This chapter examines in more detail than the previous chapter, the commodification of her Blasianness. The emphasis on her multiraciality resulted in bringing Blasians out from backstage and onto the runway. While there had been other Blasians working in the entertainment industry before her, none had reached the level of celebrity Simmons had at that point. She continues to be popular, arguably more so now than at the height of her modeling career. That she has parlayed that early fame in an industry not known for highlighting women of color into her own fashion line, book series and television show, while emphasizing her Blasian status, makes her a compelling figure for a case study. Additionally, while the fashion world is still not very diverse or welcoming in terms of race, it cannot be a coincidence that some of the more popular models of color since Simmons have also been Blasian.

Chapter five is focused on Blasian athlete Hines Ward, MVP of Super Bowl XL in 2006. The celebrity of sport ensures athletes are some of the most highly visible, well-paid celebrities, and the realm of sport is also where narratives of race, gender, sexuality and ability are unambiguously linked to our culture of consumption. Ward is used as a case study to discuss the way masculinity and nationalism intersect with sport’s commodification of athletes. His reception into popular culture, as indicated in the introduction, reveals some of the contradictory
narratives that frame Blasians. Ward is both the hypermasculine, athletically superior Black man (Jackson) and the Asian who is suspiciously smart yet not American enough (Tuan). Ward explicitly addresses the transnational nature of Blasians, by focusing media attention on his immigrant Korean mother and his homecoming return trip to Korea. Narratives of U.S. military intervention in Asian countries accompanied his homecoming trip, and the tensions to both the military and Ward’s presence reveals the cleavages happening around the shifting discourses on Asian masculinity and mixed race identity. Ward was used to recuperate Asian masculinity, both in the face of American military occupation and the continued emasculation of Asian American men in popular culture. He is also used to challenge the constant framing of Asian Americans as “forever foreigners or honorary whites” (Tuan 1998) by fitting into neither category. The discussion around Ward centered on nationalism, the work his Super Bowl win did for Blasians in the U.S. and South Korea, and the representation of Blasian males in popular culture.

Chapter six deconstructs the rhetoric around Tiger Woods since his extramarital affairs became public. Though Woods coined the term “Cablinasian” on the Oprah Winfrey Show to refer to his White, Indian, Black and Asian racial make-up, and was promptly labeled “America’s son” by Winfrey, the scandal effectively removed any stake to Whiteness Woods might receive. Though Woods had not professed to be Cablinasian since Winfrey’s show, and in a calculated move by either him or his team, distanced himself from public talk of his racial identity for much of his career, the swiftness with which various media stripped him of any claim to Whiteness is particularly illuminating. Interestingly, in a text message sent to one of his mistresses Woods referred to himself as Blasian, a move, which purposeful or not, adjusted the

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14 As an example, one of the 28 entries in urbandictionary.com refers to Blasians as “the godly mixture of a black and asian (sic) person. You get the combined athleticism of black man plus you get the smart skills of an asain (sic). Blasians are perfect people.”
branding strategy. When the scandal broke media organizations in part used his Blasian status to frame his destructive behavior, referring to his “I’m Blasian” text message reply to a mistress as explanation for why the women were attracted to him and why he continued to have affairs (Waite, NY Post, US Magazine). His self-identification brought Blasians under scrutiny, which resulted in moves to protect the Blasian brand. Woods offers an interesting analysis of the way Blasians are discussed in media and popular culture. The multiple ways in which Blackness and Asianness were deployed to shame, emasculate, understand, praise, pity, and mock him offer an extended glimpse into the way Blasians trouble U.S. constructions of race. This chapter asked how do writers, reporters, bloggers, internet commenters, celebrities, comedians, politicians, and the hoi polloi label him racially, and is it dependent on what they want to say about him, and why is there little agreement?

I conclude this dissertation by addressing the marginalization of Blasians within the multiracial movement and mixed-race studies. As stated earlier in this introduction, a vast majority of research on racial mixing has been firmly within the Black/White racial binary, with some attention paid to White mixing with other communities of color. However, very little attention has been paid groups of color mixing with each other, the motivations for it and the reactions to it. The final chapter focuses on how the multiracial movement and mixed-race studies will change with the inclusion of Blasians. As mixed race studies grows and becomes more critical, it needs to offer theories and research that can account for the experiences of mixed race people usually erased or subsumed by the movement and early works on multiracial identity. The narratives accompanying Blasian celebrities in the realm of popular culture are helpful for eschewing the tendency to paint all multiracial people with one homogenizing brush. Hopefully, it will show that the discourse on mixed race is shifting toward acknowledging the
differences in the many complicated lived realities of multiracial people and the specificities of their experiences as suggested by Moraga and Anzaldúa.

Acknowledging Blasians belong to more than one community, recognizing multiple histories and experiences, and in trying to shift the rhetoric beyond the dominant discourses of pathology, celebration, binaries and essentialisms, my dissertation is thus not concerned with defining or categorizing mixed race but rather with recognizing the multiplicities of Blasians and the process by which Blasians come to have meaning, and using that to illustrate a shift in narratives about identity. It uses particular celebrity brand of Blasians and the narratives that accompany their every move to interrogate how society both provides and still needs spaces in which mixed-race identities can be articulated. I use the case studies to highlight how Blasian subjectivities challenge and destabilize current racial discourse, creates spaces for themselves when there were none and change the narratives which frame multiracial people. I use the stars to also point out that there is some understanding of the Blasian brand, for without that understanding who would do things like watch Kimora Lee Simmons’s reality show or buy her products, or book Blasian models for music videos, or vote for Hines Ward on Dancing with the Stars and then ignore his DUI months later, or cheer for Tiger Wood’s comeback. This dissertation argues that mixed-race Black and Asian celebrities, and non-celebrities, are represented differently from other multiracial stars. Furthermore, it analyzes where and why the discourses framing celebrity and race diverge from dominant discourses of mixed-race when it comes to Blasian stars. Lastly, I argue that Blasian has become a racial identity in large part because of the branding strategies of these Blasian stars, and there is now emerging a Blasian community. What this Blasian community looks like is where my future research will take me.
Chapter 2

Where Do Blasians Come From?: Black and Asian Encounters

Less than 50 years after the Supreme Court of the United States overturned the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals’ judgment to uphold the conviction of Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving for violating Virginia’s ban on interracial marriages in *Loving v. Virginia*, the demographic increase in interracial relationships and bi- and multiracial people has generated a great deal of interest. With Barack Obama’s successful campaign for the presidency of the United States, Halle Berry’s Oscar win, multiracial and multinational collaborations and successes in music, and a visible rise in ethnically ambiguous models and celebrities, interracial relationships and their multiracial progeny have become a popular area for research and criticism (Beltran & Fojas; Kwan & Speirs; Gaines & Leaver; Paulin; Root; Zack). It comes as no surprise that many want to, and do, celebrate this “new generation [that] doesn’t blink at interracial relationships” (Jayson). Only recently have interracial relationships become mainstream enough to be represented on various prime time television shows. Scholars and students studying Asian Americans or Blacks on television might be surprised to find out that a handful of the most recognizable Asian and Black actors on television have been paired together on these shows. Research on interracial relationships is not novel, but the focus has been mainly on Black/White, sometimes Asian/White or Latino/White relationships (Bramlett-Solomon; Bramlett-Solomon & Farwell; Orbe & Harris; Chito Childs; Gaines & Leaver; Kang; Mehta; Paulin; Root; Zack).

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16. 2002
The research on interracial relationships on television between people of color, especially Black and Asian relationships, is non-existent.

This chapter contextualizes the transnational movements of Blacks and Asians, and superficially delves into the historical connections and associations they have had with each other. The chapter ends with an examination of the interracial relationships from seasons 9-12 of the now-canceled television show ER, and seasons 1-3 of current prime time show, Grey's Anatomy. These shows were chosen because they were the first shows to depict emergent Black/Asian interracial relationships, and the only shows for some years, thus they represent a key moment when Blacks and Asians intersect on television. Furthermore, the relationships on these shows offered up Asian American women and Black men as mediating figures by which race, gender, sexuality, and desire could be analyzed and understood as separate and apart from interracial White and Asian, White and Black relationships. Additionally, focusing on Black and Asian encounters, both historically and televisually, is important because Blacks and Asians have continually been set against each other; though both undesirable at one point, one has become the model and the other remains undesirable. The discourses framing these encounters underscore why tensions and anxieties exist around Black/Asian connections, the products of these interracial relationships – Blasians. Though my branding theory traces out the processes of making Blasians legible, this chapter becomes about illegibility as the desire for Blasian babies, the desire for each other, the desire for a post-racial future, are all averted on these shows. Lastly, the connections Blacks and Asians have made with each other also offer potential for rethinking culture, race, and societal structure.
Mapping out Afro-Asian Associations

Vijay Prashad notes that African and Asian countries were trading with each other long before Vasco de Gama led Europeans into forging (forcing?) relationships with countries outside of Europe. He traces the presence of xenophobia and ethnocentrism, which he says predates the early modern world, to records of “anxiety and cultural difference” (4). He notes the Chinese trade expeditions included trips to Africa, which led creating trade routes between a number of Asian and African countries. In *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting*, Prashad offers an extensive explication of the ways African and Asian countries were not only familiar with each other, but also exhibited some of the earliest examples of what he terms polyculturalism, via a long tradition of cultural exchanges and encounters. Some of the examples of polyculturalism include the presence of Arabic and Gujarati inflections and vocabulary in Swahili, which is a Bantu language spoken by a sizable portion of East African inhabitants. Prashad also alludes to the intimate mixing of African and Asian (proto-Blasian) peoples by noting the presence of *Bajuni*-Chinese/Swahili Africans - in what is now Kenya, and the intermarriages of native inhabitants of Madagascar and Indonesian immigrants (7). Importantly, there a number of scholars who note the African slave trade was not limited to the Atlantic (Prashad; Harris; Sheriff), though they note the Indian Ocean trade did not reach the numbers of the Atlantic slave trade, the need for slave labor magnified under the “flag of colonial powers” (Prashad, 11). Also magnified under colonialism was a global racial formation that framed Africans as inferior to not only Europeans, but Asians, particularly those colonized by various European countries, as well.

While Africans and Asians had a history with each other, it was not until the arrival of Chinese laborers in the mid-1800s, that they encountered each other in the United States. The laborers in the United States were overwhelmingly male, as they were not allowed to bring their
families with them. The Chinese laborers, and later Filipino, South Asian, and Japanese workers, were also prohibited from living near Whites and the anti-miscegenation laws precluded them from having relationships with White women. The exclusion by/into White society and lack of access to women, drove these laborers into Black communities. While the Asian immigrants were forging relationships with the Black communities around them, they were simultaneously being used to “depress the wages of the newly freed” slaves (Prashad, 75). Blacks and Asians continued to be pitted against each other with each new labor development, such as the introduction of machines or the need for more specialized skills (Prashad). The divide and rule strategy worked to maintain both social and political economic control of Blacks and Asians, to the obvious benefit of White laborers and managers. Despite the efforts of Whites to drive a wedge between Blacks and Asians, there were many moments of solidarity between the two groups at that time, including Frederick Douglass’ speech calling for the inclusion of Asians into American society, which he claimed would benefit Blacks because of the amount of similarities between the two groups which far exceeded the differences (Prashad); and the lone dissenting vote against the Chinese Exclusion Act from Black Mississippi senator Blanche Bruce.

Other moments of solidarity occurred during wartime. For example during the Philippine-American War (1898-1902) Black soldiers defected to fight alongside Filipino soldiers against the United States. After the war, a number of the soldiers stayed in the Philippines and married. Widener notes that during the Korean War, North Korean broadcasts were aimed at the Black regiment of soldiers and played on the growing disenchantment of its members in continuing to fight the war. In prison camps run by either Chinese or North Korean forces, the captors would often use racial conditions back in the United States to encourage the
Black soldiers “to go back to your country and help start a revolution”, using mutual hatred of Whites to build up opposition (Widener, 67). Widener also notes a few captured Black soldiers when given the choice to go back to the United States or stay in North Korea, chose to stay in North Korea. Perhaps the best known war-time moment of solidarity comes via Muhammad Ali, né Cassius Clay, who famously declared his objection to fighting in the Viet Nam War by noting “I ain’t got no quarrel with those Viet Cong, anyway. They never called me nigger” (“This week”; Prashad 146). His declaration summed up nearly five decades worth of social movements calling for the cooperation of Blacks and Asians, African countries and Asians countries, to collectively oppose Euro-American imperialism and as a show of anti-colonial solidarity. The union included the Bandung Conference (1955) in Indonesia, and culminated with the joining of Black and Yellow Power (and Brown and Red) movements in the United States.

While anti-miscegenation laws did not prohibit relationships between Blacks and Asians, fighting wars in various Asian countries allowed for the gradual demise of those laws. The 1944 War Brides Act allowed White\textsuperscript{18} soldiers to gain entry into the United States for the Asian women they married while fighting wars abroad, and the children from those marriages. The War Brides Acts eventually led to the reversal of the immigration policies which limited the number of Asian immigrants allowed entry into the United States, which allowed Black soldiers to also bring their war families into the country. Furthermore, the presence of American military in various Asian countries is responsible for the bulk of Blasian producing encounters in the last few decades. It explains the emergence of the military dad trope, where an American soldier who is stationed in an Asian country assumes an interracial relationship with a woman from the

\textsuperscript{18} The act did not explicitly exclude Black soldiers, but since anti-miscegenation laws were intended to keep Whites from marrying into various groups of color, they were the ones to benefit from this act.
country, and they have mixed-race children together who are often abandoned once the father returns to the United States. The term *amerasian* refers to these mixed-race children of Asian women and American soldiers specifically (*America’s Forgotten Children*), and the passage of policies like the American Homecoming Act (1988), which was also referred to as the Amerasian Homecoming Act cemented the label amerasian for these children. Movies such as Gail Dolgin’s *Daughter from Danang* (2002), or plays like Velina Hasu Houston’s *Calligraphy* (2010) focus on these mixed-race children of military occupation couplings.

There are a number of factors that have played a part in eliding the historical connections between Asians and Africans, but the most important factors as noted by Ho and Mullen, are “race, racism, and capitalism [which] have conspired, according to Horneⁱ⁹, to both produce and manipulate the black world’s understanding of Asia and the Asian world’s understanding of the black ‘West’.” (5) I would also argue that race, racism, and capitalism is not limited to understandings between Blacks and Asians, but has allowed for the triangulation of Blacks and Asians against each other always for the benefit of Whiteness. Additionally, part of the reason why Blasians have not figured as prominently in either research or popular culture, or as prominently as the amount of racial mixing between Blacks and Asians suggests they should be mentioned, is because of the pernicious effects of hypodescent, which makes any product of Asian and Black interracial relationships, *de facto* Black (McFerson). So just as White sexual violence against Black female slaves resulted in the deployment of the one-drop rule against the biracial children, the same has happened with early Blasians in the United States. Additionally, those Asians wanting to gain honorary White status had to eschew connections

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with Blacks, distancing themselves was a necessary move in order to move up the racialized hierarchy (McFerson).

Just as historical examination and contextualization of Black and Asian encounters are sparse, despite evidence of their frequent exchanges and associations, analyses of popular mass mediated images have also been sparse (Prashad; Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon; Sharma), emphasizing the need for examining the politics of desire within Black/Asian interracial relationships. Cross-racial relationships on television and in films have been heralded as the progressive evolution of racial representations and race relations. However, the implications of progress are a façade and operating underneath them are the same longstanding tropes of racialized sexuality already familiar to television and film audiences. While the narrative of the United States as a bastion of post-racial ideology has become increasingly popular through its dissemination to countless media outlets, the uneasiness of society over interracial unions comes out in popular culture. As couples, Blacks and Asians on prime time dramas are always relegated to one of two story arcs - either having sex without love, or being in love without the sex. Interestingly both storylines fall short of the heteronormative ideal for romantic couples on television - marriage and a baby. Whereas the reliance on stereotypical tropes by these programs shows the United States is nowhere close to being a post-racial utopia, it also reveals society’s anxiety over the products of interracial, specifically Black and Asian unions – Blasian babies. Those babies represent a compelling challenge to the racial classification schema of the United States by virtue of the both/and nature of their racial mixture. For both Blacks and Asians “segregation in sex, marriage, and family [has been] a hallmark of intense racialization and entrenched inequality” (Moran,18). To study representations within popular culture it is necessary to look at interracial relationships, particularly because it provides both a foundation
and frame for understanding the issues around sexuality and race, while simultaneously highlighting popular culture’s conflicted stance on Blasians. This chapter concludes that despite the notion of crossing boundaries and the possibility of breaking taboos, television continues to be a space where White supremacy reigns through continued reliance on uncomplicated, stereotypical portrayals of race and gender. Moreover, these interracial Black and Asian relationships in both Grey’s Anatomy and ER, despite their apparent racial progressiveness or the promise of breaking with convention, work to maintain and cement that supremacy and hegemonic rule of television.

In examining representations of interracial Black and Asian relationships, this chapter allows for consideration of what those relationships signify within contemporary culture. Studying interracial relationships has the potential to disrupt the discursive boundaries between Black and Asian American identities and to expose the racialization and historicization of gender roles and sexualities within both groups. Indeed, their very appearance on television marks a shift away from an era in which such images did not exist. However, on the two television shows examined, the representation of interracial relationships is not disruptive nor transgressive, particularly because they rely on traditional Black masculine and Asian feminine tropes and also because they adhere to traditional gender roles. Thus, they are not the progressive representations lauded by critics and fans, but are instead stagnant, if not regressive, depictions of race produced and distributed by the dominant discourse. That the dominant discourse continues to play subordinate groups against each other is not new, however, racial triangulation is especially helpful for understanding why these Black and Asian American relationships, in which Whites are not members of the romantic coupling, nevertheless reproduce power relations that support the White privileged racial hegemony. Within the structural
interrelationships among Black, Asian American, and White racial structures and identities, Asianness and Blackness are positioned in relation to each other, resulting in representations that serve Whites, rather than benefit Asians and Blacks. Both medical dramas use racially triangulated hierarchies to represent characters and plots in such a way that a progressive evolution of racial representations is implied. The narratives however quickly unravel to reveal these storylines rely on longstanding racial stereotypes which are ultimately comforting, instead of disruptive, because of their familiarity.

Interracial Utopia, or Continuing Color Neutrality on Grey's Anatomy and ER

On first glance, these Black and Asian American interracial relationships on Grey's Anatomy and ER might imply television is changing, race relations are improving, and media are in the process of moving forward to a newfound celebration of racial diversity and interracial romantic utopia. However, in analyzing the discourse surrounding the shows, it becomes clear that a "color neutral" standard, one that ignores race and racism and celebrates the invisibility of racial identity, a standard which has been part of U.S. multicultural racial discourses at least since the racial politics of the film, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967), persists, despite the façade of racial progress. Without an extended look at how the writers and directors are conceptualizing the episodes it is impossible to adequately draw out the motivations and machinations occurring on the micro-level, though the few interviews of producers for both shows provide a great start. For example, in an interview for the March 2007 issue of Marie Claire magazine, Shonda Rhimes - creator, writer, and executive producer of Grey’s Anatomy, answered the question: “Even though there are a few interracial relationships, race is never discussed on the show. Is that a conscious decision?” with this reply:
I think that issues of race are a larger conversation that people project on a relationship, but for the two people in it, that's not the primary thing on their minds. I also wanted to do something that felt modern in terms of the casting. Part of a truly diverse world is not needing to make a statement about the fact that it's a diverse world. When we get to that point, we've gotten somewhere.

(Oakley)

Additionally, Rhimes points out as a “post-civil rights baby I’m not trying to make a point,” choosing not to have racial identity and identification shape her life and the lives of her characters (Eli, G4). She later declares, “It’s incredibly encouraging that our viewers haven’t gotten hung up on the race thing. It’s not about the fact that she’s Asian and he’s black. It’s about the fact that she’s a slob, and he’s a neat freak. That’s what the whole relationships is all about” (Barney, F4). Here Rhimes triumphantly praises audiences for not thinking about race as it relates to these interracial relationships. Executive producer of ER, David Zabel, like Rhimes, suggests the construction of the characters takes place on a race neutral production field. In discussing Drs. Neela Rasgotra (Asian) and Michael Gallant (Black) [and later Drs. Jing-Mei Chen (Asian) and Gregory Pratt (Black)], Zabel says, “honestly, we don’t even talk about it or consider that it’s an interracial couple” (Oldenburg, 1D). Additionally, one of the actors on ER draws attention to the race neutral grounds on which the show’s interracial romances occur by saying, “romance sweeps viewers away, making them forget about race” (Oldenburg, 1D). The trend in these television dramas is to claim ignorance about race and racial differences when coupling the characters despite being set in the large, richly diverse cities of Seattle and Chicago (Pennington). These interviews provide a rare glimpse into how two different producers, one a Black woman, and the other a White man, similarly conceptualize their respective shows;
resulting in near identical treatments of some their main characters and the accompanying story
arcs.

In their quest to keep color out of the conversation, and to welcome a racially progressive
present, these discourses ignore the way race matters and thus erase the very real significance of
race on bodies and peoples. Critics like Eduardo Bonilla-Silva have taken issue with the term
“color-blind” and its tendency to combine elements of liberalism with culturally based anti-
minority views to justify the contemporary racial order. By refusing to talk about race, Whites
avoid being labeled racist and use color neutral rhetoric to preserve an illusion of anti-racism.
Combining these discourses with a critical reading of the representations of race within the
shows themselves reveals not progressive representations of race and interracial mixing, but
representations that are deeply rooted in historical stereotypical representations of Black
masculinity and Asian femininity and those representations simultaneously fail to break out of
the White hegemonic narratives that continue to structure contemporary race relations.

Stereotypes Refashioned to Look Like A Racially Progressive Costume

Both racial triangulation and the color neutral discourses work through the deployment
of specific Black and Asian stereotypes in the two shows, which allows race to be in the picture
without explicitly addressing it. The tropes used are the same reductive, stereotypical portrayals
viewers are familiar with, complete with the labels film/television critics have used before.
Again, these tropes are not new; in fact some might bristle at the thought of trotting out these
banal stereotypes to talk about contemporary television. Yet, they continue to be relevant,
accurate, and appropriate to this discussion because they highlight just how little representations
of Blacks and Asians have changed on television. For instance, there are several images of
Asian American\textsuperscript{20} women that signify both sexual and racial otherness which continue to persist on the screen (Kang). One of the most persistent stereotypes is the dragon lady, who is always depicted as being calculating, cold and mean with a sexual alluring side used to seduce and corrupt men (Marchetti; Shah). The dragon lady - the hypersexualized Asian contemporary of the jezebel - is, despite (or maybe because of) her fiery temperament, explicitly constructed for the pleasure of men. As Kang notes, “her body [is] available without emotional or economic demands” (7). Being already situated within the almost permanently sexually charged atmosphere of Seattle Grace, the hospital featured in \textit{Grey’s Anatomy}, Dr. Cristina Yang is an incarnation of the dragon lady. Yang is, according to the bio listed for her on the \textit{Grey’s Anatomy} website, “aggressive, cutthroat and arrogant.”\textsuperscript{21} Her character is a brilliant, über-competitive, ranked first in her class at Stanford medical school, intern, whose abrasive and cold personality makes her unable to relate to her patients on an emotional level. Sex, especially in the beginning, is very much the focus of the relationship between Dr. Burke and herself. She is often shown unable, or unwilling, to control her sexual urges – which results in numerous sexual episodes with Burke in the hospital during the workday.

The loyal and loving lotus blossom, also known as the China doll, Indian princess or geisha, is typically passive and like the dragon lady is constructed to serve men, and is another stock depiction of Asian American women still very popular on screen (Feng). The lotus blossom serves as the personification of the “East,” offering her exotic and submissive nature (or

\textsuperscript{20} An acknowledgement is needed regarding the term Asian. It is a problematic term because it subsumes the disparate identities of the various nations and peoples located in the same general geographic area under the panethnic umbrella of “Asian”. Certainly for critics like Yen Le Espiritu, this label is distinctively American and it both, brings together the diverse Asian ethnicities and highlights their individuality. Obviously, this chapter recognizes that the Indian, Korean and Chinese identities of the actresses in \textit{ER} and \textit{Grey’s Anatomy} come with their own unique cultural and ethnic materialities that deserve to be analyzed independently. However, the findings from the separate critiques of their characters would in all likelihood share the same conclusion; as such, they are grouped together here.

\textsuperscript{21} \url{http://abc.go.com/primetime/greysanatomy/bios}
perhaps more fittingly, nations) up for Western subjugation. The racial and sexual otherness of Asian women is used here to construct their bodies as exotic objects complicit with the sometimes colonial, always patriarchal, gaze that desires their bodies. This character has typically been portrayed as virginal, submissive and/or meek, and the two doctors on ER--Drs. Jing-Mei Chen and Neela Rasgotra--are indeed modern day lotus blossoms. Rasgotra is a Yale medical school graduate, who, while obviously intelligent, is portrayed as indecisive and weak. She at one point has an identity crisis after her proficiency as a doctor is challenged and quits, working as a store clerk but eventually finding her way back to the hospital. Chen is also portrayed as indecisive and weak. Not only does she question her competence, but others - her medical colleagues and sometimes patients, question it as well. When issues arise in the emergency room, her character is almost always accommodating and acquiescent, very rarely does the character of Dr. Chen behave assertively.

The last stereotype is that of the Asian American as the model minority, and it applies to all three doctors. The model minority myth, as with racial triangulation, allows White society to pit Asian Americans against Blacks and other groups of color. These women serve as proof on their respective television shows that hard work provides countless opportunities for attaining the American dream, and race is not a hindrance at all. In fact, their cultural distinctiveness is indirectly referenced when attempting to locate the key to their success. The model minority stereotype is used on these shows as the “ultimate ticket toward gaining social acceptance…[to] gain the full approval of White Americans” (Tuan, 8). It is important to note in both shows, ER and Grey’s Anatomy, the audience is made aware that these women graduated at the top of their classes at some of the top medical schools around the country. Additionally, as doctors, their level of education and career choice/positions, which are beyond the population average,
showcases their success even more. Both shows use these women to mandate how Asian Americans should conduct themselves in order to fit into White society. So while some of the other non-Asian characters have storylines which mention their particular struggles to make it through medical school or to pass examinations and complete their internships or residencies, these women did not have those struggles. These characters make no references to instances or feelings of marginalization and/or racial discrimination, playing into the mainstream audience’s belief that race no longer matters. Ironically, in playing up the model minority stereotype both shows allow “sexual and racial stereotype[s] to be mutually implicated and embedded in discourses of Asian cultural inferiority” (Feng,10).

Originating in minstrel shows popular in the late 1800s/early 1900s the Black male doctors in ER and Grey’s Anatomy represent two of the most enduring racialized stereotypes: the tom and buck. The most obvious stereotype embodied by two of doctors is the tom, getting its name from the main character in Harriett Beecher Stowes’, Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Bogle describes toms as “always chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved, and insulted, [yet] they keep the faith, n’er turn against their White massas, and remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless, and oh-so-very kind. Thus they endear themselves to White audiences and emerge as heroes of sorts” (6). On the medical shows toms are used to remind Blacks that they need only to obey their White “masters” in order to solve all their problems. This genial “darky” is the least threatening and least offensive character, hence the most likable. Dr. Burke in Grey’s Anatomy epitomizes the tom stereotype, as he is stoic, selfless, kind and submissive. Even after the promised chief of surgery position is taken away from him, he remains loyal to the hospital. The audience rarely sees Burke angry, but when they do his anger is controlled and contained, never menacing or threatening – in contrast with the White male doctors on the show. He does
not lash out violently – physically or verbally--and is always composed, always shown as remembering his place. The Dr. Gallant character in *ER* is perhaps the essence of the tom stereotype. Despite the constant questioning of his abilities and competency, he remains good-natured and cordial – even to those who directly challenge him. He is always depicted as selflessly concerned about others, whether they are family, patients, other doctors or even Iraqis – whom he treats when he is goes on another tour of duty. His military service results in his death, which perhaps serves as the ultimate symbol of this particular tom’s loyalty, to his country. The story lines featuring both characters always portray the men as denying their sexual selves in exchange for their class privilege.

The other stereotype, the definitive symbol of Black masculinity, is the brutal Black buck, also sometimes referred to as the Black male rapist. The brutal Black buck is constructed as being “a barbaric black out to raise havoc…his physical violence served as an outlet for a man who was sexually repressed. [They] are always big, baadddd niggers, oversexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for White flesh” (Bogle,13-14). The brutal Black buck is the most dangerous and threatening character to the White audience. In the contemporary entertainment media, the brutal Black buck is still a menace, which is reflected in the scarcity of opportunities for relationships, especially non-sexual ones, between Black men and women, especially White women. *ER*’s Dr. Pratt is portrayed on the show as a lascivious, hot-tempered, aggressive, over-sexed prowler looking for his next conquest.

