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Dana L. Benton
Faces of the Future: An
Exploration of Biracial
Identity Development and
Racial Identification in
Biracial Young Adults

ABSTRACT

This research study examines how biracial young adults experience the process of racial identification and racial identity development. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the growing body of knowledge budding around this topic. This study utilized a mixed methods approach to explore the racial demographics and quality of relationships in bi racial young adults social networks across their life span; experiences with ascribed and self declared racial identifications, as well as, thoughts, feelings and attitudes about being biracial. The experiences of N= 53 biracial young adults, 18 to 35 years of age, were collected through an anonymous, online survey created by the research. The results of this study suggest that (1) Racial self identification in biracial people can vary across person, time and place (2) Social Factors and Racial Group Membership can be important to biracial peoples racial identity development and racial self identification (3) Inquiry into a biracial persons racial identification can evoke a variety of emotions (4) Biracial people's attitudes about being biracial can range from negative to positive. This study considers these findings and offers clinical practice as well as research implications for future best practices.

FACES OF THE FUTURE:
AN EXPLORATION OF BIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND RACIAL
IDENTIFICATION IN BIRACIAL YOUNG ADULTS

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2009

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I submit this thesis in loving memory of my dad. I dedicate these pages, the energy and the enlightenment derived from this process to my father, to the late great Roosevelt “Bells” Benton. I am honored to be the child of a man that showed me the value of choosing to live a “purpose driven life”.

This thesis is the product of hard work, determination, and faith in addition to a massive amount of support and love. This thesis could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many people whose contributions are gratefully acknowledged. First, I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to the 53 participants who shared their ways of being in the world as biracial people. There is much learning to be done through simply listening to the emotional depth of your experiences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The United States prides itself on being a diverse nation. People from other countries and continents come to visit, study, work and settle in the U.S., on a daily basis. This progression has given birth to a nation whose racial and ethnic demographics are constantly evolving. One of the largest growing populations in this country consists of individuals conceived through interracial unions. Currently, this population represents over 7 million of the people residing in the United States (Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Llyod, 2005). They are the individuals that self identify as or are labeled as, “half-breed, mulatto [and] mixed. Maria P Root (1990) describes this population as “the ‘others’, biracial individuals, who do not have a clear racial reference group (Henriques, 1975; Moritsugu, Forester, & Morishima, 1978, as cited in Root, 1990) and have had little control over how they are viewed by society” (Root, 1990, p.575).

Moreover, there has been an increase in the visibility of biracial people in the media mostly funneled by their stardom. Celebrities such as golfer Tiger Woods, singer Alicia Keys and actress Halle Berry have all been candid about their biracial ancestry. However, most recently, President Barack Obama’s rise to stardom and encapsulation of the U.S. Presidency has increased the visibility of this population, while rekindling discussions and debates surrounding the topics of racial identification and racial group membership, of biracial people in the United States. On March 18, 2008, Senator Barack Obama addressed the nation in response to what was perceived by many, across the

country, as racist remarks made by his pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, during a biblical sermon. In then Senator Obama's speech "A More Perfect Union", he addressed the history of race and race relations in the United States, while illuminating his own racial identification and the racial and ethnic demographics of his immediate and extended family. He stated,

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners - an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible. It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional candidate. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts that out of many, we are truly one.

However, Senator Obama's clear declaration of his racial ancestry seemed insignificant to many who coined him the potential first black president of the United States. During the 2008 Democratic National Convention, Senator Barack Obama accepted the "nomination for the Presidency of the United States." The following morning, most of us awoke to media mania and controversial debates with friends, family, classmates, co-workers and the alike about the possibility of the United States having its first Black, Black & White, African American, biracial, Kenyan, Polynesian president? CNN reported, "Barack Obama becomes the first African American to lead a major party ticket." While Fox news reported that Barack Obama was "making history as the first black presidential nominee of a major party." Conversely, political analysts

debated on talk and radio shows as to whether Senator Barack Obama was “black enough” to secure the black vote.

In the midst of this mania, we never heard President Obama publically claim a racial identification. We observed and listened intently and repeatedly to his family history and account of his life as a child of a Caucasian American and Black Kenyan. Meanwhile, society attempted to make meaning of, conceptualize and label his racial group membership. Yet we almost never heard President Obama racially label himself or comment directly on his “otherness”. It appeared that he was leaving his public racial group membership up to the public, who in turn ascribed him a plethora of racial and ethnic identifications. President Obama’s willingness to repeatedly share his racial background through the racial group membership of his parents serves as a public reminder of the existence of the biracial population. This case example illustrates the complexity and unconventionality of the biracial experience, especially for individuals living in a society that all too often automatically identifies people monoracially.

