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THE MISSING BOX:
MULTIRACIAL STUDENT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AT A PREDOMINATELY
WHITE INSTITUTION

By

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A THESIS

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THE MISSING BOX:
MULTIRACIAL STUDENT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AT A PREDOMINATELY
WHITE INSTITUTION

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University of Nebraska, 2011

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The purpose of this study was to add to the growing body of research aimed at deciphering the unique identity development experiences of multiracial college students. In doing so, this particular study sought to explore the process for self-identified multiracial students attending a Mid-western predominately white institution. Personal interviews and a focus group were utilized to delve into the students' stories, and the participants' pathways through negotiating their racial identities were linked with Renn's (2004) ecological identity development patterns. The result was an in-depth and critical understanding of how a predominately white institution places multiracial students in an unsupportive environment, where they are often forced into racial identities that they might not have otherwise chosen for themselves.

This study explored how five self-identified multiracial students' experiences attending a predominately white institution led to Renn's (2004) ecological patterns of multiracial identity development through the completion of five interviews and one focus group. The following sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the participants' connection to Renn's (2004) five ecological patterns of multiracial identity development: "I think diversity is important," "I am proud of my heritage," "I'll switch back and forth between my identities," "Identifying as 'x' and 'y' – that's key," "Why can't you be

both,” “I classify for ease, but this is who I really am,” “People like me only happen in America,” “I’m racially ambiguous,” “Too Black to be White, too White to be Black,” and “The amount of non-White people is very low.” The results from this qualitative study indicated that the process of identity development for multiracial students attending a predominately white institution is highly influenced by the environment, leaving them little agency in determining how they racially identify and forcing them to enter situational modes of identity. Implications for multiracial student identity development, as well as, student affairs practitioners are provided. Additionally, recommendations for future research are reviewed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Multiracial Student Bill of Rights

“I have the right not to justify my existence in this world”:

Multiracial people blur the boundaries between races, the “us” and “them.” They do not fit neatly into the observer’s schema of reality. The multiracial person’s existence challenges the rigidity of racial lines that are a prerequisite for maintaining the delusion that race is a scientific fact. (Root, 1996, p. 7)

“Although the United States is traditionally represented as a democratic society, with equal opportunity for all, a brief review of American history indicates that this has only been a dream for many citizens, especially in higher education” (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002, p. 78). The multiracial population in the United States has grown significantly over the past 30 years, due largely to an increase in interracial marriages (Roth, 2005). As a result, interest in how multiracial students self-identify, as well as, why they make certain racial identification choices has grown, specifically because they challenge normative rules about race in our society (Roth, 2005). However, recent history is a reminder that most multiracial students were not meant to exist, let alone have personal agency in how they racially identified. The purpose of this study was to examine how multiracial students experience the process of identity development within the context of the predominately white university environment.

At one time, anti-miscegenation laws, widespread state statutes, prohibited interracial marriage in the United States (Moran, 2004). “The laws universally targeted relationships between Blacks and Whites, and a number of the provisions, particularly those in Western states, banned unions between Asians and Whites. A few restricted intermarriage with Native Americans, but none mentioned Latinos” (p. 1664). These laws were extremely pervasive, and lasted until the Supreme Court struck them down in

1967 in *Loving v. Virginia*. The foundation for anti-miscegenation laws was a belief that racial groups had always lived separately and that it was natural to do so (Moran, 2004). More importantly, confusion arose over how to identify the offspring of interracial unions because traditionally patrilineal lines had determined a child's race; yet, for most mixed-race children this would make them European American, or White. Thus, the ideology of the one-drop rule came into being.

The "one-drop rule" was established specifically to keep Black and White racially mixed children from garnering entrance into the European American community; however, it is indicative of the stringent barriers that existed, and continue to permeate, the American culture. America's history of the one-drop rule – codified legally as well as socially and culturally – designated how people with any known Black ancestry should be identified (Roth, 2005). If an individual contained "a single drop" of Black blood, then they were legally designated as Black and consequently many multiracial individuals, who claim an African American heritage, abide by this "rule" to this day (Roth, 2005). This study sought to explore the way that multiracial students self-identify. In the 2000 census, four percent of respondents under the age of eighteen checked multiple race boxes; thus, this is in part an attempt to understand if the growth of the multiracial student population, as well as, the patterns in which these individuals can racially identify, has contributed to a greater sense of pride and ownership in multiracial identity (Renn & Lunceford, 2004). Or, has the influx of multiracial students on college campuses simply added more racial identification boxes to check without a place to truly belong?

Context

“There has been a growing emphasis on the importance of multiculturalism and the current challenges facing the system of American higher education” (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995, p. 117). There is no greater evidence of this than in the faces of multiracial students, a population on college campuses that appears to be growing. Yet, this population of students remains a vastly understudied population in the context of higher education research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to add to the growing body of research aimed at deciphering the unique identity development experiences of multiracial college students. In doing so, this particular study sought to explore the self-identification processes for multiracial students attending a Mid-western predominately white institution. Five personal interviews and a focus group were utilized to delve into the students’ stories, and the participants’ pathways through negotiating their racial identities were linked with Renn’s (2004) ecological identity development patterns. The result was an in-depth and critical understanding of how a predominately white institution places multiracial students in an unsupportive environment, where they are often forced into racial identities that they might not have otherwise chosen for themselves.

Significance of Study

This study is significant in that it adds to the body of research on a growing, but understudied student population: multiracial students. This study provides support for Renn’s (2004) ecological identity development patterns. The study also provides new contentions concerning the role of the predominately white environment in multiracial

identity development, as well as, the amount of agency students have in negotiating this process. The results can be utilized to foster campus environments which are more amenable and supportive of the multiple ways multiracial students self-identify.

Research Questions

Within this qualitative study I employed the primary research question: “How do multiracial students describe their experiences attending a predominately white collegiate institution (PWI)?” The following sub-questions were additionally explored:

- What are the students’ perspectives on the issue of “passing” for those multiracial students who have the ability to do so? (The term “passing” refers to the ability to be perceived as a member of the dominant racial group.)
- How do multiracial students select the peers they choose to associate with and the student groups they become involved in?
- How do multiracial students perceive that they are treated by European American faculty, staff, and peers?

The research questions were influenced by Renn’s (2004) ecological patterns of multiracial self-identification, which was utilized as a theoretical framework throughout the study. Renn’s (2004) research was similarly conducted at a predominately white institution and explores the importance of environment in the identity development process for multiracial collegiate students. Following a thorough analysis of the resultant data, I was able to locate the participants within Renn’s (2004) patterns of identification, as well as, determine ways in which their experiences diverged from her theory.

Research Design

Creswell (2007) notes that when researchers are faced with a problem that statistical analysis will not adequately answer, qualitative methodology must be employed. Therefore, I utilized qualitative case study methodology because quantitative measures would not have effectively addressed the lived experiences of multiracial students as they navigate the process of identity development at a predominately white institution. Five self-identified multiracial students were purposefully recruited and interviewed. Four of the five participated in a focus group. The interviews allowed me to elicit each participant's personal story of racial identity development; whereas, the focus group focused on the participants' collective understanding of their role at a predominately white institution. I then transcribed the interviews, as well as, the focus group and analyzed the data for emergent themes and sub-themes.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are employed throughout the study:

Predominately white institution (PWI): "Predominately" was chosen versus the traditional "predominantly" to convey the inherent struggle of race relations on a predominantly white campus; dominant meaning more prominent, and dominate meaning to exert control over. Thus, predominate alluded to the control the white institutional environment has over the way in which multiracial students self-identify. However, "predominantly" is sometimes used where appropriate.

Multiracial/Biracial: An individual whose biological parents are members of two or more different racial groups. This operational definition was employed in order to be more inclusive than the term biracial which commonly refers to an individual whose

biological parents are members of two different racial groups (Root, 1996). The term “biracial” is incorporated in the discussion of earlier research which utilized this term.

Monoracial: An individual who claims only a single racial heritage, or a multiracial individual who preferences a singular ethnic background (Root, 1996).

European American: The term European American is utilized in the study as a means of describing all individuals who would self identify as “White.” I chose European American in order to be as inclusive as possible since many of the participants may consider themselves part “White.”

Ecology: The scientific study of the person and the environment and the resultant development from each component acting on the other (Renn, 2004).

Delimitations

This study incorporated several delimitations due to the fact a bounded case study methodology was utilized. Five self-identified multiracial students were recruited from a single Mid-western, predominately white institution. The students who participated were required to be 19 years of age or older, and to have parents of at least two different racial groups. Beyond these requirements, no additional restrictions were placed on the participants.

Limitations

Since I utilized qualitative research methodology to complete this study, there are several limitations affecting the generalizability of the findings. Purposeful sampling was employed to recruit participants since they were required to be self-identified multiracial students. A recruitment e-mail was sent to organizations and campus offices which might work with this population. As a result, students volunteered to participate after receiving

the recruitment e-mail; therefore, they may not be an accurate representation of the general multiracial student population at [Central University]. The thoughts, feelings, and experiences highlighted in the study represented the participants' opinions at the time of the study, and may have been affected by my own multiracial self-identification as I interacted with the participants. Additionally, since this was a qualitative study I served as the primary research instrument, and personally collected, transcribed, and analyzed all of the data.

Conclusion

The number of multiracial students on college campuses across the nation will continue to rise, and their experiences of racial identity development are wholly unique making them a significant population to study. This study sought to bridge this information gap and examine how five multiracial students described their experiences forming their racial identities while attending a predominately white institution. The literature review in Chapter 2 outlines previous work on predominately white institutions, students of color, identity development, and multiracial students. Chapter 3 delineates the methodology of this study, which included both interviews and a focus group to draw out the participants' distinctive stories about their pathways through identity development and the role the predominately white institution played in each of their experiences. Chapter 4 presents the resultant findings and connects the participants to Renn's (2004) ecological identity development theory for multiracial students through their explanatory sub-themes: "I think diversity is important," "I am proud of my heritage," "I'll switch back and forth between my identities," "Identifying as 'x' and 'y' – that's key," "Why can't you be both," "I classify for ease, but this is who I really am," "People like me only

happen in America,” “I’m racially ambiguous,” “Too Black to be White, too White to be Black,” and “The amount of non-White people is very low.” Ultimately, the participants indicated that it was difficult to identify as multiracial within the predominately white institution. Finally, in Chapter 5, I offer a discussion of the study’s findings alongside some implications of this study for practice.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Multiracial Student Bill of Rights

“I have the right not to justify my ethnic legitimacy”:

The existence of multiracial individuals requires that the common definition of ethnicity be revised. Specifically, race must not be synonymous with it. We must also challenge the notion that multiracial people will be the harbingers of doom to ethnic solidarity or ethnic continuity (Root, 1996, p. 9)

Introduction

Multiracial student identity development remains a complex and largely undefined process (Poston, 1990). Yet, on the 2000 United States census (the inaugural year to provide the option of selecting more than a singular race) almost two and half percent of respondents indicated that they belonged to more than one racial category, and almost four and a half percent of these multiracial respondents were under the age of eighteen (Renn & Lunceford, 2004). This changing demographic is paramount for higher education administration professionals who are now experiencing an influx of multiracial students with neither an environment nor a theoretical lens in which to receive them, particularly at predominately white institutions many of which have already experienced decades of racial unrest between diverse monoracial student groups and their European American counterparts.

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of identity development for multiracial students attending a predominately white institution, and to determine what role the college played in determining the students' ultimate racial identity. Within this chapter, I will present an overview of the literature on predominately white institutions; as well as, student of color experiences and identity development, as they relate to PWIs, in an effort to establish a doorway through which to reach the more recent and less

explored research on multiracial student experiences and their road to healthy identity development.

I completed a broad spectrum analysis of the literature by exploring books and online-databases of peer-reviewed journals, including: Academic Search Premier (EBSCO), Google Scholar, and JSTOR. I specifically examined research from the fields of sociology and psychology, much of which was undertaken through a critical perspective which specifically focused on inherent inequalities and oppression in the predominately white institution environment. I utilized the search terms “predominantly white institution,” “students of color,” “identity development theory,” and “multiracial students,” as well as, combinations of the search terms such as “identity development theory AND multiracial students” in order to build a pathway through the literature from predominately white institutions and student of color experiences at these collegiate campuses to multiracial student identity development theory at predominately white institutions.

The following sections of reviewed literature seek to serve as foundational building blocks to illustrate the environmental and cultural context in which students of color, particularly multiracial students, navigate predominately white institutions. The most significant and enduring critique of much of the foundational literature is the fact that it focuses primarily on monoracial student experiences and thus illuminates the paucity of current research on multiracial student identity development theory and experiences on predominately white college campuses. Yet, juxtaposed against this criticism, is the reality that the scarcity of multiracial student research serves as a catalyst for the current study.

The Culture of Predominately White Institutions

An understanding of the historical and sociological actors which have shaped the cultural backdrop of predominately white institutions will provide a basic fundamental conception of the stage in which the current study takes place. “Lawyers and civil rights advocates who presented constitutional and moral arguments for school desegregation believed that guaranteeing African-Americans access to predominantly white institutions would enhance their opportunities for social mobility and thus improve their life chances” (Wells & Crain, 1994, p. 531). “Without access to these universities and the status of the degrees they conferred, African-Americans, no matter what their level of educational achievement or attainment, would remain a separate and unequal segment of our society” (p. 532). However, despite the passage of civil rights legislation in the last half century, the national goal of providing ethnic minority populations with equal access to quality institutions of higher education, and opportunities for academic success has yet to be fully realized (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002).

Nevertheless, as a result of past desegregation, the racial compositions of predominately White institution settings are consistently becoming more diverse; yet, this has not necessarily translated into increased intergroup interactions or resulted in diminished racial tensions on campus (Chavous, 2005). Chavous (2005) completed a large-scale, quantitative study with 215 African American and 144 White undergraduate students, examining their perspectives on the predominantly white campus’s racial climate. Chavous’s (2005) findings revealed that, “...diversity related issues continue to be primary sources of conflict on campuses across the country” (p. 239). As a result, predominantly white college campuses may be relatively unprepared for many of the

problems accompanying change in their student bodies, specifically in the wake of impending demographic changes (Hurtado, 1992).

Racial conflict at predominately white institutions is often not outwardly directed, but rather exists beneath the surface where it permeates through the campus as an “invisible” problem (McClelland & Auster, 1990). In fact, in a qualitative study utilizing 15 discussion groups, composed of 75 monoracial students of color interview data repeatedly demonstrated that many European American students believe that the racial/ethnic climates of their predominately white campuses are fine and are often not aware of the ways in which their behaviors have a direct detrimental impact on students of color (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000). This ideology is defined as “symbolic racism,” which is linked with the more blatant forms of “traditional” racism by a common negative affect toward people of color; however, symbolic racists demonstrate negative affect in more subtle, yet equally volatile ways (McClelland & Auster, 1990).

After conducting a qualitative study in which forty-one White college students who had completed the 1997 Social Attitudes of College Students Survey were interviewed, Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) found that in exhibiting this new racial ideology White collegiate students will resolutely deny that inequality is structural and they will seek to explain it away as the result of students of color’s “cultural deficiency.” In other words, though White students may believe that students of color experience discrimination, they also believe that it is the result of a small number of prejudiced White individuals (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). Additionally, they criticize students of color for utilizing discrimination as an excuse, and if only they would work harder and complain less then they too would succeed (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). In order to

obscure this new form of *racetalk* on predominately white college campuses, institutions are initiating new “diversity-friendly” policies to aid in ameliorating racial friction; however, many of these policies are superficial, at best, and fail to achieve the desired result of unity within the campus community.

During a series of interviews with seven untenured faculty and scholars of color, Brayboy (2003) found that in an effort to implement diversity, predominately white institutions will employ several cursory methods such as: providing new courses on diversity, hiring a few faculty of color, and assigning these new faculty members to cover committee assignments, work with students of color, serve as role models for students of color, as well as, offer helpful suggestions on how to be a more user-friendly institution to all students, including students of color. Yet, the notion of “implementing diversity,” in and of itself, is problematic and it underscores the lens through which predominately white institutions of higher education view diversity – as a free-standing policy (Brayboy, 2003). Thus, diversity becomes an endeavor to be executed without necessarily overhauling the underlying structure of the institution and its day-to-day operations; the implementation process is window-dressing and the structure of the window, or the institution, remains the same (Brayboy, 2003). To advance the agenda of diversity, institutions that truly value students of color must move toward considering comprehensive changes in their underlying composition, especially if they wish to demonstrate a commitment to refocusing the historical legacies of institutional, epistemological, and societal racisms that pervade predominately white colleges and universities (Brayboy, 2003).

Two significant critiques of these studies outlining the culture of predominately white institutions are that the studies primarily utilized quantitative methodology and they all focus on monoracial students or faculty. Thus, the in-depth stories which might provide experiential evidence for how the culture of predominately white institutions shapes the identity development of multiracial students has yet to be examined in great detail. However, the new ideology of “symbolic racism” has indelibly influenced the cultural framework in which students of color experience predominately white institutions and their European American classmates. Yet, in order to better flush out the multiracial student experience at predominately white institutions it is important to not only critically dissect how the environment of a predominately white college or university acts upon its students of color, but how these students in turn view their environment.

The Student of Color Experience at Predominately White Institutions

This section is intended to serve only as a brief overview of the student of color experience at predominately white institutions in order to provide a window into the multiracial student experience, and is by no means meant to be exhaustive; therefore, only research focused on the aggregate student of color experience at predominately white colleges and universities was utilized to shed light on how students of color interact and react to their collegiate milieu.

“Actualizing an educational vision of equality in higher education in the new millennium requires understanding the sociopolitical forces that preclude and promote equal opportunity and academic success” (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002, p. 77). Pewewardy and Frey (2002) came to this conclusion following the completion of a quantitative study

examining 412 monoracial undergraduates' perceptions of racial campus climate, students support services, and cultural diversity courses on campus. In addition to this ideology, Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) found through a qualitative study utilizing focus groups and two-hour observations of thirty-five students of color, that over the past forty years American institutions of higher education have ventured to increase educational access for ethnic minorities. However, students of color have experienced for decades the unequal distribution of education in this country. Specifically, higher college dropout rates, lower levels of academic preparation in high school, lower socioeconomic status, and greater alienation or isolation in the White college environment have been cited as problems facing ethnic minority college students (Loo & Rolison, 1986). These experiences were echoed by the 163 undergraduate monoracial students in Loo and Rolison's (1986) qualitative, interview-based study focused on the alienation of ethnic minorities on collegiate campuses. Owing to these obstacles which place students of color on unequal footing in the college competition, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are less likely to attend a postsecondary institution and to attain a degree than are their European American counterparts (Tierney, 1999). Tierney (1999) asserted that Tinto's theory of college student retention "missed the mark" for minority students and thus, employed this information in creating a model of minority college-going and retention.

Although many predominately white colleges and universities are making good faith efforts to enroll a diverse student body, recent quantitative research examining 578 monoracial undergraduates' perceptions of campus cultural climate suggests that these students do not necessarily experience a similar campus environment (Ancis, Sedlacek, &

Mohr, 2000). The ethnic minority experience is said to be distinctly dissimilar from that of European American students at PWIs, and these changing demographics present a challenge to predominately white institutions which are now confronted with a growing student of color population that has a different value system, an intensified awareness of their minority status, a need for climate inclusiveness, and who are first generation to attend college (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002).

“While all students may experience forms of marginality over the course of their time in college, students of color in particular can feel marginalized more often than they feel that they matter” (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002, p. 78-9). Emerging from focus group data and observations of students of color, Jones, Castellanos and Cole (2002) found that parallel to the tension felt by predominately white institutions as they adjust to a more diverse student body, ethnic minority students experience stress on a variety of levels in navigating a dominant-cultured campus, including: social climate stresses (the student’s view of campus climate, whether the student feels isolated or underrepresented), interracial stresses (the interaction of ethnic minority students and the dominant culture), racial discrimination (being mistreated or disrespected because of one’s race), within-group stresses, and achievement stress. These stresses are encapsulated within the tension that students of color feel between being required to “blend in” on predominately white college campuses, while at the same time the application of academic and behavioral stereotypes emphasize their group characteristics and difference – as described through group interview data with seventy-five students of color examining intergroup relations with their White peers (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000). And, resulting from exposure to these stresses, students of color are likely to view predominately white

collegiate campuses as cold and lonely places, where the institutional climate is unwelcoming and where racism is oft encountered (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002).

Garnered from quantitative survey data completed by 322 undergraduate monoracial students examining differential treatment on college campuses, Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, and Andrews-Guillen (2003) revealed that experiencing discrimination has significant negative consequences on minority student adjustment and persistence in school due to feelings of alienation, intimidation, segregation, and isolation at predominately white institutions. Therefore, a one size fits all campus climate will never adequately foster a supportive environment for a diverse student body, and despite the extensive research highlighting the fact that university campuses are increasingly becoming more diverse, we cannot assume that the appearance of diversity equates with acceptance and respect for racial differences (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002).