**Marriage without Sex and Sex without Marriage: The Fate of Interracial Romance on TV**

The result of a television show bent on color neutrality, yet espousing racial progressive representations, despite constructing standard, historical representations of Asian American
women and Black men is a romantic context in which intimacy that leads to marriage with children is rendered impossible, either because it culminates in a marriage without sex or in a sexual relationship that cannot lead to marriage. The relationship on ER between Drs. Rasgotra and Gallant is an example of the safe, non-threatening marriage without sex trope. The doctors become a pair when Gallant, ever the selfless tom, saves Rasgotra from being fired due to a mistake she made when she gave a patient the wrong medicine, resulting in the patient’s death. Almost immediately after declaring their feelings for each other, Gallant is called up for a tour of duty in Iraq. Letters are written back and forth, and he returns to their hospital with an injured Iraqi (who for some reason unbeknownst to the viewer, or probably writers, can only be treated at County General), and then leaves again to finish his tour. Upon Gallant’s return from the first tour, they rashly decide to get married, buy a house, and begin to start their lives together. Gallant admits he has an overwhelming desire to return to Iraq for a second tour and leaves his new bride. As a military man, Gallant is shown foregoing his own happiness with Rasgotra to fight for his country, emerging as a hero for the audience when a roadside bomb kills him during his second tour, leaving Rasgotra a widow. ER makes sure the relationship between Drs. Rasgotra and Gallant is lacking sexually, by making sure the audience is hardly ever treated to any physical displays of attraction or affection between these two characters. While their relationship is always portrayed as sweet and romantic, it is never passionate (even after he returns from Iraq) or even intimate. When compared to the other relationships going on between other (read: White) doctors, their relationship is noticeably lacking. While these relationships involving the other doctors are conspicuously sexual yet still romantic, Gallant and Rasgotra’s relationship is not.
The depiction of the connection between Drs. Chen and Pratt centers on physical attraction, making sex the only and most important element in their relationship. Dr. Chen’s relationship with Dr. Pratt is not her first foray into a Black and Asian intimacy, and her previous relationship explicitly addresses popular culture’s discomfort with multiracial, specifically Blasian, people. Chen previously had a baby with a Black male nurse, but decides to give the baby up for adoption. This particular narrative aligns nicely with Seshagiri’s observation that “when characters assert sexual desire outside of their own communities the mutual support system built on shared racial oppression quickly falls apart” (186). Parental disapproval provides a convenient out for this particular narrative arc, enabling the show to ignore exploring what this multiracial baby means in the color-neutral world of ER. Additionally, both of Chen’s interracial relationships fit within the sex without marriage narrative. Chen’s relationship with Pratt is offered as the antithesis to the relationship between Gallant and Rasgotra. Chen and Pratt leave romance out of their relationship, focusing solely on their physical attraction to each other. When Pratt tries to maintain their relationship on a purely sexual level, even flirting with other doctors and nurses, Chen ends it. If Kim had a romantic relationship in mind while writing on racial triangulation, it would have been very much like this one between Chen and Pratt. The combination of both Pratt and Chen’s hypersexualities are located opposite the normative sexuality shown via the White doctors and their relationships with each other. Through their interpellation into their familiar and acceptable roles, they are both positioned as mainly sexual beings – especially when read against the fully developed relationships the White characters have with each other.

The relationship between Drs. Burke and Yang could have almost become a transgressive combination of the physical and romantic connections portrayed in the two aforementioned
relationships. As the predatory dragon lady, Yang is continuously depicted throughout each season as cutthroat, cunning, and willing to do to whomever and whatever is necessary to become a leading cardio-thoracic surgeon. She is also always the one in control of their relationship, which plays out nicely against Burke’s portrayal as the genial tom. They begin their relationship on a purely sexual level, much like Pratt and Chen, when Yang seduces Burke. In the beginning her move on Burke was meant to showcase her erotic and exotic body and how her “sexuality is a source of her power and of her pleasure” (Watts, 196). The audience in the beginning is unsure of the motivation behind Yang’s seduction of Burke. It is unclear if there are true feelings involved or if she is attempting to benefit from a relationship with a resident as the White title character, Meredith Grey, does. One of the most pivotal moments in their relationship occurs when Yang becomes pregnant. Though she tells the other characters (except Burke) that she plans on terminating the pregnancy, she does not actually take any action to do so. It appears, for a few episodes at least, that she will end up having her Blasian baby until she ends up miscarrying. When confronted by her colleagues, she appears relieved to be no longer pregnant, but mourns in secret for the loss of her baby. It isn’t until Burke learns about the miscarriage that he is prompted to take their relationship to a more romantic level by asking her to move in and eventually marry him. The way the pregnancy/miscarriage and subsequent marriage proposal are represented in Grey’s Anatomy (as well as the similar narrative in ER) demonstrate that race is integral to defining marriage and family building, not independent of those things.

Grey’s Anatomy deploys the marriage between Burke and Yang as a rhetorical strategy meant solely to highlight how ordinary interracial couples are in general, and Blacks and Asians specifically. Yet, the possibility of both sex and marriage moves them into the space solely held
by same-raced, mainly White, couples in television. As season three of *Grey's Anatomy* moved towards its finale, the representations of both Burke and Yang drew even more on their respective tropes. Burke, assumed the role of wedding planner, making sure to please as many people as possible, being the pleasant tom character that he is – his colleagues, his fiancée, and of course his mother. On the other hand, Yang became more and more agitated with the thought of settling down with one person, and she tries to scheme her way out of the engagement. In the meantime, Yang’s former lover, her (White) medical school professor, shows up and attempts to win her back. In another explicit illustration of racial triangulation, the professor demonstrates that he is smarter and more skilled than Yang, and as such should be more desirable to Yang than Burke. When Yang chooses Burke over him, he dismisses it by pointing out that she has changed and is no longer as focused, driven and competitive as she used to be – implying she has diminished in value to him and as such should remain with Burke who he has deemed inferior. Here the White doctor does what anti-miscegenation laws did in the past, sending messages of racial inferiority. It is during this moment when hope is no longer out of place and the pairing of Burke and Yang finally has the potential to challenge the mainstream discourse that dictates only Whites are allowed to have it all. This moment and these characters had the potential to resist serving their “pedagogical function for viewers” by refusing to “affirm contemporary racial, gender, sexual [and] class hierarchies” (Ono, 2000, p. 167). Since season three ended with Yang finally wanting to marry Burke and Burke leaving her at the altar, the moment has passed and these hierarchies remain unchallenged. This relationship had the potential to be the first Black and Asian interracial pairing on television to move beyond the love or sex binary and finally include both and unfortunately it failed.
Conclusion: No Interracial Fairy Tale Ending Means the Continuation of Racial Hegemony

All relationships, particularly interracial relationships, always involve the distribution and movement of power. In the last decade or so there has been an increase in the amount of research on Black and Asian American interactions in general; however, very little has been written about the intimate interactions between Blacks and Asian Americans. More popular, understandably, has been the discussions of interracial relationships that are either Black/White or White/Asian. The attribution of power in interracial relationships is the source of much anxiety and fear. Because White men are the protectors of White womanhood, particularly their sexuality, White women retain their privilege only through relationships with White men. Women of color on the other hand are hypersexualized, either as wanton sexual beings or submissive and willing, in either case White men (and sometimes men of color) preserve their supremacy through the sexual expression of their power. Compulsory heterosexuality stipulates that the role expectations of all groups are racially, heterosexually and gender bound (Allman). For instance when a White man dates or marries a woman of color, no fundamental change in power within the American social structure is perceived as taking place, due to Black women’s hypersexualization and position along the social hierarchy in society. In contrast, when a White woman is in a relationship with a Black man, the man often is perceived as attaining higher social status – White woman as a “trophy” for the Black man (Gaines and Leaver, 67-68). Not surprisingly, when both partners in a relationship are people of color, the racial, gender and heterosexual imperatives are still in play, but become complicated.

*ER* and *Grey’s Anatomy* as popular cultural texts provide a specific discourse, that is, they construct objects of signification rooted in a specific social environment. Their meanings
spring from the institutions (within the television industry and outside of it) and the historical, cultural, and social circumstances surrounding their production. They are the raw material for examining ideologies of race and sexuality (Marchetti). As Marchetti explains, “like all discourses, they are concrete manifestations of the ideological sphere and share in all of the struggles for power, identity, and influence… part of the construction of hegemony within any given society” (7). Furthermore, these shows in general and the relationships specifically provide opportunities for the examination of the power systems based on systems of privilege, whether race, gender, ability, class and/or sexuality. These systems of privilege merely serve to maintain and reestablish existing hierarchies of oppression (Moon and Nakayama).

While some might hold up the Black and Asian American relationships in ER and Grey’s Anatomy as examples of attempts at resisting the dominant hegemony, what these shows are actually doing is playing directly into the racial hierarchy. The use of Asian women and Black men as signifiers of racial otherness in the Black/Asian relationships helps Hollywood circumvent the racialized power tensions in Black/White and White/Asian pairings, however it still privileges Whiteness and masculinity through its dysfunctional, stereotypical portrayal of the characters and their relationships. Interracial relationships in television and film have generally either been portrayed as marriages without sex or sex without marriage (Gaines and Leaver). In Hollywood where interracial couples have traditionally been denied their happily ever or shown marrying and having children (as compulsory heterosexuality mandates), within these relationships sexuality and romance usually provide the metaphorical justification for the domination of Whites over others, because Whites are the only people shown in relationships that involve both sex and marriage (Beltran and Fojas). Marchetti observes “any act of domination brings with it opposition, guilt, repression, and resistance, which must be
incorporated and silenced, rationalized, domesticated, or otherwise eliminated” (6). That two of the three relationship story arcs have dealt with a pregnancy and a potential Blasian child, which has either been eliminated (through a miscarriage) or silence (via adoption) seems to be in keeping with Marchetti observations. Furthermore, both of these medical dramas use colorblindness as a rhetorical strategy, taking pains to leave race literally out of the picture, it works to remove any anxieties from the mainstream audience concerning the potential shift of power away from Whites.

Examination of Grey’s Anatomy and ER is necessary because they, and media in general, are sites for the production of cultural symbols that are then used to police boundaries of difference. These dramas provide audiences with a normative blueprint that points out not only who can be a doctor, but also what doctors should do and how they should behave in order to be successful. Furthermore, television, as a tool for socialization, depends entirely on stereotypes to quickly and clearly express mainstream notions regarding race, gender, class, etc.… Darrell Hamamoto notes “television has been the principal medium by which rituals of psychosocial dominance are reenacted daily” (3). Obviously information about potential partners and relationships are also bound up in those stereotypes, and scholars like Kumiko Nemoto point to “racial stereotypes as significant components of racialized desires” (28). Looking at both of these shows critically allows us to see how Hollywood normalizes hierarchies of race, gender and class while proffering certain desires as deviant and/or forbidden (Marchetti).

Both ER and Grey’s Anatomy continue the dissemination of basic stereotypes of Black men and Asian American women, doing very little to complicate the portrayal of the characters and challenge the typical viewing and understanding of either Black or Asian peoples. The enduring presence of these stereotypical images and relationships are what contradicts
exclamations that progress is being made. Additionally, these specific representations of Black and Asian American relationships in media seem natural instead of constructed (Gray). When the hypersexualization of both Blacks and Asian Americans become commonsensical, and power circulates underneath these representations unchallenged, Whiteness maintains its position at the top of the hierarchy. Through the deployment of specific rhetorical devices involving the Black and Asian stereotypes, the interracial romantic relationships in both of these television medical dramas exist within a discourse that concentrates and maintains the psychosocial dominance of the White (male) elites over people of color. The very specific positioning of these relationships within the current discourse of mainstream Hollywood very subtly “divorces white privilege from racism while producing a form of racial solidarity and white masculinity that celebrates and exploits black masculinity” and Asian femininity (Watts, 203-204). Racial triangulation is served by the benefits of Whiteness to “garner its representational power through its ability to be many things at once, to be universal and particular, to be a source of identity and difference” (Nakayama and Krizek, 302). The marking of gendered and racial differences on the Black and Asian American bodies is ultimately seized and exploited by White masculinity, which reaffirms the superiority of the White male.

These Black and Asian American interracial relationships are problematic partly because of the very celebratory response that accompanies their presence on television. Amidst praise for having finally moved past race and seeing people for “who they are,” these medical dramas have effectively ushered in the “displacement of the social by the personal and the complex by the dramatic [which] both draws viewers in to the [shows] and takes them away from explanations that criticize the social system” (Gray 382). Furthermore, crossing racial boundaries to forge new relationships does not result in the automatic elimination of categories and boundaries, but
rather does the opposite, producing and intensifying the differences (Yu). The lack of development for any potential multiracial offspring from either narrative frames for these Black and Asian relationships further highlights the insecurity policing boundaries and racial categories. Historically the policing and governing of interracial relationships occurred only when a White woman and non-White man were involved. There were no laws governing relationships if both parties were of color, of if the man was White and the woman was non-White. Situating the discourse historically disproves the “transgressive” nature of these Black and Asian American pairings. That television is holding up these relationships as evidence of progress glosses over the maintenance being done by the dominant hegemony and elides the fact that sexual intimacy has been marked by inequalities of power and violence (Yu). The Black and Asian American relationships are also problematic because they adhere to the norms for Black and Asian representations on television. However, while sexuality for some of these characters are not being traditionally repressed on television “the politics of [their] sexuality” are (Dow, 135). These relationships are a demonstration of the mechanisms of power and control at work in mediated discourse about Blacks and Asians Americans.

The production and dissemination of the Black and Asian relationship narratives in ER and Grey’s Anatomy functions as a reassurance of the centrality of White hegemony, despite these relationships being praised for moving us towards a simultaneously colorblind yet increasingly multicultural society. While these interracial relationships have the potential to be truly transgressive, they fail in negotiating and producing a legitimate cultural space where all relationships are equal. Interracial relationships, marriages and families are still bound by class, gender and racial hierarchies. Due to their deployment of raced and gendered rhetorical strategies in their depictions of both Blacks and Asian Americans, these shows effectively shut
out the possibility of a more layered, nuanced representation, which could then be used to
dismantle the majority/minority, White/non-White binaries. Or as Paulin notes “it is necessary
to transform and work through restrictive representations of race, class, gender, and sexual acts
so that static one-dimensional constructions do not dictate the acceptability or illegitimacy of
‘outside’ or multiply informed identities” (190-191). Rather than perpetuating the curse and
punishment of these interracially interrelated characters, we must confront monolithic labels and
work to construct useful, nuanced and livable understandings of relationships.

Blacks and Asians have been construed as occupying incommensurable positions,
whether culturally, economically, or politically, which a handful of scholars have shown as not
having always been the case. There exists a history of Black and Asian interactions, which
oftentimes resulted in opposition to White supremacy. Though not prevented from joining forces
by law or policies, political-economic dictates have worked to prevent them from interacting
with each other. Yet, during times of war and social protest they have managed to again forge
interconnections “across a variety of cultural, political, and historical contexts” (Raphael-
Hernandez & Steen 1) Contemporarily we see their interactions play out in popular culture on
television screens. Both ER and Grey’s Anatomy utilize the same rhetorical strategies to
represent their interracial relationships. The relationships on these shows have led to death,
chicanery, and/or some sort of destruction in the lives of the characters. The tragic happenings
and endings for the relationships work to maintain the racialized hierarchy by ensuring the
dominant ideas of romantic relationships are not available for all, certainly not for Black and
Asian interracial couples. The narratives work by relying partially on the triangulation of
Blackness, Asianness and Whiteness, where Asian Americans are valorized as model minorities
relative to the positioning of Blacks as less than ideal. If these shows explored more realistic
depictions, meaning relationships that can include both sex and marriage consistently, it could offer a space for the genuine appreciation of difference, respect for singularity and an acknowledgement of the subtlety between minority groups. This space, which would put aside the presence of Whiteness and the need for the racial triangulation of Asians and Blacks, would enable meaning to surface through negotiation of difference. It would also allow for the discussion of interracial relationships and multiracial peoples to finally move beyond a space where identity is constructed based on White hegemonic norms and the discourse is always based on reactions to those norms. In television, truly liberatory interethnic contact, which has yet to happen, would definitely provide the progressive representations and characters that would then challenge and disrupt traditional racial, class and gender constructions and stereotypes. Certainly that contact will come when interracial relationships and the multiracial products of those relationships cease to be constrained by hegemonic Whiteness, and that is the moment when we should celebrate.
Chapter 3

Blasian Invasion: The Emergence of Blasians

“I’m Charles Mingus. Half black man, yellow man, half yellow, not even yellow, not even white enough to pass for nothing but black, and not too light to be called white. I claim that I am a Negro.” (Triumph of the Underdog)

Charles Mingus, an American composer and jazz musician, opens the documentary film, Triumph of the Underdog, by discussing his racial identity. Using archival footage of Mingus, interviews of family, friends, and musicians, and his original music – the film offers a compelling exploration of his life and career. The son of a biracial man and a Blasian woman, biographers mention Mingus’ own multiraciality in passing. In the above quotation we find out about his multiraciality, his identity process, his reasoning regarding his identity, and his ultimate choices. Despite claiming a "Negro" identity, it is clear Mingus was Cablinasian long before Tiger Woods’ coined the label; yet, he rejects an identification with multiraciality and, instead, identifies with Blackness.

Mingus has been described as being race conscious before the civil rights era logic about race permeated society (Santoro). His opening statement is perhaps the most compelling piece of audio from Mingus himself, because it foregrounds the importance and influence of race on his life and work. His words were originally recorded in 1968, in Thomas Reichman’s film, Mingus: Charlie Mingus 1968, but were not the only time he addressed being mixed race. He disparagingly referred to his multiracial makeup by pretending to title his autobiography “Memoirs of a Half-Schitt Colored Nigger” (Santoro). Through Mingus’s explicit rejection of his Blasian mixture, was public acknowledgement of the existence of Blasians.
While he is more than likely not the first Blasian celebrity, I introduce Charles Mingus here to act as a starting point for the emergence of Blasians within the entertainment industry. Others have written about the issues faced by celebrities in disclosing or not disclosing their particular racial make-up (Nishime; Wang; Dagbovie; Black; Streeter). The previous chapter describes the ways and means Blacks and Asians have come into contact, formed relationships with each other, and examined specific televisual representations of those relationships. Now Mingus’s statement, offered two years after Muhammad Ali would apply for conscientious objector status with the Army, and his eschewing of a Blasian identity, memorialized in the documentary and his own writings and music, brings the products of those relationships into the popular imaginary. Blasians, as a group of people existed before Mingus’s identification with, and rejection of, the label in 1968, but his statement here initiates the moment at which Blasians began to become legible.

While the particular racial formation of multiraciality, and Blasianness in particular, has been taking place for quite some time, it has only been because of a confluence of factors more recently relating to civil rights, e.g., the 1967 Loving v. Virginia decision, that the media has begun to acknowledge the existence and popularity of multiracial celebrities, and Blasians as part of that cadre. Blasians have become what Omi and Winant term, racialized, which means they are the recipients of an “extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice of group” (64). From that moment in 1968, actors, singers, athletes and models have all availed themselves of Asianness, Blackness, and multiraciality as necessary in order to negotiate all parts of their identity, oftentimes simultaneously. Additionally, Blasianness has: been referenced in storylines on television shows, shown up in hip-hop lyrics,

22 As discussed in chapter two.
helped models book more jobs, applied to explain athletic success and moral failings, and been credited with both creating and destroying celebrity. To contextualize these moments: the emergence begins with Mingus’s rejection of Blasian identity, occurring as the Viet Nam war raged and at the height of the Black Power movement, supported the counterhegemonic assertion that “Black is Beautiful”, to the multicultural 1980s and 1990s when Chong nearly achieves “It Girl” status, to the commodification of hip-hop and Black womanhood in the 1990s and 2000s, and the simultaneous emergence of the mixed-race movement. This chapter begins to trace out how popular media has created, defined and represented Blasians, and explores some of the ways Blasians themselves are destabilizing those media discourses.

Using 1980s Multiculturalism to Make Rae Dawn Chong and Blasians Visible

Rae Dawn Chong becomes the first star to claim a Blasian identity publicly and do so while explicitly rejecting a monoracial identity that media attempt to foist upon her. Chong kicks off a moment that introduces Blasians into the popular imaginary, most notably through an episode of a popular television show. But, a larger move toward broader interest and acceptance of Blasianness, in part perhaps supported and influenced by Chong, is the emergence of Blasian women in music videos. And, it is here, in the 2000s, that we begin to see not only the beginnings of widespread acceptance, but fetishization of Blasianness within hip hop media culture, a fetishization that also means the production of job positions and employment, meaning a multiplicity of Blasians become employed in the media industry. So, not only do they make a splash representationally, but their employment ensures their own identities will inform the productions in which they become involved, further shaping the way Blasians become branded.
While famous, Mingus did not become a figure around which multiraciality was discussed significantly, nor is his multiraciality mentioned much, even today. The most prominent Blasian figure did not emerge until two decades later. Actor Rae Dawn Chong, daughter of Chinese and Scot-Irish actor Tommy Chong, and Black and Cherokee woman Maxine Sneed, was especially popular in the 1980s, starring in films like *Soul Man* (1986), *Beat Street* (1984), *American Flyers* (1985), *The Color Purple* (1985), and *Commando* (1985). As the daughter of a famous Asian-Canadian, who appeared in his film *Cheech and Chong’s The Corsican Brothers* (1984) and *Far Out Man* (1990), Chong emphasized her multiraciality, rather than focusing only on being either Black or Asian. She became accustomed to being neither Black nor Asian, but both, because she was always positioned “on the outside looking in” on both groups (Pratt). She purposely labeled herself as not a “Blacktor” (Black actor), because as she put she was never considered Black enough to be hired for Black roles, or at all by Black directors (Mullen). She notes she was accepted by “the establishment” (major Hollywood studios) and rejected by the Black “renaissance” (Black directors making movies in the 1980s and 1990s). That did not keep movie critics and reporters from being torn between referring to her as Black in reviews of her films and roles (Ebert; Muller), or letting readers infer that she was Asian by mentioning her father (Pratt; Canby). Chong did hold a number of roles not initially meant for a person of color, and she was the primary love interest for many of the White male stars, but in her own comments about her racial identity she reveals a self-critical awareness of the history of White men and women of color, acknowledging being cast in studio films did little to challenge the racial hegemony of Hollywood (Gordon).

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23 Who starred in the Cheech & Chong comedy franchise of films popular in the 1960s and 70s, with co-star Cheech Marin.
24 Directors include: Spike Lee, Robert Townsend, John Singleton
She notes on her personal blog however that her branding gamble nearly paid off during her “peak 80s run [when she] almost cracked that glass ceiling by just showing up as ‘the girl’ instead of THE BLACK girl” (Chong, emphasis hers). Chong also notes in interviews and on her blog that the biggest consequence of her decision to not be pigeonholed as a Black actor, was being ostracized by black directors, notably Spike Lee - who Chong claims blacklisted her, ensuring that she was excluded from casting in the few large, mostly-Black Hollywood studio productions (Gordon; Muller; Deggan). In making the rounds of the press junket for the re-release of *The Color Purple* (1985), Chong relayed how Spike Lee declared she was not Black enough, and talked about the dual struggle of trying to be cast in mainstream productions, and proving herself to indeed be Black enough (Gordon).

While Chong may have distanced herself purposely from the label of Blacktor, she did not distance herself from Blackness. She knew people were offended because she “didn’t care to take up our cause for the struggle… [and] wasn’t applying my afrocentricity into every role” (Hazell, emphasis mine). She notes she is a part of the Black community’s struggle by using *our* and *my* afrocentricity, which is meant to emphasis the fact that she, too, is Black. In *Ebony*, Chong is included in an article addressing the difficulties Black women face in becoming established in Hollywood (Givens). Chong has also talked about growing up with a Chinese-Canadian grandfather who was ashamed to be Chinese and wanted to be White, and how she was “desperate to know anything about our Chinese culture” (Pratt, emphasis mine). Chong uses her interviews to talk about her racial identity and the impact it has had on her career, but it is not until Barack Obama’s election as President that she begins to address being multiracial as its own category. Remarking after Obama becomes President she is “relieved there’s a beige face in the White House…I’m hoping we can be a little less sensitive about things that make people
scared of us” (Deegan, emphasis mine). It is possible to read Chong’s racial negotiations as ambivalent, but I interpret her maneuvers differently. That these interviews touched on Chong’s racial identity, combining both her self-identification moves with the interviewers’ own attempts to label Chong monoracially, is indicative of the difficulty in placing Blasians within the U.S. racial system, not Chong’s uncertainty. This becomes a hallmark of Blasian branding maneuvers, the resistance, maybe even unwillingness, on the part of media to acknowledge that these stars can indeed be both Black and Asian.

Characterizing Blasians for Television

The trajectory of Blasian emergence begins with Mingus’s acknowledgement and rejection of a Blasian subjectivity, and continues with the embracement Blasian identity by Rae Dawn Chong25 herself, though not as much by media coverage on Rae Dawn Chong. I would contend a watershed moment arrives when a Blasian is figured as integral to the storyline on a Law & Order: Special Victims Unit episode. This episode becomes a watershed moment because the coverage shifts from actual Blasians to representations of Blasians, and that coverage exhibits many of the struggles media have in making sense of Blasians. The entire Law & Order franchise prides itself on its “ripped from the headlines” episodes, and while this particular episode seems to not be ripped literally from the headlines, that makes the acknowledgment that Blasians exist, both important and interesting. Rae Dawn Chong’s brother, Marcus Chong, plays a racially mixed Black and Chinese character, Darryl, in an episode titled “Inheritance”. This episode was part of the third season for Law & Order: SVU, and marked the year when the series broke into the top 20 for television shows (“How did your show”). The show was averaging

25 Chong’s sister Robbi who becomes a model, and adopted brother Marcus, an actor, are part of the Blasian emergence trajectory.
15.2 million viewers an episode, which is a sizeable television audience, and meant that this episode could have been for many, an introduction to Blasians. The episode follows the unit’s investigation of the rapes of several Chinese American women in the Chinatown neighborhood. A break in the case comes when during an interview of a Chinese woman who had filed a police complaint, she tells them how a man she met through a personal ad in a “Chinese language newspaper” who pulled a knife on her during their date. She also tells officers Stabler and Benson through FBI psychologist, and substitute Chinese translator, Wong, that, “he wasn’t Chinese, he was Black.” In the next scene is this exchange between Stabler and Wong:

Stabler: How many African-American males speak and write Chinese well enough to fool a native speaker?
Wong: Well, he could be a student, or work at the World Bank or the UN, or...
Stabler: Why lie about being Chinese?
Wong: Because he knows she’ll never go out with him if he’s not, and then he expects that once they’ve met, she’ll have been so taken with him that his ethnicity won’t matter. Her reaction to his race is what sets him off.

The conversation between the two characters is illuminating, because it speaks to the disbelief that a Black person can also be Asian, in this case specifically Chinese, as none of the characters even bring up that likelihood. Also learned from this exchange is the notion that identifying as ethnically Chinese, by being able to speak the language and understand the customs, is looked on with suspicion by both the Chinese and White characters in the episode because of Darryl’s Blackness. In both points from that conversation Darryl’s Blackness precludes any possibility of authentic Asianness.

Marcus Chong’s Darryl, the serial rapist in the episode, turns out to be himself the product of rape when the investigation uncovers that his Black father raped his Chinese mother. The Chinese mother details in the episode the difficulties and isolation Darryl faced growing up,
being called “half Devil” by her parents, never being accepted by her family, being harassed physically by neighborhood children and verbally by the Chinese neighbors.

In the trial portion of the episode, Darryl’s difficulties growing up and the circumstances of his existence are used to depict him as mentally diseased/defective. Though this episode aired in 2001, the twin notions of hybrid vigor and multiracial glorification were only beginning to come into vogue, and this particular narrative is in keeping with popular media’s continued deployment of the tragic mulatto trope. Hybrid vigor initially referred to the crossbreeding of plants and/or animals, and the “empirically observed phenomenon of increased capacity for growth often displayed by hybrid animals or plants” (Stross, 257). It has now come to refer to the multiracial children of interracial relationships who are thought to be more attractive, smarter, fertile; and better all-around when compared to their monoracial counterparts (Stross; Kapchan & Strong; Teo; Teng; Carter). Multiracial glorification refers to the notion that mixed race people, by virtue of their multiraciality, act as a racial salve, their bodies becoming a promise to bridge the racial divides in the United States (Beltran; Dagbovie; Senna; Zack; Daniel; DaCosta). Though the tragic mulatto trope refers to a biracial person’s anguish over the
abandonment of their Black identity in favor for passing as White, which results in some sort of mental, emotional or psychic instability (Orbe & Strother; Tate; Bogle; Giles), it is useful here to describe Darryl’s mental instability. Though not mulatto26, Darryl is depicted as crazy, because that is what is wrought when the races mix, the mixed race person is unable to deal with tensions and contradictions, and subsequently loses his mind and/or succumbs to his baser desires.

Towards the end of the episode, FBI psychologist Wong interviews Darryl to determine if he is competent for trial, and Darryl notes Wong is Chinese and identifies himself as Chinese also. To which Wong replies “actually you’re half Chinese.” Their exchange touches on discourses of authenticity – foreign-born Chinese vs. Chinese Americans, monoracial vs. multiracial. The trial at the end of the episode focuses on essentialist ideas of violence and sexuality, and this particular episode works, because it fits within hegemonic beliefs already held by the audience that violent and criminal behavior is biologically determined: Black man raped and so his son, who is also Black, rapes. Darryl is portrayed by both sides as a Black man, not a mixed-race person, and definitely not Chinese. His treatment by the Chinese community is brought up as the motive for Darryl’s rapes, but it is never used to talk about Darryl’s identity.

Lyrically Representing Blasians

Blasians and Blasianness are treated not only as plot devices in serial dramas, they have made the leap into mainstream consciousness via hip-hop and r&b song lyrics and video models. Rappers and singers have begun to mention Blasians in their song lyrics, and Blasians are cited in such a way that they represent something different and separate from being a light-skinned Black person (usually a woman), or someone who is biracial. The process of tracing the

26 Mulatto historically denotes a Black and White racially mixed person, and continues to culturally connote a biracial person.
emergence and representation of Blasians in mainstream music involved searching through different databases: rapartists.com, smoothbeats.com, rapbase.net, for any combination of words that involved “Asian.” I did not refine the search by date, or artist, nor did I use any other search terms. These searches resulted in over 200 song results from albums released by artists on major record labels. Since transcribing lyrics is prone to human error, (as is interpreting lyrics for dissertations), I listened to each of those results using either YouTube, the artists’ website, or a music website hosting the song file – keeping only the results that actually mention or reference Blasians. Meaning Asian had to be mentioned in combination with Blackness, not independently or as a descriptor for anything other than a mixed-race person. In the D12 song “Chance to Advance” (1997), Black and Asian are used to rhyme with the word amazing: “Make moms say ‘that’s amazing,’ all the same like Black and Asian.” The lyrics makes little sense in the verse they appear in, but this is possibly the first instance in hip-hop/r&b where Black and Asian are used together to signify a Blasian, rather than Blacks and Asians as separate entities. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Black and Asian together could be positively inflected as “amazing” or negatively cast as in “all the same.” The unclear meaning of Black and Asian, together here, is emblematic of the historical position Blasianness is in prior to broader circulation in media. Nelly, in his song “E.I.” (2000), has “a chick rollin’ up, half Black and Asian. Another one pagin’, tellin’ me to come home”. In Nelly’s song, the Blasian woman is notable enough to warrant a mention of her racial makeup, while the next woman is not. R. Kelly sings in his song “Showdown” (2003) about a “Black and Asian girl” who is the cause of tension between him and his duet partner, Ron Isley. Most striking in the lyrics of Kelly’s song, is the line “Gotta have you now ‘cause me so horny, Black and Asian girl, tattoo on your tummy,” which samples the 2 Live Crew song “Me So Horny” which itself used the Kubrick
film, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), as a reference. The 2 Live Crew song re-appropriates the scene in which Privates Joker and Rafterman are solicited by a Vietnamese sex worker, who uses the line “Me so horny. Me love you long time.” The sex worker’s line is used as a loop in the 2 Live Crew song, and Kelly then uses this in his song “Showdown.” The “me so horny line,” coupled with the focus of the song on a Blasian woman, leaves the listener seeking to draw a connection among sex workers, Asian women, and this Blasian protagonist. The song then references the Black and Asian girl’s tongue ring which goes “with a look that’s kinky,” and observations that she “dance[s] so freaky.” The entirety of the song’s lyrics depicts a performance of Blasian sexuality that relies on piercings, dancing, and tattoos.

