WHY DO YOU CALL YOURSELF BIRACIAL?

AN EVALUATION OF RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN BIRACIAL

ADOLESCENCE

A Thesis

Presented to the faculty of the Department of Bilingual and Multicultural Education

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by

Christel Linnéa Cruz

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Department of Bilingual and Multicultural Education

Abstract

of

WHY DO YOU CALL YOURSELF BIRACIAL?

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America has been classifying people by the color of their skin for centuries. The notion of race is a social construct, which the government of United States has utilized to categorize individuals into racial groups. In the past when the mixing of an individual from the dominant racial group and a minority individual occurred, the norm was to automatically label the child after the minority race. However, as mixing between minority groups happened, researchers began to analyze the reasons behind the self-labeling choice of these individuals. This current research attempts to analyze the various factors which influence the choice of identifying with one or multiple races, cultures or ethnicities. The study takes into account the participants; past experiences, racial make-up of childhood versus current peer group, family and school influences. The result shows that the individual understanding of race is different in each participant, and that the identification with an ethnicity or culture takes precedents over identifying with a race.

_____, Committee Chair
Lisa William-White, Ph. D.

_____
Date

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Race through History

America has a complex history when it comes to race and although progress has

been made through activism such as the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's

(naacp.org), race is still a passionate and often sensitive subject to many. From the

beginnings of the United States through the current century, race has been used in politics

in various ways. The ideologies constructed around it have been used to oppress groups

of people throughout history in ways such as not allowing some racial groups to vote; and

by placing others in internment camps based solely on their "race". Although race is not a

biological reality but a social and cultural construct, the idea of racial categorization is

ingrained in the American social structure and in most of her people (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2001), as opposed to the idea of there being one human race.

Race has also been used by American politicians to categorize groups of people

based on the color of their skin in order to gain upward mobility (Porter & Washington,

1993). Because of the politics of race and laws such as the one-drop-rule, most

Americans still feel that they have to belong to at least one of these racial categories

(Darder & Torres, 2004). The term "race" is situational, meaning that it will signify

different things to different people at various times in their lives. Therefore, the definition

of race as it relates to this study will be explored later on in this chapter.

Ever-evolving America

When people refer to America as *the melting pot* to describe the mixing of ethnic groups and cultures, they overlook the complexity of racial identity development. Racial identity development refers to an individual's process of understanding where they belong on the racial spectrum. The generalization of the term *the melting pot* also neglects to take into account its effect on young biracial individuals who attempt to answer the question of *what they are* and *where they fit* within the racial spectrum. Race should be recognized and discussed to allow teens today to develop a positive outlook on their individual racial identity.

Even though the term "melting pot" is used to describe the making of a new American culture, it can also depict the mixing of several different ethnic groups. When people refer to the "melting pot" it often means that the borders between cultures are erased which, in turn, creates a new culture. However, the term holds a negative connotation as it implies a loss of heritage, so for the purpose of this study the phenomenon of mixing ethnic groups will be referred to as **ethnic fusion,** a term the researcher has created for the purpose of this study. The occurrence of ethnic fusion is not to imply the discarding of one culture for another or creating a new one. The combining of cultures and cherishing them all is the meaning intended by this term.

Ethnic fusion is inevitable in a country with such rich diversity as America. For example, the American federal government imposed four racial categories on the 1977 Census form. They were: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander,

Black, and White (census.gov). There were also two ethnicities listed: Hispanic origin, and not of Hispanic origin. As the population of America gained diversity the census form was revised over time to include more races. By 2000 the racial categories had expanded to include the following: White, Black, Asian, American Indian and Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Subcategories were also included under American Indian and Alaskan Native where a person could write the tribe to which they belong, and six specified categories were available under Asian, and three under Pacific Islander. People could also select a box to identify their ethnicity. The categories for ethnicity included: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. Additionally, people were for the first time able to check two or more races when they self identified their race. The 2010 Census was revised again and included an even more detailed overview of a person's race which allowed 57 possible multiple race combinations to be identified.

Today, there are 784,764 United States residents who identified themselves as being both Black and White according to the 2010 Census data. Unfortunately, the data for other race combination was not available on the census which further strengthens the need for additional research about the types of racial combinations that are present in America today. According to the 2010 report from the Census Bureau about half of all Americans will be people of color around 2020 (census.gov). However, it is unclear if this data also counts biracial individuals as people of color. Perhaps the most recognized

biracial person in America is our President Barack Obama whose mother is a White woman from Kansas and his father is a Black man from Kenya. Furthermore, in America, the numbers of children who are born from a racially mixed marriage or union are growing. This is evident in the 2010 census data where individuals had the opportunity to identify themselves as belonging to two or more ethnic groups.

California is a racially diverse state with a developing multiracial population as well. The latest census data presents the following racial classifications and the percentages representing the California demographics: White 57.6%, Black 6.2%, Asian 13%, Hispanic 37.6% and as mentioned above 4.7% identified as bi/multiracial (census.gov). River City County, which is the name chosen for the fictitious county used in this research, reflects the rich diverse population of California in the following ways: White 57.7%, Black 10.4%, Asian 14.3%, Hispanic 21.6% and 6.6% bi/multiracial (census.gov). However, it is important to keep in mind the number of participants in the study as not all Californians responded to the survey. The percentages of participants included: 73 percent in California, 75 percent in River City County (census.gov). Additionally, it should be noted that there are biracial individuals who might not identify as such and on the Census (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2001).

Ethnic fusion is not to be ignored, but that does not mean that researchers, educators as well as parents should be naive when examining the potential social and emotional challenges that teens will face as being a product of two cultures coming

together (Poston, 1990; Tatum, 2004). For example, many Americans believe that racism is disappearing. However, the truth is that it has only developed into subtle acts which are sometimes difficult to detect. Although laws have made an obvious racist act such as lynching a crime, other forms of discrimination are still occurring and often left unpunished and ignored (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Racism is often discussed in the context of history and not as an on-going reality in the defining of America. It is evident through current research and media reports that racism continues to effect people in America today (Davis, 2010). Racism must be included among the possible influences in the lives of minorities, including biracial individuals. As such, it is important to recognize and discuss ethnic fusion to develop a better understanding of the unique circumstances of each biracial individual as part of an effort to learn from, support and honor their experiences.

History of Biracial Research

Research on biracial identity development has evolved over time. It has been developed by building on work from researchers such as Erikson (1968) who wrote about identity development and Cross (1971) whose work focused on racial development in Black individuals. They each analyzed the sense of self and how people come to understand who they are as well as what influenced this perception.

Race as a social construct often leaves the determination of a person's "race" to his/her phenotype (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2001; Root, 2003). This means that the biracial individual will often be categorized and grouped with whatever

ethnic group he/she shares similar physical characteristics. This can happen anywhere, including at school with peers and even teachers as no one is exempt from the "societal stereotypes that link physical appearance to assumptions about cultural backgrounds" (Renn, 2008). Because of the unique situation of biracial individuals face, they may also sometimes experience racism from one or both sides of the ethnic groups to which they belong (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2001). One possible reason for a biracial individual to be discriminated against by one of their own ethnic groups might be that they do not share the same physical features, or phenotype, as is more typically found in that group.

Early research often focused on the marginal situation for biracial individuals as they were identified as being part of a minority group, and the problems of sharing two ethnic heritages (Adler 1987; Stonequist, 1937). Two models were developed in the 1990's regarding biracial identity development; Poston's Five Stage Model (1990) and Root's Four Stage Model (1990). Each model will be described in chapter two. Both models focused on the positive elements of sharing two or more cultures and the possibility of belonging to one or more ethnic groups or a combination of them.

Both of these researchers felt the need for a positive resolution to biracial identity development and what they perceived as previous deficit models (Renn, 2008). Additional research has been conducted using the previous-mentioned stages, which in turn has resulted in new theories (Renn, 2000, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Although many of the later research models for biracial identity development share

similar ideas on what this process includes, there is still a need for continued research as the population of America continues to change.

Some research suggests that the racial identification process of a biracial individual might be challenging for some teenagers as environmental influences play a big role in their development (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2001; Tatum, 2004). If the biracial teen lives in a neighborhood where one culture is more dominant, there might be a natural pull toward that culture. Rockquemore and Brunsma provide several examples of this phenomenon in their extensive study where the pull factor also includes the positive experience with one race over the other (2001). Additionally, their home environment and those with whom they associate, often influence which culture and race they identify with (Rockquemore & Brunsma 2001). Their study also describes a push factor where a biracial individual has had bad experiences with one of their ethnic groups and has made a conscious choice not to identify with that group.

Statement of the Problem

The main focus of this study will be to answer the following questions: What social and academic challenges, if any, are faced by biracial high school students? Do biracial individuals recognize social experiences as an influence on their choice of racial identification?

The aforementioned questions are framed because adolescence is a time where teens actively attempt to figure out where they belong in social groups at the high school level and within other social settings in life. Some individuals have developed a positive

sense of their identity which has been accepted by their family and peers. However, for most teenagers, this time in their life is a period of self-doubt, wanting to fit in, and questioning what life is all about (Tatum, 2004).

High school can be a time for developing friendships, allies and interests, in addition to a keener awareness of personal identity. Erikson expressed that the most important "task of adolescence is to form a stable identity" (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2001). However, on the path of this process of discovery there are challenges which face most kids, such as not finding which social group to relate to, or being exposed to bullying (Goddard, 2007). These issues have the possibility to academically, socially and emotionally cripple those students who have not yet developed an assured sense of identity and self-worth. As the above-mentioned trials and tribulations face all students, mono-racial individuals face them on terms different from those of biracial teens, as their racial identity is not questioned (Helms, 1995).

The current study will examine how situations such as the ones mentioned above would affect a child born into a family with parents from different cultures and ethnic groups. It will also evaluate how their previous experiences with either ethnic group have or have not affected their choice of racial classification. These environmental and social elements will be discussed further in chapter two. And although this study does not intend to focus on the academic challenges biracial youth face, it is important to recognize the social and emotional influences within schools which act on this

population. As a researcher and educator, one also has to ask ones self *how children who share two or more ethnic groups are expected to identify who they are in an academic environment which is based on either-or-binaries?* How will these individuals answer the question: *what are you* if what they learn at school focuses on mono-racial individuals alone?