Predominately white institutions were not initially established for students of color; therefore, intolerance and exclusion are too often the experience of this population (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002). However, if predominately white postsecondary institutions make a concerted and meaningful effort to affirm the cultural identities of students of color, they stand to gain increased possibilities for ensuring the latter's success in college – if the structure of the education these students receive also encompasses a commitment to high academic and social goals, as well as, active learning (Tierney, 1999). “Not only must students fit into the academic culture, but educational organizations must also accommodate for and honor students' cultural differences” (p. 83). Ultimately, students of color on predominately white campuses must be able to affirm, rather than reject, who

they are, resulting in students of color having a greater likelihood of gaining access to institutionalized capital and predominately white campuses becoming more democratic spheres of educational opportunity (Tierney, 1999).

The trends connecting all of the research on the student of color experience at predominately white institutions are expressed feelings of isolation and a need for diverse cultural rejection in favor of blending into the dominant group by students of color, as well as, negative intergroup interactions with European American peers. Though there are a greater number of qualitative studies in this niche of predominately white institution research which illustrate the students' personal experiences, they still fail to address the multiracial student experience and how it might be differently affected by the students' possible unique mixture of European American heritage and diverse culture. Thus, more qualitative work on multiracial students' interactions with the culture of predominately white institutions must be undertaken.

Nevertheless, these studies do expose that the student of color experience on predominately white collegiate campuses is uniquely different and assuredly a more arduous journey as compared to their European American counterparts. Yet, a student's pathway through college is comprised of more than outwardly directed interactions with his or her environment, peers, the faculty, and the administration; additionally, it is imperative to understand how these factors influence the student's negotiation and development of self. Therefore, in order to better delineate how multiracial students navigate the process of identity development one must examine how students of color, as well as European American students, form their identities to demonstrate why these theories are a clumsy fit, at best, to define multiracial student identity development.

Racial Identity Development Models

W.E.B. Du Bois accurately predicted that, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line,” regrettably his prophetic words remain an accurate portrayal of the twenty-first century as well (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 253-4). Racial identity theories focus on the role of race and the extent to which it is incorporated into identity of self-concept; these theories evolve out of the tradition of treating race as a sociopolitical and, to a lesser extent, cultural construction (Evans, et al., 2010; Helms, 1995). Therefore, racial identity theories do not aim to suggest that racial groups in the United States are biologically distinct, but rather suppose that each group has endured different conditions of domination or oppression, which have shaped their construction of self (Helms, 1995). There is no panacea for understanding the identity development of everyone; however the following models seek to provide a frame in which differing racial groups negotiate the process of identity development in a culture which seeks to preserve Whiteness (Salazar & Abrams, 2005; Evans, et al., 2010).

Each of the following monoracial identity development models are discussed in considerable detail in order to demonstrate the conceptual progression of how singular racial groups reach positive, actualized identities. This is done in order to delineate why they are an inaccurate portrayal of the multiracial process of identity development. Additionally, it should be noted that these studies largely fail to account for the influence of the environment on individuals’ different identity development pathways, which is inconsistent with the overwhelming influence of the predominately white environment on students of color, as suggested by the previously presented research.

Helms's People of Color and White Racial Identity Models

In Helms's version of racial identity theory, members of all socioracial groups, regardless of specific racial or ethnic group membership, are assumed to experience a racial identity development process that is delineated by several statuses (Helms, 1995). "Helms contended that all people in the United States have a racial identity that is experienced within a framework of power and privilege" (Evans, et al., 2010, p. 260). The general developmental issue at hand for Whites is abandonment of entitlement; whereas, the general developmental issue for people of color is surmounting internalized racism in its various manifestations (Helms, 1995). However, in both circumstances, development for the individual potentially occurs by way of the evolution or differentiation of successive racial identity statuses; statuses represent the dynamic cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that govern a person's interpretation of racial information in his or her interpersonal environment (Helms, 1995).

In order to craft her theory of White racial identity development, Helms created the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale and has continued to update her theory over the past two decades. Helms's White identity development model is widely known, and the most researched theory of White identity development; it was created to raise the awareness of White people about their role in creating and sustaining a racist society and to illuminate the role they must play in dismantling it (Evans, et al., 2010). Helms suggested that White identity development occurs in two distinct, sequential phases: abandonment of racism and evolution of a nonracist identity (Evans, et al., 2010). As a consequence of being socialized in an environment in which members of their group, if not themselves personally, are privileged relative to other groups, Whites learn to

perceive themselves as entitled to similar privileges; thus, in order to protect their afforded privilege individual group members will learn to deny and distort race-related reality and aggress against perceived threats to the racial status quo (Helms, 1995). The abandonment of these racist ideologies to protect endowed privilege comprises the first phase of Helms's White Racial Identity Model, abandonment of racism. Healthy identity development for Whites involves the capacity to recognize and abandon the normative strategies of White people for coping with race; consequently, the second phase of Helms's model, evolution of a nonracist identity, must occur in order to ensure that Whites have successfully traversed the identity development process (Helms, 1995).

A cursory overview of the history of race relations in the United States reveals that people of color have been subjected to similar (but not necessarily identical) deplorable political and economic conditions because they were not perceived to be "pure" White (Helms, 1995). "One consequence of differential treatment of people according to their racial classification is that negative racial stereotypes of the affected groups of [people] of color become automatic social themes that can be called upon to explain the circumstances of the deprived groups" (p. 189). Helms (1995) asserted that overcoming societal racial stereotypes and negative self- and own-group conceptions is a major component of racial identity development; accordingly, the people of color racial identity model is a series of statuses moving from being defined externally by White people and White standards, to valuing collective identities and learning to empathize and collaborate with members of other oppressed groups. Helms (1995) adapted her People of Color Racial Identity Model from Cross's Model of Black Nigrescence (discussed concurrently) because she believed that with some elaboration his model could address

the identity development experiences of all marginalized groups. Thus, Helms contends that her People of Color Racial Identity Model is meant to describe the pathway to identity development for African Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Latino Americans.

I find that significant critiques of Helms's models are that she utilized quantitative methods and adapted previously created theory in order to develop theoretical models that are meant to illustrate the identity development process for large swaths of people, especially the people of color model, and in doing so she does not account for cultural differences among the different monoracial groups. Additionally, neither of these models would accurately describe how multiracial individuals formulate their identities, since they might identify as White, people of color, monoracial, multiracial, or any combination thereof. Also, these models are linear in nature and suggest that individuals proceed through the identity development process similarly and sequentially; this is most likely not the case for multiracial individuals who can opt to identify in a myriad of ways. Lastly, the lack of qualitative data precludes one's ability to understand how these identity development models play out in everyday life, signaling the need for further qualitative work.

Cross's Model of Black Identity Development

In the analysis of identity transformation, interest is placed on (a) how a person perceives change in himself/herself, and (b) an objective analysis of the person's personality, attitudes, ideology, and behavior in order to determine the extent to which the person has actually changed (Cross, Jr., 1978). A host of scholars have developed models of Black identity development; yet, Cross's theory of psychological nigrescence

is the best known (Evans, et al., 2010). Cross constructed a descriptive model on “The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience;” the French term “nigrescence” referring to the “process of becoming Black” (Cross, Jr., 1978; Evans, et al., 2010). The Cross Model of Black Identity Development places considerable importance on understanding the dynamics of the Negro personality and/or worldview, and on the need for temporary withdrawal into Blackness (Cross, Jr., 1978). The model concludes with an analysis of self identity internalization by the individual (Cross, Jr., 1978).

Cross employed quantitative survey methodology several times in evaluating whether this model was an accurate depiction of how Blacks navigated the process of identity development (Cross, Jr., 1978). Therefore, this model once again fails to illuminate how these linear stages actually operate in individuals’ lives, making a strong case for the need of qualitative research. Cross’s model is also very linear which is arguably an inaccurate lens through which to view multiracial identity development, due to the numerous pathways to identity formation that multiracial individuals might follow. Furthermore, he reinforces a significant dichotomous relationship between Black and White cultures in the process of Black identity development, which is likely to fail to describe the experience of a multiracial student who claims allegiance to both Black and White heritages.

Ferdman and Gallegos’s Model of Latino Identity Development

As their numbers have grown, Latinos in the United States have been the focus of increasing attention by the media and by scholars; however, the racial constructs that have predominated in the United States do not easily apply to Latinos, and when they are forced to fit, they truncate and distort Latino realities (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Evans,

et al., 2010). A focus on racial identity and its development should consider how individuals and groups cope with the surrounding racial order and its constructs; both individually and collectively, people can accept and internalize the racial order, resist it, or transform it (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). Ferdman and Gallegos offered three considerations for framing how Latinos experience race and racism: 1. Though being Latino involves racial, cultural, and ethnic distinctions, race is secondary for this population; however, skin color remains pertinent among Latinos, 2. Latinos often come from mixed heritages and represent a wide range of skin colors, making it difficult to place them in finite racial categories and, 3. Latinos respond in various ways to the racial categories in which they are placed in the United States (Evans, et al., 2010).

Ferdman and Gallegos developed a model of Latino identity development that considers the racial system in the United States, and they avoided the use of static stages to describe the identity navigation process choosing instead to provide six different orientations that serve as lenses through which Latinos may view themselves (Evans, et al., 2010). The most important dimensions in defining one's orientation toward one's identity as Latino/a, according to this model, include: one's "lens" toward identity, how individuals prefer to self-identify, how Latinos are seen as an ethnic group, how Whites are viewed, and how "race" fits into the equation (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001).

Ferdman & Gallegos (2001) developed a theoretical model for Latino identity development through the rigorous examination of research illuminating the Latino experience in America. Because they were interested in creating orientations of identification rather than statuses, due to the nature of the Latino population which is a cultural group that racially identifies in numerous ways, their theory begins to resemble a

model for multiracial identity development because multiracial, too, might serve as a larger context for individuals who identify racially in several ways. Yet, the model was still derived from large-scale data depicting the Latino experience versus individual stories – further qualitative exploration needs to be completed examining the process of identity development in order to bring “life” to these theories. Lastly, some multiracial individuals may racially associate with Latino culture in addition to other races; therefore, this theory only begins to proceed in the right direction toward a multiracial model, but it has not yet arrived.

Kim’s Asian American Identity Development Model

Jean Kim (1981, 2001) introduced the Asian American identity development model following research examining the experiences of Japanese American women (Evans, et al., 2010). The model addresses how Asian Americans come to terms with their racial identity and resolve racial conflicts in a society dominated by White perspectives, through five distinct, sequential, and progressive stages (Evans, et al., 2010). Kim (1981, 2001) presented three key assumptions to explain how racialized populations manage their identities in a White racist society: 1. Asian American identity and White racism are not mutually exclusive entities, 2. Asian Americans must consciously work to unlearn and challenge the negative messages and stereotypes that they previously adopted without question and, 3. A positive Asian American identity is contingent on one’s capacity to grapple with identity crises and transform previous negative experiences into constructive, growth-enhancing ones (Evans, et al., 2010).

Though Kim (1981, 2001) was similarly examining a cultural framework, Asian, in which individuals might racially identify in numerous ways she reverted to a linear

stage model unlike Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) (Evans, et al., 2010). Therefore, like previous stage models, her theory is unlikely to translate to the multiracial identity development experience since it is improbable that these individuals would all follow the same identity formation process. Like Cross (1978), Kim (1981, 2001) incorporated a forced racial dichotomy between Asians and Whites in her identity theory which would be an inaccurate depiction of multiracial individuals who seek to incorporate each of these heritages into their racial makeup. Lastly, Kim's (1981, 2001) model incorporates value judgments that suggest the possibility of a "negative" identity, which was also initially suggested in the process of multiracial identity development and thoroughly refuted by later theorists; this concept will be further discussed in the following section.

Erik Erikson postulated that the development of a positive racial identity was crucial to the establishment of a healthy individual identity; furthermore, the development of a healthy ethnic identity is important because it is a master status – an identity that overrides all others in the judgment of one's self (Renn, 2004). The theories outlined above are a sampling of a number of theories developed to describe how people of color accomplish the developmental task of achieving a positive racial identity; these theories are all based on a psychosocial or social interactionist paradigm in which an individual of color comes to understand himself or herself through a series of racialized interactions with others that prompt personal development (Renn, 2004). Additionally, all of these theories follow a general format in which the individual progresses through a stage model, and each stage represents an increasing level of sophistication in racial awareness – from a level of no conception of race or racial difference, to a level of complete integration of race as a component of a health adult identity (Renn, 2004).

Yet, these traditional stage models fail to aptly illustrate healthy identity formation for multiracial individuals (Renn, 2004). This lack of cohesion with multiracial identity development is first exemplified by the fact that the models for healthy singular race maturation and Helms's People of Color Racial Identity Model all propose that the individual must renegotiate their comprehension of what it is to be White, and recognize that they are *not* a member of this privileged race; however, for many people who identify as multiracial, the notion of "Whiteness" may be a significant element of their personal identity because they are often partially descendant from European nations, as well as, historically disadvantaged populations. The second inconsistency with multiracial identity development is encapsulated within the prefix "multi-" itself, all of the racial identity models outline a evolutionary method for achieving a healthy *solitary* racial identity; thus, the models do not allow for the incorporation of more than one race on the pathway to the amalgamation of race with a healthy concept of self.

An examination of student of color experiences and racial development models has depicted the process of how students of color formulate their identities within the predominately white campus environment. Though this research opens the window to multiracial student experiences and identity development on predominately white collegiate campuses as well, it fails to paint the entire picture. Thus, an overview of the historical and burgeoning field of multiracial student research exploring their experiences and journey to racially identify will aid in developing the whole portrait of identity formation for students at the axis of multiple worlds.

Theoretical Approaches Exploring the Multiracial Experience of Identity Development

The theoretical approaches to defining multiracial identity development included in this section are mostly historical in nature and are not often used presently to illustrate the multiracial identity experience; however, they do aid in depicting the evolution of multiracial identity research. Whereas, the foundational theories illustrated in the subsequent section might align with one of the following approaches, they simultaneously pushed the study of multiracial identity development into new arenas, which is why they are outlined separately.

Historically races have been viewed as distinct, separate categories; the boundaries between them meaningful to both the group's experience and order of life; however, shifting racial regimes have exerted an influence over today's racial classification patterns; whereas, previous generations were stymied by the one-drop rule¹, youth are now being raised in a society where diversity is increasingly valued and the notion of multiracial self-identification is more likely to be legitimated (Thornton, 1996; Harris & Sim, 2002). Juxtaposed against this newfound freedom to express oneself as multiracial is the ubiquitous backlash from monoracial populations, as well as, an undercurrent of racism which still threatens American society and is arguably present on predominately white campuses. Within this conflicting sociocultural environment, researchers over the last century have utilized several lenses to construct theoretical processes through which multiracial individuals' malleable racial identities are developed via their unique experiences: the problem approach, the equivalent approach, and the variant approach (Shih & Sanchez, 2009; Renn, 2004).

¹ The one-drop rule references the historical argument meant to separate those who were European American and those who were "other." Therefore, all individuals who were proven to have even "one drop" of Black blood, were summarily categorized as Black.

The Problem Approach

The earliest scholars (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937) studying multiracial identity development during the Jim Crow era proposed the theoretical model of the “marginal man;” the marginal man was thought to represent the multiracial impasse – an individual caught between two cultures but who is in actuality not a member of either realm (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). This led to the advancement of the problem approach, which encapsulates all theories on multiracial identity development that claim multiraciality, in a racially divided world, is a problematic social position which will inevitably lead to tragedy for the individual; therefore, these theories primarily focus on the deficits, dilemmas, and negative experiences associated with being multiracial (Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009). Consequently, the problem approach assumes that a monoracial identity is preferable and that multiracial individuals will ultimately encounter crises arising from their positionality “between” races (Renn, 2004).

Scholars utilizing this approach focused on understanding and identifying the resultant problems associated with a multiracial identity, including: rejection, isolation, and stigmatization; additionally, they postulated that these obstacles were foisted upon multiracial individuals by not only the dominant race, but also by minority groups in society (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Researchers during this period typically conducted their observations of multiracial individuals within clinical populations and on those with behavioral and psychological problems; as a result, the problem approach necessarily painted a pessimistic picture of the livelihoods of multiracial individuals, and predicted lifelong negative psychological consequences for those without a singular racial sphere (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

The Equivalent Approach

After 1970 a shift in racial politics occurred in the United States exemplified by the prohibition of antimiscegenation laws and the newfound racial pride following the civil rights movement. Correlated during this period, is the increase in the number of mixed-heritage researchers studying multiracial identity development through a far more positive, sensitive lens than the problem approach (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Researchers, at this time, assumed that mixed-race individuals would be absorbed into their minority monoracial culture; therefore, the need to draw racial distinctions between multiracial and monoracial became moot (Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009). Accordingly, proponents of the equivalent approach concluded that multiracial individuals would undergo similar identity development patterns and assimilation processes, with similar outcomes, to their monoracial counterparts (Renn, 2004). Thus, these researchers applied monoracial identity development models to the multiracial identity development experience and attempted to force a fit (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Identity development models that treated those who were multiracial as equivalent to monoracial individuals derived largely from Erik Erikson's (1968) ego-identity developmental framework, in which, the central task of adolescence is to form a stable identity, defined as a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity (Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009). The development of racial identity was viewed as a similar process to ego-identity formation because on the pathway to a healthy racial identity, individuals similarly explore and make various levels of commitment, across various social spaces, over time toward a centered, meaningful identity (Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009).

Yet, it soon became apparent that though more optimistic, equivalent approach models were inadequate for properly depicting racial identity development for multiracial individuals; many critiqued these theories because they did not provide agency to the individual who desired to identify with multiple ethnic groups (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). And, for those multiracial individuals who chose to identify with only one of their component races, equivalent approach models lacked the phase during which mixed-race individuals confront crises prior to opting to self-identify as monoracial (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). “Thus, these models could not fully capture the experiences of multiracial individuals as they tried to forge their racial identity” (p. 571). The next approach transitioned from the assumption that multiracial individuals developed their racial identities as monoracial people of color to an understanding that this group had unique processes for cultivating diverse identities unlike any other racial group.

The Variant Approach

The mid-1980s through the 1990s brought a new generation of researchers aimed at conceptualizing the multiracial identity development experience as dissimilar from any single racial group’s identity development trajectory (Rockquemore, Brunσμα, & Delgado, 2009). These researchers, many of whom were multiracial themselves, sought to theoretically describe how psychologically, clinically, and developmentally multiracial individuals actively and consciously construct a multiracial identity that allows them to maintain a healthy, integrated sense of their multiple racial ancestries, their distinctive culture, and their social location (Rockquemore, Brunσμα, & Delgado, 2009). Thus, these researchers would argue that utilizing a variant approach for depicting multiracial identity development allows for the uniqueness of the multiracial experience and the

possibility of situational identity patterns (Renn, 2004). The primary concern for variant approach researchers is defining how multiracial individuals live in a society demarcated by monoracial definitions, and they sought to explain this ideology psychologically, clinically and developmentally (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009). Thus, these researchers crafted new analytical tools and employed multidisciplinary approaches in their studies (Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009). Stephan (1992) and Brown (1995) bolstered this new approach through putting forward research that postulated that the majority of mixed race individuals do not self-identify as being a member of a singular racial heritage, they came to this conclusion through the collection of quantitative data from biracial individuals that began to incorporate the influence of the environment on identity development (Renn, 2004).

Gibbs (1989) and Herring (1992) contributed to the variant approach through their proposal that the challenge for multiracial adolescents in developing a healthy identity is two-fold; multiracial individuals must learn to successfully integrate their multiple racial and cultural identifications, while also learning how to cultivate a positive self-concept and sense of competence (Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009). They came to these conclusions following a study of a small sample of clinical cases. Additionally, they found that multiracial individuals must construct the ability to synthesize their identifications over their lifetime into a coherent and stable personal identity, as well as, a positive racial identity (Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009).

Jacobs (1992) likewise utilized progressive developmental tasks in formulating a multiracial identity model; Jacobs completed his research using a doll-play interview method to measure and classify the stages through which multiracial children pass as they

complete their racial identity development (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Jacobs employed the dolls as a channel through which to explore how children understand race as it pertains to skin color, and from his results determined that multiracial children and adolescents pass through three stages: 1. Pre-color constancy (early childhood), during which the child's understanding of skin color is flexible, 2. Post-color constancy (approximately four years old), a stage in which multiracial children begin to understand the vast social implications associated with skin color and; thus, become ambivalent about their background and lastly, 3. Biracial identity (eight to twelve years old), this stage encapsulates the formulation of an integrated biracial/multiracial identity (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Developmental problems in the variant approach may arise when multiracial individuals encounter obstacles in their efforts to resolve five major psychological tasks: 1. Conflicts about their multiple racial/ethnic identities, 2. Conflicts about their social marginality, 3. Conflicts about their sexuality and choice of sexual partners, 4. Conflicts about separation from their parents, and 5. Conflicts about their educational or career aspirations (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). However, researchers in the variant approach assume that the development of a healthy multiracial identity is preferable to a monoracial self-concept (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009).

