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THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT AND THE RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF BIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

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THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT AND THE RACIAL
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF BIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

By:

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

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Under the Supervision of Professor Marilyn L. Grady

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Natasha Hanako Chapman

University of Nebraska, 2005

Advisor: Marilyn L. Grady

The purpose of this study was to explore how biracial students described the role of the college campus environment on the development of their racial identity. The research questions were: 1) What is the biracial student's self-assigned racial identity? 2) What life experiences have aided in the formation of the biracial individual's racial identity? 3) How has the college experience contributed to the development of the biracial individual's racial identity? 4) What key factors in the campus environment were most salient to biracial college students in the development of their racial identity? 5) How do biracial college students perceive their racial identity options within the campus environment?

A purposeful sample of 13 participants who were biracial or multiracial graduate students was chosen. Data collection occurred through semi-structured face-to-face and phone interviews. The data collected represented biracial experiences from 10 different undergraduate institutions.

Three overarching themes emerged from the data: a) laying the foundation b) the college experience and c) visions for the future. The findings suggest that early

childhood experiences laid the foundation for the racial identity of participants upon entering college. College courses, instructors and peers were salient factors in the students' racial identity development on campus. Participants recommend that university administrators deconstruct traditional models of racial classification and develop programs and policy that are inclusive of all students.

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I dedicate this work to the Chapman, Youngblood, and Yamashita families who have taught me that love is boundless.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Context of the Problem

Genes and chromosomes from Africa, Europe and a pristine America commingled and created me. I have been called Egyptian, Italian, Jewish, French, Iranian, Armenian, Syrian, Spanish, Portuguese and Greek. I have also been called black and Peola, and nigger and high yellow and bright. I am an American anomaly. I am an American ideal. I am the American nightmare. I am the Martin Luther King dream. I am the new America (Haizlip, 1994, p. 15).

Since the 1960s, factors such as the passing of anti-miscegenation laws, the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights movement have led to an increase in interracial couples, prompting a rise in the number of biracial and multiracial individuals in the United States. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 6,828,228 individuals who identified with two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The biracial population in the United States is not a new phenomenon, but certain federal decisions and historical events (i.e. Brown vs. Board of Education, Loving vs. Virginia) have led to an increase in multi-racial families and a greater acceptance of them. According to Wardle (1992), the mounting interest in the identity development of biracial individuals is due to their growing numbers, the common belief that biracial persons are marginalized and unstable, and an increased understanding that biracial identity development is different from that of monoracial individuals.

There has been an active movement within the multiracial population that has rattled the racial norms of society,

Social psychology in general and social identity theory in particular have regarded groups as discrete entities and conflict between groups as inevitable. Multiethnic individuals present a challenge to the view of ethnic groups as distinct and in conflict...the presence of racially mixed persons blurs racial and ethnic group boundaries and challenges long-held notions about the biological, moral, and social meaning of race (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996, p. 149).

These individuals have become more assertive about their rights and responsibilities as their families are challenged to overcome societal myths, problems, and barriers (Wardle, 1992). Traditional and biological models regarding race, ethnic, and identity development generally do not apply to individuals who are the product of a mixed-heritage. The growing voice of multiracial individuals has prompted questions regarding racial attitudes, psychological wellness, racial categorization, and identity development.

The fact that an entire generation of biracial individuals is coming of age, and the number of biracial children is expected to increase suggests that colleges and universities will experience a similar increase in their multiracial student body (Nishimura, 1998). “The challenge to university officials will be to provide support and a forum for student development that will enhance their ability to be productive and valued members in a diverse society” (Nishimura, 1998, p. 49). The way in which multiracial adults view the world and respond to challenges regarding their identity will be influenced by sources and systems of support that reflect and validate their very being (Kenney, 2002). “Consequently, college counselors and other student affairs professionals will be

confronted with both the opportunity and challenge of addressing the needs of this newly emerging student group” (Nishimura 1998, p. 45).

Statement of the Problem

There is little empirical research about racial identity development of biracial students in the college environment,

Future research on the academic experiences of multiracial college students is warranted. Not only is this a rapidly growing population in the United States, it is a population that will not disappear as racial groups become more fluid and interracial relationships become more prolific. Because of the potential magnitude, biracial and multiracial student academic experiences would be an important area for research initiatives (Sands & Schuh, 2004, p. 360).

The increasing number of mixed-race births will be reflected in college student populations throughout the country. It will be important for these post-secondary institutions to prepare for the unique needs of students who cannot claim a single racial background (Sands & Schuh, 2004). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how biracial students described the role of the campus environment on the development of their racial identity

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how biracial students described the role of the college campus environment on the development of their racial identity. The results of this study will help education administrators, staff, and students understand the factors in the campus environment that influence the racial identity development of biracial individuals. In addition, the research may help to address questions regarding the

biracial experience and racial identity development in order to better serve this student population.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants in order to examine how they identify racially, how their college experience has (or has not) contributed to their racial identity development, and what factors within the campus environment were salient to their racial identity development. The following grand tour question guided the study: How does the college campus environment influence the development of the biracial college student's racial identity? The sub questions included:

1. What is the biracial student's self-assigned racial identity?
2. What life experiences have aided in the formation of the biracial individual's racial identity?
3. How has the college experience contributed to the development of the biracial individual's racial identity?
4. What key factors in the campus environment are most salient to biracial college students in the development of their racial identity?
5. How do biracial college students perceive their racial identity options within the campus environment?

Definitions

The following definitions were used in the study:

Interracial couples – married or unmarried partners who are each members of a different racial/cultural background.

Biracial individual – those persons whose parents are of two different and distinct racial/cultural backgrounds.

Multiracial individuals – often used synonymously with the term biracial. Those persons whose parents are of two or more different and distinct racial--cultural backgrounds.

Multiracial families – may include families that are composed of interracial couples or single parents and their multiracial offspring. Multiracial families may also include families who have gone through an adoption or pregnancy that results in a multiracial child. (Definitions were adapted from Kenney, 1999).

Racial Identity – “Sometimes used interchangeably with ethnic identity, racial identity refers to the individual’s acquisition of group patterns...one’s sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership” (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, p. 202).

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was restricted to interviewing biracial and multiracial graduate students. The students were asked to describe their undergraduate experiences. The time frame during which the participants attended their undergraduate institutions varied. The number of participants was limited to thirteen. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling.

As a biracial individual, I have personal experiences that have shaped my perceptions on the biracial experience. As a student affairs practitioner I have a different perspective on the campus experience than the participants. My work with students of color, especially my experiences working with biracial students, may play a role in how I interpret the data.

The results of this qualitative study cannot be generalized. However, measures were taken so that readers can make logical conclusions regarding the transferability of

the findings of the study to other settings and groups. Detailed and thick descriptions were used throughout the study. I recorded my personal thoughts and observations in a journal. I maintained a record log of my research activities. I asked the participants to verify transcripts. And, I have included the voice of the participants as much as possible.

Researcher Biases

“In evaluation studies, especially those using qualitative data, the evaluator is an integral part of the data collection. This is particularly so in observation and interview work, when the evaluator’s judgment and influence on those being observed can influence the data collected” (Lapan, 2004, p. 241). My researcher biases follow.

1. I am a biracial graduate student and may share similar experiences and feelings as the participants. Additionally, my personal experiences have molded my current perspective on the biracial experience.
2. I have worked closely with biracial and multiracial students and have observed the challenges they face with racial identity in college.
3. I believe that biracial college students face different challenges in their racial identity development than their monoracial counterparts.
4. I have strong feelings that biracial individuals have unique developmental needs that are not being addressed at the post-secondary level.
5. I am comfortable with identifying as biracial and feel a strong connection to the multiracial community.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

There is little empirical research about the racial identity development of biracial students in the college environment (Nishimura, 1996, Renn, 2000, Renn, 2003, Sands & Schuh, 2004). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore how biracial students describe the role of the college campus environment on the development of their racial identity. The following literature review includes existing studies and literature about the biracial population. The review focuses on the following themes: 1) marginality and psychological concerns, 2) racial attitudes, 3) identity development, 4) racial categorization, and 5) the biracial college student.

Marginality and Psychological Concerns

There are several theories that surround the biracial population that guide research and service providers,

A long held notion is that biracial individuals are destined to have far-reaching problems due to their racial heritage. They are stereotyped as people who will be rejected at face value by all ethnic/racial groups and considered to be marginal but not actual members of these groups (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, p. 203).

This idea is widely accepted by the general public and continues to be perpetuated by many professions. Several studies address the ideology of the marginal man. The idea stemming from a conceptualization of mixed heritage people theorized this population as being a marginal people — bordering between cultures but never really belonging. Some studies support the work of Parks (Stonequist, 1961), who coined the term in the 1920s, who stated that because of their marginality, biracial individuals are more culturally

competent and sensitive, are able to adapt to changing environments, and thus are no more psychologically disadvantaged than their mono-racial counterparts (Kao, 1999, Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993, and Phinney & Alipuria, 1996).

“Multiethnic people have been portrayed as troubled and anxious outsiders who lack a clear identity...Researchers using measures of self-esteem have consistently found no significant difference between the self-esteem of multiethnic groups and that of mono-ethnic comparison groups” (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996, p. 140).

Kao (1999) examined whether biracial youth have a psychological disadvantage because of their dual heritage. The study investigated whether the school outcomes of the biracial students were more closely related to their minority or white counterparts. Data from the study found no evidence of lower global self-esteem or a specific self-esteem among biracial youth. Biracial youth were not marginalized in their schools and their popularity was comparable or surpassed their mono-racial peers. Kao suggested biracial youth are not more psychologically disadvantaged than other youth.

Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris (1993) conducted semi-structured interviews with nine New York Black/White biracial children and their parents to study issues salient to the development of racial identity. The purpose of the study was to identify issues critical to biracial children and to generate hypotheses for further research. The results revealed major themes among the parents who were interviewed regarding the use and non-use of labels, perception for anticipated discrimination, location for childrearing, and relationships with friends and extended family. Emerging themes among the biracial children included labels and biracial awareness. Significant findings were that members of the families reported many of the same issues and absence of the

same problems. All of the parents seemed to have a secure sense of their racial identity, none of the families reported alienation from their extended families, many of the families reported openness to talking about the issues, and the children described their biracial status positively.

Phinney & Alipuria (1996) examined two typical samples of multiethnic youth and a comparison sample of monoethnic youth. The study explored how the students self-labeled regarding their ethnicity and if there were differences in self-esteem based on self-labeling. The study included 43 multi-ethnic university students and a comparison group of 305 mono-ethnic students from two large state universities in Southern California. The students completed questionnaires that addressed self-labeling and completed the 10-item Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. Approximately 80% of the students self-labeled as mono-ethnic. T-tests comparing self-esteem scores of those who used a mono-ethnic label to those who chose multi-ethnic label showed no significant differences. Additionally, the results of ANOVA suggested that there was no difference in self-esteem between the multi-ethnic and mono-ethnic students. The researchers claimed that, "Contrary to popular views, and earlier clinical impressions, multi-ethnic individuals are not troubled, marginal people" (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996, p. 147).

Other studies support Park's student, Stonequist (1961), these studies attest that as a result of their mixed heritage, biracial individuals are confused, frustrated, and anxious people (Gibbs & Moskovitz-Sweet, 1991, Ramos, Jaccard, & Guilamo-Ramos, 2003). This idea is commonly used among mental health professionals and educators (Wardle, 1992).

Gibbs and Moskowitz-Sweet (1991) gathered data from 20 case studies of biracial and bicultural adolescence to examine major developmental conflicts experienced by these individuals; to investigate clinical, sociocultural, and environmental issues in the assessment of these individuals in order to propose strategies for intervention. All of the individuals in the case studies were selected based on severe psychological distress and feelings of confusion due to their racial background. The researchers found that conflict regarding racial and ethnic identity was the central phenomena for these youths. Often these individuals over identified with the minority parent and rejected the white culture. Conflict regarding separation, individualization from parents, education and career aspirations, social marginality, and impulse management and sexuality were common themes.

Ramo, Jaccard, and Guilamo-Ramos (2003) investigated the expression of depressive symptoms in 7th-12th grade students who are of Afro-Latino descent. The Afro-Latino group was compared to three other groups of adolescents: European American, African American, and Latinos. In general, across all ethnic groups, the females tended to show higher levels of depressive symptoms than males. Older adolescents tended to have higher levels of depressive symptoms than their younger counterparts. Afro-Latino females tended to show higher levels of depressive symptoms than the other ethnic groups.

Hall (1992) suggested that Stonequist's view on marginality is faulty because it made no distinction among marginal person, marginal status, and marginal personality. Hall described a marginal person as biologically or culturally from two or more races or cultures; marginal status as an individual who occupies a position somewhere between

cultures but who does not fully belong to any; and a marginal personality as a person who has challenges dealing with a marginal status. Thus, "...the mere fact of being a marginal person does not lead to a marginal personality" (Hall, p. 251).

Racial Attitudes towards Biracial Individuals

The idea of a biracial identity and the increase of the biracial population challenge normative values on race and culture. Since the awareness of biracial people has heightened since the 1960s, attitudes regarding mixed marriages and their offspring have become a topic of interest for researchers. Several authors have examined racial attitudes towards and among biracial individuals (Harris, 2002, Jackman, Wagner, & Johnson, 2001, and Neto & Paiva, 1998).

The goal of Harris' (2002) study on biracial children was to examine school counselors' personal perceptions of biracial individuals. Three-hundred and twenty-eight school counselors located in nine states from the South Eastern region of the United States completed a 25-item survey including a broad range of issues concerning biracial children. The survey addressed questions regarding the counselors' educational backgrounds with multicultural issues, experiences working with multicultural individuals, and perceptions of biracial children – specifically in academic, behavioral and identity-related matters. The results indicated that the majority of the counselors did not believe society openly accepts biracial children. Eighty-two percent of the school counselors reported some personal counseling experiences with biracial individuals and indicated that they would feel comfortable providing services to this group. In general, the school counselors perceived that biracial children might face more challenges than monoracial children due to how their families are perceived in society. An important

finding of the study revealed that school counselors who worked in environments that actively promoted cultural diversity hold more accurate perceptions of biracial children.

Jackman, Wagner, & Johnson (2001) developed the Attitudes Toward Multiracial Children Scale (AMCS) based on their interest in the attitudes that parents, extended family members, teachers, and mental health professionals held concerning the psychosocial development of multiracial children. The 43-item scale was administered to undergraduate students in psychology courses. The results showed that people of color had higher AMCS total scores than did the white students.

Neto & Paiva (1998) employed a translated version of the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure II (PRAM II) and the Color Meaning Test II (CMT II) to investigate racial preferences of 88 eight-year-old black, white and biracial children from Portugal. There was a general tendency among all the groups toward a pro-light-skinned/anti-dark-skinned bias with the degree of bias being somewhat less among black and biracial children.

Identity Development

Racial identity is the topic that is most disputed concerning biracial individuals (Wardle, 1992). Many insist that biracial individuals have a “dual” identity--one that is based on a collective heritage of both parents. Thus, one can see the challenge faced by biracial students when securing identity. Although individuals may perceive their identity as being whole, society and even family perceive their identity as being dual--in many situations forcing biracial individuals to choose.

“The additional challenge for multiracial individuals is that very little of their world is ‘given’ that is, able to be accepted without conscious thought and decisions”

(Nishimura, 1998, p. 46). Race strongly influences how others perceive an individual, the community an individual identifies with, an individual's social relationships, and how the individual perceives him or herself,

This racial identities--social context configuration can create discomfort for multiracial individuals, who may feel that claiming one racial heritage over the other automatically negates the heritage of one of their parents. Multiracial persons often find themselves in a position of simultaneously trying to examine who they are while confronting the racial designation people want to impose on them (Nishimura, 1998, p. 46).

Biracial college students face both similar and different identity challenges as monoracial minority members. As a result of the differences, existing racial identity models often make a poor fit for biracial students (Casas & Pytluk, 1995, Cross, 1995, and Helms, 1995). Scenarios from traditional monoracial models include transitions into discriminatory attitudes towards other minority groups, depreciating attitudes and rejection of the dominant society, and culturocentrisms (Casas & Pytluk, 1995, Cross, 1995). Obvious complexities arise for individuals of dual heritage in transitioning through these stages.

In the 1990s, racial identity models were conceptualized that suit the challenges faced by biracial individuals. These theories take into account the unique experiences faced by the multiracial population, and recognize the differences between this group and other minority groups. Several authors (Poston, 1990, Kich, 1992, and Kerwin-Ponterroto, 1993) introduced stage models that were similar in form to traditional

monoracial models, but were developed to address the unique experiences of multiracial individuals (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

Poston (1990) developed a model of biracial identity development because he believed development would be different for biracial individuals for the following reasons:

1. The biracial individuals may choose one group over the other at different stages of life.
2. Monoracial identity models for minority group members include rejection of the minority culture followed by rejection of the majority culture. These stages may be different for biracial individuals because they have a stake in both cultures.
3. Monoracial identity development models do not include the possibility of integrating more than one racial/ethnic group identity into one's sense of self.
4. All models assume that the minority community will be completely accepting as the individual "immerses" him—or herself in the minority culture at a given stage. (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, p. 205)

Poston's five stage model included:

- Personal Identity-the individual sense of self is independent of group identity because these have not yet developed.
- Choice of Group Categorization-the individual feels compelled to choose an identity, usually of just one ethnic or racial group. Often the individual feels pressure from one's living and social situation, available peer groups, family acceptance, and physical appearance.

- Enmeshment/Denial-the individual becomes enmeshed with one group and feels guilt, self-hatred, and rejection from one or more groups due to the choice made.
- Appreciation – the individuals become receptive to their multiple heritages and broaden their reference group orientation.
- Integration – the individuals perceive value in having a multiple identity. They experience a sense of wholeness and integration. (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995)

Kich's (1992) model was based on findings from a qualitative study of Japanese/White adults. Kich found that participants transitioned through three main stages during their biracial identity development (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). Kich's model included the following stages:

- Awareness of Differentness and Dissonance (ages 3-10)--the biracial individual experiences the sense of being different, regardless of specific racial makeup. This can be positively valued when it is "dealt with within a secure family context" (Kerwin & Ponterotto, p. 207). Parental involvement is essential to a positive self-concept.
- Struggle for Acceptance (ages 8 through young adulthood)--the individuals have increased feelings that others perceive them and their families as different. Individuals find themselves answering more questions about their background and recognize that standard racial categories are narrowly defined.
- Self-Acceptance and Assertion of an Interracial Identity (typically occurs after high school and during transition to or from college)--the individual "achieves the ability to create congruent self-definitions rather than be determined by others' definitions and stereotypes." (Kerwin & Ponterotto, p. 208)

Kerwin-Ponterotto's Model of Biracial Identity Development (1993) drew upon previous models of identity development, as well as, findings from empirical research. This model recognized that "the eventual resolution of the steps toward a biracial identity formation is dependent on numerous personal, societal, and environmental factors" (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, p. 210). The six stage model is described below:

- Preschool--racial awareness emerges during this stage. There is a growing recognition of similarities and differences in people's appearance.
- Entry to School--children begin to use labels and descriptive terms to define themselves in response to inquiries about their social group.
- Preadolescence--during this stage there is an increasing recognition of differences in skin color, physical appearance language, and culture.
- Adolescence--the authors suggested that this may be the most challenging stage for biracial individuals because of developmental factors and societal pressures of this age group. At this time, there is perceived pressure from peers to choose one racial group over another.
- College/Young Adulthood--the individual immerses in one culture while rejecting the other. "With the development of a more secure personal identity usually accompanying this stage, however, rejection of others' expectations and an acceptance of one's biracial and bicultural heritage is increasingly likely to occur" (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, p. 213). If there is a positive transition through this stage, the individual will begin to recognize the advantages and disadvantages with having a biracial heritage.

- Adulthood--“With the successful resolution of earlier stages, there will be a continuing exploration and interest in different cultures, including one’s own. The integrated individual will find that he or she is able to function effectively in varying situations and understands different communities” (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, p. 214).

In 1990, Root developed a non-linear model with four strategies. Root proposed that, “the healthy development for biracial children must include learning strategies for coping with the ‘otherness’ forced on them by a dichotomous, black-white society but notes that these children have few models available in this attempt to resolve ‘other’ status” (Renn, 2004, p. 20). “These strategies are not mutually exclusive or progressive, and they may exist simultaneously” (Renn, 2004, p. 20). All of the four strategies share the following themes: the biracial person accepts both sides of their heritage, the individual has the right to declare how they choose to self-identify, the individual develops personal strategies for coping with social resistance, and the biracial person no longer internalizes questions about their identity as inferences that there is something wrong with them (Renn, 2004). Root’s four strategies in resolving the ‘other’ status are to: accept the identity society assigns, identify with both racial groups, identify with a single racial group, or identify as a new racial group.

In 1996, Root developed this idea further by identifying four types of border crossings. Renn (2004) suggested that, “the border crossings do not exactly match the strategies for resolving marginal status but view them through a postmodern lens” (p. 21). Biracial individuals could opt for any one of the four options at anytime in their life, crossing over as they feel comfortable.

The first type of border crossing is to have *both* feet in *both* groups. The biracial individual is able to “hold and merge multiple perspectives simultaneously” (Renn, 2004, p. 21). Another border crossing “highlights the shifting of foreground and background as one crosses between and among social contexts defined by race and ethnicity” (Root, 1996, p. xxi). In this option, the individual matches the demands of the social context; practicing situational race. In the third option, the individual sits on the border and embraces a multiracial label that cannot be deconstructed. In the last option, one is at home in one camp for an extended period of time. This individual may move to another camp at some point. “Again, loyalty is not the issue; rather, surrounding oneself by an environment that supports one’s psychological, emotional, social, and political needs may guide this type of crossing” (Root, p. xxii). “Root’s border-crossing paradigm suggests that healthy resolution of multiracial identity in a postmodern world allows an individual consciously to choose a manner of negotiating life in the borderlands of our constructed racial ecology” (Renn, 2004, p. 22).

Racial Categorization

Racial categorization is a major issue in the identity development of biracial individuals. How one self-categorizes is not a simple concept for individuals with multiple heritages. “A major challenge faced by mixed-race people involves the struggle to define themselves racially within a society that conceptualizes races in a rigidly dichotomous manner and that attaches differential values to each of these dichotomies” (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003).

The U.S. government addressed concerns regarding the labeling of multiracial individuals, allowing for a multiracial option on the 2000 U.S Census. Yet, it is still a

question as to how multiracial individuals choose to self-select when given the option. Much of the research on biracial individuals examined the factors that influence the racial categorization of biracial people (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Harris & Simm, 2002; Johnson, Jobe, Rocke, Seedman, Warnecke, Chavez, Chapa-Resendez, & Golden, 1997; Luke & Luke, 1999; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Renn, 2000; Renn, 2003; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Twine, 1996; Xie & Goyette, 1997).

Brunsma & Rockquemore (2001) examined the role that physical appearance plays in racial identity choice of Black and White Biracial individuals. Utilizing Rockquemore's taxonomy of the racial self-understandings of biracial individuals, the study tested how phenotype and social context influence the racial identities of biracial individuals. The participants, from two metropolitan colleges in Detroit, completed the Survey of Biracial Experience instrument. The results produced a wide variation in self-reported skin color, although the majority of respondents described their socially mediated appearance as ambiguous. There was no association between skin color and the way that biracial individuals racially understood themselves.

Harris & Sim (2002) investigated how youth, who self-identify as multiracial, answer questions that insist upon single race responses. The data were collected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The analysis of the data suggested that for a minority of adolescents race is both socially constructed and fluid. The data revealed inconsistencies in racial classification between self-reports, as well as between self-reports and parent-based measures. The authors stated that the changing perspective on race explained the patterns of multiracial reporting. Additionally, the authors

suggested that patterns of race and classification vary because multiracial groups comprise socially distinct mono-racial groups.

Johnson, Jobe, Rocke, Seedman, Warnecke, Chavez, Chapa-Resendez, & Golden (1997) suggested that the concept of racial and ethnic identity is dependent on context and is more complex than biological models assume. They evaluated alternative survey and statistical formats for collecting racial information from multiracial individuals and assessed their preference for each. Interviews were conducted with 69 women ages 18 to 44 living in the Chicago area. The sample was selected using convenience and snowball methods. During the interviews, the respondents were asked to complete portions of the U.S. Standard Certificate of Live Birth forms and then were shown two other versions of the racial identification questions that contained varying sets of responses. The findings were that of the alternatives examined, multiracial respondents largely preferred a question format that allowed them to self-identify themselves as multiracial. Many respondents expressed negative reactions to forced categorization of single racial groups. The evidence suggested that ethnic and racial identities are far more sensitive to methods of data collection than suggested by traditional models.

Luke & Luke (1999) explored the significance of place, locality, and situated “racializing practices” in identity construction of interethnic families in Australia. The study focused on understanding how identity development occurred in relation to specific histories and geography. Couples of mixed race marriages (Caucasian and Indo-Asian) were interviewed. Families from five major Australian cities were examined. The aim was to produce grounded theory and new literature regarding identity construction. The authors found that identity construction differs depending on locality and racialized

practices within that locality. These families created a paradigm shift in the valued norms and practices that are common in mono-racial partnerships. The authors suggested that race does matter in the development of identity politics and in the evaluation of racialized practices within the community.

Phinney & Alipuria (1996) compared 194 multi-ethnic high school students with 696 mono-ethnic students from the same schools located in urban areas of Los Angeles. Similar to their study on college students, the participants completed a questionnaire regarding their selected self-label and also completed a six-item measure of attitudes towards other groups. Thirty-four percent of the multi-ethnic students selected a mixed heritage self-label, while the other 66 % selected a mono-ethnic self-label. A clear pattern was evident from those students who had one black parent and one parent from a different minority group. These students most often labeled themselves as Black.

Renn (2000) conducted a qualitative study on 24 biracial and multiracial college students introducing a conditional model for how students define themselves racially based on their environment. The results indicated five patterns of racial identification among the participants: 1) The student holds a monoracial identity, 2) the student holds multiple monoracial identities, shifting according to situation, 3) the student holds a multiracial identity, 4) the student holds an extraracial identity, deconstructing race; and 5) the student has a situational identity. Renn found that these patterns, “are not exclusive, nor are they rigid or unchangeable” (Renn, 2004, p.68). Renn suggested the results of this study indicated a need to provide “space” for these students to explore their multiracial heritage.

Using an ecology model of human development, Renn (2003) explored the influence of specific environments on the racial identity choice of mixed race college students. In the first phase, Renn collected data from 24 mixed race students attending three private, residential, predominately white institutions in the Northeast. In the second phase, data were collected from 14 mixed race students in the rural Southern Midwest. The students participated in open-ended interviews and a written exercise. Additionally three to four participants per institution participated in a focus group. Renn also collected archival material and observed the campus racial climates and student events. The identities of the students were among five non-exclusive patterns. Results from this study indicated that 33 of the 38 participants identified in more than one pattern, three identified with one racial category, and two identified with the multiracial pattern.

Rockquemore & Brunsma (2002) illustrated that biracial people make various identity choices. These choices depend on their environment and experiences with a particular race. One hundred and seventy-seven Black--White biracial participants were selected from a private liberal arts college and a large community college in Detroit. They were asked to fill out a 106-item questionnaire that measured the respondents understanding of their racial identities, racial composition of social networks, negative experiences, group evaluations, and appearance. The results of the study indicated that biracial individuals understand themselves in at least six different ways. The authors noted that many individuals who self-identify as exclusively biracial are still categorized by others as black.

Twine (1996) conducted a case study of multiracial college women who had been culturally constructed as "white" prior to puberty and later constructed a black or biracial

identity. Twine interviewed 16 university students attending the University of California at Berkeley. The findings were that all of the women interviewed revealed their middle class, racially invisible status as salient to their experience with being raised white. Their experiences at Berkeley allowed them to experience a black identity by immersing into the black campus community. The research indicated that there is a white identity available to certain economically privileged biracial individuals, but this white identity is vulnerable when the individual relocates to a racially politicized community.

Xie & Goyette (1997) examined the socioeconomic and demographic factors that influenced if biracial children with one Asian parent racially identified with their Asian or non-Asian parent. Utilizing the Public Use Microdata Sample of the 1990 Census, the researchers assessed variables that affected how the child is identified. The explanation variables included the child and parent's characteristics as well as the racial composition of the community. The sample consisted of 7,808 children between the ages of 0-14 who lived with both biological parents, one was Asian and the other non-Asian. The results of the study suggested that the racial identification among biracial children with one Asian parent is generally optional. The study revealed marginal distributions of the racial identification of the participants. The percentage of Asian identification varied from 30-50 % across the different demographic factors and none of the demographic groups overwhelming identified as Asian or non-Asian.

Biracial College Students

The way in which multiracial adults view the world and respond to challenges regarding their identity will be influenced by sources and systems of support that reflect and validate their very being (Kenney, 2002). "Consequently, college counselors and

other student affairs professionals will be confronted with both the opportunity and challenge of addressing the needs of this newly emerging student group” (Nishimura, 1998, p. 45).

Studies are beginning to emerge that specifically address biracial individuals in the college context (Nishimura, 1998, Renn 2000, Renn, 2003, Sands & Schuh, 2004).

Yet,

Despite significant and increasing numbers of biracial and multiracial students, almost nothing is known about their development and interactions in the college environment. This topic has special relevance to higher education at a time when multiraciality has become a matter of political and popular interest (Renn, 2000, p.399).

Nishimura (1998) did a preliminary study with members of SHADES, an undergraduate student support group for multiracial students enrolled at a Midwestern university. The qualitative study consisted of extensive semi-structured interviews with three of the members of SHADES, followed by a focus group session with all the members. The interviews and focus group revealed that race is an ever-present issue. Most of the members of SHADES revealed that while growing up, their families did not discuss the fact that they were a multiracial family. “Messages such as ‘color doesn’t matter, we’re just people’ were meant to be loving, but group members viewed such a perspective as unrealistic” (p. 49). Another theme that came about was the lack of empathy from loved ones. There is an added challenge in the identity development of multiracial individuals because “most people, including their parents, do not know what it is like to be multiracial” (p.49). Another finding of the study was that the members felt

that the traditional university sponsored minority student groups were sometimes challenging. Several of the members voiced discomfort when in the presence of traditional minority student groups, and felt that they had to prove their ethnic membership.

Renn (2000) studied twenty-four biracial students ages nineteen through twenty-three from three New England schools. This qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews with the participants, written responses by the participants, observation and archival data about each campus on multiracial issues, and a focus group of 3-4 students per campus. Two major themes emerged from the data-the meaning of space and peer culture,

Like their monoracial peers, multiracial students went about the business of developing meaningful definitions of who they were and who they wanted to become. They were doing the work of identity development on campuses not set up to accommodate those who do not fit into previously defined categories. Their solutions to this challenge demonstrated their ability to define themselves situationally and to create new spaces to express multiracial identity (p. 405).

Renn (2003) studied biracial students using data from an ongoing study of twenty-four students from New England (Renn, 2000) and collecting data from an additional fourteen students in the rural southern Midwest. Renn utilized the Bronfenbrenner's ecology model of development to explore the influence of postsecondary environments on multiracial identity. Based on the research, Renn suggested that institutions enhance curriculum to promote student identity development, align curriculum and co-curriculum

to support new ways of thinking about identity, and engage peer culture to promote boundary crossing.

Sand & Schuh (2004) conducted a case study on the experiences of six biracial students at one institution. Results from semi-structured interviews revealed that some students felt the university was segregated into narrow racial groups, making it difficult for a biracial student to fit into a peer group. Another issue that was discussed was services for biracial students--at the time of the study the institution did not have specific programs in place. The participants voiced mixed opinions regarding the need for services and programs specific to biracial individuals. Additionally, the majority of the students chose not to affiliate themselves with the Office of Minority Student Affairs. The study found that the most significant experiences the students faced stemmed from the repetitive questioning about the students' racial backgrounds. "For these students, others created their own perceptions of the students' racial composition. Often, this perception did not include biracialness, but rather a single ethnic identity to which the student didn't belong" (Sand & Schuh, p. 358). The authors suggested that universities expand racial categories on admission applications, develop programs and services specific to biracial student development, and create a learning community specifically for first-year biracial students.

Colleges and universities continually emphasize diversity initiatives and are race-conscious, yet students of dual race may not be included or mirrored in their programs and services. The reality of higher education is that it is a highly racialized climate (e.g. admission forms, affirmative action, scholarships, financial aid, student organizations, programs, support services). The question administrators must ask is: How do biracial

individuals fit into these factors, and how can their needs be addressed? Post-secondary institutions should provide learning environments that support and foster a positive development of self: this would include the development of one's racial identity.

Conclusion

The U.S. and global populations continue to diversify and, with an increasing acceptance of interracial couples/marriages, there will be a growing population of biracial and multiracial individuals. The issues surrounding race and identity are complex and sensitive and the added diversity within the multiracial population only contributes to these issues. It is important to recognize that biracial individuals do not follow traditional models of racial identity development and have experiences different from their monoracial counterparts. As some of the literature has shown, these individuals are likely to opt for a multiracial categorization and are more readily voicing their opinions about the uniqueness of their identity.