The goal of this study is also to highlight the academic and social challenges biracial teens face or perceive they face, and to examine their perspectives on the positive aspects of being biracial. It is the belief of the researcher that working with the participants in this study can bring their social and academic needs into focus, as well as guide the framing of future curriculum towards the needs of the biracial teen. This is necessary in as much as most American schools are facing greater racial and ethnic diversity in the student population.

Significance of Study

This study will focus on the racial identity development and the social influences which shape the biracial individual. Ultimately, the result of this study will guide researchers, educators, curriculum developers and parents through the complex path of racial identification among biracial individuals. It is important to develop an understanding of the possible challenges that might face a biracial teen if we are to support them in their effort to embrace their racial identity development. It is hoped that the results of this study will lead to further research, relative curriculum and discourse among educators, parents and students.

Although this study will be conducted with the help of adolescent participants, their pre-adolescent experience with racial identity is primary to examine the degree to which individuals are influenced by their environment (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2001). The idea that biracial individuals develop their racial identity at a young age leads us to understand that family and educational support needs to be developed at an early stage.

However, perhaps more importantly, this study can be used as a tool for the participants and their families to start a dialogue about what racial identity means to them. As a discussion is initiated it will allow family members to evaluate their own idea of race and ethnicity and possibly share their own experiences with racial identity. It is the hope of the researcher that through this study the biracial participants will think critically about their identity and evaluate their answer to the question; *what are you?*

Definition of Terms

It is important to know that the words *race* and *ethnicity* mean very different things and should therefore not be used interchangeably. As mentioned above, race is a social construct and the term focuses mainly on physical phenotype, such as skin color and facial features. Ethnicity on the other hand, speaks to group characteristics such as nationality, tradition and culture. For the purpose of this study, ethnicity will be used more frequently as it is the belief of the researcher that we belong to ethnic groups and not racial groups. Therefore, *ethnic fusion* rather than *racial fusion* was chosen to depict the combining of culture and tradition. Other terms have been used to describe ethnic

fusion and biracial individuals, such as swirl, mixed and mestizo (swirlinc.org, merriam-webster.com) among many others.

Definition of Terms used in Study

Bi-cultural -   being of two cultures

Biracial -   having parents who are of two "socially designated" racial or ethnic backgrounds (Root, 1996, p. ix); "Person who identifies with two racial groups" (Valdez, 2009, p. 4)

Culture -   a set of customs, traditions and social interaction shared among people

Ethnicity -   ancestry, individuals whom share common descent and culture

Ethnic Fusion -   The racial and ethnic combination of two or more cultures combining without omitting each other

Intersectionality - "the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings." (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 51)

Marginalized -   to relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group (Merriam-webster.com)

Mestizo -   a term to describe a biracial individual, specifically a person of mixed European and American Indian ancestry (Merriam-webster.com)

Mixed -   combining of two or more racial or ethnic backgrounds

Multiracial -   an individual where at least one parent is biracial and the other

parent does not share either race.

Race -   a socially constructed notion which includes grouping individuals

based on similar physical traits

Social Relations -   interactions among persons in environments such as school,

neighborhood, work, sport clubs etc.

Swirl -   a term to describe a biracial individual (swirlinc.org)

Limitations of the Study

This study is designed to evaluate the findings of current research and its

relevance to the biracial participants in this study, as well as to challenge the existing data

which is limited by the number of participants and racial combinations.

In addition, the participants in this study belong to one or more minority groups

and it is assumed by this researcher that they have experienced oppression in the form of

racism in one way or another. However, this is a recognized assumption and will not

affect the data collected from the students.

The number of participants was kept below ten individuals to allow sufficient

time to collect and analyze the data. Therefore, the results of this study will be limited to

the individual experience of these participants and cannot be applied to all biracial teens

in River City County or the United States.

The initial location of the study was to take place at a local high school and

involve one-on-one interviews with the participants. Unfortunately, there were

unforeseen problems with the location and the study had to be revised. The new location for the study was set to involve children from a local charter school. The challenge with this new location was to obtain access to the participants because the instruction is conducted online as a home study program. The researcher was reliant on educators to identify possible participants to complete the survey in connection with this study. Fortunately, the administration was accommodating in providing the researcher with demographic data and other information necessary to complete the study.

As a professional educator, a graduate student and perhaps more importantly, a mono-racial person, the researcher would not be considered an insider by the biracial participants. Due to the last mentioned challenge, the researcher is aware of the possibility that the answers given by the participants can be affected. However, as the research will be conducted on-line without personal contact between researcher and participant, the researcher's identity will remain confidential apart from her name. The on-line survey poses another limitation because of the impersonal nature of on-line research. The researcher will have no interaction with the participants and can therefore make no interpretations based on body language, facial expressions or overall impressions.

Another limitation is the fact that the participants will possibly have conflicting experiences with biracial identity development which will affect the validity of the result of the survey. Their socio-economic status is not analyzed in this study and can therefore

not be a factor in evaluating similarities in their experience. The students are not all located in the same area and because their studies are on-line there is no common social environment to analyze further. The goal is to find a common theme through analysis of the participants' answers on the survey to determine the strength of existing research such as that of Rockquemore and Brunsma (2001).

As mentioned above, the fact that the researcher is mono-racial limits the insider view of the experience of being biracial. The researcher will have to recognize her own biases and be aware of her own experience with racial identity development. She will also be cautious of making strict generalizations and assumptions based on the participants' answers on the survey. The analysis of the surveys will be open for interpretation as the questions were developed by the researcher. The result of the answers will be unique to this study and cannot be applied to all biracial individuals.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

America has come far in the recognition that race is not as simple as the

categories of black and white. Discourse and research on bi-racial and multi-racial

individuals is not a new phenomenon in America. It can be traced back to the slave trade

era where the concept of the one-drop-rule became a marker for a clearly delineated

difference in racial identity. This became clear when, in 1790, Thomas Jefferson

articulated the concept which only recognized White or Black as racial identities (Wright,

1994). This meant that if anyone in a person's family lineage had Black heritage, that

person would be classified as Black (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). The reason

behind the one-drop rule was to classify Black individuals and make it easier for the

different states to enforce such laws as forbidding interracial marriages (Roth, 2005).

Many plantation owners supported the mandate clearly because it increased the numbers

of people who could be considered slaves, and this in turn increased their work force and

their economic gains (Wright, 1994).

Although race mixing has occurred since the founding of America as we know it,

there has been research into its effects on society at the time. Some people even believed

that each race had its own blood type (Wright, 1994). The work conducted by geneticist

Charles Davenport in 1929, made outrageous claims that racial mixing would create a

cognitive lesser human being, and this way of thinking set the tone for how biracial individuals were treated long after his study was completed (Vanouse, 2002).

Later the census began to recognize mulattos as being a mix of the two previous races and included that option on the form. "In the 1890 census, gradations of mulattos were further broken down into quadroons and octoroons" (Wright, 1994, p.3). Although the one-drop rule is no longer a law in America, many African American individuals have internalized the concept and identify themselves as Black despite their biracial membership (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Roth, 2005). Since the legalization of interracial marriages in 1967, the numbers of mixed marriages have increased, thus producing more biracial children. Consequently, the number of interracial marriages went from 150,000 in 1960 to over a million in 1990 (Roth, 2005). With the racial mixing of people came new challenges in racial self-identification and researchers begun to analyze how people came to answer the question: *what are you*?

Research documents the complexities of identity development and the social and environmental influences which shape a persons' sense of self. Perhaps the most recognized research regarding this topic is that developed by Erik Erickson (1968). Although his research focused on the development of identity as a whole and not specifically racial identity, his findings inspired later researchers such as Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002); and Bracey, Bamaca and Umana-Taylor (2004) among many others.

Today, researchers look beyond the historic racial classifications to examine factors which shape an individuals' choice in racial classification (Helms, 1984, Helms & Carter, 1990; Phinney, 1990; Porter & Washington, 1993; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002; Bracey, Bamaca & Umana-Taylor, 2004). Their work, among others, guides current research in understanding of biracial identity development and how to adequately provide psychological, social and academic support regarding this process.

Ethnic Identity Development

Ethnic Identity is a complex process, as it reflects the cultures, traditions and values to which people relate, rather than the color of their skin (Wright, 1994). While there have been several theoretical writings regarding ethnic identity (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984), little empirical research has been conducted on the subject, or about the attitudes one holds regarding one's own ethnicity among the American minority populations (Phinney, 1990; Porter & Washington, 1993; Tatum, 1999, 2004). Some studies include generalizations of ethnic groups such as Hispanics or Asian Americans, which are too broad to be considered accurate (Porter & Washington, 1993). The focus of most studies has been on minority children's racial misidentification or the fact that they often identify with White stimulus figures (Phinney, 1990; Tatum, 2004). This means that researchers have examined the affect that majority-group role models, and symbolic representations have had on minority youth. Although early examination of what influences one's ethnic identity is important, it is crucial to further analyze this developmental process as one moves into adolescence and adulthood.

Throughout adulthood individuals are emotionally and culturally affected by the majority ethnic group. If the dominant group has adapted a negative generalization about the characteristics and/or traits of a minority group, it can negatively influence the way that minority individual's view themselves (Phinney, 1990; Tatum, 1999, 2004). When this is the case, it is often because the ethnic identity of the minority person is still developing and is easily challenged by internalization of other people's views regarding one's ethnicity. For instance, some minority families will unfortunately distance themselves and their children from their own ethnicity because of various reasons. Some have a low self-esteem regarding their ethnicity and find it more comfortable identifying with the dominant group (Porter & Washington, 1993), while others would place no importance on race in their family setting (Tatum, 2004).

When some minority families find themselves surrounded by the dominant culture they find other ways to maintain the connection to their ethnic group. Tatum found that in her studies of Black families in predominantly White communities, they seek out cultural events and other families to strengthen their children's racial and ethnic identity (1987, 1992, and 2004).

Two models describe what minority individuals may experience during the development of their ethnic identity: the first one provides a linear model where strong ethnic ties are on one end and strong mainstream ties are on the other (Phinney, 1990; Porter & Washington, 1993). This either-or-model suggests that an individual who is

interested in developing a stronger connection to one's own ethnicity cannot also be interested in developing a strong connection to the mainstream identity or visa versa. According to this model, people may lose their ethnic ties in an effort to assimilate into a dominant identity. However, there are clear limitations with this model, as it does not factor in the areas in the individual's life where he/she is interacting with, and is a member of the mainstream culture due to one's mixed ethnic heritage.