Other hip-hop and r&b artists have also mentioned Blasians in their songs. Rapper Nas and his partner at the time, singer Kelis, were featured on the song “Popular Thug” (2003) from The Neptunes’ “Clones” album, on which Nas rhymes about how his “money’s amazing,” with the line “honey [who is] Black, Puerto Rican and Asian,” effectively outing Kelis as a Blasian. Nas again mentions Blasians, this time on his own album, *Street Disciple* (2004), in the song “Sekou Story,” which is an ode to his “half Haitian, half Asian” titular protagonist whose life is cut short too soon. Southern rapper Gucci Mane, notes in his lyrics for the song “Atlanta Zoo” (2010), that he “lean[s] laid with a bad bitch Black ‘n Asian”; meaning he was drinking a cocktail of codeine and soda (Leinwand; Peters Jr.) with a woman who is not just a Blasian, but a “bad” one, which in hip-hop parlance means the opposite. T.I., another southern rapper mentions Blasians a few times in different songs. First, in his song “Let’s Get Away” (2003),

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27 Kelis has not publicly identified racially as anything other than non-White.

28 Nas is not the only artist to refer to Blasians from the Caribbean. There are a number of artists who allude to the history of Black, Indigenous, and Asian racial mixing that has been occurring on the various islands for generations. See: Fabolous – “Gangsta Don’t Play” (2007), Pitbull – “The Anthem” (2007), Black Rob – “Thug Story” (1999), KRS-One “Brown Skin Woman” (1993), Memphis Bleek – “Do My” (2000).
when he raps about spending time with “women who like women, light-skinned Asians, Jamaicans, and white women, Indians, Italians, Haitians and Puerto Ricans.” “Light-skinned” as a descriptor used for women in hip-hop and r&b songs is used to connote Black women with lighter complexions, usually because they were biracial. This is the first time in song that “light-skinned” Black women were simultaneously Asians. T.I. uses the label again in his collaboration with aforementioned Nelly on Nelly’s song “Pretty Toes” (2004); T.I. talks about “light-skinned Asian bitches with pink toes.” The other contributors to the “Pretty Toes” song specifically mention Black women, or biracial Black women, and T.I. is the only one to mention Black women who are also Asian. One of the most famous and successful rappers from the South, Big Boi, offers the most specific lyric about Blasians in his song “Flip Flop Rock” (2003), when he asks the listener/critic how they racially identify: “Black, White, Asian, Indonesian, or Borean – that’s Black and Korean?” Big Boi works off the assumption that a Black/Asian mixed person is not only possible but occurs enough to warrant mentioning. Lloyd Banks of the G-Unit collective, on the other hand precludes the possibility of Blasians when he raps in the song “Smile” (2004) that his current partner is “amazing in the sack, eyes slanted like you’re Asian, but you’re Black.” For Banks, the woman in his song gets the qualifier “but” rather than “and”, which would not have taken away from either her skills “in the sack” nor her “slanted” eyes. These examples seem to suggest that Blasian began to become a positive attribute, a trendy thing to include, titillating, fashionable, and sexy, but that the ambivalence of its inclusion appears at times, suggesting it is not unequivocally accepted by all. There is tension around the emergence of Blasian, and the rappers demonstrate acceptance is not absolute but conditional, making Blasians what Raymond Williams (1977) would term emergent and not yet traditional.
Commodifying and Popularizing Blasians via Video Models

As channels like VH1 (Video Hits 1) and MTV (Music Television) eschew the music video in favor of cheaply produced reality television shows, it is niche channels like BET (Black Entertainment Television) and CMT (Country Music Television) that continue to play music videos. In fact 70 per cent of BET’s programming is music videos (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). The hip-hop video in particular has “collapsed art, commerce, and interactive technology into one mutant animal” (Tate 7). Music videos, popularized by music channels on cable television, used to “represent the lion’s share of formatting for these stations” (Sharpley-Whiting 25). Perhaps as a countermeasure for declining record sales, artists regularly appear on the BET music video countdown show to plug their videos and the guest stars, video models included, who appear in them to drum up fan support for their music. Rap videos emphasize more and more the women who appear in their videos, making sure to feature familiar and more popular models. Black gossip blogs are filled with quotidian posts about women whose only fame comes from their appearance in hip-hop music videos.29 The cable television channel E! has a reality television show, “Candy Girls,” which features a group of women who regularly appear in music videos. The show was a success for E! and renewed for another season. Sharpley-Whiting (2007) claims hip-hop is now about image just as much as rapping skills and the beats in the songs. Hip-hop, at least the commercial, mainstream version, is now arguably more about image than it is skills or beats, which is why the women featured in music videos play such an important role. These videos offer up particular ideals of femininity based on the “vast majority of young women in these videos [who] are either fairer-skinned, ethnically mixed, or of indeterminate ethnic/racial origins, with long, straight or curly hair would suggest that along with

the stereotype of hypersexuality and sexual accessibility, a particular type of beauty is offered up as ideal” (Sharpley-Whiting 27).

As the market for hip hop music expanded, the need to differentiate between artists called for larger and deeper marketing and promotion budgets. Part of those budgets were spent on the music video, especially during the 1990s when hip hop was exploding into mainstream consciousness and becoming a global commodity (Watkins “Black Youth”; Watts; Blair; Negus). The music, which the video was meant to highlight, meant that unlike non-music videos the characters were only seen and not heard. Without the benefits of dialogue, narration, and other devices meant to explicate the plot, bodies, and what those bodies do, became the key to a successful music video (Watkins; Sharpley-Whiting; Rose, “Hip Hop Wars”; Pough). As music videos became increasingly more focused on women and their bodies, Tricia Rose notes women in these videos either became “creatures of male sexual possession or they [were] reified into the status of nonbeing” (“Black Noise” 168). As hip hop in its more commercialized form targets an ever-growing global audience, the aesthetics of video models have evolved (or maybe devolved is more accurate), though the women are still positioned as male sexual possessions.

Video models are featured on websites focused on everything from celebrity gossip to fashion to music, on their own dedicated blogs, in magazines – especially urban men’s magazines and hip hop magazines (though sometimes those two things are interchangeable), on the New York Times’ bestsellers list, in reality television shows, movies, and in social media platforms (to varying degrees of success). The presence of models has become so linked to the music that hip hop magazine Vibe, created the “Vibe Video Vixen” award in the mid-2000s, which was later renamed the “Vibe Video Goddess” award. The purpose of the award was to recognize “a woman whose personae and spirit influences urban culture” (Story, 245). Now
video models are not merely props for mostly male rappers and singers in their videos, they had become major cultural influences in their own right. A number of these models have managed to parlay their appearances in music videos into careers as actors, rappers, singers, and writers.

It is difficult to determine which came first in hip hop and r&b music, lyrics about Blasians or the presence of Blasian video models, but they have had a mutually beneficial relationship: artists mention Blasians in their lyrics, and Blasians are highlighted in their music videos in hopes they will draw more (and new) viewers. While Charles Mingus, the Chong siblings, and other Blasian entertainers had begun the work of making Blasians legible as a group, it is the popularity of video models that have turned Blasians into an identifiable, and therefore, consumable commodity. Shaviro notes in his analysis of women in hip hop music videos about the trend “most recently [with the] tendency to focus on women who are ‘multi-racial,’ i.e. black and Asian” (174). Though White women are still the standard by which beauty and femininity are judged, music videos have become the predominant venue for finding images of women of color. Still, the explosion of not-dark skinned, long and straight haired, thin yet amply figured women in music videos have been the dominant image of women of color in popular culture (Balaji; Perry; Sharpley-Whiting; Shaviro). In keeping with racialized ideas of attractiveness, the more popular video models, the ones who “star” in music videos, are racially mixed, or at least ethnically ambiguous, beige colored women. While the biracial woman might represent the ultimate, and ideal mixture of Black sexuality and White femininity/beauty (Bogle; Sharpley-Whiting), Blasian video models do not have the benefit of Whiteness to draw them closer to hegemonic beauty standards. One could argue these women are popular simply because their Black and Asian mixture renders them as exotic enough, thanks to conflicting cultural notions that are grounded in anti-Blackness yet simultaneously fascinated by Blackness.
Meaning while Blackness is not a hegemonic marker of beauty in the United States, Blackness does operate as a barometer of cool. Thus U.S. fascination with Blackness coupled with orientalist notions of Asian femininity result in the aforementioned conflicting tensions around Blasians. A similar argument that would dismiss the utility of these Blasian video models because they come close to the idea White standards of beauty, via mixed-race fetishization, without challenging those standards, is to dismiss the complexity that accompanies the popularity of ethnic ambiguity. Thornton and Gates note ethnic ambiguity has proven to be beneficial when thinking about the situational nature of racial identification (particularly in hostile environments where blending in is the difference between life and death). Ambiguity also enables the manipulation and/or performance of race (King & DaCosta; Williams). There are also of course the political economic benefits of ethnic ambiguity, the ability to appeal to a racially broad cross-section of people is especially beneficial for any star, but certainly for mixed race stars and these Blasian video models specifically. Additionally, these Blasian video models act as a cipher for hegemonic definitions of race, sexuality, and gender while simultaneously redefining those definitions by virtue of their embodied Blasian identity. Included in this group of multiracial video models are Blasians: Tomika Skanes, La'Shontae Heckard, Denyce Lawton. I focus on these three women because they were prominent enough to have developed fans amongst industry players and fans, and thus they allow me the opportunity to delve deeper into how Blasians are branding themselves, and what it means to be Blasian. Importantly, the presence of these women in hip-hop videos usher in a moment where the fetishizing of Blasians,

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30 Cassie Ventura, who initially became famous for not being a very good r&b/pop singer, but now appears in other artists’ music videos, (Kanye West “Stronger”, Chris Brown “Crawl”, Wiz Khalifa “Roll up”) is a possible addition to this group. While her career trajectory happened in a different order from the other women, her identity as a mixed race Black/Filipina woman has been part of the media narratives about her.
in particular Heckard, brings about the explosion of mixed-race identity as fact and not aberration.

Tomika Skanes, Denyce Lawton, and La’Shontae Heckard, who all identify as Black and Korean, got their starts in music videos roughly around the same time, early 2000s, and together have been featured in over fifty videos for popular, mainstream artists throughout the decade (Sanders; “Tomika Skanes”; Sandra Rose; “Interview with Denyce”; “Interview with

Figure 3.2  Tomika Skanes (l) with Blasian non singer Amerie
Figure 3.3  Denyce Lawton
Figure 3.4  La’Shontae Heckard

Tomika Skanes, Denyce Lawton, and La’Shontae Heckard, who all identify as Black and Korean, got their starts in music videos roughly around the same time, early 2000s, and together have been featured in over fifty videos for popular, mainstream artists throughout the decade (Sanders; “Tomika Skanes”; Sandra Rose; “Interview with Denyce”; “Interview with

LaShontae”; “So amazing”). Interestingly, in an interview with the website HalfKorean.com, Lawton was asked if she had met any other “half/mixed Korean artists,” to which she replied that she knew both Skanes and Heckard (Sanders). The women, during their careers as video models, have also modeled for urban men’s magazines, album covers, been crowned “Video Vixen of the Year” by Vibe magazine, and have been featured on a number of websites devoted to tracking the careers and movements of video models (“Video Vixen”; Tellez; “Interview). They have gone from being featured in music videos to regular acting roles on Black sitcoms, The Game for Heckard and Tyler Perry’s House of Payne for Lawton, and model management for Skanes. This cohort of Blasian video models have strategically leveraged their careers in video modeling to negotiate and challenge societal attitudes towards non-White multiracial people, and structural shifts that have resulted in the dominance of capitalist forms of exchange.

Denyce Lawton’s 2004 interview with www.HalfKorean.com fittingly frames the explosion of Blasians, specifically via a tangible presence in the music industry and music videos, by offering a rough timeline. The Blasian stars already mentioned in this chapter, were part of the initial wave, but it really is not until the 2000s that Blasians as a group become truly visible. When Lawton’s interviewer asks what she thinks of the website and its purpose, she answers:

Honestly! I don’t know. I do remember thinking, how neat. I never thought this was a hot issue to have a site about or that many people would be interested in half Korean people. You have to understand; to meet half Korean/Black people these days is still weird for me. Up until 3 years ago, the only ones I knew were on the bases with me and my family, now I turn around in this business and everyone is. :) (emphasis mine) (Sanders)
It is significant that these women, who I argue are, in part, responsible for thrusting Blasians into a category understandable by people accustomed to the U.S.’s racialized hierarchy, all starred in music videos. Website www.dynastyseries.com, which functions as both a modeling agency for models of color and an aggregator of links mentioning models from other websites, included Heckard in their ranking of the top 25 models of the decade. In their blurb about why the website chose her they wrote “in the early to mid 2000 there was a stint where the Asian/Black model was really sought after; a large part of this was due to Tae Heckard. Her ethnic yet diverse look really changed the game” (Amina). The influence from their roles as marquee music video stars enabled them to strategically utilize the power of the music video and transnational consumption of Black urban music to effectively promote both themselves, as individuals, and Blasians.

The ways these women were branded hinged not only on how they were racialized by both the music (video) industry, and the celebrity industrial complex, but also on how they self-identified. An interviewer informed Heckard “we all know that your (sic) mixed: African American and Korean” before asking her if being Blasian has helped her land more jobs. Heckard’s reply interestingly notes “there’s too many beautiful & exotic women in the world to be booked solely on your looks… I think most, if not all of the times, it had to do with my character & personality” (Milano). She, like Tiger Woods in chapter six, suggest Blasianness has very little to do with either popularity or success, this despite being identified as the most notable Blasian video model by various websites and urban men’s magazines, and quite possibly being one of the key players in the progression of Blasian legibility. Heckard’s (and Woods’s) willingness to discount the impact and influence their multiraciality had on their careers is an indication of how they as part of the Blasian brand are not completely in control of its meaning,
there are other people who have had active roles in the production of the meaning of the brand. The fact remains they are commodities that have a particular relationship with both producers and consumers of the Blasian brand. On the other hand, Lawton points out that actively branding herself as Blasian has both helped and harmed her career: “I get that I’m either too Asian or not Asian enough or too ethnic or not ethnic enough. I have been told I don’t look like the All-American girl next door but then not being that has gotten me work so… it balances out” (Sanders). Both women are similar in that they both identify alternately as a Blasian multiracial or as Black depending on the current topic. When discussing future opportunities she hoped to gain, Lawton in a different interview continues to discuss how branding herself as Blasian is not always successful, “I’m either too light or not light enough. Mostly not dark enough. Not the girl next-door innocent look. I can play a lot of ethnicities but roles aren’t being written for those ethnicities!” (Interview with D. L.). Critically, she points out despite the flexibility afforded her by being Blasian, she cannot take advantage of that flexibility because of the lack of opportunities in general for women of color in entertainment. A problem Heckard similarly echoes in her criticisms about the industry and the reactions to women who participate in it, which she sums up as a “backlash of … negativity that surrounds women of color” (Milano). The women always acknowledge, despite the social contradictions embodied by their multiraciality, and in recognition of their Blasian identity, that they are always women of color. They do not distance themselves, given their flexibility to play different ethnicities/roles, from the systemic problems faced by women of color.

Part of the identity negotiation process for the women deals in part with sharing stories of the rejection they faced from both the Asian and Black communities. Heckard’s profile on XXL magazine’s website details in dizzyingly quick fashion her abandonment by her Korean mother
when she was five, who had divorced her Black military father, and her subsequent rescue and relocation to the U.S. at the hands of her Korean grandmother back to her Black father (“So Amazing”). It would seem part of Heckard’s hesitation in explicitly claiming her racial identity/ies as the root of her success, unlike other Blasian celebrities like Hines Ward or Kimora Lee Simmons, is based in the rejection she faced on both sides during her childhood. While Lawton did not deal with the same abandonment issues as Heckard, she does mention as a result of “growing up Blasian” that “people didn’t know how to react to a light skinned Black girl with a lot of crazy hair :) and ‘Chinky’ eyes. I still get it a little but not by Black people anymore; more so by some Koreans” (Sanders). Kimora Lee Simmons in chapter four, shares similar stories of the slurs and insults hurled at her, usually appended with “chinky.” Lawton also shared that speaking in Korean to mono-racial Koreans would have unpredictable results, sometimes they would be impressed and treat her differently after finding out she was Korean, though most of the time she said it did not seem to make much difference (Sanders; “Interview with Denyce”).

LaShontae Heckard’s sexuality adds complexity to the Blasian branding strategy. In keeping with the video model trope of out of control hypersexuality – on screen and off – Heckard initially maintained that image by admitting “men were a weakness” of hers and that she had been engaged “a couple times” (“So Amazing”). In other interviews and features from the beginning of her career, the questions about who she is dating always referenced men; questions like “Do you prefer to date celebrities or regular guys?” and “What would your perfect man be like?” “Do you have a man?” (“So Amazing”; “Eye Candy”; TheUrbanAdvocate). Her answers have ranged from interest in regular guys, to Bill Cosby, to “a hood who’s romantic and knows how to express himself clearly” (“Eye Candy”). Then a picture emerged, on one of the
blogs devoted to video models, of her kissing another woman, which served to only increase her popularity. Since the publishing of that picture there have been a few snarky blog posts about whether she was acting as a “beard” for the music artists she dated, or if there were acting as a beard for her (Rose; “Morning Glory”). To act as a beard for someone means to allude to heterosexuality by being seen with someone of the opposite gender. The blog posts were an attempt to out both the musicians Heckard has dated, and Heckard herself as gay, claiming each party was part of the ruse for the other. This resulted in questions about her sexual preference, and “what percentage of her was attracted to women” (“So Amazing”, Milano). Her answers to those questions were “does it matter” and “15%-20%.” There has also been a magazine cover for Ikons magazine, which bills itself as a “groundbreaking Lesbian magazine.” Heckard is transgressing the borders of her sexual identity, like she does with her racial identity, in order to take advantage of the political possibilities available by expanding the boundaries of Blasian identity. While common sense might dictate that she loses her more homophobic fans in an effort to appeal to the LGBT community, as an attractive (possible) lesbian, I am doubtful this move did much, if any, damage to her popularity. In fact, by appealing to the queer community, she increases the number of followers and fans, which is a clever marketing strategy since that also attracts more consumers, which leads to more profits. Moreover, I argue Blasians already exist in a space where they are non-normative, both within dominant discourses of race in the U.S. as mixed-race people, but also within dominant discourses of multiraciality because they are not White mixed-race people; so these Blasian women are launching a “counter-racial-sexualization” that allows them to “redefine sex, race, and representation in an open-ended fashion” (Shimizu, 17).
Conclusion: Embodying the Brand

Blasian video models have had to negotiate the attendant sexual representations of women of color in popular culture. Ronald Jackson discusses the importance of the body by pointing out that “bodies are inscriptive surfaces that are discursive texts, which can be rewritten after acts of struggle toward emancipations, though still not fully divested of prior inscriptions; body politics is the lifeline for race and racism; and corporeal inscriptions stimulate the negotiation of racial identities” (5). The bodies of Black and Asian women have been and continue to be a constant site of struggle – over meanings, over power, over control. Railton and Watson offer comment on the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality of women in videos, which is particularly trenchant for these Blasian models, when they write “race is deployed within pop music videos to not only delimit or sanction sexual behavior, but also sex and gender signify race in ways which tend to reproduce and shore up existing hierarchical power relations” (52). Research on the role of women in hip hop/r&b music videos have already parsed the continued hypersexualization of women of color. They are represented through their physicality - never as emotional or intellectual beings (Bailey), and as sexual commodities (Sharpley-Whiting). Shimizu writes how the “perversity unifying their representations, which are palpably different from normal sexuality usually embodied by a white woman, can be interpreted variously: as strength, diversity, or pathology” (4). While she is writing about the sexualized images of Asian women in the media, her contention is equally applicable to Black women, whose sexuality is also interpreted within those same categories. It is important to analyze and understand Blasian video models because the representation of women of color, especially as hypersexual beings, happens within a system of social forces, which “ground their legibility in culture, as terms for self recognition and as condition of social marginalization that leads to
opportunities for creative self-invention” (Shimizu, 17). Furthermore, these representations happen in a system that from its inception has assigned romantic love, marriage, and respectability to middle-class White womanhood, leaving all women of color to express their fulfillment in other arenas. In other words, as contextualizing the expressions of women of color in terms of sexual love as Angela Davis has, shows it as being “linked inextricably with possibilities of social freedom in the economic and political realms” (10). Davis and Shimizu both talk about the sexuality of Black and Asian women as being a force that both allows them mobility and empowers them. The politics of respectability might have problems with sexuality being used to empower, but I argue these Blasian video models are examples of how that happens.

I focus on music videos and these Blasian video models because videos, and popular media, have made Blasians visible – literally, and have become contested terrain where these women challenge the meanings and uses of their representations. 50 years or so ago Blasians as either a category or an identity did not exist within the popular imaginary, so there were no representations to examine or contest. Now, Blasians are part of a system that is steeped in essentialisms, the branding strategies that make them legible within media rely on dominant notions of what Blackness and Asianness are, cobbling those narratives together in order to understand Blasians. So on one hand, these Blasian video models are part of dominant, stereotypical representations of both Black and Asian women. But there are competing claims of Blackness, Asianness, and multiraciality made discursively, empirically, and materially by these women that forces us to acknowledge the constitutive aspect of culture and representation. These video models are the beginning of understanding the process of branding Blasians, the women themselves are merely markers – logos – for the Blasian brand. The brand itself has
progressed from illegibility in the form of non-existence, to a way of viewing multiracial identity as multiple, intersecting, and perpetually shifting in reaction to societal structures, social conditions, and relations of power.
Chapter 4

Brand Camp: Re-fashioning Kimora as Alternative Branding Strategy

Kimora Lee Simmons, former fashion model, fashion designer, and now reality television star, has apparently always acknowledged her Black and Asian mixed-race identity. From the onset of her celebrity in the 1990s as the muse for designer Karl Lagerfeld and Chanel, her Blasian identity has been a, if not the most obvious, source of her popularity. Simmons has turned her fame into a career, using herself as the template for how women can and should live well. In building her empire that consists of a fashion line for women, and a line for children, fragrances, Hello Kitty jewelry collaborations, movie roles, a reality television show, and various philanthropic efforts – she has leveraged her Blasianness to be a unique selling point in bringing together a disparate fan base.

Employing and coining terms like "ghetto-fabulous" and "fabulosity," Simmons has created an outsized, exaggerated persona, which this chapter argues is necessary in order for her to both access and utilize her Blasianness. In her book, Fabulosity, Simmons introduces the reader to the five key components of the philosophy of fabulosity: confidence, uniqueness, independence, luxury, and generosity (8). Those components are especially well suited stylistically with her overall attitude of fun and the over-the-top spirit of camp. She shows and tells her fans, followers, and critics that this is a part of her very specific branding strategy:

To boost my self-esteem in the early days, I would actively think of and write down the words that I felt defined me. Now that I market my clothes and products around the world, I see exactly what I was doing then: I was creating the “brand of Kimora,” and it was a brand that was so fabulous and so solid, its
import couldn’t be denied. To build any successful brand, you need a “brand vocabulary.” In my beauty-brand vocabulary, I wasn’t “unconventional-looking:” I was “exotic.” I wasn’t “too tall;” I was “regal.” I wasn’t “too outspoken;” I was “influential.” I wasn’t too “flashy;” I was “show-stopping.” (Simmons 38)

Indeed those key components appear over and over again in her book, on her television show, in her interviews, and in her advertisements. In order to understand Simmons’s branding practices, one needs to understand the strategies of her branding, which is camp and, thus, in order to talk about camp one has to recognize it as not just an upper-middle class White male performative and interpretive practice, but one that also relates to race, gender, class, and even mixed race alternative identities which are part of the “wink” that makes her appearance in media and the marketing of her so compelling.

This chapter offers an alternate reading of Simmons, one that emphasizes the resistive potential of her class politics and personality. The existence of multiple readings of Simmons makes her camp an object, because as Robertson points out “for there to be a genuinely camp spectator, there must be another hypothetical spectator who views the object ‘normally’” (Guilty, 17). Simmons’s reality television show, Life in the Fab Lane, is part of her branding strategy, and the show offers some interesting glimpses into the production of both her own celebrity brand and the Blasian brand – oftentimes blurring the line between both brands. For example, in the latest season of her show Simmons hires Amy, who is identified with the banner “branding consultant,” who informs Simmons her purpose is to “identif[y] what you need and where you want to be with a conscious effort and thought. KLS the enterprise, KLS the brand, KLS the person. We need to put some definitions around what the KLS brand is as we reintroduce it, and talk about what that’s going to look like in the market.” (S4E5) Celebrities acknowledging that
their public images and personae are constructed is not new or even news in and of itself – especially in this heavily socially mediated age, but Simmons’s wink about her use of camp as the means of recognizing the work put into her image, and of subverting dominant ideologies of race, gender, and class does make her a compelling case study. As Amy, the branding consultant, informs Simmons “all new brands need to step out and introduce themselves at some point,” and, Simmons’s use of Blasian identity as the fulcrum for the production of her brand makes it unique.

The last two decades have seen a considerable increase in the amount of research on camp, which is a testament to the “slipperiness of camp” and its inability (or perhaps instability) to be defined concretely (Cleto, 2). While the majority of the scholarship on camp has focused on its relationship to queer identity (Sontag; Core; Booth; Dyer; Babuscio Camp, Cinema; Cleto; Whitney; Griffin; Padva), others have added an emphasis on feminist and racialized discourses (Robertson Guilty, Mae West; hooks, Pearson, Flinn, Shugart and Waggoner). Still, camp is used to usually refer primarily to gay culture. Considering the historical context of camp means acknowledging that a primary emphasis of its use has been to appeal to a male, White, affluent (or at least middle-class), subset of the gay community. This more particularized notion of camp is evident in Babuscio's linking of camp to what he termed ‘gay sensibilities,’ or the “creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression; in short, a perception of the world which is coloured, shaped, directed and defined by the fact of one’s gayness.” (117-118) Meyer further essentialized camp when he forcefully declared that “rather than a popular style or sensibility, Camp is a solely homosexual performance inseparable from the body of the performers.” (Signifying 277) Certainly, in their haste to discuss camp as a
knowing nod between gays, many scholars ignore the fact homosexuals are not a homogenous community, nor do they automatically possess some preternatural heightened awareness of style and performance. In fact critics like Padva attempt to reconcile Babuscio’s use of ‘gay sensibility’ as the foundation of camp with the acknowledgement that the gay community is a not a monolith by noting one need not be gay in order to have a gay sensibility (226). He goes on to note:

Camp, as queer creation and manifestation, objects to the stigmatization that marks the unnatural, extraordinary, perverse, sick, inefficient, dangerous and queer. Camp, as queer counterculture and counterpraxis, undermines and reconsiders the epistemology intended by the bourgeois to produce and reproduce, present and represent its hegemony. Camp not only subverts and revises the dominant ideology, but also creates, produces, and performs counterculture. In its radical interpretation of human existence, camp offers a different point of view, or a broader and vital perspective, of social experience that might be useful not only to members of queer subcultures but also to other groups and subcultures. (Padva 237)

While some scholars have begun to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the gay community, many elide the notion of camp as a racialized and feminized performance. In fact, most of Babuscio’s definition for ‘gay sensibility’ can be extended to any marginalized group – including women and people of color.

Writing about the documentary Paris is Burning, hooks and Robertson both note how the inclusion of race somehow confounds critics and culminates in their devaluation of the work of camp. In fact Robertson observes “critics tend to treat the African American and Hispanic use of
camp to gain access to fantasies of whiteness as a special case, without fully acknowledging … how inextricably race and sex are intertwined, and without considering whether or how race discourse operates in camp generally” (Robertson 1999, 393). The appearance of race is not the only stumbling block for many scholars discussing camp, the presence of camp for mainstream (read: heterosexual) audiences creates what Rudnick and Andersen have termed ‘Camp Lite,’ or straight camp. The differentiating between camp and ‘straight camp,’ or ignoring the raced and gendered discourses operating in and around camp, points to the privileging of camp as being for a specific audience, one that is White, male, homosexual, and middle-class. Using Kimora Lee Simmons allows for the explication of camp as more than simply a gay performance, but a performance that is gendered and racialized as well. Thinking of camp more broadly requires an expansion of it theoretically to include performance and interpretation beyond the aforementioned current iteration, to one that addresses a broader range of identity masquerade and parody practices.