Therefore, this study will examine how biracial young adults experience the process of racial identification and racial identity development. Much of the recent literature in this area has focused on devising theoretical frameworks for interpreting the racial identification and identity development process of biracial peoples. Additionally, a significant amount of research has set out to identify factors that may influence the way in which a biracial person experiences the process of racial identity development and racial identification during different developmental stages of their lives. However, researchers continue to struggle with developing research methods that can retrieve in depth data from larger sample sets. This challenge has limited the breadth of research in

this area of study. Therefore, the goal of this study is to (a) expand on the knowledge base of this topic, and (b) to offer the contribution of a self-reporting measurement tool for accessing an individual's attitudes towards their biracial ancestry. Conversely, this study will be an asset to clinical practitioners who may be treating biracial clients, who may be sifting through internal or external turmoil related to their navigation of the world as a biracial person. By expanding this body of knowledge and offering a possible assessment tool, clinical practitioners may feel better equipped to meet the needs of their biracial client's and the needs of the parent's of biracial children.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploration into the racial identity development and racial self identification of biracial people can encompass a wide range of subject areas. In an effort make the focus of this study more comprehensible to the reader, I have developed a literature review that aims to create a conceptual framework for this study. Therefore, this chapter will identify and define commonly used terms that may serve as useful reference points when attempting to understand the intent and results of this study. In addition this chapter also contains a synopsis of the evolution of race, racial groups and racial identification in the United States. Next, there is a review of a number of empirical studies that concentrate on how biracial people experience and declare racial identification; social factors that influence racial identification and racial identity development and attitudes of biracial people in reference to their racial identity. Finally the review ends with a summary and comparison of two biracial identity development theoretical models that will be used to interpret the results of this study.

Relevant Terminology and Language

A review of the literature suggests that there are numerous terms that may be useful when attempting to further understand the ways in which biracial people experience the process of racial identification and racial identity development. The first most commonly used terms are *Race* and *Racial Group*. These terms are often used interchangeably and speak to “certain groups of people [who] do have clear physical

differences—such as skin tone, hair color/ texture, and facial features” (Miller & Garran, 2008, p. 16). The definition and conceptualization of these terms have changed over time. Tafoya and Lee (2006) highlight the chronological development of the concept of race and racial group noting,

In the past, race was understood as a biological concept. Today there is a general consensus that race and ethnicity are social constructions, that is, the definitions and measurements of race and ethnicity are mainly shaped by history, political, social, cultural, and other factors, and therefore dynamic, as illustrated by changes in the number and labels of racial categories from census to census. (p. 234)

Across discipline race is no longer perceived as biologically based; however race continues to be determined by an individual’s ancestry, lineage or family line of descent. Characteristics such as skin complexion, physical features and hair color/texture, continue to be signifiers of a person’s race. These traits are undeniable transmitted through genetics. Therefore, to create uniformity among the participants in this research study, their race/s will be determined by genetics, specifically the race/s of their biological parents. Additionally, the purpose for collecting race based data in this study will be to gain a better understanding of the needs and characteristics of this population, so that clinical practitioners and researchers may better serve them.

Some literature written on this topic uses the term *Race* interchangeably with the term *Ethnicity*. However, Carter & Pieterse (2005) specify the distinction between *Race* and *Ethnicity* as described by white racial identity development theorist, Janet Helms.

They note,

Ethnicity has not been used to nor does it define a place in the social hierarchy, whereas race does locate a group in the social hierarchy. One’s ethnicity can change over time; one’s racial group membership does not. Race does not define a specific or singular culture; people who belong to the Asian racial group represent many cultures [and countries of origin]. (p. 42)

For the purpose of this study race will not encompass ethnicity; however, the analysis of literature will include studies that may indeed use the terms interchangeably.

The terms *Race* and *Ethnicity* are often coupled with the term identity.

Rockquemore & Laszloffy (2005) describes *Identity* as,

The way we understand ourselves in relation to others and our social environment... Identities are constructed through a reflexive process involving interaction between our self and others in our environment (e.g. families, schools, neighborhoods, and houses of worship) (p.4).

Racial Identity Development is symbolic of the journey that a person travels when exploring their racial identity. Beverly Tatum (1997) further defines racial identity development as the “process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning belonging to a particular racial group”. (p.16)

The term *Racial Identification* is also a commonly used term when discussing biracial identity development. Herman (2008) describes *Racial Identification* as the “group or groups a person uses to identify him or herself racially” (Herman, 2008, p.204). More specifically, *Biracial Self Identification* is the way that a biracial person racially self identifies, a term that is most often discussed in correlation with the process of biracial identity development. On the contrary, biracial identity development also tends to be incumbent of a person’s experience with *Ascribed Racial Group Membership*.