The other model presents the theory that one can keep one's relationship with both of one's identities and that these identities can co-exist. This means that one could have a strong sense of both personal and group identity, as well as be confident around the majority population. The latter model seems more plausible as an individual may develop a strong ethnic identity while also learning how to maneuver socially within the dominant culture (Gordon, 1961; Tatum, 2004).

There is always the question of assimilation and to what extent it is an issue that minority groups must continually negotiate within American culture. "Assimilation refers to economic, political and social integration of the ethnic group into the mainstream society" (Porter & Washington, 1993, p. 142). Milton Gordon explains assimilation by differentiating between behavioral and structural assimilation (1961). Behavioral assimilation refers to individuals who have lost their own ethnicity through adoption of the dominant culture. Structural assimilation refers to the minority individual's ability to function in a society which is run by the dominant ethnic group (Gordon, 1961). It is

important to emphasize the distinction between the two as minority groups and biracial people should know that it is possible for them to honor ethnic origin in a dominant society, without assimilating in a manner where one experience's cultural loss.

Some researchers on ethnic identity have examined the relationship between an individual's attitude towards their ethnic identity, their psychological well-being and self-esteem (Porter & Washington, 1993; Tatum, 2004). There is also a need to distinguish between group and individual self-esteem as it relates to both ethnicity and race. This means that the attitude relating to one's own racial/ethnic identity greatly influences one's individuality, while the opinion about to which racial/ethnic group one belongs is a separate entity (Porter & Washington, 1993). Studies show that children and adolescents that have a strong ethnic identity have been exposed, through parents, teachers and community members, to literature relevant to their ethnicity, as well as having heard positive messages and stories about their ethnic group (Phinney, 1990; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Although there are many minority groups in America, it is important to recognize that the experience of each ethnic group will vary from each other. A big reason for this is the varied groups' historic past and its affect on them in relationship to the dominant culture varies. For example, in many of the studies conducted on racial and ethnic identity, many examine the African American experience (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Tatum, 2004). While Africans were forced to live in North America as enslaved

people, most Hispanics and Asians immigrated to America for various reasons. Because

of the long lasting oppression of African Americans in the United States, support groups

began to form within the ethnic group (Porter & Washington, 1993). During the Civil

Rights Movement of the 1960's, African Americans strengthened their racial identity by

joining Black pride groups in which their racial and ethnic identity was honored (Porter

& Washington, 1993).

It is also important to distinguish between minority groups who have been

clustered together by socially constructed terms such as *Hispanic* and *Asian*. These terms

make it easier for politicians as they target certain groups to gain votes, but they fail to

recognize the identities of varied individuals that these terms encompass. Under the

umbrella-term Hispanic, there is an array of ethnic groups with different cultures,

languages and whose origins are from different countries (Porter & Washington, 1993).

Some of these ethnic groups include: Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans.

The same goes for ethnic groups such as Vietnamese, Koreans and many others clustered

under the term *Asian*. The term does not take into account the varying levels of

educational achievement or the socioeconomic challenges which vary greatly among the

many ethnic groups (Porter & Washington, 1993).

Racial and ethnic identity is important in the evaluation of bi-racial identity

development as at least one, and in many cases both parents will belong to a minority

group. Whether or not this parent has a strong ethnic identity will be situational,

depending on his/her experiences. Whatever the parent's feelings are regarding ethnic identity, these feelings will likely influence the child; they must therefore be taken into consideration as family attitudes will affect the racial identity development in the child (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Moreover, if a child has one White parent, it is necessary to avoid assuming that all White individuals view race and ethnicity the same; thus, examining White racial and ethnic identity is important.

 White Identity Development

Many researchers on white privilege agree that there are stages of awareness for an individuals' White racial consciousness (Helms, 1984, 1990, 1995; Tokar & Swanson, 1991). This is important because "White privilege" refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Much of the research regarding racial identity development concerns minority racial development or how it compares to the majority racial group. Consequently, it is important to understand the elements of White identity development as many bi-racial people have a parent who is White. Although there has been some research about the development of White racial identity (Helms, 1984, 1990) the amount of data is still limited. Janet Helms developed a five stage model to explain her findings of White racial identity development (Helms, 1984) that can help researchers to understand the complexity of identity development. The stages identified are: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence and autonomy (Helms, 1984). Within this

framework, Helms later produced an assessment called WRIAS (White Racial Identity Attitude Scale) with a colleague (Helms & Carter, 1990). The scale was designed to measure the racial consciousness and development in White persons, specifically counselors. Around the same time she added a sixth stage to her model called immersion/emersion (Helms, 1990; Tokar & Swanson, 1991).

Helms states that there are six stages of White identity development and the understanding of race and ethnicity (1984). The first stage Helms called *Contact.* An individual at this stage has a very limited view of what racism is and will often claim that they adhere to the color-blind view of race (Tatum, 2004). These individuals will not recognize discrimination in society and will often accept stereotypes about other ethnicities without critical analysis (Helms, 1984). Contrary to the first stage, the next stage, called *Disintegration,* recognizes that racism exists, but a person at this stage carries conflicting feelings about one's own opinions on race. At this stage an individual may claim that he/she thinks people should be able to marry outside their race: however, they would not approve their children marrying outside their own race. People at the *Reintegration* stage have developed a superior view on their White race and feel that minorities have themselves to blame for their situation. These individuals often feel that anyone can succeed in society as long as they try hard. It is not until the following stage, *Pseudo-Independence*, where the individual begins to recognize racial injustices in society. The person might attempt to examine their own prejudice as well as seek out

minorities to learn about their culture. However, they often chose ethnicities that resemble their own. The final two stages, *Immersion/Emersion* and *Autonomy* are where a person first recognizes their White privilege, can critically examine the issues of race and their part in actively fighting racism in society. Finally, the individual no longer feels guilty about one's own Whiteness and becomes increasingly knowledgeable about ethnic groups and the value of a diverse society.

Although Helms's studies focused on counselors and their Whiteness, which potentially affects their ability to help their clients, her findings can also be applied to other areas in society. As most teachers in America today are White women, the WRIAS should be incorporated to evaluate the racial attitudes towards the minority students (Helms, 1990). This does not mean that teachers should be singled out as having prejudices towards their students; instead all staff should be involved in a self-evaluation process and discussions about what identity means, and how views impact perceptions of people. After individuals analyze their attitudes about race, the possibility of working with and supporting their minority clients will be strengthened.

Biracial Identity Development

Although the social situation for biracial individuals have changed over 200 years there is still controversy regarding the subject. The progress on the 2000 and 2010 Census forms which allowed individuals to check multiple boxes for their race was the cause of great discussion both before and after the survey was conducted. Some argue

that people should not have to classify their race or ethnicity on government surveys, while others pushed for the multi-race option (Will, 2002).

Researchers in the past have studied the impact of social aspects on racial identity development (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002, Root, 1998; Tatum, 2004). These studies have shown that there is not one racial identity process which is true for all biracial individuals. Therefore, contemporary research has to include the individual experience to allow a more accurate depiction of biracial identity development. Some of the factors which have to be taken into consideration are: family make-up, personality, cultural values, and social environments among many others (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1998). The complexity of an individuals' racial, as well as gender and sexual identity is reflected in the following personal poem;

Living in the borderlands of racial identity

by Gloria Anzaldua:

"To live in the Borderlands means you are neither hispana india negra espanola ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed caught in the crossfire between camps while carrying all five races on your back not knowing which side to turn to, run from;

To live in the Borderlands means knowing that the india in you, betrayed for 5oo years, is no longer speaking to you, that mexicanas call you rajetas, that denying the Anglo inside you is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;

Cuando vives en la frontera

people walk through you, the wind steals your voice, you're a burra, buey, scapegoat,

forerunner of a new race, half and half-both woman and man, neithera new gender;

To live in the Borderlands means to put chile in the borscht, eat whole wheat tortillas,

speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent; be stopped by la migra at the border

checkpoints;"

The excerpt from this poem describes the complexity that surrounds identity development that takes into consideration racial, gender and sexual preference, and how these elements are a part of the intersectionality of all individuals. Anzaldua explicitly explains the challenges of belonging to several ethnic groups, and the destitution experienced as their membership is not being recognized by these groups due to their multi-racial status.

An individual with parents from two different ethnic backgrounds develop their racial identity based on several factors as mentioned above, such as environment, family culture and life experience. Therefore, this person will often experience their biracial identity differently than another biracial individual, even if they share the same household (Root, 1998). For instance, Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) presented four variations of racial identity development in their Black and White biracial participants. Although their study was limited in the numbers and racial combinations of participants they used, these four categories: Border Identity, Protean Identity, Singular Identity and Transcendent Identity, present a clear perspective of the complexity of racial identity development for biracial individuals.

Border Identity

Individuals who identify with the border identity are aware that they are biracial but also that it is a border identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). This means that some of these individuals have been accepted by their social group as being biracial, while others are not recognized as such. One of the most determining factors for acceptance as biracial is appearance. If an individual can "pass" as White and has grown up around predominantly White peers, it appeared that their biracial identity would be accepted. However, if one's features are more similar to those of a Black individual, and they grew up with a predominantly Black social network, then their biracial identity would be less likely accepted (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Lusk, Taylor, Nanny & Austin, 2010).

Protean Identity

The individual's who falls under the Protean Identity category does not experience their biracial identity as being part of one ethnicity or the other. Instead, they have developed a flexible racial identity and will act according to context and move between the different races as they see fit. Therefore, the individual who falls under the Protean Identity can identify with either the ethnicity of the mother or the father, or as being biracial (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). The Protean Identity is based on the individuals' ability to change his/her racial identity to accommodate various social situations. An example of this would be a biracial individual attending a family gathering on one side of the family where he/she will practice and identify with the cultural

customs of that race. This same individual can also participate in cultural customs on the other side of the family as well (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Tatum, 2004).