There is a general lack of awareness concerning biracial identity development and few studies specific to the college-age biracial student. This study will build on existing literature regarding biracial identity development and contribute new research from the college student perspective. The purpose of this research is to explore how biracial students describe the role of the campus environment on the development of their racial identity. The results of this study will help education administrators, staff, and students understand the factors in the campus environment that influence the racial identity development of biracial individuals. In addition, the research may help to address questions regarding the biracial experience and racial identity development in order to better meet the needs of this student population.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how biracial students described the role of the campus environment on the development of their racial identity. The results of this study will help administrators, faculty, staff, and students understand the factors in the campus environment that influence the racial identity development of biracial individuals. In addition, the research may help to address questions regarding the biracial experience and racial identity development in order to better meet the needs of this student population. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants to examine how they identified racially, how their college experiences contributed to their racial identity development, and what factors within the campus environment were salient to their racial identity development. The following research questions were developed to address the purpose of this study.

Grand Tour Question

How does the campus environment influence the development of the biracial college student's racial identity?

Sub Questions

1. What is the biracial student's self-assigned racial identity?
2. What life experiences have aided in the formation of the biracial individual's racial identity?
3. How has the college experience contributed to the development of the biracial individual's racial identity?

4. What key factors in the campus environment are most salient to biracial college students in the development of their racial identity?
5. How do biracial college students perceive their racial identity options within the campus environment?

Qualitative Research

“Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2001, p. 264).

Several features distinguish qualitative from quantitative research: 1) qualitative research is an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, 2) qualitative research maintains an interpretivist position, that stresses understanding the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by the participants, and 3) qualitative research holds a constructivist position, that implies that social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals (Bryman, 2000). Unlike quantitative research, “qualitative researchers use a lens not based on scores, instruments, or research designs but a lens established using the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In qualitative research, the emphasis is placed on how the participants make sense of a situation--the knowledge is internal, rather than an external phenomena (Creswell & Miller, 1997). Creswell & Miller (1997) stated that qualitative researchers constitute knowledge based on internal perspectives provided by specific individuals; obtain information inductively through interviews; and write studies using the participant’s detailed and personal information.

Data Collection Procedures

Approval

Collection of data began upon approval of the study by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (IRB Letter of Approval--Appendix A). It was my responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of the research participants. The UNL Institutional Review Board's primary function is to assist researchers in this responsibility. All research that involves human participants must receive UNL IRB approval prior to starting the research. This applies to research conducted on the premises of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or research that is conducted by any representative of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in connection with their institutional responsibilities. This process also serves to protect the investigator and the institution through a comprehensive review process (<http://www.unl.edu/research/IRBguide2.pdf>). Prior to their participation in the study, potential subjects were fully informed regarding the purpose of the study, the interview process, and the right to discontinue their participation at any time (Participant Consent Form--Appendix B).

Sampling

Individuals who participated in this research met two basic criteria: they had to be the product of parents from more than one federally-designated racial or ethnic category (Renn, 2004), and they had to be a graduate student. The majority of the studies conducted on biracial college students sample undergraduate students (Renn 2000, Renn, 2003, Sand & Schuh, 2004). Graduate students were sought for this study, because I wanted the participants to have had some time to reflect and look back on their

undergraduate experiences. I hoped that they would have had more thoughtful and articulate responses to the research questions.

Issues of race and identity development can be sensitive topics for some individuals. Additionally, biracial individuals who are willing to openly discuss their experiences are not easily identifiable. For these reasons, I used purposeful sampling to recruit volunteers. Purposeful sampling is, the “deliberate selection of information-rich sources” (Lapan, 2004, p. 242). “Purposive sampling requires that the researcher identify the method and rationale for selecting individuals prior to the interviews. The rationale behind the sampling enables the researcher to meet the goals of the study and answer the research questions” (Ortiz, 2003 p.38). The purpose was to explore how biracial students described the role of the campus environment on the development of their racial identity. The criteria regarding the appropriateness of the sample included individuals who attended a college or university and individuals who were biracial. Additionally, the ability of the participant to offer a full, descriptive account of his or her experiences was carefully considered.

Thirteen participants were obtained using several methods including personal contacts and colleague referrals. I contacted the referred individuals, inquiring whether they would be interested in participating in the study (Email to Participants—Appendix B). Face-to-face and phone interviews were arranged at an agreed upon time and place.

The snowball technique was used to identify potential participants. This method, also known as network selection, uses referrals from previously identified participants to identify new potential participants (Hutchinson, 2004). “This type of sampling is useful when a formal listing of population members is unavailable or when access to population

members is restricted..." (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 292). Each participant was asked to identify additional individuals who fit the criteria. These new referrals were contacted and invited to participate in the study. None of the referrals chose to participate.

I continued to solicit respondents until categories were saturated. "Saturation is met when the same information is heard repeatedly throughout the interviews: the researcher is no 'longer learning anything new'" (Ortiz, 2003, p.40). I continued to interview participants until enough data were collected to fully describe the biracial college experience. The number of interviews depended on "the richness of the interviews, the extent to which the participants are able to respond to the research purpose and questions" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 60).

Self-as-instrument

"In evaluation studies, especially those using qualitative data, the evaluator is an integral part of the data collection. This is particularly so in observation and interview work, when the evaluator's judgment and influence on those being observed can influence the data collected" (Lapan, 2004, p. 241). I was the primary instrument in the collection of data. I was aware of my role in constructing meaning through the interview process. The data collected during the interviews were the product of the interactions between the respondents and me (Ortiz, 2003).

My status, in terms of gender, ethnicity, relationship to the participants, and age, may have influenced how much the respondents chose to disclose. Ortiz (2003) suggested that rapport can be established easily when the interviewer and respondent characteristics match. "This is especially critical if the research topic is one where identity and power differences illuminate unique variations in the experiences of the

population” (Ortiz, 2003, p.42). Bryman (2001) stated that “...there is undoubtedly some evidence that effects due to characteristics of interviewers can be discerned” and that the “characteristics of interviewers do have an impact on respondents’ replies.” It should be noted that I am biracial and a college graduate.

Although there are several advantages to conducting “insider” research, there are also several disadvantages. Arksey and Knight (1999) stated that, “being too close to the subject matter and the research populations can make it difficult to maintain balance, which in turn may compromise the validity of the research” (p.67). Investigators may face role conflict in discerning when they are researchers or when they are colleagues (Arksey & Knight, 1999). “Forfeiting the researcher’s ground and moving toward the participant’s perspective is dangerous, especially for the insider who most probably harbors a sympathetic grasp of the participant’s belief systems” (Johnson-Bailey, 2004 p. 132). I addressed these issues through careful self-examination, adhering to the interview protocol, and by conducting procedures to verify the validity of the research.

Interviews

The primary source of data collection was semi-structured interviews. According to Ortiz (2003), interviewing provides a unique insight into the lives of those individuals most affected by the education problems and issues under study. This method allows the researcher to investigate the issue in a way that, “yields rich data impossible to obtain through surveys, docent analysis, or observation” (Ortiz, 2003, p. 35). “Campus climate issues for any constituency group, studied through interviews, have the potential to illuminate nuances and highly important and sensitive information often overlooked through quantitative methods” (Ortiz, p. 36).

The 13 participants were interviewed at a time and location that was comfortable and convenient for them. Ortiz (2003) suggested that the interview take place in a neutral, non-threatening environment to establish equality in the interview. The interviews were held in a mutually established location that allowed for privacy and minimal distractions. The interviews were conducted from February through April of 2005.

Ten of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the remaining three were conducted by phone. Face-to-face interviews were preferable, but the three phone interviews were conducted because of proximity and time constraints. Five of the face-to-face interviews were conducted locally. I traveled out-of-state to conduct the remaining five face-to-face interviews. The first two face-to-face interviews were held in coffee shops. The remaining face-to-face interviews were conducted at the participants' home or office. The interviews ranged from approximately one hour to three hours. The average interview would last about an hour. Two interviews went longer than two hours.

I developed a list of questions that were relevant to the research questions and that addressed the topic thoroughly (Interview Protocol—Appendix D). deMarrais (2004) suggested the following guidelines when developing interview questions: 1) short, clear questions lead to detailed responses from participants, 2) questions that ask participants to recall specific events or experiences in detail encourage fuller narratives, and 3) a few broad, open-ended questions work better than a long series of closed-ended questions. An interview protocol was developed to “assist the researcher to ask important questions, pose easy to understand questions, or posit probing questions yielding productive data” (Ortiz, 2003, p.40). “The interview guide serves as a framework for the main body of a

semi-structured interview, and is based on the key questions that the study is addressing”

(Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 97)

Data Recording

All interviews were tape recorded. Two audio tape recorders were used during face-to-face interviews. One audio tape recorder was used to record the phone interviews. In addition, I took field notes during and after the interviews to “provide a record and interpretation of the data expressed during the interview” (Ortiz, 2003, p. 45). Immediately following each interview, I recorded additional recollections of the interview and interpreted the field notes.

Transcripts

Once each interview was completed, the audio-recorded data were transcribed. My transcriptionist had a quick turn-around time and would email me MS Word documents of the transcribed tapes within a week. I would then pick up the tapes and review the transcripts while listening to the tapes to check for accuracy-making any changes I felt were necessary.

Participants were asked to review the transcribed interview to check for accuracy. Each participant was sent an attachment of the transcript, a Transcript Verification Form (Transcript Verification Form—Appendix E) and an email with instructions for reviewing and making corrections. The participants were given the option of faxing or mailing the Transcript Verification Form to me and emailing, mailing or faxing any corrections they had regarding the transcript.

Data Analysis Procedures

“The goal of analysis is to reduce the data into meaningful constructs that best represent the experiences and understanding of the study participants” (Ortiz, 2003, p. 46). I used the constant comparative method. This method allowed me to unitize the interview transcripts into meaningful pieces that were organized into thematic categories that reflect the themes emerging from the research. “Decisions about the categorization of unitized data are made on the basis of similarity between the data being evaluated and those already present in the category” (Ortiz, p. 46). The data were hand coded in order to gain familiarity with the emerging themes and patterns.

I began coding the documents once I had reviewed all of the transcripts and made corrections. As participants sent in their revisions (if any were made), I would make those changes as well. I coded the transcripts in a word document, utilizing the comment tool to indicate a code. I opted to code in phrases rather than single word codes.

Once I had every transcript coded, I printed each off on colored paper. Each participant’s transcript was identified by a particular color. I then began to hand code, by cutting out quotes from the transcripts that had been coded. I would then tape or staple the quote onto a piece of notebook paper and labeled the notebook paper with a code. I continued to do this with every piece of data until each quote had been grouped with the appropriate code.

The codes were then grouped into fourteen different categories (Codes and Themes—Appendix E). After reviewing these categories and reviewing the research questions, the fourteen categories became sub-categories placed under the umbrella of

three overarching themes: a) laying the foundation b) the college experience and c) visions for the future.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Several measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research. Bryman (2001) described the four criteria of trustworthiness as: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility entails “submitting research findings to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that social world” (Bryman, 2001, p. 272). Credibility was established through member-checking. Member checking “consists of taking data back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of information and the narrative account” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.127).

A peer reviewer was used to verify that the findings and recommendations were credible (Peer Audit Attestation—Appendix G). The peer reviewer was an outside source. This individual is a biracial student affairs professional, with a Masters degree in Education.

Qualitative research often involves the study of a small group of individuals who share similar characteristics (Bryman, 2001). “The purpose of a rich description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced or could experience the events being described in the study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). To aid in transferability, qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce “rich accounts of the details of the culture” (Bryman, p. 272). I carefully developed questions and created an interview environment that encouraged the

participants to describe their biracial experiences in college in a rich, descriptive manner. Additionally, I reported the findings of the study using as much detail as possible.

Ethical Considerations

Certain precautions were taken to ensure that participants did not have any negative personal consequences as a result of the study. “The respondents need to understand that their participation is voluntary, they can refuse to answer any question, they can choose to end the interview at any time, and if they withdraw from the study, they can have their data returned” (Ortiz, 2003, p.44). The respondents were given a Participant Consent Form prior to their participation in the study. The Participant Consent Form addressed the purpose of the study, the rights of the participants, and the responsibility of the investigator. Additionally, pseudonyms were used to guarantee that participant names were not revealed in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during and after the research process. The data were stored in a locked storage cabinet in the investigator’s home.

Participant Vignettes

Thirteen biracial graduate students participated in this study. They were selected based on the process described in this chapter. Pseudonyms were given to each participant to ensure anonymity. Three males and ten females described their biracial experiences. The participants came from ten different undergraduate institutions. Two attended undergraduate institutions in the Northeast. One attended an undergraduate school in the Southeast. Eight attended schools in the Midwest. One attended school in the East. And one participant attended an undergraduate institution in the Northwest. Seven of the participants identified with a Multiracial Identity. Six of the participants

identified with a Monoracial Identity. Due to the nature of qualitative research it is important to learn more about each of the participants. The following table (Table 1) and paragraphs will provide a brief description of each participant.

Table 1

Name	Gender	Mother's Race/Ethnicity	Father's Race/Ethnicity	Identifies As
Justin	Male	Black	White	Biracial
Marcus	Male	European American	African American	African American
Norah	Female	Cherokee/German	Ojibwa ancestry	Multiracial
Sabrina	Female	Adoptive-Caucasian Biological-African American and Caucasian		Biracial
Dorri	Female	African American	Iranian	Biracial
Pilar	Female	White, Caucasian	Mexican American	Chicana
Kassandra	Female	Mexican American Chicana	German American	Biracial
Nicole	Female	White	Lummi Tribe, American Indian	American Indian
Leala	Female	Mestizo	White	Mestizo
Teresa	Female	Puerto Rican/Iranian	Irish/German	White
Marina	Female	Norwegian American	Sri Lankan	Biracial
Taron	Male	German/White	Black	Black
Adrienne	Female	Caucasian	African American	African American

Justin

The youngest of three boys, Justin grew up near a large metropolitan city in the Northeast. With universal good looks and easy going personality, Justin has been able to navigate in the predominant culture quite smoothly. He grew up in a fairly diverse neighborhood, mostly Black and Hispanic, although the public school he attended was predominantly upper class and White.

Justin's parents did not place an emphasis on his race while he was growing up, but encouraged him to find his own path in developing his identity. This non-issue theme

was consistent throughout my interview with him. He continues to carry the philosophy on race his parents instilled in him,

Oh... I don't know. I mean I pretty much go with the flow of everything. I never really thought of it as an issue until I actually got to college. It's, it's more acceptable where I'm from to... you know to be biracial, or to be Black, or to be whatever that you are. So, you know, it, it was never really an issue. You know, I mean I identified with both Blacks and Whites and you name it, you know, I can identify with that person.

Justin attended a large university in the Midwest. As an athlete on the Division I football team, he found that many of his black peers did not accept him as a part of their community. Placing less emphasis on race than his peers, Justin did not feel the need to utilize Multicultural Support Services and participate in culturally-tied events, programs, or organizations. Additionally, he found that he was able to find other communities of peers to build relationships and didn't feel that race should be a defining factor in his relationships.

Marcus

Articulate and educated on issues of race, Marcus is a respected leader in the community, recognized as an advocate and voice for underrepresented populations. It was evident that Marcus was well-liked and well known from the continuous greetings he received from coffee shop patrons during our hour long interview. His thoughtful responses to my questions, led me to believe that he has spent his lifetime pondering issues of race.

Marcus grew up in a predominantly white college town in the Midwest. Marcus developed his racial identity at an early age, “And the neighborhood that we grew up in was predominantly White. The elementary school I went to was predominantly White. I had some negative experiences with kids, you know, or people kinda callin’ these racial slurs directed at Black people, but never White people. So I realized that people perceived me as a Black person.”

Although Marcus embraces his dual heritage, he psychologically connects with the Black community. In fact, he never “...joined the, the move to get like biracial on the census. And partly ‘cause I was always suspicious over who was really behind that. Was it biracial people, or was it a power structure? ‘Cause you know, earlier on in our history, you just had to have one drop of Black. And then you were considered Black. And then they counted you as three fifths of a person.”

Marcus attended a small, private, liberal arts college in the town that he grew up. He chose this school because of its small size and proximity to his family. Consequently the small size and location of the school meant that he was one of few minority students attending. He found that his identity choice was only reaffirmed by several negative racial encounters he encountered during his undergraduate career. Yet, Marcus believed that the overall experience was positive in that it provided opportunities for leadership, advocacy, and self-exploration.

Norah

Norah grew up in a small town in a Southern state. The town and school she attended was by far predominately White, and her Cherokee and Ojibwa heritages were not brought to her attention until she was an adult. Because of this, “I struggle a lot with

that issue, because I, I really feel like I grew up being identified for the most part with a few exceptions, by the people around me, and by myself and my family as White.”

Norah can recall certain experiences as a child where she was singled out by her peers—they would call her Little Indian because of her tan skin and dark hair,

...especially in the summertime ‘cause we would tan very dark, and I was usually a lifeguard at the swimming pool or something...in fact, I, I apologize for using this term, but there was a period of time...my nickname was also Nig, which I didn’t like, and told people not to, to....So those were all very racially confusing to me, to try to figure out what, where that fit into what my family seemed to say that we were.

Norah attended a community college and then a state college near her home town. As a student in the hard sciences, Norah’s schedule was academically rigorous. Between that and working to keep up financially, she did not find a lot of time to engage in activities outside of her academic program. Additionally, she felt that people at her school were, “a bit more open-minded”, and believed that race was a, “non issue” during this time.

Issues of identity—racial and sexual—emerged during her graduate school career. She chose to earn her Masters degree at a large institution in the Midwest. She entered a interdisciplinary program, majoring in Sociology, Women’s Studies, and Adult Education. The experiences she gained from her assistantships and involvement on campus, along with classes that encouraged exploration provided avenues for identity development.

Norah found that her bisexuality also played a role in her racial identity development. She found that her sexual identity development complicated matters,

So here I was, struggling around my racial and ethnic identity, and trying to work on that, and now all of a sudden I began struggling with my own sexual orientation, whatever you wanna call it, identity, around, orientation. And, that complicated things greatly. Because then, all of a sudden, there became this choice thing for me. Do I talk, do I... deal with the race issue, do I talk about being mixed race, or....Do I risk being ostracized, you know, in that community, and talk about my, you know, my... continuing exploration of trying to figure out who I was around sexual orientation. So it got very split at that point. And didn't get integrated for quite a while I would say.

Now Norah embraces her multiracial heritage, but she is still careful in her approach, "So I think I'm a lot more cautious now, even about talking about it, just because I, I wanna make sure that I'm just talking about who I am, and not trying to claim something that will take something from someone else, or feel like I'm trying to get something."

Sabrina

Adopted at a young age, Sabrina was the only participant that was raised by two White parents. Being adopted created some unusual challenges, "Because I don't have parents that when people see the three of us go, oh, that's why she looks that way. I don't have that. I consider it a luxury...And even though we have very similar experiences, it's still, I, I don't have that. So, that adds another layer of complications to the issue."

Dressed casually with her soft brown curls pulled back into a baseball cap, Sabrina candidly described her experiences growing up in a rural Midwest town of 5,000. As an educator, her dad, “specifically moved us there to sort of make a difference and, and help out the area.” Noticeably different than the other members in what she describes as, “a very small, small community, small town community”, Sabrina has always identified as biracial. In fact, her racial identity plays a huge role in how she has always defined herself, “And I, I’ve always kind of prided myself in being different and you know an individual and all that... I mean I knew I didn’t, I couldn’t probably have passed looking that way, so, it was just, it was important to me to have... something that was sort of controversial for where I was living.”

Upon entering college at a large Midwestern university, Sabrina had several negative encounters which she feels caused a disconnect with the African American culture. Like Justin, Sabrina found that her Black peers did not welcome her into their community. She felt that her physical appearance was a factor, “didn’t realize how I apparently looked Latina. And when I got to college that became very apparent to me. So, even though I had the racial identity of what I actually am, I’m also seen as something different.” The fact that her parents were White, created questions among her peers. And her behaviors were not deemed acceptable to the black community, “...it hasn’t changed how I identify, but it did sort of change how I... how ridiculous I think race is and how frustrating it is. And, how I have to apparently learn all these things in order to be accepted by, you know various cultures and races.”

Like Norah, Sabrina openly discussed the impact of her bisexuality on her racial identity development. Although she began to recognize her bisexuality as a teenager, she

did not feel that she lived in an environment where she could express that. By closeting her sexual orientation, she felt that her racial identity really took hold,

... I'm experiencing the similarities. Which sucks. I'm, you know, just not being accepted by heterosexuals or lesbians. You know...and people wanting me to choose something. You know, or you act more heterosexual because you have a male life partner. Just like well you were raised White and you're really light skinned so you should really pick something. So yeah, it's, it's really kind of it's really tough. At least for me it's, it's tough. But I wouldn't say, like right now I'd say they're pretty even. And I can, I can look at one and then look at the other and kind of compare them. But prior to that, it was all about race. Because I just wasn't in a position to be as open about my sexuality as I am now. And I'm not even that open now. I mean, in the grand scheme of life I'm not.

Dorri

Dorri and I met at a conference in which I was presenting on biracial college students. During our short conversation after the presentation, I found that she truly wanted the world to have a better understanding of the biracial experience. She was particularly passionate about debunking theories of marginality and deficiency as a result of mixed-race heritage. I knew that she would have a lot to share during our interview.

Dorri was raised in a small town in the South, by an African American mother, a Iranian father, and surrounded by a large extended family on her mother's side. She recalls her community being divided into a Black side and a White side, "I didn't grow up on the Black side of town. So when I was growin' up, I did hear Black kids say oh you just think you're White...my mom remembers hearin' people say, oh she just thinks

she's better than everybody since she married a White man and moved across the White side, moved to the White side of town".

Regardless of how others perceived her, Dorri has felt comfortable identifying as biracial. She attributes her parents for providing her with the tools necessary to be confident in a world that is not as accepting, "Yeah, because that's the way they always raised me. It was never, I don't ever remember going to my mom and saying you know like what am I, because I always knew. This is what my dad is, and this is what my mom is. I mean...it was never, I never grew up not knowing what, who, what it, or who I am".

Dorri attended college at a large University in her hometown state. Dorri proudly listed her academic accomplishments and involvement on campus. Although she was involved with culturally based organizations and programs, she was equally involved in other activities. Dorri found that her racial identity was not swayed by factors on campus, because her identity had been set prior to attending college. If anything, she felt that the opportunity to explore other cultures gave her a better appreciation for diversity.

Pilar

I interviewed Pilar in her office at the university where she received her undergraduate degree. As a program coordinator for the university's minority support center, it was apparent that her collegiate experience had influenced her racial identity in a significant way.

Pilar grew up in a college town in the Midwest. Growing up, she and her six siblings were immersed in Mexican American culture. Although demographics have changed, while she was growing up, there were few Latinos in the community. She and

her siblings, “were pretty much the only ones” that attended their small Catholic high school.

Pilar attended the flagship university in her state, where her father was on the professional staff. Pilar found herself heavily involved in the Mexican American Student Association (MASA), and believed that her undergraduate experiences influenced her racial identity development because it allowed her to interact with more members of the Latino community, “I think in college you have the opportunity to see more students that are like you, who share your identity, who, you know, are really passionate about their culture.”

Kassandra

Kassandra grew up in a Navy family, but was born and raised on an island off of a Northwestern State,

...it’s a weird dynamic of like a largely transient population because people are getting orders to other bases all the time. But then also, a lot of retirees, so like military people that had passed through earlier in their career and decided that’s where they wanted to settle. Incredibly homogenous you know, like, in terms of, political views, racial and ethnic backgrounds. The largest quote unquote minority population there was, Filipino American which is not uncommon for the Navy base because of like we’ve got bases over there and all that kind a stuff.

Additionally, her school was, “not particularly, ethnically or culturally diverse. I mean we all—the joke that we have with like my sister and, and I, and a couple other friends from high school is you know, the four Mexicans at our high school.” Although, she recalls that there were a lot of biracial kids in her community—particularly Filipino

and Anglo—being biracial was, “one of those things that was, like was ever really even addressed.”

Kassandra attended community college for eight years before attending a university as a non-traditional student, entering at age 26. The school was actually a small college within a northwest university. She describes it as a, “real nontraditional...student driven...kinda...we call it a hippy school.” Upon taking courses on Chicano Studies and becoming involved with the Ethnic Student Center, she began to embrace her family traditions as Mexican American culture,

That was the first time in my life that I, I was able to learn about that part of my history and culture in a way that was absolutely mind blowing. Because to me, all these things that I’d grown up with, I had not attributed to culture, I had just attributed to my family’s particular dynamics. Because growing up here, there’s not a large Latino population, and so I didn’t have other people to... share with you know.

Nicole

Nicole grew up with her mother and stepfather, but was strongly connected to her American Indian family—her paternal family. In fact, she identifies as American Indian. She grew up in a, “...probably a predominantly White community. There were, some Indian families within the community, but for the most part the, it was a small town, maybe about 3,000 people and predominantly White.”

Because her stepfather was a coach, she moved to another state, in the South, for high school. She attended a high school that was predominantly White, but had a significant amount of Blacks and Hispanics,

...so I think, I didn't have the opportunity in high school to really surround myself with, with peers that were like myself. I didn't have a chance to, to hang out or, to surrou—surround myself with, with other Indian students. So, I really kind of moved within groups. And, was able to get along with anyone and everyone. And, and, had a really different mix of friends. And, sometimes it's like, I think I've described it as bein' like a chameleon. You know, you can move from one group to another and fit in wherever need be.

Nicole was the only participant who chose an undergraduate institution based on the ethnic community that was present. Nicole chose to attend the large Southern University because it was closer to her paternal family, and the institution had a, "high American Indian population." The school had approximately 1,500 to 2,000 Indian students on campus which was "their highest, minority population."

Leala

Leala's situation was unique from the other participants because she grew up in a large city in a Southeast state with a significant Latino population. Her neighborhood and high school were predominantly Latino, "You had some... you know Honduran and some Guatemalan, and, but mostly the majority were either Cuban or, or Nicaraguan, at least in my neighborhood." Her high school resembled her neighborhood, "But like my high school was predominantly Hispanic/Latino, like, probably like 85 percent was either Cuban or Nicaraguan, and then, another 10 percent was like African American, and then, the other 5 percent was Other which was like White or Asian, so."

She differed from her peers in that she was Mestizo-Nicaraguan and Amerindian. And she found that although her school was predominantly Latino there was still a separation by race,

Cubans are of White background, White racial background—so much so, that like I, when I was a, a kid, in either high school or elementary school and junior high school, I was always hesitant to say that I was Nicaraguan, because Nicaraguans are labeled as arrow or spear throwers as the Indians you know.... And so... the more defined your, your indigenous features are, the more harassment you, you received from the Cuban kids, who were suppo—you know were supposedly White, you know, White race as opposed to those that had a more of an indigenous background.

Leala attended a large, Division I university in the Southeastern state. Similar to many of the other participants in this study, Leala found that her college experience was eye-opening. She found a connection between the many faces of the Latino community and came to appreciate it's diversity.

Like Dorri, Leala had a resume' full of extracurricular activities that extended beyond cultural based programs. As a result of her involvement she decided to make a career in Student Affairs, and is currently working as a program coordinator at a Southern university.

Therese

I met Therese in her graduate student office; at the large Northeastern University she was earning her Psychology degree. A pretty girl with fair skin, and brownish-blond hair she had indicated her hesitance in participating in the study because she had "pretty

Caucasian features”. She recognizes her multiracial heritage—connecting strongly with her Puerto Rican side—yet she primarily identifies as White.

Growing up in the Northeast, Therese described her community as, “primarily upper middle class. Mixed. Like a lot of Jewish, a lot of White, and very few African Americans. Like in my high school maybe like one or two. But there were Hispanics and Asians.” At a young age, Therese realized that she didn’t quite fit in with her peers because, “cause I didn’t feel like entirely White. But when you look at like a lot of people look at me, and they’re like oh, she, you know, she’s White but she speaks Spanish, like what, what is this, you know... I guess like entirely fit in with any one group... when everybody’s all White, or everybody’s all you know like Latino or—I, I didn’t blend in really anywhere.”

Therese decided to attend school at a large, private, Catholic institution in the East. A large part of her decision to attend was due to her strong religious ties. Although the institution is internationally diverse, Therese felt that it did not provide many outlets to explore her racial identity. Strong in academics, Therese did not feel that she needed to use minority support services, and was involved in the Latino community on an informal level-“not organized through the university’.

Language was a significant piece in the racial identity of Therese. Physically she did not present as a Latina, but psychologically she felt a connection—primarily because she spoke the language. I found that language was a factor that she addressed frequently throughout our interview.

Marina

Marina was a petite, young lady with straight brown hair sweeping her shoulders. Although it was our first time meeting, we were able to break the ice by sharing stories about our Student Affairs programs. As a first year graduate student, Marina's undergraduate experiences were still fresh in her mind.

Marina grew up in the Northeast, "economically like very, like everybody, all my friends were pretty much middle class. I did have within my, my high school and middle school and elementary school experiences, I was used to a lot of diversity... And I think that was very different when I went to school." Marina attended a small college of 1,900 in the Northeast. She wanted to go to a school with a strong academic program that also allowed her to swim competitively.

A school with eight percent international and minority students, Marina found it easiest to blend into the mainstream society. She felt that her institution tried to meet the needs of the minority students, but just "didn't have the population there".

Marina struggles a lot with how she is perceived by others, 'cause I always got a lot of that, oh you're so exotic." She elaborated,

One of my pet peeves is when I'm dealing with somebody and I first meet them and we're having a good conversation, and immediately they're like where you from. Because you just, like, no matter where I'm from, and no matter how important that is, as a student, as an undergraduate student, you wanna feel that you are a person. So I think too many times I heard, where are you from. And immediately I'd be like, [Northeastern state].

Taron

Upon meeting Taron, I was immediately struck by his presence – he was over six feet tall, straight dark hair pulled back into a ponytail, with piercing grey-green eyes. As we walked from his graduate student office in the Engineering building, he disclosed that his mixed race background was not something that he typically discussed. He reasoned that he has always identified monoracially—as Black. And while he was raised by both his White mother (a native of Germany) and his Black father, he was immersed into the Black community.

This revelation became apparent, as we continued our interview in a quiet room. Taron's responses to the interview questions were addressed from a monoracial perspective. For example, "You know, honestly I, I can't say that there's much of a... support network for biracial students specifically. Which is maybe where I'm confusing the questions. You know I, I see support for, for minority students, and since I consider myself part of that group, you know I consider that part my support network."

Taron grew up in a city in a Eastern State. His mother is a long time professor at a historically Black university where he attended lab school as a child. Taron did not associate much with the White community until he attended a public school and started to take upper level academic courses. As a honor student in high school and college, Taron found that his peers were predominantly White. As a doctoral student in engineering he has found that this continues to be the case.

Taron attend college at a large, Division I university in the Northeast. He decided to attend this university because it offered him a scholarship. Additionally, he was

impressed by the university president who fought to set aside scholarships for Black students.

Although he identifies as a monoracial minority, he did not feel compelled to utilize minority support services or participate in culturally based programs. He attributes this to his personality, “It’s, it’s not a reflection on what was available, what wasn’t; it, it’s just that I choose not to, to pursue those kind of resources.”

Adrienne

As a doctoral student in Chemistry, Adrienne’s scientific perspective on race added a different dimension to the data. We spent over two hours sitting on her living room floor discussing her biracial experiences. Tall, with thick curly hair, fair skin and freckles sprinkled across her face, Adrienne grew up in a suburb near a large metropolitan city on the West Coast.

As a young child growing up in a predominately Latino community, Adrienne was constantly asked, “What are you, what are you, what are you. And, and that just gets annoying. And when you’re little, you don’t really know what they’re talking about.” Adrienne was honest and vocal about feeling pressure from the Black community to identify in a certain way,

The pressure was coming from Black students. And, there was always a pressure to identify as a member of our group. You better be a member of our group. And you better behave the way the members of our group behave. And if you step out of line, whatever that may be, then we’re gonna have issues. It’s a, it’s a strong level of group cohesiveness that can be destructive in certain ways. And, I

definitely think that I always knew that if I did not behave in the manner that that group wanted me to, that they would make my life a living hell.

The pressure to conform to belong to a community seems to have followed Adrienne throughout her life, creating several negative experiences with her Black peers, and influencing how she interacts with the Black community.

Additionally, Adrienne spent a significant amount of time discussing the lack of preparation she felt from her parents in dealing with her biracial background. She brought attention to the fact that parents of biracial individuals are often monoracial themselves and will not have first hand knowledge of the biracial experience, “It’s kind of like the elephant in the room no one’s ever talking about. And I don’t think that’s an uncommon phenomenon in, in, with multiracial, families. That we’ll just, everyone will just act like they, that there’s nothing different about any of us.”