The problem, equivalent, and variant approach models differ in their conceptualization of healthy multiracial identity development or the possibility thereof; yet, they all propose a period or phase in which multiracial individuals feel tension and conflict about their multiple racial identities (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The following foundational multiracial identity development theories and models capitalized on the

experience of tension as a central, and pivotal, component in the creation of a healthy multiracial identity for the individual.

Foundational Theories and Models of Multiracial Identity Development

As illustrated previously, traditional stage models for singular racial identity development are an inadequate fit for describing multiracial identity formation; they have been critiqued for being too linear, for disregarding the socioecology of race, and for relying on the rejection of White culture as an essential middle stage (Renn, 2004). In contrast, multiracial identity development is viewed as highly personal and multidimensional, and the foundational multiracial identity development theories aimed to convey this previously unexplored distinction (Renn, 2004). However, disagreement exists among the foundational theorists as to the ultimate goal of a healthy multiracial identity pathway; consequently, three theoretical frames have emerged: 1. The achievement of an integrated identity similar to the highest level of achievement in minority racial identity models, 2. Development of a positive multiracial identity, and 3. An outcome in which an individual has not only developed a positive multiracial identity, but a sense of “positive alterity,” or feeling of specialness, additionally emerges (Renn, 2004).

Integrated Identity

Poston (1990) pioneered the advancement of integrated identity models for multiracial individuals through the creation of his progressive, developmental model based upon Cross’s construction of personal identity (individual characteristics independent of racial categorization such as self-esteem and interpersonal competence) and reference group orientation (includes racial identity, racial esteem, and racial

ideology) (Renn, 2004; Poston, 1990). Poston (1990) recognized the absence of cohesion between current minority and multiracial identity theories and the lived multiracial identity. Current theoretical models postulated that multiracial individuals must forgo one, or more, of their cultural heritages in order to achieve racial group pride and whereas current monoracial models called for the rejection of minority then majority culture, multiracial people have often inherited both racial identities (Renn, 2004). Thus, Poston aimed to hone a theoretical model of biracial identity development which allowed for the simultaneous integration of several group identities (Renn, 2004). Poston's Positive Model of Biracial Identity Development is composed of five transitional stages: Personal Identity, Choice of Group Categorization, Enmeshment/Denial, Appreciation, and Integration (Poston, 1990).

The structure of Poston's (1990) model introduced several important issues and assumptions leading to a positive, integrated multiracial identity: 1. Biracial individuals tend to experience identity definition obstacles when they internalize outside prejudice and values; 2. Numerous factors influence individuals' identity choice (family and peer influences, for example); 3. Biracial individuals may experience alienation at the choice phase and will ultimately make a choice, even if they are uncomfortable with it; 4. The choice of one identity over another at the choice phase and the resultant denial can be associated with feelings of guilt and disloyalty for the individual; 5. Integration of multiple ethnic heritages is important and is associated with positive indicators of mental health; and 6. The most difficult period of adjustment and identity confusion is during the choice phase and the enmeshment/denial phase, when personal identity indicators might be most affected by reference group orientation attitudes. Thus, several key points

emerging from Poston's (1990) model are that multiracial individuals are necessarily impacted by their environment in the identity development process, they may choose among multiple racial self-identifications, and that they have agency in ultimately determining how they identify. However, what Poston (1990) fails to reconcile is in the linear, stage model approach, it is highly likely that all multiracial individuals do not reach a phase of integration where they fully accept their multiraciality in its totality.

The Kerwin-Ponterotto (1995) model similarly utilizes progressive stages to illustrate integrated multiethnic identity development in biracial children (Renn, 2004). Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) focused their study on Black/White biracial children and aimed to discover, through qualitative interviews, the psychosocial factors on which a multiracial identity formation is dependent; additionally, the stages parallel periods in the individual's life from preschool through adulthood (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993; Renn, 2004; Evans, et al., 2010). The model begins with *Preschool*, when racial awareness emerges, and is followed by the second stage *Entry to school*; "What are you?" questions and a need to categorize people and objects prompt children to examine and reassess their self-concept (Renn, 2004). *Preadolescence*, the third stage, is demarcated by an increased awareness that physical appearance is correlated to group membership, and the individual's recognition that his or her parents have differing racial heritages (Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Lloyd, 2005; Renn, 2004).

Stage four in the Kerwin-Ponterotto (1995) model, *Adolescence*, is analogous to Poston's (1990) model in that it is described as the most arduous stage for biracial youth due to both the challenges inherent in the nature of adolescent development and the particular difficulties society imparts on those with a multiracial heritage (Renn, 2004).

Stage five, *College/young adulthood*, may be a continuation of the individual's immersion in one culture while simultaneously rejecting others, but as young people continue to develop a more secure personal identity, they are more likely to reject societal expectations and accept their biracial heritage (Renn, 2004). The transition to college will often afford biracial individuals the opportunity to explore their racial identity, and as a result, they will begin to assess the advantages and disadvantages of their multiethnic heritage (Renn, 2004). Finally, as individuals move into the sixth stage, *Adulthood*, they continue to hone a positive racial identity through the integration of the different facets of their multiethnic backgrounds; this final stage represents not only an integration of racial identity, but an integration of one's racial self and other aspects of identity as well (Renn, 2004).

Though the Kerwin-Ponterotto (1995) model continues the integration of the environment into the multiracial identity development experience, and even suggests that these individuals feel pressure to racially define a certain way by their peers, this theory again fails to allow multiracial individuals to positively identify in multiple ways because of its employment of linear stages. The theory also postulates that the transition to college will allow multiracial students to explore their own multiple ethnic heritages; however the researchers disregard the idea that attendance at a predominately white institution may stymie this exploration process. The next set of foundational theories explored the development of a multiracial identity.

Multiracial Identity

Though Poston (1990) and Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) visualized the integration of racial identities as the completion of multiracial identity development,

other theorists postulated that the claiming of a distinct multiracial identity was the positive endpoint of the identity development process (Renn, 2004).

The biracial person's process of developmental self-valuation is a major journey through these self and society interactions: awareness of differentness, struggle for acceptance, self-acceptance and assertion of an interracial identity, and an ongoing reevaluation and expression of a transforming ethnic/racial self in relationship to others (Kich, 1996, p. 266-7).

Following an ethnographic study examining the identity development of fifteen White and Japanese biracial adults, Kich (1992) concluded that for a biracial individual, an affirmative expression of that reality is the integration and assertion of a biracial identity; he proposed a three-stage model of biracial/bicultural identity development that exemplified this conviction (Renn, 2004).

Stage one spans from ages three through ten and is characterized by an individual's initial recognition of the dissonance between their self-perceptions and others' perceptions (Renn, 2004). Stage two follows this period and extends through grade school and into late adolescence or young adulthood; during this stage the individual engages in a struggle for acceptance by others (Renn, 2004). Multiracial individuals will self-identify in this stage as either monoracial or will simply list all of their different heritages; however, some may claim an interracial identity (Renn, 2004). Once the individual accepts himself or herself as a person with a biracial and bicultural identity, he or she has progressed into stage three (Renn, 2004). Individuals in this stage are still influenced by the acceptance of others when defining their own identity, but they come to form congruent, positive self-definitions that contradict negative social constructions of multiracial people.

A unique component of Kich's (1992) model is that it relies on the agency of the multiracial individual to overcome the external, negative societal ideas about biraciality; thus, this model requires reflexivity (Renn, 2004). In order to achieve the final stage of Kich's model an individual must develop the cognitive capacity to view race as a social construction and multiraciality as a singular construct among many (Renn, 2004). Ultimately, the multiracial individual cultivates a positive racial identity and hones their ability for self-authorship, leading to greater cognitive and personal growth (Renn, 2004). Yet, through only studying Japanese and White multiracial individual Kich (1992) limited his model by not diversifying his multiracial population. Similar to previous theories, Kich (1992) also suggests that a healthy multiracial identity is a fully actualized one where the individual self-defines as interracial, multiracial, etc.; however, this is likely not the only healthy mode of self-identification for multiracial individuals. The next subset of foundational theories builds on these ideologies of multiracial identity development, but incorporates the individual's belief that being multiracial is a privileged social position.

Positive Alterity

Related to the models focused on the achievement of a multiracial identity as the desired goal is the subset which holds that the formation of a positive marginality aids individuals in reaching the finish line of identity development (Renn, 2004). "In these theories, an individual comes not only to see himself as biracial, but also to understand biraciality as a privileged position from which to experience social interactions" (p. 18). Rather than a stage model, Daniel (1996) outlined a theory proposing that a healthy biracial identity lent itself to a sense of "positive marginality," which is characterized by

a self-consciousness that affords an experience of increased tolerance for difference and appreciation of commonalities, as well as multiple points of reference (Renn, 2004).

Resulting from informal conversations with and observations of Black and White biracial students, Daniel (1996) outlined four distinct modes of identity that correspond to a positive marginality, and two modes each are located within two larger frameworks of multiracial identity – integrative identity and pluralistic identity (Renn, 2004; Daniel, 1996).

Daniel's (1996) theoretical model of multiracial identity development begins to incorporate several key elements: multiple modes of positive self-identification and situational identity salience. However, Daniel (1996) gives the multiracial individual complete agency in determining his or her own racial identity and disregards the role of the environment in the identity development process. Furthermore, Daniel (1996) was able to add to the literature on personal multiracial identity experiences due to the fact that he utilized qualitative methodology, but he only recruited Black and White mixed race participants limiting the breadth of his findings.

Root (1990) similarly focused on how multiracial individuals might develop and manage positive marginality or alterity, and presented a model aimed at outlining this progression through research conducted with mixed race individuals with a claim to both a White and minority heritage (Renn, 2004). Like Kich (1992), Root underscored the importance of shifting from seeking approval from others to defining oneself on the road to a healthy multiracial identity, and stated "it is the marginal status imposed by society rather than the objective mixed race of biracial individuals which poses a severe stress to positive identity development" (p. 20). Root's model postulates that healthy

development for multiracial children must include learning strategies, a significant shift from developmental stages, to cope with the “otherness” foisted upon them by a dichotomous, Black-White society and proposed four strategies that function as management mechanisms (Renn, 2004). These strategies are not progressive, or linear, in nature and can coexist simultaneously; additionally, they share a number of themes, including: the multiracial individual accepting both sides of his or her heritage, the individual having the right to declare how he or she chooses to identify, personal strategies for coping with social resistance are developed, and the individual no longer internalizes questions about his or her identity as inferences that there is something wrong with him or her (Renn, 2004).

Root (1996) built upon the idea of resolving “other” status for biracial and multiracial individuals in her discussion of “borderlands” (Renn, 2004). Mixed-race individuals occupy the borderlands, and as they simultaneously construct Root’s (1990) previous strategies to self-identify, they utilize border crossings to move between and among the strategies (Renn, 2004). The border crossings do not exactly match Root’s (1990) strategies; however, they function as a postmodern lens for illustrating how multiracial individuals identify in multiple ways concurrently (Renn, 2004).

In the first type of border crossing, a multiracial individual has “both feet in both groups;” this individual is able to hold and merge multiple perspectives simultaneously (Renn, 2004). The second border crossing describes a multiracial individual who employs situational ethnicity and situational race, consciously shifting their foreground and background as they move across social group boundaries maintained by race and ethnicity (Renn, 2004). Root (1996) describes this multiracial individual as not one who

has varying loyalties, but as an individual who recognizes race as socially co-constructed by economics, gender, and sexual orientation and therefore responds naturally (Renn, 2004).

The third border crossing is actually not a crossing, but rather a conscious choice to remain on the border and to make it the central reference point (Renn, 2004). These individuals may claim a multiracial label or consciousness (Renn, 2004). In the final type of border crossing, the multiracial individual creates a home base in one identity and ventures out into other identities periodically and may possibly settle into a new home base as a result (Renn, 2004). Root (1996) stated that this transiency is not a demonstration of racial disloyalty, but rather a strategy aimed at meeting psychological, emotional, social, or political needs. Additionally, this final border crossing method allows multiracial individuals to alter their identity over the lifetime (Renn, 2004).

Root's model and border crossing paradigm accounted for the impact of racism on identity development and introduced the possibility of a new identity group: biracial or multiracial (Renn, 2008). She also constructed a model which provided for the possibility of multiracial individuals self-identifying in more than one way simultaneously, or moving fluidly among identities; thus, Root's model and paradigm paved the way for the emergence of empirically derived, nonlinear models of identity development for multiracial students (Renn, 2008).

Summary of the Literature

The literature provides a foundation from which to hypothesize about the experiences of multiracial individuals on predominately white college campuses, through the research conducted on their minority monoracial peers. However, studies linking

multiracial student experiences at predominately white institutions to how these experiences, and the environment itself, affect identity development are virtually nonexistent. The current study aims to bridge this gap and illustrate how ecology necessarily affects identity development for the multiracial college student.

Additionally, though identity development theories and models depicting how multiracial individuals complete the process of self-identification have been created, compared to models for monoracial identity development they lack consensus on ideal outcomes as well as developmental processes (stage models versus nonlinear paradigms) (Renn, 2004). The current study utilizes a nonlinear theoretical framework, which accounts for environment in the identity development process, to detect how, and if, multiracial college students do in fact embrace multiple identities simultaneously and how this is practiced within the context of a predominately white institution.

Theoretical Framework

Renn's (2004) ecological theory of multiracial identity patterns served as the theoretical framework for this study because she is the first multiracial identity development researcher to bundle all of the progressive lenses other theorists were utilizing in examining models for multiracial identity formation. Specifically her theory incorporates the role of the predominately white environment, multiple patterns of healthy multiracial identification that are nonlinear, and data drawn from multiracial individuals with various cultural backgrounds.

In a grounded theory study of fifty-six students from six postsecondary institutions, Renn (2004) identified five patterns of identity among biracial and multiracial college students. She adopted the premise that the collegiate environment

provides opportunities for identity exploration in academic, social, and peer involvement settings and therefore utilized an ecological perspective in her research (Renn, 2004). Renn (2004) named her five options “identity patterns,” and found that some students chose not to self-identify within United States racial categories by deconstructing race or opting out of racial categories entirely, and that others fell into two or more patterns because they identified situationally, according to social context.

Student holds a monoracial identity. Many multiracial students strongly identify with only one of their monoracial or ethnic backgrounds; for most students who have one European American parents and one parent of color, this monoracial self-identification is with Black, Asian, Latino, or Native American heritage, though some students may choose to identify with the European American community (Renn, 2004). A monoracial identity, whether of color or European American, is one of the options for a healthy resolution of a mixed race identity, and students who have the cultural knowledge and physical characteristics to fit in with the monoracial group have an easier time doing so than those who are not familiar with the community prior to attending college (Renn, 2004). Yet, on some campuses where the monoracial group lines are less stringent and they are more open to diversity, cultural knowledge and appearance do not pose barriers to group access for multiracial individuals (Renn, 2004).

Student holds multiple monoracial identities, shifting according to situation. Students who choose to identify with two or more of their racial heritages may do so because they come to college with cultural knowledge of each group, or because they desire to gain such knowledge when they enter a supportive college environment (Renn, 2004). Peer cultures play an important role in multiracial students’ ability to identify

with more than one reference group because some microsystems are highly intolerant of members whom they view as disloyal (Renn, 2004). The reality of campus life is that, depending on the dynamics of peer culture and the histories of various campus organizations and communities, students may encounter significant resistance and barriers to being “either/or at my convenience ” (Renn, 2004).

Student holds a multiracial identity. In this third identity pattern, the individual elects an identity that is neither one heritage nor another, but of a distinct “multiracial” group (Renn, 2008). On campuses which have a culture that supports the public claiming of a multiracial identity, students are given the opportunity to join a microsystem in which multiracial students connect with one another and form a community that supports bi/multiracial identity development independent of monoracial categories or particular combinations of them (Renn, 2004). Conversely, collegiate institutions which do not foster a supportive environment, force multiracial students to privately construct their identities (Renn, 2004). Thus, being mixed is a private identity shared with friends rather than a motivation to meet with similar others publicly (Renn, 2004).

Student holds an extraracial identity by deconstructing race or opting out of identification by U.S. racial categories. This pattern represents a multiracial individual’s resistance to what he or she may view as artificial identification categories that have been socially constructed by the dominant, monoracial, European American majority (Renn, 2008). Four types of students utilize this pattern:

1. The first approach is taken by college students who are not visually marked as having anything other than European American heritage, and might choose not to adopt a cultural identity other than the homogenized youth culture;

2. A second approach taken by students is resistance to outside definitions of racial categories and these students will refuse to mark the race and ethnicity boxes on official forms, as well as, to answer “What are you?” questions posed by others;
3. The third approach is enmeshed in the active intellectual engagement of the social construction of race and the purposeful deconstruction of its validity as a means of categorizing individuals; thus, these students will use postmodern language and academic discourse to explain why and how they constructed their identities outside the categorical norms;
4. The fourth approach is often taken by students with international experience who recognize the complicated sociocultural histories of their ancestors’ homelands and as a result, these students do not recognize race as a legitimate social category by which to sort people and group cultures (Renn, 2008).

Student holds a situational identity, identifying differently in different contexts.

Situational identity describes a fluid identity pattern in which multiracial individuals have a stable racial identity, but different elements are more salient in some contexts than within others (Renn, 2008). For some multiracial students the shift between identity patterns was smooth; whereas, for others the transitions were more abrupt (Renn, 2004). Negotiating the boundaries between peer microsystems is especially challenging for multiracial students on campuses where these boundaries are heavily policed by members who want to keep groups distinct by verifying the authenticity of anyone who attempts to claim group membership (Renn, 2004) On campuses where group boundaries are more fluid, the transition among groups for multiracial individuals is far easier and they find that foregrounding of different identities in each community is untroubled (Renn, 2004).

Identifying differently in differing social contexts was once seen as a weakness of multiracial identity development; according to several of the previously discussed stage models, the ultimate goal of a healthy multiracial identity is to elicit one which is integrated and unified and carried across social contexts (Renn, 2004). Renn (2004) argues against this ideology and proposes that the ability to accurately read and assess differing social environments, and then to construct one's identity in response, is a highly evolved skill requiring both emotional maturity and cognitive complexity.

I analyzed Renn's (2004) Patterns of Situational Identity Theory prior to completing this study, and utilized her nonlinear theoretical framework for multiracial student self-identification to guide my research, interview and focus group questions. Renn's (2004) identity patterns were also employed in the data coding process to determine if her patterns were salient in this study, or if different identity patterns emerged for multiracial students at [Central University].

Looking Ahead

Chapter three will describe how research methodology was employed to plan and conduct the present study, and chapter four provides a detailed illustration of the study's findings on the identity development patterns for multiracial students at a predominately white institution. Finally, chapter five details the implications of the research and outlines future recommendations to continue to build a body of literature on the multiracial student identity development process.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The Multiracial Student Bill of Rights

“I have the right to identify myself differently in different situations”:

Many biracial and multiracial people identify themselves differently in different situations, depending on what aspects of identity are salient. Situational ethnicity is a natural strategy in response to the social demands of a situation for multiethnically and multiracially identified people. Yet, the essence of who one is as a person remains the same (Root, 1996, p. 9).

Introduction

“Racial identity development among college students with parents from different heritage groups was largely unexplored until the 1990s, when two forces—one demographic, the other theoretical—converged to stimulate interest in understanding the experiences and identities of biracial and multiracial youth” (Renn, 2008, p. 13). This burgeoning field of research in higher education is where I sought to insert my research question – into the larger conversation of multiracial student identity development.

Multiracial was defined as an individual whose biological parents are members of two or more different racial groups. This operational definition was employed in order to be more inclusive than the term biracial which commonly refers to an individual whose biological parents are members of two different racial groups.

Study Rationale

The existing conversation concerning multiracial student identity development provided the rationale for the research study.

The increasing number of students from two or more races (Renn, 2004) drew the attention of student affairs professionals just as student development researchers moved into a period of close study of individual identity groups. Although it might have occurred without this convergence, a body of research from the mid-1990s to the present has produced a solid foundation of theory to

support student affairs practice regarding multiracial college students (Renn, 2008, p. 13).

Despite the fact that a basic foundation of theory centered on multiracial student identity development has slowly been amassed, the research on this topic did not gain momentum until the mid – 1990s, which suggests that this is still a considerably new field with many stories yet to be told. This is evidenced by Renn’s (2008) discussion of the still existent voids in the conversation. “Relying on studies of precollege youth leaves gaps in knowledge about the identities, experiences, and psychological outcomes of multiracial college students” (Renn, 2008, p. 20). Moreover, “Including participants from only one heritage combination (Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002; Wijeyesinghe, 2001) introduces another kind of limitation” (p. 20). Therefore, I believe that the rationale for my study lied in the youth of the current research and the ability for my research question to explore parts of multiracial identity development that had yet to be fleshed out, such as the role of the predominately white environment in the students’ experiences of identity development.