Singular Identity

Perhaps the most socially influenced identity is that of the biracial individual who selected to identify with a Singular Identity. Singular Identity means that the choice has been made to identify with only one of the ethnicities. The choice is often influenced by factors such as having experienced more social connections and positive experiences with the chosen race, as well as with one's own phenotype. Some of the individuals in the Rockquemore and Brunsma study expressed that they related to others largely based on their similar physical features (2002). According to these researchers, the element of pre-adult social networks proved to be another determining factor for individuals choosing a Singular Identity. The individuals identifying with only one of their ethnic backgrounds described their pre-adult social network as mainly containing peers of that one ethnicity. Participants shared that their adult social networks were also made up of individuals of that one ethnicity (Phinney, 1990; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Transcendent Identity

Although the participants who identify with this category also recognize the significance of appearance when identifying themselves racially, they do not consider race a defining element in their identity development. However, appearance was also a factor for these individuals, though not as influential as the other variations of racial identity mentioned above. Perhaps the defining difference between those individuals who

identified with the transcendent identity versus the other three options was the make up of their social network. "Transcendents had the whitest social networks of all respondents" (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002, p. 72). The transcendent individuals also feel that race is a social construct and therefore does not place a high importance on race as factor in their identity development (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Lusk, Taylor, Nanny & Austin, 2010).

Appearance and Intersectionality

Although the findings of Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) describe four possible identities for biracial individuals, it is important to acknowledge that not all people will choose to identify with one of the four. Root (1998) recognized that biracial individuals might have certain experiences based on factors such as phenotype, but this does not necessarily determine their choice of racial identity. Additionally, individuals who grow up in the same family environment do not necessarily share the same choice of racial identity (Root, 1998).

In our society people often focus on and judge others by how they look and make assumptions based on this information (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Prejudices such as assuming that an individual belongs to a certain race are common, and often less offensive than blunt racial slurs. Nonetheless, these assumptions can be hurtful to the person on the receiving end. People are complex beings with strong individual traits which are often hidden to the naked eye. "Intersectionality means the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays

out in various settings" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 51). Individuals who presume they share race and culture with someone will often overlook that person's intersectionality. As a result, there is often miscommunication and conflict. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) describe some scenarios in their study where individuals are discriminated against based on the intersectionality of their positionality to several minority groups. This means that an individual can experience life from the position of a minority while also belonging to the dominant societal group by being biracial. Biracial people will often experience situations where their bicultural experience will be tested and even questioned, especially if their appearance is somewhat ambiguous (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Studies have shown that appearance is of great importance for racial self-classification in bi-racial individuals (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). If the person shares the phenotype with one of his/her parents more so than the other, it is likely that they will identify with that parent's race, although this is not always the case. If that parent is White there is an increased chance that the person will identify as biracial. Appearance also affects the chance of the biracial identity being validated by the individual's own community and society overall. As mentioned above skin tone alone does not determine the racial self-classification in a biracial individual (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002 ; Root, 1998).

Positive Approach vs. Deficit Model

In early research there was a clear focus on the challenges facing biracial

individuals as they developed their understanding of how to racially identify themselves

(Poston, 1990). Some of the research highlights the negative experiences of individuals

who had been forced to choose one of their races and ignore the other (Poston, 1990;

Tatum 2004). Biracial identity has not been recognized as such according to national

surveys such as the Census. However, the more detrimental challenge has possibly been

the lack of social acceptance. Many researchers have written about the marginality of

biracial individuals and their struggle of not fitting in with either one of their racial

membership groups (Poston, 1990).

Contrary to the deficit focus by some researchers, there are many other scholars

who have researched and written about the positive influence of sharing two races and

cultures (Poston, 1990; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1998). These studies have

provided data which shows biracial individuals who have embraced their biracial identity

and who feel comfortable sharing more than one culture (Rockquemore & Brunsma,

2002; Root, 1998).

Self-esteem in connection to bi-racial individuals is a major factor in the racial

self-identification process. Research has focused on the minority standing of biracial

individuals with the assumption that their marginal status of not fitting in to either racial

group, meant that they had low self-esteem as they did not belong to either racial

category (Bracey, Bamaca & Umana-Taylor, 2004). It was believed that belonging to

multiple ethnic groups would be difficult for biracial individuals and thereby create problems with self-confidence (Brown, 1990). However, as later research provided more complex analysis of the multiplicity of identity choices for biracial individuals, it becomes evident that they no longer merely fit the marginal category (Bracey, Bamaca & Umana-Taylor, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Although more studies have been conducted about biracial individuals and self-esteem, there have been conflicting findings. Some studies have found that biracial people have a stronger self-esteem compared to their mono-racial peers (Brown, 2001). However, there are studies that report that the opposite is true (Martinez & Dukes, 1997). Possible reasons for the inconclusive results could be low numbers of participants in the studies as well as grouping different minorities together and not taking their socio-economic status into consideration (Bracey, Bamaca & Umana-Taylor, 2004). These examples further emphasize the need for additional research into the self-esteem of biracial people and the complexity of identity development.

Race and Education

Although this study is not solely focused on the academic challenges that biracial youth face it is also important to recognize the social and emotional influences on this population. For example, there is still a cultural gap in many K-12 public school district's adapted curricula for students who have a different culture than the students of European American decent (Ginwright, 2004; Nieto, 2001). This makes it difficult for many teens to relate to the learning context and materials, particularly if they belong to a minority

group that is not represented in their learning. Although attempts have been made to adapt to and celebrate the diversity in schools with multicultural education (Banks, 1995) this focus is still illusive. This is increasingly evident as one examines what multicultural education is. For instance, Banks defines MCE, "As an idea or concept, multicultural education maintains that all students should have equal opportunities to learn regardless of the racial, ethnic, social-class, or gender group to which they belong" (Banks, 1995, p. 391).

However, isolated units of MCE often single out famous events and people of a certain ethnicity. Although these events and people might be significant to the American history, it is more important to make lessons relatable to the students' lives. By relating the subject matter to the students it can support their sense of self and strengthen their racial identity development (Banks, 1995; Ginwright, 2004). However, MCE without curriculum reform is insufficient and can therefore not be considered a support for students outside the racial majority population (Banks, 1993, 1995; Nieto, 2001).

In addition, in the event that a school has adapted a MCE curriculum it will do little to support minority and biracial students if their teachers are unable to connect with their students. Although most of the research by Helms is based on counselors, the levels of awareness can be applied to any White individual, such as a teacher or parent, to evaluate their White privilege awareness. The theory of White privilege and Whiteness relate to this study as some of the biracial participants have one White parent and often one or

more White teachers. Therefore, it is important to evaluate to possible influence this parent or teacher could have had on the child based on their own Whiteness.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter examines the complexity of race and ethnicity through the evaluation of previous empirical and theoretical work. Ethnic identity is a factor which most people have a conscious or unconscious relationship with. All individuals are raised with some form of culture and traditions in their family settings, as well as in other social areas of their lives. Whether or not the individual embraces the ethnicity depends factors unique to the individual. It is clear from the research presented above that generalizations should not be made based on a minority or dominant group membership.

Whiteness and White privilege relates to this study by informing the researcher and the reader about the multifaceted element of White Identity. Even though this section describes the level of an individual's consciousness about her/his own race, it also provides a view into the stages of overall racial awareness of White persons.

Finally, the bi-racial identity research and theory provides a view into the complicated process of racial and ethnic self-identification for a biracial person. Although appearance is important in racial identification it is not the only category that biracial individuals use to classify themselves. It is clear by the literature review that the surroundings of a biracial individual also influence the process and choice of racial identity. Therefore, based on the previous research, this study will evaluate the influence of the participants' social life, at school and in their neighborhood. In the subsequent

chapters, the researcher will present the methodology shaping this research and the data from subjects. Their answers will be evaluated to develop a comprehensible view of how biracial teens come to answer the question: w*hat are you?*

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and overview

This study will use a mixed method research design which means that both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used to collect data regarding biracial identity development. This method was chosen to allow both definite numbers of ethnic demographics and evaluative data through the participants' answers to survey questions. Using mixed methods can also support the research by evaluating the data from one method in comparison to the other to check for accuracy (Hanson; Creswell, Plano Clark Petska & Creswell, 2005). The source of data will come from a local high school's application form which identifies racial combinations, and from personal responses given on a survey by identified participants. Although this high school is an online charter school, the students, depending on the grade level, have access to instructors via email and biweekly home visits. The school currently has 3946 students enrolled from Kindergarten to twelfth grade. Most of these students are being homeschooled by their guardian while others have other arrangements with the school. The ethnic demographics of students at the school at the time of research are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1:

Distribution of Ethnicity at Ideas In Education

Ethnicity at Ideas In Education

As of September 20, 2011		
Ethnicity	**Total # of Students**	**Percent of Student Population**
American Indian / Alaskan Native	33	0.84%
Asian-Asian Indian	16	0.41%
Asian-Cambodian	6	0.15%
Asian-Chinese	24	0.61%
Asian-Hmong	6	0.15%
Asian-Japanese	29	0.73%
Asian-Korean	12	0.30%
Asian-Laotian	3	0.08%
Asian-Other Asian	34	0.86%
Black/African Am.	287	7.27%
Filipino	102	2.58%
Hispanic or Latino	649	16.45%
Pacific Islander-Guamanian	7	0.18%
Pacific Islander-Hawaiian	6	0.15%
Pacific Islander-Other	14	0.35%
Pacific Islander-Samoan	1	0.03%
White	2717	68.85%
Grand Total	3946	100.00%

Research Design

The initial demographic data was collected with the help of the school's administration. The school's racial self-identification data given by each student on his/her entrance application provided the study with an overview of the racial demographic data of the students. The application form allowed students to self-identify as being a part of two or more ethnic groups, as well as identifying what those groups were by checking the appropriate boxes. Unfortunately, the school's computer software does not include the biracial or multi-racial option as the administration inputs the data. Therefore, it left the researcher without an accurate percentage of the biracial/multi-racial group enrolled at the school. After the initial data collection of ethnic groups represented at the school, the administration worked together with the instructors to identify twenty participants who identified as being biracial. The number of participants was higher than originally chosen to increase the possibility of receiving ten or more completed surveys within the given time frame.

Criteria

The chosen participants had to fit the following criteria; they had to have biological parents from different ethnic groups; be between the ages of 16 and 18; and recognize that they share two or more ethnicities.