Findings

After the thirteen participants were interviewed about their experiences as multiracial college students, three overarching themes emerged that addressed the research questions. The three overarching themes were: a) laying the foundation, b) the college experience and c) visions for the future. In the following chapters, the three themes and their sub-categories are presented.

Chapter 4

Laying the Foundation

The pre-college history of each participant opened a window into the early development of racial/ethnic identity. As the participants discussed their collegiate experiences, it was evident that significant events that occurred prior to college were central to their self-perception and laid the foundation for their identity. Grade school and high school experiences, parental rearing, familial influence, and peer relationships were fundamental pieces to the puzzle in the racial identity development of each participant. Having a fuller understanding of the participants' identity formation prior to college helped to provide a fuller picture of their biracial experiences. This section will address the identity process experienced by these biracial students upon their arrival to the university.

Race and Ethnicity

“Mixed race college students do not all identify in the same way. Some identify primarily with one of their heritages, some with two or more, and some as ‘multiracial,’ ‘biracial,’ ‘hapa,’ or some other term that indicates being mixed” (Renn, 2004, p. 67). Six of the participants hold a Monoracial Identity (e.g. Black, American Indian). Five of these participants hold a monoracial minority designation, while one identified as White. The explanation for choosing to identify monoracially varied among participants.

Teresa primarily identifies as White, yet she feels closest to her Puerto Rican side: Okay, identify definitely with all of them. I, I was brought up like it was; you know that all of them were very like important in my family. So, probably the Puerto Rican side I identify with the most because my mother speaks Spanish, and

I speak Spanish, so. And that, was like what I study, it's what I'm interested in, like Spanish language, Spanish culture, Latin American culture, so. That's probably the side that I identify with the most.

Teresa distinguishes between race and ethnicity which contributes to her struggle with identifying primarily as White, "Okay. I primarily identify as White. But, I guess I'm mixed. So, I, put a question, like whenever I have to check a box, it's pretty, like a struggle, I guess kind of." She continues to explain, "'cause racially I think I'm White, but ethnically I'm mixed. Well racially I guess I'm a little mixed too, but more mixed ethnically than racially".

Similarly, Adrienne differentiates between race and ethnicity while identifying primarily as an African American woman,

That's just because I'm a scientist. So, unlike the average individual that would not have a difference between ethnic group and race, I believe it's, if you look scientifically, there are only three races in the world, oh, Mongoloid, Negroid, and Caucasian. So, therefore there are several ethnic groups. So I would say my ethnicity would be as a Black American. And my race would be all over the place.

Taron's decision to identify as Black developed at an early age. He was immersed into the black community by both his father, who was black, and his mother, who was a native of Germany and who is white. Taron's mother, a long-term professor at a historically black university, was strongly connected to the Black community personally and professionally,

I've always considered myself Black. It's, I guess the byproduct of being raised by both my father and my mother who I think if you referred to her as, as White, she would probably get a little upset...She's a professor at the University. She's been there for over fifteen years now. And basically wouldn't have it any other way. So...That's sort of my upbringing. So I've just never really...Like I said, mentioned to you earlier, this is a topic I sort of run away, 'cause I just never, really bothered with it. I've always just considered myself Black.

The other seven participants hold a Multiracial Identity (e.g. Biracial, Mixed).

These participants also discussed the complexity of race versus ethnicity when choosing their identity. Leala describes herself as half European (mainly Spanish) and half Amerindian (Nicaragua Indians of Nicaragua); a racial mix that is also known as Mestizo. "My...ethnic identity is Hispanic/Latino. My racial identity, I really don't...even though my birth certificate says I'm, I'm classified as White, I never really say I'm White because I'm not White, I'm Mestizo". Differentiating between her race and ethnicity, Leala prefers to identify culturally rather than racially,

How do I identify it? Well, you see it's, it's been, really...difficult, because I was raised in the United States. So, I mostly identify with my Latino background as opposed to a racial background. So like I don't like sit there and, and like think well, you know what is my Native American, you know Amerindian background do, or what does my White, you know Spanish background do and stuff like that. I really don't think in that way. I think of it as, as being Latino or being Hispanic.

As a young person Norah identified as White, "I struggle a lot with that issue, because I, I really feel like I grew up being identified for the most part with a few

exceptions, by the people around me, and by myself and my family as White.” As she learned about her Cherokee, German, and Ojibwa ancestry, she embraced each group equally and opted not to choose,

But when I became an adult, my father began to have conversations with us about my grandmother, who was Ojibwa. And then my mother, who was adopted, sort of chimed in about her father, her birth father who was Cherokee. Her mother was German. So all of my racial identity is mixed race Cherokee, Ojibwa, German. And I kind of mix the order of those three every time I write it down, because they are equally important to me.

Kassandra is firm on identifying as a biracial person and identifies as mixed whenever possible. If she has the option, she checks both Anglo Caucasian/White and Hispanic. She describes the complexity of race and ethnic categorization,

I was, I, I majored in American Cultural Studies in undergrad, and so I tend to, hold the belief that race-race is a social construct, and so I kind of try, I, I tend to think more in terms of culture groups. But I know that like our society looks at, you know race. That’s the, that’s a category that’s usually deeply engrained. And so...I don’t know. It’s something that I, I’m, I still struggle with, that I still kinda dance with.

None of the participants hold a Multiple Monoracial Identity (e.g. half white and half black), although they did distinguish their dual or mixed heritages when given the opportunity to select more than one option. None of the participants hold an Extracial Identity—deconstructing race altogether or opting out (Renn, 2004). However participants did voice resentment for having to “check boxes”. Surprisingly, none of the

participants hold a Situational Identity in which they identify differently in different contexts (Renn, 2004).

Family

The influence of family was fundamental in the way participants perceived themselves. Family members provided the participants with their first experiences as members of ethnic groups. The manner in which parents, siblings, and other relatives influence the child's identity development will often determine the individual's stable sense of identity at an early age (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

Eleven participants discussed their parents and rearing. These participants described the impact their parents had on their racial identity development. From a young age, Justin was told that he had choices. His parents raised him to find his way by making his own decisions, without pressure from them:

I guess the way that I was raised you're given choices, you know like for example, religion. At a young age my parents told me, you have a choice. You know, you have choices every day. We're not gonna, we're not gonna, force you to believe in this, or we're not gonna persuade you to believe this way....so that was kinda the attitude.

Marcus believed that he was encouraged to celebrate diversity and was self-assured with his identity choice because his parents have always had a consistent message about the value of individuals:

... growin' up in the home that I did, is that my parents never gave me mixed messages about, about people. You know they didn't say, they didn't say at one side of their mouth, all people are equal; there's good and there's bad in each

group. And then when my best friend in junior high was Mexican they'd say, well, I know, we know what we said about everybody, but you don't wanna be stayin' over night at their house, or nothin' like that...I dated all, women from all different groups....So I never got those mixed messages. Where sometimes, philosophically and theoretically, parents will say you know there's good people—you know, there's, everybody's equal, but when you get really close and start datin', it's like ah, ah. And so I never got that mixed message in the house I grew up with. And so I think it really shaped my celebration of people and appreciation for, and respect for different cultures.

He attributes the sureness of his identity and his ability to embrace diversity to his parents and their friends,

Yeah, to growin' up. And, 'cause there was always just diverse people around me. You know my dad's friends were mainly Black men from the south. You know...It's like, there's a small group of 'em who are from Mississippi and Tennessee and, and so... so I, you know I kinda grew up around diversity. The neighborhood I lived in immediately wasn't very diverse, but you know my dad's friends. And we would go to their houses. And so I just ended up bein' around a lot of diversity.

Similarly, Adrienne's parents had close friends who were also multicultural families,

I think part of it too is they had a, a lot of multicultural friends, a lot of biracial couples. I mean this was the '70s. It was the disco era. You know their best friends were also a Black and White couple that got married I believe within a

year of themselves and had, started having children at the same time. And so it was kind of like that's the people they surrounded themselves with. It was a bubble of that.

At an early age, Dorri's parents candidly spoke to their children about their multiethnic background and encouraged them to love their uniqueness:

Because my parents have always said, this is who you are; this is who you are.

You're gonna be this way till you die. Get used to it. It's not a bad thing, no matter who tells you what, because you're from love. And so, and my mom always used to make us say before we left the house, we had to look in the mirror and say I like myself just the way I am.

Her parents spoke openly about the realities of the world, about racism and sexism,

They, they tried to shelter us from that stuff, but without letting us think that everyone loves you. My parents always told us you're biracial. You're biracial and Black. And whether, we don't think it's inferior, but and you're a female, so you're gonna have to work ten times harder than the average White person in this town, because that's the way this town is, to even be considered at the same educational academic societal level as your peers.

Dorri's mother made an effort to reach out to other multicultural families in their small community. Dorri recalled a memory of her mother knocking on the door of a new multiracial family,

... she's like I want your daughters to meet my daughters, because my, my daughters are biracial. And it was a family, the husband was African

American and the mom was Hispanic. So it was kinda like that was the first time, besides seeing family members that were bira—biracial, that I'd ever seen anyone in [town] that resembled me, or had hair like me or somethin' like that. And it was really nice that my mom stepped out like that.

Dorri's mother saw the importance in introducing a broader world perspective than the town itself could offer. Dorri remembered always having black, white, Hispanic, and Asian dolls to play with, "It wasn't just about our culture even. She tried to expose us to a lot of different people, groups, that sort of thing."

Taron identifies strongly with the Black community based on the example his mother and father set and the community they lived in:

Well I guess, in...in terms of influences, then the biggest one like I said would be my mother who has I guess always strived to, to be Black...I have no idea why that is. I really don't. That's just, that's just who she is. And, and you know between that and my father being Black, you know those were the, the biggest influences in setting up probably, my view of my ethnicity... Yeah, it's just that she's always surrounded herself I guess with, with Black people you know in terms of being at, where she works; those are her friends, that sort of thing. So that's, sort of the example that I had to follow. So I mean, no, it's not that, you know, she doesn't walk around with a kente clothe or, you know, so.

Teresa, who identifies primarily with being White, found that her mother's experiences were similar to hers:

Well my mother also, she was, she has dark hair and dark eyes and dark features. But she could technically pass for Ital-she doesn't look Ital-she looks like kind of Puerto Rican, like Iranian I guess. She's darker. My father has like, blonde, blonde hair and blue eyes. So, she...I guess she, she has a lot of stories kind of like how I do to about like kind of like how she could kind of pass you know.

Several of the participants found themselves identifying more strongly with one of their heritages than another. They often found that they had to negotiate this choice with the parent with whom they did not identify. Participants describe their decision and negotiating process below.

Kassandra explains,

Well, to me I do-there's nothing in my, you know German American side that I necessarily celebrate in particular. There were you know a few foods and things that, you know we ate at home, that you know my friends thought were disgusting. You know and that, that I definitely associate with that side of my family. But to me, I sort of lump that part into kind of mainstream America and majority culture. I, you know I do have my dad's last name and not the Spanish last name, and so that has been interesting in terms of, ability to move through both sides. But in terms of my mom's, Mexican American Chicana culture, I think that was probably the stronger of the two in terms of just daily, the foods, the celebrations, the religion...family values, things like that. So I think even though I maybe appear to belong more to one group, I think just in terms of the way that I grew up and the values and things like that, they tend to be more of the other.

Having grown up in Texas, Kassandra's father was immersed in the Tex-Mex culture. Kassandra did not feel that it was necessary to negotiate with her father, because the Mexican culture was a large part of his everyday life as well. "I think my, my dad had such a genuine appreciation and respect for the culture. And like I said, I mean that was just a part of the way that he grew up, and those were the people that he was around in this border town....You know it was somethin' to be proud of just as much as, you know anything else."

Taron suggests that the proximity of his mother's family played a part in how he identifies, "I guess I'd have to admit that I associate more closely with my father's side, with the African American side. But that's probably mostly a byproduct of you know they're in this country, and my mother's family is in, in Europe."

Marina provides several reasons for identifying more with her Norwegian family such as proximity, familial involvement, and familial acceptance,

...especially I think because my Sri Lanka side of my family besides one aunt and uncle all live in Canada....I lived in Connecticut growing up, so they weren't ...they were close, but they weren't that easy access. So the Norwegian side was huge because I, as a child I'd go to my grandmother's, she would take care of me a lot while my parents were working. So I formed a really strong identity there. And my Sri Lankan side came a little bit later. And I think part of the reason that came late is when we would go to Canada, my, we were the onl-I was, my sister and I were the only mixed race within that family. And my aunts and uncles would be, would be very much cognizant of that, and be like they'd make food and they're like, we'll order pizza for you guys, or can't eat this, too spicy. So I, I

felt like pulling, I was pulling part from that side, 'cause I felt like I wasn't accepted, as with I was with my White side....

Like Marina, Teresa describes her relationship with her grandparents as salient to her identity development,

Grandparents were very involved. Yeah. Especially, and that's again I think why the Latino part is like the most salient to me. Especially my Puerto Rican grandmother, she, she was probably, next to my parents was the biggest like caretaker, like, like at, at times. She was, and she's still my only living grandparent, so we're very, very close.

It was, it's very, like very strong family. Especially on that side. Like when we would go to like, I don't know, even when we would go to like have Easter dinner or something with my dad's family, it would be like once or twice a year. And they lived like in the town next to us. But with my mom's family, it was like my grandmother co-would come and stay with us every weekend, like growing up. So it was like there was a much stronger contact I think with that side of the family.

When asked about her Iranian heritage, Teresa explains,

That, that's an interesting side, because that was always just something that made me like extra different you know...I mean 'cause I don't, I identify with it, but that's the side that like I know that I am, but I identify probably the least with. Because that I feel like is such a strong like, you know there's the language and the culture, and I wasn't brought with like really either...I think also 'cause of the

religion. Like they were, my, like my Iranian cousins are Moslem, and very like proper and very like—‘cause I always felt like very different from them.

Pilar also suggests familial involvement and cultural exposure as factors for identifying with her Mexican American family more than her Caucasian family,

My dad grew up with a family of 10, and my mom was just a single, as single child. So all my family that I ever grew up with, cousins, was all from my dad’s side; there’s 40 first cousins, and then my mom’s side, there was her and her parents. So growing up we were so exposed to the Mexican culture that that’s all we ever knew. My mom cooked the food, made, you know, rice, beans and tortillas. It was just a constant.

Marcus, who identifies as African American, had to negotiate his decision to identify as African American with his European American mother:

At first we just had to negotiate that I wasn’t...that I was denyin’ hers, you know. And it wasn’t about that. So she really understood, and so...Like I said, my mom is the regular old everyday White person. She wasn’t, she, she wasn’t a White person who was overly...who was attemptin’ to overly identify with Black culture, you know. She was, she was a White person. A White, White person, you know. And her culture was White, and, and, and, it just so happened she fell in love with a Black man, you know, so, you know ‘cause sometimes you have...it happens, that the White person has grown up around Black people, and so culturally they’re you know, identify with African American culture and music and all that. My, my mom wasn’t that. She grew up in an all White environment basically.

Siblings had a role as biracial peers, often setting the example for participants or providing a support network through identity development. Interestingly, some participants noted the physical differences between themselves and their siblings, and how this difference influenced the experiences each had – in turn influencing how they identify. Marcus and his brother did not talk about their experiences with one another:

I have a brother who's a year and a half younger, yeah. He's much more fair skinned.... [And does he identify in the same way that you do?] No, not, no. I don't think he really...For a while he was kinda really, kinda pro Black. Went through kind of a Louis Farrakhan stage...but now he's, he's much more, I don't know, laid back. I'm not even really sure, 'cause we never talked about it...you know, we, I'm not even-that's a good question. Yeah, I've never, never really talked about it.

Marina and her sister, on the other hand, continue to discuss their experiences with one another. Although they have lived very similar lives, their experiences have been different:

Yeah, we, we talk about it a lot. She has, darker skin tone than I do, so, and we've also, we've had very similar lives. Like we went to the same high school, we both like swam, we both, you know had the, pretty much the same jobs, like throughout, of course the four years difference. But her experiences have been drastically different than mine. Like she's involved with racism a lot more that I have. For, and it's obviously just because of her skin color.

Teresa and her sisters share an ambiguous identity:

I have two little sisters, yeah. [Okay. Do they identify in the same way that you do too?] We all kind of do like a muffled identity I guess. Like we all kind of identify as like mixed, like definitely White, but also a little different, like not typical White. So I don't identify to-like as biracial, it's probably like a ro-I think you know like multi ethnic kind of.

Although, Dorri and her sisters are not physically similar, they all choose to identify as biracial:

[Do your sisters, identify in the same way?] Yes. I...I know that on all of our forms and stuff, we always check. We always do the Other or Biracial. And we always say that. I always, I've always felt that, my middle sister...she does have African America-whatever African American hair is, she does have whatever Black hair is. So she has black hair. She's a little, just a little different tone skin color. So sometimes I think people may quicker lump her in a Black category or whatever. But that's never bothered any of us for how people wanna see us, because we know how we are. But...I, we all feel I think that we're biracial.

Norah and her sibling all recognize and celebrate their Native American heritage, yet she identifies as multiracial, while her sister identifies primarily as White:

I have siblings. They all pretty much...I mean they claim that we're part Native American, they talk about it. And they are pretty proud of it actually. Yeah, my family lives in southern Missouri and southern Kansas, and there are a lot of, there are a lot of things happening down in southern Kansas especially on, there's a lot of reservation land down there, so there are a lot of powwows, and a lot of people. And my, older sister especially is involved in that. And she's, and not,

not necessarily as a Native American person, but she's just deeply entrenched in. She loves to go to powwows, and she loves to, to, she has several friends that are Native American and that, you know. So, I think that's really great that she's started to get more involved in that. But I think she still identifies pretty much as White though.

Extended family reacted differently to each participant depending on their particular situation. Some family members were welcoming while others rejected the participant. Family members often treated the participants differently because of racial and cultural differences. Marcus's maternal grandparents disowned his mother when she married his father:

Because my, when my parents got married, my mom's parents lived in [town]. My, and my dad was from Mississippi...but my moms parents didn't agree with her marrying' my father. And so they disowned her. And then I lived in the same city with my biological maternal grandparents and never met them. And so for my first 25 years until they both passed away, lived in the same city, but if I passed them on the street, I wouldn't have known who they were.

Marina's maternal grandparents were also against her parents' marriage, but they had a change of heart after she was born:

When my, my, my parents first got married, my grandfather did not accept it in the least bit. And it was a, was a big issue for a while. And then, eventually when I was born, I was the, I'm the, el-eldest, it kind of built a bridge again. And he, they now, like every Christmas, every Thanksgiving, every time we see 'em, like my grandfather makes a point of saying like how, like, what a great person

my dad is, and how good he is. So we talk about that struggle there. And with my mom when she talks about my dad's side of the family, it's always as if she was always very welcome.

Pilar's family stood out in the community her mother grew up in and it took a while for her maternal grandmother to get used to the marriage:

I know my mom says that when they got married, she had to ask my parent-my grandparents for permission on my dad's side. And they didn't speak any English, so she had to go through my aunt as a translator. ,And I know my gramma on my mom's side, we asked her one time, and I know, you know, she has her, her comments. And she's, at first she was pretty shocked, but she said you kids turned out okay. So then she was alright with it. But, my grandparents on my dad's side lived in [a town in western] Nebraska. And my, mom's parents lived in [a small town in] Nebraska... It's, a town about 300. So that, you know and that too was a little interesting, going in a town of all white people, and then our family comin' in, seven kids. Yeah, and we didn't, we did, we kinda stood out.

Pilar explains that family members don't always feel you belong, You got to, you're, you're not brown enough, or you're not so much of this culture, but yet you're not this other culture. And where do you fit. And then trying to prove to your family members that yeah, I belong to both. 'Cause I even think you know, you know with your aunts or your uncles, that's where a lot of that inner struggle comes in, because they're not really accepting you as, as truly part of them. You know. As where you, where you fit in, and things like that.

Marina describes incidents on both sides of her family in which she felt uncomfortable about her identity,

I guess there, I guess the two, there were two experiences in which... Which I guess in which I realized that I was different, which started to sort of like... One was actually in Canada visiting family and hanging out with my cousins who were all five years or some older than I am. And, I was younger, so I wasn't quite sure what was going on. But then they were all with their friends, and then I finally realized that they were making racist jokes against Whites. And my cousins were like, oh be quiet, be quiet, you can't say that, Marina's here... And then, then the other thing happened with the other side. My, I grew up with my cousins, four girls living like right behind us, literally like right behind us... When the old—their oldest was ready to go to high school they decided to move... one of the main reasons that they decided to move is they did not want their children like seeing so much diversity when they got through high school. Which was... to me at that age being like just a freshman, it was just like... well, I'm diverse and I'm in your family, like what are you saying. So that I think was hard. I think it's also something I just sort of pushed to the back of my head, and that's come up again recently.

Nicole's maternal and paternal families treated her differently, "I would say mostly family has, is, is been one of the biggest influences... and then, with that, both families; both my Indian family and my Caucasian family. And sometimes the experiences in... I guess being, different in, with my mom's family... you know, kind of

sticking out". She describes how her skin color made her different from her mother's side,

It was just kinda, it was somethin' that was always noted and, and... discussed, especially in the summertime when, we all obviously all would get darker and, and comments would be made about my skin color. And, and I think too, being from a small community and, and not, for them not having, even though they had, Indian people within their family, not having a lot of experience with other races. Sometimes tendencies to make racial comments, or racist comments sometimes I think. So... a lot of times, a, a lot of, references were made to the fact that I was different, or using terms like, oh, papoose or Indian; things that aren't necessarily acceptable. But they didn't understand they weren't acceptable.

Teresa found that her extended family was very accepting because it was so diverse:

No, and my family like it's very colorful, like very colorful on both sides. So it's not really like, I think my family's pretty like accepting of that. Like I have cousins who are like, pretty much like Black, you know. And then I have cousins who are like White, and it's like, I have an Asian cousin, you know. So it's very like diverse.

Adrienne spent more time with her maternal family, which she feels was open to diversity,

It didn't seem anything that was different about our family occasions than other people's family occasions. Based on the mixture of ethnic groups that were present, so...I don't really. Probably because...my aunt and uncle-my Aunt Jackie,

my mother's sister, married a Jew and converted to Judaism. And my cousin Jason, at a very young age, married a Latina. So I think that my mother's side of the family was always open to a certain level of diversity. So it was never...an uncomfortable situation.

Dorri explained that initially her great-grandmother voiced uneasiness with her parents union because of race, education, and religion,

...my mom's mom, my mom's grandmother, was kinda like, well, why are you bringin' a White man home. That kind of thing. But, my mom's great grandmother on her mom's side, my big mamma, as in her great, great grandmother, my great, great grandmother, on her dad's side really liked my dad. My great, great grandmother maybe because she was biracial herself, that didn't bother her. She, she knew my dad was a good man. It was also different because my grandmother was not college educated. So my dad was you know, graduating college. So maybe she didn't feel comfortable like education background, different race. She was maybe afraid that my dad thought he might be better. And then you know, Muslim, what's that. Did they even believe in God, because we're Southern Baptist; that kind of thing. So at first, my, my dad said, my mom and dad said that, m... my grandmother didn't really like my dad very much.

As Dorri's parents' relationship grew, her grandmother started to accept their marriage:

But my grandmother came around pretty much immediately because she saw my dad wasn't a bum. She saw that he wasn't just marrying her to get a green card or citizenship or anything like that. And she saw that he was a good man and everybody eventually came around. Like everyone loves my dad. My parents are

divorced now. They got a divorce when I was in high school. But they live a block apart from each other. And they, we still all celebrate holiday—holidays together. My uncles and aunts still treat my dad like family. And my grandmother saw that you know she treated my dad like a son.

Dorri felt that other members of her extended family were open to diversity because it was already colorful:

But no. After a while, it wasn't, it wasn't a big deal...My family is just very open. And for the most part they kinda have to be, because we are diverse. And so it's not... it's kinda like the pot callin' the kettle black if you start havin' problems with it.

Non-Issue

One sub theme that emerged from the data was that talking about issues of race and ethnicity was often a non-issue in many houses. Being biracial was not something that participants spoke about with their parents. For some individuals, this idea of “non-issue” continues to be their way of thinking. Others indicated that the lack of discussion did not prepare them for the reactions they received from the rest of the world. Most of the participants revealed that race and ethnicity “was not an issue” or wasn't discussed while growing up.

Justin described his parents' method of upbringing as “laid back”, they allowed their children to make choices on their own, and their racial composition was not considered an issue. Justin's parents strongly influenced how he views race and his racial/ethnic identity today. The “non-issue” theme permeated our conversation:

Yeah, my parents, you know my parents are, they're really laid back. Almost to the point where like how much more laid back can you get. But, it was never, it was never a thing. It's...you need to focus, you know, you should focus on this, or you should understand where you come from or anything like that. If, if, if anything, they're more or less like... you have choices, you make decisions. If you wanna go ahead and embrace something more, or, you know, the White side or the Black side or anything more, that's your choice, you know. But, no, it was never really an issue.

No, not at all. It's...it's never really an issue. I mean sometimes we joke around a little bit you know and kinda clown around, but, there's never really any serious issue. I mean, mean my dad grew, my dad grew up in an all Black community, so, you know there's never really...there's not really an issue, except for jokes.

Not particularly. I mean.....It, it just really was never an issue. It was never something that was like...I don't know, 'cause I think it was, sometimes when it comes up, it's, it's...has like a negative connotation. Or it has a negative feel about it you know. And there was never any of that. From anybody. So, and, and growing up, looking at my brothers and, you know, seeing how they grew up and everything, there just, there's absolutely no reason for us to question, you know who we are, or what we are, or, what it is, to a degree or anything like that, so.

...you know I, I, I just... I don't really have...I never really, I guess focused on it. It's ...it shouldn't be an issue...you know, it, it's, if me, me and that other person, if we connect in some way or another, that's great...and I will embrace, you know their, their, their culture and anything like that...completely. ...but I really just...don't focus on it or whatever.

Oh...I don't know. I mean I pretty much go with the flow of everything. I never really thought of it as an issue until I actually got to college. It's, it's more acceptable where I'm from to...you know to be biracial, or to be Black, or to be whatever that you are. So, you know, it, it was never really an issue. You know, I mean I identified with both Black and Whites and you name it, you know, I can identify with that person.

Norah did not learn of her Native American background until she was older: Because it, my grandmother died when I was very, when I was three years old. So I didn't have any contact with her. And my grandfather who lived until I was a sophomore in high school really wouldn't discuss her ethnicity. He didn't, he didn't, he, we were all American...And I think it was one of the reasons my father waited until after his father died to sort of tell us that she was—and I don't think she was com—I, this is sketchy, but I don't think she was a hundred percent Ojibwa. I think she herself was mixed race. But predominantly, Ojibwa, Ojibwa, however you wanna say it, and so I don't have a lot of connection with, with people, with other people, in, certainly with people from her family, you know, further back generations. So, on my mother's side, it's the same situation.

Because she was adopted, we didn't talk about her birth parents for years and years and years. And when she began talking about her birth parents, she just sort of casually mentioned one day, well, you know, my father was part Cherokee. And as we began to look at pictures of him, and think about that, it just sort of hit all of us that she, that he really looked, you know, like his ethnicity wasn't, you know Caucasian or White. And so, but again, we have almost no connection to that side of the family since he's deceased now, and so, it's kind of, it's kind of sad in a way.

For Sabrina, her ethnicity was not discussed unless a relevant incident occurred: It wasn't something that we avoided. It really only came up if I had a bad experience at school or something. My parents, we actually just talked about this last Sunday, about their sort of lack of incorporating a lot of diversity into our family or into my life. But it, I mean it was something that, that we were able to talk about. We, it didn't really come up a whole lot unless I had a, somethin' happened.

Nicole's mother didn't talk about race until she began dating in high school, ...talking about dating people of other races. And her concern was you know, she had an obvious concern for dating people, outside of my race. And, and her concern was, she always expressed a concern for children, biracial children, and the difficulties that they faced....She felt like we had faced certain difficulties as biracial children.

Marcus's parents did not directly address racial differences:

My parents...you know what, my parents, my dad always talked about you know you gotta work hard, you know, treat people with respect and dignity. But he never like, he didn't give these little African his-African American history moments or anything like that...you know, never...there'd been a great deal of education about it. I became real interested in it myself, but my parents didn't like give me any instruction in it. Or, you know, we didn't do Kwanzaa at my house or anything like that.

Marcus believes that his father's painful experiences prevented him from addressing issues of race and racism:

Well, I think my... my dad had to deal with so much prejudice in the '70s. He grew up in Mississippi. You know Mississippi was a terrible place for a while. You know he, he actually got sent away from his home town in the middle of the night, well, well, before nightfall because he made a threat to his White neighbor because his White neighbor's cattle were eatin' his family's crops. And He said, if your, if your cattle eat my crops again, I'm gonna shoot 'em. Well, in 1960, a Black man didn't say that to a White man, and so. . .So he—you know. And, and I think he dealt with some ugly—my dad never talked about growin' up in Mississippi...So he just never talked about it. I think it's just too, too difficult to talk about.

Kassandra and her mother just recently started having conversations about race, but it was not discussed when she was younger because it didn't seem to be an issue then, Not really, honestly, because my, my sister and I are so White. I mean we're just, we're so fair, and we've got Anglo last names. It wasn't until...the-the, the

majority of the discussions have taken place since college and like since getting into ethnic studies classes. And especially with my, with my mom, and her, her side of the family. My, my dad was killed in a plane crash, gee it's 12 years ago. And so like we...you know, and so if you think about like what kind of development has happened since then, like I wasn't able to have those conversations with them.

Some participants wished that their parents had prepared them better for the issues they would face regarding their racial identity. Adrienne describes how her parents dealt with issues of race while she was growing up,

I think that my parents always, they ser—they either they don't-- it's really, it's kind of bizarre to watch them from the outside. Either they don't think it's an issue, or they think if I don't make it an issue, my, it won't be an issue for my children. Which blew up in their face, because it turned out to be definitely not true. Both their children had, went through periods, I think as most biracial children do, of, of... you know kind of racial insecurity. Where do you fit in, what am I s'posed to do with myself. And my parents did not in any way discuss race or ethnic issues. They certainly, they certainly made it clear that all people were created equal and one shouldn't judge people by the color of their skin. And they certainly made it seem as if there's a definite degree of social injustice. But they never talked about personal issues. And I certainly don't believe they never had any. They got married in 1970 in Los Angeles. So, those were definitely there. I just think that... I think they're the kind of people that feel that there just comes a time where you stop talking about problems and start focusing on

solutions, which is a valid thing to say. But I think that if you don't acknowledge problems, then, it makes people think that you don't have any.

So...but I think that he... he just comes from a different generation where those things just weren't discussed in nauseating details. You know, you kinda, you did your silent protests or whatever you needed to do and, you know, they come, these, I think they come from the Martin Luther King era where, you know, you register to vote and you hope for the best, and you know you kind of, yeah, I'm an American, I'm gonna do my American way of life, and that's it. Like they don't wanna talk about all this you know social injustice and things...They have this kind of, yes, that's wrong and I don't agree with it, but that's the way the game is played. Now, go on and do what you need to do. So, it's kind of a weird situation. It's kind of like the elephant in the room no one's ever talking about. And I don't think that's an uncommon phenomenon in, in, with multiracial families. That we'll just, everyone will just act like they, that there's nothing different about any of us.

And I think that they, they realize now that making something a non issue does not mean it is going to be a non issue to everyone outside of your house... And so, I think that now that my parents know these things that went on with both of their children, that they, they realize that they didn't do certain things the way they should have. And so, I think now with raising my niece...who's multiracial, they're doing things a lot differently. They're talking about these racial issues

that they didn't do before. Because they realize that though it might not be an issue for them that is not the case for everyone else , in the world.

And I think now it's they've, they've gotten older and it becomes less of an emotion—they can emotionally detach from certain things. And you do need a, some degree of emotional, detachment to be able to talk calmly about certain issues. You can't be so wrapped up in the moment that you don't have any perspective. So I think now that they're older, their kids are out of the house, they feel less pressure to impart certain behavioral characteristics, they're more open to talk about certain issues. So, perhaps it should have been the other way around, but, you know, I mean that's the kind of thing where it is, it's all late now.

Taron felt that his race was not an issue while he attended a school that was predominantly Black. When he entered a public school and began to have White friends others made issue of it:

When I was in elementary school, I actually went to a laboratory school at, at [a historically Black] University. So at the time I was surrounded by, by Black students. And, you know it was never as issue then. You know it wasn't until I went to a public middle school and was surrounded by White people. And then, just because they were around, they became my friends. And that's when, you know, that it starts to become any sort of issue.

Taron suggested that race may be less of an issue for him because he has not faced some of the challenges that other minorities have faced,

Well, I mean I'm sure that I've been, you know subjected to sort of the same issues that minorities face. I don't think that any of those issues have held me back in any way though...I mean I can't claim to be a victim of, of any prejudice or racism...in terms of my...my own perception of it, I don't know.