This chapter will not attempt to define the differences (if they exist) between ‘gay camp,’ ‘straight camp,’ ‘camp lite,’ and ‘feminist camp.’ Instead, it will focus on the oppositional potential of camp and its ability to subvert dominant ideologies more generally, especially in regards to race, class, and gender. More important to this chapter is reconceptualizing camp as a process, rather than just a product, which creates an interpretive framework in which to analyze Simmons and her particular brand of Blasian identity. Thus, camp is not a thing—a particular performance or identity—but an actively changing performative and identifying process, and interpretations of it, too, can change across time. Robertson notes using camp as a framework allows for the complication of “how dominant texts and resistant viewers interact to produce camp, and by reconceptualizing resistance and subversion to account for the way in which
camp’s simultaneous pleasure of alienation and absorption refuse simplistic categories of dominant versus resistant readings” (1996, 17). The ability of camp to upend dominant ideologies by operating in culturally ambiguous and contradictory spaces is crucial to its troubling of a range of hegemonic notions. Additionally, camp as a mechanism, as a purposefully utilized tool, “has the power to force attention onto bodies in a culture that seems increasingly interested in burying, suppressing, or transcending” them (Flinn 76). Multiracial bodies have historically been buried because of racist state and cultural policies threatening and/or punishing Blacks who had relationships with Whites34 with death during the U.S. history of slavery on through Jim Crow. Mixed race has also been suppressed, especially via the act of passing, and multiracial bodies are being transcended as discourses of post-racial America and the declining significance of race gain steam. The current discourse on mixed-race is either celebratory or panicked, and both discourses are an important function of camp. Both Simmons’ body and celebrity become sites for where race, mixed race, gender, class and celebrity intersect with camp’s simultaneous embrace and subversion of hegemonic ideologies.

That Simmons publicly acknowledges how much of her image is performance means she is situated squarely, and more importantly, queerly amongst other marginalized groups and deviant people. That she is constructed in a myriad of (possibly contradictory and inconsistent) ways is in keeping with Babuscio’s determination that camp “signifies performance rather than existence. Clothes and décor, for example, can be a means of asserting one’s identity, as well as a form of justification in a society which denies one’s essential validity” (122). Using camp to understand the way power operates in and around Simmons’ Blasian body allows her audience to view her as possibly deviant (she does not fit expectations), while also acknowledging that

34 Of course, this punishment was reserved mostly for Black men, as White plantation owners and White men in general were not usually punished for relationships with Black women.
deviancy might also work to contest oppressive raced and gendered hierarchies. As a 6-foot tall middle-aged woman with children, Simmons’ penchant for very high heels, long hair, full makeup, and body conscious outfits rejects the disciplining and controlling mechanisms of hegemonic femininity. While Sontag might have famously declared camp as “apolitical,” in her refusal to be normalized and silenced by dominant ideologies regarding Blackness, femininity, celebrity, and Asianness, Simmons is unambiguously political.

Babuscio grounds much of theorization of the ‘queer sensibility’ of camp within the realm of theatricality, claiming that because gays by virtue of who they are attracted to, violate the moral and social codes of society, have had to gain experience passing and have “heightened sensitivity to aspects of a performance which others are likely to regards as routine or uncalculated” (125). The social regulation of sexuality is not the only regulatory system that has led to alternative practices of passing; the regulations of race, gender, and class have had similar and interlinked effects. For instance, multiracial people in general, and multiracial celebrities perhaps especially, have had to pass, and take on roles to conform to social and sometimes legal expectations.

Passing for mixed-race celebrities has become more difficult as multiracial people are taking to the internet and using websites and social media in order to “out” these stars. The increase in the number of websites like www.mixedfolks.com, www.intermix.org.uk, and www.asiansofmixedrace.com has made it easier to affirm and/or confirm the racial mixtures of celebrities. These sites deconstruct and emphasize the racial mixtures of celebrities to rally around these stars as a show of solidarity because dominant ideas of race have left them out (Nakamura; Nishime; Washington). The ‘role-playing’ Babuscio mentions when explaining camp is the same strategy for destabilizing dominant ideologies Squires and Bower highlight.
when talking about the politics of passing. Babuscio’s role-playing is just another way to say passing, and camp works the same way passing does in that when passers, or camp actors, “are discovered, they expose the fact that despite the failure of the regime of visibility to tell us who is who, such failure is not sufficient to destroy the categories that have been confounded” (Squires & Bower, 285).

The performative aspect of camp enables the unambiguous troubling of all sorts of binaries – male/female, black/white, rich/poor, gay/straight, etc…. Drag queens and kings are camp figures because their overt performance of gender during drag shows, and while they do not destroy gender, they do trouble the authenticity of gender and with it the simple binary of masculinity and femininity. Similarly, Simmons as a camp figure uses Blasian multiraciality to trouble the Black and White duality of race in the United States, as noted by Nishime in her critiques about the race play in Simmons’s advertisements for the fashion company Baby Phat.

Nishime focuses on two Baby Phat advertisements meant to convey an Asian aesthetic, which feature Simmons and her two daughters, Ming and Aoki. Both advertisements feature stereotypical markers of Asianness– shoji screens, fans, and Chinese lanterns, along with the more specific Japanese marker – kanji lettering on the signs. The inference is that the models featured are Japanese, but as Nishime points out there is a purposeful blurring of the racial
boundaries (20). All of the models are the same shade of beige as Simmons, appearing in
dreadlocks and cornrows (typical markers of Blackness) on two of the male models, and eye-
obscurung paint or bangs on the women (typical markers of Asianness) – produce a productively
ambivalent racialized context. The racial identities of the models are ambiguous and conflicting,
as is the racial identity of Simmons herself, who is centered in the ad, wearing eye obscuring
sunglasses and straightened hair. Nishime concludes (about this same image that) without “a
stable racial reference point” the viewer is unable to concretely racially identify Simmons.
Simmons does not ultimately topple racial categories, but she does challenge what it means to be
both Black and Asian, or as Nishime states, she “revise[s] the meanings of racial stereotypes and
open[s] up a space to question the basis for racial categorization and its hierarchical
organization” (10).

In *Fabulosity*, Simmons introduces a key section, conveniently on image and the body, of
her book by asking the reader to “spend a bit of energy considering your image. How are you
coming across to the world, and is your image helping your cause? Does anybody out there know
who you are?” (131, emphasis in original) She goes on to explain just how much of her image
“the clothes, the home, the office, are deliberate choices, not lucky accidents” (135). In essence
Simmons is declaring that what the audience sees is what they get while simultaneously
acknowledging that what they see has been purposefully chosen. Sontag describes the essence of
camp as “love of the unnatural: artifice and exaggeration.” (1) Dollimore extends Sontag’s
description by indicating that the “real, the true, and the authentic are surrendered to, or
contaminated by, the fictitious and the contrived. But camp comes to life around that
recognition; it is situated at the point of emergence of the artificial from the real, culture from
nature – or rather when and where the real collapses into artifice, nature into culture.” (225)
image projected by Simmons and her camp takes a post-modernist turn by flattening difference and making it impossible to distinguish the ‘artificial from the real,’ because she claims to not make that distinction. Collapsing her lifestyle into her own personal brand, she makes it impossible for anyone else to draw boundaries and make distinctions either. When she explains to her readers how her “personal brand” is created by “taking the icons of old money – diamonds, luxury goods, and decorative arts – and turning them upside down” (136), Simmons’ description of her lifestyle takes to heart Sontag’s claim that extravagance is the hallmark of camp (7). Simmons’ entire brand is predicated on always being ‘too much,’ which allows her to manipulate her identity in order to defy social expectations. In writing about turning old money icons upside down as she appropriates them for her benefit, she indirectly addresses how she, and other people of color, have historically not had access to these ‘icons of old money’.

Here, camp is immensely useful as an analytical tool, because it transforms her indirect criticism of the exclusivity of Whiteness into an obvious critique and subversion of the hegemonic dominance of Whiteness. She uses those icons, and their implicit reference to old money, luxury, and Whiteness, and reappropriates them not just for herself, but for members of the diverse community she represents, as well as her diverse following. As illustrated through an anecdote she shares both in her book and in interviews about how she single-handedly made Franck Muller watches popular within the hip-hop community. Simmons explains at the time (the mid 1990s) a diamond Rolex watch was the status symbol for wealthy White people, and she, in response, made the Muller watches popular by purchasing one and encouraging others in her social group to do the same and, “soon enough one big hip-hop mogul got that same watch, then another major rapper had one too, and it was on the cover of the luxury magazine, Robb Report, as the quintessential luxury item!” (Simmons 136) Similar to the hip-hop community’s
appropriation and resignification of specific New England, preppy, country-club brands like Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, and Nautica, Simmons rejects dominant discourses of consumption and appropriateness by resignifying the Muller watch as no longer an exclusive item for Whites, but launched a rather determined (according to her) effort to challenge hegemonic discourses around race and class.

Simmons’ embrace of a ghetto fabulous ideology and conspicuous consumption does particular racial work, especially when coupled with camp. According to Roopali Mukherjeee, ghetto fabulousness is the “elevation of the black urban experience as [the] ultimate crucible of cool” (Ghetto 600). Mukherjee goes on to suggest that ghetto fabulousness, a distant cousin of hip-hop culture, is a product of the post-soul era, which is what scholars have termed the moment when we have officially made a break from the preceding civil rights era. It is marked by neo-liberal demands and policies attacking race, and increased surveillance of bodies of color (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Boyd 2003; Mukherjee, Racial 2006; Neal 2002). Black consumptive practices have been contradictorily marked as either pathological (Cosby; Austin) or transformative and subversive (Austin; Weems; Dyson). What Simmons does with commodities (including herself) is an arguably transformative act because she appears to be exploiting them as a subversive play on Black identity and an indirect critique of Black stereotypes. In a New York magazine profile of Simmons, Eaton remarks on how there are no white pets or white furniture pieces anywhere in the Simmons’ house, to which Simmons replied “who’s even this color in this house? … All my animals are black!”
Losing the “Baby Phat”

The aesthetic and purpose of Simmons’s first fashion line, Baby Phat\(^{35}\), is intimately tied to her attempts to link ghetto fabulousness with fabulosity. Simmons explains she created Baby Phat because there had “never been a clothing line made by a young woman like me: a multiethnic woman who has one foot in Gucci and one foot in the ghetto.” (80) So intertwined is the relationship between Baby Phat and Simmons’ identity that when she was removed\(^{36}\) from the position as creative director and president in August 2010 she said “I have spent 15 years building Baby Phat, almost half of my life… We created the logo off of Max the cat I’ve had since I was eight. This customer, this woman, I’ve catered to this woman and her lifestyle, and I’ve presented a lifestyle for her. I am these women and these women are me.” (Season 4, Episode 4) Even this description of Simmons and the rise and fall of her tenure with Baby Phat maintains a campy relationship to performance, identity, and play, self-representing her as a woman, which is rich, yet from poor, Black roots, and "multi-ethnic," hence conspicuously positing her gendered, racial, and classed identities not only as part of her, but as part of the company she is creating.

Simmons explains how she came to be the model used in Baby Phat advertising campaigns as a response to the backlash the company received when they used monoracially White, and Black models. She notes putting herself in the ads meant highlighting her multiraciality, which would leave little for people to criticize because “you can’t say I’m too black, or not black enough. You can’t say crap because it’s my damn fashion line… This is me”

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\(^{35}\) Baby Phat was created for her by then husband Russell Simmons, who spun it off his already existing Phat Farm fashion company.

\(^{36}\) In 2004 Russell Simmons sold Phat Fashions, of which Baby Phat was a large part, to Kellwood Industries. It is unclear if it was understood that at some point Kimora Lee Simmons would step down (as is implied on S4E4 of Simmons’s show Life in the Fab Lane), or if she was fired as the gossip blogs claim.
Her words both call attention to her identity and also reflexively refer to the political strategy of making a company based on her as a creative solution to potential critiques and comments people might make about her mixed racial identity. By making a company that incorporates her identity, she suggests, she can avoid assumptions and discourse questioning her racial authenticity; indeed, through the success of her company, she takes control of representation, remaking what it means to be multiethnic, recoding it as something positive, hence taking control away from those who might question her legitimacy.

One of the earliest advertising campaigns to feature Simmons, shot in 2005, showed her coming down the stairs of Air Force One (the Baby Phat logo replacing the President’s seal) with her two daughters. In case the viewer misses the President’s seal on Air Force One, the background of the image is the Washington monument, effectively locating the advertisement in Washington D.C. A press corps and models in dark suits, secret service agents, who are either scanning the crowd and communicating via their headsets, or carrying her bags and a child, surround Simmons and her daughters. The advertisement is full of bright colors; Simmons and her daughters are in pink, contrasted against the stark black of the secret service agents’ suits. Simmons is wearing a trench coat with a pattern similar to the plaid used by luxury British brand, Burberry. Photographer and occasional director, David LaChapelle, who is known for his
vivid images and use of irony, shot the ad campaign. The advertisement is framed so that the viewer is literally looking up to Simmons as she is descending the stairs, and the recipient of the waves from Simmons and her daughters. As the viewer is being greeted in the advertisement, Simmons explains in the copy written on the Baby Phat advertisement included in her book, “in all the Baby Phat ads I try to share my lifestyle with the consumers and try to represent everything is luxurious about our brand.” (57) Simmons also explains in her book just how campy the ad was and why they chose to go that route for the first campaign: “Why not? I had married the guy many considered a leader of hip-hop, so I was kind of poking fun at the idea of being a new American leading lady, part preppy, part ghetto fabulous. It was a traditional kind of image with a sneaky, fun twist.” (124, emphasis mine) The advertisement came out four years before Barack Obama would become President of the United States, though Simmons preppy chic style seems to be a foreshadowing of the preppy chic style Michelle Obama would draw on as First Lady (sans the overt sexiness).

Simmons uses conspicuous consumption as a way to authenticate her Blackness, by relying on “ghetto fabulous [as] a marker of vernacular blackness” (Mukherjee 611). While she refers to her book as a primer, “Ghetto Fabulous: 101,” she uses her buying power to purchase items that act as markers of White affluence, which then enables her to resist dominant hierarchies of class, and race by troubling the racial exclusivity of those products. Davis, Gardner and Gardner explain how and why conspicuous consumption historically has acted as a critique of race, and especially class hierarchies:

Most of the symbols of status in our society are denied to colored persons. In the south and in most areas in the North even those colored people who have the economic means are not allowed to share in most activities which serve as
symbols of economic and social status for the parallel white groups. They appear to compensate psychologically for this deprivation by acquiring expensive clothes, furniture, and automobiles… Negroes will scrimp on many things to be able to buy the things in life which are most evident to their fellow men, the things by which people judge one’s status in the world of today. (Qtd in Alexis 58-59)

Lamont and Molnar note consumption continues to be a “means for expressing resistance to dominant society” (34). In other words, because Blacks historically have been un/under-employed and shut out of traditional paths to wealth (home and land ownership), the purchase of goods on which there are no limitations or restrictions have acted, and continue to act, as a means to showcase their status in spite of persistent institutionalized oppression.

Being ghetto fabulous in itself is not necessarily campy, but turning ghetto fabulousness into *fabulosity* definitely is. What Simmons’ has done with the aforementioned Muller watches, she has also done with her Louis Vuitton collection, which is described as being the largest single-owner collection in the world (Sales; Eaton; MTV *Cribs*). The first season of her reality show, *Life in the Fab Lane*, includes a scene of her assistants packing her luggage for a trip to
Los Angeles. Sandra, one assistant, obviously answering a question posed off-camera, says about Simmons, “she has more Louis Vuitton than anyone in the world. This is more than what you would find in a store, ‘cause she gets bags custom-made” (episode 2). The next shot shows the other assistant, Brandon, explaining how Simmons usually needs at least 30 pieces of luggage for a trip, and the twenty pieces they have packed is “light.” Booth points out that the “bourgeois gentilhomme” and the “camp person” share a number of things, including a love of possessions (84). For Simmons’s presentation of ghetto fabulousness to work it is necessary to exchange economic capital in order to gain the cultural and symbolic capital necessary for her campiness to then be effective. While it might appear counter-productive to champion capitalistic consumerism as a positive, what Simmons does by living excessively and extravagantly aligns precisely with the theatrical performativity inherent in camp.

Camp has been analyzed as a response to the oppressive gender hierarchies, and combined with ghetto fabulousness to critique dominant notions of class; and there are many moments in Simmons’s career when camp is used to resist racial hegemony through the deployment of her Blasian identity. Moments when she is depicted as engaging in what Cleto claims is the “collective, ritual and performative existence, in which it is the object itself to be set on a stage, being, in the process of campification, subjected.” (25) In talking about her childhood, Simmons describes growing up in the Midwest with an absent Black father and a “very The Joy Luck Club” Japanese-Korean mother (28). It is interesting she uses the movie/book The Joy Luck Club about Chinese and Chinese American women as the template for her not-Chinese immigrant mother, given that one of the major criticisms of the story is that it conflates all Asians into an Orientalist ‘other’ category (Yin). She mentions not being accepted by classmates, and being confused by the images on television that did not reflect who she was.
She goes on to explain she expected public school, with its mixture of students, would be a place where she would be finally accepted: “the black kids would high-five me and the Asian kids would trade slap bracelets with me and I’d get to sit at whatever lunch table I wanted” (Simmons 29). Instead as the most visibly different person, she was excluded from every clique. Simmons describes herself as a misfit who is “too-tall, too-weird, not-black-enough but not-Asian enough, too-ethnic, too kooky-haired, too-dark, and too-light… girl most unlikely” (27). She acknowledges she exists in a space where she is considered both not enough and too much, and she campily exploits her that liminality to her advantage.

The "Chinky Giraffe"

Simmons shares in her book anecdotes about the phrase “chinky giraffe,” being used to taunt her when she was younger because she was tall, skinny, and Asian:

“Chinky Giraffe,” they’d say and laugh hysterically at how funny they were and so smart, too, for coming up with a nickname that covered all the bases – “giraffe” because I was way too tall and skinny, with long, loping legs. And since I definitely had some Asian in me too – horror of horrors – they added the “Chinky” in a surefire stroke of genius. Pretty soon the name caught on, and if those kids or their friends were hanging out in the street, they’d yell after me, “Chinky Giraffe!” It really hurt, especially since “chink” was like a slap in the face to my Mom and all the values she believed in. (30)

She explains the slur was hurtful because it would be used to exclude her from the lunch table, activities, and generally bully her. The website www.disgrasian.com (tagline: “You’re a disgrace. To the race.”) continued use of the slur when they used chinky giraffe in a post about
Simmons’s date with now husband Djimon Honsou. The site instructs its readers to “enjoy these pictures of our favorite Chinky Giraffe having a leisurely lunch with her boy toy Djimon over the weekend.” (Wang) The site uses chinky giraffe again, this time to designate Simmons as their “Disgrasian of the Weak”, for “reveling in money-grubbing and excess” (Nguyen). And yet that phrase is uttered throughout her book, show, and in interviews, and is used to do what Sontag highlights is the point of camp: “to dethrone the serious” (10). That Simmons says, “I’m the Chinky Giraffe who now collects bejeweled giraffe statues and puts them on display right where everyone can see them. Some of them are in the form of diamond giraffe picture-frames – they’re blinged out and totally gorgeous.” She even features a giant giraffe topiary at her New Jersey home. What is a serious racial slur against Simmons has now been re-signified and rendered frivolous. Additionally, Simmons’s reclamation of the originally racist ‘chinky giraffe’ epithet does exactly what Abel points out needs to happen for camp to be successful. He notes: “precision is essential to camp for in order to execute a critique of social norms, the camp artist must achieve simultaneously an embodiment of the target and a parody of it living in the object and turning it upside-down at once” (184).

Kimora Barbie

If the aim of Barbie is to promote beauty and femininity, the creation of the Kimora Barbie provides a perfect illustration for Abel’s point. In the premiere episode of her reality show, Life in the Fab Lane, Simmons’ informs the viewer about her collaboration with Mattel on producing a new Barbie doll, which will be called "Kimora Barbie." On the show, Simmons goes over the mock-up of the Barbie with Tina, her ‘vice president of branding,’ when her ex-
husband Russell Simmons joins the meeting. As Russell Simmons examines the drawing of the doll wearing a full-length faux fur coat, red mini skirt and halter, and little black dog—

Simmons exclaims, “the world is talking to me about this Barbie - I hope she represents a proper ethnic blend. She looks ethnic right? I picked fat face, fat lips, I picked a mixture of colored skin.” To which Russell Simmons asks, “why does she have to be so naked, and just so sexy? She’s a doll. For children. Why she gotta have the tightest little mini skirt, and garter belt?” (Season 1, Episode 1) Kimora Lee Simmons responds by explaining the clothes on the Barbie will actually be sold in department stores, to which Russell Simmons looks visibly relieved, exclaiming, “oh this is for adults!” Kimora Lee Simmons explains that the doll is still a Barbie, implicitly acknowledging that children will be playing with her very ‘sexy,’ nearly ‘naked’ doll.

Others have written about Barbie’s “overly sexualized body” and not very progressive gender politics (Nishime 2-3). However, the Kimora Barbie, an even more exaggerated version of hypersexualized Barbie, alternatively draws attention to the “exaggerated femininity of Barbie…[and] the artificiality of gender” (Nishime 3). Simmons explains further that Mattel has made professional Barbies before, notably doctor and lawyer Barbies, and that her Barbie would

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37 Though the Simmons are divorced, Kimora Lee Simmons explains she maintains a great relationship with Russell Simmons because they are co-parenting their children, and because they continue to work together in their jobs with Phat Fashions.
be a “single mother, entrepreneur, mogul Barbie!” In that same meeting Simmons had already stated she was excited about the collaboration because she could add a little fabulosity to what Barbie already stood for. No doubt single-motherhood is not in keeping with previous iterations of Barbie, and yet the Kimora Barbie offers a counter-hegemonic representation of gender and race that is in keeping with Simmons’ definition of fabulosity.

During the same episode of the show, Simmons visits the Mattel office with her daughters, Ming and Aoki, assistant, and Tina, to check the progress of Kimora Barbie. After noting her Barbie needs to be flashier - with more glitter and makeup - drawing attention again to the performative nature of femininity and gender, the Mattel representatives, identified in the episode as Sharon the principal designer for Mattel and Liz in Mattel marketing, tell her because the doll is tied so closely to Simmons’s image they want to drop the title Barbie and name the doll simply Kimora Lee Simmons. Simmons immediately rejects the suggestion, declaring to the Mattel staffers “we want it to be a Kimora Barbie. You’re trying to take that word away from me, and I will not have it, because I want children to know that there are other colors and textures, and she’s still considered Barbie. She doesn’t have to be the sidekick” (Season 1, Episode 1). The Mattel people are shown backing down, agreeing with Simmons on keeping the Barbie label on the doll.

Then more drama ensues when Sharon and Liz ask Simmons to choose between a full-length fur coat, and her dog Zoe, as accessories for her Barbie in order to get it within the “right cost structure” (Season 1, Episode 1). Nishime points out the racial undertones that underlie Simmons’s reply to Mattel, which questioned why none of the other (read: White) Barbies seemingly have had to choose between having multiple accessories. In the show the representatives do not respond to Simmons as the camera shots switch back and forth between
Sharon and Liz and Simmons, leaving the viewer to fill in the answer: that because the Kimora Barbie is non-White, she cannot have it all. Aoki, Simmons’s younger daughter, breaks the silence by announcing that the Barbie should have both the coat and the dog. To which Simmons’ voices her agreement, refusing to make a choice between the two accessories as the scene ends.

As the meeting ends on the show, the viewer has no idea whether Mattel will really make Simmons choose between accessories, leaving it up in the air until the third episode. While her refusal seems trivial and superficial, especially because it concerns accessories for a doll, it becomes a defining moment for the series. Encapsulated in this one scene is Simmons resistance to hegemonic ideals of beauty and gender, evidenced in the creation of this multiracial Barbie, and her statement that the Barbie needs to look more “drag queen,” because that is a closer representation to how she looks. Referencing drag queens and their explicitly exaggerated version of femininity, draws attention to Simmons’ own campy performance of identity, and the work she puts in herself to look the way she does. A point underscored in her book when she writes about being an “illusion.” (183) Simmons pulls back the curtain on the illusion, exposing

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 4.6**
**Prep for show filming**

the artificiality that passes for normal and explains that it takes “at least an hour and a half (sometimes three hours) of hair styling, makeup, and lighting. Not to mention the waxing, teeth-bleaching, colored contact-lens wearing, hair-straightening, [and] hair-extensions adding” to achieve her look (183). She even, via her verified twitter account (@OfficialKimora), sent out a
picture of herself getting her hair touched-up, seated in front of cameras and bright lights, as she filmed her reality show. She reconfigures identity as a theatrical performance, as camp, or as Sontag describes it “Being-As-Playing-A-Role”(4). Simmons continues to demystify the authenticity of identity by playing with racial narratives.

Autoexoticizing Kimora

Just as Simmons’ adaptation of a ghetto fabulous aesthetic does the work of locating her within Blackness, her attempts at autoexoticization (when marginalized people reproduce the same dominant discourses used against them) through the deployment of orientalist tropes place her within a very orientalist depiction of Asia. Kwon writes about Asian American youth in the import car scene who “borrow from dominant ideology of the ‘Orient’ by appropriating essentialist Asian symbols,” and in so doing “threaten hegemonic representations of them and forge new cultural identities.” (3) Starting with her aforementioned Baby Phat Asian-themed advertising campaign, Simmons’s combination of autoexoticization and “racial camp” are used to parody stereotypes of Asian women, but as Nishime notes ends up “disrupt[ing] the discourse of realness surrounding race itself.” (8) In the third episode of the first season of Life in the Fab Lane Simmons receives the Kimora Barbie finally, and the viewer sees Mattel ultimately let her keep both the floor-length fur and the dog as accessories. She declares her daughters, Ming and Aoki, then 7 and 4 years old, were the ultimate word on how authentic the doll is as both a

Figure 4.7
Aoki (l) and Ming (r) Simmons
Barbie and as a representation of their mother. We see in the next scene Ming and Aoki playing with other dolls while dressed up in matching, differently colored, modified *qipaos*, a traditional Chinese garment. Simmons has in interviews, in her reality show, and in her book, continually referenced her Japanese38 mother. One camp reading of this scene would be that Simmons is intentionally parodying the notion that all Asians are/look the same. A reading that seems all the more plausible when contextualized with statements from Simmons about growing up in a working class St. Louis neighborhood, where she was frustrated because there was “no Asian anything.” (Eaton) Even the naming of her children, Ming (Chinese surname), Aoki (Japanese surname), and baby son Kenzo (depending on kanji lettering used typically connotes three/third), would seemingly be to lend Simmons some sort of Asian authenticity. As she writes in her book about being made fun of, partly due to her name, and always being regarded as some sort of inauthentically raced person, her naming practices cannot be chalked up to random baby naming. When coupled with Simmons’s emphasis on her role as a mother, the naming of her children is an act of resistance against being declared not Asian enough. For those fans, viewers, readers, consumers familiar with her particular racial mixture, the naming of her children is a large part of her camp persona, particularly that ‘wink’ shared between Simmons and those who acknowledge her multiraciality.

The names of Simmons’s children are the not the only ways she references being Asian. In interviews given in the last year, she has mentioned how she is one of the few celebrities who maintains their own twitter account, and that she replies to as many followers as possible because it allows her to get closer to her fans. As such, following her twitter stream allows me to assign her more agency regarding the control over her image, than I have been able to with other forms

38 At least one reporter, Eaton, questions whether her mother is actually Japanese rather than an ethnic Korean who fled Kyoto during World War II.
of media and it is particularly illuminating. Her current avatar on twitter is a picture of her sitting next to Buddha’s face. She sent out the following tweet to alert her fans to the change (sic):

![Simmons’s tweet about changing her avatar](Figure 4.8)

While it is impossible to see all the tweets sent to Simmons, the majority of the messages she replied to were positive. One tweet, regarding her light complexion, however stands out as one of the few negative messages Simmons replied to:

![Simmons’s current twitter avatar](Figure 4.9)

By replying to this tweet that she is “pale at times!” thanks to her genes, her explanation shows up in the twitter feeds of her 86,300 followers.\(^{39}\) While Simmons’ twitter is mostly posts wishing her followers to be fabulous, or random bits of advice/encouragement, there are also consecutive tweets about Black history month and Chinese New Year and they appear in the timelines of her followers are reminders that she is indeed both Black and Asian. Her tweet

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\(^{39}\) The number of twitter accounts following @OfficialKimora as of December 14, 2011.
wishing everyone a happy Chinese new year resulted in tweets back wishing both her and her mother the same. Without giving her undue credit, the fact that she has used her antique stone Buddha as a prop in “order to respond to her audience” to remind them of just how Asian she is, is partly why she is an effective camp subject (Sontag 6). At her disposal are oriental objects (Said) that can be utilized to prop up (pun intended) her performance as a multiracial, media mogul, entrepreneur mother. The new Buddha avatar appears to have been successful, as evidenced by this tweet she received and replied to over a month after tweeting about the avatar change:

In addition to replying to followers who tweet her, Simmons also retweets (posting someone else’s tweet to her account so that it goes out to her followers/shows up in her timeline) messages, and she adds her reply to the original message. Her timeline during the avatar change had numerous messages regarding her appearance, to which she would reply with her thanks. The one message she retweeted however, is the message that explicitly mentioned her being Asian. She agrees with the follower that she is a ‘Divine fine Asian’, which for most people could be construed as the reification of gendered, racist notions of Asian women. And yet, for those in the know, this becomes an autoexoticizing moment when she both embodies and
parodies hegemonic representations of Asians in order to contest it. In forcing her followers, fans, writers, critics, and detractors to acknowledge that she too is Asian, she again challenges, as she did with Blackness, the realness of race.

Re-fashioning Race

When Kimora Lee Simmons was president and creative director of two fashion companies, Phat Farm and Baby Phat, she was a somewhat important\textsuperscript{40} player in the fashion industry. While neither company had the cachet of the more established, couture fashion houses like Chanel, Versace, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, etc.… the brands did have name recognition and a substantial consumer base. That both companies made affordable clothes, targeted towards urban consumers, yet were offered space in Bryant Park (where the elite fashions shows take place) and could afford to put on shows during fashion week biannually, provided Simmons another platform from which she could resist, and potentially subvert, the hegemonic Whiteness favored by the fashion industry. Her reality show offers a glimpse into the work put in by her staff in order to put on a show during fashion week in New York City, and there are some moments that can be read as counter-hegemonic. As Simmons is meeting with her staff and being updated on the progress of the show, she takes a moment to tell her marketing director James that the models for the show should be “hot, sexy, multiethnic” (Season 2, Episode 2). When she appears later in the episode to approve of the model selections for the show, she rejects a few of the choices and then frustratingly exclaims “she’s not even Asian!” to which her friend and fashion show consultant, J. Alexander\textsuperscript{41} asks “how many Asians

\textsuperscript{40} Important enough to be covered by trade magazines, and appear in major fashion magazines.