Disclosure

The researcher relied on the administration to encourage instructors to select students appropriate for the study. The researcher had no contact with either instructor or

student to ensure that accurate information was provided about the study. Additionally, there is no guarantee that the selected participants are the respondents on the survey as it is completed on-line.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the social, emotional and environmental influences which shape a person's racial identity development, as well as to examine a person's perception of their own racial identity. The history of the participants of this study and their experiences with racial identity will be compared to their current perception of their racial identity. The result of this study will also evaluate its relativity to previous studies and claims of environmental influences on racial identification. To successfully complete this evaluation, a part of this chapter will discuss and examine the participant's responses in relation to the following frameworks on; Social Behaviorism and Symbolic Interactionism.

Social Behaviorism

Researchers on human behavior have developed several theories through the last century on why people act or form opinions the way they do. Within the newly developing psychological circles in the beginning of the 20th century, there was a belief, sparked by George Herbert Mead, that any action was merely a reaction to someone or something (Collins, 2011). The thought was that actions occurred on an unconscious level with the exception of the conscious effort in dealing with an obstacle or a problem. The early research of humans as social beings claimed that "humans are not action-

seekers, but reaction-makers; they are active only because the social environment is so unpredictable" (Collins, 2011, p. 158). However, this theory does not differentiate between humans and animals which is what succeeding sociologists later challenged and researched further (Blumer, 1969; Wiley, 1994). At the end of his life, Mead began to formulate ideas that humans act as a result of internalizing others' thoughts and actions. These new concepts sparked a new movement through Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead's and his interest in human behavior (Collins, 2011).

Symbolic Interactionism

Early research had focused on the action through reaction, which was said to be true for human beings and animals alike. Eventually, researchers felt the need to further explore human behavior separate from lower animals. The theory behind Symbolic Interactionism is that people put meaning to everything around them including actions, inanimate objects and other people (Blumer, 1969; Collins, 2011). Sociologist Herbert Blumer, 1900-1989, was one of the early researchers of Symbolic Interactionism and the one who named this sociological field (Collins, 2011). Blumer developed his ideas from the teachings of Mead in the field of sociology. The major difference between Mead and Blumer was that the latter drew a clear line between the behavior of animals and that of human beings (Collins, 2011).

This current study evaluates its participants' experiences by using the methodology of Symbolic Interactionism, which was developed around three main ideas. First, people act a certain way towards things due to the meaning they have placed on

them. Second, the meaning is developed through the interactions with others and finally, each person uses an interpretation process in able to deal with the things in his environment (Blumer, 1973). The most relative part of this study is the concept and importance of Self. The researcher wishes to place emphasis on the idea that people do not only exist in a group or within its social structure, but they also exist within themselves (Blumer, 1973). This means that everybody has the ability to conduct an internal conversation with oneself to determine how to act, react, plan ahead or respond to any external situation (Collins, 2011).

Since our study will survey biracial participants from various backgrounds, the researcher utilizes the theory of Symbolic Interactionism to dive meaning to each individual's views of their biracial heritage. These views will be the results of having giving unique meaning to their own experiences at interaction with the people and things in their environment. "Meaning is a major component in understanding human behavior, interactions and social processes." (Jeon, 2004, p. 250). For this reason, Symbolic Interactionism will be used to evaluate the participants' survey answers.

Research through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism focuses on the action/interaction between people and how they create meaning from previous experiences (Collins, 2011; Jeon, 2004). It is extremely important that the researcher is able to grasp "the lived experiences from the point of view of the person who lived it." (Jeon, 2004, p. 250) This current study will evaluate the experiences of its participants

and weigh the influence experience have had on the choice of racial self-classification.
Because the researcher does not share the participants' backgrounds, it is not the
researchers place to validate or devalue their experiences. This study will therefore report
the experience of each participant and evaluate the findings, but it will not claim that their
experience is or is not authentic.

Although the researcher of this study did not have personal meetings with the
participants, great importance was placed on their individual experiences regarding their
racial identity development. The survey was designed in such a way that each participant
would be able to answer each question according to his/her own perception and
experience. Blumer claimed that surveys where participants simply answer general
questions by checking a box were easily detached from a persons' sense of individuality
(Collins, 2011). Therefore, this study adapted Blumer's findings regarding surveys and
created open-ended questions for its participants along with the quantitative data of
multiple choice answers.

Data Collection

The application required for conducting a study involving human subjects was
submitted to the Department of Research at the University. All survey questions and a
detailed description of each step of the study was explained in the application. The study
was approved in accordance with the Protection Human Subject Protocol.

The researcher chose to conduct an online survey, despite criticism regarding the
survey method of collecting data (Collins, 2011). Although the method can be impersonal

and takes away from the social interaction and its value to the research (Blumer, 1973),

the survey was a necessary tool for the researcher. The surveys contained both multiple

choice answers and open-ended essay questions to allow an insight into the perspectives

of the participants. The open-ended questions will erase part of the impersonal feel of the

survey by asking questions such as: 1 *During your childhood, did you socialize with*

friends of similar ethnic/racial backgrounds to your own? Please explain. 2 *Even though*

you have been identified as being biracial, do you identify more with one ethnic or racial

group over the other? Please explain. Although the survey was created by the researcher,

the questions were inspired by the work of Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) and the

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure developed by Phinney (1992).

Evaluation of Data

The quantitative data will be presented in figures and tables to create an overview

of the school racial demographic as well as the racial/ethnic combinations of the group of

participants. Some of the answers to the survey questions will displayed in a figure and

evaluated through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism. This data will also be compared to

the literature and research presented in chapter two. A more in-depth evaluation will be

conducted using the qualitative data collected from the participants' answers to the essay

style questions on the survey.

Positionality

There have been great debates regarding the issue of insider/outsider as it relates

to qualitative research (Chavez, 2008). A researcher who is considered an insider may

share the culture, ethnicity, sex, religion or any other trait with the participants of the study. Hence the terms of the research are different from that of research conducted by on outsider. The criticism has been that it is impossible for a researcher who is considered an insider to ignore his/her own biases as they embark on the study and evaluate its findings. The thought of some researchers has been that the outsiders' objective perspective can produce more accurate results in qualitative research (Chavez, 2008).

However, many other researchers recognize the power of the insiders' ability to produce more accurate results as the researcher is already familiar with the subject. It is also be beneficial to the study when the participants feel that they can relate to the researcher (Zentella, 1997). When the participants feel that they are comfortable with the researcher it is more likely that their answers and actions will reflect their true selves. Unfortunately, this will not exist as part of the current study in which there will be no contact between researcher and participants. However, as the researchers positionality is naturally that of an outsider as she is not biracial, the research design could prove to be beneficial.

Why the interest in biracialism?

My husband and I have been together for many years and we both want children one day. There are many factors that we have to consider in addition to financial stability and making a lifetime commitment to care for a new person. We also have to decide how to instill a sense of pride of sharing two ethnicities, languages and cultures. I am Swedish; my husband is Mexican American, so our child would be bi-ethnic, bi-cultural

and bi-lingual. My research topic comes from a selfish urge to develop an understanding of the possible challenges that our future child might face from being bi-ethnic. Since I am mono-racial, I am an outsider in regards to biracial experiences and identity development; therefore I wish to better understand what social and/or academic challenges teens today might face based on their ethnicity and find out the positive aspects they perceive are the result from being biracial.

Conclusion and summary

The researcher will apply the strategies of mixed methods and rely on the research of symbolic interactionism when collecting and evaluating the data.

Chapter 4

PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF FINDINGS

The history of race in America continues to evolve, as people continue to merge across racial groups through marriages and partnerships, which causes the levels of ethnic fusion to increase. Furthermore, the complexity of biracial, multi-racial and bi-cultural identity development will require researchers to continuously evaluate the individual experience of their subjects. This study was designed to answer questions regarding the unique elements which affect an individuals' choice of racial identity. The survey given to the participants also attempted to bring forth the individual awareness of external factors affected by their biracial membership, such as academics and social influences.

In this chapter, the findings from the survey are presented and interpreted by the researcher within the frameworks of Social Behaviorism and Social Interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Collins, 2011). The collected data will be analyzed within the frameworks and will utilize existing studies, to determine its relevance to the findings of this current study. Evaluation of the qualitative data will present the personal experience of each participant, while the quantitative data will determine themes and patterns emerging from subjects' responses. The results will create greater understanding of the perspectives and experiences of biracial individuals. Additionally, environmental and social factors will be taken into account in shaping subjects' racial self-identification.

The participants included three females and two males from the local high school; yet, this study does not evaluate the biracial experience from a gendered point of view. The results of the racial self-classification survey are presented below. The researcher purposely left the options of racial classification up to the participant as to get an insight into their understanding of race. Therefore, the racial categories listed below do not necessarily coincide with those on the latest United States Census survey. The participants responded to the following question: *Please describe your biracial background. For example: I am White and Mexican American.*

Table 2:

Racial/Cultural Self-identification

Racial/Cultural Combination	Gender	Pseudonym
White, Black, Native American, Mexican	Female	Elisa
African American, Puerto Rican	Female	Linda
White, Russian	Male	Milo
Mexican, Mexican American	Female	Rosa
African American	Male	Jilan

The table presents a first glance into how the participants' classify their individual biracial identity. Even though the individuals have been identified as biracial by the administration at the school, it is evident that some identify with one race or culture and

others with multiple. Thereby the complexity of racial classification is already apparent

as the study evaluates each individual's response before comparing the participants'

answers.

Narrative Responses

Because of the inability to meet the participants in person, it was important for the

researcher to allow the students' personal experiences to be shared in narrative form. This

was made possible through the use of open-ended survey questions, allowing each

participant to interpret the question and answer it based on his/her own perception. The

disadvantage of this method proved to be the short responses provided by some of the

participants, as well as the inability for the researcher to provide follow up questions or

clarifications. The answers of each of the five participants will be presented, along with

the interpretation of the researcher.