Similarly Teresa and her siblings didn't feel that they experienced the same suffering as other minorities:

[Is that something that you and your sisters talk about at all, or together?]

Like it's like okay we're, we're different you know, but we pass as White, so, I guess just kind of like go with it, and just kind of know that like you're different you know. Like we just... we never talked about how we could like you know, reach out or something. 'Cause like we've, we've been blessed in every way you know. It's like, I mean we haven't had to struggle really with anything. Like it's more like, I mean I feel like other people have had to struggle so much more with like their racial identity than like we have. You know like, so, so at times when like I, like I think about it and I'm like oh, you know, like, woe is me, you know. It's like, well, other people have like had it like you know worse. Like I've been blessed. Like I could go to the school that I wanted, you know. Like I was made, never made fun of by like how I looked or something, or made to feel like—mean times I was made to feel like I didn't belong, but not intentionally. And like I, I've been able to work through it for the most part, so.

Several of the participants did not think much about their racial identity until they entered college. Marina explains,

In high school I think I just...I don't think I thought about my identity too much in high school. I think the first time it would, it came up was when I was applying to colleges, and then you have to write down you know your race and ethnicity. But, now I think it's a big issue of who I am. And a lot of...a lot of my choices, like my, what I read, or what I do, outside of when I have free time...

Leala concurs,

Well, I, honestly, I... really can't recall any...And honestly, as a student affairs professional now and knowing theory development and racial identity development, I really didn't start developing my identity until I got to the [state University]...then I was enrolled in a predominantly White institution and actually became aware of my race. You know, as like, as aware—I mean I was aware of my race before, because again like I said those kids in high school and elementary school used to call Nicaraguan kids spear throwers. But, I really didn't think or analyze it you know. I didn't really think about it all that at all actually. I was just, to me it's just an insult that those kids say. Just like some kid picking on you because you're chubby or because you wear glasses, or because, you know. It wasn't, I, I didn't internalize it; like oh my God, I feel oppressed because I'm you know Nicaraguan or anything like that. And it wasn't until I got to college at the [state University] that I started developing that whole sense of identity and racial differences and stuff like that.

Significant Pre-college Experience

Many of the participants discussed significant events that occurred during their K-12 years. These events affected the way they viewed themselves and the way they

viewed the communities to which they belonged. Often, the memories that stick out most are negative in nature; and although negative, the participants felt that these moments helped shape who they are. Several of the participants pointed out specific experiences in which they came to the realization of their differences--these often occurred outside of the comforts of their homes. Additionally, interactions with peers and the community also influenced their self-perception. The simple nature of demographics in their neighborhoods and schools determined how they racially identified. Pilar recalled a childhood incident with neighborhood kids:

Yeah, I know we, my sister and I got in a fight with some kids, or, and I remember they told us to go back to our own country. And I didn't get it. You know I, I just looked at my sister, I'm like, I don't get it. And obviously she knew, 'cause she was like just sit down, just sit down. I'm like, but I don't get it. You know I didn't get it. But, you know now that you look back, then you're like, oh, okay, I get it now. But back then I was just like, I didn't get it.

Sabrina described reactions from her high school peers and their families, I would say...well dating that one, that one guy and the, the reactions from his family kind of made me more vocal about it I'd say...I mean I had a lot of high school, junior high and high school experiences where I was just really aware of how closed-minded my peers and people in my community were. And I was very furious about not choosing one racial identity over another. I was very solid in the fact that I was both, and I was gonna identify that way, even though I didn't have parents that looked like that.

Teresa realized that she was different at a young age,

Kind of, because like, it was like I, I, I struggle with even like at a, like a younger age, 'cause I didn't feel like entirely White. But when you look at, like a lot of people look at me, and they're like oh, she, you know, she's White but she speaks Spanish, like what, what is this, you know. So it was always something I was like really like aware of, just because, and, 'cause I never really... I guess like entirely fit in with any one group. Because of like my family and like my background. Especially when like you're in a... when everybody's all White, or everybody's all you know like Latino or—I, I didn't blend in really anywhere. So, it, I would definitely say I was aware of that before high school even.

Teresa felt uncomfortable when her peers would make racist comments, but wanted to blend in:

I ha—like one of the peer groups that I hung out with was definitely like a, like a mostly White. And they were, and some of them were really you know kind of like, I guess, I don't wanna say racist, but I, I'd call them almost racist now looking back on it. And they would say jokes like you know making fun of like Latinos and Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, oh, dirty Puerto Ricans and that you know. Like I remember that stuff and I remember like you know being offended and like hurt, but not like wanting to say anything, because like I kind of blended in, you know. I would say something, depending on the situation. But a lot of times like I wouldn't. Like whenever I heard a joke like that. And it was kind of like hard for me, 'cause I was like, oh, that's part of me, but that's not all of me you know.

Leala also felt uncomfortable about voicing her ethnicity around peers:

So much so, that like I, when I was a, a kid, in either high school or elementary school and junior high school, I was always hesitant to say that I was Nicaraguan, because Nicaraguans like Cubans are labeled as arrow or spear throwers as the Indians you know...kids that were Nicaraguan... see I'm, I don't have the, the... facial features as much defined, you know as, you know Indian or whatever but some other Nicaraguan kids did. And so...the more defined your, your indigenous features are, the more harassment you, you received from the Cuban kids, who were suppo—you know were supposedly White, you know, White race as opposed to those that had a more of an indigenous background.

Pilar's peers would make racist comments, but would try to correct themselves to soften the blow,

Comments in high school of, you know, when you see, when they se—would see somebody Mexican or somethin', and they would say somethin' negative about then, but then turn to you and say oh, but you're different. You know. And it's like no, I'm not different just because I'm your friend, it's the same thing. So, comments like that.

Leala vividly remembered a negative experience with a high school teacher about her potential,

You know some teachers in my high school weren't the greatest teachers, you know. I mean I had one teacher tell me once you know that when I first said that I wanted to go to the [State University], he laughed and said you're never gonna go to the [State University]. You know, it's like; he laughed and said that to my face that I wasn't ever gonna go to the [State University]. That people like me don't

go to the [state University]. No, again, I was young. I didn't think to ask him what do you mean people like me. You know what I'm saying? I'm like do you mean people like me as far as like poor people, or people that are Brown, or, or, people that are lazy, or maybe because I don't do all the work in your class? What kind of people do you mean people like me? I didn't ask him that question. But you know what? Once I get my Ph.D. degree, and I go back to [my hometown] for a visit, I will go over to that high school and be like hey, you can call me Dr....now.

High school experiences differed among participants. Some said that their experiences prompted opportunities to learn about diversity. Others indicated that race was not emphasized because of the demographics of their schools. Marcus described his high school experience as an opportunity to learn about different cultures,

You know, in high school there was, and junior high even, but especially in high school, you know there were a lot more opportunities to learn about culture. And not just Black culture, but all different cultures...so we had a lot of opportunities to learn about culture then. And then just in my classes I studied history, literature. I was always really interested in that. So that really helped in terms of, you know, 'cause growin' up I got a good ground in the European side of me, but not as strong a ground in the, in the African American side. So I kind of went on a quest to learn more about that side...

Marina's experience was different, "In high school, I feel like it wasn't brought up that much. And maybe it was just because there was just so many...Like I, don't, I don't have any good friends from high school who are biracial. But...but it was just

there's, it was so much diversity within that school, that it wasn't like...it wasn't an issue at that point in my life".

Pilar did not feel diversity was addressed because of the homogenous population of her school, "So. But, and you know in high school, they really didn't have clubs. I mean they have clubs now, but the population was, just wasn't there back then".

... I would say when I was a senior, their population of Latinos started to grow.

And then they started to see more issues and more problems...And, I mean we had a lot of Asian, we had a high Asian population at [my school] and most of them are female; and most of 'em came because they were on the path to bein' a nun. So, the school didn't really consider them bein' a minority population; they were just there because they were gonna be nuns. And, nobody was really gonna talk race relations, you know, or say anything about people that were gonna be future nuns or somethin' like that.

Leala's school situation was unique in that the majority of the students were Latino. Regardless, Leala still found that students separated themselves according to race:

Well I mean it was your typical high school culture as far as like, you know like your separation or stereotypes between jocks and you know the smart kids and the cool kids and the you know heavy metal kids and, and stuff like that. But, difference being that you know everybody was Latino or... But the thing is like the, the Cuban population is very—it was the majority, you know. And, right at, I know that as of right now, the demographics has, have changed in my high school

now. But , in the time that I went to high school it was majority Cuban. And majority Cubans, are of White background, White racial background.

Taron described academic achievements as a factor for race divisions. As an honor student in high school and in college he has had few peers who were racial minorities in his classes:

I wouldn't say that it leaned towards one side or the other. I've always had Black friends; I've always had White friends. Like I said, coming up through school though, it's been mostly I've been surrounded by White students...you know being in, in upper level classes, being in aerospace engineering as a department you know. Like in college there's only been, maybe six or seven other Black students that have come through with me. So...and right now there's only three other Ph.D. students that are Black, so.

Naturally, Taron developed friendships with his classmates which created tension from his black peers, "And again that was because you know, I guess I had so many White friends that the Black people looked at me just as you know wanting to be with them".

Other's Response

The response participants received from others regarding their appearance, behaviors, and identity choice had a significant influence on how comfortable they were in their skin and with the distinct communities they were a part of. Participants were placed in situations where they felt they had to choose between groups, or prove that they belonged. This struggle seems to be a constant frustration for these unique individuals.

Seven participants discussed how their communities reacted to them. Justin described his interactions with black peers on the football team:

...they kinda like singled me out that, like right away from the get go. Kinda like, oh, you know, that's the, that's the mixed guy or whatever, and all, the like the half breed or whatever they would call it. So, you know, pretty much right off the get go it started as you know. But it was never anything, anything bad or, anything wrong with it. I never felt anything, any harm by it. As time went on, I started to see... a little bit of... I guess kinda like distrust from the Black community, the athletes. And... the reason for that... I think is that there's not a heavy Black community up here... So, when you get a, you know, when you get a bunch of guys on a football team that, you know, on a football team that's, there's quite a few Black people, they're, they come together. And they come together strong here.....I couldn't be included in that, because I'm not, I don't look, I don't look like you, I don't talk like you. You know, I talk like I'm, quote, unquote White. I'm not really, really dark and you know.

I guess, I guess the, the, the guys that were heavily involved in their, you know their, their little subculture, the guys that were really... really pressing to find a Black identity, those were the ones that kind of pushed me away. Or they, they really wouldn't allow me to, to set foot near any of it, in that area. Some of the other people that really didn't, you know that were part of it, but they didn't, weren't like as heavy into it, and you can tell, you know, I, I think those people I got a, you know had, I had better relationships with.

Justin didn't feel that same reaction from the White community, "Didn't really get it from the White community. They just question what the hell I am... What the hell are you, you know. What are you, or whatever."

Kassandra described how she was treated differently by different communities, "... we definitely growing up encountered the, you know, why are the two White girls acting like they're Mexican on the one side, and then the, oh, yeah, you're kind of less then because you're be—Mexican on the other side." She believed these past experiences initially made her uncomfortable in participating in her undergraduate Chicana student organization, "I think I was very active in a Chicano student organization in undergrad, but even that process was a little bit overwhelming because there was tremendous fear on my part that I would be seen as this other, or that I would be somehow suspect or not fully welcome...which totally wasn't the case, but that was my fear just based on experiences that I'd had you know in my past."

Pilar found that people didn't question her identity until they saw her mother, "So, I don't think they ever really question that I'm, that I'm not full Mexican American. And then they see my mom, and they see our family and how we ac-we react, they're just like, oh, okay. But I mean you get occasional, when you're not, you're not brown enough, or you're not white at all, you're not white enough."

Dorri described several incident's were people were confused about her family makeup,

But the people right at the very end of the street came over to my dad one day, and I guess he'd just seen, he just saw me maybe on the front porch, and then he saw my dad. And then later on, he was watering his lawn or somethin', and he saw my mom. And then he talked to my dad, and he was like yeah, I noticed you have a, a nanny or whatever for your kids. And, you know, he was in his 70s or whatever. My dad was like you know, that's my wife.

When Dorri was in first grade her mother came to pick her up after school,

And the teacher goes in the classroom and brought out an African American girl.

And my mom goes, that's not my daughter. And the woman goes, well that's the only you know Black person, Black little girl I have in this class. Mom was like, excuse me, and Dorri, come along. And you know I skipped out, and skipped out with my mom and never knew that until later when my mom told me.

Pilar, Kassandra, and Therese discussed how language was a factor in how they were accepted in the Latino community. Pilar explains,

Yeah, I think so. 'Cause, you know, I've come across a lot of people that can't, that don't understand why I don't speak Spanish. My dad speaks Spanish, but they don't understand why I don't speak Spanish. And it's like you know you're a disgrace to your culture 'cause you don't know your language....And that, and that's a huge issue. And that's, I think, again, that, proves to a lot of people that you're not Mexican enough because you don't speak the language.

Kassandra described the language factor as a, "tests they'll put you through." She continued, "... you know it's like okay, you've got this, you've got a different last name and you look really light, but even that, you might have to do a little work. Let, you know, let me see how good your Spanish is. Or, let me, what do you know about your history, and you know what, you know that kind of thing."

Three participants described noted differences as more cultural and less to do with race.

....you see that same, a similar phenomenon with African Americans that grew up in predominantly White areas or were adopted by, by white folks, you see the

same, very similar phenomenon, almost. 'Cause really it's not so much biracial, it's bicultural. And I mean I think that's where the, where the issue is, is culturally. What I look like is one thing, but the whole culture of it is, is, is totally different. And, you know, Black folks that have grown up in, in predominantly European cultures, I mean, adopt more of those characteristics you know.

(Marcus)

It has to be more than the color of your skin. It has to be, has to be an ethnic, almost cultural identity. But then again, those questions are very tricky because I don't even know how you would define Black culture...And, I think some people in America, when they mean race, they mean ethnic group. And that's the trickier, much more, what's the word I'm looking for, sensitive issue. And, I think it's one of those issues that you know I mean is there a White culture? People always say there's this Black culture. There's a—and there's people in that hip hop culture, which is actually not synonymous with Black culture. But no one ever talks about there being a White culture. There might be an Irish, or a German, but when it comes down to it, most White people I know, don't strongly identify with being Irish or German or Dutch or English or Scottish or whatever, unless they found out, and they know. And most the time it's just random, well, I think my grandmother was Irish, and there's a Scott in there, so random Western European mix. Or maybe they're Polish. They don't know. But when it comes down to it, they just, they're White. But I think even that has a stigma of shame attached to it. It's just not cool to be white. And 'cause you're se—I think you're

seen as being oppressors, with no, that's also, that's an issue. So people now say oh, I'm Italian, or I'm Irish or... 'Cause that sounds more friendly. So I think America has come a long way, but we're still like a bunch of confused preteens running around not knowing what we're doing. We just make shit up. And hope it all works out in the end. But I don't think anyone knows for sure. And I think that that's the, that 's the confusing part is there is no definite answer. (Adrienne)

And I think it just has to do with personality. Personality differences...the way they talk, the way they dress, or, you know...but then there's other people that were separated like me, and kinda wishy-washy if you wanna call it.....[So you, you felt some the separation was due to your like physical appearance in terms of what they considered to be...] To be Black. And to be White... what I consider to be Black is what, is, is different than what they consider to be Black...granted I don't have the same life experiences as, as everybody else, so I completely understand that. But... I don't, I don't talk like a Black...and what does that mean? Well, I mean it's pretty self explanatory. You know I mean, I don't dress, you know, I don't dress with baggy jeans, or you know have the whole if you wanna call it the hip-hop culture or whatever it is you know. One day maybe I will dress like it, the next day I'll dress like a surfer. So, that's why they kinda question, question me a little bit, so. (Justin)

Justin found that people are often confused about his racial make up. He describes this below:

And it was actually pretty, quite funny too, 'cause like, I was, I think they [college friends] went like three or four months not knowing what I was...I know and, somebody told me one time they were, they were like, they were in a conversation with one of the guys who lived on my dorm floor. And, and this girl, she said well what is, what is [he]? What is, what is he...And the guys were like, we don't even know.

[Do you get that a lot?] Yeah. I thought it was funny. Actually I just got someone last night...Some kid goes like, what are, what are you, Black-Black, Black and White? I'm like yeah, half and half. Kinda like cream you put in coffee. I'm half you know. And, and he was like oh, you look, you just look White. [Does it bother you when people ask you?] Not really. No. I think it's funny....I, I just joke with 'em about it, or whatever. Call me whatever. And my brothers and I joke about it, you know. You know, so, it doesn't bother me.

Six participants noted experiences of, with, and in comparison to their biracial peers.

There's some other, there, there is a couple of other guys. I wouldn't say that they were really a part like, a part of it. I, I think they were, on the border, if you wanna say it, as with me... you know, I don't know. I'd say maybe there's one or two people that were more in it, more a part of the [Black] community. (Justin)

Their, their experiences, I'm sure in a way are sorta like mine. But some other people, I would say, they fit more into a Black community. Or they, are accepted more. Or, you know they... they... they work better, I guess, or they...you know,

they, they're, they're from the inner city. They talk like they're quote, unquote Black. So, and you know I, I would say yeah, that they're diff—some, some are different. But I would say some—a couple people are probably sorta like me, in the fact that it's just... it's never an issue. (Justin)

....one of, one of the students was Black adopted by , a White family. And one, one... actually there were, a Hispanic, Asian, and a Black person, all that were adopted by White families. And the, the, the Black male, he lived in [a larger city]. But the other two lived in, out, you know, other places, smaller communities. And so I don't know that they had really went through the process of kind of their own cultural identity. I think they perceived themselves as, as White. And so they didn't see themselves as needing, you know a minority resource person. 'Cause they didn't perceive themselves as minority. And, and, you know, just, I don't think they perceived that in the same way I would. They had that same kind of emotional or psychological connection. (Marcus)

[You had mentioned a girlfriend at the time was biracial as well. Did she, m...identify in the same way as you do?] no she didn't. She was, it was a point of contention between us actually...well, I mean she just, it was... I guess sort of the opposite upbringing on her part. Her father was Black and her mother was White. Her father left when she was young. He wasn't a very good guy. Her mother remarried a White man, and she was brought up to, I guess embrace both of, you know, both halves of her identity, much more than I was I guess, so. (Taron)

And...it was interesting because I knew, within my school, I knew two other biracial students, that were, White and Asian, not South Asian, but white and Asian. And, those were people I immediately clicked with and who I became friends with. (Marina)

I had, actually I had a Psychology Discrimination class, and I would sit with this girl and she was like half Mexican and half White. And she, like we had like, we kind of like talked about like what it was like to be like mixed. And that was like the one experience. That like we had. And then she was different than me because she looked like different. Like she looked, she was, you know, she looked like, like Mexicana, she looked like, she looked like that, so, it was a different experience. She had kind of like different stories that I had, so. (Therese)

Marginality

It is evident that the idea of marginality is present in the lives of several of the participants. As in the previous sub-category (Other's Response). The individual rarely felt that they fully belonged or could be accepted as they choose. The struggle has been created from external forces, but often creates a war within. Sabrina has used her feelings of marginality as fuel for educating others:

...I fell like I have...like we talk about the sociological perspective, which if you're marginalized you can see things in a different way than, than those that are in privileged positions can. And so I'm not, I consider myself even more

marginalized than someone who's almost a hundred percent African American or whatever that would, you know whatever that would be. Or whatever race. And so...I ...when I hear people complaining about their, their position, I'm like, okay, that, you're right. Your position's awful. But let's think for just a second. I'm not gonna compare my own position. But let's think for a second how that might be for somebody like me who doesn't- I mean you're at least accepted by a group. I'm not. You know. So that's really...It's made me bitter, but I've turned the bitterness into like this desperate need to be in the classroom. You know. I think that's probably the most. Yeah, and then that's been an ongoing process. I mean I, I, if I hadn't had such shitty experiences in undergrad, you know, then when I got to my masters program, you know I kind of puzzle through it. And I was teaching then too. And now it's like I'm pretty hard core about changing people views on things and making people more open minded.

Leala described the inner struggle she has with the history of her people, Well, you know it...sometimes it causes a war between, within me, not between, within I it causes a war. Because...sometimes I don't know who-where my, where my loyalties lie...But like sometimes when I...people talk bad about Indians, or American Indians, or Native American Indians, or whatever you wanna label people, I get really, really upset you know what I'm saying, because those are my people. And I think I identify with Native Americans more than I do with White side, just because Native Americans are supposed to be really, are really proud people. And I'm really proud of who I am. And when I think of the atrocities that the Conquistadors did you know to the Aztecs, to the Mayans, to

the, to the Nicar Indi-, Indians in Nicaragua, you know what, the genocide that happened because of the Spaniards that came and wanted to steal the gold. I, I, I become enraged, you know, I mean enraged, engaged at them, because they came and, and raped the purity of not only people, but my, of our land. You know so sometimes I have that inner struggle of like I wanna reject my White side you know. And, but then again, I'm also proud of my hi- you know Hispanic, of my Spanish, you know background and you know my character that is also Hispanic and Spaniard you know...you know the, the language that I speak, I speak Spanish. You know my religion. All that they brought with them to the new world you know. So, and, you know I'm happy with my language, and I'm happy with you know my faith and all that stuff. So, because of that, I embrace the, the Spanish, Hispanic background. But for as far as everything else, I, I reject it, you know, because I feel that Spain and...But you know like the Spanish, they just came and stole everything. And stole, raped you know the, the Indian maidens and created this quote unquote bastard race you know, that is the Mestizo. You know it's no longer pure. It's, it's this mixture of two races. So...I don't know. You know sometimes I, I battle with that within myself.

Adrienne described a marginal person as a spectator on the outside, It's just, it's a funny position to be in, to see you know, that the average White person legitimately does not feel as if they have any advantages. But then you look at them and you go, clearly you do. I know you do because I am able to partake in some of those advantages, which is a unique position to be in compared to someone who clearly is Black. I mean that's kind of the, it's one of those

things that's a unique position to be in, because you can certainly see everyone's side to all these stories, and how everyone plays out in all these different things. And so you kind of feel as if you're watch—you're a spectator watching these groups you're supposed to be a part of; but you're not really a part of any one of them. So, it, it's kind of a weird.

Adrienne continued to describe feelings of marginality, yet understood it to be a part of who she is,

I can't even imagine, I think that's, or that I can't I can't imagine not being, having one White parent and one Black parent. It, it, it, it's just a unique situation which has...I don't know. It's kind of weird. I, I certainly don't feel Black or White, but I certainly feel as if I'm caught in the middle. And that's just all on identity. And so I realize how powerful a force that is, because I can't imagine ever not being that, because that certainly has influenced a huge amount of my life...It's, this, it's who you are. I mean it, it just comes to me how, how you step out in the world, and how you're presented and how people respond to you, and it's this whole intimate dance and you can't separate the two...And so, it gives you a unique perspective. 'Cause you can just look at. It's weird, because you feel as if you're a minority within your minority, but then you have an inside track on the quote unquote majority power wise. And just, it just gives you, you just kinda look at each group and go (gestures) Get it together you know what I mean?

Two participants described how their identity choice was often determined by how others perceived them. Marcus was faced with racial identification at a young age.

He experienced several negative experiences from peers that prompted him to identify as Black,

And the neighborhood that we grew up in was predominantly White. The elementary school I went to was predominantly White. I had some negative experiences with kids, you know, or people kinda callin' these racial slurs directed at Black people, but never White people. So I realized that people perceived me as a Black person. And so, and I realized that for my own emotional health that, that I'd be healthier and happier if I just accepted that I was perceived as Black. And, and so that was, that was crucial in makin' my decision you know in terms of what I see, what people reflected back to me about who I was.

He described another experience with racism as a child,

And so, you know, the one experience was, that I remember vividly in elementary school was that I had some, a friend who was havin' a slumber party. And I didn't get invited. And I heard him talkin' about it. And I asked how come I didn't get invited? And he said, well, my mom doesn't want me playing with niggers. And you know that was while I was in elementary. And you know, thing like that made me realize that I was Black. And there wasn't a lot of biracial kids around at that time, so, I felt like I had a choice; Black or White. And because of what I looked like, there was no way I was gonna be perceived as White, so.

Marina experienced the struggle later in life, but voiced her realization of the influence external people have on one's identity formation,

I'm not...I'm not quite sure. This is, this has been the, classes I'm taking this semester in graduate school have kind of challenged a lot of, of my perceptions of my own identity. And I think that...I've struggled a lot with how other people perceive me, 'cause I always got a lot of that, oh you're so exotic, oh, that's so...and that, and that I almost feel like, there's a conflict there, because that's not how I perceive myself as how other people perceive you. And when you form your identity, a lot of that comes from how people perceive you so...

Four participants found that their only option was to choose one race or the other. In fact Pilar was taken aback in college when her biracial peers were opting to identify as biracial:

I would say at that time, you would, you were either one or the other. There was no s-sense of bein' biracial or even multiracial. That wasn't even considered, ten years ago. So it was really you need, you need to decide, you need to choose...and you know joining MASA and, you know, and even seeing students like myself that were biracial or multiracial that considered themselves biracial. And, you know that was a shock to me because I'd never met anybody that said you know, I'm not gonna pick; this is what I am. But ev-I mean till, even till this day, I still pick one over the other, just because I had, I had always done that.

Teresa found that she choose based on her physical appearance:

I think having that, and then having like you said, like maybe, like some kind of like outreach for people who are mixed, because I think nowadays it's like who isn't like mixed, you know. And, people like kind of primarily like identify with

like one or the other based on like...how you look you know, like how you pass.

And I like would pass as White. So it's like that was a big part of it for me.

Unlike Teresa, passing was not an option for Adrienne who felt that her only choice was to identify as Black:

Well, I think, I don't think that if you're ...I don't think you're given much choice if you are biracial with respect to having a Black parent...you're- you can't really choose to identify yourself as a White American. Number one, probably 'cause you don't look like a White American, and number two, because your, members of the Black ethnic group will not let you identify in that manner through social pressure. So, there really is only one choice, unless you make an elaborate effort to quote unquote pass. So, I think that, you're not really given a real option there, and you learn that very early in life, that if you don't associate with the groups you're supposed to, that certain social pressure will be applied to you to make you conform to the group you're supposed to be a member of by skin color...

That's always the issue I think for multicultural people is that you have to choose. You have to choose one. And you're told that from a very early age, because you can only bubble in one box...there's something with, with I feel almost uncomfortable about filling in that box, because what does that mean...You think you know the answers, but then when they came out with the new multiracial box, you still, your hand still went to Black. And you were like, uuuh. So it's still a...It's always a trick. I think it will always be that way because this is America,

and we're just screwed up when it comes to issues of race. And it doesn't ever get-I mean it's always gonna be that way.

Adrienne strongly felt that there was a lot of pressure to choose from the Black community,

...And therefore, you're s'posed to display certain behaviors, characteristics, and certain preferences by fitting into this group. And the group itself puts those pressures on you, more than I would say, members of the majority, meaning White Americans. White Americans don't care one way or the other for the most part how quote unquote Black you are and how Black you act. Its other Black people that dictate to you that you are either not Black enough, or, you are acting too Black. There's a, a fine line there, which I think is really only...well, I shouldn't say is only applied to biracial individuals, but I think that those students, those people are held to a higher standard, or looked at more closely, for whatever reason.

Leala emphasized that it was a struggle being from distinct races and cultures, but is reminded that you don't have to choose:

You know I don't have to be American one hundred percent of the time, and I don't have to be Nicaraguan one hundred percent of the time. And I can be either/or, or I can be both at the same time. You know w because when-if, I haven't gone back to Nicaragua since I was two years old, but like, I know that if I went back now, they wouldn't seem as Nicaraguan, they would see me as American. You know but Americans see me as Nicaraguan, you know. So it's like to the opposite party, I'm whatever the opposite thing is at the time, you

know. So, you know I can be both. I can be both American, and I can be Latino, and I can be both Latino-American at the same time, you know. So it's , it, and not only do I have to deal with you know being biracial and dealing with the Amerindian side and then the White side, but also dealing with being ethnically Latino and then being American as well, and, and knowing American culture. So, it just really sucks because you're torn between two worlds. But who says that you can't be in both at the same time, so.

Throughout his interview Justin maintained a positive attitude about being biracial, and was very nonchalant about issues of race, yet he did acknowledge feelings of rejection and feelings of not fully belonging,

I don't know, it's just more...more like whatever. I built a little bit of a...shield up. You know, like, if you're not gonna accept me or you're not gonna...I don't know, and I, I'm not sayin' everybody's gotta accept me. You know there's, there's tons of other groups and, little cultures and everything I can associate with. But, you know, I was kinda just, whatever, you know. And...so then, and then I think that's, you know...that's when I started to kinda question like what, what's the deal there. I'm not, I don't completely understand why the White kids act like this or what they're doin'. I don't understand what, why the, the Black community, the Black guys, why they're doin' what they're doin'. And then there's me in the middle..., you know, kinda which way to go.

[Is that somethin that you're still having to figure out you think? Or is that-over the years has that...changed?] I guess you could say yeah, still tryin' to figure it

out. h...I, I don't, I don't know, I mean it's, I...h...I don't know, I feel like, I think my barrier's kinda gone up a little bit. And, more, more so towards the Black community. I don't know. Still kinda...in between I guess.

Whiteness

For those participants with one white parent, the idea of whiteness came across in their interviews. Issues involving the ability to “pass”, white privilege, and a “white” culture were things that the participants had to negotiate in developing their identity. Some participants, especially those who physically had Caucasian feature, fairer skin and lived in an environment that lacked diversity tended to be torn about how they identify, but felt more comfortable in a “white” environment.

Although Marcus cannot physically pass as white he believed he was white during his earliest stages of racial identity development:

I mean it, it, in early Elementary I thought I was White. Just 'cause, you know my Dad was a truck driver so he was gone a lot. The neighborhood was predominantly White...school was predominantly White. What I'd seen on TV was predominantly White. I was White...so way back initially I didn't realize was diff-I was different, and didn't understand really what that difference was. You know.

Taron brought up an unfortunate correlation regarding race and academic achievement, describing his honor classmates as mostly white,

Well, I mean you know, kids always have problems when they're growing up. So it's, you know, one of the ones I had, so. And it, also, just you know I've always been, in, I guess like the honors classes, advanced classes and stuff. So

I've always tended to be surrounded mostly by White students in class. And, of course since I was surrounded by 'em, those would be my friends. And it's kinda hard to go back and forth

Marina's fair complexion and her environment played a part in how she identified:

I think that the fact that I have light skin has made me pull more towards the White side. And then I also, I attended a, a small, so, 1600 students, liberal arts, undergraduate institution. And for that reason, there, there was a very small amount of minorities. And I don't-I think I remember one South Asian. So it was, just became, almost a survival skill to identify with my White side.

Leala discussed the "White is Right" phenomenon within her family-the idea that if you have lighter skin you are better, more beautiful, smarter, civil. Leala disagrees with her family's aspirations to "better" their race,

Like others, like my mother for example, she says that I'm White, and like, coming from my family, everybody, there's this whole notion of like we're White, even though I'm Brown. You know, to oth-like everybody else sees me as Brown. Everybody else in this country sees me as Brown...so it's, it's really difficult because it's that whole identity of like coming from what, where I come from, you always aspire to... (Sigh) how do you say?... make the race better. You're s'posed to better the race. You know, so like, in parts of my family, I'm supposed to marry someone who's lighter skinned than me. Preferably someone that's American by the definition of being White American, not necessarily you know African American, or, or whatever other hyphenated American. It's always

supposed to be somebody White. In fact, two of my cousins have married you know Caucasian men, and you know their children have come out White and you know, I'm always, I've always been encouraged to marry somebody who's White as opposed to someone who's Latino or black or, year, mainly Latino or Black. So, m...that's how my family views it, so views my, our race, you know, as being White. But I, I don't view it that way. I don't see myself as White and I never will.

Sabrina was raised by White parents and grew up in a predominantly White community, but she has always identified differently,

I have a...that's a good question. I think I just felt like I didn't want to abandon one side. And because I was raised in a predominantly White environment, it's like identifying on that part of me was not that cool. I mean it wasn't. And I, I've always kind of prided myself in being different and you know an individual and all that. And, and, and so if I had to identify that way, I mean I knew I didn't, I couldn't probably have passed looking that way, so it was just, it was important to me to have...something that was sort of controversial for where I was living.