\textsuperscript{41} J. Alexander is also a judge on Tyra Banks America’s Next Top Model, and a runway coach. He is a familiar face for some reality television viewers, and is a campy personality himself – as
do you want in your show?” her reply, “as many as you can find.” The Baby Phat/Phat Farm fall fashion show featured in the episode ultimately featured mainly models of color, which made it an anomaly amongst the other runway shows during fashion week.

Trade magazine *Women’s Wear Daily* tallied the numbers of Black models for the fashion season before (Fall 2007) this episode was filmed, and found that at least a third of the shows featured no models of color (Feitelberg). A number of designers had two or less, but only a handful of designers featured a substantial number of models of color. The season, during which this episode was filmed offered more than 2278 modeling opportunities, yet women of color were only used to fill 298 spots. Of those 298 models, Asian models were the most popular (124), then Black models (112), then Latinas (62) (Sauers). Though the tally of models of color is a little problematic, in that it assigned the numerous mixed-race models to whichever category they fit into most phenotypically, and Latinas were classified as such if they appeared to be “visibly non-white Hispanic” (Sauers), it does not take away from the incredibly small percentage of models of color working the most elite fashion shows.

That the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) had sent letters to designers showing their collections in Bryant Park encouraging them to reflect the multicultural world around them, and still 88% of the models used were White, reveals how strong racist ideologies persist within the industry and its workers. Once contextualized against this particularly oppressive industry practice, the featured Baby Phat/Phat Farm show in *Life in the Fab Lane* becomes one of the few places challenging the hegemonic Whiteness of fashion week and fashion shows. Since camp operates through the materiality of the body, Simmons’ directive for he often dresses in drag when he shows up on *ANTM*. People on both shows, and he himself, refer to him informally as Ms. Jay, which he started to differentiate himself from *ANTM* cast member Jay Manuel.  

42 In 2009 the number of models of color rose to 18% overall during the same fashion week.
multiethnic models, and her subsequent casting of those models, forces attention on bodies – hers included – the dominant culture has marginalized.

The current (fourth) season of *Life in the Fab Lane* finds Simmons again forcing attention onto bodies with the release of her latest product, Shinto Clinical and a model search to promote the line. Naming the skincare line Shinto Clinical does the same Orientalizing, autoexoticizing work that naming her children Ming, Aoki, and Kenzo, or using a Buddha in her avatar on Twitter does. Even if one is unfamiliar with what Shintoism is exactly, the name is vaguely Asian enough to work as yet another marker of Asianness for Simmons. While the name of the products is evocative of a spiritual and exotic Asianness, the purpose of the skincare line, according to Simmons, is to appeal to the “multiethnic woman like [herself]” (Season 4, Episode 5). In the quest to appeal to those multiethnic women, Simmons states, “I need to make sure we have enough beautiful multiethnic women to choose from… because this is a multicultural skin care line I think the models should show that – a spectrum from light to dark.” (Season 4, Episode 5) She goes on to explain and reaffirm later in the same episode that Shinto Clinical is “specifically formulated for women who are of multicultural descent like me. It’s all encompassing, it’s colorless, universal.” (Season 4, Episode 5) Though Simmons asserts mixed-race people like her are “colorless”, in describing whom she represents specifically she claims, “I represent a woman of color which in my definition is this gold woman.” (Season 4, Episode 5) Contradictorily the multicultural woman is both colorless, but a woman of color, and most importantly, if she is like Simmons, golden. One interpretation of the emphasis on gold could be meant to stand in for gilded, implying in order to be like her women must be wealthy. Or, perhaps more in keeping with her view of ghetto fabulousness and fabulosity, gold is meant to stand in for shiny, thus recalling her statement to the Mattel executives that there is no such thing
as too much makeup or glitter. Another interpretation however of the gold woman could imply a particular complexion (think: beige), which occurs for mixed-race people who acknowledge the presence of Blackness in their particular racial mixture. This last interpretation fortifies my claim that asserting a Blasian identity for these stars is not a way to avoid Blackness, in fact, as Simmons declaration highlights, Blackness is crucial to understanding what a Blasian is.

In the model search episode, she informs her employees she wants real women instead of models in order to appeal to her multicultural target audience. When asked what sort of women should her team look she reasserts her desire for multiracial women, “we need an array of different types of beauties, different skin tone, multiethnic.” (Season 4, Episode 5) In order to launch her model search she and her advertising manager meet with two executives from the website celebuzz.com, whose parent company is BUZZMEDIA.43 BUZZMEDIA is responsible for synergistically posting “sponsored” editorial content on its sites, meaning readers are unaware that the gossip, fashion, celebrity, or music site they are visiting is being used to market particular products (which includes celebrities) to them. The executives inform Simmons that her Shinto Clinical products will become a sponsored editorial post, though it will be marketed to their readers via the model search. To drive that point home, the women from celebuzz tell Simmons that using their site to launch the search is an “opportunity to mass market, and reach a lot of women very quickly.” (Season 4, Episode 5) The rest of the episode is spent publicizing the search, and holding castings in order to find the new spokesmodels for the Shinto Clinical

43 BUZZMEDIA bills itself as the “web’s fastest growing entertainment publisher… [with] influential and authentic social media properties [which] afford brand advertisers unique access to impassioned and engaged audiences through a blend of professional editorial, expert opinion, user contributions and customized marketing solutions.” (Buzzmedia) Interestingly some of the other websites included as part of company include popular blogs: for fashion - GoFugYourself, TheFrisky, TheSuperficial; music and video - Idolator, Stereogum, ConcreteLoop, Videogum; and gossip - SocialiteLife, JustJared, Ok! magazine, WWTDD (what would Tyler Durden do). Additionally, the company also hosts “official” sites for celebrities like Kim, Kourtney, and Khloe Kardashian; and Kimora Lee Simmons.
line. By the end of the episode, Simmons and her team have found the “real" women for the Shinto Clinical campaign and Simmons ends the episode with the declaration that she feels “really great about this campaign… we are showing the world diverse beauty, multi-culti, gold.” (Season 4, Episode 5) The women selected do represent diverse beauty, exhibiting a spectrum of complexions, including ethnically ambiguous/possibly multiracial gold women. Should these remain the women used in the campaign when the line is revealed in the spring of 2012, then Simmons would have reached her goal of appealing to a diverse, and multiethnic audience.

Simmons’s use of ghetto fabulousness and orientalist tropes through the process of autoexoticization, results in a version of camp that suggests a complex racial consciousness. Her camp persona works to very publically challenge the idea of a color-blind, post-racial United States through playing up and exaggerating racial identities. Additionally, Simmons’s beige, or gold as she calls it, body, troubles the exclusivity and authenticity of dominant understandings of both Blackness and Asianness. This chapter uses her participation, as shown especially in her reality television show and her twitter stream, to provide a very specific sense of Blasian

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44 Though the show refers to them as real women who are not models, the scene wherein these women are cast for the campaign shows them arriving with professionally photographed headshots. It is possible that while they are models, that “real” is meant to refer to women who do not fit within dominant (thin, and/or White) representations of models.
identity. Her embodied performance of Blasianness is a hopeful position as she refuses to settle for what is already visible. Simmons is contesting dominant raced, gendered, and classed ideas about what it means to be both Black and Asian, subsequently destabilizing hegemonic notions of those aforementioned identity markers, but importantly, of mixed-race as well.
Chapter 5

Moving the Line of Scrimmage: Hines Ward, Football, and Shifting Discourses of Race, Nation, and Masculinity

“...It reinforces the central assumption we have about him: that he’s a good guy. Even as his fame has grown, there has been little to sully the impression. He seems to be stronger than the modern American celebrity machine. And for a man who has been the defender of biracial children in South Korea, a four-time Pro Bowl selection, a two-time Super Bowl champion, the Super Bowl XL MVP, a likely Hall of Fame inductee, a presidential advisor, an honorary ambassador, and a Dancing With the Stars champion, Hines Ward’s greatest accomplishment may be that, somehow, he seems to still just be Hines Ward.” (Yi)

On July 9, 2011, news broke about Blasian football star Hines Ward’s arrest for driving under the influence of alcohol in suburban Atlanta. Many of his fans and supporters took to social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, to vocalize their disappointment in him and his actions. His manager and lawyer responded to the fallout with a statement that said Ward was both “not impaired by alcohol” as the arrest alleged, and deeply apologetic for the “distraction” caused by his arrest (Morris). Incredibly, and in contrast to the fallout from Tiger Woods’s scandal (discussed in detail in the next chapter), Ward has come out of the incident with reputation intact, endorsements preserved, and a seemingly loyal fan base still behind him.

While Ward does not have the same star status Tiger Woods enjoys, Ward did just weeks before his arrest win the mirror ball trophy given out on ABC’s hit show, Dancing with the Stars, to the best star dancer and their professional dance partner. His brand name is now known outside of football, where he has also become a recognizable celebrity, not merely a decorated athlete.
(Sciullo). In addition to varying levels of celebrity, I would argue that the differences between Ward and Woods lie in the discourses that frame each man, and the discrete purposes of those narratives. Ward’s Blasianness, arguably much more so than Woods’s, is cemented firmly in particular transnational discourses.

This chapter offers an exploration of those narratives, especially as they relate to nationalism, masculinity, and race. It is focused on Blasian athletes, and uses Hines Ward as a case study to discuss the way masculinity and nationalism intersect with sport’s commodification of athletes. That the discourses of sport, race, masculinity, and nation are contradictory, inconsistent, and multiple allows this chapter to interrogate how Ward’s reception into popular culture, as indicated in the introduction of this dissertation, emphasizes how different narratives about Blasians are contradictory articulations. I hope to conclude with an explanation of why Ward’s Blasian representations have cushioned and protected the Blasian brand in ways that Tiger Woods’ Blasianness, as explained in the next chapter, could not.

The role of “celebrity” in sports ensures that athletes are some of the most highly visible, well-paid figures. The realm of sport is also where narratives of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability are unambiguously linked to a culture of consumption (Hoberman, Lapchick, Carrington, Boyd, Marquesee, Jackson, hooks, Majors, Messner, Ono). In his essay on the path sport has taken from ritual to mass consumption, John Alt makes the claim that corporations have made sport a replacement for communities, and the spectacle of sport provides both a diversion from reality and a way to meet the “emotional needs of the masses” (99). As Todd Boyd notes in his introduction, when athletes win, victory is shared with people who have nothing to do with the sport, but the win becomes a source of cultural identity. Alt and Halberstam both suggest that modern sport, and the spectacle sport has become, came about as
reactions to cultural shifts impacting gender and class, especially the crisis of masculinity men were facing due to new divisions of labor. Furthermore, because class-consciousness was being shaped by corporate rationalizations, and winning and moneymaking were the new ultimate goals, athletes were now subjected to new means of discipline in order to regulate their labor and extract maximum spectacle. Sewart discusses the implementation of new rules, spectacle, and theatricality, all designed to bring in audiences, often to the detriment of the players’ health and wellbeing. He also mentions that, as both amateur sports and athletes rely more and more on private corporations and endorsements for support, these businesses compel bodies that govern sports to attract more advertising revenue and commercial media. While Alt, Halberstam, and Sewart all discuss the specialization of athletic talent, and the pressure on athletes to perform, left unsaid is how the socioeconomic relationships emphasize capitalist values – namely racism, but also sexism, ageism, masculinity, and dominance (especially physically).

Cultivating capitalist values has resulted in very specific discourses of sport, class, and the athletes who participate in sports. For instance, in studying the career of Tonya Harding, Foote observes that Harding’s behavior, as well as the media coverage of her actively resists middle-class markers of behavior, especially when compared to her assault victim, Nancy Kerrigan. This overlooking of class, then, made it difficult for journalists to see her as anything other than fundamentally working-class. Which was then used to explain her behavior and subsequent fall from grace.

Whereas Foote does not explicitly mention race in her discussion of Harding, Samantha King unequivocally centers race and its intersection with homosexuality and middle-class values in her analysis of Sheryl Swoopes and her coming out moment. Analyzing Swoopes media coverage against the backlash that greeted Martina Navratilova twenty-five years earlier, King
found Swoopes gained endorsements and did not lose the ones she already had, as opposed to Navratilova who lost all of her endorsements. Coupling the introduction of lesbian identities in the marketplace with Swoopes’ image as a nurturing (she had a son from a previous marriage), feminine (especially when compared to Navratilova’s more masculine appearance), and successful basketball player, made her a more consumable commodity for mainstream audiences. The power of the narratives of masculinity become apparent, for example, when applied to the aforementioned women athletes like Harding and Swoopes, who are by those narratives masculinized by sports (unless special effort is made to soften them), rather than doing the reverse which would mean feminizing sport itself with their presence.

Masculinity is made all the more salient in sport when it becomes intimately coupled with nationalism, often drawing on the same narratives. Nagle points out the parallels between the discourses of nationalism and masculinity, where terms like “honour, patriotism, cowardice, bravery and duty are hard to distinguish as either nationalistic or masculinist, since they seem so thoroughly tied both to the nation and to manliness” (251-252). There are some scholars (Allison; Maguire) who think international sport and the globalization of sport has successfully worn down the importance of national identity. I would argue that globalization operates unevenly and has bypassed a wide range of people and places, such that national identity is still very important in many places. The fact that American/Aussie rules football, indigenous sports, Gaelic games, etc… still exist, are popular and play a central role in the definition and cultural practices of those various national cultures, demonstrates how nationalism has seemingly resisted the “encroachment of globalisation’s homogenizing tendencies and that sport and globalization have become accomplices in the process whereby the importance of national identity has been ensured” (Bairner 176). Additionally, the fact that the Olympic Games, World Cup(s) for a
multitude of sports, and other international sporting events seem to be fertile grounds for intensification of nationalisms and nation-states, indicates that the relationship between nationalisms and sport seems to be growing rather than shrinking. Jarvie builds on Bairner’s argument by pointing out how the “symbolism of sport has helped to promote national identity and sentiment at major sporting events… the idea that sport and sporting achievements contribute to a nation’s greatness, national identity, and at times help to transcend internal strife and social deference” demonstrate how sport is still very much a nationalist cause (539-540). Jarvie helpfully categorizes the discussions on the relationship between sport and nations as relying on at least one of the following arguments (540-541):

1. sport acts as a form of cultural nationalism;
2. sport acts as a substitute for political nationalism;
3. sport can contribute to both ethnic and civic forms of nationality, many of which may be mythical, invented, and/or selected;
4. sport helps with the process of national reconciliation;
5. sport provides a safety valve or outlet of emotional energy for frustrated peoples or nations;
6. sport helps to build national identity and patriotism;
7. nations denied national sports representation have at times vested great national sentiment in specific clubs or sports
8. nationalist support for sport has been a natural reaction against the pressures arising out of the development of global or international sport;
9. sport contributes to the building of national consciousness; and
10. sport has contributed to the politics of cultural imperialism and colonialism.

Furthermore, it is national sporting celebrity(ies) who embody the notion of what a certain nation is, was, should or can be. Those celebrities demonstrate the fluidity of the relationship between nation and sport, helping contextualize the relationship politically, socially and culturally.

With the flow of goods, technology, information, capital, and people, comes the formation of supranational corporations and organizations that benefit from globalization – both economically and culturally. The increase in globalization and the reaches of globalization would ostensibly signal the demise of the nation-state, and yet in sport we find the simultaneous
reinforcement of national identities, and undermining of nations. Hargreaves agrees, and points out “global expansion is supposed to generate supra-national, more cosmopolitan loyalties and identities as part of the emergence of a global culture. But this idea fails to recognize that the entrenchment of national identities, and nationalist sentiment places strong limits on the development of global identity and global culture” (31). Thus sport exists as a contested space where nationalism is both simultaneously encouraged and discouraged.

There are numerous forms of identification for people, but national identification is one of the “most intense and demanding” (Allison 346). Additionally, linking national identity to sport means recognizing sport(s) as a “potential signifier of oppression and liberation” (Jarvie & Reid, 214). Sport becomes a signifier for oppression because it recreates the relations of dominance and subordination found in society. For example, women are naturalized as masculine if they participate in sports, Blacks are essentialized as physically superior and mentally inferior (discussed in detail below), and Asians are rarely discussed, gay men are relegated to feminized sports like ice-skating, and Latinos are consigned to baseball and boxing (Birrell; Anderson & McCormack). So sport, as mentioned already, is a sexist, racist, classist, homophobic institution. Furthermore, sport behaves as though it is a meritocracy, where those who practice, sharpen their skills, and work hard, end up being winners, and those who lose must not have had the ability or work ethic to win. This of course obscures the way power is structured via ascription and privilege. Watching and/or participating in sports is not an innocent social activity, especially when considering the political economy of sport and its players.

The economic conditions that require the exploitation of most players of color in order for sport to thrive are the same exact factors that require the importation of players from overseas, hence from outside the United States. The corporatizing of sport and its attendant
theatrical, highlight reel style of play, has resulted in the scouting of athletes from outside traditional borders, and has facilitated the emergence of activities that “require cross-border travel and contact on a sustained basis” (Wong & Trumper, 169). Meaning the corporatization of sport has resulted in a two-way flow of talent into and out of the United States, but also in the transformation of sports abroad in becoming more similar to the spectacle of sport seen domestically so as to increase the bottom line of sponsoring corporations.

The transnational movements of athletes like Hideo Nomo, Pedro Alvarez, David Beckham, Yao Ming, Allen Iverson, many of the players in the National Hockey League, et al., makes them what Chiba, Ebihara, and Morino refer to as “borderless athletes” (203). Despite the growing borderlessness of athletes, the presence of the Olympics – along with the popularity of FIFA’s world cup competition, and other global competitions and title matches, means the globalization of sport has been happening for quite some time. Yet, it is the increasing popularity of sports that have long been bound within certain geographical areas (cricket, baseball, basketball, American football) where processes of globalization are becoming more and more apparent – as uneven as that process is. Globalization is influencing national consciousness and in the process bringing about new cultural, national, economical, and political conditions. Which is crucial to note because it explains why Hines Ward, who was important previously only within the confines of American football, could emerge as a key figure in both the redefining of Korean national identity, and the challenging of racialized representations of Black and Asian athletes in the United States.
Hines Ward talked about feeling like a racialized outsider in the ESPN Outside the Lines documentary about him (Hines Ward), noting he did not fit in with any group because he was both Black and Korean, until he started playing and excelling at football. It is crucial and necessary to contextualize the representation of Ward within institutionalized sport, because sport is a realm of cultural significance, and it serves as a text that has become central to American identity. Televised, computerized, newspapered, and magazined sports function as a spectacle where social inequality can be imagined and understood through a competitive framework. The many inequalities of contemporary society are laid bare in the world of entertainment, particularly in the area of sports. Mary Jo Kane writes “sport has become such a bedrock of our national psyche that sport figures often come to symbolize larger pressing social

45 George Sage’s Power and Ideology in American Sport, offers a useful and necessary explanation on why using critical theory to examine the influence of sports reveals its significance: “In the realm of sport, as in many others, dominant groups use political, economic, and cultural resources to define societal norms and values to sustain their influence. Their interests are legitimized by compatible ideologies disseminated by schools, mass media, and various agencies of social control, and the processes they use to suppress alternative versions.” (3)
concerns” (97). This is understandable, since sport has played a crucial role in naturalizing gender roles and racial hierarchies in the United States (Rees & Miracle, Carrington, Jarvie & Reid, Boyd, S. King, Ferber, Foote, Trujillo, Jackson). As Ben Carrington importantly notes, “sports contests are more than just significant events, in and of themselves important, they [also] act as a key signifier for wider questions about identity within racially demarcated societies in which racial narratives about the self and society are read both into and from sporting contests that are imbued with racial meanings” (280). In this realm of sport, as it is in so many other areas of popular culture, hegemonic ideas and values are created, maintained, and sometimes subverted, by groups using resources – economic, cultural, and political – to legitimate their ideologies.

After Ward’s homecoming trip to Korea following his first Super Bowl appearance, those questions from his youth about where to place him racially reappear once again, but with the addition of global race narratives. Ward’s philanthropic efforts in Korea, coupled with continued focus on his immigrant Korean mother, explicitly address the transnational nature of Blasians, and shifts the way U.S. audiences read him. Ward and his mother’s homecoming trip brought out narratives of U.S. military intervention in Asia, reactions to that presence, and emergent globalized, national identities.

In addition, Ward has been used to recuperate Asian masculinity, both in the face of American military occupation of Asian nations, which could itself be read as emasculating Asians, and through the continued emasculation of Asian American men in popular culture. Though he, himself, has been framed as both a threat and model minority, he is also used to challenge the constant framing of Asian Americans as either model minorities or threats. The discussion around Ward centered on nationalism, the work his Super Bowl win did for Blasians
in the U.S. and South Korea, and the representation of Blasian male athletes in popular culture. Curiously, narratives about Ward begin with his being the hypermasculine, athletically superior Black man (Jackson) and progress (regress?) into yellow peril territory as he transforms into the Asian who is suspiciously sneaky and a cheater (Mayeda). Analysis of Hines Ward and the foregrounding of his Blasian identity provides an illustrative look at how exactly those racial narratives about self and society operate in sport.

Bourdieu points out that participation in sports is limited by one’s access to various forms of capital – be it economic, cultural, social, symbolic, or political. The historical development of sport in the United States allowed men of color entry initially as long as White men won, in order to maintain the racial order (Carrington; Jarvie). Even though Jim Crow laws were instituted in the mid 1870s, Black athletes participated in sports alongside Whites. A few years later however the more popular sports became segregated, Blacks were pushed out of baseball, and White boxers refused to fight Black boxers (Bederman). When sport and its athletes began to subvert the racial order in America during the late 1800s, formal segregation was instituted. It was not until 1908 when Tommy Burns agreed to fight Jack Johnson, and 1947, when Jackie Robinson played baseball in the Major Leagues instead of the Negro Leagues, that America’s most popular sports became reintegrated. The eventual and inevitable integration of sport resulted in the creation of new means of emphasizing racial order in order to maintain white supremacy. As such, key narratives about both Blacks and Asians have arisen in order to discursively maintain hegemonic notions of race, nation and sport.

In response to the segregation and integration of sports, sports and athleticism have been partly responsible for shifting the definitions of manhood and masculinity. For example, narratives of sport had previously framed Black men as excelling in sports due to brute strength
and/or natural athleticism, especially when pitted against White men (Billings & Eastman; Rada & Wulfemeyer; Wonsek; Viklund; Eastman & Billings; Dufur; Staples & Jones), it has only become recently in sport that narratives have expanded enough to also hail some Black athletes as also skilled. Bederman notes post-Civil War Black male athletes were framed as inferior to White men because they were too emotional; whereas, the more cerebral White man was the only one with the capacity for thinking. The ability to think, in addition to athletic skill and power meant Whites had more tools in their arsenal; whereas, Black men had only their strength to rely on. Tommy Burns’s defeat in 1908 at the hands of Jack Johnson showed just how much the world was not ready for a Black champion athlete, particularly in the sport of boxing – then a space for demonstrating White dominance. 46 That Jack Johnson was also arguably the first Black celebrity athlete, who spent his time outside of the ring socializing very publicly and flashily with White women, served to intensify what a blow his win was to both masculinity and Whiteness. The White public championed Jim Jeffries, then a retired world champion boxer, who would come out of retirement to beat Johnson. Jeffries was asked to return to the ring in order to beat the “uppity” Johnson and restore White masculinity and manhood. According to Bederman, Jeffries was labeled a savior “whose intrinsic Anglo-Saxon nature” would naturally lead to Johnson’s defeat, and return the title of most powerful man in the world to White men, where it belonged (2). When Johnson decisively beat Jeffries, the Great White Hope, it began to dismantle hegemonic ideologies of White male power. This sent Whites scrambling to have the fight film suppressed and Johnson jailed and eventually exiled from the country (Bederman). Though Johnson’s win challenged and started shifting the discourse around Black male

46 Bederman notes at the turn of the 20th century bodily strength (and size) was equated with public and political power/authority. That the sport of boxing purposely kept men of color out of championship bouts while they were concurrently denied power outside the realm sport highlights how well sport reflects cultural norms.
athleticism and skill, the idea of the thinking White athlete vs. intellectual inferior, but physically superior, Black athlete persists in contemporary discourses about race and athletes.

Of course there are still vestiges of these hegemonic notions of White male athleticism in current race and sport discourses. Using the National Football League (NFL) as an example, where the presence of Black quarterbacks has (until very recently) been rare, it was not until the mid-1990s that multiple Black male athletes were positioned as quarterbacks (Zengerle; Billings). Believing Black football players not intellectually capable enough to lead teams as quarterbacks, their emergence as quarterbacks is an important moment for Black athletes in all sports, but especially football. The first Black quarterback, Willie Thrower, threw eight passes in the NFL in 1953. It was not until 1968 that another Black player, Marlin Briscoe, would start as quarterback. By 1993 only eight Black quarterbacks received significant playing time in the NFL, and in 2006 the number reached an all-time high of 11 Black quarterbacks (Berri and Simmons). Considering that 65% of the NFL is Black, and there are 32 teams – those 11 quarterbacks suggest how much more progress needs to be made in the NFL.

Berri and Simmons note that the small number of Black quarterbacks and the racial segregation of players are only two problems the NFL faces. Their study of salary discrepancies between Black and White quarterbacks shows the more skilled and successful a Black quarterback is, the larger the difference in salary between that quarterback and a comparable White quarterback. When Rush Limbaugh remarked in 2003 about how much he felt the media wanted a Black quarterback to perform well in the NFL, the backlash to that comment quickly forced him to resign from his co-hosting job with ESPN’s Sunday Countdown. The most revealing aspect of that incident came when Limbaugh defended his opinion, using as evidence the media outcry that ensued. Berri and Simmons’s study and Limbaugh’s comments all appear
to lend credence to implicit ideas held by the owners of these football teams, that despite gains made as quarterbacks, Black players are still thought of as quick physically but perhaps not mentally. This is made understandable when contextualized within a metanarrative of Black inferiority, stemming from the colonialist mind versus body dialectic (Robinson; Yancy; Wonsek; Viklund; Hoberman; Gilman; Helmreich).

Inferior intellectual capabilities are just one of the many narratives involving the Black male body, which has long been commodified in sports and offered up as entertainment for mass consumption (Jackson; Ferber; Collins; Leonard; Carrington; Majors; Hoberman). When Collins talks about how Black men have been reduced to “their bodies [with] their muscles and their penises as their most important sites” (57), she is effectively pointing out the narrative of Black males is one which defines them as hypersexual and physical (read: potentially violent). Sport has continued to evolve as a way for elites to recognize and discipline Black bodies, which become docile when they are being used to entertain. This has become a way to neutralize the threat Black men pose.

Whereas the success of Black athlete in sports, as discussed below, is potentially threatening to White male superiority and white social and cultural hegemony, the depictions of these athletes/celebrities reinforce hegemonic ideas of Blackness by centering on the “natural” ability of Blacks to excel at sports – thereby establishing biological racial difference as the reason for Black success. Juxtaposing the narratives regarding the innate ability of Black athletes against the accomplishments of White athletes highlights the explicit the relationship between race and sport. The narratives focusing on the “natural” ability of Blacks also does the work of erasing the labor contributions of these Black bodies, the amount of work they have put in toward becoming skilled athletes is made invisible because it challenges the discourse on the
difference between Black and White athletes. White athletes are characterized as having “fortitude, intelligence, moral character, strategic preparation, coachability, and good organization” (Ferber); whereas, Black athletes are reduced to biological characteristics that enable them to succeed. The discourse focusing on the natural ability of Blacks, when taken together with the fact that they are rarely in positions of power, as coaches or owners, are in keeping with White supremacist ideology. In fact, the coach – usually a White male, easily becomes a metaphor for the way White supremacist patriarchy works. The well-meaning father figure controlling his wild children, disciplining them so they become acceptable and are no longer a threat. Lastly, the narrative of the successful Black athlete is wielded like a double-edged sword. Providing, on the one hand, an example of how even Black men can be successful when using their (innate) talents; while simultaneously being used to vilify other Black men and boys who aspire to the same level of success as unrealistic.

Hines Ward, throughout his career, has routinely been identified as a ‘natural talent.’ From polls about top college football players, where Ward ranked highly, to sports section deconstructions of games, comments like “rushing and receiving came pretty naturally to him” (Martin), “blocking is natural [to him]” (Sugiura), and “the kid is just a natural athlete” (Reid), are par for the course. Currently Ward is in his 14th season playing in the NFL, seventh as offensive captain of the Pittsburgh Steelers, yet there is still very little mention of his work ethic or training regimen. Additionally, the use of natural as a descriptor of athletic skill and “media-generated images that sustain [the idea of natural talent], probably do more than anything else in our public life to encourage the idea that blacks and whites are biologically different in a meaningful way.” (Hoberman, xiv) Though Ward is not a quarterback, nor stacked in what is regarded as a thinking position, he, like Black athletes (especially quarterbacks), is perpetually
constructed through traditional media lenses that frame Black athletes as body, not mind. Sport, and essentialist narratives regarding the bodies of athletes, has been and continues to be accepting of embodied racial difference.

Inferiorizing Asian American Athletes

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus is helpful in explaining and understanding which sports are acceptable for participation by which athletes. It is not surprising that certain sports have been, and still are, largely associated with particular social classes, races, ethnicities, and nationalities, not to mention gender (Kaufman). Tiger Woods playing golf is a huge deal because he represents a break from the notion that golf is a game for wealthy, White men; while Michael Jordan playing basketball legitimizes the idea that Black men are good for fast paced sports that involve little thinking and even less economic capital. This also explains why the idea of Asian-American men participating in sports like football and basketball seems to cause widespread cognitive dissonance. That dissonance often results in jokes about Asian/Americans in sports, which Richard King observes, “not only reinforce dominant ideas about Asian (American) masculinity but also encourage[s] the perpetuation of Black-White understandings of male-centered sporting worlds” (342).