Wijeyesinghe (2001) defines Ascribed Racial Group membership as,

The racial group or groups that are applied to an individual by other people and social institutions based on factors such as physical appearance, racial ancestry, and the social construction of race at a given point in time. This ascribed racial group may or may not be consistent with the racial group that the individual actually identifies with. (p. 130)

When discussing racial identity development, it is important to draw a distinction between racial identity and ethnic identity. Theorist Jean Phinney has made it a priority to pay special attention to the ethnic diversity that exists within and amongst racial groups. More specifically, she has dedicated her work to researching the ways in which individuals develop singular and multi-ethnic identities through the use of *The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement Scale* (Phinney & Ong, 2007). However, Ethnic Identity differs from Racial Identity because it reflects “the set of roles and behaviors a person chooses to exhibit concerning his or her connection with a particular culture” (Herman, 2008, p. 204), rather than affiliation with or membership in a particular racial group/s. Therefore for this study the focus will be on racial identity rather than ethnic identity, because the objective of this project is to hone in on the experiences of people that have biological parents from two different racial groups.

Most relevant, to this study are the terms *Biracial*, *Multiracial* and *Mixed Race Identity*. These terms have been used interchangeably to describe people that are members of more than one racial group or race. More specifically, the term *Biracial* generally refers to an individual of two races, while *multiracial* and *mixed race* most often refer to individuals that are members of more than one race. Charmaine Wijeyesinghe (2001) provides a succinct definition that she contends can be useful to understanding *Monoracial* and *Multiracial* identity, which could be also be generalized and applied to the definition of biracial identity. She notes that these terms “can refer to (1) a person’s racial ancestry, (2) a person’s chosen racial identity, (3) a racial group membership ascribed to a person, or/[and] a person’s chosen racial group membership” (p. 130).

These terms and definitions serve as the foundation for this study and will be utilized frequently throughout the text. This research study aims to explore the experiences of individuals that have two *Races* and are therefore are *Mixed Raced*. These are people who were conceived by two individuals from differing *Racial Groups*. This population may have a *Racial Identification* of *Monoracial*, *Biracial* or *Multiracial*. Conversely, they may have contended with making meaning out of their *Assigned Racial Group Membership*, which may have differed from their own *Racial Self Identification*. Finally, this study further attempts to understand some of the social and environmental factors that are related to the ways in which this heterogeneous group of individuals have experienced the process of *Racial Identity Development*.

A Historical Account: Race, Racial groups and Multi Racial Identifications

The mixing of races, resulting in the conception of mixed-raced children, is not a new phenomenon. Historically, colonialism, slavery, immigration and the end of anti-miscegenation laws, which prohibited interracial unions, are some examples of factors that are said to have contributed to the birth of the mixed-race population (Tatum, 1997; Roth, 2005; Shih and Sanchez, 2005). Bean and Lee (2007) reported that interracial marriages have grown significantly over the last forty years, from 150,000 marriages in 1960 to 3.1 million in 2000 (Roth 2005; Bean and Lee, 2007; Lee and Edmonston, 2005). This drastic growth in married and likely unmarried interracial unions has coincided with a similar growth in the percentage of mixed race births. Roth (2005) further reported that the percentage of mixed-race births increased from 1.0% to 3.4% from 1970 and 1992 (Harris and Sim, 2000 & Harris and Bennett, 1995 as cited in Roth, 2005).

Nonetheless, the solicitation of this data and public recognition of this population, particularly by the federal government through the U.S Census, have varied throughout history (Tafoya & Lee, 2006; Noble; 2000; Tatum; 1997). From the inception of the U.S. Census in 1790 to 1960, enumerators were responsible for racially classifying the population. Enumerators assigned individuals racial identifications, primarily, based on the racial group membership that was “evident” through their physical appearance. In 1960 the method of collecting race based data evolved by allowing individuals to identify their own racial group membership. However, many people of color continued to feel constrained by the racial identification process, because of the limited number of race based options made available on standard forms such as the Census.