Research Questions

The study’s research question was: How do multiracial students describe their experiences attending a predominately white collegiate institution (PWI)? Sub-questions sought to add greater depth to the current body of research which is focused on deciphering multiracial student identity development:

- What are the students’ perspectives on the issue of “passing” for those multiracial students who have the ability to do so? (The term “passing” refers to the ability to be perceived as a member of the dominant racial group.)

- How do multiracial students select the peers they choose to associate with and the student groups in which they become involved?
- How do multiracial students perceive that they are treated by European American faculty, staff, and peers?

Methodology Rationale

According to Merriam (2009) “Basically, qualitative researchers are interested in *understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). The relative infancy of the research on multiracial student identity development provided justification for a qualitative research design, because the diminutive amount of current data suggested the need to explore the experiences of multiracial students in depth. An attempt to create a quantitative methodology for this particular study would have been arduous at best, due to the lack of a breadth of research concerning multiracial student identity development from which to draw a foundation for potential survey questionnaires or experimental designs. In other words, a survey would have been difficult to create because the exploration remained to be done in terms of what questions would be appropriate. Furthermore, a cause and effect relationship cannot be predetermined when a holistic analysis of the experience itself has yet to be undertaken.

Prior research on multiracial student identity development has also utilized a qualitative research design in order to effectively draw out the stories of participants. “It is important to note that most studies of biracial college students rely on qualitative methods and limited samples” (Renn, 2008, p. 14). Therefore, in order to speak in the same language as the current conversation a qualitative design was most appropriate.

In addition to a deficiency of multiracial identity development research spotlighting college student populations, the research in this field to date has yet to focus specifically on the experiences of multiracial college students attending predominately white institutions. Thus, I employed a critical case study research methodology. A case study as defined by Merriam (2009) "...is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). A critical perspective can open the door to examine multiple realities that are situated in a political, social, and cultural context (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the case was topical, describing the students' experiences of being multiracial on a particular predominately white college campus.

The multiracial student population at [Central University] (PWI) provided the unique case and bounded system for the study, thus fulfilling Merriam's (2009) trait of a case study being particularistic. The study was not only bounded by place (a single PWI), but by time as well since the participants only reflected on their time as an undergraduate student. A case study research methodology was appropriate for the research study because I aimed to provide an in-depth description (Merriam, 2009) and analysis of the experience of these students. Furthermore, this study sought to establish a new understanding of the way in which attendance at a predominately white institution affects the identity development of multiracial college students, satisfying Merriam's (2009) attribute of a case study being heuristic because the resultant themes provide a way to understand multiracial identity development. All of these characteristics of the study suggested the need for a bounded system and a definitive case within the research design, which lent itself to case study research.

Yin (2009) delineates a second layer of case study methodology, by discussing the distinctions between single and multiple case studies, and whether a case study is holistic or embedded. My case study was appropriately classified as a single-case design because it represented a unique case, since the number of multiracial students at predominately white institutions is small. Additionally, this case study represents an embedded single-case study because the multiracial student population at [Central University] served as the single case and each topic of analysis (passing, involvement, identity development, and interactions with European American faculty, staff, and peers) was embedded within the single-case research design.

The single greatest limitation of utilizing a case study research design for the outlined study was the small number of participants that fit into the bounded system. If another qualitative research style was utilized I could have increased the sample size by recruiting participants from other universities. However, since the research study was conducted at a specific predominately white institution I could make claims, based on the emergent themes, as to the impact of the students' distinctive collegiate experiences.

Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective

Prior to engaging in the study, I examined the lenses of epistemology and theoretical perspective through which I would interact with the participants. I ascribed to a constructivist epistemology and a critical theoretical perspective. A constructivist epistemology is founded in an understanding that individuals construct a reality and build meaning together within a population; yet, each individual has a distinctive reality which lends itself to multiple "truths" (Merriam, 2009). Thus, I was interested in the participants' truth or reality relative to being a multiracial student. A critical theoretical

perspective acknowledges the forces over which individuals have no control in society, that impose themselves within their lives and aid in the construction of their truth (Merriam, 2009). Due to a personal belief that meaning is constructed among participants in a community, but coupled with an understanding that there are social forces which privilege few while oppressing many, I was attracted to a constructivist epistemology and critical theoretical perspective.

Participants

Denoted by the research question, the study participants were multiracial undergraduate students at [Central University]. The study population was comprised of five participants (see Table 1). They were purposefully recruited from organizations focused on the student of color and diverse student experience such as: the Latino Student Association (LSA), African American People's Union (AAPU), [Central University] Inter-Tribal Exchange, the Office of TRIO programs, the campus's Multicultural Center, and multicultural fraternities and sororities. Recruitment methods began with an e-mail to the presidents of the named organizations and multiple individuals in the listed offices, requesting that they send an attached letter of recruitment to eligible participants that they could identify. Following involvement in the study, participants were given and e-mailed the same recruitment letter to pass on to additional possible study participants. If these methods did not result in the number of participants needed to reach data saturation, I intended to contact registration and records and obtain a list of students who had self-identified as multiracial and/or other within the UNL system. These students would then have been sent an e-mail with the recruitment letter inviting them to join the research study. The recruitment of study participants may have been hampered by the stipulation

that participants self-identify as multiracial; therefore, there may have been students who technically fit the study's definition of multiracial, yet failed to view themselves through this paradigm.

<i>Participant Demographic Information</i>						
<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Racial Background</i>	<i>Year in School</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Primary Language(s)</i>	<i>First Generation</i>
<i>Seven</i>	Male	White/Black	Junior	20	English	No
<i>Danielle</i>	Female	Asian/White (Jamaican)	Senior	21	English	No
<i>Risa</i>	Female	African American/ Chinese/Cuban	Sophomore	19	English	Yes
<i>Brad</i>	Male	Puerto Rican/Filipino (Puerto Rican)	Senior	21	English	No
<i>Melquiades</i>	Male	White/American Indian/Black	Senior	26	English	Yes

Table 1. Participant demographic information.

Research Site

[Central University]² is a large, Mid-western University with an undergraduate and graduate population of 24,610. 53.51% of the student populace is male, and 46.49% is female. The racial demographics of the university are: 80.24% White non-Hispanic, 2.39% Black non-Hispanic, 0.35% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2.15% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.61% Hispanic, 1.03% two or more races, and 3.12% race or ethnicity unknown. This is the first year in which [Central University] is providing a “box” for first-year students that identify as more than one race. [Central University] is located in a predominately white city and state which also aided in establishing the multiracial student population at [Central University] as a unique case. However, the rationale for utilizing [Central University] as the research site was its typicality as a predominately white

² The data was taken from fall semester 2010 enrollment demographics on the university's website. The website has been suppressed in order to protect the identities of the study participants.

institution, and its location in a predominately white city and state which provided an area of study that afforded a disproportionate level of marginalization for students of color.

As a current graduate student at [Central University], I had access to the institution's student population. Yet, in order to gain access to the multiracial undergraduate student population at [Central University], the research site, I utilized the assistance of the aforementioned organizations and a letter of recruitment to establish a connection to eligible participants. The greatest challenge that I encountered in gaining access to the research site was the small number of students who qualified to participate in the study, due to the minute number of multiracial students currently attending [Central University]. My method to address this obstacle was to identify as many organizations, student groups, and classes that would potentially result in the recruitment of eligible study participants by reason of their area of concentration being the student of color or diverse student experience.

Data Collection

I utilized interviews and focus group in order to obtain data centered on the participants' experiences related to the research question: "How do multiracial students describe their experiences attending a predominately white collegiate institution?" "In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews...an interview is 'a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study'" (Merriam, 2009, p. 87). Interviews were employed in this study in order to provide the participants with an opportunity to self-disclose about their individual experiences being multiracial at

[Central University], and to allow me to establish a rapport with the participants so that they may talk more personally.

I utilized a focus group to obtain additional data from the participants. “As a method of qualitative research data collection, a focus group is an interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 93). A focus group created a forum in which the participants met and connected with other multiracial students at [Central University] and expressed their shared meaning of their experiences negotiating the predominately white campus environment. Four out of the five participants were involved in the focus group, and it took place following the completion of all of the one-on one interviews. Greater detail is provided below.

Interviews

During the research study, participants were asked to complete a single, one and a half hour, one-on-one interview aimed at gathering stories related to their constructed experiences self-identifying at a predominately white institution. A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized.

In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. Usually, specific information is desired from all of the respondents, in which case there is a more structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 2009, p. 90).

A semi-structured protocol was appropriate, in that it allowed me to let the interview proceed naturally into topic areas which the participant believed were important in the process of identity development. The specific areas of information desired from each

participant were demographic in nature so were therefore asked of the participant prior to the commencement of the guiding questions incorporated in the semi-structured interview protocol. The issues of interest addressed in the protocol were involvement and identity development, and so sought to address the research sub-questions: 1. How do multiracial students select the peers they choose to associate with and the student groups they become involved in, and 2. What are the students' perspectives on the issue of 'passing' for those multiracial students who have the ability to do so? The following guiding questions were used to elicit stories addressing these topics:

1. Reflect for a moment, and tell me the story of how you became socially involved at [Central University].
 - a. Who do you hang out with? Why?
 - b. Where do you hang out on campus? Why?
 - c. What challenges and support did you experience in the process of becoming involved at [Central University]?
2. Tell me a story about when you had to define who you are at [Central University].
 - a. Is this the same way you would define yourself at home?
 - b. If this changed, why?
 - c. Have you ever felt you had to check a box? How did this make you feel?

Participant responses were audio recorded during the interview, "This practice ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis" (Merriam, 2009, p. 109).

Following the interview, participants were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym under which their data was stored in order to maintain participant confidentiality. The

recorded interviews were given to a professional transcriber, who signed a confidentiality agreement and returned typed, verbatim, transcriptions to me. All data collected throughout the interview process was stored in a locked cabinet in my office in order to further safeguard participant confidentiality.

Focus Group

The same cohort of participants were additionally asked to contribute to a one-time focus group for an hour and a half, aimed at eliciting their constructed experiences interacting with European American faculty, staff, and peers at a predominately white institution. Four out of the five students were available to participate. At the end of the interviews, I asked the participants if they would like to be a member of the focus group and all students agreed that they would. However, Risa's schedule conflicted with the other four participants so she was unable to take part in the focus group. Had she been able to participate it may have altered the way the other participants responded because she was the youngest participant, so it is possible that she would have added another layer of complexity.

An unstructured protocol was utilized. "These are particularly useful when the researcher does not know enough about a phenomenon to ask relevant questions. Thus there is no predetermined set of question, and the interview is essentially exploratory" (Merriam, 2009, p. 91). A semi-structured protocol was most appropriate for the participant interviews due to the availability of the literature concerning multiracial identity development and the need to allow participants to construct individualized responses. Because there is a lack of research focused on the impact of a predominately white institution on multiracial identity development, an unstructured protocol for the

focus group was most appropriate. The issues of interest in the focus group were multiracial student interactions with European American faculty, staff, and peers and if those interactions played a role in their identity development, which address the research sub-question: How do multiracial students perceive that they are treated by European American faculty, staff, and peers? Therefore, the opening exploratory question was: Take a moment to reflect, and describe how you think White people see you.

Participant responses were audio recorded during the focus group, for subsequent analysis. The same pseudonyms requested during the interviews were employed to identify data resulting from the focus group, and participants' data was once more stored under these pseudonyms in order to maintain participant confidentiality. The recorded focus group data was given to a professional transcriber, who signed a confidentiality agreement and return typed transcriptions to me. All data collected throughout the focus group was stored in a locked cabinet in my office in order to further safeguard participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis

In order to rigorously analyze the resultant data from the case study interviews and focus group, I completed a four-step critical research method of analysis that is paramount in examining issues of social structure, power, and inequality. This method of analysis was best suited for this case study because it was aligned with my critical theoretical perspective, and the issue of race at a predominately white institution lent itself to a critical lens. The steps involved in conveying an understanding of the studied case are (each is defined below): 1. In vivo coding, 2. Meaning field analysis, 3. Reconstructive horizon analysis, and 4. High-level coding (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). These

analysis techniques were completed within the transcripts themselves utilizing Microsoft Word track changes.

The analysis process began with in vivo coding which aimed at grasping the participants' words from the transcript which directly communicated their experiences, and utilizing those single words, or 2-3 word phrases, as codes for larger phrases. Thus, this first round of examination resulted in a significant number of codes for each transcript which conveyed the participants' meaning in their own words. Next, the multiple lower-level codes were combined to create a higher-level analysis of the participants' deeper meaning, and these higher-level codes were analyzed against Renn's (2004) ecological identity development patterns to see if similarity of dissonance resulted. Secondly, I employed meaning field analysis, aimed at identifying the full range of meaning in a statement, through the scrutiny of key phrases from the participants (Carspecken, 1996). Selected phrases were dissected in order to determine all possible connotations and then linked by "and," "or," or "and/or" phrases; thus allowing the range of meanings to be compared to the overall context of the participants' words and a greater understanding of the overall expression to emerge (Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

The third step in my analysis process was reconstructive horizon analysis which sought to examine the meaning fields on a continuum of inference from highly explicit to highly implicit (Carspecken, 1996). The meaning fields were analyzed through an objective (third person claims), subjective (first person claims), normative (moral-ethical claims), and identity (claims about oneself) ontological lens in order to determine the participants' outward expression and inward sentiment, which allowed for a more holistic understanding of their experiences and ultimately the unique case. Lastly, I utilized the

participants' words to create high-level codes which sought to underscore the themes among the data and serve as a response to the research question. Higher-level code were established from analyzing the larger context of the low-level codes and themes emerged through examining the high-level codes and Renn's (2004) ecological identity development patterns for multiracial students. Sub-themes additionally emerged in support of the consistency between Renn's (2004) patterns and the resultant themes.

Validation Techniques

One of the defects often cited in qualitative research is the "lack" of generalizability of the study's findings. Yet, "The idea that the general resides in the particular, that we can extract a universal from a particular, is...what renders great literature and other art forms enduring" (Merriam, 2009, p. 236). Thus, I utilized techniques aimed at validating this particular case study in order to create a solid foundation which would allow future readers to grasp a sense of transferability in their own lives. Eight validation techniques (see Table 2) were employed in the study's data analysis and the report of the findings (Merriam, 2009).

The first validation technique, triangulation, occurred through two data collection methods: interviews and a focus group, the use of multiple validation procedures, and the five participants served as confirming sources of the emergent data. Participants were presented with the findings so that they might review how they were being represented after the data was analyzed and the resultant themes emerged in order to incorporate member checks into the validation process. If participants raised concerns about the study's findings, which very few participants did, I deferred to the participants' interpretation. In order to allow for adequate engagement in the data, I utilized four

levels of coding in the data analysis process (low-level, high-level, meaning field analysis, and reconstructive horizon analysis), participants were interviewed until data reached a saturation point, and “negative cases,” those which were unique to the experiences of other participants, were specifically analyzed through meaning field analysis in order to provide rich description to these stories.

In the subsequent section, I reflect on the lenses and biases that I brought to the study as a researcher, in order to further validate the findings. Additionally, two self-identified, White women served as peer reviewers for the emergent findings. I trained them on the theoretical framework and coding process for the study and they were also provided with a sampling of un-coded quotes which were utilized in the findings. The peer reviewers then proceeded to verify if the sampling of the participants’ un-coded quotes linked to the themes which I had placed them in.

An audit trail is included in Appendix H for the reader, in order to visually depict the multiple-level coding process that was used to draw out the themes and sub-themes for the study. The emergent themes and sub-themes are further discussed through the use of rich, thick descriptions which allow the reader to gain a holistic picture and sense of context for the study to determine if the results are transferrable to their own lives. Lastly, maximum variation was achieved as a validation technique through the incorporation of participants with varying ages, genders, and racial heritages.

Qualitative Research Validation Techniques

<i>Validation Technique</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Triangulation</i>	This study was triangulated through dual data collection methods, interviews and focus groups, multiple methods of data analysis, and the multiple participants served as confirming sources for the emergent findings.
<i>Member Checks</i>	Once the high-level codes were tentatively established, participants were given the opportunity to review them and determine if they were plausible themes to delineate their experiences.
<i>Adequate Engagement in the Data</i>	Participants were interviewed until I began to see recurrent experiences within the data, suggesting that I had reached a saturation point. Additionally, I employed meaning field analysis on “negative cases” in order to provide rich description to those instances which ran counter to the overarching themes. Lastly, four levels of codes were utilized.
<i>Researcher’s Position of Reflexivity</i>	In a discussion of my epistemology and theoretical perspective, I hope to have established the lens I viewed the data through in order to provide a critical self-reflection of my relationship to the study that may have affected my investigation. Additionally the study includes a discussion of my biases and assumptions which I held prior to engagement in the study.
<i>Peer Review</i>	Colleagues (2) were given the high-level codes in addition to an un-coded excerpt in order to gauge whether the themes I tentatively located within the data also emerged from their examination.
<i>Audit Trail</i>	An example of a transcript that I coded is provided in the appendix in order to demonstrate the methods utilized in the analysis of the data; additionally, a thorough description of the data collection procedures has been discussed.
<i>Rich, Thick Descriptions</i>	The discussion of study findings provides an in-depth and holistic picture of the case in order to contextualize the study in such a way that readers are able to determine whether the case is transferrable to their own experiences.
<i>Maximum Variation</i>	In the process of sample selection I aimed to recruit participants from multiple multiracial backgrounds (purposeful “maximal sampling”) in order to allow for a plethora of experiences and a greater range of application of the study’s findings by the consumer.

Table 2. Qualitative research validation techniques (Merriam, 2009; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Researcher Biases and Assumptions

I recognized and reflected on my position as a multiracial student doing research with other multiracial students. I desired for my similarity to the participants to alleviate unease within the one-on-one interviews and the focus group, and for the participants to view me as an equal with whom they could disclose personal experiences. This attempt at an equalization of power was consistent with a critical theoretical perspective (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Furthermore, I brought to the research an assumption that most multiracial students are unaware of other multiracial individuals on campus. Therefore, I utilized a focus group as not only a means of collecting data, but as an environment in which they could meet others who may share their experiences allowing them to feel as though their issues are the norm rather than a marginalized subset (Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

Ultimately, I believe that the participants were willing to trust me with their personal experiences of identity development because they saw me as someone who could understand, and as a result they shared their stories in totality – both the positive and negative. Additionally, I can recognize that being a multiracial student doing research on the identity development patterns of other multiracial students encouraged me to reflect on my own racial self-identification and justify why I identify the way I do – as a complete multiracial individual.

Limitations

The primary limitations of this case study were the pieces which made it a case and bounded system. Due to the research site having been limited to the multiracial student population at [Central University] that may impede on the generalizability of the

resultant findings. However, I attempted to combat this limitation through several methods of data validation, so that consumers may find that the emergent themes are applicable to their own constructed understanding of the multiracial student experience of identity development at a predominately white institution. A second limitation may have been the researcher as the research instrument. My positionality as a multiracial student, studying other multiracial students may impact the replicability of the research study.

Strengths

In opposition to my positionality within the study serving as a limitation, it served as a strength in that I am an in-group member to the multiracial student experience; thus, participants may have felt a greater sense of comfort and safety discussing their stories with me. This most likely allowed me to garner deeper rich, thick descriptions than an outsider might have accessed. Additionally, this study not only added to the current research on multiracial student identity development, it also explored a new avenue of the conversation due to its focus on predominately white collegiate institutions.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the background and rationale for the research study, presented the utilized methodology, and divulged my epistemology, theoretical perspective, biases, and assumptions. The world is constantly changing, and so too is the face of the “average” college student. As the multiracial college student population continues to grow, the need to further understand their unique experience does as well. Chapter 4 will build upon this foundation through a discussion of the research study’s findings, and what the resultant themes propose about the multiracial student identity development experience at a predominately white institution and illuminate the link

between the emergent themes and the study's theoretical framework, Renn's (2004) ecological identity development patterns for multiracial students.

Chapter 4

Findings

The Multiracial Student Bill of Rights

*“I have the right to have loyalties and identify with more than one group of people”:
You have the right to loyalties and identification with more than one group of people. In fact, this fosters connections and bridges, broadening one’s worldview, rather than perpetuating “us” versus “them” schisms and antagonisms. The allegiance to a greater number and variety of people increases the individual’s sense of connection. We are all empowered by connection. (Root, 1996, p. 9).*

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of self-identified multiracial students at a predominately white institution. The participants described their experiences in terms of distinct patterns of identity development within Renn’s (2004) ecological framework. Through personal interviews and a focus group, I sought to extract how a predominately white institution places multiracial students in an environment that often coerces this population into certain modes of identity. This occurred in the study through: limited peer diversity, the quest to live outside the box, or traumatic encounters with racism. This study aimed to contribute to the growing quantity of research on multiracial students by illustrating how their experiences at a predominately white institution may influence certain paths of identity development. In this chapter, I present the research findings and expound on the study’s themes and sub-themes which emerged from interaction with the participants.