Elisa

When asked to describe her biracial background, Elisa identified as being a part of

the following four racial categories: White, Black, Native American and Mexican. She

has a positive outlook on her multi-racial membership and identifies with all four

racial/cultural groups. Elisa also wrote that all four races/cultures are of equal importance

to her. When asked if she had experienced discrimination which she felt was due to her

mixed heritage, she wrote; "No, some of my friends are Mexican too, and we like to joke

around." Although Elisa does not clarify whether these jokes are racially or culturally

based, it is the interpretation of the researcher that the jokes are related to her Mexican identity.

Elisa feels that her multiracial heritage has had a positive effect on her social life. She expressed that she "socialized with everyone" throughout her childhood and that "it didn't matter what race they were." Additionally, Elisa explained that in her current friendship group, she can talk to everyone, and does not feel that either racial group is given more value over the other. Elisa feels that appearance is not important in determining racial/cultural membership. She also believes that "people should socialize with whomever they want" despite their racial heritage.

Elisa explains that not all four ethnicities are celebrated in her family because "we don't celebrate all cultural things". Unfortunately, Elisa appears to have adopted the multicultural education model, where culture often is discussed in connection with celebratory practices, rather than the values, beliefs and knowledge used by a group of people. She subsequently expressed that she is not interested in talking about her heritage. It is possible that Elisa is experiencing acculturation which, as a result, leaves her uninterested in her heritage (Bautista De Domanico, Crawford & De Wolfe, 1994). Elisa also explains that her community does not represent her multiracial membership; she further elaborates that "no one really represents their culture now-a-days." It is possible that Elisa sees a relationship between culture representation with visible elements such as clothing and cultural celebrations. Additionally, Elisa does not believe

that her multiracial membership has had any effect on her academics. She describes that her racial background is represented at school because they "learn about the Blacks, Whites, Mexicans, and Native Americans." Although these listed groups of people are discussed at school, it is likely that the isolated units only perpetuate the students understanding of race as historical elements, and are not designed to develop a deeper understanding of race in American today.

Elisa' responses reflect a young woman who is aware of her diverse background; yet, is uninterested in finding out more about her heritage. In the racial self-identification portion of the survey, she mentions three racial categories which are recognized as such on the U.S. Census form: Black, White and Native American. However, she also identifies as being Mexican, which is a nationality listed under the racial category of Hispanic on the Census. Her choice to list Mexican as part of her race could be due, in part, to her lack of awareness of the difference between race, ethnicity and nationality, and/or her connection to the classification of Mexican vs. Hispanic. Nonetheless, it is another indicator that race means different things to different people, as well as some individuals choose to identify with one ethnic group over another (Porter & Washington, 1993).

Elisa's social group has been of various racial/cultural backgrounds since her childhood. Her exposure to various races/cultures could be a factor that supports her opinion that people should be able to socialize with whomever, despite their race.

Through the survey responses, it appears that race is not a determining factor in the social or personal life of Elisa, though she expresses that she and her Mexican friends joke around together about their race, which indicates that Elisa can identify with certain racial/cultural groups when the situation appears. According to the 2002 Rockquemore and Brunsma study, Elisa would be identified as having a Protean Identity as she shows traits of contextual flexibility in her racial/cultural membership and the level of importance placed on race in her overall life. The Protean Identity individual relies on social situations when identifying with one race over another or identifying as biracial. However, Elisa stated that she identifies with all four of her ethnic groups, but her nonchalant attitude towards race could also place her in the category of Transcendent Identity, as she places low to no importance on race as a factor in her identity development (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Transcendent Identity individuals also believe that race is a social construct and they are described to have the whitest social network which in Elisa's case does not appear to be true.

Linda

Linda identifies as biracial, and lists African American and Puerto Rican as the racial categories to which she belongs. She has a positive disposition towards her dual racial membership and reports that each ethnicity is equally important to her. When asked about the effect of being biracial on her social life she wrote: It's "positive, because I feel more relatable to different people." Her family honors both cultures and has expressed the importance of their individual history, which Linda finds "fascinating". Although she

expressed pride in belonging to both racial groups, Linda often presents herself as African American first, then Puerto Rican. She explains that the reason behind this is her phenotype. She writes, "When a person asks what ethnicity I am, I say African American first then Puerto Rican second, because the black is more dominant." Even though she states that appearance is only somewhat important when it comes to identifying race, she also believes that one should present oneself as the race that is most dominant. It appears that Elisa is unaware of the diverse racial history of Puerto Ricans, as there are both Black and White Puerto Ricans (Landale & Oropesa, 2002).

Regardless of her appearance, Linda explains that her biracial membership has made it easier to relate to different people, and that many of her friends are of mixed race as well. When asked whether her peers during her childhood had similar ethnic backgrounds, she responds "I always hung around a mixed group; White, Black, Hispanic, Asian… you name it." However, when asked about being discriminated against due to her biracial membership she wrote that there had been "Teenagers trying to be funny not knowing that they were being hurtful". Although she has experienced discrimination which she perceives is based on her biracial membership, she expresses that people should be able to "socialize with whomever they want". She further clarifies: "I think it is a wonderful and beautiful thing. Everyone can close the gaps, and we can all be intertwined in some way".

When asked about the relevance of biracial membership in her academic experience, she states that it has had no effect on her academic performance. Linda feels that her ethnic background is represented at school through subjects such as geography and language classes. She recognizes that these subjects are limited in what they actually cover about an ethnic group "but they give a good start". However, she wrote "I don't believe ethnicity has anything to do with academics, even though society has made it that way. I believe it is the individuals own determination." Linda's statement reflects the opinion that people all have the same opportunity in life and can succeed as long as they try hard enough. Unfortunately, the reality is much different as individuals experience life in diverse ways, depending on elements such as race, culture and socioeconomic factors. Society also treats people differently based on these elements which affect the life experience of individuals. Finally, she expresses that although she has not been able to talk about her biracial/bi-cultural origin with anyone, she would like to learn more.

Through her answers on the survey, it is apparent that race plays a role in Linda's social and personal life. She is aware of her biracial membership and curious to learn more. Although she expresses that race should not be a factor in the selection of friends, she recognizes that racial discrimination exists. Linda identifies more with her Black heritage as she describes her phenotype as closer to Black than Puerto Rican. Since Linda grew up with a mixed peer group, which could be categorized as a Border Identity, and believes that people should socialize across racial boundaries, but identifies with one race

over the other, which indicates a Singular Identity, she does not fit the specific categories presented in the Rockquemore and Brunsma study (2002).

Certain statements given by Linda fits under the Transcendent Identity category in that she does place importance on her phenotype, when identifying her race (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). This means that because Linda believes that she shares more physical features with Black individuals she often presents herself as Black rather than Puerto Rican or biracial. Linda hereby reflects the United States' focus on race which forces people to make a choice of where they fit in racially, based on their phenotype. However, contrary to the individuals categorized under Transcendent Identity in the previous mentioned study, Linda did not express that her peers where predominantly White. Linda could also fit under the Singular Identity because she mainly identifies with her African American heritage due to her appearance. However, she expresses that she has always socialized with a mixed group of friends from various races, which is not true according to the Rockquemore and Brunsma description of Singular Identity or Transcendent Identity (2002). Linda appears to possess elements from various racial categories which further amplify the complexity of racial identity development.

Milo

Milo self-identified as White and Russian in the self-identification portion of the survey. He explains that he does not believe that his biracial membership has had a negative effect on his social life and further writes that "my friends enjoy having me as

their friend". Milo also expresses that he never has experienced discrimination which he perceived was due to his biracial membership. A possible reason for this is the fact that Russians are categorized as White which reinforces the idea that in the United States, race is related to individuals' phenotype rather than their ethnic heritage. However, Milo feels that appearance is only somewhat important in the process of identifying as biracial versus mono-racial. When asked about the racial make up of his friends growing up, Milo describes that during his childhood he lived in a country "where everybody is the same race". He further explains that his friends today are mostly individuals who share his Russian heritage. Milo writes: "My Slavic friends value my Slavic ethnic or biracial background. We have a lot of things in common. We share the same cultural values, customs, tradition. We accept other ethnic groups, but we prefer to hang out with the same Russian speaking people".

His family celebrates Russian traditions more so than American. Milo further explains: "We celebrate more of Russian than English because of how we were raised and got used to it." Milo used the term "English" instead of American which could be a reflection of the importance he places on language as part of his heritage. However, when asked about the significance of either ethnic group, he said that they are equally important to him and that he identifies with both. He states; "I'm proud of my Slavic background, but the American background takes over." Milo's neighborhood largely consists of individuals from his home country Russia. He explains that his neighbors

usually spend holidays together as well as getting together to play sports and engage in other activities. Milo writes: "We help each other, for example to help fix a car, a fence, or take each other to medical appointments."

Milo does not identify how his biracial membership is or is not represented in what he is learning at school. Instead, he describes various ways in which he and his family keep their Russian heritage alive. Milo listed some of the activities where this occurs: "We speak our native language at home. We stay connected to our family from the whole country by talking to them on the phone or using Skype. We cook our cultural food. I go to a Russian speaking church where I have people from my home country. My school has a translative service for parents who don't speak English. I personally have a Russian speaking for me."

Throughout his survey, Milo expressed his pride in his ethnic background. It appears that he considers his American side as White and his Russian heritage as Slavic. Although Milo regards himself as biracial, his survey responses reflect those of a bi-cultural individual. He is clear in expressing that although he feels that people should be able to socialize with whomever, the majority of his peers are from the similar cultural background as himself. Milo also stated that he grew up in a country where everyone shared the same ethnic background. This means that his exposure to individuals of diverse ethnic background was limited during his childhood which continues during his adolescent years.

Milo appears to be accepting of other ethnic groups, but he clearly expresses that he prefers to socialize with individuals from similar backgrounds similar to his own. According to the Rockquemore and Brunsma study, Milo could be identified as belonging to the Singular Identity category (2002). Although Milo identifies as biracial, he emphasize the importance of the Slavic culture more so than the American. Another identifier of Singular Identity would be the ethnic make-up of peer groups from childhood until adolescent, which for Milo mainly consists of individuals with Slavic backgrounds.

Rosa

Rosa identifies as Mexican and Mexican American on the racial self identification part of the survey. She writes that she has never experienced discrimination, which she felt was due to her biracial membership. Additionally, Rosa does not feel that appearance is important in determining a persons' ethnicity or race. Rosa explains that both of her ethnic/racial backgrounds are important to her. However, she further explains "I may line more on one side then the other, but at the end of the day they both play a role in my life and they make me who I am."