The earliest recognition of mixed race people by the federal government occurred in 1850, with the addition of the Mulatto category on the U.S. Census, which referred to individuals that were racially mixed with black and white ancestry (Nobles, 2000). However, in 1920 the category of Mulatto was dropped from the list of racial identification options on the U.S. Census (Tatum, 1997; Noble, 2000, Roth, 2005). At this time, “the one drop rule was institutionalized by the U.S. Census Bureau” (Tatum, 1997, p. 169), declaring that anyone with Black ancestry be racially categorized as Negro. The following U.S. Census, which took place in 1930, affirmed the one drop rule across racial group specifying that “any mixture of white and nonwhite should be reported according to the nonwhite parent. Mixtures of colored races should be reported according to the race, of the father, except Negro-Indian” (Noble, 2000, p.74). This marked the beginning of a long standing ideology that race in the United States is mutually exclusive (Thernstrom, 2000).

Historically, race has been constructed and viewed as an *exclusive* category (Thernstrom, 2000; Haney Lopez, 1996 as cited in Roth, 2005). The conceptualization of race as an exclusive entity suggests that an individual can only be a member of one race. For centuries the United States has operated within the framework of such beliefs as exemplified by the establishment and enforcement of current and past race based laws from Jim Crow to Affirmative Action. Subsequently, race as an exclusive entity has been a core theoretical theme in the study of racial identification and the plight for accurate demographic documentation. Race as an exclusive entity as presented on the U.S. Census began to be challenged nationally during the late 1980's simultaneously as a new wave of research on this population was beginning to surface.

In 1988 “representatives of local interracial groups formed the Association of Multiethnic Americans (AMEA), the first nationwide group of its kind in the United States, to advance an awareness of the emerging population of multiracial, multiethnic people in this country” (Fernandez, in Root 1996, p. 25). Nationally multiracial organizations, individuals and their allies lead a movement committed to lobbying for a change to the way in which mixed race people were allowed to racial identify. One of the largest endeavors of this campaign was to push change, in the way in which, the U.S. Census collected and tabulated race based data from mixed race persons. Those in favor of the change to the race based question on the existing U.S. census lobbied for the rights of mixed race individuals to indicate their bi and multiracial identification (Norment, 1995; Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Proponents for changes to the U.S. Census perceived an alteration to the Census as a nationwide call to increase the visibility of mixed race people in this country, while

honoring their right to declare their multiple ancestries. In 1997, in response to the lobbying, a review of the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy, Directive No. 15, which serves as the race and ethnic standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting, was undertaken. This review resulted in significant race and ethnicity based changes to the 2000 U.S. Census. The first monumental change was that the option of Hispanic and Latino was changed from being offered as a race to being offered as an ethnicity. The second major change was that, for the first time in history all mixed raced respondents were presented with the option of choosing more than one race rather than the previous choices offered, which included selecting one racial group or the choice of "some other race".

On a micro level, change to the Census was significant in restructuring the way that racial identifications and racial identity development in biracial people was viewed by clinical practitioners and researchers. Concerns surfaced around denying individuals the right to racially identify as they please. Central to these concerns were the possible implications for the perception of race related psychological development in this population. Historically, mixed race people that refused to identify themselves as a member of one race were often pathologized by researchers, clinical practitioners and the alike (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Jacobs, 1992). However, during the late 1980's perceptions began to slowly change as the growth of , " a new generation of researchers, many of whom were themselves multiracial, advanced a new way of defining healthy identity for mixed-race people" (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005, p.2). These researchers boldly challenged earlier beliefs about the necessity of this population to identify with one race solely, in order to exuberate psychological well being. Their hard

work and commitment are visible threads in the change that has come to the U.S. census as well as the overall theoretical conceptualization of mixed race peoples psychological functioning and experiences. The following section consists of some of the research studies circulating in academia, which explore biracial racial identification and biracial identity development.

Research Studies

Racial Identity

The 2000 U.S. Census calculated that 2.4 percent of the population, 7 million people, classified themselves as being a member of two or more races (Quian, 2004; Constantine & So-Llyod, 2005). Consequently, 2.9 million of the mixed race individuals that were accounted for were under the age of 18, making mixed race children one of the fastest growing populations in this country (Nakazawa, 2003). However, it has been argued that this population is difficult to identify and continues to be inaccurately counted. Donna Nakazawa (2003) further comments on the variations and underreporting that can occur for the mixed race youth population as the result of their parents being the reporters of their race and racial group membership. She notes,

According to a 2002 report by the Population Division of the U.S. Census, the 2000 census may actually reflect a vast underreporting of the potential pool of multiracial children, which may be closer to 4.5 million. In 2000, the parents of 2.9 million children reported that their child was of two or more races; an additional 1.6 million more children who were reported as being of a single race did not racially match their interracial parentage, as noted by the reporting adult in their home... (p. 30)