Introduction to the Participants

Each participant was required to be a self-identified multiracial student nineteen years of age or older; no additional restrictions were placed on the participant population. The five participants each individually identified with one of Renn’s (2004) ecological patterns of multiracial identity development which are recalled below; therefore, each

identity pattern is discussed, followed by the sub-themes illustrating the participant's personal experiences which prompted him/her to identify in that particular mode. Yet, the participants all engaged in the same identity development formula: influence of predominately white environment (actor) + experiences (reactor) = identity pattern (solution). In other words, the predominately white institution played a major role in the collegiate experiences of each of the participants, and dependant on how each participant filtered and absorbed those experiences, they were led down a particular pathway of identity development.

Overview of Emergent Themes and Sub-themes

From the interviews and focus group conducted with the participants, five themes and ten sub-themes emerged. Below the themes are identified, as well as visually depicted (see Table 3). The themes are consistent with Renn's (2004) five ecological identity patterns for multiracial students, and the sub-themes are taken from the participants' own descriptions of their experiences in order to accurately describe their stories of racial identity formation. Additionally, an ecological analysis of the influence of [Central University] on each participant's identity development is incorporated in order to present a critical perspective of the racial identity formation process at a predominately white institution. Ecology is taken from Renn's (2004) multiracial identity development theory, and refers to the contextual human and physical elements in a given environment.

Research Themes & Sub-themes	
Theme 1: Monoracial Identity	
Many multiracial students strongly identify with only one of their monoracial or ethnic backgrounds (Renn, 2004, p. 70).	
Sub-themes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think diversity is important.” • “I am proud of my heritage.”
Theme 2: Multiple Monoracial Identities, Shifting According to Situation	
Students who choose to identify with two or more of their racial heritages because they come to college with cultural knowledge of each group (p. 73).	
Sub-themes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’ll switch back and forth between my identities.” • “Identifying as ‘x’ and ‘y’ – that’s key.”
Theme 3: Multiracial Identity	
The individual elects an identity that is neither one heritage nor another, but of a distinct “multiracial” group (Renn, 2008, p. 17).	
Sub-themes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Why can’t you be both?” • “I classify for ease, but this is who I really am.”
Theme 4: Extraracial Identity	
This pattern represents a multiracial individual’s resistance to what he/she may view as artificial identification categories that have been socially constructed by the dominant, monoracial, European American majority (p. 17).	
Sub-themes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “People like me only happen in America.” • “I’m racially ambiguous.”
Theme 5: Situational Identity, Identifying Differently in Different Contexts	
Multiracial individuals have a stable racial identity, but different elements are more salient in some contexts than within others (p. 17).	
Sub-themes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Too Black to be White, too White to be Black.” • “The amount of non-White people is very low.”

Table 3. Research themes and sub-themes.

Theme 1: Monoracial Identity

Renn (2004) postulated that the first identity development pattern for multiracial students was the exhibition of a monoracial identity, through which the individual strongly identifies with only one of his or her monoracial or ethnic backgrounds; the multiracial individual in this pattern is most likely to identify with his or her monoracial identity of color (i.e. Black, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American), if one monoracial identity is European American. This mode of self-identification was utilized by Danielle – a senior who is Chinese and White, but identifies as Asian. Two sub-themes emerged

from Danielle's experiences leading her to identify in the monoracial identity pattern: "I think diversity is important" (Danielle's commitment to living out a diverse ideology in her own life) and "I am proud of my heritage" (Danielle's commitment to her mother's cultural heritage).

"I think diversity is important." For Danielle, the importance of diversity in her own life, as well as, on a predominately white campus orchestrated her decision to identify as monoracial. Danielle describes her friends, and her place among them, by stating, "...they're all (laughs) they're all White! I feel like...we make jokes that I'm...the token Asian." When asked how she defines herself at [Central University], Danielle responded, "I'm...half Asian...and it's not...a particular time but...I choose to identify myself as Asian because I...think diversity is important." She is identifying as Asian in part because she wants to be included within the framework of "diversity" on campus. However, because Danielle's physical characteristics are often perceived by her peers as more European American, she experiences backlash from the predominately white campus based upon her Asian self-identification:

And, it's one of those things where I'm choosing how to define myself, and how I view myself, and how I apply myself to the rest of the world. And, for you who mean well...to say that I'm not Asian and to kind of roll your eyes when I'm talking about it...these are just off-the-cuff remarks like... "You're not Asian," and I'm like, "Why am I not Asian?" And it does kind of suck to have to define why I view myself as Asian and justify that – I don't think anyone should have to do that.

The discrepancy between how Danielle chooses to self-identify, and how her peers want to define her racial identity for her has caused Danielle a great deal of internal conflict. However, consistent with Renn's (2004) description of the multiracial individual who chooses to identify monoracially, Danielle is strongly bound to her Asian self-

identification and is therefore verbally “fighting back” and not only claiming, but asserting her right to her Chinese heritage. Simultaneously, Danielle recognizes that not only should she not have to defend or define her motivation for identifying as Asian, but that no one should have to fight a racial battle with their peers.

Additionally, in the face of conflicting views on her Asian identity Danielle demonstrates her commitment to the importance of diversity, as well as, her desire to push back against the predominately white campus culture by encouraging her European American peer to illustrate her dedication to the importance of diversity in the following experience:

I’ve also wanted to encourage [my White friend] because she’s an editor and has a leadership role at the [Daily Central], and she has an active interest in promoting the diversity of her [news]paper...She hopes to be a student journalist somewhere, and possibly she wants to work as a correspondent in French-speaking Africa. Diversity...will become her life, and issues that are not necessarily important to her will be important to the populations that she will be covering. So...I’ve tried so hard to tell her that diversity is important and that if it diverges on race then it diverges on race...and if that’s how you are different you shouldn’t let your race be something that stops you from understanding a community. And...I’ve hopefully changed her mind from freshman and sophomore years to senior year.

It is imperative to Danielle that she encourages an appreciation for diversity in the lives of her European American peers because she has essentially “denied” this identity for herself and chosen a diverse life. Therefore, she has placed a higher valuation on diversity and her Asian heritage, so it is natural for her to both advance and expect this attentiveness to diverse communities in her friends.

Danielle’s dissolution with the predominately white campus culture is not only relegated to her European American peers, she additionally opposes her multiracial friend’s identification with the European American culture because she feels as though he overlooks his unique ethnic heritage:

...what also kind of sucks...is that I have a friend who is Middle Eastern, but he's half Middle Eastern and he chooses to identify himself as White which is his choice but to me...for someone who I feel like we are in the same boat...I feel that he does not give credit to how his life has been different and I don't really feel like he wants to see the differences. Not that the differences are bad, but that...I don't know...if he owned that the people might have a better association with that. I want people to think, "Oh, she's Asian – she's really cool." You know? And, she's really proud and she makes me proud to be myself.

Danielle is most likely experiencing an internal conflict balancing her "choice" to identify as monoracial, Chinese, and her Middle Eastern friend's decision to identify as monoracial, White. Danielle's lens is that diversity is important because they attend a predominately white institution; thus, her friend is ignorantly turning a blind eye to his unique ethnic heritage, in Danielle's estimation. Danielle has reacted to this disagreement of racial self-identification by reasserting her loyalty to her Asian heritage and hoping that her friend will grow to appreciate and claim his Middle Eastern racial background too.

Unfortunately, Danielle explained how she has had to cope with the fact that though diversity may play a significant role in her own life, it is often not something that is highlighted in the lives of her European American peers. This value dichotomy has greatly impacted her sense of self:

Something that kind of bothers me is that people...I mean a lot of White students, just in my conversations...try to say that [diversity is] not important, and what is important is your academics and your personality. But...it completely...negates...I have an experience that's different than yours and...I might have grown up speaking a different language than you, and when I go home, over...holidays, I eat different food than you do. And, this [college] is a really good chance...for...people to recognize that...backgrounds are important and it is important to be in a class with...students who have...a racially diverse background...And, it really bothers me when people say..."Oh, it's not important." It is actually really important! It's really important for me, and for you to tell me something that is important to me isn't important, makes me feel like...I can't contribute something because...my contribution is no longer important.

Though Danielle self-identifies as Asian-Chinese, she has also claimed the ideology of “diversity” as an identity. And, from this diverse identity she has created a soapbox where she proclaims the need to not only appreciate, but preference one’s student of color identity before all else or display a commitment to diversity in one’s own life. And, as a result, when peers negate the importance of diversity she may feel as though they are negating HER identity. Danielle is exemplifying Renn’s (2004) first pattern to an extreme because not only has she “chosen” a monoracial identity for herself, and demonstrated her allegiance to that choice, but she lives out her pride through foisting her value of diversity on her peers. The second sub-theme illustrating Danielle’s story, describes in greater detail why she has self-identified as monoracial because she is proud of her ethnic heritage.

“I am proud of my heritage.” Not only did Danielle believe that enhancing diversity at a predominately white institution was important, but she was pleased to support diversity initiatives because she is personally proud of her Asian heritage:

I’m really actually proud of my Asian heritage – my grandmother was a mail-order bride. She came over to the United States and married someone...the United States used Chinese laborers to harvest sugar cane crops in Hawaii, and it was essentially slave labor...from that my mom is...a doctor and...she’s incredibly successful and happy and...she speak English without an accent...And, so I choose to pay homage to that...and...it’s just really shocking when I’m told that I’m not Asian...I get an Asian person that says, “You’re a fake” because I don’t know how to use chops[ticks] and I don’t know how to speak Chinese. But that’s not what makes me Asian. What makes me Asian is that my mom is Asian...I can choose to define myself and that my upbringing, I realize, has been different because of my Mom’s cultural background...and it’s kind of hurtful when I try to say, “This is important to me.”

Not only is Danielle choosing a diverse identity because she appreciates the need to bring diversity to a predominately white institution, but she is also choosing to embody

her mother's path and honing a Chinese identity for herself because she has deep sense of pride in her mother's history. Again, this ties back to Renn's (2004) monoracial identity pattern since she found that students who chose a monoracial identity would be strongly tied to their heritage of color versus their European American identity, and Danielle is living this out through her connection to her Asian ancestors. Danielle illustrates that her racial identity isn't only linked to behavior, but to ancestry as well.

Additionally, when asked if she ever felt that she had to check a box at [Central University], Danielle understood the opportunity to check the "Asian" box as another means of celebrating her diverse heritage. "I don't know...I'm always really proud to check boxes indicating that I'm Asian because I really feel like I represent my community well...I've always been really proud to say that I'm Asian and diversity has become really important to me." Despite her pride in her heritage, and belief that diversity is important, Danielle recognizes that identifying as a monoracial student of color is often easier at a predominately white institution than attempting to assert one's multiraciality, "But...our society doesn't...really accept that [multiracial] terminology. If you...are fifty percent minority, you are one hundred percent minority and that is your label...it is sad that it's easier for me to say that I'm Asian than it is for me to say that I'm half, and...nobody really cares if you're half. You're... [a] minority."

The dissonance between Danielle's pride in her identity and its relative importance to her, and the predominately white environment around her may have placed her in the position to appreciate diversity and claim an Asian identity more than the self-identification that she declares it to be. In other words, it is highly likely that Danielle has had an Asian identity imposed on her by European American peers who want to

easily delineate people into traditional racial categories. And, as a result Danielle has responded positively by investing herself into her Asian cultural heritage and then pushing back against the European American norm by assuming that they too garner an appreciation for diversity.

Ultimately, Danielle optimistically reflects on her undergraduate experience self-identifying as Asian at [Central University] stating, “I wish that someone...two years ago had said to me...look...it’s kind of an anomaly here and...be proud that you’re Asian...don’t downplay it...it wasn’t something that mattered to me. Whereas, now it’s...something that’s important to me [and it’s] an area that I’m passionate about and look to promote.” Danielle accurately reflects Renn’s (2004) description of a monoracial identity pattern. Her sub-themes exemplify the commitment and pride in her ethnic heritage that Renn (2004) noted were a large component of this pattern. Furthermore, she extends Renn’s (2004) pattern by not only claiming her Asian identity for herself, but claiming an allegiance to diversity as well and promoting this passion for diversity in the lives of her peers. Conversely, a critical analysis of how the predominately white environment has perhaps influenced her monoracial identity is examined below.

Ecological Analysis. Danielle described the predominately white culture at [Central University] as having both a positive and negative impact on her experiences of racial identification. Because Danielle attends an institution where the majority of the student body is European American, her explanation of its positive influence is that it encouraged her to appreciate diversity and consider its importance for how she views her own heritage since she was an “anomaly” on campus. Thus, since Danielle feels obviously in the minority on campus, this may have largely impacted her racial self-

identification. In fact, Danielle was so adamant about the importance of diversity and heritage that she attempted to impress these values on her European American and multiracial peers, as well.

Examining her experiences through a critical lens that focuses on the potential for inequality or oppression, despite the fact that the predominately white institution encouraged Danielle to foster a pride in her Asian identity it also played a dominate role in attempting to quell that same cultural dignity. Consistently, Danielle was forced to take a defensive front with her European American peers who challenged her Asian racial identification, and she described these experiences as, “hurtful.” Danielle’s response to this racial identification pressure she encountered at [Central University] was to self-identify as monoracial; yet, the hegemony of the institution within the context of her experiences cannot be ignored as demonstrated in this final description of the [Central University] environment, from Danielle:

I just think...the conversation [about racial identification] just doesn't take place...everyone else knows what they are...but nobody...cares to have this conversation, cares enough to have this conversation about...self-identification, because...even though my friends might be from Germany and England...they still mark off Caucasian and it's not a debate for them. And...that sucks...because...I almost have never had this conversation [because] it's just something nobody cares to talk about.

This quote largely reinforces the idea that Danielle might have been slotted into her Asian racial identification by the larger European American community. She recognizes that her European American peers easily know what box they check, but she has never been able to talk to anyone about it because no one else appreciates the need to discuss issues of diversity. And, because she has not been able to verbally dissect and form her identity it stands to reason that a predominately white institution and those

within it may have pressured her into one, and she has acknowledged and positively reinforced the racial identity presented to her. Brad, in the next section, also identifies as monoracial; yet, he does so through Renn's (2004) second multiracial identity pattern – multiple monoracial identities that shift according to the situation.

Theme 2: Multiple Monoracial Identities, Shifting According to Situation

Renn (2004) determined that a second pattern of multiracial self-identification was the use of multiple monoracial identities that the student altered to coalesce with the given situational context. Students who choose to identify with two or more of their racial heritages may do so because they come to college with cultural knowledge of each group, or because they desire to gain such knowledge when they enter a supportive college environment (Renn, 2004). Peer cultures play an important role in multiracial students' ability to identify with more than one reference group because some microsystems are highly intolerant of members whom they view as disloyal (Renn, 2004). The reality of campus life is that, depending on the dynamics of peer culture and the histories of various campus organizations and communities, students may encounter significant resistance and barriers to being “either/or at my convenience ” (Renn, 2004).

Two sub-themes emerged from Brad's experiences leading him to identify in the multiple monoracial, situational identity pattern: “I'll switch back and forth between my identities” (Brad's desire to be distinctly Filipino and Puerto Rican in different contexts) and “Identifying as ‘x’ and ‘y’ – that's key” (Brad's pride in both of his identities and his desire to embody each of them, albeit separately).

“I'll switch back and forth between my identities.” Brad was one of two study participants whose multiracial identity was comprised of two ethnic minorities; he is a

senior who identifies as both Puerto Rican and Filipino. Therefore, he would make one identity or the other more salient based on the environmental context or his personal whims, since he was not regarded more positively or negatively by the predominately white campus culture either way, because whoever Brad decided to be that day, he was still a student of color. Brad explains this concept when asked if he has ever had to check a box at [Central University], "...sometimes I just, and this is going to sound weird, but...sometimes I'll switch back and forth between Pacific Islander and Hispanic. I don't know why, just to, kind of, diversify the demographics." Brad represents Renn's (2004) second multiracial identity pattern in that he displays his cultural knowledge of each of his monoracial heritages and chooses to make one or the other more salient based on the current situation or environment he is in. In this example he decides to vary back and forth between his Puerto Rican and Filipino identities because he attends a predominately white institution and would like to make the demographics seem more diverse simply because he can. Brad's behavior related to Danielle's in that they both underscore their belief in the importance of diversity through their actions.

Brad has also preferenced one of his monoracial identities over the other based on the environmental or cultural context of where his military family was located, or which group of relatives he was visiting. "So...when I lived overseas there was a huge Filipino population where I was at, so I was a lot more Filipino there than I am here. And, when I go to California where...my extended family is...that's when I identify with more than my Puerto Rican." This relates back to Renn's (2004) pattern, because Brad is demonstrating how he makes his identity situational.

Brad does experience difficulties determining which component of his racial identity to make most salient at times, and questions which monoracial group he most identifies with:

...something that...I actually just started thinking about this last summer was the...in any survey that you take you typically only have the option of checking one box. I feel like now, more and more, there's...more surveys that offer the options of checking more than one box or checking an "other" box. I dunno, but I just feel like that's weird to...have to say all your parts...and which one do I identify more with? One...of my Filipino cousins asked me. He was like, "What box do you check?" And, typically it's Hispanic just because I dunno, I almost feel like it's easier to say I'm Hispanic than to explain each piece. And, a lot of times people don't even know what Filipino is, or, like, Pacific Islander. 'Cuz, Asian is different than Pacific Islander."

In this quote Brad, perhaps subconsciously, reflects on his inability to see himself as both of his monoracial identities simultaneously, which reverts back to Renn's (2004) pattern of multiple monoracial identities that vary situationally. In box-checking experiences Brad opts to identify as Hispanic because it's easier since the Hispanic population on campus is larger and many European American students are unfamiliar with the Filipino nationality; thus, he chooses to be monoracial, Hispanic in the predominately white institution environment.

Brad also encounters difficulties alternating between his two monoracial identities because the majority European American population at [Central University] experiences cognitive dissonance attempting to associate his physical characteristics with his multiracial heritage:

So...people's stereotypical definition of...Puerto Rican or Filipino is not what I fit in either sense. So it's...I dunno, a lot of people are always very confused as to how I identify myself racially because they already have their perceptions and ideas of what I should be in their mind, or what I could be in their mind. So...I dunno...I joke with...some of [my] friends...I feel like I could probably pass for ...a Hawaiian or...if you met a person who didn't know enough about races...I could probably be a Native American or an Inuit, or a Peruvian or a Columbian.

Again, Brad reiterates his view of racial identification as monoracial singular identities; therefore, despite the fact that his European American counterparts might not visually recognize that he is Puerto Rican or Filipino, the other entities they might see him as are also monoracial. In essence, Brad is always a monoracial identity of color even if he is simply musing about other identities that he might be seen as – never multiracial. In the second sub-theme, Brad further elaborates on his pride in both of his monoracial identities and how he negotiates one identity or the other in the predominately white campus environment.

“Identifying with ‘x’ and ‘y’ – that’s key.” Though Brad experiences difficulty determining which monoracial piece of his identity is, for him, most salient, as well as, difficulty negotiating the confusion of his European American peers about his multiracial identity, Brad discusses his enthusiasm for his cultural heritage. “...identifying as Puerto Rican or Filipino...that’s key...I’m proud to be identified as the races that I am, for sure.”

Yet, the limited ethnic diversity at [Central University] is a major factor in compelling him to preference a monoracial identity that has shifted to reflect the situational context of the campus. “Well...I dunno, my perspective is very different just because I’m multiracial with two different...minorities...so...I feel like I...typically identify myself as Puerto Rican the majority of the time because Filipinos in the United States are even more rare, but then especially at [Central University].” He expounds on this concept stating, “I feel like...people just automatically assume...because I’m brown I have to be Mexican, which completely negates the fact that I’m also half Filipino...nobody would think that far into it.” This experience is unique for Brad

because one of his monoracial identities is *not* European American; therefore, he feels as though the campus environment forces him to go back and forth between two minority racial identities. In fact, Brad even expounds on why he doesn't view himself as a complete multiracial whole, it is due to the fact that those around him wouldn't "think that far into it." His peers automatically assume he is Mexican because that is the most prevalent Hispanic race on campus, so Brad asserts his monoracial Puerto Rican identity at [Central University], since that is at least another Hispanic nationality, because no one would be so astute as to comprehend that he is also Filipino.

Brad situationally identifies as monoracial Hispanic-Puerto Rican at [Central University] because of the nonexistent Filipino population; yet, Brad additionally experiences difficulty claiming a Puerto Rican identity because the dominant European American environment attempts to lump him into another Hispanic population:

I think in terms of other people...it's very clear that I'm something...and then when you hear my last name...everybody assumes that I am Hispanic and the typical Hispanic at [Central University] is Mexican...so I'm very quick to correct them and say that I'm Puerto Rican...and that's an interesting dynamic just in itself in regards to...Hispanics and...being Mexican versus being actually Spanish, being...Columbian, or Puerto Rican.