Like the aforementioned Black male athlete, Asian American male athletes, when they are researched (which is rare), are discursively constructed by media in ways that leave them firmly within established racialized hierarchies. A few of the narrative structures that frame the understanding of sport in the United States deemphasize the masculinity of Asian men as athletes, while emphasizing (sometimes simultaneously and contradictorily) their model minority status and/or their presence as a threat. Mayeda, in one of the few pieces of research on
professional Asian and Asian American athletes explains that the American media portrayal of the two Japanese pitchers he examines have “mirrored stereotypical images of Asian Americans and Asian nationals, thereby perpetuating a national culture that already unfairly categorizes Asian Americans and Asian nationals as model minorities and economic threats” (204). King touches on other rhetorical devices used in the maintenance of dominant ideologies when he notes “the absence of Asian American coaches (and players) embodies the long-standing feminization of all things ‘Asian,’ which, in turn, reserves desired athletic and leadership qualities for white coaches” (344), and Black players.

Hines Ward is consistently mentioned in stories and lists that count the number of Asian players in the National Football League, so it is not surprising that the depictions of Ward – like fellow athlete Tiger Woods – are framed by narratives of both Black and Asian athletes. Ward had already been, and continues to be, rhetorically framed in the usual ways Black male athletes are, as a naturally talented, physical player in a non-thinking position. He had already been a professional football player for years prior to being recognized as the MVP of the Super Bowl XL. The ensuing press coverage which discovered and highlighted his Blasian identity after the Super Bowl was enough that the “NFL has to have been watching all that happen. It’s a safe guess that pro football has Ward’s Asian descent on its radar screen” (Lapchick, Promise to Prominence). Not only is Ward characterized as Asian American, but as Asian. Hence, his Asian-ness specifically becomes a focus, and this is not a coincidence. Lapchick notes the NFL since the mid-2000s has been looking for a way to market itself in Asia, and Ward has been considered to do what Yao Ming did for the National Basketball Association. Again, it bears repeating, there has been a dearth of literature written on Asian and Asian American athletes in the U.S. Among the sparse literature that is available, “Asian athletes have been depicted as
anything but normal. They are mysterious competitors, cultural appropriators, cheaters, or simply athletically inept” (Mayeda, 209). Ono’s analysis of the rhetoric surrounding the interest of a Japanese syndicate in the purchase of the Seattle Mariners aligns with the narratives Mayeda highlights.

In keeping with rhetoric of yellow peril that is invoked when representing Asians and Asian Americans, Ward comes to be represented as sneaky, conniving, and dishonest. The cheater rhetoric used to describe Ward fits the yellow peril narrative, which seems to be operational again as East Asian countries continue to make gains on the U.S. Ono analyzes an earlier instance when fear of an Asian economic takeover colored the way sports media, and even then baseball commissioner Fay Vincent, talked about Asian athletes and U.S. sports. Ono takes them to task for their racist and nationalistic framing of the “un-American” purchase, linking their criticisms to a fear of what he calls “economic miscegenation”—the mixing of money as a metaphor for racial mixture. During the early 1990s Japan had cemented its position as a legitimate economic threat to the United States, which resulted in Japan being discursively constructed as the “newly masculinized Other, attempting to dominate, control, and take over feminized baseball, Seattle, and the U.S.” (100). The Japanese in this instance are both mysterious competitors, with shadowy reasons for wanting to purchase the Mariners, and cultural appropriators trying to taint the pristine nature of “America’s” sport. Mayeda’s summary of the ways U.S. media frame Asian and Asian Americans are evident in this particular episode. While the NFL’s attempts to expand into Asia would not appear to stir up the same xenophobic feelings as the Mariner purchase, there appears to be a theme in the comments on reports about the NFL’s push, largely complaining about taking “our” game to “those countries” (Smith).
From MVP to “Dirty Player”: The Media Transformation of Ward Post-Korea

After Ward’s trip to Korea there were some very public efforts to claim and promote him as Asian. Though he had appeared on lists of Asian Americans currently in the NFL from the early 2000s, there was not as much public acknowledgement of his Korean identity. Upon his return from his first trip to Korea, Ward was asked to comment on topics ranging from the passing of President Roh Moo-hyun (Bouchette) to the tsunami and earthquake that devastated Japan in 2011 (Hoppes). The website Disgrasian.com, (tagline: You’re a disgrace. To the race.) which covers Asian American pop culture and politics, has twice named Ward their “Amazian of the Week” for “speaking up for ethnic Koreans…[and] kicking arse every time he rocks the Pro Bowl” (Nguyen), and for being appointed to President Obama’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. He and his Helping Hands Foundation have been profiled in the New York Times for helping “half-Korean half something else” children gain acceptance in Korea (Branch D1). His appointment to the President’s advisory committee47 was in recognition

47 It is important to note that the initiative that reestablished the AAPI committee is the only race-based committee to come out of the White House during the Obama administration. “The mission of the
of the work Ward does on behalf of mixed-race Koreans. As the only celebrity appointed, Ward has emerged as “the public face” for the committee (Yi). The coverage of him, and the public reclamation of Ward in the United States as Asian had an impact on his football career, and his reception off the field.

Interestingly and not surprisingly, it was not until the season after Super Bowl XL and Ward’s visit to Korea when criticisms about the way he played started. Since then Ward has been continually dogged by cries, from players, fans and the sports media, that he is the “dirtiest” player in the NFL. Ward’s Blackness ensures that he is never described as physically inept, but his Asianness enables him to discursively be constructed as a cheater. Indeed, because of his physical prowess, when he “cheats” he does so in a physically overpowering manner, hence both racial stereotypes converge to construct him. To label Ward a dirty player means he blocks unsuspecting defenders, often and “crushingly,” which had been a legal move until an NFL rule change (Cooper). A Sports Illustrated poll given to nearly 300 NFL players, labeled Ward the dirtiest player in the league (Deitsch). He once hit Keith Rivers of the Cincinnati Bengals so hard Rivers’ jaw was broken. Though that play was deemed a clean play, after that hit the NFL changed its rules on crack-back blocks – blind-side blocks using the helmet, forearm, or shoulder to hit a player in the neck or head. Subsequently, the media dubbed the policy the “Hines Ward Rule” (Bires). The dirty player label continued to be applied to him while he was on Dancing With the Stars, hence beyond his football persona, suggesting the cheating dimension of his character became part of his larger image off the field. On DWS recaps or comments about his performance were also accompanied with statements like: “Ward has developed a reputation around the NFL for being a tough and, at time, dirty player in his 13 seasons” (Treutel) and

committee is to work with 23 agencies and departments across our government to improve the health, education, and economic status of AAPI communities.” (Obama)
“Around the NFL Hines Ward has a reputation for being a dirty player who dishes out cheap shots when nobody is looking and after he just went WWF pile driver on his Dancing the Start (sic) partner, Kym Johnson, I don’t think its gonna help his case” (Wooldridge).

There were also a few who pointed out his turn on the television show had gone a long way to repair his reputation as a dirty player (Carter). While Ward insists he is not a dirty player, he notes since the rule change he has seen numerous crack-back hits in other games but his are the only ones getting called (Bires). There are some fans and sports writers who feel he should take the title of the dirtiest player in the NFL as a compliment, considering the position he plays is rarely known for being tough or physical enough. Interestingly, in defending Ward against criticisms, Jim Rome on his show, Rome Is Burning, questions why “the allegedly dirtiest players in the NFL are always some of the best players?” He answers his own question, “it’s because they spend their Sundays knocking guys out, making enemies.” In the same segment Rome faux-innocently asks “what has Ward ever done to anybody? I mean besides break their jaw or concuss them.” He then differentiates between a dirty player and Ward by listing what dirty players do, “eye-gouging, stepping on [opponents] hands, taking coin shots in the pile (hitting someone in the crotch)”. Rome finishes the segment using words like “nasty,” “filthy,” and “violent” to explain why Ward should not be labeled a dirty player. He defends Ward’s method of playing by noting it is not his fault his opponents are neither ready, nor expecting to be hit by a wide receiver like Ward instead of a linebacker. He also encourages Ward to put his
dirtiest player award on the mantle next to his Super Bowl trophies, “because this one is one that you can be proud of.” Rome damns Ward with praise by using familiar destructive narratives of men of color to highlight Ward’s style of play. I use the phrase men of color because Asian men, like Black men, have also been framed via yellow peril discourses as being destructive and violent.

The converse of the controlling, conniving, masculine construction of Asians and Asian Americans in sport is the physically inferior Asian male. This particular construction of the Asian athlete is the cause of the cognitive dissonance within the American psyche because “it is this Asian stereotype, portraying the Asian and Asian American athlete as physically inept, that is most pervasive and accepted in American media” (Mayeda 208). Like the naturally skilled Black male athlete, this particular narrative of the Asian athlete is rooted in the biological. Taking this biologically oriented approach is especially problematic because it works together with other biological and cultural narratives. Asians and Asian Americans are “stereotyped as less athletic but hard working and more intelligent (hence, they are the model minority)” (Mayeda, 208). So while Asian athletes are portrayed as not being as physically capable as their Black and White counterparts, they are tracked into positions that require “thinking” (i.e. pitcher), or sports where size is not a requirement for success (Lapchick, Race and College Sport, 92). Mayeda, remarking on how the racialization of Asian athletes is indirectly also a comment on Black athletes, “if this positional racialization goes on without scrutiny, unproven and false images of both Asian and African Americans will be further essentialized in American minds” (214). Mayeda believes sports in the United States can be used to resist and subvert hegemonic norms, not to reinforce them, which is exactly what Hines Ward as a Blasian athlete does.
While Ferber claims success in the field of athletics does nothing to undermine the historical propensity to reduce men of color to their bodies, other scholars would disagree. The playing field is rarely level in sports, yet it is possible as Marquesee claims, “to challenge and overturn the dominant hierarchies of nation, race, and class” (5). While he reads the achievements of Black male athletes as a form of resistance – both collective and individual, I extend it here to include all men of color. My approach to scholarship about race in media requires me to address multiple racial identities, in this case black and Asian. Such a focus necessarily means taking both identities and representations of those identities into account, while simultaneously also accounting for Blasian identity, specifically, as informed by the other two, but yet different from them as well. Carrington agrees with Marquesee claiming, “sports provide an arena whereby Black men can lay claim to a masculine identity as a means of restoring a unified sense of racial identity, freed, if only momentarily, from the emasculating discourses imposed by the ideologies and practices of White racism” (291). It is precisely the hegemonic nature of sport that allows for contestation of the dominant ideologies and hierarchies. Messner argues that marginalized groups are able to “use sport as a means to resist (at least symbolically) the domination imposed upon them. Sport must thus be viewed as an institution through which domination is not only imposed, but also contested; an institution within which power is constantly at play” (13). As such, Hines Ward and his position as an “outcast in two worlds” (ESPN), is an illustration of how a Blasian athlete can contest hegemonic norms and expectations of race and nation, both on and off the football field. As an outcast, Ward is able to negotiate the multiplicities of his identities in order to exhibit Asian masculinity, or Black congeniality, or a transnational/global identity that is neither rooted neither in the United States or Korea, but somewhere in between.
The Reinforcement of Nationalism in the Face of Forces of Globalization

Hines Ward has become a Blasian athlete who is positioned in such a way that he supports nearly all the arguments Jarvie has proffered to explain the relationship between sport and nation-building. He has been made into a celebrity athlete who has become a barometer for the cultural shifts taking place not only in the United States, but in Korea, as well. He is located as a transnational figure, a Korean raised as an American, who goes back home after he has “made good” playing in an American sport. Though Jarvie was referencing the movement of global capital and the policies of international sport governing boards he assertion that “the relationship between sport and specific national territories cannot be fully understood without recognizing the part played by transnational organizations and international forces of development” (545) is applicable to Ward’s movements within and outside nations.

Despite not being familiar with U.S. football, Hines Ward mania gripped South Korea in 2006. There was an extraordinary amount of fanfare surrounding Ward during his Korean visit, with the press everywhere, visits with politicians and celebrities, countless interviews and photo opportunities, and endorsement meetings, all culminating in a ceremony granting him honorary Korean citizenship. One of the arguments linking sport and nationalism claims that sport can be a source for national reconciliation. The narrative of reconciliation comes through in the coverage of Ward’s visit to Korea. The Korean news media focused nearly every story on Ward’s identity as a multiracial Korean, an inverse of the U.S. coverage, and only in passing did they mention his MVP status and starting position on the Pittsburgh Steelers. Korean news stories reemphasized the nation’s inclusion of him: “Ward is Korean, Ward is one of us” (Choe, par. 9), surprising considering during the citizenship ceremony he said he was “angry for the longest time [because Koreans] didn’t accept me, they didn’t accept my mom” (ESPN
Ward then opens the reconciliation process by tearfully proclaiming, after being made an honorary citizen, “I used to be ashamed to say I was Korean, today I just want to thank you guys, because I apologize to you for being ashamed to say I was Korean.” (ESPN Sportscenter) Ward was often quoted as saying he was “ashamed to say I was Korean” because he had trouble fitting in as a child (Sherman). In the ESPN newsmagazine piece, he talks about the difficulties he had growing up largely friendless, poor, and raised by a single mother working multiple jobs, but claims those difficulties pale in comparison to the disadvantages he would have faced had they stayed in Korea. The piece notes biracial Koreans are “poorer and less well–educated”, “pariahs”, and “outcasts” in Korean society (Sportscenter). Ward recalls his mother telling him “people would call her names, spit on her…treat [mixed-race] people like dogs” (Sportscenter). The narrator mentions both Ward and his mother had feelings of trepidation upon their return trip to Korea, not knowing what to expect or how they would be treated. As he talks about his hero’s welcome in Korea, and his surprising acceptance by Koreans, he uses his Blasian status as the point of reconciliation claiming “if people can accept me for who I am being Korean (emphasis mine), rather than what I am as a biracial athlete, then I know there is hope for biracial kids here in Korea” (Sanfilippo).

Building on the narrative of reconciliation, Ward’s exemplary Blasian identity was responsible for constructing an alternative understanding of the role of the U.S. military. Nearly every news account mentioned the parents of Hines Ward were divorced almost as soon as they
got to the U.S. However, the Korean reports framed the divorce as Hines Ward Sr. abandoning Kim Young-hee (Ward’s mother) and leaving her to fend for herself in the United States with poor English speaking skills and no support system. This particular narrative determination worked because it accessed prior experiences of “mixed-race children born to U.S. servicemen and South Korean women who were often raised by single mothers after the American father returned home.” (Herskovitz). In portraying the relationship as an example of failed Black fatherhood, that relationship became a metaphor for the presence of the American military and its impotency in Korea. Ward’s celebrity becomes a powerful tool in the Korean recuperation of masculinity. Because Ward’s father and the armed forces are constructed as a threatening masculine presence in Korea, the United States was constructed as an evil presence in Asia. Against the malevolent presence of the United States, Korea gets to position itself as moral and benevolent country. The contrast in reception between Korea and the United States regarding Ward’s Super Bowl win allows Korea to come to the rescue of this poor, abandoned biracial person, bestowing on him the praise he deserved but barely received in America. The celebration of Ward as Korean represented “the symbolic ‘rescue’ of national policy” (Briggs), and is in keeping with Jarvie’s assertion that sport can act as a substitute for political nationalism. In order for this narrative to be successful, Ward had to be both Black (American) and Korean. Only Ward’s Blasian identity would allow Korea to rhetorically and “systematically erase all but the most innocuous traces of the child’s origins” (Briggs). This particular strategy could raise the questions about “whether or not a multiethnic person can have two allegiances or whether she chooses one and, in so doing, betrays the other(s)” (Houston). However, for this rhetorical strategy to work Ward had to embrace both of his allegiances by
asserting his Blasianness, so that politically and symbolically Korea could dominate America through its acceptance of mixed-race Ward.

Conclusion: Redefining Nationalism

Muhammad Ali was stripped of his boxing title when he refused to fight in the Viet Nam war, kicking off opposition to the war and the U.S. government (Wallace). Just a year after Ali’s conviction for draft evasion, Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists while on the medal stand during the 1968 Olympics, their gesture became “one of the most recognized demonstrations of protest and resistance in the history of the United States athletics, and it was the perfect symbol of a generation.” (Rhoden) According to Jarvie, sport can help build (or undermine) national identity, consciousness, and patriotism. Ward’s popularity during his visit to Korea resulted in one man saying, in an article for The International Herald Tribune, that while he is proud of Hines Ward, as a biracial Korean himself, “I see the two faces of Korean society. Since when have they shown so much interest in half-Koreans?” (Choe) While that article was referencing the manic-levels of press and adulation Ward had been receiving during his trip, the man’s quote can be extended to include the new policies Korea began to enact in recognition of Ward’s Blasian identity. During the months leading up to the visit by Ward and his mother, the focus on the plight of bi and multiracial Koreans prompted the government to begin “a long-term project to redefine the meaning of being Korean and the meaning of the nation as well as educating people on cultural relativism.” (Park) A redefinition of Korean citizenship was necessary, obviously because the previous definitions were created during periods of Chinese and Japanese imperialism as a form of resistance to both of those countries. The discrimination faced by mixed-raced Amer/Euro/Afro-Asians stemmed from “lingering
memories of past oppression by foreign powers and the continual presence of US troops on [Korean] soil” (Lee). As Korea becomes more globalized, the successes of Blasian celebrities like Ward are emphasized “not [for] merely leading us in becoming more globalized, but also towards becoming more patriotic, as they are proud of their roots” (Dunn). Ward’s successes and subsequent lionization in Korea has allowed Korean-born Blasians like Jamie Boyd and Suan Yoo (both included in a profile on Ward for KoreAm magazine), to proclaim a Korean identity. When asked what they are, Boyd replied, “I’m Korean.’ Now it’s so natural for me, but before I didn’t really want to talk about it. It kind of made me grow seeing how [Hines] handles stuff, and just seeing him, it just changed everything.” (Yi) Through their acceptance of, and attention to him, Ward challenges a Korean nationalism that excludes bi/multiracial Koreans.

The discourse around Hines Ward, his skill as a football player, the absence of his father, and the subsequent rescue of a “father-less” Ward by Korea, together all create a specific Korean national identity that centers on Ward as the key player. Ward and this new Korean identity become a symbol for the influences and flows of globalization and sport. With the implementation of new policies regarding mixed-race Koreans and the conferral of honorary citizenship to Hines Ward and actual citizenship to thousands of bi and multi-racial Koreans, the national narrative has been forcibly changed because a Blasian athlete became MVP of a Super Bowl in the U.S.
Chapter 6

“Because I’m Blasian”: Tiger Woods, Scandal, and Protecting the Brand

The purpose of this statement is to explain my heritage for the benefit of members of the media who may be seeing me play for the first time. It is the final and only comment I will make regarding the issue. My parents have taught me to always be proud of my ethnic background. Please rest assured that is, and always will be, the case – past, present, and future. The media has portrayed me as African-American, sometimes, Asian. In fact, I am both. Yes, I am the product of two great cultures, one African-American and the other Asian. On my father’s side, I am African-American. On my mother’s side, I am Thai. Truthfully, I feel very fortunate, and equally proud, to be both African-American and Asian (emphasis mine). The critical and fundamental point is that ethnic background and/or composition should not make a difference. It does not make a difference to me. The bottom line is that I am an American… and proud of it. That is who I am and what I am. Now, with your cooperation, I hope I can just be a golfer and a human being.

Before playing in the 1995 U.S. Open in Southampton, NY, Tiger Woods shared this statement with members of the sports media who were assembled there. The sentence most ignored in that statement is Woods's declaration that he is Blasian - not just Black or Asian - but in fact both, equally (Callahan; Kern). In the decade and a half since he delivered that statement, Tiger Woods's racial identity has come full-circle, and he is again reasserting that he is both Black and Asian. The research on Tiger Woods provides a timeline of his racial trajectory from his emergence as a golf phenom to professional golfer to the first athlete to be worth more than a billion dollars to established celebrity status. This chapter continues the timeline by examining the post-scandal moment, starting with his car crash on November 27, 2009, and charts its impact on Woods racial trajectory, which sends us back to the point where Woods himself starts in that statement delivered in 1995. The swiftness with which various media stripped him of any claim to Whiteness is particularly illuminating. Woods offers an interesting analysis of the way
Blasians are discussed in media and popular culture because much has been written about him pre-scandal which makes it possible to follow the shifting logics of race that have been and continue to be mapped onto his body. The multiple ways in which Blackness and Asianness were used to make sense of Woods simultaneously reifies and resists racial construction, while also invoking the United States’ history of racialized sexual violence. Woods’ self-identification as Blasian, revealed as the scandal was unfolding, brought Blasians under scrutiny, which resulted in moves to protect Woods’ personal brand, which also worked to protect the Blasian brand.

Earl Woods made the claim at a dinner in 1996, held to honor his son, that Tiger was “going to be able to help so many people. He will transcend this game and bring to the world a humanitarianism which has never been known before. The world will be a better place to live in by virtue of his existence and his presence” (Smith, “The Chosen One”). While the senior Woods's claim was full of puffery, the magnitude of Tiger Woods's presence in golf was corroborated later by the veneration he received from golf fans, media, corporations, and the global public. As one the most important aspects of Woods's appeal, and one of the reasons for the harsh criticism he received, his image has been set up from the beginning of his career to appeal to as wide a range of audiences as possible. Racially, Woods has been claimed by Blacks, Asians, and multiracial people in between, for being a trailblazer in the world of golf. His multiraciality has been leveraged to sell everything from Nike products to razors to Swiss watches to management consultants. Both Woods and his Team have had to use his identity to negotiate the devastating blow to his image and brand, the reluctance of the American public to forgive, and his poor performance on the golf course.
The year after his first U.S. Open appearance, Tiger Woods became a professional golfer and signed a $40 million endorsement deal with Nike, which used that opportunity to brand him as their Black golfer (Yu, “How Tiger”; Callahan). Woods's first commercial for Nike, the much maligned “Hello World” ad (Weisman; Dorman; Turner; Cole & Andrews; Perez), used images of Young Tiger playing golf juxtaposed against text describing his successes. The commercial ended with a rhetorical question asking if the world was ready for Tiger Woods. Cole and Andrews’ deft deconstruction of the commercial reveals it to be an attempt by Nike to “African-Americanize” Woods through the generically vague use of African drumming. The ad also declared the color of Woods's skin to be black when it suggested he was still unwelcome at some golf courses in the United States, because of the color of his skin (Cole & Andrews, 75-76).

In responding to the backlash against the commercial, a Nike spokesperson simultaneously confirmed Nike’s purposeful attempt to blacken Woods, and informed critics that the ad was not be taken literally, Woods was merely a metaphor for other black golfers who have historically been excluded. Despite the fact that just the year before Tiger Woods himself had railed against attempts to fix his racial identity as merely Black, Nike used the high profile advertisement to both darken Woods and challenge racism in the U.S., and ultimately gain new consumers who similarly saw themselves as challenging racism - by purchasing Nike products (Cole & Andrews; Perez; Yu). Nike, however, was not the only entity blackening Woods's racial identity.
Much of the media coverage from the earliest moments of Woods's career framed the narrative of Woods's success around the discipline instilled in him by Earl Woods, his retired military father, linking his success to Black militarized masculinity. The “Hello World” commercial ends with Woods hugging his father Earl Woods after his win, connecting Woods to Blackness through physical proximity to his Black father. Also used to blacken Woods was the narrative of militarized masculinity through his father’s interviews and discussions about his son’s success on the golf course, linking it to Earl Woods’s determination and training as a Green Beret (Yu, “Tiger Woods is Not the End of History”; Yu, “Tiger Woods at the Center of History”; Callahan; Woods & McDaniel; Cole, “The Place of Golf”). Earl Woods’s would mention employing strategies and tactics he learned as a Green Beret to train his son: breaking him down mentally; distracting him with sounds; intimidating him verbally (Woods & McDaniel). The result was the linking of Tiger Woods’s accomplishments to the training undertaken by elite soldiers in the United States military and the self-discipline he exhibits on the golf course.

Habiba Ibrahim details the other strategies used in blackening Tiger Woods, like situating him within a lineage of other successful and notable Black athletes. Asking whether Woods would become the next Jackie Robinson, Arthur Ashe, Lee Elder, or Michael Jordan framed him as a challenger of the discriminatory and oppressive treatment meted out to Blacks and a source of Black success. She goes on to detail how positioning Woods within a Black genealogy also makes him part of the Black racial family, which is further cemented by the exclusion of Kutilda Woods from the popular narratives about him. Ibrahim goes on to note that Woods’s Cablinasian declaration, and subsequent appropriation by the multiracial movement, did not
prevent racist declarations like Fuzzy Zoeller’s,\textsuperscript{48} which effectively confirmed his Blackness. While Ibrahim’s essay is an appeal for Black racial solidarity between monoracially and multiracially identified Blacks, I argue here that Woods’s use of Cablinasian, and utilization of a multiracial identity, is not rooted in anti-Blackness.

Of course, both Nike and the media shifted its coverage of Tiger Woods, from framing him via Blackness to situating him as a multiracial flag-bearer for post-racial America. Cole and Andrews, writing about a pre-scar Wood describe the process of making him America’s multiracial son, which involved distancing him from those Blacks by commodifying his wholesome image and making him more appealing to Whites through a sanitized racialized narrative. C.L. Cole expands on Woods’s racial appeal by noting he was beyond established racial classifications, and thus allowed to exist in a sort of non-raced space in the public imaginary, making him the perfect figure to market products to diversifying markets. I argue in this chapter that the Woods did enjoy the whitening benefits of multiraciality, but his extramarital affairs made it impossible to distance him from other Black athletes, who continue to be depicted as hypersexual, dangerous, and criminal.

Henry Yu (“Tiger Woods is Not the End of History”) helpfully points out in his response to David Hollinger, that racial mixing is not a transgressive boundary crossing experience, and that any talk of transgression is really a reaction to the practices of white supremacy. Yu instead uses Tiger Woods to “illustrate the very complex migrations and movements of human bodies around the globe” and to show how he “helps trace the changing politics of racial difference” (“Tiger Woods at the Center of History, 321). Yu notes Woods’s label of Cablinasian never

\textsuperscript{48} After winning the Master’s Tournament in 1997, Zoeller said: “That little boy is driving well and he’s putting well. He’s doing everything it takes to win. You pat him on the back and say congratulations and enjoy it and tell him not to serve fried chicken next year, got it… or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve.”
caught on because the label was too singularly focused, it was a mixture limited to Woods and racial categories ultimately need to lump large numbers of people together. Yu agrees with Cole’s assessment of Woods’s marketability based on his multicultural appeal, and how the stripes Woods loses are those complex migrations and movements that have been mapped onto his body. Yu is absolutely correct in his determination that racial mixing is an automatic transgressive act, it does after all need to first establish racialized categories and boundaries before they can be transgressed. However, as an emergent racial formation I think Blasian is a more useful term than Woods’s Cablinasian in that it draws groups of people together, and in its potential ability to transgress racial boundaries. As Blasians effectively move between racial categories they challenge the fixed nature of those categories through their successful negotiations.

Hiram Perez, like Yu, takes issue with the trumpeting of Tiger Woods’s multiracial identity when it is used to usher in a color-blind era, and erase the racialized sexual violence, disenfranchisement, and imperialism that is a crucial part of the United States’ long and brutal history of racial mixing. Perez notes Nike’s “Hello World” commercial was a huge misstep mostly because the commercial explicitly referenced Blackness and related it to Woods. He finds that the subsequent commercial “I am Tiger Woods” worked much better because it was free from any racial specificity, which made Woods much more serviceable to both color-blind and multicultural ideologies. Perez determines ultimately that Woods “rehabilitate(s) the mulatto” when he is declared America’s son and that results in an “organized forgetting” that elides the history of White sexualized violence against women of color, and the number of U.S. military occupations in Asian countries (223, 226). Focusing on a post-scandal Tiger Woods
makes forgetting racialized sexual encounters, forced and consensual, no longer possible; and Tiger Woods is no longer free from racial specificity.

Jan Weisman writes about Woods’s reception in Thailand, and the resistance of the nation in moving beyond racialized hierarchies and accepting the Thai government’s proclamation of Woods as a native son. Weisman notes any Whiteness that is part of Woods’s racial makeup is subsumed by his Blackness, and the fact that it is linked so intimately to Black G.I.s and American military intervention. She touches on the commodification of his “racial self”, and makes the claim that Blacks especially expressed “the strongest desire to appropriate him racially”, and that Asians, with the exception of some Thai elite, had no such interest (240).

Nike learned from their initial misstep, and the fall out from the “Hello World” commercial, and responded with a “I Am Tiger Woods” spot. In that commercial was a rainbow coalition of children all declaring themselves to be Tiger Woods. The year after turning pro, Tiger Woods won his first Master’s tournament in 1997. He appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show a few weeks later, where she crowned him “America’s son,” and he declared himself to be Cablinasian49 to explain how he understood his multiracial identity (Cole & Andrews; Kamiya; Oprah Winfrey Show). Fans and critics jumped on his label – using it either to praise him for finally moving America past its racial impasse via his multiracial celebrity (Kamiya; Perez; G. Smith; Hall; White; Uchacz; ), or to excoriate him for trying to distance himself from Blackness (Pitts Jr.; Nordlinger; Pierce; Houck; ). There were also those who understood why Woods self-identified as multiracial, but doubted his Cablinasian moniker was as neither transgressive nor restrictive as others made it out to be (Yu; Cole; Cole and Andrews; Billings). Though Tiger Woods has never identified himself again as Cablinasian to any media outlet, that label has

49 Cablinasian = CAucasian, BLack, INdian, ASIAN
followed him throughout his career - that is until news of his extramarital affairs moved from the pages of supermarket tabloids and into the national consciousness in 2009.