Rosa perceives that her biracial membership has had a positive effect on her social life. She proclaims "instead of hiding and running away from it I embrace it. Being biracial also helps in the different ways including speaking more then one language." Rosa writes that she mostly socializes with Mexican-American peers during her childhood, "mostly because where I grew up there weren't much of any other race."

Similarly, her current peer group contains individuals with the same background as her. Rosa explains that her Mexican heritage "plays a bigger role" in her social group and that she feels this is because she is "more comfortable around her own people." She elaborates further, expressing that she "sometimes feel out of place with other people because I share no same interest with them." Although she mostly surrounds herself with individuals of similar heritage, Rosa believes that people should be able to socialize with whomever they want.

Rosa's family honors elements from both cultures. She explains: "we celebrate and follow some of our Mexican traditions, but we also follow American traditions simply because we've been around that." She also says that both ethnicities come naturally to her. However, Rosa explains that her community does not represent her biracial membership, because they recently moved to a predominantly African American community.

When asked about whether or not Rosa perceived that her biracial membership has had a positive or negative effect on her academics, she answers that it has had a negative effect. She explains that "it has had some negative effect because I can't ask my parents for help like some of the other kids can. My parents speak no English and can't understand my school work." Additionally, Rosa writes that her parents did not attend school for very long and that "a lot of the material is new to them". She explains that she has not been able to talk to anyone about her biracial membership and expressed no

interest in doing so. Rosa describes that at school "there isn't really Mexican history being thought. Just the main things like cinco de mayo, nothing is researched in depth like it is with other cultures."

It is unclear how Rosa determines her biracial membership as she identifies as Mexican and Mexican-American, both of which are nationalities. She describes her relationship with both Mexican and American culture, which indicates a bi-cultural membership rather than a biracial one. Although Rosa expresses that the majority of her peers share her Mexican cultural background, she also values her American heritage. Her ability to relate to both ethnicities would list her under the category of Protean Identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). However, because most of Rosa's peers share her Mexican heritage and she finds that she has more things in common with this ethnic group, Rosa could also be categorized under Singular Identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Jilan

When asked to describe his biracial background, Jilan answered that he is African American. He explains that his biracial membership has had a positive effect on his social life as he "can be in on both sides of jokes". To answer whether or not he has experienced discrimination which he believes was directly due to his biracial membership, Jilan writes; "I've never experienced any discrimination or been around any." He expresses that most of his friends are from a similar racial/ethnic background as himself. Additionally, Jilan stated that in his social circle: "My African side is given more value

because everybody seems to think that's where my sports talent comes from". He also believes that appearance is somewhat important in determining ethnic/racial group membership.

Jilan describes that within his family both ethnicities are celebrated. He explains: "my family isn't the type to take sides with anything or anybody". When asked if one of his ethnic backgrounds is more important to him than the other, Jilan responds: "I believe the background has nothing to do with me. I choose my own choices; my background doesn't do it for me". Additionally, Jilan believes that individuals should be able to socialize with whomever they want, regardless of ethnicity or race.

Although Jilan expresses that "there's not really any reflection or represented culture in my neighborhood", he explains that they learn about individual's racial backgrounds at school. He elaborates that "in history we go over a lot of racial backgrounds but we don't go over them by color; we go over them by what they did and have accomplished." Additionally, Jilan does not believe that his biracial membership has had any effect on his academics. He also expresses that he has had the opportunity to talk about his biracial/bicultural membership but did not specify with whom.

On the racial self identification portion of the survey, Jilan lists African American as his biracial background. It is unclear if he indeed has one parent who is an African national and one who is American, or if he has one parent who is Black, African American, and one parent that is of another African descent identity or White American.

Jilan wrote that his African side is believed by his friends to be connected to his ability in sports. This stereotypical statement leads the researcher to believe that Jilan's biracial membership is Black and White.

Jilan grew up with peers who shared his ethnic background and expressed that his "African side" is valued more around his friends. According to Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002), it is possible that Jilan's phenotype appear more phenotypically Black which would explain why his African ethnicity is valued more among his friends. Considering the racial make-up of Jilan's friends and how he is perceived by these friends, it appears that he would be categorized as having a Border Identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Lusk, Taylor, Nanny & Austin, 2010). However, Jilan's comments on the survey could also reflect an individual categorized under Singular Identity as he does not place great importance on his racial background.

Themes within Survey Responses

The researcher evaluated all participant responses on an individual level before assessing any possible themes emerging from their answers. Each person interpreted the questions differently which amplifies the use of Symbolic Interactionism. This means that the individual background and experience of each participant guide their opinions and ultimately their responses to the survey. The framework used in this research highlights the meaning individuals place on people, objects and situations based on experiences they had earlier in their lives. Each participant relates to their biracial membership in a unique way according to this experience. Therefore, it is important to highlight the differences in

their responses as well as the similarities. For instance, Milo, who grew up surrounded by individuals who share his cultural customs, still place great value on the traditions of this culture in his adult life. Additionally, Jilan, who recognizes that his African race is valued more by his peers, does not appear to place importance on his biracial membership. Rosa expresses that she has maintained a peer group of similar background as her, from when she was a child until now. Additionally, she feels more comfortable with people of similar ethnicity which indicates that she has had better experiences with this group.

Preliminary Evaluations of Findings

Several of the participants could be categorized under more than one of the four types of identities named by Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002). Although the researcher is aware of the difference in racial make-up between the participants of their study versus this current one, this fact, along with the difference in individual responses is worthy of further analysis. The intersectionality of people becomes evident through the variation of the participants responses. Despite being identified as biracial, each individual understands this membership in a different way. For example; Jilan does not appear to put great importance on identifying as biracial while Linda cherishes the fact that she is both African American and Puerto Rican.

Among other differences in the participants' answers was the ethnic make-up of their childhood peer group. Their responses were split where two (40%) of the participants expresses that their friends had been individuals of various races, whilst three (60%) had friends whom shared a similar ethnic background. Similarly, three (60%) of

participants expressed that one of their ethnic backgrounds were valued more than the other by peers. Two (40%) did not believe that appearance is important in determining a persons' racial membership compared to three (60%) who stated that appearance is somewhat important. A slim majority of three (60%) also acknowledged that not all of their ethnic backgrounds were celebrated in their family. The results above are not displaying a clear theme among the respondents' answers as the majority is determined by only one person. However, the divide reinforces the idea that biracial people experience their racial membership differently depending on their individual situation.

Although most answers were too equally divided to justifiably rule as a theme among the participants, there were some common threads. For example, when asked about the personal importance placed on either side of their ethnic/racial backgrounds, four (80%) of the participants expressed that both are of equal importance to them, whilst one (20%) was indifferent. Additionally, four (80%) express that they had experienced discrimination perceived to be due to their biracial membership. Only one (20%) of the participants expressed that their biracial group was not represented in what they were learning at school. Comparably, four (80%) stated that they do not feel that their community reflects their ethnic group. The commonalities found are important to analyze further. The fact that most of the participants experience that their biracial membership is represented at school is a positive indicator that multicultural education is implemented in some way. Furthermore, the fact that four (80%) reported having experienced

discrimination due to their biracial membership, reinforce the need for further emotional support for these individuals.

Conclusion

Despite the inability to meet with the participants in person, the researcher was able to recognize and preliminary evaluate the individuality through their survey responses. The fact that each participant knowingly submitted anonymous answers allowed them to express their opinions without reservation. Differences and similarities became evident through evaluation of themes that emerged through the survey responses. These themes were compared to existing studies and although similarities appeared, there were clear inconsistencies. This fact reinforces the need for further study into biracial identity development and the importance of including the individual voice of the participant in any future research.

Many of the participants expressed cultural elements in describing their biracial membership. For example, Milo stated that he and his friends share Slavic "cultural values, customs and traditions", which all describe ethnic/cultural traits, not racial ones such as phenotype. Rosa, along with Milo, mentioned language as part of her biracial heritage. Language is also an ethnic element and another indicator of the importance of ethnic/cultural identity for individuals as opposed to racial identity. In fact, only two participants referred to their phenotype as being directly linked to their choice of racial identity. Jilan expressed that his peers connected his Black identity to his talent in sports stereotypically belonging to his race. Linda stated that she knowingly presented herself as

African American first and Puerto Rican second as her phenotype shares more similarities with that race. It is evident that the term *biracial* should be individually defined by each participant to allow their idea of what it means to be presented. The challenge of identifying individuals by race is evident by the results mentioned above and should be take into consideration in future studies.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

My study proposed to provide greater understanding of the relationship between

biracial teens' past experiences and their choice of racial identity while shedding greater

light on factors that influences this choice. The goal was also to present what factors

influence this choice. The survey presented to the participants was designed to allow the

researcher to gain insight into the subjects' perception of race, as well as what, if any,

importance subjects place on their biracial membership.

Although this study included a limited number of participants, the variety of their

racial backgrounds provides an insight into the intersectional identities of individuals.

Their responses reflect the complexity of categorizing any person without fully

understanding their previous life experiences. Symbolic Interactionism relates this

previous experience to individuals' current opinions and social relationships (Blumer,

1969; Collins, 2011). This means that whatever a person has experienced from childhood

through adulthood affects the meaning they place on every element in their lives today.

There are elements to each individual which are unique such as family situation,

socioeconomic status and emotional well being, which are unique. Throughout the

survey, the variation of participants' responses highlights the unique experience of each

individual. For example: Jilan expressed that his peers value his African side, but that he

still values both of his ethnicities, while Rosa believes in identifying with the

phenotypically dominant characteristics. Consequently, it is difficult to accurately make absolute conclusions regarding an individuals' biracial identity development.

Reasons for Study

I moved to the United States from Sweden just over nine years ago. My husband is a third-generation Mexican American who lived in Sweden with me for about two years. When people in Sweden asked where he was from, my husband would answer the United States of America. However, because his features are not stereotypically White American, people would then ask him about where his ancestors came from. He struggled with identifying with the Mexican culture as he grew up surrounded by mostly White American peers as well as other Mexican Americans who spoke English only; and he had little to no connection to the Mexican culture. Additionally, according to my husband's birth records, he is categorized as White, as no other option was available for his parents at the time of his birth. As a part of his racial identity development, my husband has experienced behavioral assimilation as a result of his environment (Porter & Washington, 1993). This means that he has adapted to the dominant culture and identifies with it more so than with his Mexican American heritage.