The previous quote illustrated why Brad identifies as Puerto Rican on [Central University's] predominately white campus, because the Hispanic population was far more visible than the Filipino student cohort. Yet, this quote hones in on the difficulty Brad encounters living out his monoracial, Puerto Rican identity. A component of Renn's (2004) second identity pattern is cultural knowledge in all of the individual's composite monoracial heritages. Therefore, Brad reasserts his Puerto Rican nationality when his European American peers attempt to categorize him as Mexican because he has

both the pride and cultural knowledge to claim this identity in the face of campus resistance.

When asked why he corrects others when they mistakenly assume that he is Mexican, Brad answers:

...in regards to...correcting people and my racial background...a lot of it again...I don't know, I just don't like people assuming things about me or...thinking that they know me just because of my appearance or my skin tone...and, I don't think it's ok for them to just, especially in regards to...the whole dynamic between being Mexican or Puerto Rican or Columbian or Chilean...there's such a negative stigma towards Mexicans...but because they're the majority in regards to...the Hispanic population in the United States...that's what most people assume, and...the negative stigma goes anywhere from being...lazy or being illegal...I don't know...that's very frustrating.

Because Brad identified monoracially by situation or environment, he refuses to let others assume who he is that day, whether he decides to be Puerto Rican or Filipino.

Additionally, Brad is uncomfortable with his European American peers assuming his race is Mexican because there is tension among Hispanic populations since each nationality has pride in where they came from, but also Brad is “frustrated” at the negative stereotypes associated with being Mexican being foisted upon him by default. This shows a dichotomy between Danielle and Brad, in that Brad has cultural pride for his monoracial nationalities only, whereas, Danielle not only claimed an Asian identity but a diverse ideology as well and believed in supporting all students of color. A critical analysis of how the environment has shaped Brad's experiences follows.

Ecological Analysis. Brad has opted to self-identify as multiracial through multiple monoracial identities that shift according to his present situation. Though Brad explicitly states his pride in identifying as the two races that he is composed of (Puerto Rican and Filipino) and foregrounds one or the other from time-to-time, he has chosen to

make his Puerto Rican identity most salient at [Central University]. Through Brad's experiences he reveals that [Central University's] predominately white campus culture played a significant role in determining his racial identification. Since there are so few Filipinos at [Central University], Brad preferences a monoracial Puerto Rican identity because his European American classmates "automatically assume" that he's Hispanic. Furthermore, the environment is oppressive on Brad's Hispanic racial identity, attempting to consign him to a Mexican American identity since the "typical Hispanic at [Central University] is Mexican."

Brad's experiences negotiating his racial identity within predominately white [Central University's] campus culture have left Brad bitter, a feeling which he passes on to incoming students through his involvement in admissions organizations:

I do think that the people that I interact with are different types of people ...especially in terms of...Diversity Enhancement Team and the ambassador groups...I try to stay consistent with my character...I don't think I'm a different person, but...clearly there's a different emphasis that you need to place...when you're talking to...a group of the stereotypical [Central University] students, versus a group of minority or underprivileged students...you have to be a lot more realistic and...in my mind, it's not fair to sugar coat it and [let them] think that oh, just because [CU] is predominantly white ...it's not going to be any different than any other school.

In this quote Brad places the European American student population as the campus norm ("stereotypical [Central University] students"), and reaffirms his need to go back and forth, here in the way he approaches people – students of color versus European American peers. Also, Brad recognizes that the demographics and campus environment have had an effect on who he is because he is "realistic" with incoming students of color in letting them know that [Central University] will *not* be like any other school since it is predominately white.

Risa, the next student, demonstrates Renn's (2004) third identity pattern, Multiracial Identity, and she does so in a very discrete way. She has assumed a monoracial identity in public and a multiracial identity in private because the predominately white institution has literally "boxed" her in through her inability to express who she fully is on demographic forms and a painful experience with racism that imprinted her with a monoracial identity simply because of her physical characteristics.

Theme 3: Multiracial Identity

In this third identity pattern, the individual elects an identity that is neither one heritage nor another, but of a distinct "multiracial" group (Renn, 2008). On campuses which have a culture that supports the public claiming of a multiracial identity, students are given the opportunity to join a microsystem in which multiracial students connect with one another and form a community that supports bi/multiracial identity development independent of monoracial categories or particular combinations of them (Renn, 2004). Conversely, collegiate institutions which do not foster a supportive environment, force multiracial students to privately construct their identities (Renn, 2004). Thus, being mixed is a private identity shared with friends rather than a motivation to meet with similar others publicly (Renn, 2004).

Two sub-themes emerged from Risa's experiences leading her to identify in the multiracial identity pattern: "Why can't you be both" (Risa's desire to incorporate all of her component races on demographic forms and in her life) and "I identify for ease, but this is who I really am" (Risa's assertion that even though she identifies as monoracial on campus for ease, she recognizes that she is truly multiracial).

“Why can’t you be both?” Risa loathes being confined! In exploring her racial self-identification, Risa (a sophomore who is African American, Chinese, and Cuban) has chosen to express herself as a complete multiracial being – proud of her ethnic heritage in its totality. When asked if she had ever felt she had to check a box at [Central University], she responded:

Yes. Oh, yes (laughs). Applications throughout everywhere...and the thing I do not like...is you have the options of checking Caucasian, non-Hispanic or Black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Island Pacific...and so forth. Cuban is Hispanic and I also consider Jamaican as Black, so the whole Black, non-Hispanic part? Why can’t you be both? You have to be one or other and so I don’t know, I wish that they would just create another box that says that you can be both and not just one or other because no two parents nowadays, no two parents can be the same, might not be the same race or ethnicity.

Risa’s view of racial identity is very dissimilar to Danielle and Brad, she wants to bundle all her monoracial pieces into one complete puzzle, rather than parcel them out, and is disconcerted by the inability to do so on demographic forms. In fact, Risa’s view of multiraciality is so complete that she postulates that in this day and age it would be unlikely for a student to have parents who are the same race or ethnicity.

After being asked how negotiating multiple identification boxes made her feel,

Risa expounded stating:

I’ve got to drop one side of my identity off and keep moving. Yeah, it’s sad and I don’t like it but especially like on a census form last year it didn’t have Black or African American – the word used there was Negro. That just took it to a whole new level (laughs). I’ve not seen that word on there before but I don’t know if they were trying to include everybody – the people from Africa and Middle Eastern that come to the United States but are not considered as African American or Black, but yeah, I had to check the box.

Because demographic identification forms don’t allow her to incorporate all components of her racial identity, Risa feel forced to choose which pieces of her identity to make salient by a predominately white institution which has compulsorily navigated her into an

incomplete racial identity. Though she wants to be multiracial, Risa has been compelled to live out a monoracial existence on campus.

When asked whether a multiracial box would be easier, Risa responds positively stating, “I think that would be easier...and if they wanted any more explanation then they could contact you and you could explain. So multiracial would be great because, at times, I do check ‘other’...but then I feel like I’m singled out because they don’t know exactly what “other” is.” This statement is directly connected to Renn’s (2004) depiction of the multiracial identity pattern because Risa prioritizes a complete multiracial identity and is willing to divvy up her monoracial heritages only if asked to since she doesn’t view her racial identity as separate pieces.

Risa additionally expresses her preference for not being boxed into a monoracial stereotype when discussing where she hangs out on campus:

Being on a predominantly white campus, I don’t want to fit the stereotypes of “all the Black kids eat together in the cafeteria,” or “all the Black kids always do this and that together.” I mean they do – that’s not anything hidden, but...I don’t know, I’ve always hung out with everybody just because I haven’t really found a spot to fit in to be...the correct identity...because the people in my family have come from all over the place, it’s kind of hard just to settle into one spot where I won’t be made fun of for not being light enough or [for not having] long, swingy hair...I just hang out with a variety of people to avoid stereotypes and judgments.

Risa’s desire to live out a multiracial identity extends to who she spends time with, and where she hangs out on campus. Risa chooses to associate with peers from multiple nationalities and in varying places on campus because she doesn’t want to be pinned down to one racial group. Thus, Risa believes that if she floats among different groups on campus she can exist in several campus cultures, much like her identity exists in several cultural heritages. Though, this is not similar to Brad’s experience of identifying situationally because Risa maintains an understanding of her multiracial status throughout

her transition among peer groups. This is similar to Danielle's story except Danielle congregates with people from various backgrounds in order to live out a belief in the importance of diversity and to spread that message; whereas, Risa travels among different peer groups in order to live out her multiracial identity. Yet, Risa has experienced difficulty in attempting to exist as a multiracial student on a predominately white campus, and the institution has thoroughly coerced her into identifying monoracially, as demonstrated in the next sub-theme.

“I classify for ease, but this is who I really am.” Risa explains that she identifies as monoracial, African American, on campus because it's easier to explain and she can have a group to identify with if she chooses. Since there is not an “out” multiracial population on campus, Risa identifies as monoracial for ease but with her family and close friends she expresses her complete multiracial identity:

At home...my brothers and sisters – I don't have any family in [Central State] – so it's just my mom and my brothers and sisters. But at home, we all know we're the same people. We have the same parents and everything. But on campus, I like to classify myself as African American because it's so much easier to explain. I can identify with a group because of my skin color, because of my hair... because of the location that I'm from in North [Springfield], so it's easier to say I'm African American here [at Central University], but back at home I understand that my grandma is Chinese, my dad is Cuban, and my mom is from Jamaica. So...we don't do many American things, but people think we do, but we really don't (laughs).

Risa's experience of finding it easier to identify monoracially on [Central University's] predominately white campus coincide with Renn's (2004) third identity pattern. Renn (2004) recognized that if a multiracial student couldn't find a population of other multiracial students with which to publicly identify, then that student would have to privately construct his or her multiracial identity. Risa has not found a multiracial cohort of students, and has therefore chosen to identify as African American on campus in order

to have a home base; nevertheless, she still remains multiracial with family and close friends – her true identity. Also of note, is the fact that Risa believes her culture is “not-American,” she may potentially believe that as a multiracial student she is not “normal-American.”

When asked to expand on why it’s easier to identify as African American at [Central University] Risa stated:

Besides a long drawn out story about the family tree, I don’t...well neither one of my parents like to tell anybody that they’re not from the U.S. because when you say my mom is from Jamaica the first words to come out of anyone’s mouth are “yeah mon” – it’s just really annoying. And the stereotypes like Cubans smoking cigars all the time – I get that sometimes, so I don’t want to talk about it too much...and then my grandma, I don’t look like her – I really don’t. My little sister does, she’s got high cheekbones, she barely has a bridge in her nose...she’s got kind of squinty eyes and she’s a little lighter than me, but we’ve all got the same parents so it might be a little harder for her, if anything, because I can identify with African Americans because that’s what I look like, but she’s got some features that you can tell she’s got some type of Asian.

An additional reason why Risa has chosen to identify monoracially is the stereotypes which arise from cultural ignorance often found on a predominately white institution. Risa has chosen to identify in a method which is not natural to her just to avoid the absurd comments which inevitably follow someone’s admission that their parents are immigrants, or the typecasts stemming from overarching beliefs about certain nationalities. In fact, it sounds as though Risa pities her sister because she cannot wholly blend into a monoracial culture and escape these labels, although even Risa herself wants to be multiracial; a catch-22 stemming from a lack of diversity and cultural competence at [Central University].

Despite the fact that Risa has found it simpler identifying monoracially in the larger campus context, and multiracially with family and close friends she has still faced

traumatic experiences with racism targeted at her surface-level monoracial self-identification:

I would say...I don't know back at home. It's a lot more comfortable to be the way that I am, the person that I am because my community that I live in—I live in north [Springfield]—and there's galore...all shades of brown people and it's not so much a problem at all for being stared at, any discriminations or any stereotypes or bad things being said. But I have had that happen at [Central University]. Um, it was the first week of school and I was walking my little sister back to her residence hall and it was around 7 o'clock at night and this pickup truck rolls by with a confederate flag hanging from the back and they yell out the window, "You niggers get off the campus, we don't want you here!" ...they were riding around the campus so they passed us twice because the way to get to her residence hall from mine is just a straight shot and so they purposefully drove around twice and said the same thing again.

When asked how this made her feel, Risa said, "Oh, I felt really low. Oh yeah, I felt low...I haven't had that incident happen again, so...I hope it's the last time."

Though Risa doesn't truly identify as African-American, this situation placed her there without her consent. This disturbing experience with racism is indicative of the larger context in which Risa has been compelled to exhibit a monoracial identity. Negative encounters with demographic forms and degrading racial comments have both placed her into the African American box, and though this box is incomplete for Risa, she has adopted it because she realizes that the predominately white institution won't view her through any other lens. Therefore, Risa is forced to privately construct her multiracial identity, outside of the institutional environment which is not prepared to see her for who she is in totality. The, negative effects of the predominately white campus are further elucidated below.

Ecological Analysis. As described by Renn (2004) this third identity pattern, in which the student identifies under a singular multiracial umbrella, is dependent on the cultural environment of the institution. In other words, if there is a microsystem of

recognizably self-identified multiracial students than those individuals who identify as multiracial will likewise publicly claim their identity (Renn, 2004). However, if a microsystem of multiracial students is not visible within the institutional environment, as is the case at [Central University], then those individuals who identify multiracially will do so privately, constructing a multiracial identity among family and friends (Renn, 2004). Therefore, the impact of the predominately white institution on Risa, is that she has found it necessary to display a monoracial façade on campus in order to “identify with a group,” since a supportive population of multiracial students is not available due to a lack of institutional diversity. Risa’s public multiracial identity development has been stymied by a predominately white environment.

When explaining a job interview experience, Risa summarizes much of the multiracial experience – the clash of heritage, physical attributes, and culture:

It was my second job that I was applying for at a hospital and my first name, LaTrisha—it’s spelled like an African American name with an apostrophe and a capital R. But also in Spanish it means “the laughter.” But also my last name, McRannon—it’s Irish and that was passed down from generations. So the person that hired me—we only talked on the phone and...he had thought I was a White girl—this is what he said: he thought I was a White girl with red hair and freckles because the last name was Irish. And, then when I was in the waiting room for him to come out and do my interview, he looked right above my head and then shouted my name and I said “I’m right here,” and then he kind of looked at the paper again and then looked back at me and just...said “Are you sure?” “Yeah, that’s me.” So...he told me what he had expected to see and he made it...a joke but I...don’t know, it’s always stuck with me, like well it is my name and I know I’ll have ups and downs.

This story exemplifies Risa’s multiracial identity because she elaborates on the issues one experiences when the individual is composed of multiple heritages. Risa’s multiracial identity is depicted in her name, physical appearance, and upbringing. She recognizes that it will constantly be a struggle to reach beyond people’s traditional views of race and

encourage them to see her as a unique and complete whole, rather than a disjointed clash of disparate cultures. Illustrating Renn's (2004) fourth identity pattern, extraracial identity, Melquiades departs from the identity development pathway of all of the multiracial students thus far.

Theme 4: Extraracial Identity

This pattern represents a multiracial individual's resistance to what he or she may view as artificial identification categories that have been socially constructed by the dominant, monoracial, European American majority (Renn, 2008). Four types of students utilize this pattern:

1. The first approach is taken by college students who are not visually marked as having anything other than European American heritage, and might choose not to adopt a cultural identity other than the homogenized youth culture;
2. A second approach taken by students is resistance to outside definitions of racial categories and these students will refuse to mark the race and ethnicity boxes on official forms, as well as, to answer "What are you?" questions posed by others;
3. The third approach is enmeshed in the active intellectual engagement of the social construction of race and the purposeful deconstruction of its validity as a means of categorizing individuals; thus, these students will use postmodern language and academic discourse to explain why and how they constructed their identities outside the categorical norms;
4. And, the fourth approach is often taken by students with international experience who recognize the complicated sociocultural histories of their ancestors'

homelands and as a result, these students do not recognize race as a legitimate social category by which to sort people and group cultures (Renn, 2008).

Two sub-themes emerged from Melquiades's experiences leading him to identify in the extraracial identity pattern: "People like me only happen in America" (Melquiades's use of historical and academic rhetoric to disassociate with traditional racial categories) and "I'm racially ambiguous" (Melquiades's belief that because he cannot be easily pinned down to a singular race, he can rise above the race boxes and just exist).

"People like me only happen in America." Melquiades utilizes an extraracial pattern of self-identification, and he exemplifies this through his use of academic discourse to discuss the sociological construction of race, and his use of national history to delegitimize the importance of race. Melquiades employs this rhetoric in honing a national versus racial identity:

We have, me and my little brother, kinda have this joke where we say that we're American, and God bless America. We don't look Mexican, we don't look Black. A lot of people think we're mixed...with, like, Black and Latino, or something like that. Or, Black and White, but that's not really our makeup...And...he just, he just said it, like, "We're American, and our culture only happen in America" ...you're not going to find another person like me or my brother anywhere on this planet except the United States. That's where, that's where people like us are made...I mean, you know, we could talk about race all day and culture or whatever like that, but I'm an American...so that's something that I've, I've really come – that's been more difficult, the fact that...for someone like me, who identified their whole life as Puerto Rican, the fact that, well I'm American, you know what I'm saying? And, God bless America, you're not gonna find, you're not gonna find a person like me anywhere but this country, and that's my view on it. So, for me, it's kind of been acceptance of my "American-ness," I guess than my multiracial-ness.

In claiming an American versus racial identity, Melquiades hones a far different method of self-identification than Danielle, Brad, or Risa. Melquiades is exemplifying Renn's

(2004) extraracial identity pattern in that he devalues traditional methods of racial identification and instead opts for a national identity. Melquiades makes a legitimate argument for his claim of an American identity, and why he is unique to the American culture through the use of active intellectual engagement on the greater importance of national heritage.

Melquiades expounds on this argument, describing the fluidity of race in American history, as well as, Puerto Rico's history:

...I guess I bring a Latin American perspective, I really do feel like there's this false racial dichotomy in the United States, where Latinos are kind of encouraged or subtly told that they are a race...that's just not – that doesn't ring true to me...as far as I'm concerned...most Latinos are by definition multiracial, but I think there's a little bit of a stigma attached to non-Whiteness. I think...if you look historically, there was a time in the United States where there was White people and then there were Irish, and then there were Italians. Then somewhere, at some point in our history, Irish and [Italian] people became [White] and I really feel like that's going to happen, or maybe it even is happening right now, with ...Latin American ethnicities...some of us are being absorbed into...the White race, and some of us are being absorbed into...Black races and what have you...but then there's people like me who are just...mid-tone and aren't really going to fit easily anywhere...in Puerto Rico...there's people who are called corn-skinned or honey-skinned...Those are...because...it's a small island and there's...if you know the history of Puerto Rico...there's so many Africans, natives, and Hispanics running through there that people just look like whatever ...And, you're going to find a plethora of people there. I mean, so with us, race is an issue in Latin American countries and I think a lot of people don't know that. I think...they don't like to, or are resistant to acknowledge those racial dynamics taking place in their home countries or their ancestral countries.

Again, Melquiades deconstructs the importance of race as a means of identifying individuals, this time through a detailed discussion of the national histories of two countries. In his conversation, Melquiades illustrates the fluctuating boundaries of race and their instability in defining groups of people as a means of establishing that great numbers of people are in fact multiracial and that other, extraracial methods of identification are more salient.

Melquiades elaborates on this historical perspective, discussing the absurd notion of race as a concept stating:

I think the problem is that well race as a concept...really has no meaning, and at this point, you know what I'm saying, with globalization of people being, especially in the United States of America where there is no...I mean, Germany was founded by Germans, and Britain was founded by Britain and I'm saying, like what have you. The United States was not founded by, you know, America was not founded by Americans it was founded by different groups of people. And, so it's kind of like the problem is, like, there's, it's especially agitated in this country because there's not like a group of people who founded this place, you know what I'm saying, we are by definition a mixture. Um, so I think that kind of aggravates things, makes it more...complicated, I guess we'll say.

Melquiades utilizes his historical argument as academic discourse to devalue the ideology of race because Americans are, in essence, all a mixture of multiple heritages and nationalities. Yet, Melquiades recognizes that people's innate heterogeneity leads to clashes, and this might be a reason why he has chosen to rise above racial classifications to declare a national identity.

Furthermore, Melquiades makes an argument for the improper use of cultural terms to describe one's racial heritage and for the unimportance of race, as a means of delegitimizing racial categorizations as superficial differences:

...you know what, I was lifting weights with a guy...this is this semester...so we're lifting weights and...we're just talking and at one point he...was just like, "Hey man, can I ask you a question?" And, I was like, "Sure"...this has been on his mind; I can tell how he has been thinking about it for awhile. And he was like, "So, what are you?" And I was like, "...what 'chu talkin' bout?" He was like, "What's your race?" And I just laughed, I was like, "Oh, ok"...and then I gave him the breakdown. What I always do is, uh, he obviously wanted a racial question, but I started answering with my ethnicity...and I broke down...my mother's Puerto Rican and...my father is Ecuadorian...and then I went into the racial aspect. I said, "Racially...my mother is half White and half Black, and my father is, he looks kinda native, but I think he's mixed...as well." I'm really not sure on my father, he's a mestizo, I believe...Indian and White...So that's where, that's where I had to define it, and the funny thing is...it's only recently where I've kind of gotten this idea that, um, Latino isn't really a race it's improper to call Latino a race. Um, 'cuz it's a blending of other races. I mean,

especially in my case...I mean, and part of me still is, like, the simple answer is Puerto Rican...you'll be like, "What's your race?" I'll be like, "It's complicated. The simple answer's Puerto Rican." You know what I'm saying? That's...kinda my standard response...but, yeah I mean, as far as defining yourself it's an ongoing process...and part of it is, like, you know, we're all human; it's all superficial differences at the end of the day.