The statistical mismatch highlighted above provides an example of the inaccuracies that can occur when people, in this case child/ren are assigned to a racial group membership, which is not reflective of their interracial parentage. A similar

statistical mismatch surfaced in the findings of a research study conducted by David Brunnsma (2006). Brunnsma utilized quantitative data collected in 1998 from the National Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) to better understand how the parents of interracial families/unions classify their children upon their entrance into Kindergarten. This study utilized data collected through the ECLS-K measurement tool, because it asked for a variety of race based data. The form asked parents to identify their child's race, also offering the option of "multiracial". The ECLS-K tool was viewed by the researchers as unique and useful, because it solicited additional information about the race of the biological and residential parents of the child/ren. The study results illustrated that 1,784 of the children for who the form was filled out for were multiracial by birth/ancestry. On the contrary parents identified only 477 of the children in the sample as mixed race on the aforementioned form. Therefore, the results illustrated a 7.8% difference between those that were ancestral multiracial and those that were assigned a racial identification of multiracial. The data presented by Nakazawa and Brunnsma suggest that there can be a disconnect between how parents view/ identify their children racially and the actual ancestral race of their child/ren. This further insinuates that parents may ascribe their child/ren a racial identification, before allowing the child to explore the process of doing so independently. Family is commonly referenced as a social factor that can influence racial identification and the way in which a biracial person experiences the process of racial identity development (Root, 1990; Poston, 1990; Gibbs, 1987; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005).

Social Factors, Racial Identification and Racial Identity

Family

Parental racial socialization is an example of one way that family can impact the racial identification and racial identity development process in developing biracial people. Parental racial socialization consists of the way in which the parent addresses issues of race, racial pride and racial identity, which can impact a child's perception of their race and racial group membership (Rockquemore, 2005). Maria Root reflects this ideal further noting that "self-concept is in part internalized by the reflection of self in others reactions" (Root, 1990, p. 579). Therefore, when a child is moving through the process of developing a racial identification and navigating the process of racial identity development it is likely that the child will incorporate their parent's perception of their race in their understanding of their own racial self. Garran & Miller (2008) also comment on the impact of family during the evolution of this process noting that "family is another critical context for everyone's racial and ethnic identity development, but particularly for multiracial people" (Garran and Miller, 2008, p. 110). Therefore, one might wonder how family as well as other social factors impact a person's developing racial identity and racial identification at different developmental life stages.

A qualitative relational research study conducted in an urban part of Canada, by Crawford and Allagia (2008), sought to investigate how family influences racial self identification in biracial people. Crawford and Allagia conducted detailed interviews with 8 biracial, specifically of African (Black) and European (White) ancestry, young adults ranging in age from 18 through 29 about the influence of family on their racial identity development. The results of this study indicate that family is one of the significant factors

that influence the way in which biracial people racially categorize themselves. More specifically the results honed in on three themes that correlated with how family can impact an individual's developing racial categorization. These three themes were (1) the level of parental awareness and understanding of race issues; (2) the impact of family structure and (3) communication and willingness to talk about race issues. This study is useful in highlighting the specific ways in which family may impact racial self categorization. However, limitations of this study (as with many studies in this field) were that there was a lack of diversity in racial combinations being studied and that the data was solicited from a very small sample. Additionally, the research was conducted on participants who live outside of the U.S. and were raised in different sociopolitical climate than those raised in the U.S.

Additional Social Networks & Environment

Brunsma (2002) conducted a fixed method research study to further investigate the influences of additional social factors on racial identity development and racial self identification in biracial people. This research was conducted through the use of quantitative data collection. Researchers gathered data through the distribution of a 106 item questionnaire. The sample consisted of 177 biracial (Black and White) college students, which the researchers described as varying in socioeconomic status and life experience. The social factors focused on in this study were the racial compositions of social networks (family members, peers, neighborhood), including pre-adult and adult experiences, quality of interactions within these networks, characteristics of participants physical appearance (skin color, eye color and physical features) and how it relates to societal perception of their appearance.

Results from this study suggest that there was variation in how Biracial people choose their identities, which seemed to be impacted by variations in the racial composition of social networks, variations in the quality of the interactions occurred within these social networks and variation in the personally perceived and social perception of appearance. This study is beneficial in highlighting examples of social factors that may influence the way in which young adults racially self identify. Some limitations of this study include its failure to include participants with additional ancestral racial combinations besides Black and White. In addition, the sample only included college students omitting participants that may not have pursued higher education as the result of a personal choice, financial constraints or some other unspecified reason.