On November 25, 2009, *The National Enquirer* broke the story about Tiger Woods's extramarital relationship with celebrity concierge Rachel Uchitel. The story about the affair was not picked up by any major news outlets, nor posted on popular gossip blogs. Not until reports of Tiger Woods's crash into a fire hydrant outside of his house and accounts of his now ex-wife, Elin Nordegren, using/wielding a golf club to help/hurt him hit the news cycle on November 27th, did that the original *Enquirer* story gain any traction. That same day Woods released a statement in which he acknowledged he was in an accident, both the accident and his injuries were minor, and he was treated and released from the hospital. It is here that I begin my analysis of both Woods's apologia and the narratives emerging from a variety of media sources to address the discovery and disclosure of his many extramarital affairs. It is impossible to look only at the many contradictory, yet interestingly complementary, discourses deployed by a sundry cast of players within mainstream entertainment and news media to shame, emasculate, understand, praise, pity and mock Woods, without also looking at the defensive strategies undertaken by Team Tiger\(^{50}\) as a response to the public criticism. It is hard to separate the motives of one camp because they are absolutely tied to the movements of the other.

In order to map out both Tiger Woods's apologia and the multiple narratives emerging from the scandal, I analyzed a number of texts ranging from newspaper, trade, and magazine articles, posts on gossip and entertainment blogs, popular sport websites and television shows, late-night talk shows, sketch comedy shows, interviews, news programs, commercials, press

\(^{50}\) Team Tiger is shorthand for what many reports have referred to as Woods's inner-circle – consisting of various sport and media agents, business associates, managers, attorneys, public relations specialists, close friends, and assistants.
conferences and releases, legal documents, to social media creations/productions/admissions, and everything in between. To collect my data, I started with a Lexis-Nexis search of the term “Tiger Woods.” I limited the search to major world publications (as determined by the database), excluded everything before November 27, 2009 and after January 1, 2011, removed duplicate articles, and discounted anything with less than 200 words. This search returned more than 3000 results, of which Lexis-Nexis only displays the first 1000, so I would repeat this particular search using date ranges of two weeks. The returns were more manageable, and I narrowed down those lists further by excluding non-North American,51 and non-English publications. I repeated the process, but instead of major world publications, set the source to broadcast transcripts. With these results, I excluded any transcripts that did not feature Tiger Woods in the title. I also excluded anything that was a meta-commentary about Tiger Woods, using the original commentary as a source. In total I read over 2000 articles on Tiger Woods and the fallout from his extramarital affairs. This exploration is also one of the first to examine the changing racialization of a star over time in relation to a media spectacle.

To collect more recent data, especially from Internet sources, on Tiger Woods and his cheating scandal, I relied on Google and its Google alerts application. Using again the search term “Tiger Woods,” I set multiple alerts – one for blogs, one for videos, and one for news, starting January 1, 2011. The alert included all results, and was/is delivered to my email inbox every day. From those results, I excluded non-English, non-North American sources. I also excluded anything that did not have Tiger Woods in its title. Duplicate news items and blog

51 Originally, I contemplated including major British and Asian news sources, but I felt there might be some nuance lost in translation for many of the Asian papers. Additionally, The Guardian reported Team Tiger “successfully won an injunction banning British media from reporting new details about his personal life after instruction London-based lawyers to take legal action.” (Hirsch)
posts were also excluded. Videos were excluded if they were not about Tiger Woods explicitly, for example a video that used Woods's name in the title was about something unrelated to Tiger Woods. Included in the videos were commercials featuring Tiger Woods, his public apology, parodies of the commercials or the scandal, and comedy sketches about the cheating, Tiger himself, and/or the accident. The only legal document included in the data is the divorce agreement, which can be found on multiple sites on the internet, without the pre and post-nuptial agreements or any settlement details - which were confidential and not leaked online. Social media data included anything in Tiger Woods's verified twitter stream, official Facebook page, and on his website: www.tigerwoods.com.

The data was organized according to function, and then by theme. If the stories or posts functioned only to relay factual information such as dates, names and titles of key players, verified monetary amounts and/or financial transactions, scores, locations, and other similar information, they were labeled background information, and were retained in case said information was necessary for context. This was far and away the smallest category of data. The rest of the data functioned to disseminate a particular stance or opinion, and this was separated into categories based on themes that emerged as I read (and watched) the stories, articles, sketches, and posts. The themes were predicated on what I determined to be the primary purpose of the text, to: shame, understand, mock, and/or praise Tiger Woods. The thematic categories however were not fixed, because many of the narratives could, and did, fit into more than one category, which could have been separated even further into more detailed subcategories. The joke theme was especially prone to slippage amongst the other categories because oftentimes jokes were deployed in an attempt to shame, pity, and/or praise Woods. As
the Venn diagram below shows, there are multiple spaces where the categories bleed into each other.

Figure 6.3

Narrative themes do not address race explicitly, but the very specific ways in which they are deployed to talk about Tiger Woods and the scandal reveal unspoken tensions about the state of race, mixed-race, sexuality, and respectability in the U.S. The discourses of shame, understanding, mockery, and praise do the work of framing Woods in racialized ways throughout his post-scandal moment. Andrews, King, and Leonard make the claim that Woods's escapes mostly unscathed from the usual raced discourses that are used against athletes of color behaving badly. They note the “Public reaction and media coverage almost universally avoided engaging blackness as it has been so often deployed around the transgressions of black athletes” (p. 250). My analysis shows just the opposite occurred, and the reaction and media coverage derived from not just his Blackness, but also his Asianness. All four of these narratives allowed any and everyone with an opinion the opportunities to discuss everything from sex, marriage, success, sport, infidelity, criminality, religion, and respectability in terms of race and mixed-race. In fact, each of the major narrative themes I examine in this chapter signify the availability of
opportunities to discuss Woods's racial identity – in ways that being declaring himself Cablinasian had not allowed.

The themes, in addition to framing Tiger Woods, also act as a kategoria, or accusations. In evaluating the merits of the accusations, the impossibility of demarcating between Tiger Woods - the golfer, and Tiger Woods - the brand, is made clear. The public, golf fans, Woods's fans, and countless members of the media, used the scandal to lodge accusations against both Woods's, what Ryan would label, “policy” and “character” (256). In proffering a defense, Woods's apologia had to account for both his actions, and his moral responsibility to the community. Hearit notes that the corporate apologia is different from an individual’s apologia, mostly because corporations become embroiled in a social legitimation crisis, which compels some sort of corrective action(s). Furthermore, corrective action is only the beginning for a corporate apologia. As a brand, Woods and Team Tiger also had to “demonstrate legitimacy [by praising] the values they are reputed to have transgressed.” (Hearit, 11) That this second part of the apologia is also part of any corporation’s image management strategy, demonstrates how crucial it was for Tiger Woods – the brand, to situate his apologia within a broader image management campaign. He did not just have to defend, explain, and apologize for his transgressions while mitigating the damage to his moral character, he needed to also use his apologia in such a way that it would repair, or at least attempt to, his damaged reputation and restore his social legitimacy. The restoration of his legitimacy and reputation would benefit Woods economically, which no doubt was part of Team Tiger’s plan. That restoration would come via negotiated branding strategies and Woods's strategic deployment of his Blasian identity.
The most popular and widespread narrative post-scandal Tiger Woods, was one of shame. The media coverage within this particular narrative expressed disappointed and/or disgust at being both duped and betrayed by Tiger Woods. Column inches were devoted to pointing out no one “knew the ‘real’ Tiger” (Kay, Lupica, Montagne, Cowlishaw, Bissinger, Neal, Houpt). Much of the coverage noted that the public was now getting to see the “real” Tiger Woods, and they used the scandal to essentially pull the curtain back to reveal the man behind the image. Woods went from being “superhuman” (“Deep Dismay”), capable of soaring greatness, to just another athlete bidding “permanent farewell to invincibility” (Jenkins). Vanity Fair magazine devoted a fair share of the first few months in 2010 to Tiger Woods and the scandal. The first article takes umbrage at the “non-threatening and non-controversial” and “fraudulent” image of Woods, when really the “abnormal” Woods was hidden away, waiting to come out (Bissinger). Woods was also featured on the cover of Vanity Fair when the first article ran, and the picture was an old one of Woods taken by Annie Liebowitz, which featured him shirtless, wearing a skullcap, lifting weights, and unsmiling. The cover meant to cover the blackening of Woods reputation, did double duty by also blackening Woods to the public. The cover showed Woods shirtless, muscles flexed and his pose as menacing, wearing a skull cap, against a background reminiscent of prison yards. That Vanity Fair cover marked the shift in the coverage of Woods as more than just a cheater, but rather as a criminal, though he had yet to break any laws, or at the minimum as another out of control Black athlete ready to ravage unsuspecting White women. The cover both asserted he was Black, defining Blackness as dangerous, and it also attempted to link his form of Blackness with criminality, which because this is a dominant mode of representing Blackness, reinforced the initial linking of his Blackness with criminality. The second article (Neal) offers accounts from a handful of Woods’ mistresses, all of whom relayed
their hurt and betrayal at finding out Woods had been using them for sex. Other coverage offered similar takes on Woods transition from the “squeaky clean” (Montagne), “clean-living citizen” (Houpt) golfer who was the “paragon of virtue” (Cowlishaw) to an athlete who has tainted and dirtied his reputation. The transition was so severe for so many people that he was dropped by a number of his sponsors – most notably Accenture, his presence was reduced in prime-time commercials featuring Gillette products, and he was removed from U.S. specific marketing materials for Tag Heuer. Woods had also been nominated for a Congressional Gold Medal in recognition “for promoting good sportsmanship and breaking down barriers in the sport” by congressman Joe Baca, but that recognition was dropped according to Baca “in light of the recent developments surrounding Tiger Woods and his family” (“Congressman drops effort”). The scandal and subsequent reveal of Woods as human was also too much for the “First church of Tiger Woods” which had been formed in 1996 to “celebrate the emergence of the true messiah” and was dissolved as the scandal developed (“Church of Tiger”). Woods’ fall from grace highlights just how much post-racial hope had been heaped on the golfer, which is part of the explanation for why the shame narrative was so intense and abundant as the scandal unfolded.

The Vanity Fair articles, like so much of the coverage, also talked about Woods's relationship with retired basketball players Michael Jordan, who himself has been in the news for his gambling/womanizing problems; and Charles Barkley, who made a splash early in his career for stating athletes should not be considered role models and more recently for his DUI arrest which he attributed to his quest to receive oral sex (Daulerio). Jordan and Barkley are already framed within the familiar hypersexualized, hyperaggressive, Black athlete narrative, and the publicity around the scandal used them to point to the inevitability of Woods's degeneration
(Kawakami, Neal, Bissinger, Montagne, Dahlberg, Rohde). In discussing Woods's loss of multiple endorsements, most notably Accenture and the U.S. division of Tag Heuer, the consensus was the scandal was “different from an NFL or NBA player going bad” (Marlow). Woods had already been set up to be different from the “other” Black athletes, who participate in mostly Black sports like basketball and football, because golf was not plagued with the bad behavior news coverage Black athletes in other sports disproportionately receive. There were the understandable comparisons between Woods and basketball player Kobe Bryant, who had also cheated on his wife, with some advising Woods to call up Bryant in order “to get the dirt off him with his wife” (Lelinwalla et al.). A major difference that the coverage glossed over was that Bryant was also accused of raping the woman, bringing his affair into criminal, rather than simply moral, territory. Woods had not been accused of any physical abuse against his mistresses; there are not any allegations of rape or assault. His behavior, unlike Bryant’s, was not criminal. Yet by connecting Woods to Bryant discursively, the coverage portrayed Woods as also criminal, and certainly criminalized his sexuality by conflating or at least confusing sexual immorality with criminality. One writer explained the ramifications of Woods's accident by comparing it to “one taken by another sports celebrity on the San Diego Freeway, followed by a convoy of Los Angeles police cars, in 1994” (Bissinger). As though the connection to Bryant was not enough to reframe Woods within the hegemonic narrative of Black athletes, the linking of Woods's scandalous behavior to O.J. Simpson, who had been chased by a “convoy” of LAPD because he was accused of killing two people, continued the re-framing of Woods from best golfer to criminal athlete. Despite Woods’ actions not being actual crimes in the way Bryant and Simpson’s actions allegedly were, he was nevertheless linked to them, and thus not only did those cases reflect onto his scandal, but together, they were of a type of narrative – constituting a
kind of frame that represents men constructed as Black in relation to criminality, regardless of criminality, and thus racializing all three cases in similar ways.

In addition to the number of women Woods slept with, much of the press coverage discussed what type of women with whom Woods chose to have extramarital affairs. These women were not professional women in traditional office jobs, but were instead waitresses, cocktail servers, nightclub hostesses, porn stars, alleged escorts and strippers. At one golf tournament in which Woods was originally scheduled to play, a small airplane circled the course flying a strip club’s banner that read “We miss you Tiger! Déjà vu Showgirls,” which was answered the next day by a competing strip club sign that read “We miss you too Tiger! Dreamgirls” (Kroichick). There was even a sports website cataloging and scoring the women involved with Woods, ranking them from believability to hotness (Brinson). That Woods met many of these women while gambling in Las Vegas, and some alleged via escort services, worked to bolster the shame narrative. By consorting with women deemed within the dominant discourse as being crass and lower class, Woods fulfilled stereotypical notions of Black male sexuality and its appetite for White women. It also linked his Blackness to lower class tastes and identity (despite his billionaire status), implying that no matter how rich one gets, one’s innate Blackness is inherently lower class and inescapable.

The shamefulness of Woods's mistresses was made even more apparent when contrasted with the coverage Elin Nordegren received. Nordegren was more than just the wronged wife, she was the embodiment of White femininity. The shame narrative effectively portrayed the Swedish Nordegren as coming from an upper-class family, silently supportive, anti-fame seeking, college-educated, beautiful, blonde, mother of two, who was too kind to behave as a woman scorned. In her one interview with People magazine, the reporter talked
about how in the days before the divorce Nordegren’s “long, blonde hair began falling out”, and that she good-naturedly laughed at the comedic portrayals of her that appeared during the height of the scandal (Armour, Westfall). With claims that Woods's had been living in a, and had subjected Nordegren to a “candy shop, open 24/7 and it’s certainly not the life for a spouse regardless of sex who takes marriage vows seriously,” was the continued pathological depiction of Black male sexuality in general, and Woods's sexuality specifically (Poole). Some of the details of the divorce leaked, namely the $750 million settlement for Nordegren and her agreement to never speak publicly about Woods's affairs, but the detail most of the coverage focused on was the clause that kept Woods from visiting his children if he were in the company of women he was not married or engaged to (Walker & McMullen). Nordegren’s representation as the ultimate wronged, White woman victim of Woods's uncontrollable sexual appetite was now complete with the contractual demonization of his errant sexuality. In linking Nordegren’s behavior to her Whiteness, she could effectively serve as a cautionary tale for the perils of interracial relationships, especially when positioned against Woods's pseudo-criminal Blackness.

The glee with which people could now skewer Tiger Woods, who to so many had been above reproach, is almost palpable in the many, many jokes, jabs, parodies, one-liners, and puns delivered at Woods's expense. The Tiger Woods's joke cycle revealed the underlying anxieties and tensions caused by both his Blackness and Asianness. Underneath the jokes were operating hegemonic notions of Black male hypersexuality, and Asian male asexuality/femininity, all designed to provide redemption for White men and their egos for having been bested by a man of color in “their” sport. The equipment and terminology of golf provided a number of puns to address Woods's extramarital affairs, most of them involving a play on wood/clubs and holes as metaphors for male and female genitals (Brown, Barry, Letterman, Leno, O’Brien, Fallon).
Brown catalogues a number of these puns including: “Tiger’s name should be changed to ‘Tiger’s wood,’” and “Is it true that Tiger is playing around? Yeah, he’s doing 18 holes.” There were countless jokes about Woods’s “club,” his length of his “iron,” the shortening of holes to “hos” to stand in for the women, and sand traps and bogeys to characterize the caliber of the women.

One of the more popular responses to initial reports about the accident was to reference Tiger Woods's Asianness by connecting him to the stereotype of bad Asian drivers (Shake, Byhoff, Oldenburg, Klemencic, Wojdyla). The week following the accident three different comedians, George Lopez, Wanda Sykes, and Jo Koy, all told the exact same joke about Woods: “Tiger Woods is half Black and half Asian. I guess the Black half bought the Cadillac, and the Asian half crashed it” (Lopez, Sykes, Handler). This particular joke provided the audience a chance to laugh at Woods's Blackness as evidenced by his car of choice,52 and a chance to laugh at his Asianness, which is highlighted by how poorly he drives a car. Comedian Paul Mooney continued the Asian jokes in both his standup performance in Oakland, and in a radio interview, when he observed “that little white girl beat the Black out of him. That’s why the Asian part of him crashed into that tree…” (Shake) Lest the audience not understand Mooney’s point about the virility and masculinity of Black man, Mooney follows up with the line “since no self-respecting Black man would allow a woman to have her way with him” (Shake). Saturday Night Live drives (no pun intended) this point home in their sketch involving Keenan Thompson as Tiger Woods and Blake Lively as ex-wife Elin Nordegren. The sketch plays on the idea that Nordegren has beaten Woods over his transgressions, which is made obvious in the sketch when Woods's press conference involves him holding up a written mea culpa with “Help” and “She is

52 The Cadillac Escalade has been linked in popular culture to an almost overwhelmingly number of Black athletes, rappers, and entertainers.
so strong” written on the backside of the papers (Season 35, Episode 8). The audience is left to infer that obviously Woods was clubbed (allegedly) by ex-wife Nordegren because his Asianness does not provide him with the proper amount of masculinity to avoid such an incident. A derivative telling of this joke involves Phil Mickelson (or another White golfer) hiring Elin Nordegren to teach him how to beat Tiger Woods. This particular joke allows for the explicit recovery of White masculinity from both Black success in sport and Asian economic domination. The jokes about Woods's lack of skill with women had the same emasculating effect on the golfer as the jokes about Nordegren beating him did. His use of text message as the preferred method of communication with his mistresses was deemed by many to be another feminizing trait. By using a medium favored by “teenage girls,” anyone who wanted to could make fun of Woods's poor flirting skills. For example GQ magazine’s website offered a “Very Tiger Xmas Gift Guide” for Tiger Woods and included the Nokia Twist cellphone as a gift option because, “OMG! U txt as much as a teenage girl, Tiger :>) Get a Twist so u can txt faster, k? XOXO.” Though GQ did not mention any racial characteristics in their gift-giving guide, their linkage of Woods's behavior to that of teenage girls, is part of a familiar feminizing discursive strategy deployed against men of color specifically Asian men.

If there was an irresistible topic within the Tiger Woods's joke cycle that allowed for the most obvious means of addressing racial tensions, it was Tiger Woods's sexual relationship with White women. For many people commenting publicly on the scandal, this particular development enabled for the discursive putting of Woods in his place. Paul Mooney, in an interview titled “Tiger Woods's wake up call” most plainly declared what others were saying when he noted Woods “was running around saying he was cablincanasian (sic), he knows what

53 Translated: Oh my god! You text as much as a teenage girl Tiger. <smiley face emoticon 😊> Get a Twist so you can text faster, ok? Hugs and kisses.
he is now” (Shake). Mooney used the scandal to assert that Woods use of Cabilasian as an attempt to distance himself from Blackness was unsuccessful, as evidenced by how quickly he was pegged as Black athlete with an affinity for White women. Which is a little confusing given his point in the same interview about Woods's crashing, and being beaten up was because he was Asian. Mooney’s interview is one of the many examples of the contradictory ways Tiger Woods was discussed racially, often in the same breath. Still, a number of the jokes revolved around Woods's mistresses being white, or appearing to be white, “What is Tiger Woods's handicap? White women” (Brown). Saturday Night Live had a sketch as part of their “Weekend Update” featuring a character named simply “Mistress 15” played by Nasim Pedrad. In an interview of the mistress, Weekend Update host Seth Myers asks what she thought of the other women who had come forward as Woods's mistresses, to which Pedrad replies “well at first I thought they were just me in different outfits and hairs” (Season 35, Episode 9). The joke being that these women were interchangeable in their Whiteness, and that was the characteristic that mattered most to Woods. After Woods checked himself into a sex rehabilitation clinic, D-Dub - a software company, released the game BoneTown: Tiger Woods Affair Tour 10. The game allows players to be like Woods by “sleeping with pornstars (sic) and cocktail waitresses, fighting with other golfers at a nightclub, or just partying and getting drunk.” (Bans) In the aforementioned “Very Tiger Xmas Gift Guide,” which included gifts ranging from a new Cadillac Escalade “with seating for up to seven Orlando waitresses,” to Beyond Seven condoms because Woods gave “Wilt Chamberlin” (sic) a run for his money – they don’t call you Tiger for nothing!...We recommend these Japanese manufactured condoms… They’re thin yet strong enough.” (Sintumuang) Woods's hypersexuality was allowable, and even encouraged in this context,  

54 Wilt Chamberlain, a Black professional basketball player, claimed to have slept with over 20,000 women in his 1991 biography A View From Above.
because he was not going for the most valuable White women, of which his ex-wife was a member. By making it obvious that the White women Woods was sleeping with were not a respectable cadre of women, Woods was effectively eliminated as a threat to White masculinity.

The coverage of Tiger Woods meant to elicit some measure of sympathy, understanding, or reflection, continued to racialize Woods by mostly emasculating him. The types of references used most often to describe Woods pre-scandal regarded him as a “non-threatening” and “non-controversial” athlete (Bissinger). By marking Woods as non-threatening, he is setup to act as a foil for the hegemonic construction of Black athletes and their behaviors – or at least the behaviors that make it into mainstream news. Tiger Woods sympathetic coverage, which increased after his apology during a televised press conference, would often declare that his career was not dead by comparing him to other Black athletes whose personal failings had also been made public (Lazarus, Lupica). In addition to placing him next to other great Black athletes, the sympathetic narrative tried to reframe the scandal by asking the public to put his behavior in perspective. By comparing his affairs to acts of murder, rape, weapons possession, selling drugs, and abuse, this particular narrative utilized positive and negative rhetoric simultaneously. The coverage sought to distance Woods from those illegal and terrible acts, while redefining his wrongdoing as not so bad.

Another strand of this narrative would drum up sympathy by portraying Tiger Woods as a hapless square, incapable of attracting women sans fame and fortune. This coverage would begin most often by writing about how Elin Nordegren turned him down numerous times before finally agreeing to go out with him. After one of the mistresses, Jamie Grubbs, released the voicemail Woods left begging her to change her outgoing message because Nordegren might call, was used to point out how unskilled, and implicitly how Asian, Woods was when it came to
women. Woods was both a “rookie at having women” and naïve for thinking the women he involved himself with would keep the relationships secret (Shake, Lelinwalla et al.). Woods was advised to stay away from voicemail and email because those could be traced back to him. Of course, the advice was doled out in a way to make it seem matter-of-fact, and that any man who had experience with women would know this. Making use of familiar tropes like the genial Uncle Tom or Chan, the coverage relished in great detail how lame, and nerdy, Woods was, and used his lack of skillfulness with women as evidence of why he should be pitied.

Fox News contributor Britt Hume, in his attempt to empathize with Tiger Woods, said “Tiger, turn to the Christian faith, and you can make a total recovery and be a great example to the world” (Fox News Sunday). Hume’s extension of Christianity as the salve that would heal Woods's wounds is reminiscent of earlier colonizing efforts in both Africa and Asia. Colonialism’s tie to Christian missions, and the purpose of those missions to domestic indigenous people using religion is a familiar racialized narrative. Hume taps into centuries long attempts of White people to save the souls of and make respectable masses of non-Whites globally, though he focuses his efforts solely on Woods. That Hume goes on to claim Woods's Buddhist faith did not offer the kind of “redemption and forgiveness offered by the Christian faith,” was his attempt at disciplining Woods and controlling his unrestrained sexuality by bringing him into line with hegemonic Whiteness. Christianity, in Hume’s statement, continues stand in for Whiteness as Hume goes on to explain that the “content” of Woods's “character” had been misunderstood previously, and only Christianity will restore his “character” to what it needs to be. The racial overtones of Hume’s comment were already recognizable, but when Bill O’Reilly offered Hume a chance to expound on his remarks the following night and Hume explicitly linked Buddhism to Woods's mother, he made the racial connotations even more clear:
“I mentioned the Buddhism only because his mother is a Buddhist and he has apparently said he was, I’m not sure how seriously he practices that” (O’Reilly Factor). Hume does say after all that he does not know “how seriously” Woods practices Buddhism, nor does he appear to care. Deeming Buddhism as inferior to Christianity allows Hume to relegate the influence of Kultilda Woods, and any other Asian influences, to the margins.

Tiger Woods's media coverage did not include very much praise, but the moments in which he garnered praise almost always revolved around the amount of sex he was having, and how, with his mistresses. The exception to the sexualized slant of the coverage within the praise narrative was the announcement that Woods had been voted the Associated Press’ Athlete of the Decade, with news outlets disagreeing on whether votes for that honor came before or after the scandal broke (Brinson, “Talking Sports”). Honors aside, the majority of the public reactions and coverage that praised Woods, praised him for having a large penis, and for having a lot of sex with a number of women, despite being married. Maino, a rapper, created a song he titled “Tiger Woods” which he claimed was not meant to pay homage to the golfer, but instead was to be a metaphor for being a cheater and should be an anthem “to all men who deal with a lot of women” (Feeney). As his mistresses came forward, some similar themes arose from their interviews, especially around how “well-endowed” Woods was (Fanelli, Bissinger, Seal). Mindy Lawton, who herself was skewered in the Woods coverage because of her occupation as a Perkins waitress, offered the most praise for Woods's sexual prowess noting, “he has a very strong sex drive and knows his way around the bedroom. On a scale of 10, I would give him 12” (Fanelli). She would later acknowledge in a Vanity Fair interview that Woods had the biggest penis she had ever seen (Seal). The hegemonic idea that Black men almost always possess a large penis is part of the racialization of Woods. As analysis of the Tiger Woods joke cycle
shows, this particular raced marker of Woods large penis and sexual prowess is not as threatening as it could have been because of the women he was consorti

Some of the coverage also praised Tiger Woods for finally showing that he was human, both in acknowledging his transgressions and for attempting to be a more fan-friendly athlete, rather than the unemotional “robot” he had long been labeled. Upon his return to golf, the attention on Woods centered on how he “smiled and waved and acknowledged most of the applause that came his way. He was even spied signing autographs out on the range Saturday, something he never does” (Fidlin). Reporters have even noted how some fans felt Woods was “gracious” despite the attacks on his reputation as the scandal was unfolding (Goodall), and greeted him cheers and applause at his first tournament post-scandal to “show appreciation for Tiger, an acknowledgement of his significance to golf and his potential significance beyond golf” (Poole Group). Those same cheers greeted Woods when he played in his first post-divorce golf tournament in August 2010 and his fans were rewarded with his best round of golf since the scandal broke (Cochran). The cheering and the boost in ratings for the PGA when Woods played in tournaments were proof that Woods's apologia was beginning to resonate with the public.

Initially Tiger Woods eschewed hiring a crisis management team and relying on Team Tiger to handle the scandal. The coverage on Woods blamed many of the missteps in his apologia on the lack of people specifically trained to manage a crisis as large as his, despite the fact that Team Tiger’s strategy was to “reduce, redress, or avoid damage to [Woods's] reputation” following the fallout from his many affairs (Benoit, p. vii). It was not until after his national press conference that Woods hired former President George W. Bush’s press secretary Ari Fleischer to help plan his return to golf (Montopoli). While Team Tiger’s motivation was the maintenance Woods's image to recoup and retain his endorsement deals, Woods's apologia
also worked to protect his own personal Blasian brand identity. The impact of Team Tiger’s handling of Woods's image is more obvious than with the other Blasian celebrities, but I would argue that the interventions of his inner-circle of agents, coaches, handlers, parents, and close friends has always been for the advancement of the Blasian brand Woods champions. Beginning with his statement to the press before playing in the U.S. Open in 1996, Woods offered his correction to the news reports that labeled him as only Black (Woods, 1995; Callahan). He explained then that he was both Black and Asian, and proud to be both. Though he had been able to mostly avoid talking about race, and his race specifically (especially after the Cablinasian episode of The Oprah Winfrey Show), he returns to his Blasian racial identity as the foundation of his apologia and as a response to media’s misidentification. Kruse notes apologiae can include a variety of mediums and methods, and Woods's apologia is no exception. Using commercials, statements, a more fan friendly persona, a televised apology, a column in a national newsmagazine, sexual addiction treatment, and sometimes - purposeful silence, the success of Woods's apologia has been mixed based on public reaction and media coverage.

Tiger Woods's apologia began the day after he crashed into the tree and fire hydrant. That the accident happening just days after the National Enquirer published allegations of his affair, and his then-wife Elin Nordegren was implicated as being involved in someway with his accident, substantiated what would have been an easily dismissible rumor. His curt statement acknowledging the accident, and his refusal to meet with the police and answer their questions regarding the incident was a purposeful move, made in the hopes of not fueling the fire of publicity awaiting him. There was the feeling that Woods's “highly paid image-polishers and truth-benders, the omnipotent sports agency International Management Group, and the assorted lawyers and security gorillas who make up the rest of his coterie” might be able to keep the
scandal from exploding around him (Cam Cole). Yet even members of that camp realized that
Woods's image had been so crafted and carefully refined that no number of image agents could
prevent his brand from taking a hit, even if they predicted his image to be “tarnished only a bit”
(“Where does Tiger”; Marlow). Then there was the other camp that designated Woods's problem
as “more a personal and business problem than a legal problem,” only to then declare, “he needs
to figure out a way to show the public what happened, or explain why he won’t be talking about
what happened” (“Toobin”). The strategy of silence backfired because his non-disclosure meant
little information was getting out to the public regarding his accident. This meant the coverage
quickly transformed from Tiger Woods has been in a non life-threatening accident, to why is he
not talking about the accident, to every arm chair analyst, blogger and reporter deciding that
Woods was obviously having an affair. Undoubtedly, that was the conclusion Woods and his
team were trying to avoid anyone reaching, and yet the public did and also concluded that his
wife found out about the affairs and reacted in anger – causing the accident. The public’s
reaction to Woods's silence became the impetus for the four narratives that became the kategoria
against him.