My husband and I had many conversations about identifying with nationality versus race as I for the first time had to identify with a race when entering the United States as a permanent resident. Growing up in Sweden, I always identified as a Swede or Scandinavian. My peers also identified with nationalities such as Italian or Swedish and Dominican, rather than race. There is no equivalence in Sweden to the American Census,

so there has not been a political force to choose between race and nationality; for this reason, I struggled identifying with the racial choices while filling out American government papers in the process of immigrating. If there were the option to check *other* I would have, and when possible, I would add Scandinavian. This process leads to personal insight into my own ethnic, cultural and national values and reinforced my belief that these three listed elements are what defines me and not race.

When my husband and I begun discussing having children, we also thought about what racial box to check for our child at the hospital. This discussion developed into thoughts about biracial and bi-cultural individuals, and the possible influences which will affect our child's ability to identify with one race, culture and/or nationality over another, or the possibility to take on multiple identities. We both agree that we value our culture and nationality over race; however, we realize that our child will experience the world differently from us, as a biracial person in a society that is still focused on categorizing people by race. These thoughts made me consider the external influences which affect an individuals' choice of racial identity. I developed a need to understand the process of racial identity development from the individual's perspective. Now, as a mother-to-be, it is important that I understand what tools I can use to best support my child in the process of his racial identity development.

Although the initial reason for this study developed on a personal level, it also became a question about how I could use the research on a professional level as an educator.

Challenges

There were challenges which emerged with using the chosen method of the online survey format. Although the idea of privacy for the participants was honorable and the ability to ask difficult questions was made easier as they could remain anonymous, there proved to be more disadvantages with this method. Most of the questions required the participants to answer in essay format. However, there was no minimum sentence requirement, which resulted in many one sentence answers. There was also no way for the researcher to include follow-up questions to the survey, to allow the participants the opportunity to clarify their answers. Subsequently, the inability to ask additional questions led to a certain degree of interpretation by the researcher. There was also no opportunity for the participants to ask questions about the survey.

The originally intended number of participants was set to include twenty individuals, with the hope that at least ten or more would complete the survey. However, as the survey was sent out to teachers, and thereby distributed to the students, there were only five survey responses retrieved. Unfortunately, because the anonymity of the teachers and students there were no way for the researcher to follow up and encourage additional responses.

Another challenge that emerged during the process of this study was the use of Symbolic Interactionism and Symbolic Behaviorism in combination with the online survey (Blumer, 1969; Collins, 2011). The elements of Symbolic Interactionism were used to evaluate how the participants formed their opinions about their biracial membership based on their past experiences. However, had the researcher also been able to use Symbolic Interactionism or Symbolic Behaviorism in the evaluation of the interaction between researcher and participant during personal interviews, it could have given additional depth to the study. The interaction would have allowed overall mannerism, facial expressions and social cues to be included in the evaluation of the participant's responses to the survey. Therefore, it is the belief of the researcher that to successfully use Symbolic Interactionism there needs to be personal contact between researcher and participant.

Suggestions for Further Study

The results of this study revealed an increasing need for biracial individuals to identify with ethnicity and culture over race. Additionally, the participants' responses reflect the theory that individuals can have strong ties to their ethnic/cultural heritage, and simultaneously function within and relate to a dominant culture (Gordon, 1961; Tatum, 2004). Most of the participants related to the cultural elements of either part of their biracial membership over race. For example, Rose expressed that she can relate more to her Mexican peers, as she feels they have more in common. Similarly, Milo and all of the other participants articulated the importance of relating to others through culture and

nationality. None of the participants mentioned race as a determining factor in the selection of friends, nor as a major influence in their overall life. Therefore, it is the conclusion of the researcher that ethnicity and culture is valued more than race by biracial individuals.

The next questions to be answered through future research should be: To what degree does the United States Census form perpetuate the value of race in America? Is there a difference between the ethnic/cultural combinations of biracial individuals in their opinions of the value of race over ethnicity and culture? Is it necessary for Americans to be categorized by race to produce and ensure a prejudice free society?

The next steps of research should be to evaluate the possibility of replacing the racial options on the United States Census survey with ethnicities/cultures and nationalities. Although biracial individuals had the opportunity to select multiple racial boxes on the current Census, minority Civil Rights groups argue that this is counterproductive as it makes it difficult to accurately assess possible racial injustices (Ellis, 2000). Therefore, for additional change to the U.S. Census to be possible, there also needs to be further studies conducted which include mono-racial and multiracial individuals and their views of racial versus ethnic, cultural and national identity.

Another element which should be researched further is the school environment and the support available for individuals interested in learning more about racial/cultural identity development. There is a wide array of staff at any high school that should be able

to support the biracial student population with their racial identity development. Apart from teachers and administrators, there are counselors in place to guide students through their academia as well as social tribulations. However, as the majority of counselors and teachers are mono-racial Whites, without extensive professional training in how to work with minorities, their ability to support this population is limited (Banks, 1995). Researchers emphasize the importance of additional training on how to best support minorities (Poston, 1990), but more importantly training should be provided to help White counselors to become aware of their own White privilege and Whiteness (Helms, 1985, 1990, 1995). After counselors develop an understanding of their privilege in society, it becomes possible for them to relate to and support biracial and bi-cultural individuals. However, it is crucial that these biracial/bi-cultural individuals are given the opportunity to express their unique relationship to their own biracial/bi-cultural membership and, in doing so, avoid assumptions by the counselor.

This current study did not include the socioeconomic status of the participants and its possible relationship in the choice of biracial identity. However, research shows a connection between minorities and poverty which further strengthens the need for teachers and counselors to understand their situation (Muhammad, 2009). Therefore, research into the possible link between socioeconomic status and biracial identity development is necessary to evaluate the affect poverty has on an individuals' choice of racial identity.

Needless to say, there are many elements in the biracial identity development which still needs to be explored. Therefore, I encourage further and continuous research into the factors that influence an individuals' way to answer the question: What are you?

APPENDIX A

Consent To Participate In Study

You are invited to participate in a study focused on the exploration of identity development among the biracial/multiracial community. My name is Christel Cruz, and I am a graduate student at California State University, Sacramento in the Bilingual/Multicultural Department. The purpose of this study is to educate parents and professionals to enhance their knowledge base regarding personal and social factors that affect biracial/multiracial individuals in their racial identity development. You were referred as a possible participant in this study because your profile corresponds with the eligibility criterion necessary to complete this study.

If you decide to participate, I will be providing you with an on-line survey, containing a mixture of close-ended and open-ended questions for the purpose of obtaining your personal thoughts regarding this subject. Information obtained would only be available to this researcher and thesis advisor Lisa William-White, PhD, who is a professor in the Bilingual/Multicultural Department. Any identifying information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from this study without consequence at any time by advising this researcher verbally in person, by email or telephone. Participation in this study should pose minimal risk; nonetheless, a list of resources will be provided for your benefit.

By choosing to sign this consent form, you are acknowledging that you are 18 years or older or that you are a parent of a participant in this research project. You understand that the information obtained in the interview and through a survey will be used to prepare this student's research thesis and that every precaution will be taken to protect your identity and assure confidentiality. You understand your/your child's participation is voluntary and that you may withdraw your/your child's participation at any time. You understand that there will be no inducement, monetary or material, for your/your child's participation in this study.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮@hotmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Parent   Date
(if participant is under 18 years of age)

If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact one or more of the following;

Christel Cruz, student researcher, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Lisa William-White, advisor of student researcher, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

APPENDIX B

ETHNIC IDENTITY SURVEY

1. Are you male or female?

☐ Male

☐ Female

2. Please describe your biracial background. For example, I am White and Mexican American.

3. Do you feel that your biracial identity has had a positive or negative effect on your social life? Please explain.

4. During your childhood did you socialize with friends of similar ethnic background as you? Please explain.

5. Are both of your ethnicities celebrated equally in your family? Why/Why not?

6. Have you ever experienced discrimination that you felt was directly related to your ethnicity/race? Please explain.

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7. Is one of your ethnic/racial backgrounds given more value than the other within your friendship groups? Please explain.

```
[                    ]
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8. Do you feel that both of your ethnic/racial backgrounds are equally important to you? Why/why not?

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[                    ]
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9. Do you feel that your bi-racial identity has had a positive or negative effect on your academics (grades)? Please check the box which best relates to you.

☐ My bi-racial identity has had a positive effect on my academics.

☐ My bi-racial identity has had a negative effect on my academics.

☐ My bi-racial identity has had no effect on my academics.

Other (please specify)

```
[                    ]
```

10. How do you feel about different ethnic/racial groups socializing/mixing together?

☐ I feel that people should socialize with whomever they want.

☐ I feel that people should socialize with people with similar ethnic/racial background.

☐ Other (please specify)

[text input box]

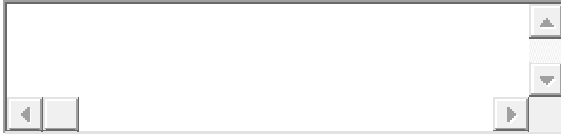**11. Have you been able to talk to anyone about your biracial/bi-cultural origin?**

☐ No.

☐ No, but I would like to learn more.

☐ Yes.

☐ I am not interested in talking about my bi-racial/bi-cultural origin.

☐ Other (please specify)

[text input box]

12. Describe how your biracial background is or is not represented in what you are learning at school.

[text input box]

13. Please explain how your biracial background and culture is reflected or represented in your community/neighborhood?

[text input box]

14. Even though you have been identified as being biracial, do you identify more with one ethnic/racial group over the other?

☐ I identify with both of my racial/ethnic groups.

☐ I only identify with one of my racial/ethnic groups.

☐ I do not identify with either of my racial/ethnic groups.

☐ Other (please specify)

[text input box]

15. How important do you feel appearance is in identifying ethnicity/race? For example, if a person looks White but is actually biracial, would you still consider them White?

☐ Appearance is very important.

☐ Appearance is somewhat important.

☐ Appearance is not important.

☐ Other (please specify)

[text input box]

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