Adrienne is still puzzled by the idea of "Whiteness" and a White culture, But no one ever talks about there being a White culture. There might be an Irish, or a German, but when it comes down to it, most White people I know, don't strongly identify with being Irish or German or Dutch or English or Scottish or whatever, unless they found out, and they know. And most the time it's just random, well, I think my grandmother was Irish, and there's a Scott in there, so random Western European mix. Or maybe they're Polish. They don't know. But

when it comes down to it, they just, they're White. But I think even that has a stigma of shame attached to it. It's just not cool to be white. And 'cause you're se—I think you're seen as being oppressors, with no, that's also, that's an issue. So people now say oh, I'm Italian, or I'm Irish or... 'Cause that sounds more friendly. So I think America has come a long way, but we're still like a bunch of confused preteens running around not knowing what we're doing. We just make shit up. And hope it all works out in the end. But I don't think anyone knows for sure. And I think that that's the, that's the confusing part is there is no definite answer. And, and that's what people want.

Because of her "whiteness" Norah believes she has an advantage of understanding the concept of white privilege and understanding the plight of people of color,

Well, I think it's, it's interesting, because for me, what it's made me do is think more about the experiences of people of color, and whiteness. Because, I, I think that people... as I, because, I could go for long periods of time and not think a bout my race, and then all of a sudden, boom, someone would remind me. I would think, okay. So for this period of time I was experience—I was experiencing what it was like to be a White person. To sort of go around and not even think about race, and not even think about privilege which I obviously had in that, in that time. And then during this brief flash of time I saw a little glimpse of what people of color experience all the time. So it sort of gave me, I thought it gave me a real unique insight that allowed me to get—and that's, that is why I got involved in diversity training. Because I thought that it was, that I had sort of a unique perspective to say I understand privilege. Let me talk about privilege, I

experienced privilege. That I have a little bit of insight; not a lot, but a little bit of insight that makes me very empathetic to people who don't experience privilege around race. And so let's hear, you know, so then I was able to bring in the voices of people who, of people of color, who talked about what their experiences were like. I didn't feel like I could, and could mention my brief you know, episodes, but it gave me an additional empathy to try to, to wanna work on bringing White women and Women of Color together to talk about those issues and how we can support each other. So I think that's a big part of how it affected me.

Adrienne also felt that her position allowed her to take on two perspectives: It's just, it's a funny position to be in, to see you know, that the average White person legitimately does not feel as if they have any advantages. But then you look at them and you go, clearly you do. I know you do because I am able to partake in some of those advantages, which is a unique position to be in compared to someone who clearly is Black. I mean that's kind of the, it's one of those things that's a unique position to be in, because you can certainly see everyone's side to all these stories, and how everyone plays out in all these different things. And so you kind of feel as if you're watch—you're a spectator watching these groups you're supposed to be a part of; but you're not really a part of any one of them.

Being Biracial

Whether they identified monoracially or multiculturally, each participant understood the uniqueness of their situation. They all had an appreciation for being from a multicultural family, and described the roles they have taken as a result of being

biracial. They have become cultural-brokers, or mediators-understanding multiple perspectives and helping others to do the same. They are helping to lay the foundation for the racial identity of other biracial individuals.

Pilar, Kassandra, and Marcus described their roles as parents of biracial or multiracial children,

...you know and my kids both of them could physically and just 'cause of the environment they live in, they may choose to identify differently than I did. And so, but most importantly I want them to be secure in who they are, and, and appreciate other people for who they are. You know that's bottom line. I want them to, to be secure. But you know part of it really is, if you have to—I wish I didn't have to prepare them for those kind of hateful things...but I know that part of my role as a parent is to prepare them. That somebody may not like them, because of who their dad is and who their, who their grandpa is. And, and that's their issue not... that's the other person's issue not, not their issue, you know. And so, I wish I didn't have to do that you know, 'cause that's ugly, you know...And, and so you don't want, I don't want 'em to have to deal with, you know someone not likin' 'em because they're not White. Which, how ugly that is. But preparin' 'em for that, I feel like is part of my responsibility. (Marcus)

Although his parents chose not to discuss issues of race while he was growing up, Marcus will address them with his children, “But my experience is that I’m gonna talk to my kids about it and share. I want ‘em to be exposed to other cultures. I want ‘em to have friends that are diverse. you know all that. I want ‘em to have a healthy sense of who they are, and part of that is their cultural identity.”

Pilar is open with her son about issues of race, and although she does not force him to choose he has followed her example in identifying with Mexican American,

You know when he has questions, you know we, we set and we talk about it...and we just kinda go through like his culture you know, positive things about the culture. 'Cause I think a lot of times when you, when you say a person's another race, everybody brings up the negative thing about that race. You know it may not be prominent in the household, you know and, only people know is like negative things. So we try and bring up the positives. You know if he has questions I an—I answer 'em. You know I don't try and shove it down his throat, like this is what you are, and this is what you are, and so we gotta do this. It's really more, you know when he's ready and he has questions, and I can help 'im.

And I would even say with my son's multiracial, but he still con—he says that he's Mexican American. So even with all the races that he is, he still says I'm Mexican American. So it's, you know it still goes down as you know. And I would say a lot of that is my father too. You know you're Mexican American, you know. Not to say that he's disrespecting my mom in any way, but that's just, you know, instilled in him, and he stilled in u—in us, and he instills it in his grandchildren.

As a parent of a biracial child, Cassandra described her daughter's experience with "Whiteness" and White privilege,

You know, she's...you know, her, her dad's Anglo, and, so...she has even less of that sort of blood quant to like fall back on, because that's what you ultimately

end up doing as a mixed person I think in a lot of situations. Is it, it, sometimes it'll come down to well, you know prove yourself. Do you really are your, are you qualifications in check you know. And so, I actually, her middle name is Garcia, which is my mom's family name. And, you know, its kind of a joke. Like you know, my grandma always says and people are gonna say what you callin' that little white girl Garcia for, you know. But the same time like it was really important to me to give her a lifelong identifier and, and to show her connection to this family, and to show her connection to the women in this family in particular. And, she, you know, she knows. And she knows about White privilege, and she knows that her experience is different than her little cousin, because you know, he's a lot darker than she is

Most of the participants described how being biracial has influenced who they are today. Marcus identifies as Black but still understands the struggle faced by biracial individuals, "...but again for me, I identify as Black, but I understand the struggle, and that not all biracial people, whether they're Black/White or, you know Mexican/White, what, whatever their combination., I, I can understand that struggle that, that people are, are facin'". Justin also feels that being biracial allows him to take in a variety of perspectives, "I can see this from the Black, from the Black perspective, I can see it from a White perspective. I, I believe, and, ...I wouldn't want it ay other different, or any, any, any different or any other ways, should say. I think it's cool. It's, I like bein' different in that sense".

Marina feels that her biracial experience has allowed her to become more open minded about others:

... I think...I think it's influenced who I am today in just a completely positive great way. Like I think that I'm...I'm a better person because I have grown up in a very culturally diverse household. Like who, we not only do I have the two cultures, but my parents both travel a lot. And from Den-from Denmark, they had a lot of multicultural friends, so we, my whole life we've had people like from all over the world in and out of our house. And it's like I feel like I have a...I'm pretty open minded about most people. I don't, I don't have a lot-I, I, obviously I'll, everybody has preconceived notions, but I don't have a lot of preconceived notions about people from, four different backgrounds. I think it's ...I would never – I wouldn't want it any like other way. I guess I can s it up by saying that. Pilar believes that being in a multiracial family has shown her that different

people can work positively work together:

I think... I mean it's, I think it opens your eyes to different cultures. You know I mean you wanna say that you get the best of both worlds. But, I think you have an—understanding of each culture and why they, they think the way they do...and I, you know you could say you're a more rounded person...because you don't feel one race is better than the other; because you see it every day. You see the, you see 'em working together and, and bein' able to work together, so you know it can happen. So I think that's a, that's a plus, to bein' able to live with two different, two dis—very distinct you know cultures and see how they can mesh.

Teresa stated that being multiracial has influenced the relationships she has and would like to make in the future,

I think it's influenced everything I'm doing. I mean if I, if I had no...if my mo— if my mother wasn't who my mother is, and my grandmother wasn't who my grandmother was, and they didn't make me, I would probably have not become interested in working with immigrants. And that's gonna be my career you know. Like that's, I, I'm, you know, that's really what I'm interested in, so. And even just like how I think about like myself and like other people. You know it's, I don't know. Like I'm, I'm, I think I'm more open to it because of my family. My family's colorful, so I'm more open to you know different people. And I might, I might have been more closed minded if I weren't you know. Like my boyfriend, he, he's Mexican, and he looks like really like, I guess he looks like more dark or indigenous or whatever. And I, I think mo—like al—some of my friends might not date somebody who looks like him, you know. And, I don't know. Like I, I... I think that I would date anybody, somebody of any color you know I mean, I mean whatever. So I think that's really just because of my background, its kind a made me more open to it.

Sharing

Several participants have served as mentors, counselors, and advisors by sharing their experiences with other biracial individuals. The experience of being biracial has influenced some to work with diverse populations through volunteering or within their careers.

Four participants work with students of color or multiracial students. Justin works as a mentor in the athletic department at a large university. When working with

these students of color he maintains the same philosophy his parents did when raising him:

I mean being in, like being a counselor kinda right now and mentor...you know I'm tryin' to help people out. And just, and just the fact of... getting comfortable with themselves, you know. Don't try and... don't try and go out of yourself, you know... But, when it comes to like racial like and identity, you know, like it, it's the same, you know. I won't... I let people know their options. I let people know what they can do. But the choices are ultimately up to them. And I don't wanna be an influence in any way to per—to be like persuasive, you know. I just wanna let them know the choices, that these, these choices are available and whatnot. But, you know, I'm helpin' White guys, I'm helpin' Black guys, you know. Helpin', a Samoan kid, you know, I'm helpin' everybody. You know. I'm embracing the racial identities, but , I really don't... I don't say I don't care, it's just... I'm, I present what they can, they can, you know, what they can; here's your options. You can do this at the university; you've got a culture center. But I don't really press it, you know. I don't, I don't want, I don't want them to be like, oh, you know, I gotta be fully Black, or I gotta be fully this. Or I gotta be, I gotta worry about my Samoan heritage or somethin' like that. You know don't, don't, don't limit yourself.

Marcus works at community organization and is in contact with young adults daily, “about 20 percent of our daily population are biracial kids. So, high population of biracial. But there's a lot of biracial students. And it seems like that's a... I don't wanna

say one of the fastest growing, but it feels like in Lincoln, it's like, oh, there's just a lot of biracial people.

Pilar works at the student support center for minority students at a large university:

I think I get a lot of students in here that are multiracial. I think, when you talk to them, they, I think now, they're, they're more, confident in saying that they are b—biracial or multiracial. And they don't really have that struggle. And I think students on campus are more accepting of that. There may be some times when they have issues with who they are, and I just kinda guide the—you know, try and guide them through that. You know it's okay, to pick. You may be different than what your parents wanna pick. And I think that's the biggest thing is their, their struggle with their parents. You know their parents want 'em to consider that they're one thing, and the students are like no, I'm both, or, you know I feel that I, I'm only this one. ,So I think that's a lot of it. And just tryin' to help 'em filter through that. And what is okay and, and really it's an individual, individual choice. And I, you know, and a lot of it is you tell 'em every race goes through that, you know. I may consider myself Chicana, but somebody else may consider themselves Mexican American or not even go that far, and say no, I'm just Latino, and, and that's, and that's it, you know. Or African American and want me consider themselves black; and just to let 'em know that everybody goes through it, and this is the time to figure out who you are and how you wanna call yourself. 'Cause you're always gonna get questions. People are always gonna assume, it's just their nature. And just lettin' 'em know that you're not the only

one going through this process. And I think that's what a lot of students feel like.

I'm the only multiracial or biracial kid that's goin' through this....internal struggle and what, what am I gonna do. And just to reiterate the fact that you're not, and it's not a new thing. You just have the op—the options are better now. People are more accepting now of biracial couples than they were then. Or at least they say they are you know.

Teresa feels that her biracial experience has influenced the career she wants to pursue and population she wants to eventually work with:

I've always wanted to do something with like Latino immigrants you know. And like, even like coming out of like high school, like I knew that was kind of like the population I wanted to work with...I think that was part of like partially because of my family influence. Also like, Spanish was always like my best subject in high school...So, I really learned Spanish like in high school mostly, but I think it came really easily to me because of like my, my mom and my gramma...Well, that was, I think that was like most of it. And also like, I think the Catholic piece of me, like I have a strong like kinda like social justice. Like I'm really into like social justice issues and whatnot. So, I figured that was like you know, a good way to kind of like reach out and the population that you know is definitely underserved, understudied. And if I have like a gift to people to speak to that, you know speak and advocate for that population and you know work with them, that's just like rewarding for me and you know whatnot, so.

Marcus volunteers some of time by visiting with students in the public school systems that are struggling with their racial identity:

[The public school system] will occasionally call me if they have a biracial student Black/White biracial student that's wrestlin' with issues. And so I, I've probably worked with three or four students just one on one. Helpin' 'em process their identity. And I, I know [The Middle School] has a support group for biracial students. Kind of like a biracial caucus. So I've gone and spoken to them. So yeah, I, I try to be a resource to them.

Leala volunteers within the Latino community by encouraging Latino students to get an education:

You know encouraging them you know to, you know, in the Latino community, it's very much expected that you're gonna help your family you know. And parents can't wait till you get out of high school so you could get a job and help the family...the tipping stone I guess of Latinos, is that, it's great to help your family because family is so important, but also, if your family pressures you to get a job and not get an education, the less you're gonna be able to help them...so I've tried to encourage other Latino students. And like I've spoken to their parents as well you know about the importance of getting a college education... I'm like if they won't give you respect because of the color of your skin, then maybe they'll give you some respect because you have a degree, you know. And, and that's what I, I wanna do.

Marina is currently helping her sister deal with her identity development:

Just my sister, especially. I mean... I definitely, I think she... she's struggling right now. 'Cause she's again same situation. She's in Pennsylvania, a small school, mostly White. We lead pretty similar lives. And, and because, like, and

she's definitely... because she's darker, she's already experienced way more racism than I ever have, in the school, in this environment. And... I can tell she's struggling, but I can tell she's not completely ready to like... talk about stuff now, so I just try to like... When she, when I, when we do see each other and we talk on the phone, I try to like bring it up slowly and see how she's feeling and try to help her see what to do. Because she's at a place where there's no, there's not very many resource, resources for her either, so, she, we, like we have to rely on each other.

Summary

Family relationships and pre-college experiences play a significant role in the identity development of biracial individuals. These experiences and relationships often set the foundation on the individual's views about race and about the mixed heritage. Parents proved to be a salient factor in the development of the participants. Some parents were open with the participants about the realities of the world, others encouraged their children to embrace their differences or to explore on their own, and several choose not to discuss issues of race within the family.

The idea of race being a 'non-issue' while growing up seemed to be ever present in the interviews. For some participants this attitude encouraged them to define themselves beyond race. Others felt unprepared for the world, once they left the safety of their home. Because of this, experiences in college were a definite eye opener.

Additionally, pre-college experiences with extended family, peers, and the communities they belonged to affected the way participants choose to identify. The level

of acceptance from their cultural communities also contributed to the participants comfort levels upon entering college.

Lastly, the finding show that regardless of their childhood and adult experiences; the participants acknowledge that their situation is different from their monoracial counterparts. They described themselves to be more open minded and culturally sensitive to the experience of others due to their dual heritage. And for the most part, the participants accepted their ambiguous identities as part of who they were.

Chapter 5

The College Experience

Biracial students, like all students, bring to college a personal set of perceptions and experiences that influence their behaviors and response to others. It is likely that most monoracial students have determined their racial identity prior to attending college. Likewise, multiracial and biracial students have likely negotiated their identity in high school, but unlike their monoracial peers these students must renegotiate their identity based on their new environment.

General College Experience

To provide a full picture of their experiences in college, the participants discussed the general college experience. Several were heavily involved in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and took on leadership positions. Depending on their comfort levels, some chose to be members of culturally-specific groups, others were less likely to become involved with these organizations. Those who were not involved outside of the classroom, stated academics were the priority and their lack of involvement was due to intense academic schedules. Having an understanding of their daily lives in college presents a fuller picture of their development through college--because inevitably their decisions were directly or indirectly influenced by or impacted their racial identity.

Six participants explained why they chose their college or university.

...it chose me...So, and the school's free. It's hard to pass up, so...came on an athletic scholarship, to play football. And that's how I got myself out here.

(Justin)

So, but it really came down to what, it was actually cheaper for me to go to [Small Private School] for undergrad than it was to go to University...Even though [Small Private School] is very expensive...[were there certain resources that attracted you to the institution?] it was smaller...And I liked that smaller...atmosphere. You know, it, it just seemed...it was actually smaller than the high school I went to. So I thought that was a plus. You know that, most of my classes were all in the same building. And so that seemed like a plus compared to...massive university structure that seemed overwhelming. (Marcus)

...And actually, you know the, at the time, the university and the president were involved in some legal issues with, setting aside scholarships basically. 'Cause they had full ride scholarships for everyone, then they had, a small portion of it set aside for Black students. And, you know there were some legal challenges to that. And, the President, instead of you know, just saying okay fine, we'll just throw 'em all into the pot, actually stood up and fought for these. So, that you know I appreciated. And, you know, seemed like a good place to go. (Taron)

Well I was looking at schools I was looking for a small liberal arts school...And this school...it's funny, I just sort of applied to 'cause I didn't have to write another essay 'cause they took the Common App. And then when I went to visit, I had such a positive feeling from the people that I met and the campus and stuff, I decided to, to go there. (Marina)

...the fact that I could swim, and that it wasn't any like intense program, but I could still do that was really big to me. I wanted to be able to...I pretty much knew I was probably gonna study English, and I wanted to be able to also keep swimming, and that was a possibility... (Marina)

...well my dad worked here...and, I'm the middle of seven, and my three older sisters attended here. (Pilar)

I chose [the school] because it was the best school I got into. My parents, I got like a small scholarship, my parents could afford to send me there which was really wonderful. My father went there; he loves it, and, so I just, I just went there. And it was, I kind of fell in love with it when I went there. Like my religion's like I'd say like a really big piece of who I am, and [the school] is the Catholic university not just in name, but actually in practice ... I think that was like a big reason why I chose it also. (Therese)

Well, like resources, I'm, I'm thinking like, one of the things that drew me there was like, that they had a good like, just general liberal arts like kind of program. And I knew I would wanna do something with like Spanish and probably something else. Like I was thinking at the time maybe I'd do like pre med and you know work with like—I've always wanted to do something with like Latino immigrants you know... and they had like kind of good everything. You know

like it was like all their programs were pretty strong, so I knew like I could kinda figure it out when I went there. (Therese)

Three participants described their college demographics. Therese said that the issue of race was not ever present at her school because of the homogeneity of campus population:

Like it never came up. [My college was] predominantly White by far, so it was kind of even good that I had like you know friends that weren't White at [my college], 'cause a lot of people like didn't. Like I made, didn't really make a point of it, it just kind of like happened...I don't know. It never really came up.

Marcus said that his small liberal arts school was not designed to provide a diverse experience:

And I think it, in some ways, I don't know it was by design, but, people who didn't want a diverse experience could choose [to go here]. And it was a pretty good bet they could go through their whole undergrad-undergraduate experience and not have a, a Black peer. You know you could, you could really avoid contact. And at the time I was there, there was a Black art teacher. And the librarian was Chinese. So you could almost literally go your whole experience with not ever having a non White professor as well.

Unlike the others, Leala noted that her large South East University was minority friendly:

Some people feel that it is not friendly to minorities...I don't agree with that...I think that the, you know, of course everybody's gonna have a long ways to go to completely immerse you know themselves into being fantastic to everyone...But,

but I...I think that the University is as culturally friendly as you're gonna get of an institution. That's a predominantly White institution. I mean, you have staff that represents all kinds of students. You know you have a diverse staff. You have diverse faculty. You have diverse administrators. I mean, and you have a diverse student population...

Five participants described their campus involvement. As a Resident Assistant (RA), Marcus was responsible for building community on his floor. He found that the attitude of his floor mates changed when he replaced the previous Resident Assistant. He explained,

...and what was interestin' is that, the dorm that I was in had what they called pods. So there was you know like twelve rooms, eight singles and four doubles in a kind of a square. And then there was like a commons area in the middle. And just, the White students were out there playin' cards or somethin' and me and my roommate came out, they would leave....Or, if we were out there playing cards or somethin', they wouldn't join us... didn't interact...Well, the same people who didn't want anything to do with me when I was a peer, then wanted to be my buddy when I was an RA...and so I realized that real quick....That was, it was so transparent. It was like, oh now you wanna know who I am! I've been in, I've lived here a full semester and you didn't know my name. Now you're all interested? Come on. No.

Dorri was also a Resident Assistant at her university. She described her experience as positive,

... I became an RA. I really loved it. I had, my first year I had upper classmen single occupancy, and then double-occupancy freshmen. And, I had a wide variety. I had Greeks, I had... I was actually kinda lucky because I lived in....the cheaper dorms. So I had a little bit, I had more Black residents than maybe some people have in the other dorms... I remember at first, some of the, the freshmen girls that were Black, they'd kind of, they didn't know how I was, or they didn't know what to expect of me or how I might act. But, and then you know there were other girls that they didn't know my racial ethnic, racial background...

Pilar's father encouraged his kids to live on campus their first year in college although they grew up in the same city, "Cause he just wanted to expose us to that". As a member of the campus faculty he encouraged his children to become involved on campus and specifically with culturally-based organizations, "So I joined MASA, which is Mexican American Student Association. At that time we had Multicultural Affairs in the Minority Assistance Program, so I was closely involved with that, and the services that they provided."

Leala, who is now a Student Affairs professional, was heavily involved during her collegiate career. Her involvement began with a historically Latina sorority that had multicultural membership. She believed her sorority was responsible for encouraging her to branch out and become involved in the wider campus community:

But then I became comfortable enough with my community and my friends and who I was, that I, it gave me the strength to branch out and become involved in other things... maybe because I was Greek it also helped...me to have that confidence to step out of my Hispanic bubble. Because a lot of students at [my

school], you know they become immersed into the Hispanic bubble, and then they are very hesitant to work with anybody that's not Hispanic. You know? But for me it wa—it wasn't like that. And I guess it's just because of my sorority, because our, my sorority is, is, it's Latino-based and it's very multicultural. You know and it has White students, White girls in it, and it has Asian girls and it has Black girls and it has Latino girls. So, because everybody, there was so many different cultures within my sorority, I, I wasn't stuck in that, oh, it's a Latino sorority, so I'm just sticking to the Latino bubble. You know what I'm saying? So we purposely made it a point to branch out you know. We're like you know the whole world isn't Latino, you know, so we need to do other things with other people...So I stepped out and I started doing other things, that weren't just Hispan—Hispanic centered.

Therese's campus did not have sororities or fraternities so she became involved with Residence Hall Government and with service opportunities on her campus:

So, and I was involved, I was doing, I did the social service coordinating for the dorm for the year, which is a, it was a big undertaking. Because I, I don't know what the statistic is, but most people at [my university] volunteer at least for, do some kind of social service for at least part of their like undergraduate experience...So I was really, I was really involved in like coordinating those with the dorm. And then that, that kind of got me into the Hall President's Council stuff. And then, I did more of it from there.

Therese chose not to use other university resources or minority support services, but described her study abroad experience as eye opening in relation to her identity,

Like I went abroad, and that kind of like brought who I was to like the forefront, 'cause I went to Spain you know, and it was like, you know, oh, oh, you're American, yeah, but you know you speak Spanish. But you don't speak Spanish like an American, you speak Spanish like something else. Like what are you, who are you kind of thing. And so that kinda made me start thinking about it.

Four participants described their college friends. The majority of Justin's college friends were white. His friends who were black were individuals who had relationships outside of the black community, "But, like I said, like my Black friends, they weren't the ones, the ones that were strong... You know, we're, we gotta be a strong Black community. They were the ones, they more or less like, well, I'll be friends with anybody..."

Marcus broadened his peer group through involvement on campus, but noted that his close circle of friends were mostly minority students:

Yeah. I mean my roommate actually-and then, you know, I'm a people person, and started bein' an RA, I just had been developin' kind of a, a broader, peer group. You know you meet kids, and folks in classes and, livin' in the dorms. But it really did tend to be...the close knit group tended to be the minority students on campus.

Taron's honors floor was predominantly white. Although this was not a problem for him, he found this experience to be similar to his high school experience. His Black peers tended to have an issue with his White friends:

It was back into the exact same problem where I, I found myself on an honors floor of the dorm. So I was mostly surrounded by, by White people again.

Which, you know isn't a problem. So, but that was, here I am again, you know.

And they become my friends, and of course, it's, it's the same sort of issue that, you know, sort of like in high school, so.

Pilar found that her biracial peers were faced with the same challenges she had to face, "I think they have similar experiences you know. You got to, you're, you're not brown enough, or you're not so much of this culture, but yet you're not this other culture. And where do you fit". She said that her college peers and family were influential to her racial identity while in college, "I would say my peers. And just bein' around the culture all the-you know, the culture and your friends."

Two participants described living on campus. Initially, Pilar did not feel comfortable living in the residence halls,

I really didn't know anybody; and then just by chance, the girl that lived next to me was in my Chicano Lit class and she was in MASA... So that was, I mean just by the luck of the draw. So, and she wa-had actually been a participant in [a summer program for students of color], so she knew a lot of students and really kinda guided me through the, through the dorm experience I guess.

Therese said her experience would have been different if she did not look White, I mean they were very, it was very welcoming, And I think I, I might have had like a different story I think if I like looked different you know. But I think just 'cause I very much pass as like White, like I never really felt like that you know. Just based on like how I look.

Multicultural Resources

The use of multicultural resources was an interesting topic. Most of the participants who discussed their involvement with multicultural organization, centers, or programs were not likely to utilize the resources. Some voiced concerns about belonging and feeling welcome. A few did not feel that the resources were necessary for their success. And others chose not to use them due to previous experiences that had a negative impact on their perceptions.

As an athlete, Justin had a busy schedule that did not allow him to become heavily involved in extracurricular activities, “There are resources, there are resources available, but I’m not one to...fill my schedule up. I already have a hectic schedule. And outside of that hectic schedule, I want my down time.” Regardless, he did not feel that he needed to be involved with the minority student center to be a part of the minority community, “It’s like, I don’t see it as being an issue, so I don’t see like that I have to, to go to a...a minority, you know, a minority center...I don’t, I don’t know, just like whatever. I mean I don’t... I don’t have to do that to...or shouldn’t have to do that to feel involved in a, in a group or what not”. He continued,

Maybe that, maybe if I would of went, that would have changed my outlook on everything now... I guess there are specific things that...that I wanna do, that, that make me feel comfortable, and that’s not one of ‘em. Not saying I wouldn’t feel comfortable if I went, went to one at all, it’s not what that means. I just don’t see that as, something that I have to do that, to be a part of a community.

Still, Justin noted that the resources may be useful for other minority students, "...Some people need that, and it helps them out, makes them better people, makes them happier, so they can kinda feel like I'm at home a little bit."

Taron chose not to use university resources for a different reason, "I just, that's sort of my personality really. It's, it's not a reflection on what was available, what wasn't, it, it's just that I chose not to, to pursue those kind of resources." He did not feel that there was much support for biracial students, but did say that resources were available for monoracial minority students--which is the community he identifies with most. "I see support for, for minority students, and since I consider myself part of that group, you know I consider that part of my support network. If we're talking strictly biracial, I don't know if there's anything you know specifically set up for influencing that."

Marina described her intimidation of the Diversity Office at her institution, ...like I would get information from, but every time I would like walk by the office, I would get intimidated my freshman year, and never went in. So because I never took that step in, I don't think I ever...I never, I never utilized it. [Why, why were you intimidated by going in there?] I don't know. I think, I think it has a lot to do with the fact that...I don't know why I was sort of intimidated. I think because...I don't know if it was the atmosphere of the, of the school, like the underlying, and all the people, all the friends that I had met at that point, most, 'cause most of the school was White. And so, and everybody was in, in the Diversity Office was very sure of who they were and, you know very, very

like...forceful, and I just didn't feel like that's where I was. So I was, I would get nervous, so I would never kind of ...utilize that.

Therese had a social relationship with the Latino community on campus, but did not utilize culturally-based programs for several reasons:

Like I always, like I always enjoyed hanging out with like Latinos on campus.

But it was like, it was very much like kind of on my own terms, not on the

University's. And I didn't really feel like, I mean, in terms of like academic

support, like I think I graduated with like a 3.81 or something. And that was—so

I never really needed like academic support or like you know social support....I

had my friends in my dorm. So I never, like that was just kind of like something

that I got emails from, and it was actually kind of annoying, 'cause I got them a

lot. And, I don't know. I went to a bunch of like the events. Like they had like

shows and stuff I would go to with my friends. But it wasn't like very organized.

Four participants described experiences with culturally-based student organizations. Justin had little time for activities outside of school and football, "Well...I don't-it's difficult. Like time management is a huge thing. And you don't have a lot of time honestly. And when you get free time to do stuff, you gotta do what makes you happy." He continued, "Never really felt a part of it. Never really had anybody ask me...to be a part of it."

There were few culture-based organizations at the small, Midwestern liberal arts institution Marcus attended:

Well, there was you know, there weren't, they were just general student

organizations, they weren't minority specific, except for the Rainbow Club. And

then that was really a relatively small population of minority students. And then allies, you know White allies. You know folks who were, who really wanted to learn. You know who planned on when they left, going to Chicago, or teaching in the--and wanted to, to have a multicultural experience. And to learn...but...those were the two options. And Rainbow Club...my roommate and I brought the [high school] concept of Rainbow Club to [our college].

Therese described her reason for not being more involved with the Latino community on campus,

I got, I always got the letters, like in emails, from like the, you know Latino community and the like, like the organizations on campus. But like, I never really went, because like the Latino community at [my institution] was very like pure Latino. And it wasn't like mixed. And especially because of like how I look and the fact that like I speak Spanish but like I prefer to speak English you know. And there were also a lot of like foreign students. So they would always speak Spanish, and it was like very pure. Like I, that kinda keeps me pure, but like you know like, kind of like, entirely Latino. And so I never felt like—although I was friends with a lot of those people, but it was kind—it was not through like the organized university. It was like on the side I would go to like parties with them and stuff.

Two participants described experiences with summer programs for minority students. Therese described her experience applying for a race-based scholastic program. It was her first time at applying for something that required one to be a minority:

And also, one summer I did this program... and it was for students of diverse backgrounds. And it was like this really great undergraduate preparatory program for colleges. And it was like for like minority students, but it had to be like you're Asian American, like Latin American—it was like all these. And they, they had like the boxes to check. And I was like, I feel kind of bad like checking for this, 'cause I'd never applied for anything based on like you know, like using that as like kind of like an affirmative action kind of role. But I was like this is so good. And, if I could get this, like this would totally help me. So I was like, you know what? Like I'm just gonna check it. Because like I, I do technically like qualify. They're not gonna tell me I don't. 'Cause I'm like I fifty percent qualify you know. And so I checked it, and I went. And it, that was, that was probably by far the biggest like push in my face, like, like you know think about who you are. Because I went there and I was, I lived with like these women who I still, like I keep in touch with like one or two of them. But they were all, like eight, eight Black girls, eight African American girls, no seven. One Dominican guy who's a Black Dominican, and one Cuban girl who was, she looked kinda like me. So, but she was all Cuban and she spoke Spanish at home. So it was, everybody was not confused about who they were. And they were all one hundred percent you know whatever they were. And then there was me. Then they, and then I get there, and they're like who is this girl with like you know, like White features and the blondish hair you know, like...And it was very, like, like I had to think about that. And I, I, like I even still think back to that, and I'm like oh my God, what a learning experience that summer.

When asked if the experience was positive or negative she replied,

It was positive and negative. Like there were times where like it was like I felt like I did not fit in...And I, I felt like this is what it's like to feel like a minority somewhere you know. Because and I, I'd never hung out with like that many like African American women, at like one time. And they were really fun and really awesome, but it was like a completely different like experience for me. You know. Well, yeah, think that it was, it was good and bad I'd say. 'Cause at times like I felt like I could contribute nothing to the conversation, because like they'd be talking about things like I had no idea about. Like I'm not into like, like the, like the music you know and stuff like that I just, I really didn't know anything about...Like positive like I learned I could be like you know really friends with like anybody and I don't know, like, that there's a lot to be said for like different people and different cultures. And it really made me like appreciate like diversity like a lot more than I think I had.

Sabrina attended a multicultural summer school program the summer before her freshman year in college. She participated in the program for the free education, but disagreed with the overall purposes of the program that she described as, "...how to be prepared for the onslaught of White students that would be coming in the fall, and giving the minority students a step-up in their education". Not only did Sabrina disagree with the programs tag line, but she also did not get along with other students in the group,

I had, what, in that program, I had... some pretty bad experiences with African American students, who, for whatever reason, a lot of, a lot of them were from Chicago which doesn't have anything to do with anything except that's where

they were from. And I would say rather sheltered. But certain things like the, the first night of the program, there was like a parents banquet. Well my parents are White, and I, I just kind of heard whispers and, well why is she in the program. You know, other than the fact that I look nothing like my parents. And, and then I, I remember, I'm, I got, sort of got into a fight with a girl at, at lunch because she was saying that I had, I, I had no idea what it was like to be Black. And my argument was that's true, but you've no idea what it's like to be stuck in the middle where nobody wants to deal with you. And so there were those sorts of things. And I really... I wouldn't say I struggled... but I, I feel comfortable with my racial identity, I just struggled with the fact that people weren't accepting of me. As a result, the negative experience, "turned me off of using any sort of like the minority student affairs program on campus."