Similar research conducted by Renn (2003) sought to analyze “the influences of post secondary environments on the identities of mixed race college students by examining the process and contexts of racial and ethnic identity development through the lens of developmental ecology theory” (Renn, 2003, p.383). Renn utilizes a descriptive research design employed by fixed method in two phases of data collection. The sample consisted of 38 biracial college students and the data was retrieved through open-ended interviews, written response exercises and a focus group. The data was synthesized through the use of the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model, which provided a framework for understanding the “influences (person), their interactions with the environment and the responses they provoke from the environment (process), their interactions within immediate settings (context), and changing sociocultural influences on development (time)” (Renn, 2003, p. 387). Through this research Renn was able to develop five categories that reflected the way in which respondents racially identified themselves.

Renn was also able to access influences from their environment before college and the environment while in college. This study provides an additional lens for racial identification of mixed race people as well as additional ways of looking at the influence of environment on the racial identification of multiracial people. Furthermore, this study provides an example of phase based research that is conducted over time with a variety of participants and in two different regions of the country. Limitations of this study were similar to Rockquemore & Brunσμα (2002) study in that Renn's sample omitted the experience of people that have not chosen to pursue higher education. However, unlike Rockquemore & Brunσμα (2002), Renn study looked at participants at more than one point in their development.

Racial Self Identification and Racial identity Development

The research presented above provides evidence of a number of factors that influence racial identification and the way in which biracial people experience the process of racial identity development. Additional research conducted by Baysden, Constantine, Milville, and So-Lloyd (2005) set out to further investigate essential themes and processes related to racial identity development as experienced and identified by individuals with bi and multiracial backgrounds. In addition, researchers sought and hoped to compare these themes to the "existing conceptualization of biracial and multiracial identity development" (Baysden et al, 2005, p.509). This study was guided by a phenomenological research design focusing on individual experiences with being ancestrally bi and multiracial. The researchers conducted a qualitative study with 12 self-identified multiracial individuals ranging in age from 20-54 years old from a variety of racial combinations. The tabulation of the data collected through individual interviews

suggested that there are four core themes prevalent in bi/multiracial identity development. These themes include encounters with racism, reference group orientation, the chameleon experience and identity development in context; critical people, critical places, critical periods. Participants in the study reported that encounters with racism increased their “awareness of group membership in one another race.”

In addition, participants often reported identifying with one race publicly and with their biracial identity in more private circles. The researchers report that the participants often perceived their identity as monoracial or monoethnic that is they “identified with one primary racial or ethnic group orientation” rather than a multiracial identification. In addition, the researchers discovered that many of the participants described having the chameleon experience. Participants described this as an attempt at fitting into one or more racial group. The researchers defined this as flexible social boundaries, “a willingness or ability to adapt to the demands or expectations of their cultural surroundings” (Baysden, et al, 2005, p.512). The final theme that surfaced during the interviews was identity development in context: critical people, places and periods. During dialogue related to this theme participants noted that their racial identity development was influenced by the quality and structure of interpersonal relationships with parents, extended family and friends, their stage of development as well as demographics and racial climate of the environments in which they dwelled i.e. neighborhoods and schools. This study provided additional examples of the diverse ways in which racial identification can evolve overtime and is impacted by environmental conditions/norms and the quality of relationships.

The strengths of this study include comparing racial identity theory with the in depth experiences of young adults that established a racial self identification of multiracial. This study also provided many concrete and descriptive examples of the participant's experiences with racial identity development and racial self identification. Nonetheless, limitations of this research include the possibility that results may have been reflective of the experiences of one particular region of the country, due to how participants were drawn. Furthermore, similarly to previously mentioned studies the participants reflected college/university students, possibly limiting the diversity amongst the sample. In addition, researchers appeared to be confined to conducting qualitative data and a therefore collection had to come from a smaller sample size. The researchers attribute their inability to conduct a quantitative study to the "lack of racial-identity instruments for multiracial identity" (Baysden et al., 2005, p. 515).

Additionally a qualitative study lead by Cruz-Janzen (2000) sought to explore the perceptions of the significance of home, school, and peers in their ethnic and racial self-identity. Ten biethnic and biracial people, ages 20-30 years old were recruited through snowball sampling, for long interviews. The racial combinations of participants did not include individuals of black and white mixed ancestry because of the prevalence of this population in research. Results yielded themes of seeking out acceptance and coping with rejection, managing stigma and labeling derived from phenotype as well as the complexity of securing a racial identification. Additionally, participants reported feeling alienated because of the lack of visibility of the biracial population in the school curriculum among others realms of society. Respondents further commented on feeling like they were navigating their lives as "faceless" beings, because of the pressure to

choose one racial group membership. Limitations of this study include the small sample size; however, the long interview method provided an opportunity to solicit detailed accounts from participants.