Melquiades's experience self-defining in response to the "What are you" question relates to Renn's (2004) analysis of students who choose an extraracial identity. Though Melquiades answers his friend's question with an elaborate discussion of his national heritage, as well as, racial makeup, he asserts that he is still on the journey to determining his own self-identification as he transitions from a racial identity to a national one. He again subverts the importance of race through denoting that perceived racial distinctions are, in fact, "superficial differences at the end of the day." Melquiades's second sub-theme illuminates a second motive for his development of an extraracial identity.

"I'm racially ambiguous." Melquiades also preferences an extraracial identity because he views himself as racially ambiguous, which makes it difficult to place him in a box. "...all of us have kind of had a rocky relationship with race just because we're kind of racially ambiguous, and like our culture is not necessarily that common in the United States or in the world I guess." Melquiades recognizes that placing him in a racial category is an issue for his European American peers as well, who will attempt to situationally classify him since he is not easily placed based upon physical characteristics:

I think there's...kind of a[n]...essentialism that takes place. A lot of people will kinda bind you according to a group they perceive you to be in...the fact that a student is multiracial, I think is often...pushed to the side. Sometimes, it's with the student themselves, like they feel a need to choose an organization – a group to identify with...as far as how White students would perceive me...I think that would depend on who they saw I was with at the time...I mean, if I'm alone on campus I'm, I'm going to assume that generally I'm ignored unless they know me

anyways, because I'm not a White student you're going to ignore people you don't really interact with or know...but I think a lot of the time it's kind of...those kinds of judgments are made in the social context, as far as what social circles you move in, what people you're seen with, and things like that. I think it's highly dependent on things like that. And, I think it could change from situation to situation depending on when and where people see you.

This quote from Melquiades directly connects to Renn's (2004) description of an extraracial identity. Melquiades utilizes academic discourse and postmodern language to discuss the "essentialism" in racial categorizations, in other words, he alludes to the idea that on a predominately white campus "multiracial" cannot exist because European American students will place you in the racial box that they perceive you to be a member of, whether they determine your racial identity through physical characteristics or group association. Therefore, Melquiades has chosen to remain racially ambiguous and self-define through other methods because how others view his race is totally dependent on social context, and completely out of his hands.

Melquiades, at times, hopes to remain racially ambiguous in order to be recognized as an individual first, without being weighed down by the baggage associated with race:

I hate it when people call me exotic or when people call my family exotic ...animals are exotic. I'm a person...My people come from this planet just like yours...I don't want to be on the cover of National Geographic. I don't want to be in an anatomy book or something like that...there's this kind of indignancy to it...I'm over here being brown you don't have to point it out to me...(laughs)... and it's a moot thing 'cuz sometimes we're like, "Yeah I'm brown and you know what I'm saying, you'll tell everybody in the room; tell everyone in the room I'm Puerto Rican...but sometimes you're just a person and it's hard being that person all the time, it's hard being that guy all the time. I'm not trying to represent for my culture (emphasis) all the time. Can I just drink some coffee and relax...Or, can I just veg out one afternoon...sometimes you just wanna be a person. You don't want to worry about all the other baggage and labels attached to you.

Melquiades additionally opts to embody an extraracial identity because he desires the opportunity to shrug off the excess “baggage and labels” that become attached to specific racial groups and categorizations. Thus, if Melquiades uses Renn’s (2004) extraracial identity to self-define, he’s not exotic or brown; he’s simply an American or a Puerto Rican with a national culture and history, not a specific racial box to be bound by. And, when Melquiades asserts his desire to “just be a person” he is verbalizing his feelings of being dehumanized by being asked what he is and called exotic.

Melquiades expounds on this ideology noting that a balance exists between claiming one’s racial identity and keeping that racial identity ambiguous, and existing as an individual:

...you know, my culture is very important to me, but...I don’t wanna be reduced to my racial makeup, or my cultural makeup. That’s not all that I am; I’m an individual...I guess it’s a balance everyone kind of has to try to find for themselves, as far as...how much you want to identify with your culture, and ...where you ancestors come from...The problem is trying to find a balance of where your individuality meets your...home culture, your home group, I guess we’ll say.

In this quote Melquiades illustrates the difficulty in finding a balance between an extraracial identity and one’s individual cultural heritage. Despite the fact that Melquiades is proud of his background, he clearly states that he doesn’t want to be reduced to his racial and cultural makeup and asserts his individuality – the crux of the extraracial identity. An analysis of the impact of the predominately white institution on Melquiades’s self-identification decision follows.

Ecological Analysis. Melquiades has made the decision to dispel the traditional system of racial classification and define himself utilizing an extraracial identification pattern. He employs this method of self-identification through academic discourse and

the discussion of national history to reduce the importance of race and bolster individual and national pride. Thus, Melquiades's reaction to the predominately white institution is to break outside of the racial confines and boxes his European American peers attempt to place him in, and to self-identify in a nonracial manner. Melquiades summarizes this perspective when he discusses the breakdown of stereotypes at the individual level:

...I'll never understand what it's like to be a, a poor, White American living in this country...I think they respect that, I mean, and I respect them...you know, I know they have their own struggles and what have you so, I think there always will be a barrier, but I don't think that necessarily matters. You know what I'm saying, when you're building, when you're building...when you're sitting and you're breaking bread and building with someone who's just an individual, you know what I'm saying, stereotypes don't matter...Stereotypes always break down at the individual. So, I think when you're talking with an individual, you have to keep that in mind.

Ultimately, Melquiades's view on racial identity is wrapped up into this quote.

Melquiades preferences the individual over racial stereotypes and categorizations, not only when he is interacting with others, but in his own life as well; thus, Melquiades has chosen to self-identify in Renn's (2004) extraracial pattern and hone a national identity through the critique of race as a socially constructed and illegitimate concept. Renn's (2004) final multiracial identity pattern, situational identity – identifying differently in different contexts, encapsulates components of all of the previous patterns and is the way in which Seven self-identifies.

Theme 5: Situational Identity, Identifying Differently in Different Contexts

Situational identity describes a fluid identity pattern in which multiracial individuals have a stable racial identity, but different elements are more salient in some contexts than within others (Renn, 2008). For some multiracial students the shift between identity patterns was smooth; whereas, for others the transitions were more

abrupt (Renn, 2004). Negotiating the boundaries between peer microsystems is especially challenging for multiracial students on campuses where these boundaries are heavily policed by members who want to keep groups distinct by verifying the authenticity of anyone who attempts to claim group membership (Renn, 2004) On campuses where group boundaries are more fluid, the transition among groups for multiracial individuals is far easier and they find that foregrounding of different identities in each community is untroubled (Renn, 2004).

Two sub-themes emerged from Seven's experiences leading him to identify in the situational identity pattern: "Too Black to be White, too White to be Black" (Seven's understanding that his diverse cultural heritage provides him with the opportunity to make pieces of his identity more salient depending on the context) and "The amount of non-White people is very low" (Seven's desire to make components of his White heritage more salient because he attends a predominately white institution in a predominately white city and state).

"Too Black to be White, too White to be Black." Seven identifies with his Black and White heritages contextually; therefore, he recognizes that his multiraciality positions him in an in-between space where he has the ability to make either identity more salient:

...there's this really weird in-between of (sigh) kind of being excluded from...both sides of...the Whiteness and Blackness...I'm not White, so I'm not...one of them, but...I can't really identify so much with its entirety...Black culture necessarily...And so...too Black to be White, too White to be Black... And, so...you know even though I...do feel...this...exclusion from both sides ...it really doesn't affect too much...there's that exclusion, but also inclusion at the same time...you know say for some... White friends, say they may be uncomfortable being in a situation where there's a lot of Black people, where I just don't care, you know...it's...one of the rare instances where, at least like aesthetically, I'd fit in a little bit more.

In this quote, Seven establishes his understanding of his racial makeup. He believes that his Black and White monoracial heritages provide him with the ability to transition back and forth between the two cultural groups on campus. Thus, Seven foregrounds one monoracial identity over the other depending on which peer group he is with and what environment they are in. In other words, Seven is capable of creating a fluid identity that subtly shifts based on the present situation. This differs from Brad's method of identifying because Seven doesn't necessarily pledge an allegiance to either of his monoracial heritages, rather he allows pieces of them to become more salient as he deems appropriate; whereas, Brad exemplifies cultural pride in both of his monoracial cultures and seeks the opportunity to live out each of them in different environments.

Seven recognizes that his ability to float situationally between monoracial groups additionally gives him the capability to negotiate multiple physical spaces on [Central University's] campus, when discussing the luxury of being multiracial:

I'd say there's a luxury to it...being able to...have that access and...being so...involved in just that White culture that, you know the majority culture...I identify with that so much that it's really not a problem...when I start to talk to someone...if they are White...they're like, "You know, ok, well this guy really isn't that Black"...And so, in a sense that does make it easier...And, then I also feel though that...because I'm not White that that also then gives me access...at the multicultural center...I'm able to go in there with...no question...Just another brown kid (laughs). And, so yeah, I would say there's, you know, some luxury to that...just being able to...come in and out of these...cliques fairly easily.

Seven observes that there is a luxury in being able to identify situationally as a multiracial individual. Because he is part European American and has grown up in the predominate culture, he recognizes that his European American peers don't view him as "Black," or different than them. However, Seven can also enter the multicultural center as another "brown kid" without disturbing racial group boundaries. Thus, Seven is able

to make the boundaries of differing racial peer groups fairly permeable as a multiracial student.

Lastly, Seven discusses harnessing his ability to relate, situationally, to multiple groups of people as an advantageous tool in performing his Resident Assistant duties:

...with my background...[issues of race] happening or just the potential for [them] to happen...it's definitely something that makes me a little bit more eligible as far as being able to relate to some residents. That...some...more or less average White guy...wouldn't necessarily have ...and again, that's the majority of people, so that I...with that minority kind of background or at least access to...I'm able to relate to more residents that way. But then, also, again ...going back to the both excluded and included thing that I'm still able to relate to...that average White guy...I can still very much relate to them, as well.

Seven also believes that being multiracial, and identifying with his monoracial heritages situationally, allows him to be a more effective resident assistant. Since Seven is part African American, he realizes that the potential for racial backlash is always present which gives him a different lens through which to view diversity, and he can bring this to his residence floor when he relates to his culturally diverse residents. Seven recognizes that this is an advantage he has over the majority of resident assistants, who are European American, because they are not as capable of empathizing and relating to a variety of people. The second sub-theme emerging from Seven's experiences details why he foregrounds his European American identity more consistently at [Central University].

“The amount of non-White people is very low.” Though Seven identifies with both his Black and White cultures, he does so situationally and the context at a predominately white institution has encouraged Seven to make his White identity more salient in order to better assimilate into the mainstream culture. This is evidenced through Seven's description of his hometown and who he has become his close friends:

[I'm] from [Washington], so the...amount of...non-White people is really low... (laughs) really low... and... my...better friends ...would be White. You know being from [Washington]...you know it's not necessarily out of choice, it's just...more what I have to work with (laughs)... as far as companionship. That ...it's not that I...went out and...looked for...White companionship, it's just that's who's there.

Seven has assumed a more salient European American identity at [Central University] because growing up in a predominately white city and state, as well as, attending a predominately white institution has indoctrinated him to the majority culture. Thus, Seven's closest friends are European American, and these are the peers he has grown up emulating and modeling and this is the monoracial heritage he foregrounds regularly in his current environment.

Conversely, Seven also experiences incidents in which he has to negotiate his claim of a more salient White identity among his European American peers.

And...when you were saying that...not dark enough or not light enough, like you know? I wouldn't really call that a cliché...I think...that's very much something that's real...and...I definitely feel it...with White friends, you know they'll always bring up the Blackness or whatever, and just like...Yeah, but hold on now, and then...you know, do a little history stuff. I'm like, well honestly, I'm gunna have more of...the...White...genes in me anyways...from [the] slave trade, and everything else. And...that's just kind of what went down. So...trying to you know fight for that inclusion, I guess. And, I mean, for me...like...I don't really have that many, like, I don't have...any close...non-White friends...I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood...at my high school there's, like, total maybe, like, two dozen Black kids.

Though Seven has found the barriers between cultural groups at [Central University] fairly permeable, he still experiences difficulties transitioning his identity to meld into different cliques. Seven finds that sometimes he must “fight for...inclusion” with his European American peers because they will attempt to make him “other” by remarking on his African American heritage. Seven feels as though he must fight against this and prove his “Whiteness” in order to maintain status in the majority cultural group.

Seven is likely to have a more difficult time identifying situationally than Brad because Brad wanted to switch between two “minority” identities, but Seven desires to have a role in the dominant culture, which is far more difficult when your physical characteristics sabotage your efforts. Renn (2004) mirrors this experience in her discussion of the fifth identity pattern stating that on those campuses where cultural boundaries are less rigid students who wish to identify situationally will find it easier to do so, than in those environments where racial boundaries are strict and well-maintained.

Seven also reiterates this reasoning for making his White culture more salient when discussing how he checks racial identification boxes:

...it’s definitely changed over the years as far as what box I would check...when I was younger, again like very much more...just, kind of clear that, you know, I’m not White. So, just checked the Black one. And then, you know, kinda later realizing, you know, more so that...I shouldn’t be...ignoring that part of me. That’s a very big part of me, if not...I mean as far as genetically, you know, just, it...I am more White, I mean...my dad...didn’t...come from Africa, you know, he, his family have been here, you know, slave trade and all that other stuff. And, like, the rape and everything else that...genetically there’s a good more of that Caucasian, more of that European in me than there is, you know the African stuff.

Even in this quote Seven is distancing himself from his African American heritage in order to make his European American qualities predominant. Rather than allowing both monoracial cultures to cycle in and out of his claimed identity, based on the current situation, Seven has been greatly influenced by the predominately white institution to believe that a European American identity is preferable to a multiracial or African American one. This effect of [Central University] on Seven’s identity development is further illustrated in the ecological analysis.

Ecological Analysis. The predominately white institution, city, and state have had a profound impact on Seven. Though he identifies multiracially, White and Black,

he has chosen to exhibit this multiracial identity in a situational pattern, whereby he makes one monoracial identity more salient dependant on the context. Growing up in a predominately white city and state, and then attending a predominately white collegiate institution have influenced Seven consistently preference his European American identity, a concept which he might have never considered had he been raised in a more diverse environment.

This ideology at work within Seven's conception of races is exhibited when he discusses a scholarship he received specifically for multicultural individuals. Though he is a student of color who grew up in an upper-middle class neighborhood, he still references students of color being the "low" and European American students being the "high," as though the European American student represents the "ideal" which the student of color is meant to live up to:

I also got the scholarship through [CU Connections]...which is, is kinda multicultural based...those...just kind of identify more with, you know, non-White cultures. It's...an inclusive thing, which...stuff needs to be when you're trying to, I guess, kinda bring up the low, you know, to meet with the high... you can't create more barriers kinda thing.

Though Seven recognizes the barriers preventing students of color from fully acclimating to the predominately white environment, and the need for greater social inclusivity for students of color, he still seems to separate himself from the student of color identity. The predominately white environment in which Seven grew up, and now attends college, has greatly impacted his view of the monoracial heritages which comprise his racial makeup. He has felt pressured into adopting a more salient European American identity because both his friends and his environment are White, and he too wants to blend into the majority group.

Conclusion

Five themes and ten sub-themes emerged from the data collected in the study utilizing Renn's (2004) Ecological Patterns of Multiracial Identification as a theoretical framework. The five themes illustrated patterns in which multiracial students construct their racial identities: monoracial, multiple monoracial identities shifting according to situation, multiracial, extraracial, and situational – identifying differently in different contexts. Employing a critical perspective, I recognized the significant influence the predominately white institution plays in the identity development process of these students, and that the predominately white environment encourages all of these students to identify far more situationally than previously established by previous theoretical work on multiracial students. The implications of the environment on all of the participants is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, as well as, the pathway to further research illuminating the multiracial identity development experience.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The Multiracial Student Bill of Rights

“I have the right to change my identity over my lifetime – and more than once”: Identity is dynamic on the surface, whereas the core maintains some constancy. Identity is shaped by interpersonal, global, and spiritual experiences that are personally interpreted. This interpretation however, is guided by cultural values. Thus, it is possible to change one’s identity over a lifetime as part of the process of clarifying or declaring who one is. (Root, 1996, p. 13)

Introduction

This final chapter offers a general discussion based upon the resultant themes and sub-themes from the analyzed data, and the data’s connection to the literature and theoretical framework. Comparing the study’s research questions and theoretical framework against the emergent themes and sub-themes, the resultant data corroborates several elements of Renn’s (2004) ecological multiracial identity patterns, as well as, brings to light new implications in multiracial student identity development. Several key topics are addressed in the following pages: 1. How the study’s themes and sub-themes, as well as, the literature answer the research questions, 2. Implications of the current study and for student affairs practitioners working with a growing multiracial student population at predominately white institutions, and 3. Recommendations for future research on multiracial student identity development.

Summary of Findings and Link to Theoretical Perspective

My guiding research question was: How do multiracial students describe their experiences attending a predominately white collegiate institution (PWI)? The study’s three sub-questions were:

- What are the students' perspectives on the issue of "passing" for those multiracial students who have the ability to do so? (The term "passing" refers to the ability to be perceived as a member of the dominant racial group.)
- How do multiracial students select the peers they choose to associate with and the student groups they become involved in?
- How do multiracial students perceive that they are treated by European American faculty, staff, and peers?

In order to respond to these questions, I collected data on five self-identified multiracial students, attending a predominately white Mid-western university, through personal, one-on-one interviews and a focus group. From the data, five themes and ten sub-themes emerged highlighting the consistency of Renn's (2004) ecological patterns of multiracial identity development, and illuminating the students' experiences at a predominately white institution which help shape their pathways toward these racial identification patterns. Topics addressed in these themes include: pride in one's heritage and a desire to promote diversity, identification monoracially or multiracially based on the situational context, the drive to be viewed as a complete multiracial being, and the belief that individual and national pride transcend racial categorization boxes. A brief summary of the themes and sub-themes is offered, which highlights that each participant identified within one of Renn's (2004) identity patterns.

Danielle self-identified within Renn's (2004) monoracial identity pattern. As a result, Danielle was strongly aligned with only one of her monoracial heritages – her Asian ethnic background. Sub-themes which emerged to give context to the ecological experiences shaping Danielle's decision to identify in this mode were: "I think diversity

is important,” and “I am proud of my heritage.” Danielle recognized the need to support diversity initiatives on a predominately white campus and in doing so claimed an Asian identity for herself and encouraged both her European American and multiracial peers to incorporate diversity in their own lives as well. Additionally, Danielle cited her family history and familial cultural background as motives for self-identifying as Chinese. This rationale for identifying as monoracial is consistent with the literature: students who choose to identify monoracially describe family structures and their own levels of cultural knowledge as key factors influencing their racial identification decision; family becomes a key element in forming these students’ sense of their own knowledge of their ethnic heritage and the personal characteristics from this background that they bring to college with them (Renn, 2004). Additionally, Danielle identified as monoracial-diverse, which was depicted in her experiences as different than Asian and unique to this context because she didn’t choose a “diverse” identity, rather one was foisted upon her because she was in the minority at a predominately white institution.

Brad identified in a way that was consistent with Renn’s (2004) second pattern of multiracial identification: multiple monoracial identities, shifting according to situation. In this pattern students choose to identify with more than one of their monoracial heritages and they choose to make one more salient based upon the current environment or situational context. Brad alternated between his Puerto Rican and Filipino identities, and two sub-themes emerged detailing why and how he alternated between these two identity lenses. “I’ll switch back and forth between my identities,” illustrated that Brad would make one monoracial identity more salient than the other when he was visiting certain family members, or based upon his personal whims and who he determined that

he wanted to be that day. “Identifying with ‘x’ and ‘y’ – that’s key,” expounded on Brad’s pride in both of his monoracial identities and why he preferences his Puerto Rican identity on [Central University’s] predominately white campus – since the population of Filipinos at [Central University] is even smaller, and the microsystem less visibly recognizable, than the Puerto Rican enclave. Brad’s impetus for choosing to racially identify with multiple monoracial groups that shift according to the situation is consistent with Renn’s (2004) research on this theme. “How students interpreted peer culture and interact with it varied, as did their levels of security and comfort with claiming multiple racial identities” (p. 152). Thus, when Brad was with his nuclear family he felt a sense of comfort in exhibiting the composite of his monoracial identities; yet, with certain sides of his family and in a predominately white campus environment, with little diversity, Brad felt security and comfort in exhibiting only one of his monoracial component identities.