Salient Factors

Overall, participants said that their experience in college was salient to their racial identity development. Participants reported that their collegiate experiences provided opportunities to challenge notions about their identity, to solidify what they already knew, and to open their eyes to the contributions of their people. Classes, professors, staff members, and peers were salient factors in their racial identity development.

Eight participants described how they have changed since high school:

You know I think who I was in high school laid a, a foundation for who I am now. In terms of, you know I became really involved in extracurricular activities, and real interested in, in cultural and diversity issues, and I think that is, is still a large part of who I am now. (Marcus)

I wouldn't say that it's changed much. You know other than, you know maybe having to, to fight less to convince people of my racial identity. But, and that's something that we talked about you know. Just growing up, you know and being young, that sort of thing. But, other than that I wouldn't say much has changed.

(Taron)

I think it's, I think...I think it's given me a realization that...that a lot of people I went to school with like are still in that area, are still very like closed-minded and very...I had, here's just a, like a brief little story: One of my friends who-not one of my friends anymore. It was, I think I'd known her for about a year and a half at this point, and we were, I was with her and another girl, and we were checking her mail. And I got one of those invitations to some event for minorities, and she looked at it, and she's like I'd be offended if I got that. And I couldn't even believe like the words came out of her mouth. I think in high school I didn't realize--I mean I--I had the, like, with between my families and stuff how there's a difference, but I didn't realize like a lot of people my own age had such different views. And so that was something that like kind of struck me. And I was like, okay, all right. And like it got me thinking. And, and I think a lot of my classes, 'cause I had some great professors that like teach you how to critically think and kind of like take things apart. And that has helped me with the struggle I've had with my identity. (Marina)

Oh, a lot different. I think in college you have the opportunity to see more students that are like you, who share your identity, who, you know, are really passionate about their culture. And I know when I came to college, you know your friends in high school, they just, they be-they couldn't understand that. That I would, I would wanna be in, in an organization that was predominantly Latino or you know, I'd start to hang out with more friends, and just hang out with them on weekends; and they just couldn't, couldn't grasp it. They know they didn't really fit in. And it wasn't that they weren't accepted they just didn't feel comfortable in that situation. So, you--my friends--I would say my friends are definitely different. (Pilar)

How would I compare? I don't—I didn't know anything in high school. Well, like I said, growing up in [a large, Southeast city], everybody's just Latino, you know. It's very different than I guess the rest of the United States, because you have such a large Latino population there. So, right now, being in [the South], where, I mean there's, there is no Nicaraguan population basically. It's, it's really different. I guess I, right now I feel like I have to be more ethnic. You know I have to be prouder of what I am, because I have to teach others, because I mean I've been asked by many people is Nicaragua in Africa, or is Nicaragua in South America somewhere...So I always have to educate people of Nicaragua and you, you know, where it is, where it's located, what its people look like, you know, and what kind of music you like and stuff like that...So I have to explain that to people that I didn't, you know, now, that I didn't have to do when I was in high

school. It wasn't necessary to go into all that explanation and stuff like that, so.

(Leala)

I guess just very similar I guess. Just kind of like more aware, more educated you know. More accepting. I've kind of come to terms with the fact that like in terms of like racial ethnic identify that you know I do have like a...it's, I'm unique and it's you know I'm trying' to come to terms with the fact that's not bad, it's, you know, it's okay. But, you know I guess the same mostly. (Therese)

Well I think...because there was a lot of confusion about what was going on, that I might have been a little defensive about it back then, instead of exploratory. Today and...and, I was also, I liked it. I thought it was, again, you know, in this, in that period of time in that place, I thought it was kind of cool to have that nickname. Now I think I'm more cautious about all of it. Because I don't wanna be offensive to people who identify strongly you know as, you know, who are Native American I should say, and who have tribal affiliation, and who have struggled hard to maintain those boundaries that people tend to wanna encroach on if they have one millionth of a, you know, percentage of Cherokee. The you know, the old my great, great, great grandmother was a Cherokee princess thing. (Norah)

I think...I think maybe I'm stronger in my identity now. I think I always had a sense, but maybe didn't have, didn't have all the, you know, have kind of

everything in place that needed to be there. You know. I would, I would identify as being Mexican American when I was in high school when it was safe. Now I could give a crap. I mean, you know. And, and, I think I know how to handle those situations where it does become a kind of a ten-kind of a tense issue. I think I have the skills now to, to handle that. I mean em-emotionally as well as just you know like academically. I mean if someone says something that's just you know blatantly ridiculous, and you know you have to pick one or the other, then I have logical, calm , well thought out answer-you know. (Kassandra)

...Opened my eyes. And I felt that my whole life I had been lied to. My history classes, my English classes you know, I had read the, the cannon you know, if you will of English, you know the English literature, American writers. You know I, all I read was the cannons. You know your Edgar Allen Poe's, your, you know William Shakespeare's and Chaucer's and stuff like that. And for the very first time in my life, I was getting a taste of what my own people were writing...And all of a sudden I was takin' this class and you know I started identifying with my own people. And I started filling the gaps that American history had left out...And then that's when I started feeling a sense of pride you know... So you know I, I really did feel robbed and like I had been lied to my whole life. So then, that increased my yearning to learn more, you know...So when I started learning all that stuff, it's like when I, I star—I stopped being Leala, you know like the Nicaraguan girl. All of a sudden I was Leala the Puerto Rican girl, Leala the, the Chicano girl, you know, the Leala the Dominican. And

you know with my Dominican friends I started you know talking to them in Dominican you know with their little accent like or dialogue or whatever. And my Puerto Rican friends, when I was around Puerto Ricans, I started talking like the Puerto Rican kids you know. Around the Cuban kids I started speaking like the Cuban kids you know. And when I'm around my, my Nicaraguan people, then I speak Nicaraguan, you know...And, it's like I immersed myself into everything, and I embraced my whole culture. And, and I don't know, it's just this whole like rebirth and awakening that had I not gone to the [University], I would of never, ever, ever, ever experienced...So that's how that impacted my undergraduate experiences. The fact that I was an English major and my model was Cultural Studies, so. (Leala)

College courses were a salient factor in the development of participants' racial identity development. Seven participants describe how their classes influenced them:

I learned a lot in my, in classes I took... I have, a Minor in Ethnic Studies and, and I have another Minor in African American studies...You'd think that somebody that has a Minor in Ethnic studies and African American Studies would be more a go getter, and try and be a part of the culture and community more, more so. But, and I guess, I guess in a, in a way, I, I kinda wanted to learn and that's why I chose to take classes and, that focused on that...But I learned a lot in my classes. (Justin)

...some of the discussions became kinda heated a little bit. And divided. And it, in a way, I don't know, a lot of times it was Black and White, you know. And,

I'm the guy in the middle. So, I'm hearin' you, and I'm hearin' you, and, here's what I think... You need to hear people out...and I just like to be the guy that, I know, I really enjoy that. I can tell that I like to be the guy in the middle. You know I don't, I don't wanna be over here, or be over here culturally, or with my views or anything or, you know. And so in some of my classes I thought it was really, that was cool. I enjoyed it, you know. I like to get in, in heated discussions. (Justin)

You know the Black people, would, some of the Black guys or Black girls or whatever, you know they would, they would be like oh you, you don't really understand what we're sayin' I'm like no, I don't understand what you're sayin'. My mom is Black, and I have a Black, a Black side of the family. You know, you wanna go ahead with this whole ghetto thing or whatever, you know, like, or, you know, or, like ghetto this, or growing up like this, or growin' up like that, you know, I know what it's all about you know. I've been there, part of it, you know. Granted I didn't have, I didn't deal with the struggle on a daily basis, you know. (Justin)

And, in, in most the classes I wasn't real talkative, but there were times when you know you kinda got into some debates over things with folks. And, I know at one point, I think when I was...maybe a sophomore, end of my freshman year, I had someone-no it, it was the beginning of my sophomore year, I had somebody tell

me that they had heard I didn't like White people. And I thought, oh that's interesting. (Marcus)

... African Americans contributed to the, the body of literature that's part of the American culture, you know, all that was legitimate. That it wasn't always just a add on you know, of a Black History Month lecture kind of thing. That it was, that it was an integral part of American society you know. I think sometimes there's this, that, I mean, African American history, literature, music, it, it's American history, literature, and it's part of that whole broad perspective. And so seein' that it's, it's valid and that study in that area is valid I think was important for me. (Marcus)

I mean there was, you know, every once in a while I, I would feel like...I guess sort of the same feelings that a lot of minorities get in that sort of situation, where you get a good test score or something, and a teacher kind of is, acts almost sort of a little surprised to see it you know, so, that sort of thing. (Taron)

...my identity development. I think it progressed like through, like that's psychology discrimination course I had was like really, really good. And that kind of like helped me, like, made me think about things, 'cause we had to think about a lot of our own experiences. (Therese)

My classroom experience was interesting. Within, within English classes there's a lot of talk and there's a lot of reading and interpreting. And...depending what we were reading, I, I would notice that I would like identify it in different ways. Like there didn't seem, I felt like there didn't seem to be a...Everything, every ti- Every time I looked at a text, a text, I would look at it at a different, like different point from my identity. I wouldn't, it wouldn't always be like I always looked at like, like if you're a White, White male, I wouldn't always look at something as a White male. Sometimes I would look at something as a White female, and sometimes I would look at, I would look at something as a minority, depending on what we were reading. (Marina)

... I guess depended on the class. But a lot of times I think you're uncomfortable because everybody just turns and looked at, looks at you. Or it's like oh my God, we gotta talk about this. (Pilar)

In the general classes, there was really no issue. But once you took more like the race relation classes, like the ethnic studies, or Chicanos in American Society, those classes tended to be a little bit harder because everybody was lookin' at you to give the answer for your entire race. And it was just a matter of you know tryin' to get them to understand that there's so many different cultures and within the own culture you know. From one side of the country to the other were just totally different. , and then speaking for everybody, you know, not even, you

know just, students of color in general, they always wanted to look at you to give 'em the answers. (Pilar)

As a graduate student in Educational Psychology, Therese finds that she is still judged based on the way she looks physically. At the same time she feels like she needs to speak on behalf of mixed race individuals to educate her classmates,

And like they'll all just like, you know like the professor'll be like oh you know, talk about like what is it like to be like a White counselor. And I'm like well, you know that's part of it, but that's not part of it. I mean if you're talking about like my racial identity and my ethnic identity, it's a lot more complex than you know like something that I share with other people in this room. And I feel like a lot times like it's kind of like grouped, I'm grouped on that variable, because it's the one that people see.

Well, I could speak about definitely right now. Because I'm in a class with five people here. And we always are addressing you know multicultural and cross cultural issues in counseling. And something that I really don't like is that I feel like I, I just kind of, like I kind of speak on behalf of like you know a lot of times it's like. 'Cause we, we do a lot of processing, like you know like what is it like for us as developing counselors and whatnot.

University staff members and professors played a significant role in the racial development of the participants. Three participants described the support of staff members, and six participants described the influence of certain professors,

...outside of the classroom I would say Dr. [Melendez]. He was, he was the advisor for the Hispanic Student Association. Him and Dr...Ed...he had two last names; I don't remember them though. But they were, they were co-advisors. Well, actually now Dr., Dr. [Melendez] was the advisor for COLSA which was the Columbian Student Association...But, they were very, also very influential as far as like you know being there for me outside of the classroom. (Leala)

But he's doin' that because he really cares, and I don't think you see very many you know staff people really getting after students and, and wanting to know you know are they makin' it on campus, you know, or really care. 'Cause you know they got that mentality of I'm in college; I don't need to go to class you know. My parents aren't gonna care you know. But he was like a second parent, like, you know. Shouldn't you be in class right now, and not being in here talking? (Pilar)

Marcus was one of the few participants that enlisted the support of the Minority Assistance Office. The Minority Student Liaison was a significant piece of his support system as he describes below,

I, I don't remember what her title was. But, you know, she was just someone who, you know, when, when you hear those crazy things in class, you could just go by and shut her office door and just process and say man, am, am I goin' crazy? Or is this environment crazy? You know you just had someone to kinda process with, and to listen to, and you know.

But she was kind of the one...It was actually her, and then a White professor, who...if it wasn't for the two of them, probably would have been...well, they were probably the difference between me stayin' and leaving.

Then having her being able to understand my struggle, you know. 'Cause she was dealin' with similar issues professionally on the campus. And so you know it, it was, having her rela-bein' able to relate to her and share with her, and just kinda really you know just vent.

Professors were influential in different ways. Some played a personal role in the lives of the participants, while others were admired for their philosophy on life and the lives they led.

One of the things actually a huge influence was my Portuguese teacher, which I have a Minor in Portuguese too...just the way that...he's an older guy in his late 60's. just a huge overall influence. On how to be a pers-you know, like kinda like how to be a person. How to...be who you are, or, you know, you are who you are. Whatever makes you happy, you gotta do what makes you happy. Don't do things for other people just because that's what they want, you know. You're the only-you-ultimately, you're the only person that walks in your shoes every day...I mean it was a life learning lesson you know. Like once a week, you know, there'd be times when I'd go home and I'd just sit there and contemplate on the things that he taught in class. That I would be like, wow, you know. It was, it really...started to get me to try to under-try to understand the way that he perceives the world. (Justin)

And one-my first semester, I had a psychology professor who, I don't remember what one of the assignments he had given us was, but I talked about I was havin' a hard time dealin' with, you know the atmosphere on campus. And so after that, so he kind of met with me and processed that with me. And then he met with me like every month the following semester. He just said, just wanna check in. And we'd have lunch or somethin'. And you know he just was real supportive...And he was very affirmative, very supportive. Very encouraging that you know I got what it takes... (Marcus)

My advisor was a English professor who, who was very influential. She was, one of the few, few minority professors that I had. I think I had about three. She was, Hispanic. And she was definitely somebody I still keep in contact with...Yeah. We never really talked about race issues too much. But she was always someone I could talk to if I needed to. I always, I always had that feeling with her. (Marina)

Well yeah, you know it was odd, because like the professors that have made the most impact in my life as far as my identity were those professors, like my Latino/Latina professor, and that was Dr. [Johnson]. And, she's White, as White comes, you know with the blonde hair and the blue eyes. Super fair skin. And, and this is something that I know I talked to her about and told her you know that she's responsible for me being who I am, of my identity development and stuff.

And you know I think it's, it's funny that it took a, a White woman, for me to, for me to, to help me realize who I was. (Leala)

...having positive role models. The chance to have two American Indian faculty that kinda helped to guide and mold me was, was probably one of the most positive things throughout my entire undergraduate experience. (Nicole)

Three participants discussed how their friends influenced them.

...through their, they're, you know...supportive, for any decisions. Just good people. Fun, interesting. We, we, we went, a lot of, a lot of my friends that were a part of the football team, we, we went through a lot of, experienced the same things. I mean you experience things which-by the way, this is kinda answering the question towards maybe like the Black, the whole Black community or like the Black subculture as part of the football team. When you go through things with people, you identify with people pretty well. You know, lie you wake up every morning at 7:00, or, or like 6:30 and then go run or lift at like 7:00 in the morning, and then go to classes, and a lot of times those people are in your classes. And you go through the day with them. You share similar experiences. You build a lot, a relationship with. But I guess it's the biggest thing is just being good friends, you know, being there. (Justin)

My roommate was Black and he, we had went to [highs school] together...So, you know, we could kinda process. And we had two different styles of handling. You know, like when the teacher and the information incorrect in class, I waited

till after class...and said, you know I don't think you're right. Well, my roommate, he just let him have it in class...(Laughs). You know and we used to do educational programs and, like in...I don't remember at one point through we, we had a little, a debate about issues, and I took on Martin's perspective, and he took on Malcolm's perspective. And that was it, we had those two different kind of personalities. So, but havin', havin' Antoine, his name was Antoine, havin' Antoine there was really helpful because we were dealin' with the same issues. (Marcus)

...I have like a bu-a couple of really close friends from, from undergrad, who, who would, I felt open enough to, to talk to about, about these different issues. And I think, especially my one friend...who was a roommate, was a very, like a very important person to have in my life 'cause she...she and I would sit and talk. And even though, though she was whi-she was White, she was Jewish, and she also was a little bit off the cuff, if that makes sense. She wasn't the typical Blonde hair. Yeah. That was, that went to that school. So her, she was a big part of, of helping me deal with different issues that I would have. Her and, and as well another, another one of my friends...who actually was that kind of like blonde hair a little, but she's from a low, lower se-socioeconomic-economic background, so she too was a little bit different than a lot everybody else. So we sort of wo-even through we had different issues, I think that we were able to like understand feeling sometimes as an outsider (Marina)

Four participants took some time to describe incidents that occurred on campus that were especially significant to them in their racial identity development. Marcus ran into several challenging incidents his first few years in college. Because he was one of a handful of minorities on campus, he had to fight stereotypes and prejudices from his peers and administration. He felt he had to “kinda put up my guard, you know around non-minority students. But, you know, I never knew how they were gonna approach me. And, and in some regards you know it’s, it’s like a defense mechanism so they couldn’t hurt you”. Marcus believed that although these experiences were often negative they helped to affirm his identity choice as Black, “I was havin’ those experiences ‘cause I was Black, not ‘cause I was biracial you know, so to speak”. His different experiences are described below,

But there was this impression that that was the only reason why we were there. Because we were on athletic scholarships. Even though Wesleyan doesn’t give athletic scholarships...and I think people had a hard time understanding that I was there on an academic scholarship. And, and then, I, I had conversations like, this is the first time I’ve ever talked to a Black person...Yeah, and I’d say, oh that, okay, that’s really interesting. Had some really stereotypical things. One time I had one of the young ladies tell me that her mom told her to stay away from Black men. Because they had more stamina. And I was like what? But you know you had those kind of stereotypical perceptions. And that, that you come in contact with. And so that’s, people think of you in those terms.

And part of it was I had written a letter to the editor. The editor of the, of the newspaper when I was, my first year was in, well just say from like, I don't know if he thought the was bein' thought provoking or what, but he'd say somethin' really kinda ignorant, racist things in his editorial. And, so I had written a response to one of his editorials about racism. And you know he was, he was deploring affirmative action. And I says well, the, the agency, the university's policy on legacies that gives extra consideration to you if you if you have it, that's affirmative action. But I don't hear you arguin' about that. And so, so kind of re- in that response, at the end of my first year I think carried over to where people that I was, didn't like White people.

In, in the courses, you know sometimes you debate and, and discuss thing that people become passionate about and argue, feel strongly about. And, that, so I had that label for a little while that I didn't like White people. [How do you respond to people when they say somethin' like that?] I just say well that's ignorant. You know my mom is White, you know. I love my mom. You, you know. I, I thought, I think, I didn't want to trivialize the argument. Saying you know, some of my good friends are White. I didn't wanna do that. But... You know, I said that's just ridiculous. I said you know, part of, part of a collegiate experience is, is in some kind of philosophical view seekin' the truth. And, I was, I spoke on, I've addressed the truth from my perspective, from the way I see it.

You know, the word “nigger” was used in my presence twice in my first semester...I was like I don’t know if I can do this...that, so that was, made it tough. And the second semester, you know I was really... I started out with a history, social science education major. And one of, one of my professors... I, I forget which history it was, but he only did kind of one little lecture on African American history...And had his facts all wrong. And so after class, I said you know, it, it, it really wasn’t Booker T. Washington that started the NAACP...W. B. Dubois was. ‘Course he said no you’re wrong. And it just so happened that the teacher who taught Black History was walking by. And so he, he affirmed what I was sayin’. But what had happened is it caused me, one he, it just seemed like he just hurried thought a lecture on African Ameri—and then didn’t even have his facts straight. I thought I’m just in the wrong place...Funny thing about it is after we had the conversation and said that, you know that, that wasn’t accurate information, he repeated the same incorrect information the next semester. My roommate was in the class.

So when I was president, when I was vice president of the student government, we met with the president of the university to talk about diversity issues and recruitment issues. And the president of the university at that time said their approach to diversity was to recruit international professors, professors from an inter—with an international perspective. And that they had had a Black chaplain ten years ago that wasn’t a very good role model, so they were a little reluctant to, to recruit Black faculty and staff. I couldn’t believe he said it...So, I think that

attitude I think permeated down in terms of the culture and the atmosphere, and the whole environment, the whole attitude about the campus.

Pilar described one situation at the large Midwestern university she attended as an undergraduate. When she was a freshman, a Latino man was mistakenly taken into police custody where he died:

..and I know that was a—I was a freshman, and it was just a huge uproar on campus, because there were so many different sides. And where you, where you try to explore that you're who you are...explore who you are and you know you—there was protests on campus and it, just a real negative backlash of who you were, and, and the culture that you... that you associate with. ...I think it affected me in a positive way. I, you know in high school you never really you know said I'm Mexican American and you know or had a T shirt that said that's who I am and I'm proud of it. And, and coming on campus and seeing students that were proud of it and, and weren't ashamed to go out in a campus that had many more white students then there were—you know you could imagine, and say this is who I am, and if you don't like it, tough, but, you know, this is what I'm gonna do. So, I mean there was a sense of pride of bein' who you are.

Leala described the lack of support from the campus administration after a racial incident on campus occurred,

Well, in the spring of 2001, a former Hispanic Students Association president was running for Student Body President. and he was the very first Hispanic to ever run for Student Body President at the [university]. And during that semester, during his campaign, the Institute of Hispanic and Latino Cultures got vandalized

by thugs. And they, they wrote on the walls. They wrote “No Spics for President.” And, and that was the very first time in ever in my life I think that I had, had an, a racial slur, perhaps not made specifically you know for me, but it was kind of for me, you know what I’m saying, because, I’m a Spic. You know what I’m saying?... You know and the University was like we’re gonna find out who’s responsible for this. And you know they had a lot of like forums and like you know the vice president of student affairs and the multicultural director was there and blah, blah, blah... They were just you know meeting and talking to students so that they would feel better, but, oh, just give it a couple weeks, it’ll die down, you know. And eventually it did, you know, as everything does. So, that was just like one of the instances that I felt that the University was, wasn’t being quite as friendly.

Nicole described several incidents on her campus that occurred during Indian Awareness Week. The Indian students would put up a teepee that would stay on campus for the week. Once the teepee was urinated on and another year it was moved and damaged. Nicole describes this as the first time she, “really experienced, I guess overt racism”. And it caused her to feel conflict regarding her Caucasian identity. Although she had always identified as American Indian, this was a time that she had thoughts of abandoning her Caucasian identity, and “struggling with the fact that that was, that was part of who I was, or that was part of my family”.

Two participants felt that their institutions were not as supportive of their racial identity development because of the school’s population was not as diverse:

“I’d say, I’d say I – guess I give [my institution] the, the benefit of trying to, but not having the resources there, because they didn’t have the population there.

(Marina)

And I think it’s just, when you’re in that kind of situation where everyone around you is White, it’s just become a safe haven to identify yourself that way. So I think that’s one of the reasons that, like putting yourself away from that and different causes like a lot more conflicts than are necessary, when things are hard enough between classes, and for me sports, and social life and everything else, that I didn’t. There was nothing there pushin’ me to...to explore that side of myself. (Marina)

I think it...didn’t really. ‘Cause it was very homogenous I guess. And...at times like I would find myself like kind of like blending into that. So, at, at those times I felt like it might of like inhibited it [racial identity development] a little bit. But at times like, I don’t know. I think it probably didn’t do much for it, like to help it. Like you know help me think about those issues. (Therese)

Marcus and Pilar discussed the idea of ‘sticking it out’ at their institutions.

Marcus felt that focus on academics and his determination to earn a college degree were factors that helped him to stay at his university when things were bad. His determination to improve the racial climate of the university was another factor,

You know, and, and, and it really was at [my institution]. ‘Cause I, I remember, I had literally... it was in October of my first year where I decided I’m not stayin’

here. And I went back to my high school guidance counselor and said I need help goin' somewhere else. That was on a Tuesday in October of '90. That night, [a student] who was a Native American fellow that I ended up bein' the vice president, and he was the president of the student affairs government, he had organized this whole symposium on racial relations. And, had panels and... student panels and faculty panels. And, and so I went to that that night and I said, okay, I'm gonna, I'm gonna stay. And part of my role is gonna be to make it easier for those who come behind me. Because [the school] was top notch academics. I mean academically, you got a top notch institution... And so that's when I decided that you know stickin' it out for me was because I accepted not in any kind of glamorous or martyr like way. That it wasn't just for me, it was for those who came after me. And so, that's what helped me stick it out. If it was, had just been for me, I would of went somewhere else. You know like man, this is about me and what I'm gonna get out of it. No, it was about helpin', helpin' Wesleyan be a better place for folks who look like me. Black and Brown people that will come next year and who are there now and who will be there ten years from now. So, and that helped.

Pilar found that she had to face the challenge of dealing with stereotypes of being Latina and being a young mother. She found that with the help of the Latino community on campus and her family that she was able to stay in school and earn her degree;

I had a child when I was a sophomore. So I think at that time it was like it's over. And I even think you know everybody was like, you know there's a, there's another stereotype. Well, you know, there, she's young, she's Latina, and she's

had a baby and, you know, chalk her up as another failure, you know. And you know the stress of that. And just, you know, everybody... just has that stereotype. And even you know in cla—you know goin' to class, like, oh my God, here comes another one, you know. She's never gonna make it. So I think you know at that time, you, you do just wanna give up and, and you don't wanna... yeah I, you know, I was really like I can't do this anymore. But you know I had students in MASA that really you know helped me through it. People on campus that were really supportive, and, you know and family too.

In general, participants described their collegiate experiences as an opportunity to learn about themselves and to explore their identities:

Well, I, I think one, I, I, I took some courses that were you know, I took like Black History, African American Literature. So that kind of academic experience was important. The opportunity for leadership and, and activism through the Rainbow Club was, was significant. And then just the, the relationships that I formed with some of my professors that encouraged that kind of self exploration was real important. (Marcus)

Has to do about like learning more about both sides of my identity, and trying to- Like my father is a, we also have religious differences. My father's a Buddhist and my mother's a Christian. And so I know, I know about Buddhism, but I don't know as much as I'd like to. So right now recently that's what I've been trying to learn more about and see more about. Because I feel like a big part of, that's a big

part of like his values, and I've grown up with his values, so that's something it I, the stems that I don't know much about. (Marina)

My college com-experience is completely responsible for the i-for my identity development. Completely. If I would not have gone away to college, I didn't have that experience you know. It wasn't until I went away to school, to a predominantly White institution....so, these are completely responsible; my college experience. I had to go away to school to be able to find myself. (Leala)

Summary

The findings in this chapter indicate that college courses and influential staff and professors were very salient to the racial identity of the participants. Peers, particularly close friends were also influential in the lives of some of the participants. College courses offered participants an opportunity for self-exploration—particularly in courses that involved race and ethnic relations. Students were given a different perspective on history and the contributions of minorities. Additionally, participants found that facilitated discussions and the opportunity to hear different perspectives played a large role in their development.

Professors and staff members that were noted as being salient factors, tend to offer students a different perspective of the world. These professionals also took extra time and effort to make the students feel included and comfortable in an often challenging environment. Additionally, peers were important to have in sharing experiences and for providing much needed support. Peers that were influential acted as a sounding board for the participant and were accepting of their identity choice.

Participants had different experiences with the multicultural resources provided by their institutions. Participants who had a stronger psychological connection to a minority community were more likely to use minority-based resources. Participants who were not strongly connected to a monoracial minority community were not as likely to use these services. Many of these participants described negative experiences that involved culturally-based programs and services. Several participants were uncomfortable with using these resources or joining university sponsored minority communities.

Chapter 6

Visions for the Future

Surprisingly participants did not have very specific solutions to meeting the needs of biracial students. Few cited in specific program, events, facilities, etc. that could be utilized as resources for this population. Rather they strongly emphasized the need for inclusion, understanding and acceptance. They encouraged educators and administrators to look beyond their organized system of racial categorization and to allow the individual to make their own identity choices. Participants encourage universities and colleges to provide a diverse environment so that all students are reflected and all students are challenged. Additionally the participants voiced the concern about making assumptions regarding biracial individuals-and realizing the uniqueness in their situations.

Words of Wisdom

Each participant had a final thought in regards to understanding the multiracial experience, and suggestions/recommendations to better serve this college population.

Two participants offered words of wisdom directed for biracial and multiracial students:

...for multiracial, all biracial people, just do what makes you happy, you know.

Do whatever suits the soul to, so to speak...learn as much as possible about all kinds of people. And then you learn, and then you learn about, a lot about yourself. And I just think that's what I've done. To be my own person, carve my own path so to speak... just, just march, march to the beat of a different drum.

That's what I say...you don't have to be like...you don't have to be like

everybody else. You can be the in between guy. Works out just fine. So, use it to your advantage... (Justin)

But just encourage someone to be themselves. I think that's no matter what race you are, what gender, what religion, I think if you can be yourself and love and like yourself, you can be a better person. So I think no matter what you are or who you are, if you can be yourself and love yourself, that's the first thing. So self, to love yourself for what you are. I think that, that is perfect for biracial students, biracial students to learn and people to learn. But I think just mankind in general. (Dorri)

Seven participants addressed the diversity within the multiracial population:

I mean just like the major thing like that I thought of like with your study was like you know, I felt even like guilty about you know should I participate in a study like this if I don't look biracial you know. And like or if I don't look multiethnic you know. But I think that that's something that might be interesting, that there are people like me out there who pass every day as White, but walk around, don't, and they don't feel White, you know. Or they, they feel different. And, I think that that's something I mean if you're interest in student affairs that, that, definitely people, you know they should be aware of. That there are people who you know get grouped into the main culture just like people who get grouped into another minority culture you know or group that, and the don't wanna belong there you know, and they don't know exactly where they belong. (Therese)

Well you know, I think one of the, the challenge is, think one of the things that people have to realize when you're talkin' about biracial students is that, they may physically present in one way, but emotionally, psychologically, mentally, they may identify totally different. And so realizing that, that biracial students are on a continuum dependin' upon you know what the environment they were raised, the parental structure-all, a lot of different factors. And so realizin' that, that biracial students may still be wrestlin' with that whole identity formation and that, because they might present African American, they may not see themselves, or define themselves that way, I think presents a, a kind of a unique challenge. Because in that case, if I look Black, but don't identify Black, you know, I don't see any resources you're offering that's relevant to me...so then, kind of bein' available for support when they realize that. When they have that a first slap in the face. Because of their id-racial identity that, that contradicts how they see themselves.

(Marcus)

And it's always so tricky to say, if you have a hundred biracial student, you have a hundred different experiences with bein' biracial. And so it's, it's hard to say that this is, this is what you need to do for biracial students. 'Cause realizin' it is a very complicated and society has made it even more complicated...And dependin' at what stage the student is at, which, you know in terms of their self identity. 'Cause I went through mine. Thought I was White. Then I went pro Black. And then now I really like the skin I'm in. You know I, I really like it.

(Marcus)

Mostly because I just haven't encountered multiracial people lately. Like I said it was a point of contention with the, ex, ex-girlfriend years ago. And we had that discussion all the time. Because she actually...I guess she leaned more towards the, the, the striking of racial identity, and, you know the, that view of the world. So that there were some issues of, of, of is this really realistic. You know arguments concerning that. And just because you don't necessarily associate yourself with the minority population, does everybody else associate you with the minority population. (Taron)

Let me, let me think about how I wanna phrase that one. Just...like I'm seen by most people as Latino. But if I'm not seen as Latino, I'm seen as for a race, I'm seen by my, everyone in my world as, as White I guess. Because they think I might be something different, but I'm not Black. So therefore, I mi-I have to be White...But if you just identify as Latino, I think you're good. You know what I'm saying? Even if you're Black, like Afro Puerto Rican, or Afro Cuban, even if you're Black and you're Latino, you're still Latino, you know and then when, and then comes your racial, you know identity after. But first, first and foremost you're Latino, and then you're White Latino or Mestizo Latino or Black, you know what I'm saying? Now for me bein a Mestizo Latino, the experience is different than being an Afro Latino. You know because Afro Latinos could pass for being Black. You know and I know and then I have lots of friends that are afr-Afro Latino that have been around White people you know that, be, start

talking crap about Latinos, and then all of a sudden they start speaking Spanish, you know. And, and then they turn pale and they're like oh my goodness, I didn't know you were Latino. Or even Black people that start talking crap about Latinos, and then all of a sudden they're like hey bro, I'm Dominican or hey bro, I'm Panamanian. (Leala)

But it's also kinda funny, because there's not an outlet here. There's not a biracial student association. I don't even know if there should be one. I mean...okay biracial student association; that is so many different things. Multi racial student association. What would you call it? I mean, in the Black Student Association, we know that there are not just Black people there. Same with the Asian American Student Association. So, I mean, the outlets are there for someone who wants to work and find them. For something that's just for biracial people, no. It's, it's not there. I don't know if it would ever even be there just because so many different biracial people view themselves in so many different ways. (Dorri)

It's tricky, because I think that there are biracial students who strongly identify with only being Black, and they don't, they don't identify at all, or acknowledge at all, their, their non ethnic, parents. Or, you know, maybe they have, and don't know, I mean there, there aren't, it doesn't seem as if there are that many, mm...you know say, Latino/Black, or Latino/Asian. It's more, mostly a White parent and a non white parent. And I think that, that...that it either can go either.