Jewelle Gibbs and Alice Hines (1992) also conducted a descriptive study, using mixed methods to investigate the experiences and perceptions of biracial individuals. The sample consisted of twelve adolescent participants varying in racial combinations that were residing in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1987 to 1989. Gibbs and Hines used a Biracial Adolescent Psychosocial Interview, the Archenbach Youth Self-Report, the Rosenberg Self –Esteem Scale for Adolescents, while parents completed a parent questionnaire. Results from the study indicated that 75 percent of the participants,

Appeared to feel positively about themselves and comfortable with their biracial identity. They had learned to incorporate positive aspects of their Black and White racial backgrounds, had established satisfactory peer and social relationships, had achieved a relatively healthy adolescent separation from their parents, and had begun to set appropriate educational and career goals...However, 25% seemed to be having more difficulty, reporting low self-esteem and more ambivalence about their biracial status. (Tatum, 1997, p. 174-175)

The findings also provided evidence that “family environment, school and neighborhood environment and social support groups have a significant impact on positive biracial identity formation” (Gibbs & Hines, in Root 1992, p. 238).

The research presented thus far suggests that there are numerous factors that influence racial identification and how biracial people experience biracial identity development. These factors include the racial demographics of the social environments such as school, neighborhood, peers and family. Additional influential factors appear to be quality of relationships within social environments, developmental stage or age of individual, ascribed racial group membership and physical appearance or phenotype. The

research reviewed thus far further indicates that biracial people's racial identification and process of racial identity development may be influenced by these factors in a plethora of ways throughout their lifetime. This highlights the significant amount of diversity that exists among the biracial population. This data further signals that racial identification and racial identity development does not have to be sedimentary, but can be a fluctuating and evolutionary process (Tashiro, 2002).

Variance in Racial Self Identifications

Maria Graham, in her article *The Real World* a critical analysis of U.S. Censuses methods of soliciting mixed race and ethnicity based data, highlights the diversity that exists within the way in which mixed race people choose to racially identify. Specifically Graham speaks to the possibilities that accompany the availability of a multiracial option on the U.S. Census during the debate that influenced changes made to the 2000 census. She writes,

I would like to stress that the multiracial category enables multiracial people to have the choice of an accurate designation, It is an important option for any person with parents of different races. This does not mean that this choice is appropriate for everyone. Some multiracial people who choose to identify with one race only. They have every right and every opportunity to do so in our society (Graham in Root; 1996, p.46-47).

A 2002 research study, conducted by Hitlin, Brown & Elder, sought to explore how development and limited options for racial identification change a person's racial self identification over time. This longitudinal study employed a quasi-experimental design to study biracial adolescent's racial self categorization over time. The data for this study was collected through in home interviews and a compared to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent health. The results revealed that the way in which

Biracial adolescence racially self identify does change over time. Similar research conducted in 1995 by Ursula Brown, utilized findings from one of her larger 1991 research studies to better understand how black and white interracial young adults racially self identify. In 1991, Brown used a cross sectional research design to examine racial identity and conflict in this population (Brown, 1995, p.126).

This data sample was collected using the Interracial Young Adult Interview, which incorporates a mixed method approach to collecting data through both quantitative and qualitative measures. The results of this study indicated that 64.7% of the 119 participants reported that they chose to racially identify themselves as a black publically and 66.4% reported that they would privately racially self identify as interracial. In addition, 5% reported that “they would define themselves as white if they had the choice” (Brown, 1995, p.127). Comparatively, there was not a percentage offered for those that reported choosing ‘other’ on forms. However, the results did state that these individuals often fill in their own description/definition of other. The results of this study coincide with an argument made by Melissa Herman (2008), a researcher in this field. She writes,

Regardless of a multiracial youth’s particular racial ancestry, the tasks of discovering and asserting a racial identity are complex. Unlike monoracial youth, multiracial youth find that racial identity is not always consistent with racial identification. Multiracial youth do not typically hold a single racial identity, although they are often forced to designate a single racial identification that ignores one or more of their racial ancestries. (p. 216)

However, the results of this study are reflective of young adults with a solely black and white biracial ancestry, which presents as a limitation of this study. Therefore, there is a possibility that these findings may not be relevant to biracial young adults with differing ancestral racial combinations. Consequently, Brown’s original 1991 data collection from

which this sample was extracted does include biracial young adults reflective of other racial combinations.