Risa viewed herself as a united whole and this exemplified Renn’s (2004) multiracial identity pattern. Therefore, Risa did not parse out her distinct monoracial heritages, rather she self-identified under a united, multiracial umbrella. Two sub-themes emerged from Risa’s experiences outlining why she racially identified in total, and detailing her struggle to do so at a predominately white institution. The sub-theme, “Why can’t you be both,” exemplified Risa’s desire to self-identify as multiracial through her disillusionment with racial box-checking since the boxes did not allow for her to self-identify in totality, as well as, her self-imposed rule of hanging out with a multitude of people so that she doesn’t sequester herself to distinct monoracial groups. However, the sub-theme “I classify for ease, but this is who I really am” illustrates the difficulty Risa encountered attempting to identify as multiracial at a predominately white institution

which did not have a significant publicized population of multiracial students. Consequently, Risa chose to identify as monoracial, African American, on campus and as multiracial with family and close friends where she felt safe privately constructing her true identity. Renn's (2004) theory supports this finding, suggesting that the fundamental characteristic shared by students who identify as mixed race is a unique family background through which the students learn to grow up as mixed-race members of interracial families. This special familial experience was shared by Risa who specifically commented on coming home and feeling security in knowing that all of her family knew that they were the "same people." Where Risa's experience parted ways with Renn's (2004) theory was through her self-identification as monoracial-African American on campus. To identify monoracially at [Central University] wasn't necessarily a choice on Risa's part; rather, it evolved from feelings of being minoritized in a predominately white environment.

Melquiades is a trailblazer and as such, has chosen to self-identify extraracially. In other words, Melquiades exhibits Renn's (2004) extraracial identification pattern; wherein, the student dispenses with the traditional, socially-constructed American system of racial classification and individually constructs his or her identity through newly-devised means. Two sub-themes emerged detailing how Melquiades has shaped an identity outside of the box, through national and historical rhetoric, and his impetus for doing so. "People like me only happen in America," described Melquiades's belief that he was unique in his multiracial heritage because someone with his distinctive racial background could only happen in America; thus, he self-identified on a national versus racial level. Additionally, Melquiades discussed the history of race in the United States

and Puerto Rico extensively and in doing so, recognized that the history of these countries has led to the development of significant racial melting pots and that attempting to locate one's individual racial identity within this macrocosm might be a futile search through superficial differences.

His contention of "I'm racially ambiguous" gave purpose to Melquiades's desire to self-identify in Renn's (2004) extraracial pattern. Because Melquiades's physical traits are hard to racially decipher and his culture is hard to pinpoint in the United States, Melquiades has sought other methods of identification rather than racial box-checking. Melquiades's experiences are consistent with the literature; students who identify in this pattern conceive of "race" in nontraditional ways and approach racial identity in the same way (Renn, 2004). Students who self-identify through extraracial means may describe the fluidity of race, refuse to check the boxes, or focus on culture rather than race, but they all are willing to literally "think outside the box" (Renn, 2004). In order to self-identify in this pattern Melquiades needed to have a fairly extensive knowledge of racial history in several countries, which sets him apart from the other participants and suggests that he may have had a modicum of agency in crafting his racial identity. Additionally, Melquiades was the only nontraditionally aged student in the participant population which may have provided him with the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time reflecting on the role of race in America. This could have been the impetus that resulted in him choosing a quite different method of racial identification that was defined by life experiences and knowledge of history and race relations.

Finally, Seven self-identified in a way consistent with Renn's (2004) situational identity pattern. Therefore, Seven holds a stable, internal racial identity but through

utilizing a skilled level of cognitive complexity, he weaves different components of his racial identity in and out of prominence as they become more salient in differing contexts and environments. Two sub-themes emerged from Seven's self-identification experiences illustrating this pattern. "Too Black to be White, too White to White to be Black," showcased Seven's positionality in the in-between which allows him, as a multiracial individual, to bring separate pieces of his monoracial heritages to the forefront as necessary. Seven believes that a situational identity provides him the luxury to spend time comfortably in a group of European American peers, but then experience an equal amount of ease walking into the campus's multicultural center. Yet, "The amount of non-White people is very low" illuminates Seven's preference for making his European American traits more salient on [Central University's] predominately white campus due to the diminutive number of people of color within the university, city, and state. Renn (2004) found that other students who opted to identify within this pattern also,

...shared a need to identify themselves in more than one way. Depending on the setting, they identified with one or more of their monoracial heritages or as biracial, multiracial, hapa, or mixed. In each case, the college environment provided specific prompts to identity and situational identification (p. 229).

Several key implications resulted from the analysis of the current study's data, important for guiding future research on multiracial student populations. Implications arising from the study's sub-questions will be addressed, followed by overall implications which emerged from the data and diverged from the theoretical framework.

Research sub-question 1. The first research sub-question dealt with the issue of passing as a member of the dominant racial group, and its possibility for multiracial students. Though Brad was not able to physically pass as a European American student, his childhood spent in a predominately white city and state afforded him with the

appropriate cultural knowledge permitting him to artificially “blend” in the majority group. However, Seven still encountered incidents in which he was required to defend his inclusion in the majority culture, due to his appearance which belied his mainstream upbringing.

Perhaps the greater passing difficulty experienced by the multiracial students in the study was the issue of passing as a member of the diverse monoracial group of which their heritage was a part. Both Danielle and Brad cited instances in which they felt as though European American peers were attempting to place them in a racial category to which they didn’t belong or that their claim to a monoracial identity of color was being challenged by peers who questioned their authenticity.

Research sub-question 2. The second sub-question addressed how multiracial students chose their friends and the student groups they decided to associate with. For each student in the study these choices were very different and were impacted by the racial identification pattern they fell in line with. Danielle had friends from varying racial backgrounds, but sought to encourage all of them to make issues of diversity a part of their daily lives as she had done through joining organizations focused on students of color or promoting Asian journalists. Brad additionally had a diverse group of friends, and he was involved in a variety of organizations across campus. However, one organization of which Brad was a part was the Mexican American Student Association which may have impacted Brad’s view of Hispanic students being more prominent on campus and his decision to preference his Puerto Rican monoracial identity.

Risa employed her variety of friends and spaces where she hung out on campus as a means of asserting her multiracial identity, and Melquiades felt as though his racial

ambiguousness left him vulnerable to be racially stereotyped as a member of whichever group he was currently with. Seven's friend group was a result of his surroundings, growing up in a predominately white city and attending a predominately white institution left him little racial variety in close friendships. And though Seven was involved in a scholarship program for students of color, his close friends were not members of this group.

Research sub-question 3. The third sub-question aimed to decipher how multiracial students perceive they are treated by European American faculty, staff, and peers. Similar to the previous sub-question this answer varied by participant, Seven strove to claim his valid participation in the mainstream culture; whereas, Danielle walked away from it and sought to bring her European American peers along with her. However, what each participant did have in common was the feeling of being labeled by their European American peers as member of a racial heritage to which they did not belong; imposters to a claim of a monoracial identity of which their culture was a part, or as illegitimate participants in the majority culture. As a result, each participant encountered an experience in which they were required to defend their racial self-identification.

Overall Implications. Two significant macro-level implications could be inferred from the research which diverged from, or were not thoroughly treated in Renn's (2004) ecological theory of multiracial identity development. The first of which is the notion of student agency. In her discussion of the multiple self-identification patterns for multiracial students Renn (2004) discusses the plethora of influences on their identity decisions (family, academics, personal characteristics, and social and recreational

involvement), but ultimately she wills the final identification decision to the students, giving them definitive agency in how they will racially identify. Yet, examining the ecological analysis for each of the study's participants, it appears evident that the predominately white institution may be the primary actor in these students' journey toward racial identification and that they are simply the reactors to their predominately white environment. Though they may choose to veer down different paths of self-identification following their experiences at a predominately white institution, the considerable impact the environment has on the students' experiences cannot be overlooked. That is, in many cases, the students felt compelled to identify in certain ways on campus because they found themselves to be such a minority. This is exemplified in Risa's adoption of a monoracial-African American identity in place of her chosen multiracial one, Danielle's exhibition of a monoracial-Asian and a monoracial-"diverse" identity, and Seven's decision to make his European American identity more salient in the campus environment.

Secondly, Renn (2004) discusses the ideology of situational self-identification in some of her patterns, but not as much or not at all in others. Analyzing the students' experiences in this study it appears that each of Renn's (2004) five identity patterns might include a piece on contextual identification because all of the students in the study felt the need to adjust their identity in some fashion based upon the peer group they were with, the lack of diversity at the predominately white institution, or a desire to walk away from traditional notions of racial categorization. While Renn (2004) believes these constitute patterns of identification, they are all rooted in the student responding to the predominately white institution and forming their identity in that environment, or that

particular situation. Arguably, according to this data, multiracial students exhibit an incredible level of cognitive complexity in their ability to amend their identity to exhibit what is most salient or secure in that moment. Thus, focusing on situational identity and how it spans multiracial identity development patterns would offer a more effective analysis of the fluidity of identity for multiracial students.

Implications of the Current Study for Student Affairs Practitioners

Based upon the themes and sub-themes which emerged in the study, as well as, the resultant implications, I have provided the following recommendations for student affairs practitioners who will continue to work with growing populations of multiracial collegiate students. The recommendations are inferences taken from the five participants' experiences of identity development at a predominately white institution.

1. This study should aid university officials in understanding the multitude of ways multiracial students construct their racial identities; therefore, forms on which students are required to provide racial classification should be made as broad and inclusive as possible in order to help students feel as though their box isn't "missing."
2. The peer groups multiracial students seek out as they travel down the pathway of identity development are as diverse as the students themselves. Thus, campuses should institute monoracial student of color groups, classes, and support services, as well as, those for multiracial students.
3. Student affairs professionals should stay abreast of the current research on multiracial students. This population will only continue to grow on college

campuses and the institution must respond with knowledgeable staff willing to provide appropriate support services.

4. In order to deflect some of the pressure multiracial students feel to assimilate with monoracial student groups or backlash they face from questioned authenticity, the campus must establish a supportive environment. This can be done through increased interaction among students across racial lines. As students learn about the unique multiracial student experience perhaps they can grow to understand why each multiracial student's racial identity is equally unique.

Recommendations for Future Research

Resulting from the implications of the current study, I recommend several areas in which future research could continue to illuminate the understudied experiences of multiracial college students. This case study examined five self-identified multiracial students' identity development experiences at a singular predominately white institution; therefore, further research should examine whether these themes and sub-themes are consistent at other predominately white institutions, as well as, universities with more diverse populations such as historically black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions. Additionally, this study included only five self-identified multiracial students; other studies should incorporate a larger participant base to determine if Renn's (2004) themes are consistent for a greater number and if they continue to evenly distribute across the five themes.

Based upon the specific experiences of the participants, I recommend that future research explore how large of a role the students felt the predominately white institution

played in their identity development process, and whether it served as the actor and the students as reactors as demonstrated in this study. Future research should also focus on the function of situational identification and whether it too operates on a greater level across the five patterns as witnessed in these participants' experiences. Lastly, future studies should explore whether a gender difference exists in the process of multiracial identity development, or if social class impacts the process of multiracial identity formation.

Conclusion

The existing literature demonstrates a need for continued research on the multiracial student experience, specifically how they form their racial identities in the collegiate environment. This study explored how five self-identified multiracial students' experiences attending a predominately white institution related to Renn's (2004) ecological patterns of multiracial identity development. The results of this study could be applicable to faculty members and student affairs administrators, in addition to multiracial students examining the process of self-identification. The implications provided in this chapter can aid these groups in developing more inclusive spaces on predominately white college campuses in order to foster positive student growth. Furthermore, this chapter presented recommendations for future research which can continue to illuminate the dark spaces of multiracial student research and bolster the success of this growing population. All leading to the day when multiracial students are no longer searching for a "missing box" on demographic forms and in relational environments, but are enabled to create their own self-defined, expansive spaces.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form



OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

Informed Consent Form

Title of Project:

The Missing Box: Multiracial Identity Development at a Predominately White Institution

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Ashley Loudd, master's student in the Student Affairs program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The purpose of this study is to explore and discuss the stories multiracial students tell about attending a predominately white institution, and how those stories contribute to their identity development. Ultimately, I am interested in how attendance at a predominately white institution connects to multiracial identity development theory. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because I am interested in how self-identified multiracial students develop their identity at a predominately white institution.

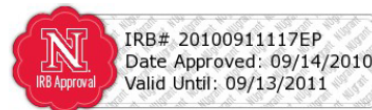
To be eligible for this study, a potential participant must self-identify as multiracial and be 19 years of age or older. If you decide to participate, you are invited to be involved in an interview, the focus group, or both. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Subsequent to the completion of individual interviews, you will be contacted to engage in a focus group with other participants, which will last approximately 120 minutes. Interviews and the focus group will take place at a time and location convenient to you.

There are no known risks for the individual interviews; for the focus group, the researcher cannot fully guarantee that all information shared in the focus group will remain confidential. To safeguard information, you will be allowed to pick a pseudonym for all transcribing and reporting of the data, so you will be unidentifiable.

The benefit to the higher education community will be the gained knowledge about the way in which a predominately white institution interacts with multiracial student identity development. Additionally, the benefit to you will be a greater understanding of how your own experiences have shaped your identity development.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing this document, we plan to disclose the information obtained from the interview and focus group by using pseudonyms in all reporting.

There will be no compensation or extra costs associated with this study for you.



Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has reviewed and approved the present research. If you have any questions, please contact me: aloudd@unlnotes.unl.edu. Questions regarding the right of research subjects may be directed to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, (402) 472-6965.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

Check here if you agree to be audio taped during your interview.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Participant *Date*

Appendix B

Recruitment E-mail to Potential Participants

Recruitment E-mail to Potential Participants

You're invited to participate in a research study!

My name is Ashley Loudd. I am currently a graduate student within the Student Affairs masters program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am beginning a research study examining the ways in which multiracial undergraduate students develop their identity at a predominately white college. To be eligible for this study, a potential participant must self-identify as multiracial and be 19 years of age or older. Participants are invited to complete an interview, engage as part of a focus group, or both. Food will be provided!

If interested, please contact Ashley Loudd at:
aloudd@unlnotes.unl.edu

In your e-mail, please include your contact information and a few time and date options that are convenient for your interview.

Thanks for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

Ashley

~~~~~

Ashley M. Loudd  
Graduate Student Assistant  
Career Services  
(402) 472.1852  
aloudd@unlnotes.unl.edu

## **Appendix C**

### **Reminder E-mail to Participants**

**Reminder E-mail to Participants**

Hi!

I just want to thank you again for continuing your participation in my research study. This is a reminder that the scheduled time for the focus group is tomorrow at \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_. I look forward to seeing you again and continuing to discuss your stories!

If for any reason you need to cancel, please e-mail me as soon as possible at:  
aloudd@unlnotes.unl.edu

Thanks again!

Ashley

~~~~~  
Ashley M. Loudd
Graduate Student Assistant
Career Services
(402) 472.1852
aloudd@unlnotes.unl.edu

Appendix D

Participant Demographic Sheet

Participant Demographic Sheet

The Missing Box: Multiracial Identity Development at a Predominately White Institution

Ashley Loudd

Date:

Name:

Pseudonym:

Gender:

Racial Background:

Year in School:

Age:

Hometown:

Primary Language(s):

First Generation: Yes No

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. Reflect for a moment, and tell me the story of how you became socially involved at [Central University].
 - a. Who do you hang out with? Why?
 - b. Where do you hang out on campus? Why?
 - c. What challenges and support did you experience in the process of becoming involved at [Central University]?

2. Tell me a story about when you had to define who you are at [Central University].
 - a. Is this the same way you would define yourself at home?
 - b. If this changed, why?
 - c. Have you ever felt you had to check a box? How did this make you feel?

Appendix F

Un-Structured Focus Group Protocol

Un-Structured Focus Group Protocol

Focus Question: Take a moment to reflect, and describe how you think White people see you.

Appendix G

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

This agreement made on this _____ day of _____ 2010, between Ashley Loudd, the primary researcher, and _____, transcriptionist.

The transcriptionist agrees to keep any and all communication (oral and written) pertaining to the research study conducted by Ashley Loudd strictly confidential. This includes, but is not limited to any and all conversations, audio tapes, or e-mail correspondence pertaining to the transcription, and/or transcription copies (electronic and paper.)

The transcriptionist agrees not to duplicate any materials provided by the researcher or presented to the researcher without the consent of the primary researcher. This includes, but is not limited to, audio tapes and transcriptions. The completed transcriptions will be electronically sent to the primary researcher after completion and also saved on a flash drive. Any e-mail or electronic correspondence or files containing transcribed information will be destroyed after receiving confirmation of receipt from the primary researcher.

The transcriptionist will return any audio tapes, or copies thereof, to the primary researcher along with any electronic copies or paper copies of the transcriptions within a reasonable amount of time as by the transcriptionist and the researcher.

By signing this confidentiality agreement you agree to the terms discussed above limiting you, as the transcriber, from sharing any information obtained during transcription or through the use of the audio tapes to anyone except the primary researcher.

Signature

Print Name

Date

Appendix H

Example of Coded Participant Transcript

Interview #2

Participant: Danielle

Location: [Central University]

Date: October 8, 2010

Danielle:

Um, they're all (laughs) they're all White! [CODE: The majority of the people the participant hangs out with are White.] *I feel like, um, we make jokes that I'm, like, the token Asian.* [CODE: The participant makes jokes with her friends that she's the token Asian.] *Um, and...it's a, like, I'm a journalism major and I'm only, and I've, like, worked in newsrooms and I've worked at, like, the [DC] where, like, like you, like everyone, you could count on, like, one hand who is diverse.* [CODE: The participant has worked in newsrooms and at the campus newspaper, where you could count on one hand who is diverse. The participant begins to signal the importance of being Asian and being diverse.] *And then, I actually did this, um...I became a little bit more interested in diversity, in my own diversity when I needed to apply for internships and I applied for this program called the Chips Quinn Scholars, which is a program to promote journalists of diverse backgrounds, or journalists who have a commitment to diversity and to newsrooms.* [CODE: The participant became more interested in her own diversity when she applied for an internship with the Chips Quinn Scholars, note: The participant reflects on becoming aware of her diversity, not Asian identity.]

Meaning Field Analysis:

"I became a little bit more interested in diversity, in my own diversity..."

MF: "Diversity is a concept to become interested in" AND "I am diverse" AND/OR "I am interested in diversity because I am diverse" AND/OR "I view myself as diverse, which encouraged me to become interested in the concept of diversity" AND/OR "Being diverse is how I view my race, as a result I am interested in diversity" AND/OR "As a result of becoming interested in the concept of diversity, I began to view myself as diverse."

And, I had to do this training with them and it was, like, all, like, there were, like three Asians and, like, three Hispanics, or you know, like a couple of Hispanics and a couple of Black kids and um, we were all together for a week and it was really, and it wasn't like we didn't discuss race, but it was just, like, we didn't discuss race like that. [CODE: The participant reflects on the less obtrusive nature/culture of race in the Chips Quinn Scholars because she was interacting with other racially diverse individuals.] *Like, some kids tease me for not being, like, a real Asian, um but, uh...it was just kind of like...I dunno, it was, it was nice to not, like, look, like, different from everyone.* [CODE: The participant acknowledges that some kids tease her for not being a "real Asian," and therefore, she thought it was nice in the Chips Quinn program to not look different from everyone else.] *Not, that I look, not that I look like that different; my, my looks aren't pronounced that much.* [CODE: The participant then backtracks and asserts that she doesn't look that different; that her looks aren't pronounced that much.]

Reconstructive Horizon Analysis

“...it was nice to not...look...different from everyone.”

Objective Claim:

Highly Foregrounded:

“I did not stand out.”

Less Foregrounded:

“I was surrounded by other diverse students.”

Backgrounded:

“I am able to blend into a group of diverse students.”

Highly Backgrounded:

“Most of my peers are White so I usually look different.”

Subjective Claim:

Highly Foregrounded:

“I enjoyed that my physical characteristics did not stand out in the group.”

Less Foregrounded:

“I wish that I could be surrounded by people who look like me more often.”

Backgrounded:

“When I am around my White peers I do not like standing out.”

Highly Backgrounded:

“I wish I had more diverse friends so that I could blend in more often.”

Normative Claim:

Highly Foregrounded:

“Looking different from my peers is negative” AND

“Looking similar to my peers is positive.”

Less Foregrounded:

“People should not always feel like their physical features make them stand out”

Backgrounded:

“I should surround myself with diverse peers regularly” OR

“It is wrong that I always feel like I stand out among my peers.”

Highly Backgrounded:

“It is wrong that diverse people always feel as though they stand out among White peers.”

Identity Claim:

Highly Foregrounded:

“I look like other diverse people.”

Less Foregrounded:

“I look different than my White peers.”

Backgrounded:

“Maybe I am diverse.”

Highly Backgrounded:

“I am not White.”