I mean I think it's...I've never seen a...I don't think I've ever seen a, a biracial person try to be like I'm White...But, but I, I have seen that whole you're just acting a little bit too White. And...I think, I think it always comes down. I don't know with any service that the university could offer. I think it's just a sign of maturity that you realize that you don't act White, or act Black, you simply are. There's not a rap artist you can listen to all of a sudden makes you legitimate. And I think that that's just the way you are with age, and exposing yourself. There's a certain process that, that, that no one can help you with, that you've got to learn that the external, that does not mark you internally. And I think that's just a sign of maturity. (Adrienne)

Well, I think some acknowledgement, that it's a...a, I mean not only a valid, I hate to say valid existences because it, I don't know, it sounds weird, but it's that, that there are lots of people on campus that are mixed race. But that...I don't think that-resources specifically...and maybe we, maybe we would find a different term than mixed race, I don't know. But finding a way to, for people to feel comfortable accessing services and being comfortable with who they are, and struggling with who they are frankly, you know. In, in a, in a more supportive way. 'Cause it's intimidating to struggle with race issues if you're mixed race. And some people are of mixed race and are clearly a person of color. And I think there's some of the issues are very much the same for them and people who are marginally a person of color, or perhaps don't look at all like a person of color. The issues are a little different, but some of 'em are exactly the same. So,

recognizing that there's so much diversity within the sort of mixed race community; finding ways to create safe space for people to deal with those issues. (Norah)

Two participants spoke about emphasis on similarities and differences:

But it was also a risk real-realizin' that when you, for me that, to identify myself as Black and to be perceived as Black in an environment that's very White, and in some cases outright hostile to that, is, is risky. But, you know, to me there was no really other option. And so I mean...it, it was probably, unless I went to a predominantly Black institution, it probably was the same experience that Black and minority students have on campuses all across the country. And I think you'll find that, that there's gonna be some who are supportive, and some who are, you know, that, in one sense they'll argue that you know we're all Americans and that we don't need to have any emphasis on our differences. You know we, we're, let's talk about our similarities. That's fine, but I wasn't called nigger 'cause of my similarities. You know so, and so I think that, that the differences ought to be celebrated. And so you have folks who will see that perspective and other folks who don't mind you, you celebratin' so long as they agree with and are similar to their perspectives, you know. And, and I just, I just really, it affirmed, through my interaction with you know Latino students and Asian students that, you know we have a lot of similarities. We have some differences, but those differences make the world better. And you know, by the time I graduate I was convinced of that. (Marcus)

I mean, you know it's, racial identity is, is something that's really important to everybody I think to some degree. And it's nice to keep, and I don't see anything wrong with it. But it's when you start...viewing other races as inferior or superior that you know that's when the, the issues start. So, so I, I have no...I guess I would say I have no desire to completely wipe away racial identity, you know I'd just like to wipe away racism and effects of racial identity. (Taron)

Recommendations for Higher Education

Four participants touched on the importance of having a diverse experience and a diverse campus environment:

And you know, but, but I think a part of the true educational experience has to be to prepare people to live in a diverse society. And I think part of that is the students have to-all students, not just minority students, but all students need to be exposed to cultural diversity in terms of who they take classes from and with. (Marcus)

Well, I would recommend that the faculty would be diverse, that the student body is diverse. That people really have an attitude to learn about each other, and not feel like accused all the time, you know...And I wish that people who are White wouldn't feel like they're being attacked every time that someone that's a minority brings up issues up to them...So, on an ideal campus everyone would be open to listening to everybody. (Leala)

I think having like a campus environment that's like...well I guess more open and just you know colorful you know. And accepting of-I think that's just something that's like new. And I think it's gonna happen like, in you know like, like the next like fifty or so years you know that, like we are becoming like very mixed as a society. And I think that that's something that people aren't really prepared to like handle, you know. (Therese)

But, I think, I think that ...a lot of the racial things are they're very segregated. I mean even our athletes which are primarily African American are stuck on one floor which, that was a lot of my research, which causes a lot of problems.

The...the fraternities are predominantly White, and nobody's really working with anybody else. And, so I just think...I mean here diversity is just a joke. So I think an ideal campus environment would be one that's actually diverse instead of-I mean, if you look at [my institution], they claim they're diverse, and they throw out some statistics. And I'm like are you kidding me. You're lying to people... so ideally all that crap would be eliminated. And there would just be a lot more support than there is, or at least awareness, I guess. But these can be issues.

(Sabrina)

Justin spoke specifically about the efforts of the Student Affairs division at his institution,

That's, that's a, it's kind of...Student Affairs does a lot. And, you know, and it's just, it's really hard, because I know, it's really, I mean...I mean I think the things

that they have in place now are good, are good. I think they're trying to embrace more cultures. But the, it's kinda tricky, the whole biracial thing is kinda tricky.

Nine participants discussed suggestions for Centers or Organizations that support multiracial students:

I don't even know if I have an answer to that. It's kinda, it's kinda hard. I mean...I guess one thing could think of is...is that I mean, is there a, is there a, a half Black, half White, minority center? (Justin)

Biracial, multiracial, center, like there's the...like there's the, you know I mean there is the Minority Center, but maybe have a multiracial center or something, I don't know. (Justin)

I think often times students...in, biracial students or multiracial students tend to identify significantly with, with one particular race. But I think that... they need resources that help them to, to reconcile sometimes that struggle that struggle of who am I and what does it mean to be biracial, or what does it mean to be a, a multiracial student. (Nicole)

I think that we have like multicultural centers and we have a lot of that at universities, but it's never geared toward students that are biracial. I think especially...I mean I struggle with having the White majority and minority complex. Like, okay, so...how do you, how do you kinda come, come together with that. And I think that's what's held me back a lot from using services,

because well I have the White in me, so I should be able to handle this like. And I think if there was, even if what we have was just marketed better to students who, who do have that, because it's a whole new set of identity issues and problems that they, that you go through. (Marina)

...think that if they had something like that, you know like, for people who, even if you look like White, you know. 'Cause that was something I struggled with that like I would, you know, I didn't feel like I completely fit in with like the White crowd. But then like the, you know the, the entirely like you know minority crowd, I didn't really fit in there either. So I think just even having something, you know, where it's like very welcoming. Even if like whatever you look like, if you have like blonde hair, or if you have like purple hair, it doesn't matter, you know, like you could belong in this. You know like in this, in this kind of like mixed group like. And there was-Like if I had gotten email about that, like I would have been more likely to attend. But it was like since it was...I felt like it kind of like excluded me a little bit. (Therese)

There's not a biracial student association. I don't even know if there should be one. I mean...okay biracial student association; that is so many different things. Multi racial student association. What would you call it? I mean, in the Black Student Association, we know that there are not just Black people there. Same with the Asian American Student Association. So, I mean, the outlets are there for someone who wants to work and find them. For something that's just for

biracial people, no. It's, it's not there. I don't know if it would ever even be there just because so many different biracial people view themselves in so many different ways. (Dorri)

Yeah, you know. But like everybody would just you know to create one student union you know that has you know, different aspects you know. So that every culture, everything would have some sort of representation, you know what I'm saying. Like, there would be an area for, you know for women's, you know development of women's leadership stuff, and you know, you know African American leadership, and like Latinos. And everyone would collaborate and do stuff together you know. Like, I think that would be cool to, to have that. (Leala)

I think if there was...if there is some sort of, similar, place like the Ethnic Student Center on a campus, if the Student Affairs people could recognize that for the, you know tremendous value that it has, and, and, and tap into that as a resource, I think that would be key. I think making, the different functions that they, or you know that they, or I guess maybe services that they provide, making them culturally, a little bit more culturally rel-relevant or culturally sensitive. I think, I think that has co-become an issue, not necessarily like I said for me, but I'm just kind of thinking of things that my other, my friends and peers have mentioned as we were going through you know school. (Kassandra)

I think that there's not really a service that, the university can offer that's supporting wise to multiracial students. I think that that's somethin' that the centers will have to do themselves. I think that the people running those communities will have to recognize that they are going to see an influx. The list when I worked with [a summer program for minority students], there's a huge number of biracial children coming through. And what does that mean. And some are quite open and some are quite guarded, and some are in different phases of discovering what that means to them. And so...I think that...those groups, and those student organizations have to come up with a plan, because they are the ones that know what the issues are. And I don't really know if, it's the university's place to decide this is now an issue and we're gonna start up a multicultural student-I mean it's just one of those things where you're like you already have a culture center, what more do you want to do. (Adrienne)

I just did an evaluation of [The Multicultural Support Center]. They sent me a thing asking me to do a little evaluation. And I said what are they doing well? And I said, oh, my gosh they're incredible. They do this and this and this and this and this, blah, blah, blah. And then it said, what's one area that you believe they can improve in? And I said, that I, that currently they have people assigned to specific racial groups. For example, there's an a-there's an African American specialist, those students who are, who are predominantly, or who identify as African American know that that person you know is there for them, and they can go get resources and they can talk to them. And they have a, they have a Native

American specialist, and I know what they have a, I'm not sure exactly what they call Latino, Chicano specialist. So I'm aware. I, and I, and I made clears that I'm aware of those three sort of specialist positions. I said, what, what I don't know, and I said I'm not being critical, but what I don't know is if mixed race students know who they would go to. Is there a way...are we attracting mixed race students, are we serving that population. That might be discussion that the staff at [The Multicultural Support Center] might want to engage in, to see how we can serve that population better. So I would say, one way, to answer your question, is that we can make sure that the services we offer from culture centers are inclusive and don't, don't in any way make people feel like they don't belong because there are only events for specific group. The need to have open events where people can come and not necessarily have to claim. 'Cause I know people that are really conflicted over. I have a friend who's African American and Native American, and if somebody asks her to choose you know, where we're gonna put the African American people on this side of the room and the Native-She feels really conflicted about tearing herself in half figuring out where to go in that case. And, people might identify one way based on how she looks, but inside she said she feels very connected to both of her parents you know, heritages. So, I, I just wanna make sure we're not doing that to student in, on this campus. So [The Multicultural Support Center] would be one place we could do that clearly.

(Norah)

...I think it would be, well, it would be hard to have like a multiracial center. I think it would be hard. Maybe it wouldn't. I think a lot of it is just the training that folks have. And I can, because I'm taking higher ed-education classes 'cause that's my minor in my Ph.D. program, and so I'm in classes with Masters students, Student Affairs professionals. And they're ignorant; I mean to be honest...so I think better training at least. Even if there couldn't be like a center. 'Cause I think I wouldn't have utilized the center. (Sabrina)

I think it would be neat-my thing is, is a biracial organization on campus would be neat just because it celebrates the diversity of the cam-of the student. Not that the student needs special attention. But at least maybe meet-meeting someone that is biracial. One of their parents is a foreigner. That right there, sometimes you co-if you've ever met anyone that's in the same boat, there's something that clicks with someone who has a parent that's foreign, and has a parent that was a different color, or spoke a different language, or a different religion. So it just kind of gives the communal bond I think sometimes to biracial students. That, that sense of community is nice. But maybe not the sense of community that they maybe need special attention, or special integration in, onto a campus. You know all of those little task force things that we wanna do to make ourselves look better at the university. But just something that's there to maybe help students just see that I'm not the only person. (Dorri)

Just the, the openness, openness. Having like forums where multiracial individuals can go and talk to other people who are multiracial. And, and obviously when you are multiracial, it's very rare to find. Like it's much harder to find people who are the exactly the same as you are. But I think you go through similar experiences to other people who are multiracial because you have that, that conflict within yourself. Like it's not, it's not easy, it's amazing. Like, well you know I'm South Asian, or I'm, oh, from Sri Lanka, or I'm just I'm White and that's it. You have to grapple with both of 'em. And I think that would be—I think a lot of—if, if, even if there were the availability, if the school has the resources or has the students, for even, just a pilot resource, to have like, departments within campus life that actually are just for biracial and multiracial students that wanna come together and talk and meet and discuss what's going on. 'Cause that would have been a val—like if there were something like that, I would of completely taken advantage of it. (Mariana)

Norah, Pilar, and Kassandra described their feeling regarding the categorization of race on university forms:

...forms drive me crazy for lots of reasons which you can imagine, both the 'are you married... No, because I can't be. Are you single? No. You know what I mean, I go down the list and nothing applies. So, but anyway, forms around race can make people feel either very welcome, because they're, you see something that includes you, or like you don't belong...So, so I think, up, updating forms...(Norah)

I mean I really think it has to start with the admissions process. I mean I know they need it for numbers and, and stuff like that, but I really don't think that it should be an issue for them to define who they are. If they wanna mark biracial, mark biracial. But I don't think they should have to put, who they, you know, who they feel they need. 'Cause it's like really, which one do I put first? And does that say...that pers-that's more important to me than the other. (Pilar)

And I, and I don't really think the University provides an opportunity for students of color to feel comfortable. Or even you know multiracial students of color to feel comfortable. 'Cause I even think still, they really want you to pick one or the other, you know, even on the admissions form. You know, I, I, would say the last two years they finally put a biracial category. But even still, they want you to put what cate-category you are. Because again that would bump up their...'Cause if you're White and Mexican, well that's gonna bump up your, your Mexican, or you Latino numbers... (Pilar)

Well, I think, I mean first and foremost, I, the form thing. That is such a huge sticking point for me. And it's, I, I ac-it's funny, I actually appli-I just applied for a job actually at Western in Administration. I had to fill out my Affirmative Action form. And, while their admissions form let you pick all that applied, the next question is, how, how, you know, if you had to choose one, which one would you choose. And I think this notion of forcing people to, I mean if I can, if the, you know, United States Government will let me choose more than one option on

my census form, that's, that gotta be key. We've gotta kinda get out of this binary thinking. Because I think it is so damaging to, to, to force people to choose. It, and, and if, assign some sort of like value judgment. (Kassandra)

And so...but I think, I think this binary thinking contributes to that I guess. That misperception or you know, I don't know. But it, I, I think, I think that's the biggest thing is just allowing people to be fully who they are; and if, even if it just means little tiny administrative things like changing a form, you know. Because I mean for me, I mean we talked about that was, that was my first big experience. My first big like wait a second moment was these stinkin' forms. (Kassandra)

Several participants had other suggestions for making the campus more comfortable for biracial students. Justin suggested having on campus housing options for multiracial students:

...I think that there should be a way, or there could be a way that they could pair people up. Pair multiracial, multiracial people or biracial people, pair 'em up, or somethin' like that. I don't know. You know maybe that would be an idea...

He also suggested placing students from different backgrounds in the same room to experience diversity in a way:

Yeah, I think, I think living is a big part...Yeah, I mean you watch MTV's Real World, or whatever, you see people learning about other people...you know, I, I don't know...But, put the guy that's from the inner city, a Black guy that comes from the inner city, or the Spanish guy that comes from the inner city, big city, or you know, whatever, maybe, or, different background. Put the, put them with the

white kid; the White kid from a town with 20 people.....that grew up on a farm. Put 'em together...chances are, it's gonna work out, and it's gonna benefit both of 'em...And I mean that, you know, if they have problems, so...They have problems, but at least they got to experience it, you know.

Norah felt that diversity training for Student Affairs professionals and a climate study of biracial individuals on campus would be beneficial, "...I'd love to see us do a study like that with our mixed race people, and find out if they felt excluded in discussions in classrooms..." Sabrina suggested a creating a Speakers Bureau where biracial or multiracial student spoke to classes and putting, "a face on some of the, the issues people experience".

Pilar suggested universities create programs specifically for biracial students, ...maybe we have a welcome just for biracial students, so they're not having to pick you know to go to African American Welcome, and, when people say okay, well she considers herself African American, you know what I mean, but then she goes to, the Latino Welcome, and they're like well wait a minute, what are you? You know you went to that one or that one. So I think they need to be supportive in that way.

Support was an underlying theme throughout my interviews. Participants suggested that professionals that work with biracial students provide necessary support while transitioning through their identity development. Additional participants felt it important to continue that support when the biracial student had made a decision regarding their racial identity.

Five participants spoke about providing support for identity choice:

I don't know, except maybe...allow them the comfort to...explore their identity, the comfort to be a part of different communities, and feel okay about that. A lot of times I think we, within higher education, we focus so much on, on diversity and getting people to, you know, interact with other people, which is, is very important to interact with other communities. And, and, you know, it's always important, but I think sometimes we, we hinder out students from affirming their identity within their own groups, and within their own communities. (Nicole)

...if anything, I would just say that administrators need to not classify or pigeonhole a student into a group. If someone comes to you and asks you about the Black Student Association, which is open to even White students, don't ask them well are you even Black when they're asking about a mentor....So I would just caution administrators to not just try to put a student in one group. Maybe there's a student that doesn't even look Asian, but their mother is, and they wanna be a part of the Asian group. Don't question that; embrace it. I mean that's, I think at least maybe that's a start. (Dorri)

I think times are changing. I think it's, it's only gonna change more. I mean it's just, I think that's gonna be the new, I guess the new race is what they call 'em, is biracial or multiracial, and I guess it's just a matter of, of the support that we give them, and how they wanna define themselves. And let 'em know that that it's okay. You know you don't have to pick one or the other. And I think that is, that is changing. (Pilar)

Well, I mean I do think they need services that really support their decision, you know...But I don't necessarily think they should be geared towards, okay, well you need to go to [Multicultural Support Center] because you're a student of color, because some of them may not consider themselves a student of color. So I don't think, I think they should be provided with the same services as any student, but not necessarily told this is where you need to go. They should have that opportunity to pick and decide who they wanna be, and not you now be classified you know as a student of color you know. (Pilar)

...I just, I want people to know that you know I'm neither White nor Indian, you know. I'm both things. And whatever I decide, I can be one or I can be the other, or I can be both. You know what I'm saying? And I don't like people to classify people or label them into a specific thing. Because, you know granted nowadays, in this, in the 21st century, no one is one hundred percent pure of anything. You know, so, not Black people, not White people, not Latino people, especially Latino people. You know not Asian people, and...you know it's just, you know I, I would really, really prefer people did away with, with labels in order to be able to classify people. But, but yeah, just let people know that I can be one, or I can be the other, or I can be both. I'm the only person in this world who can make ma-who can make that decision for me, you know. (Leala)

...just the acknowledgement that...if you want to be both, you can be both. If you don't wanna be both, or three of the races, or however many races you may have in your ancestry, just the knowledge that that person has the right to choose, what, who and what they identify with. I don't think every Irish person runs around on Saint Patrick's Day with you know saying kiss me I'm Irish. They may not even identify with Irish people because they've never been to Ireland, or they can't speak Gaelic or something like that. But, or whatever Irish people speak; I think it's Gaelic. But, just that the, just the fact that that student has a choice. That choice may have come from negativity that they grew up with, from an actual parent or an actual family, prejudice within an actual race; and just be open to the fact to kinda allow that student to explore what they want to explore without being pushy. (Dorri)

...hopefully having people that are more open to people deciding for themselves. And not, I think if it comes down to it is so what if a Black person decides one day to wake up and I'm gonna be Latino today. Why did, why does that, why does that concern me. Like why is that an issue for me. So I think it'd be more of a, I always wish that they'd be around people, and myself too, that would be like, well congratulations you know. Like how does that in—how does that you know change me. It doesn't. (Adrienne)

Two participants stressed the importance of a support system for multiracial students.

...that all students need support services that help them address their issues. That, and, and when I say issues, I mean the non-academic issues. There's, there are a lot of issues that go in students' lives that have nothing to do with academics that make the college experience difficult. And so, in, for biracial students it might be wrestlin' with my identity. So you know a diverse faculty, a diverse student body, and, and some support services. And I think that is critical. (Marcus)

I just suppose some system to guarantee that you know that equality is being attained and sustained. You know and of course the, the support groups that we were talkin' about. But yeah, I mean some, maybe some place to file your grievances you know if you feel that you've been done wrong because of your race and that sort of thing. (Taron)

Two participants described the need to hire student affairs professionals that were open minded and sensitive to the needs of a diverse population:

I just think that there should be people who are working in these cultural areas that should be open to people who identify themselves multi culturally. And who should be able to talk, to talk about these issues calmly and rationally. And I think be open to people who are going to choose to identify themselves as being multicultural, not Asian or Black or whatever. And so I think that they, I think that the, the training is there. I think that you'll, we'll simply have more multicultural people that will turn around and be student affairs people, and then the problem will be, more effectively addressed. So I think it's just more, I think

it's just something that professionals need to become more aware of that. And I think they are. (Adrienne)

I just think it's to remain open. And don't just try to classify that every biracial student you have is going to be confused; every biracial student you have is looking for one group or the other; every biracial student you have is ashamed of their heritage or is proud of their heritage; just recognize that just as any other person, any other young person on campus, they're going to be exploring their identity and what activities they're interested in. (Dorri)

Summary

Participants provided several recommendations for colleges and universities to increase the inclusion of biracial students on campuses. It is suggested that there is no one cure all to improve or decrease the complexities that come with racial identity development for mixed heritage individuals, but emphasis was placed on sensitivity and support from professionals that work with these students. Adrienne provided her take on the issue,

But I don't really know if, if it's—it's not a problem to be solved. I think that's the important part, is that it's not. People need to realize you don't ever solve issues of identity. You simply accept what they are. And I think that that's a, it's a very American characteristic though. Problem? Solve. And so we don't like to exist as a culture with any level of ambiguity....And that's probably why we try so hard to address certain issues, whatever those issues may be; which is part of our charm. It's also why we're such a pain in the ass. So, and I think I'm a

typical American that you always think too much about things. You ponder them. Cost benefits. You write about them. You read about them. And then you still, where are you. So, but I think that's part of the, the interesting part you know. It's better than the alternative which is to act like things don't exist, which I do think a lot of Americans do by saying, oh, I'm not, I don't see race, I don't see color. Really? Who are you trying to kid? So there's, you know, I think people just need to be, and myself included, more honest with ourselves about how we view ourselves and other people.

Participants suggest administrators and practitioners reflect on their opinions and perspectives on race and multiculturalism-on a personal and institutional level. The participants provide recommendations that provide campuses with the chance to look beyond traditional definitions of race and to recreate an environment in an inclusive way.

Chapter 7

Discussion and Recommendations

The following discussion is based on the findings of the study presented in previous chapters. Particular emphasis will be given to the recommendations provided by the study participants. The implications sections include recommendations for postsecondary educators, administrators, and graduate students as they address the issues that pertain to the growing population of multiracial students.

Discussion

Pre-College Experiences

The histories of the participants before entering college were noteworthy in the way they perceived race, race relations, and racial identity once they arrived at college. Participants described an event or experience growing up—either positive and/or negative—that influenced how they identified pre-college. These experiences included their childhood upbringing, family influences, K-12 experiences, and peer influences.

It is important to recognize the significance of family-especially parental influence when working with these students. The findings revealed that parental rearing, siblings, and extended family relationships influence the racial identity development of biracial students. Typically core values and beliefs are taught by the family. Early experiences involving race and culture will set a foundation for an individual's attitude regarding race, ethnicity, and relationships.

Non-issue

The overwhelming presence of the sub theme 'non issue' came as a surprise to me. My personal experience growing up reflected that of my participants' in that race

was a non-issue until I entered college. I had my own reasons for this; for example, growing up in a military community with other multiracial families, or because both my parents were minorities, there was not a large as a social dichotomy such as in a white/black marriage. Even after experiencing this myself, I did not realize the presence of the non-issue phenomena within the biracial experience. I had assest that more of the participants would have had discussions about race and what that meant for their identity in their homes. After the interviews, it was evident that for these individuals, race was a non-issue and often not discussed in the home prior to college.

This finding suggests that higher education must be even more careful and sensitive to the role it takes in the development of the racial identity of biracial and multiracial students. The idea that race was a 'non-issue' for nine of the participants until they attended college means that administrators must be prepared to deal with the shock or "breaking of the bubble" that these students experience. Colleges and Universities are highly racialized environments, students will be faced with decisions regarding race throughout their college careers.

Situational Identity

I was surprised to find that the option of situational identity was not prominent theme. Although there were some shared experiences in which situational identity (described by two participants as a chameleon) was utilized; it was not a prominent concept. Participants remained consistent in their self-assigned roles, including those who described ambiguous identities, even when they were faced with uncomfortable situations.

It was interesting to find that seven of the thirteen participants opted for a monoracial identity. I say this because I employed purposeful sampling to enlist volunteers for the study. My inquiries to identify participants asked for biracial graduate students who were willing to share their undergraduate experiences. I ascertained that the majority of participants would identify with a biracial or multiracial identity. In fact, two of the participants had mentioned initially feeling uncomfortable about participating because they identified monoracially (one as Black and the other as White).

Biracial Plus

Two participants described “other issues” that they were faced with in addition to working through their biracialness. Sexual identity was one issue that both participants discussed candidly in their interviews. As these individuals were navigating through their racial identity development, they also were exploring their sexual identity. One of the participants also pointed out the challenges she faced as an adoptee of White parents. The challenges that these participants described are reminders to administrators that identity development is multi-faceted. Each vector of identity will influence the development of another vector; adding to the complexity of an already challenging situation.

The way in which a biracial student presents him or herself may not be the way in which the individual may be perceived by others. Although a student may physically present monoracially or multiracially, the student may psychologically connect in another way. Making assumptions regarding a student’s racial identity can make a student feel uncomfortable. Six students described incidents when they did not feel as if they were

welcome in certain communities because of the way they looked physically or the way they behaved.

College Experience

The findings indicate that the college experience played a significant part in the racial identity of biracial students. The opportunity to be challenged about their race by various factors in the campus environment allows biracial students to reflect on the way they identify. Although experiences are both negative and positive students are still forced to evaluate who they are and how they are perceived by others. The college experience had influenced the racial development of participants in different ways. It has given some the opportunity to engage in self exploration; it has allowed others to question the realities of race, and for a few it solidified what they already knew to be true.

Eight participants described their experiences with Multicultural Centers, Resources, and Staff. Participants who identified as a monoracial minority or identified strongly with the minority community were more apt to utilize and be involved in these services. Students who identified as white or as biracial described experiences of not feeling comfortable using these resources. Student Affairs practitioners who work with biracial students should provide the opportunity for students to utilize support services, but must not assume and expect that students will take advantage of them. Additionally, practitioners should look beyond narrow descriptions of race and consider biracial/multiracial students when developing programs and services. Practitioners should identify ways in which biracial students would feel comfortable accessing minority-centered resources.

Universities and colleges need to offer a diverse experience for all students. Nine of the participants indicated that diverse classroom experiences, faculty, and staff contributed to their racial identity development. Classes that allow students to discover the contributions of all populations and that provide avenues for self-exploration give students an opportunity to challenge or support their ideals on race. Six of the participants named specific faculty and staff members as individuals who influenced them in college. These diverse students emphasized the impact that these faculty and staff had on their lives. They said that without these individuals they would not have been successful. Additionally, these participants appreciated the contributions these professionals made in their racial identity development.

Support, support, support! This was a mantra overwhelmingly present in the interviews. Participants described support as a necessity in a campus environment. Each biracial student will come with a distinct history and perspective on race. Additionally, they will often present themselves physically in one way, but connect psychologically in another. Each student will be at a different place developmentally and will identify differently. Considering the diversity of the population, administrators, practitioners, and educators must have support mechanisms in place to help these students transition successfully. Although participants were less likely to recommend specific resources, they suggested universities hire administrators/practitioners who are diverse, open-minded, and supportive of biracial students.

Student Affairs Administrators must be cognizant of the diverse experiences students bring with them to college. Seven of the participants noted that biracial experiences were diverse--for every hundred biracial students there are a hundred

different stories. Administrators are reminded that students' perceptions, values, and ideals will be based on their past interactions and experiences. Administrators must be ready to support these diverse experiences, and must be careful not to make assumptions because students are biracial.

Recommendations for Higher Education

Admissions

The university admission process is one of the first places that students are approached with decisions regarding their identity. Three participants described their experiences with admission forms that requested a race--ethnic choice. Many of these forms require individuals to select one option. Understandably these forms help the university identify demographics of their students, yet having only monoracial options does not accurately portray the college student population. Once students select their race--ethnic category, they are identified throughout the university system in this way for the remainder of their collegiate careers.

Upon applying for admission, biracial and multiracial students are immediately placed in an uncomfortable position of choosing their identity. Although this choice may be a "given" for most students, biracial students may feel conflicted about their decision. The participants who described their application experiences found that this was the first time their race was an issue. One participant was particularly passionate about this issue, as her last experience with an admission application was quite negative. She refused to select one racial category and was contacted by admission's staff. They refused to accept her application, because she would not select one race option. Because of this experience, she decided not to pursue admittance into this program.

One participant suggested that university forms, such as those used in Admissions, allow students to describe their racial or ethnic identity rather than give them a select collection of choices. Another option would be to allow the student to select more than one option or offer a biracial choice. Keeping in mind that students may identify solely as biracial and not distinguish between the races, some may identify with both races, and some may identify with one race (Maria Root Border Crossings). And what of those students who reject the whole notion of racial categorization? Do we make it mandatory for these students to make a choice on their applications? Do we deny these students admission into an institution because they refuse to do so? These are concerns that University Admissions administrators must consider. Indeed these can be complicated questions, and they require a breach in our realities--in how we have perceived things must be. In order to suit the needs of a diverse student population, administrators must carefully consider alternatives to the traditional model of admissions.

Financial Aid and Scholarships

Similar to the Admissions process, students who apply for financial aid and scholarships are faced with choices regarding their racial categorization. Race-based scholarships and scholarship programs can be challenging for biracial or multiracial students for several reasons. Some biracial students do not feel a strong psychological connection to one racial or ethnic community that reflects their family heritage. What are the moral ramifications if this student were to apply for a scholarship whose requirements include a specific racial designation? Some students may physically look one way, but identify in another. Will these students feel comfortable about applying for specific race-based scholarships, even if they do not “look the part”? Will they be challenged by

selection committees or by those who have endowed the scholarship? Having sat on scholarship selection committees, I realize that these are realities.

Administrators must consider race-related legalities--for example, Tribal affiliation. Must students have documentation of their race or ethnic affiliations? Are students any less Native American, African American, Latina, or Asian because of a percentage of blood? What takes place when a student disagrees with the legal definition of race? What measures are taken to ensure that students are guaranteed a right to fairly apply for aid and scholarships for which they feel qualified? These are questions that must be addressed by offices of financial aid and scholarship. Biracial students are faced with moral and legal dilemmas that are often overlooked.

Minority Student Centers

Minority Student Centers were developed to support the matriculation and graduation of monoracial minority students. Typically a coordinator or advisor is assigned to a monoracial minority student group to serve as an advocate, to provide programs, and to give advice on behalf of that student population. Few of these centers offer direct support for multiracial students. Rather, biracial students are grouped into a monoracial category. Similar to the admissions and financial aid processes; biracial students are resigned to choosing one monoracial group. Unfortunately, this pressure is coming from a division of Student Affairs that designed to support and guide students of color. Like the rest of the university, the Minority Student Center functions under a monoracial model and students are forced to float between and among monoracial groups (Calleroz, 2003)

Three of the participants who identified with a monoracial category felt comfortable using resources designed for minority students at their institutions. In fact these services provided a safe place for them to voice their frustrations and socialize with other students of color. Two participants who identified with a biracial category also felt comfortable utilizing these programs. These participants held a biracial identity, but were strongly connected to the Latino community.

The other participants chose not to use minority-centered resources for different reasons. One participant was an athlete. His time and schedule did not allow him to fully utilize campus services outside of the athletic center. Additionally, this participant did not feel he had to participate in minority-related events to prove himself a part of a particular community. Another participant, who identified as African American, did not use the services because he had a rigorous academic schedule as an engineering student. He noted that it was not his personality to use these services. One of the participants described being uncomfortable about entering the center or attending culture-based programs. Another participant said that the staff and the students who frequented the center were very certain about their identity. Her identity was quite ambiguous, so she felt uncomfortable interacting with these individuals. One participant described feeling uncomfortable about joining a race-based organization because her peers made her feel uncomfortable about being there.

The findings indicate that students who have an ambiguous identity or do not identify monoracially are less likely to use services for minority students. Four of the participants were not sure if they would use services that were designated specifically for biracial students, if they were available, even though they indicated that minority and

multiracial services are necessary at an institution. One participant acknowledged that a safe space for multiracial students would have helped her in college. Another participant said that a multiracial student organization would be important for the celebration of cultures, but not necessarily as a support mechanism. It is still unclear whether services specifically for multiracial or biracial students would be fully used if offered on campus.