At the core of the accusations against Tiger Woods were assertions that his behavior had
violated his responsibility to the public. In the narratives of shame, understanding and mockery
were cries that he had violated the trust of his corporate sponsors, the sport of golf, his family,
and most importantly, his fans. There was the hope that Woods would apologize publicly since
“America loves when the rich and famous publicly apologize. It makes them look human.”
(Hicks) The violation of trust is what Woods's initial statement on November 29th, 2009 was
meant to address. In that statement he alluded to a “situation” that was his fault, and that was
“obviously embarrassing to my family and me” (Woods “Statement”). While that initial
statement included the acknowledgment, “I’m human and I’m not perfect. I will certainly make sure this doesn’t happen again,” it failed to divert further attention to what the “situation” entailed, and was thus another misstep in Woods's apologia. Though he had been labeled as “superhuman” and “robotic” before the scandal, humanizing his image did not keep information about his extramarital affairs from being released, and subsequently being exploited. Whereas Woods's needed to re-legitimate his brand, this strategy just provided more fodder for the attacks against his image.

The chorus of disapproval surrounding Tiger Woods's statement about his unfortunate “situation” was followed up with a new statement about his “transgressions” and the abandonment of his “values” (Woods, “Transgressions”). The new statement was delivered to address the unveiling of yet another mistress, in addition to the criticism regarding his previous statement to the public. His new statement differed from the previous statement in that his self-serving “situation” was replaced with “transgressions” in an effort to acknowledge he was accepting the blame. He also offered an explanation of his actions by stating he had not been “true to [his] values” (Woods, “Transgressions”). This statement allowed Woods to dissociate himself from his extramarital affairs, and present them as isolated acts that do not represent his true self. As public opinion started to weigh in on Woods's latest statement, some made note of his calculated positioning before the scandal that made him responsible to divergent constituencies, and as such he had a “limited amount of time to explain the events, or risk staining both his own brand and those of his sponsors” (Houpt). Woods's own brand is an entity not entirely separate from the brands he endorsed, and while some of his corporate sponsors dropped him as the scandal deepened, the ineffectiveness of his apologia did major damage to his own personal brand. The sponsors who dropped Woods entirely include Gatorade, AT&T, and
Accenture, and his role was scaled back, though he was not dropped entirely by Tag Heuer, and Gillette. The endorsements he kept were from Nike, Electronic Arts, Golf Digest, NetJets, Upper Deck, TLC Laser Eye Centers (“Gatorade Cuts Ties”).\(^{55}\) With the exception of Gatorade, the majority of corporate sponsors who stuck by Woods, understandably, were affiliated with sports and entertainment. He did not lose all of his luxury endorsements, maintaining a relationship with luxury watchmaker Tag Heuer and private jet company, NetJets. Being dropped by Accenture was one of the biggest hits to his image, since Accenture’s marketing strategy (Be a Tiger) was so intimately linked to Woods. The deployment of his statements as press releases instead of a conference, Nordegren’s refusal to speak on either the scandal or Woods's behalf, and his unavailability for questioning from anyone from the police to Oprah Winfrey, seemed to aggravate the public’s anger. His statement, however, appeared to be enough for his fellow golfers on tour, who voted him as their PGA player of the year (“PGA Player”). Nevertheless, the golfers seemed to be the only group moving past the scandal, and perhaps realizing this, Woods issued yet another statement. This time his statement was to announce he was taking “an indefinite break from professional golf.” (Woods, “Break”) Still his critics charged that his irresponsible behavior, and his responses to having that behavior uncovered, continued to violate the public’s trust.

Tiger Woods’s revised statements to the press did very little to mitigate the damage to his reputation and his brand, as more women continued to come forward and confess their involvement with him in December 2009, he was dropped, or saw his presence reduced, by a number of his corporate sponsors (Lupica; Hamilton; Cowlishaw; “What They’re Saying”). As

\(^{55}\) He also maintained his deal with Tatweer: Tiger Woods Dubai, a private residential community that was supposed to feature a Woods designed golf course, mansions, luxury hotel and Michelin-starred restaurant. That fell through due to the collapse of the Middle East property market (Donegan).
each statement to the press served to intensify the public scrutiny and pressure, the next tactic in his apologia was to enter a sexual rehabilitation clinic. Woods could no longer adopt a strategy of denial, he had already admitted to transgressions and forsaking his values and women continued to come forward. However, by entering sex rehab, Woods showed he was taking corrective action. Sexual rehabilitation becomes an important part of his apologia and works rhetorically because it demonstrates Woods has both learned from his mistakes and has established measures of control to ensure it will not happen again.

Hearit in his analysis of organizations and apologia, notes corrective action is only the beginning of re-establishing legitimacy for corporations. The next step is demonstrating legitimacy “through a form of epideictic, value-oriented discourse in which they praise the very values they are reputed to have transgressed” (11). Though not a corporation, Tiger Woods followed Hearit’s model and offered an official apology during a nationally televised press conference (Woods, “Public Apology”). Woods plainly admitted to being “unfaithful” and having “affairs.” He acknowledged frankly that he cheated and that only he, and his sense of entitlement thanks to money and fame, was responsible. He also admitted to transgressing the “boundaries” of his marriage, as well as the boundaries of the public’s trust. As a measure of sincerity intended to act as a reassurance, Woods spoke about checking himself into “in-patient therapy,” where he had been for the last two and half months. To reassure his many constituencies that he both was capable of, and had indeed changed, Woods then called on his mother and their shared Buddhist faith for teaching him “to stop following every impulse and to learn restraint.” He ended his apology by asking for help from the people “who believed in me” so that they may one day believe in him again. Woods apology is part of a familiar ritual for celebrities and public figures who transgress social norms. Yet he managed to repair some of the
damage done to his reputation by touching on the values – honesty, transparency, not sleeping with (White) women everywhere – he had been accused of violating. He also brought in religion, remorse, repentance, and transformation to continue his brand’s restoration process.

There were some very specific discourses in Tiger Woods's apology meant to reestablish Woods's Blasian brand. His sex addiction situated him squarely within dominant discourses of Black masculinity, effectively depicting his sexuality as something to be feared. In his apology, when he addressed his stay in a sexual rehabilitation clinic and his continued therapy for sex addiction, he rhetorically allayed fears that he was a Black man, out of control. Additionally, as he spoke, in front of his carefully vetted audience of family, supporters, and Team Tiger members, the camera framed Woods against the backdrop of his mother’s stoic face. The image of Woods and his mother as he spoke about her guidance and his return to Buddhism, worked as reminders about Woods's Asianness. Invoking Buddhism and its tenet for seeking happiness and fulfillment transferred to Woods an authentic Asianness that he certainly did not have then, and possibly never had within the U.S.

Tiger Woods's apologia did not end with his public apology. As Woods prepared to play in the Master’s tournament, Nike released a commercial featuring the voice of Earl Woods. The commercial featured a close shot of Woods on the golf course in black and white, while the voice of his father asked (from the grave?) if “he had learned anything” (Earl and Tiger). The

![Figure 6.4](image)
Nike commercial – Earl Woods
commercial was not literally asking Woods if he had learned anything since he had already addressed that in his apology. Instead, the commercial was asking what people still following the scandal really wanted to know, had he learned his lesson? I have made the claim that Woods has never benefitted from Whiteness, as other biracial people have been able to, and the airing of this commercial reinforces that claim. There would have been no lesson to learn after all had Woods had extramarital affairs with women of color and/or been married to a woman of color. Learning his lesson meant recognizing his place within the racial hierarchy, a lesson learned by so many men of color before him.

Tiger Woods's apologia and brand restoration is not complete though he and Elin Nordegren have finalized their divorce, and he has returned to playing in the PGA tour. In his column for Newsweek he brings up again “values [his] upbringing had taught” as explanation for the change in his behavior. He then thanks those “who stood by [him] in ways large and small” to point out how people are moving on from the scandal. He ends his column with an assurance that he is “not the same man I was a year ago. And that’s a good thing.” His column provides an update for his constituencies on how well he is adhering to the values he had been accused of violating, and it continues the strategy to use his apologia in order to protect the Blasian brand. Yet, missing in all of steps of his apologia from his statements to the press, his televised apology, through therapy for sex addiction, the commercial featuring his dead father’s voice (ghost?), and his divorce, is his ability to win golf tournaments. Woods's ranking has fallen from first in the world to 23, and he has only won one tournament, which was not a major tournament. His celebrity, and by extension his brand, is predicated on his skills and abilities on the golf course, and what his publics want is for him to win again. His sponsors want him to win so that people

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56 As of the first week of January 2012
will affiliate their products with a winner. The PGA wants him to win so the ratings will increase again. His fans and the general public want him to win because the U.S. loves a winner, even if he is a loser.
Chapter 7
Em-Blasianing the Future

In the summer of 2011, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) aired a documentary series on Korean cuisine, titled “Kimchi Chronicles”. The host and focus of the show was Marja Vongerichten, wife of famous chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, and a Blasian. The show was billed as both a look into the rising popularity of Korean food, and a journey of self-discovery for Vongerichten, who was born to a Black father and Korean mother, orphaned, and then adopted by a Black family in the United States (Smith-Sloman). The producer in an interview notes the plan originally was to use a Korean-American chef, but ultimately Vongerichten was chosen because her story embodied “the true Korean-American spirit. Somebody born in Korea, but yet gets adopted, and then finds her family. I think a lot of us Korean Americans have that issue, not just necessarily with adoption, but just finding our own identities... Her story made our story even better.” (Korea Society) That a mixed-race Black and Asian person would be chosen to be the face of Korean cuisine and identity, and for a series intended to be a primer of sorts for those unfamiliar with Korea and its culture no less, highlights the trajectory this dissertation works to uncover, and symbolizes the successes of Blasian branding within popular culture. In an interview to promote the show, with Black women’s magazine Essence, Vongerichten states “I like to refer to Korean food as the soul food of Asia because it really is reminiscent of a lot of the cooking and stewing techniques we use in African-American soul food” (Smith-Sloman). Like Ward, Simmons, and Woods, Vongerichten, and the other Blasians mentioned, become symbols of a radical racial amalgamation. She encapsulates the both/and inherent in Blasianness, and what the multiracial movement wishes to highlight; she does not use her Asian identity to
distance herself from Blackness, or vice versa, and yet it would be difficult to find space for her within the multiracial movement.

In the introduction of the dissertation I touched on the Whiteness centering foundation of the multiracial movement, particularly in groups like Project Reclassify All Children Equally (RACE), and the Association for MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA). These groups appear to be mirroring the same strategies used by ethnic immigrants (i.e. Irish, Italians, Jews) at the turn of the 20th century to Whiten themselves. The groups that make up the multiracial movement, however, claim not to be Whitening themselves, but to be working towards the end of race as a classification category by calling for multiraciality to be recognized as its own category. Yet, despite criticisms the movement is anti-Black, those leading the various groups for multiracial people appropriated the language of the Civil Rights movement and its ideological moorings to argue that the refusal to let mixed-race people identify as they choose, and use of the one-drop rule to recruit, unwillingly according to the movement, members to the Black community, were violations of the rights of multiracial people. Activists within the mixed race movement and scholars researching multiracial people agree the one-drop rule is racist, because its enforcement maintains racial categories. In order for hypodescent to be applicable, the biologically based nature of race had to exist, Whiteness had to be considered biologically pure, and transitively Blackness had to be biologically impure. Interestingly, those same activists and many of those scholars insist on framing the discussion of mixed race in terms of a multiracial baby boom/explosion in numbers, which, despite their intentions, reinforces those very biological differences they wish to avoid with the application of hypodescent. This means that, in order to have and count multiracial babies, biologically raced people need to exist, Black, White, Asian, etc.… and need to be able to be counted.
Nevertheless, through legal and political maneuvering based on perceived civil rights violations, the multiracial movement’s mobilization to allow those filling out the U.S. census to check more than one box was successful. This policy approach won out over creating a multiracial category, which some members of the movement claim would have at least challenged the existing categories. Changing the census, the movement declared, would allow mixed-race people to be counted fairly and finally represented in numbers. The multiracial movement’s rallying point was in having the need and ability to self-identity was validated at state, federal, and cultural levels. The success has varied from state to state, and other than the census, has yet to be implemented full-scale within the federal government, but the movement has had some success in making it more culturally appropriate to self-identify. Maria P.P. Root’s (Racial Borders) ‘Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People’ and Nathan Douglas’s ‘Declaration of Racial Independence’ both focused on the “rights” of multiracial people to self-identify. The movement has expanded beyond its need for self-identification to include support groups and resources for people in interracial relationships and mixed-race children, to including various websites with information ranging from advocacy information to multiracial celebrity fan sites.

Despite talk of rights and fair representations, many of the criticisms against the multiracial movement are grounded in claims that it is anti-Black. Sexton points out the way “multiracialism operates [is] by way of a historic double standard – endorsed when it does not involve blackness in significant ways, abjured whenever it does” (17). That key organizations within the multiracial movement found support from neoconservatives like Newt Gingrich and Ward Connerly certainly seems to buttress the claims of antiblackness. The tensions between critics and supporters of the multiracial movement pre-2000 census centered on how state and federal agencies would disperse resources to communities of color should multiracial become a
census category. Racial groups previously represented on the census believed the change in the census would see first their numbers, then subsequently their resources, decrease. In addition to those very possible political and economical implications of the changes proposed by the multiracial movement, were the discursive claims that mixed-race should stop being viewed as a subset of Blackness. Multiracial would become another category added to the racialized hierarchy in the United States that would serve to further separate Blacks from Whites (and Blackness from Whiteness). Critics of the movement point out Maria P. P. Root’s *Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People* rhetorically positions Blacks as lacking and accuses them of trapping biracial people into Blackness by enforcing the one drop rule. The movement proffers racial mixing as a means for escape from that Black identity, offering mixed race people as exemplars of progress and change. Furthermore, challengers point out by “representing multiracialism as a progressive claim for social change against the reactionary demands of blacks for maintenance of the status quo, advocates endorse the delusional, inverted worldview in which the oppressive power of racism is generated from the ground up, propagated by blacks, its prototypical targets, rather than by whites, its prototypical agents” (Sexton 79). Another criticism is that mixed-race studies and the multiracial movement have focused on the removal of sexual politics around miscegenation (Spencer, Sexton). They argue that both the movement and mixed race studies elide the existence of racial differences and the subsequent hierarchies that have everything to do with how certain races and interracial relationships are framed.

Vongerichten and my celebrity case studies do not quite fit within the trends of mixed-race studies, in part because Blasians have long been ignored by both the multiracial movement, and critical mixed-race theorists. Five key narratives have emerged within the research on multiracial people. The first narrative is that of the tragic mulatta/o, which depicts multiracial
individuals as survivors of the unfortunate act of miscegenation (Edison). The second narrative is a proscriptive, boundary-setting discourse that resigns the mixed race person’s experiences to fit within one racial discourse, usually based on phenotypical features and tradition (Rockquemore & Brunsma). The third narrative is full of celebratory rhetoric focusing on how hybrid vigor is responsible for mixed race people being so attractive, exotic looking, smart, different, unique, ideal mating partners, best of (both) all worlds, and so on (Dagbovie; Daniel; Senna). The fourth research theme assumes the assertion of a mixed-race identity is a rejection of Blackness (Sexton; Spickard; J. M. Spencer), and destroys solidarity within communities of color. Lastly, are the colorblind and/or post-racial narratives that declare racial mixing responsible for the lack of color (race) now, and the rendering of racial categories obsolete in the future (S. Hall; Nakshima; DaCosta Remaking; Beltran; R. Spencer). These trajectories of multiracial discourse rely on two overarching frames of mixed-race: mixed-race as uniquely new phenomenon and mixed race as resistant to dominant paradigms of race and racism. Both have been necessary for multiracial activists and the mixed race movement, and have served as the foundation for much of the current research in mixed race studies. I posit in this dissertation that a third frame exists, one that neither sees mixed-race as new or unique, nor as a racial salve to move the United States past the problem of the color line. This third paradigm is pluralistic, fluid in its ambiguity, and allows mixed-race to not only “sustain contradictions”, it “turns the ambivalence into something else.” (Anzaldua 79) This paradigmatic shifting view of race rearticulates what it means to be Black, Asian, Other, and results in the creation of multiracial/other subjectivities which can become a formidable obstacle to the racial order of the United States. Importantly, I argue in this dissertation Blasians trouble the logic of existing U.S. racial classifications, without establishing their own.
Blasians are challenging the hegemony of race constructed around the lives of not just Blacks and Asians, but all members of U.S. society, as we are all embroiled in the illogical (and contradictory) discourses framing our identities. After all, as Stuart Hall notes, “the future belongs to the impure.” (299) In the previous chapters I do not offer Blasians as a racial salve, as resistant to or prescription for either race or racism through virtue of their mixed-race bodies. Instead, I have used this dissertation to describe the emergence of Blasians, not to add to the research that divides monoracials from multiracials, but to muddle the lines between them. The analyses of these celebrities acknowledge that to understand what is a Blasian, means to first understand hegemonic notions of both Blacks and Asians. Contextualized against those dominant discourses, Blasians explode the narrow boundaries of authenticity around racialized categories. Blasians do not escape race, or erase race, but they do reconstruct normative instantiations of identity. Additionally, the branding of Blasians engages hegemonic Whiteness and its attendant privileges, and helps to reframe the sociopolitical contexts of racial identity formation in the United States. Furthermore, if Blasians can pick and choose which aspects of identity to highlight, and media also pick and choose which aspects of identity to highlight, the sheer number of possible identity combinations at any point in time, allow Blasians to confront and challenge essentializing discourses by engaging the fluidity of their subjectivities.

While I have always considered myself both Black and Asian, for a number reasons including the fact that I moved transnationally several times as a child and the fact that I was surrounded by friends and family members who were also mixed-race Black and Asian, this dissertation came about because I noticed an increase in the number and frequency of images and stories in popular culture about Blasians. As a result of this increase, I began to wonder, how
people came to identify with this label, and what sort of maneuvers and discourses enabled Black and Asian identity's spread through social media and popular culture.

From there, I looked to the most visible Black and Asian figures, and they were celebrities. Thus, I asked the question, "How did they become the fulcrum for Blasian legibility?" In this dissertation, I have explored how media processes, institutions, and discourses have "branded" mixed-race Black/Asian celebrities, hence made them legible and marketable to broad popular audiences. Omi and Winant’s theory of racial formation suggests views of race change overtime and constitute a new racial milieu and context in which race relations take place. Historical, cultural, and political transformations, therefore, affect a given racial formation within a particular time period. Thus, there is a new common sense understanding about race affecting groups and individuals. The emergence of Blasians is both evidence of a new racial formation and part of the developing racial formation itself. The emergence of Blasians as a brand, hence as marketable celebrities and stars, challenges the current racial hegemony by forcing the contextualization of historical conditions, hegemonic understandings about race and racialized tropes, and counteracting those myths through various branding tactics. The emergence of these celebrities has played a not insignificant role in helping prompt shifts surrounding multiracial identity discourses (as in the role Tiger Woods, as a key celebrity figure, played in the decisive inclusion of racial "options" on the 2000 U.S. Census), and forced popular media to recognize the significant dynamics that have arisen as a result of the boundary blurring racialization occurring within the ways and means Blasians are represented.

Each of the chapters in this dissertation attempt to answer my four overarching research questions: How does the discursive regime of U.S. popular media create, define and represent Blasians? Why and how are branding strategies of Blasians further destabilizing the discursive
practices of popular media? How do Blasians change race for other groups? What critical insights can be applied to other groups, both multi and monoracial, in American society by analyzing the experiences of Blasian celebrities?

Looking back at the Emergence of Blasians

In the introduction I provided an overview of my arguments, defined key terms and concepts used throughout the dissertation, and explained the significance for each of my research questions. I introduced Blasians, in the form of three stars – Kimora Lee Simmons, Tiger Woods, and Hines Ward – in order to begin my analysis about the way various media discourses mold and frame the racialized neutrality of their images and personas in very particular and recognizable ways. I also introduce my very specific definition of branding, in order to talk about people as commodities and to demonstrate that in turning Blasian identity into a brand, that the identity has currency that extends beyond the Blasians who claim that identity. I extended my re-conceptualization of the branding process to the celebrity industrial complex as a realm for sense making, and linked them together through the process of impression management. The impression management has evolved from Goffman’s original iteration as presentation of self to include the role of others, including fans and media, in the impression management of these stars and Blasians as a group. The meteoric rise of social media platforms on the internet has allowed for the impression management of celebrities, which used be more behind the scenes, but is more publicly produced as well, to be part and parcel of their identities. I spend the greater part of the introduction arguing that theorizing Blasians as a brand allows me to look at the intersections of identity, analyze them as an emergent racial formation who are framed by multiple and contradictory discourses (which the subsequent chapters discuss in detail) and rearticulate the
meaning of race and mixed-race. In stressing the intersectionality of identity, and the pluralized view of ourselves intersectionality commands, the introduction lays the dissertational foundation that multiple subjectivities should always be taken into account even if media and societal understandings of race limit how many facets are considered.

In Chapters two and three I outline the trajectory of racialized narratives framing Blacks and Asians, and Blasians. The second chapter of this dissertation provides some needed historical contextualization of the policies, diasporic movements, globalizing trends and interventions necessary for Blacks and Asians to come together, politically, culturally and intimately. While I explore the increasing legibility of Blasians in this dissertation, this chapter necessarily looks at the moments when Blasians are illegible. Using prime time dramas, I highlight efforts to avert the presence of Blasians through representations of Black and Asian interracial relationships as always incomplete. The fairy tale, or hegemonic understanding of heterosexual relationships, ends with marriage and a baby, which these shows never express. In arguing that the racial triangulation of Blacks and Asians, wherein both groups were undesirable at one point and Blacks have remained undesirable whereas Asians have become the model, the tensions revealed surrounding their interracial relationships and the subsequent emergence of Blasians is rooted in on-going efforts to maintain White supremacy.

Chapter three introduces a key moment in the Blasian trajectory, where Blasians begin to appear in a number of popular entertainment media and availed themselves of Asianness, Blackness, and multiraciality in order to negotiate not just their identities, but the representations of their identities. This chapter uses a number of entertainers like 80s “It-Girl” Rae Dawn Chong, and the immense popularity of Blasian video models in hip-hop and R&B videos as crucial actors in the emergence. In this moment Blasians become characters on television shows,
plot devices, models, entertainers, and subjects for hip-hop and R&B songs. While the stars in this chapter alternately identified or not as Blasian, their reception by the media was curiously similar across the decades. The inability to process that these entertainers could claim more than one minority identity, resulted in confusion and oftentimes resentment by other figures in the entertainment realm and media. I argue in this chapter that part of the rise in their popularity was due to the simultaneous emergence of the mixed-race movement (birthed out of the multicultural era of the 1980s and 1990s). Without the parallel emergence, Blasians could not be used as a foil for the hegemonic understanding of mixed-race as either Black/White, or sometimes Asian/White. I use this chapter to demonstrate how the plurality of subjectivities plays out on and off screen. The competing claims of Blackness, Asianness, and multiraciality are made discursively, empirically, and materially by the Blasians in this chapter, and it ultimately forces acknowledgement of the multiple, intersecting, and perpetually shifting view of identity in relation to power, dominant structures, and social conditions.

Kimora Lee Simmons and her exaggerated campy persona is the focus of chapter four. I argue that the presence of alternate readings of Simmons, like mine which emphasizes the resistive potential of her class politics and persona, make her a camp object. This chapter argues that the use of camp as a lens in which to read the way Simmons is represented allows for examining the ways the performance of her identity, through ghetto fabulosity and orientalist tropes, is definitely resistant to and potentially subverts hegemonic ideologies of race, mixed race, gender, class, and sexuality. Simmons’s start in the fashion industry and her position as a designer, her championing of a Kimora Barbie™, the naming of her children, the storylines on her reality television show, model castings, and her tweets to fans via Twitter, are all moments where dominant narratives meet resistance. The image of Simmons projected to the world self-
consciously renders the artificial indistinguishable from the real, contributing to a representation that destabilizes what it means to be both Black and Asian. Her embodies performance of Blasianness indicates a refusal to settle for what is visible and allows for the contestations hegemonic notions of identity. As the representations of Simmons’ work to revise meanings behind racial stereotypes, it also opened up a space to question racial categorizations and hierarchies.

Chapter five continues the questioning of racial categorizations and hierarchies with U.S. football player turned *Dancing with the Stars* champion, Hines Ward. Ward becomes the embodiment of a number of contradictory narratives regarding race, gender, nation and masculinity. On the field he is mentioned as having the natural talent of a Black athlete, but the cunning and trickery of an Asian. Off the field, he becomes part of the model-minority myth through his foundation for other mixed-race children and his membership on the White House’s Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. As his star turn on *DWTS* demonstrates, his racial identity often confounds popular media who read him monoracially, or refuse to interact with the multiplicities of his identity despite the numerous opportunities to do so. His success as the impetus for the redefinition of Korean nationalism roots part of the Blasian branding process firmly within transnational discourses. I argue that when multiple subjectivities are considered and acknowledged, as they are with Ward in Korea, that shifts in both the definition and narrative of everything from race to nationalism to citizenship to masculinity can be shifted to become more inclusive rather than rooted in false notions of authenticity and realness.

The sixth chapter and third celebrity case study traces out the multiple narratives that frame post-cheating scandal Tiger Woods. If popular media outlets refused to read Hines Ward as Blasian despite the moves that center and re-center different aspects of his identity, then Tiger
Woods offers a counter. The interaction with Woods’ Blasian identity happened for the benefit of the numerous and concurrent news stories, contradictory jokes about his masculinity and sexuality, the hand wringing and shaming, and (scant) praising of his behavior. Though there were very few narrative themes that addressed race explicitly, they were deployed in very specific ways that revealed a number of unspoken tensions about the state of race, mixed-race, sexuality, and respectability in the United States. In other words, in order to shame, praise, emasculate, and mock Woods the reaction and coverage had to engage not just his Blackness, but his Asianness as well, purposefully leaving out any claim to Whiteness he might have gained with his declaration of multiraciality and his career in golf. This chapter also examined the counter to those mediated narratives about Woods’, the apologia that occurred in order to save, generally the Blasian brand, and specifically the Tiger Woods brand. The restoration of the Blasian brand came via negotiated branding strategies that deployed his Blasianness in an effort to win back the publics’ trust. Woods has not yet returned to his pre-scandal position of prominence, both within the sport of golf and in popular culture, but this moment has resulted in some insights about multiracial identity and celebrity that can be applied to other groups. The lack of consistency between media on the coverage of Woods as his scandal played out should be taken as a sign of progress, because it illuminates how quickly some are able to keep up with dynamic transformations in racialization, and forces others left behind to (hopefully) acknowledge the changes. The lack of consistency also acknowledges that these celebrities, and Blasians (and by extension any other text) are no inscribed with a singular, “right” meaning, despite the presence of hegemonic (or preferred) meanings.

Possibly the most important intervention this research on Blasians can make is in the recognition that not only is a multiracial subjectivity possible, but it exists and a Blasian
subjectivity exists as well. Furthermore these subjectivities escape the anti-Black, self-loathing, blindly celebratory logics of previous research on mixed-race; and offer a way of reconceptualizing race through its disruption of the hegemonic order of society. Also important is the acknowledgement that there is no way to escape the ascription of race by media and society, but the conflict of ascription with personal choice opens up a realm of possibilities. Blasianness challenges extant discursive identity models by recognizing the ways identities and subjectivities evolve, and shift, and potentially change. Furthermore, if prevalent notions of racial authenticity, or realness, can be overcome, then the opportunities for building coalitions across the pluralities of subjectivities and identities have grown exponentially. Lastly, by not privileging Blasian identity over both monoracial Black or Asian identities, this dissertation opens up the possibility of studying race and mixed-race in ways that do not sustain racial disparities. In other words, examining the branding of Blasians allows for taking a truly antiracist research position.

I did consider Barack Obama as a potential case study for this dissertation, since for all intents and purposes, he too should be considered Blasian. Having been raised by his Indonesian stepfather, in both Hawai’i and Indonesia, he has made references in his biography and in his speeches to being raised in a melting pot that includes a half-Indonesian sister, and a Chinese niece. He has championed Asian American issues, restoring a White House initiative (which counts Hines Ward as a member) whose sole purpose is to address issues concerning the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. If my future research directions involve analyzing multiracial identity as existing in the space between being biologically determined and socially constructed, President Obama is part of how I envision the future of multiracials and critical mixed-race studies. It is necessary to peel back the many layers surrounding race and identity in
the United States in order to redefine what multiracial means. Just as we have moved away from using blood quantum, matrilineal lineage, and hypodescent\textsuperscript{57} to determine racial identity, the shifting and contestation that occurs around multiracials needs to be accommodated within racial formation theories. In other words if one thinks, as I have argued in this dissertation, that being Blasian is not the same as combining monoracial Blackness with monoracial Asianness, then an analysis of the discursive representation of Obama should bear out my argument.

As I conclude this dissertation I am looking at list of Blasians that I began compiling at the inception of this project. The list originally contained names of famous, kind-of famous, and slightly famous Blasian people. Then as friends and family understood the direction of my project, they contributed names to the list. It has now expanded to include the names of people I have met as I was writing who have identified themselves to me as Blasian, and the names of others within their families and communities who also think of themselves as Blasian. I tried not to write this dissertation using the generalizing notion that “all Blasians are like this”, since ‘all’ is never broad enough to include everyone and their experiences, and I could never speak to or for the experiences of every Blasian. So I end this dissertation where I started, with a rapidly growing list of people who reject the ideal of unadulterated, pure races through their embodied Blasian subjectivity, who offer less predictable, multifaceted identities ripe for subverting current paradigms of racialization.

\textsuperscript{57} The undoing of hypodescent and its influence on US racial formations is still in the beginning stages, but as the multiracial movement continues to make gains on both policy and culture levels, it is within the realm of possibilities that the one-drop rule will no longer be a viable option for determining blackness.
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Conclusion