*It is apparent that programming and support services developed by Minority Student Centers are missing the mark with the multiracial student population. For example, minority-specific orientation and open house activities, culture-based student organizations, and requirements for participation in minority based programs typically request a monoracial designation (formal and informal). Formally, the university identifies the student through paper identification, but there is often an informal designation on behalf of peers *and* staff that involves one's physical appearance. Whether formal or informal, treatment by designation ultimately determines if the student belongs or if they are welcome. (Calleroz, 2003)* Staff will need to be creative in developing programs that are inclusive by engaging in a more expansive approach to race.

Student Affairs professionals also must look beyond their personal biases and opinions about interracial dating, marriages, and multiracial families. One participant expressed her concerns about being stereotyped as the “marginal man”--having low self-esteem, feelings of anxiety, and social isolation. The same student described her experience with a program coordinator who questioned her racial identity, making assumptions about her race based on her physical appearance. This was her first experience with the Minority Student Center, and it influenced her lack of utilization of the Center throughout the rest of her college career. It is important for staff to self-reflect

and disregard any preconceived notions regarding the way biracial students should look and behave.

Minority Student Centers must recognize the different needs of the biracial student population. It is expected that staff from multicultural services has a strong grounding on monoracial identity development and survival strategies of minorities in predominantly white settings. Administrators and staff who run these facilities must understand that the traditional models of identity development will not suit this student population. It is important for these professionals to learn about biracial student identity models to have a general foundation of what these students might be facing. It would be helpful to investigate the current survival strategies biracial students have used to navigate within a system that does not acknowledge their needs. Professionals who are responsible for helping students succeed in college must look beyond traditional paradigms of monoracial categories to provide biracial students with the tools necessary for social and cultural survival.

The most emphasized suggestion from participants was that staff who work with students of color be supportive. One participant strongly believed that administrators needed to be selective in the individuals that they hire to work in Minority Student Centers. These practitioners should be open-minded, understanding, and supportive of any identity choice a student makes. Support is even expected at times when the student rejects being associated with the minority population. These students must also be respected for their decisions. Staff cannot take student identity choice personally--because it is ultimately an individual choice.

University Administrators

The training and education of staff who work directly with multiracial students is an essential key in meeting the needs of this population. It will be necessary and perhaps more challenging, to educate the university leadership and senior administrators about the dynamics of this unique population. “The positive aspect of this situation is that staff need not have a grasp of traditional cultural paradigms to understand the experiences of biracial students. What they must have is the sense of responsibility to combat ignorance and assist a student in succeeding” (Calleroz, 2003, p. 176).

One participant suggests institutions introduce a climate study on behalf of the biracial and multiracial student population, similar to studies done with monoracial minorities, women, and GLBT populations. Four participants said that a diverse campus community allowed for greater inclusion, acceptance, and discussion of differences among community members. Campus diversity would include diversity within the enrolled student population, hired staff, hired faculty, class curriculum, and extra-curricular programs, activities, and opportunities.

Key players at colleges and universities such as board members, college presidents, chancellors, and vice-chancellors must consider the changing dynamics of their clientele when making decisions about institutional policy and practice. Decisions regarding admissions, funding, programming, and personnel will be impacted by the growing diversity in the student population. Significant shifts in the traditional higher education paradigm can only be made if university power holders lead the way by acknowledging the multiracial student experience, by educating themselves, and then

instituting measures that support the education and training for the rest of the campus community.

Faculty

The classroom experience proved to be a salient factor to racial identity development. Not only were faculty members significant in supporting the racial identity of students, but the classes themselves provided an avenue for exploration. It is important for faculty to grasp the importance of their role in the identity development of students.

Once again it is important to emphasize the need for a diverse faculty--a faculty that can show students various perspectives on the world. Faculty must be trained to be sensitive to issues of race and ethnicity, especially as we become a more global society. Faculty must look beyond traditional definitions of diversity and narrow categorizations of race.

In the classroom, students should be given opportunities to learn about the histories of their people. They should be given a fair account of the contributions, atrocities, and demographics of their communities. This education will allow students to reflect on who they are, where they come from, and make connections to their ancestors--contributing to the development of their racial and ethnic identity. This will allow students to learn about other cultures and gain an appreciation for a multicultural society.

The classroom should provide avenues for intellectual and open discussions about issues of race and ethnicity. It should provide opportunities for students from different backgrounds to challenge preconceived notions about race. This only can be beneficial to

the students if faculty recognize the sensitivity of the issue and carefully facilitate discussions in a way that is productive.

Faculty have an added opportunity to personalize the experience for students because of their daily interactions with them. Participants in this study named professors who were not only salient to their racial identity development, but played a role in their retention at the institution they were attending. The professors who were described were not all biracial or racial minorities, but they had the following characteristics in common: they invested some time in the life of the student, they openly shared their diverse life experiences, and they each had a broad world view.

Student Affairs Preparation Programs

Student Affairs administrators and practitioners have been leaders on campus in identifying and accommodating new student populations. The field of Student Affairs has yet another opportunity to be proactive in working with a unique student population. The biracial student population is ever-increasing and is reflected in college demographics. Programs preparing students to work with college students must educate them about the experiences, the needs, and the developmental processes of biracial and multiracial students. Authors have contributed to research and information regarding this population are highly recommended for inclusion in course materials. It will be important for students to have a foundational understanding of monoracial identity development models, as well as, biracial identity development models. These resources can include works by Root (1992,1996), Renn (2004), Wardle (2001), Nakashima (1996), and Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander (1995).

It would be highly beneficial for students to have a personal look into the lives of biracial students. The following books are enjoyable, educational, and inspiring. They describe the personal journey of the author or his/her family and include: *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute To His White Mother* by James McBride (1996), *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black* by Gregory Williams (1995), and *The Sweeter The Juice: A Family Memoir In Black And White* by Shirlee Taylor Haizlip (1994). There are many other books written by biracial or multiracial individuals about their experiences. Also, invite a panel of biracial students to come to class so that they can give a personal account of their college experiences and answer questions from the students.

Diversity and sensitivity training is a definite priority for future student affairs practitioners. Students should have opportunities to share concerns and questions about working with students from different cultures. The program should provide opportunities to role play, review case studies, and complete other assignments that allow these new professionals to learn appropriate support strategies and how to assist a student's development in a positive manner.

Students in student affairs preparation programs should take advantage of opportunities to work with students from diverse backgrounds. As students are exposed to different populations and different world views, they have more opportunities to reflect upon their own values and beliefs. The field of student affairs must be stronger at recruiting students of color to pursue the field. It is important to increase the diversity within the division of student affairs on campuses.

Methods

The last two years have been an incredible journey for me as a student, a researcher, a new student affairs professional, and as a biracial woman. As a student, I had the opportunity to look into the minds of multiracial individuals reflected in published books and other avenues of literature; I gained an understanding of identity development theory and college student populations in journals, textbooks, classrooms and assistantships. As a researcher, I have become accustomed to the process of trial and error, the outcomes of motivation versus procrastination, and the concept of building from the ground up. I was given a window into the lives of thirteen biracial graduate students – their childhood stories, their family and peer relationships, and their college experiences. I had a chance to look at the biracial experience from a perspective different, yet strangely similar to my own. I have learned how the experiences of a handful of individuals can challenge current practice and administration in postsecondary settings. I found that indeed changes are necessary to satisfactorily meet the needs of this growing student population.

Personally, I found this research to be challenging and rewarding. In identifying my own biases and misconceptions about the multiracial population, I realized the role my personal experiences have played in creating my perceptions. Careful self-reflection was necessary throughout this study. I relived my own identity development process, questioned why I chose to identify as biracial and identified the factors that influenced my decision. As a result of this study, I have an increased admiration for the multiracial family--for their stories, their struggles, and their successes. I have gained a greater appreciation for the biracial experience and the wisdom that can be gained from it.

As an individual from a multiracial family, I felt compelled to pursue a study that involved biracial individuals. As far back as I can remember, I have felt it necessary to recognize my African-American and Japanese heritages. Although I did not always have the appropriate language, *most* of my life I have been comfortable identifying as biracial. As I entered my first year in college, I began to have questions about my racial identity--impacted mostly by peer influence and the institution's lack of appreciation for the biracial experience. During the last few years, I have discussed my personal story with other biracial individuals and have witnessed the challenges faced by biracial college students. I have discovered that other individuals from multiracial families have had similar experiences upon entering college.

During the ten years I have been in the university setting, I realized that campuses are highly racialized, yet race and ethnic categories are narrowly defined. What does this mean for the biracial student? I do not feel that my identity struggle had a negative bearing on me, but I do realize that it significantly impacted me. For a time, I was unsure of my identity. I was uncomfortable interacting with certain people. I constantly questioned my behavior. My life was quite ambiguous and I was forced to self-reflect. The biracial/multiracial student population is steadily increasing in colleges and universities, yet they are sorely misunderstood. It is necessary to have a better understanding of this diverse and unique population of students to ensure a positive collegiate experience. Thus, I was persuaded to bring attention to this topic.

Subjects

The biracial student population has been growing significantly in colleges and universities. Ironically, the most difficult part of my research was finding multiracial

individuals to participate. In fact, the first three months of the study was spent identifying participants. Initially I had planned to interview undergraduate students at one large, Midwestern, Research I institution. Later, I decided to interview graduate students because I was convinced that they would have had more time to reflect on their undergraduate experiences--and could describe them more thoughtfully. My committee also persuaded me to interview participants from diverse institutions and observe the common themes that emerged--allowing me to make more convincing generalizations.

Finding subjects was problematic for several reasons. First of all, the Midwestern state I lived in had a small biracial population. Additionally, it was physically difficult to identify individuals who were biracial. Race is a very sensitive subject, and I had to be careful to find individuals who would be willing and open to discussing their experiences. At the beginning of my research, I was working with programs for students of color. I was able to identify and have access to biracial undergraduate students, but had little contact with biracial graduate students. The pipeline for students of color into graduate programs is small; further limiting my subject pool.

I began my search at the institution I was attending. I invited the few individuals that I knew were biracial and I felt would be comfortable with participating. I had casually mentioned my research to some of my biracial classmates and college friends months before I began the study--just to inquire about their interest and to let them know that I would eventually be looking for subjects. I kept a mental list of those who voiced interest, and upon IRB approval sent out an official invitation via email to those on the list. Four of the thirteen participants were obtained. I also asked Student Affairs colleagues who worked with minority students on campus to forward names and contact

information for individuals they believed would be willing to participate. I sent them an official invitation to participate via email. Two of the thirteen participants were identified with this method.

In order to find participants from other institutions I solicited old classmates and Student Affairs colleagues working at other institutions for help in identifying participants. One of the thirteen participants was identified in this way. In November of 2003, I presented at a regional National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The topic of the presentation was biracial college students. I obtained a contact list of individuals who were interested in my research and were eager to help when needed. I sent an invitation to participate via email to those on the contact list. One of the thirteen participants was obtained with this method.

My intention was to gain participants through the snowball method. After interviewing participants I inquired about individuals they felt would be interested in participating. I sent out an invitation to each name that was given to me, but did not gain any participants. By February of 2005, I enlisted the assistance of Student Affairs colleagues on NASPA knowledge communities that were culturally based or researched based. I gained six more participants from this method--completing my search with thirteen participants.

Interviews

My first two face-to-face interviews were conducted at two different coffee shops at the participant's request. I found that the participants were comfortable talking in a public place, but noise levels and interruptions from acquaintances were distracting. Two

audio-tape recorders were used to record the interviews during face-to-face interviews. The tapes were more difficult to decipher with the background noise. The remaining face-to-face interviews were conducted at the participant's home or office, which allowed for few interruptions and distractions. Although noise and distraction was an issue for the first two interviews, I do not feel that the participants were any less comfortable.

The three individuals that I interviewed by phone were very articulate and thoughtful about their biracial experiences. They were all open about their experiences and I did not find them any more difficult than face-to face interviews regarding content. I do believe that it took a little more time to develop a fluid dialogue because it was difficult to determine if they had completed their thought or were still thinking. Initially, there were more interruptions and probes. One participant used a cell phone during the interview and we were disconnected several times throughout the interview. I would not recommend using a cell phone when conducting interviews in the future. The phone interviews could only be recorded by one audio-tape recorder. Luckily, I did not have any technical problems during the interviews.

I found that the participants who were more candid about their experiences were those that I knew from previous circumstances, were passionate about the topic of race and identity, had thoughtfully contemplated this topic before, or who were more comfortable about their identity choice. Those who had less to say were unsure about their identity choice, and had not considered the questions before the interview. The participants were open and thoughtful with their responses. This was the case for both face-to-face and phone interviews.

Future Research

The findings of my research have limitations. The qualitative study involved thirteen biracial and multiracial graduate students who described their undergraduate experiences at eleven different institutions. Additionally, data were collected by conducting one interview with each participant. Findings from this study are based solely on the experiences of the participants and my interpretations of them. Based on my findings and relevant literature on the topic, I suggest the following recommendations for future research.

- This particular study involved graduate students' biracial experiences at their undergraduate institutions. A longitudinal study of undergraduate students could provide another insight into the racial identity development a student evolves through during their entire undergraduate career.
- The individuals interviewed in this study are "success stories"—students who successfully matriculated through the system to earn bachelor degrees and are continuing their educations. They knew how to navigate the system; had political, social, and interpersonal skills, and support from home. Researchers should study individuals who could not navigate the system—those who dropped out of college. Additional study should investigate the retention of biracial students and their survival strategies.
- Additional study should explore the diversity within the biracial/multiracial college student population. Differences and similarities faced by biracial students of the same ethnic or racial background should be explored. Difference and

similarities faced by biracial students from different ethnic or racial compositions should be explored.

- Further study into gender difference among biracial individuals should be explored.
- Many studies involving biracial students involve individuals with one white parent and one minority parent. Additional study should investigate the experiences of double minority biracial students.
- Further research should discriminate between pre-college factors that are salient to the racial identity of biracial students.
- Additional study should be conducted to explore the necessity of specific services and support programs for biracial students on campus.
- Future research should focus on campus climate and biracial students. Additional studies on attitudes of faculty and staff regarding multiracial families and their offspring should be conducted.
- Future research should further investigate environmental factors on college campuses that increase the feelings of support in the racial identity development of biracial students.

Dissemination of Research

During the last two years I have presented on the topic of biracial college students at several conferences and have given a limited number of presentations at Midwest University. These presentations have been based on previous research and literature on the biracial student. As I conclude my study, I can now include the voice of my

participants in my presentations. I look forward to presenting these personal findings at local, regional, and national conferences that focus on diversity, multiculturalism, college student population, student affairs, and higher education. I also expect to share my finding with students, staff, and faculty at the institution where I am employed. I plan to submit the findings of this study for publication in relevant academic journals. Finally, as a Student Affairs professional, in my daily work with students, I will use this research as a resource towards advocacy and support of biracial and multiracial students.

Conclusion

The United States is increasingly becoming a more diverse and accepting society. As evident in the recent Census, biracial individuals have become a visible, growing population. With the passing of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and legal victories (such as Loving versus Virginia) the biracial population is finding its voice. Diversifying college demographics will reflect society's biracial numbers, and these students will be expecting their campus community to recognize them as a unique population.

The findings of this study are significant because they reflect the experiences faced by an increasingly multiracial student population. These findings support the work of Calleroz (2003) who found that “ there was a different experience unique to mixed race students, and that while they did not articulate specific needs for specialized biracial services, their stories indicated that their needs as mixed race students were not being met, but rather went unrecognized by the institution”(p.170). We live in a world that is race-conscious and the university environment is highly racialized, yet it is expected to create an atmosphere of respect, inclusion, and learning. Thus, it will be essential for

post-secondary administrators, practitioners, and educators to inform themselves about the growing biracial population.

The study yielded the challenges and frustrations faced by these students upon entering college and also provided a window into the biracial experience. The study provides suggestions for higher education policy and practice in preparing to meet the needs of the biracial student population. Additionally, the study can act as a resource for biracial college students who feel that they are alone in facing the challenges of racial identity development.

Based on the findings of this study and current literature on biracial college students, I have developed the following propositions:

- Parents play a significant role in the development of their children. The home is where values and beliefs are grounded. Children whose parents expose them to diversity and encourage them to celebrate their mixed heritage are more likely to feel comfortable and confident about their identity choice.
- Factors outside of the home such as extended family, peers, and other childhood experiences are also influential in the way a biracial individual perceives him or herself. Negative experiences and positive experiences regarding race and ethnicity will influence the way a child identifies. Additionally, limited experiences with race will influence the child's self-perception.
- College courses provide an opportunity for students to learn more about the world and the contributions of a diverse number of individuals. Specifically, courses that involve human relationships or are racially and ethnically relevant are influential. Courses that offer a diverse curriculum are likely to influence the

racial identity development of biracial students. Additionally, courses that allow students gain a broad worldview are likely to be beneficial to the racial identity development of biracial students.

- The presence of role models in faculty and staff play a significant role in the lives of students. Faculty and staff who are open-minded, sensitive, and supportive are likely to positively influence the identity development of biracial students.
- Biracial students who do not identify monoracially or feel a disconnect with minority communities are less likely to use minority student resources. The traditional monoracial model that is used to create minority-based programs is not inclusive of biracial students.
- Biracial and multiracial students will be experiencing different levels of comfort with their mixed heritage identity upon entering college. While specific resources for biracial individuals may not be necessary, these students will benefit most from a university system that fosters support and is sensitive to their unique situation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
IRB Approval Letter



February 4, 2005

RESEARCH COMPLIANCE SERVICES
Institutional Review Board

Natasha H. Chapman
Educational Administration
115 TC Hall
(0360)

IRB#: 2004-12-123 EP

TITLE OF PROPOSAL: **The Influence of the Campus Environment on the Racial
Identity Development of Biracial College Students**

Dear Natasha:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study. Your proposal seems to be in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

Date of EP Review: **01/21/05**

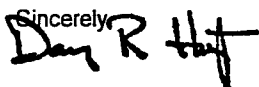
You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: **02/04/05**

This approval is Valid Until: **02/03/06**

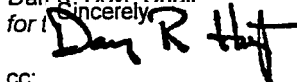
Enclosed is the IRB approved Informed Consent form for this project. Please use this form when making copies to distribute to your participants. If it is necessary to create a new Informed Consent form, please send us your original so that we may approve and stamp it before it is distributed to participants.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for keeping this Board informed of any changes involved with the procedures or methodology in this study. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board. For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

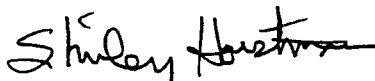
If you have any questions, please contact Shirley Horstman, IRB Administrator, at 472-9417 or email shorstman1@unl.edu.

Sincerely,


Dan R. Hoyt, Chair
for



cc: Dan R. Hoyt, Chair



Shirley Horstman
IRB Administrator

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The Influence of the Campus Environment on the Racial Identity Development of Biracial College Students

I am conducting this study as part of my dissertation at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The purpose of this study is to explore how biracial students describe the role of the campus environment on the development of their racial identity. The results of this study will help educate administrators, staff, and students about factors in the campus environment that influence the racial identity development of biracial individuals. In addition, the research may help to address questions regarding the biracial experience and racial identity development in order to better meet the needs of this student population.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a college graduate with parents of two distinct and different races who can provide rich and thick descriptions for this study. Participation in this research will require approximately two hours of your time. Your participation requires that you meet with the investigator in an interview setting and address questions regarding your biracial experience, your undergraduate collegiate experience, and racial identity development.

Additionally, it is important that you are aware of the following factors regarding this study:

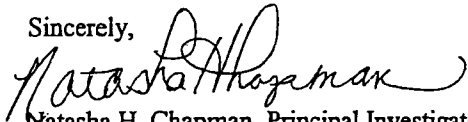
- You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- Participation is anonymous. Pseudonyms will be used in place of the actual names of the participants in order to conceal their identity. The data will be stored and locked in a file cabinet at the researcher's home and will only be seen by the investigator(s) during the study. The data will be destroyed in two years.
- The results obtained from this study may be published in scholarly journals or presented at scholarly conferences and meetings.
- The interviews will be scheduled at times and locations that are convenient for the participant.
- There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.
- The investigator will ask certain demographic questions (e.g. ethnicity, gender).
- By completing the interview you certify that you are 19 years of age or older and that you are consenting to participate in this study.
- You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or during the interview. Questions or concerns regarding this survey may be directed to Natasha Chapman at (402) 472-9419 or email at nchapma1@bigred.unl.edu.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 472-6965.

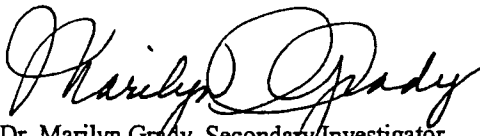
IRB#2004-12-123 EP
Date Approved: 2/04/05
Valid Until: 2/03/06

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

We recognize the value of your time and believe that the potential positive results for biracial student in higher education, as well as other members of the campus community, justify the time it will take you to complete the interview.

Sincerely,


Natasha H. Chapman, Principal Investigator
(402) 472-9419 nchapma1@bigred.unl.edu


Dr. Marilyn Grady, Secondary Investigator
(402) 472-0971 mgradyl@unl.edu

Signature of Research Participant

Date

☐

Please check the box if you agree to have the interview audio tape recorded.

APPENDIX C

Email to Participants

Dear Colleague,

I am conducting a qualitative study entitled “The Influence of the Campus Environment on the Racial Identity Development of Biracial College Students” as part of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am seeking biracial graduate or professional school students who are willing to share their undergraduate experiences as a biracial individual.

If you would like to hear more about my research or if you would like to participate in my study by sharing your biracial experiences, please contact me at (402) 770-6068 or at nchapmal@bigred.unl.edu.

The data collection consists of an interview that will be scheduled at a time and location convenient for you. The interview will address issues regarding your biracial experience, your undergraduate collegiate experience, and racial identity development.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Natasha Chapman
Graduate Assistant
Department of Educational Administration

402-770-6068 (cell)
402-472-9419 (work)
Nchapmal@bigred.unl.edu

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

THE INFLUENCE OF THE COLLEGE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT ON THE RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Interview Protocol

Name: _____	Date of Interview: _____
Location of Interview: _____	Time of Interview: _____

Demographic Information	
Race/Ethnicity of Mother: _____	
Race/Ethnicity of Father: _____	
Gender: _____	Male Female

Introduction:

Thank you so much for visiting with me today. I am very interested in hearing about your racial identity development and about your undergraduate experiences as a biracial/multiracial student. Please feel free to share anything that you feel is important in understanding this topic.

This conversation will be audio-tape recorded and transcribed. I will then ask you to review the transcriptions for accuracy to make sure they reflect exactly what you mean in this study.

Do you have any questions about this interview or about this study? Are you ready to begin?

(Turn on audio tape)

THE INFLUENCE OF THE COLLEGE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT ON THE
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Interview Protocol

Theme: Racial Identity

Question: Describe your racial identity?

Question: Describe your ethnic identity. How do you distinguish this from your racial identity?

Question: How would you mark your identity on a standardized form?

Question: How do you identify with each part of your ethnic or racial background?

Question: How have others responded to your racial identity choice?

Theme: Pre-College Experience

Question: Describe the demographics of your community. Describe your community culture.

Question: Describe the demographics of your high school. Describe your high school culture.

Question: Describe life experiences that have aided in the formation of your racial identity.

Question: How would you compare who you were in high school with who you are now?

THE INFLUENCE OF THE COLLEGE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT ON THE
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Interview Protocol

Theme: Collegiate Experience

Question: Where did you go for your undergraduate degree? What was your major?

Question: Why did you choose your undergraduate institution?

Question: Were there resources that attracted you to the institution?

Question: Which resources did you choose to use?

Question: Where did you live during your undergraduate career?

Questions: How welcome did you feel in your living situation?

Question: Describe your classroom experiences in relation to your racial identity.

Question: What individuals on campus were most instrumental to your identity development?

Question: What activities did they facilitate that were useful?

Question: Was “sticking it out” at the university an issue for you? How did you resolve this issue?

Question: Describe factors that were most salient to the development of your racial identity during your undergraduate experience.

Question: In what ways has your college experience contributed to the development of your racial identity?

Question: Describe how the campus environment did/did not support your racial identity development.

Question: What student affairs resources should be available to multiracial students?

Question: What would be your recommendations for an ideal campus environment for multiracial students?

THE INFLUENCE OF THE COLLEGE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT ON THE
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Interview Protocol

Theme: Current Role

Question: Have you taken a role in helping others who have been in your situation? In what capacity?

Question: How has being biracial influenced who you are today?

Question: Is there anything that we missed that you think people should know?

(Turn off audio tape)

Collecting more interviews:

Do you know of anyone else who would like to share their experiences with me? Could you tell me their name and provide me with their email address? I certainly would like to hear from any individual that might be willing to openly discuss their racial identity development and undergraduate experiences as a multiracial student. Thank you!

Name: _____

Email: _____

Name: _____

Email: _____

APPENDIX E

Transcript Verification Form

Transcript Verification Form

THE INFLUENCE OF THE COLLEGE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT ON THE
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

March 30, 2005

Dear _____,

I would like to offer you an opportunity to review the transcript of our interview about your experiences as a multiracial college student. Please feel free to note, on the transcript, any errors you discover in order to make the information as accurate as possible.

Please check the space below that indicates the level of approval for your part in this study. I truly appreciate your time and participation.

_____ I approve of the interview transcript without reading it.

_____ I have read the transcript and approve it without changes.

_____ I have read the transcript and approve it with changes as noted.

_____ I do not approve of the interview transcript.

Signature of participant

Date

Natasha Chapman, Principal Investigator
Phone: 402-770-6068
Email: nchapma1@bigred.unl.edu

APPENDIX F

Codes and Themes

Code	Translation	Sub-category	Theme
Adoption	Being biracial and adopted	Pre-College	Laying the Foundation
Bicultural	Not a biracial issue, bicultural	Others' Response	Laying the Foundation
Biracial Children	Biracial Children of Participant	Being Biracial	Laying the Foundation
Biracial Exp. Diverse	The Biracial experience will be different for each individual	Words of wisdom	Visions for the Future
Biracial Option	Biracial option on standardized forms	Ethnicity	Laying the Foundation
Biracial Peers		Others' Response	Laying the Foundation
Bisexual/Lesbian	Being biracial and bisexual or lesbian	Other Issues	Laying the Foundation
Both Perspectives	Can view the world from two perspectives	Being Biracial	Laying the Foundation
Built a Shield	Built a shield as reaction to others' response	Marginality	Laying the Foundation
Change Atmosphere	Stayed to change climate, atmosphere	Salient Factors	College Experience
College Choice	Reasons for choosing particular college or university	College Experience	College Experience
College Classes		Salient Factors	College Experience
College Demographics		College Experience	College Experience
College Friends		College Experience	College Experience
College Influence	College influence on development	Salient Factors	College Experience
College Involvement	Participant co-curricular, extra-curricular involvement	College Experience	College Experience
Counselor	Work with multiracial or ethnically diverse individuals	Sharing	Laying the Foundation
Cultural thing	Not a racial issue, cultural issue	Others' Response	Laying the Foundation
Culturally Based Programs	Culturally based program, events, or organizations	Multicultural Resources	College Experience
Definition of Black	Define what is black, how you act black	Others' Response	Laying the Foundation
Didn't like White People	Assumption that participant didn't like white people	Salient Factors	College Experience
Didn't support	The College or University did not support development	Salient Factors	College Experience
Didn't talk at home	Parents did not talk about being biracial	Non-issue	Laying the Foundation
Different than H.S.	Different perspective since High School	Salient Factors	College Experience
Diverse Environment	Diverse campus environment and experiences	Recommendation	Visions for the Future
Extended Family	Response/reaction from extended family	Family	Laying the Foundation
Final Words		Words of wisdom	Visions for the Future
Focused on Academics	Focus on academics influenced matriculation	Salient Factors	College Experience
Friend Influence	College friends had positive influence	Salient Factors	College Experience
High School Demographics		Pre-College	Laying the Foundation
High School Peers		Pre-College	Laying the Foundation
How Identify	Participants race/ethnic identity choice	Ethnicity	Laying the Foundation
How Raised	How participant was raised	Family	Laying the Foundation
Identify more	Identify/Associate more with one race or ethnicity	Ethnicity	Laying the Foundation
Living on Campus		College Experience	College Experience
Mentor	Mentor multiracial or ethnically diverse individuals	Sharing	Laying the Foundation

Code	Translation	Sub-category	Theme
Minority Center	University Minority, Multicultural, Ethnic Center and Resources	Multicultural Resources	College Experience
Need Center	<i>Need a center, safe space for multiracial students</i>	Recommendation	Visions for the Future
Need Support		Recommendation	Visions for the Future
Negotiate with Parent	Communicate with parent about identity choice	Ethnicity	Laying the Foundation
Neighborhood/Community	Demographics, description of neighborhood	Pre-College	Laying the Foundation
Never Victim	Never been a victim of racism	Non-issue	Laying the Foundation
Non-Issue	<i>Being biracial was not an issue</i>	Non-Issue	Laying the Foundation
Not an Option	Didn't feel biracial was an option, had to choose one	Marginality	Laying the Foundation
Open-minded		Being Biracial	Laying the Foundation
Other Box	Other box on standardized forms	Ethnicity	Laying the Foundation
Others' Perception	Identity choice is determined by how others perceive	Marginality	Laying the Foundation
Others' Respond	Others' response to race/ethnic choice	Others' Response	Laying the Foundation
Parent Race/Ethnicity		Ethnicity	Laying the Foundation
Parents		Family	Laying the Foundation
Physcial/Emotionally Different	Physically present one way but emotionally feel another	Words of wisdom	Visions for the Future
Professor Influence	University Professors that had positive influence	Salient Factors	College Experience
Questioned	Opportunity to question in college	Salient Factors	College Experience
Racial Identity Constant	Racial identity hasn't changed since childhood	Ethnicity	Laying the Foundation
Reaction Community	Reaction from Minority Community	Others' Response	Laying the Foundation
Resident Assistant		College Experience	Colleg Experience
Resources Needed	Resources that are needed on campus	Recommendation	Visions for the Future
Self Exploration	Opportunity to explore and learn about self	Salient Factors	College Experience
Siblings		Family	Laying the Foundation
Significant College Experience	Specific experience or incident that occurred in college	Salient Factors	College Experience
Significant Pre-College Exp.	Significant Pre-College Experiences	Pre-College	Laying the Foundation
Similarities and Differences	Celebrate similiarities and differences	Words of wisdom	Visions for the Future
Staff Influence	University Staff that had postive influence	Salient Factors	College Experience
Standardized Forms		Ethnicity	Laying the Foundation
Stereotypes	Stereotypes made by others in college	Salient Factors	College Experience
Sticking it out	Sticking it out at the University was as issue	Salient Factors	College Experience
Student Affairs	Student Affairs contribution to multiracial population	Recommendation	Visions for the Future
Torn	Torn between two worlds, communities	Marginality	Laying the Foundation
Understand the Struggle	Understand the struggle from minority community,	Being Biracial	Laying the Foundation
Volunteer	Volunteer with multiracial or ethnically diverse individuals	Sharing	Laying the Foundation
What are you?	Confusion from others' about race/ethnic identity	Others' Response	Laying the Foundation
Whiteness	Perception of being white, advantages of being white	Whiteness	Laying the Foundation

APPENDIX G

Peer Audit Attestation

HAMPTON UNIVERSITY
HAMPTON, VIRGINIA 23668

THE GRADUATE COLLEGE
(757) 727-5496

July 3, 2005

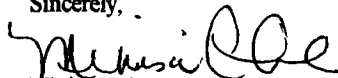
To the Reader:

I have read and reviewed Natasha H. Chapman's dissertation, "The Role of the College Campus Environment and the Racial Identity Development of Biracial College Students." I believe this to be an admirable study of what biracial students can experience on predominately White campuses, and how their experiences relate to their racial identity development and vice versa. Based on my own personal experiences as a biracial undergraduate student and also now as a professional working in higher education, I find Ms. Chapman's presentation of the issue and the conclusions she has drawn to be valid. Additionally, given the relatively limited research concerning biracial students in higher education and the growing demographics of this population on college campuses, her study is quite timely.

Ms. Chapman gives voice to the experiences of and issues faced by a growing number of bi and multiracial students at predominately White institutions. She asks the research participants to provide insight on how to better address the needs of these students, as well as draws her own conclusions for implications of the research. I would be interested to learn how the individual experiences of biracial students might be similar or different at historically (predominately) Black institutions, such as the one I am currently employed; and if the same recommendations would apply.

I believe that Ms. Chapman has done an excellent job of communicating the experiences and feelings of the participants of her study in a manner that is reliable, logical, and practical. I look forward to reading any published articles that are a result of this study.

Sincerely,



Minisa Huls
Graduate College Counselor