Biracial Identity & Psychological Well Being

The majority of research conducted on mixed race people has focused on factors and variations among racial identifications and the navigation of the racial identity development process. In the past, biracial people were stigmatized as a population of psychologically fragmented individuals especially if they were unsuccessful in declaring themselves as members of one race (Root, 1992; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). These ideals have been challenged and proven to be pathological in their nature. Consequently, minimal attention has been given to the examination of these populations' attitudes towards their biracial identity and the psychological impact of living in the world as a biracial person. This may be reflective of concerns about repeating the past pattern of pathologizing of this population. Research conducted by Bracey, Bamaca & Umana (2004) ventured out to explore self-esteem, ethnic identity, and the relationship between these constructs among biracial and monoracial adolescents. The study utilized an existing data set from a previous mixed methods study (Umana-Taylor, 2003) conducted on 3,282 adolescents, between the ages of 13 and 20 years of age, residing in the southwest. Participants included those that were monoracial and biracial as determined by the race of their biological parents. Monoracial participants were categorized as Black, White, Asian and Latino, while the biracial participants were categorized as Black/White, Latino/White, Asian/Black, Asian/Latino and Black/Latino.

Researchers collapsed the racial groupings into five racial identifications (Black, White, Asian, Latino and biracial) and explored the direction of the relationship between

self-esteem and ethnic identity for these groups. Results indicated that there was no significant statistical difference among biracial subgroups nor the five identified racial groups; however the findings did indicate that there was a positive relationship between ethnic identity and self esteem for all of the groups. Overall this study illustrated that adolescents with a heightened ethnic identity also tended to possess higher levels of self esteem. This study was successful at soliciting a large sample with comparison groups; determined race based on the race of the parent rather than ascribed race or self identified race of respondents and actively investigated differences among the biracial individuals in the sample. This study also illustrates how some researchers utilize the terms of race and ethnicity interchangeably, as evidenced by this researcher's construction of the sample based on their race rather than ethnicity. This also raises questions as to whether the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)* was the most appropriate tool for this study since the study focused on the participant's race rather than their ethnicities.

A similar study was conducted by Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers (2004). They sought to examine ethnic identification, psychological well being and intergroup competence of biracial college students. The sample consisted of 66 biracial black/white and Asian/white subjects. Participants were asked to complete four quantitative measurement tools to explore three clinically significant areas. The first tool was an ethnic identity measure created by researchers leading the study, developed as a way to assess participants racial self labeling. The second set of tools were used to assess the psychological well being of respondents were the *Rosenberg (1995) Self-Esteem Scale* and the Deiner, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) *Satisfaction with Life Scale*. Lastly, researchers sought to

measure intergroup competence by measuring intergroup confidence through the use of an adapted version of the *Gudykunst (1998) scale*.

Results from the study indicated that participants were most likely to racially self identify in the following order bicultural, minority and then non identified (no racial membership). Furthermore respondents varied in terms of their psychological well-being and intergroup anxiety. These findings echo the results reported by Bracey, Bamaca and Umana-Taylor (2004) suggesting that biracial people's level of ethnic identity can be predicting factor in their psychological well-being and intergroup competence. In addition, similarly to Bracey et al. (2004), a concrete limitation of the study was that the researchers used ethnicity interchangeable with the term race. Additionally, this study consisted of a small sample of convenience, which may have limited the diversity in the results. On the contrary, the study was successful in creating and administering a racial identification measure in conjunction with already existing tools to get a multi-dimensional picture of participants functioning in relationship to their biracial group membership.

The studies presented above provide examples of some of the research being conducted with biracial people. The majority of researchers interested in this area of study have opted to explore a core group of interest. Most commonly researchers have explored how biracial people racially self identify and the progress and process of biracial identity development. Additionally, researchers appear to have a significant amount of interest in the social factors that contribute to or shape these varying racial identifications and experiences with identity exploration. More recently, these professionals have begun to take an interest in how this population feels about being

biracial. Therefore, studies have also begun to explore the psychological well being and functioning of biracial people.

The studies presented in this literature contend the following:

- (1) There are a number of social factors that can impact the way in which a biracial person comes to see and define themselves
- (2) The more grounded and connected a person feels in their races; the more positive they may feel about themselves and their biracial identity.
- (3) Establishing a racial identification and traveling through the process of biracial identity development are evolutionary processes.
- (4) Biracial people identify in a variety of ways, are identified by others similarly and are a heterogeneous group of individuals with a spectrum of experiences.

Therefore, this research study aims to further explore all four of these areas, by surveying biracial people to gain more insight into their experiences and processes as they relate to their racial identification and biracial identity development. The next section will focus on the theory that has been developed to interpret these experiences and processes. More specifically this section will also introduce the theoretical frameworks that will be used, during the analysis of the findings generated through this study.

Theoretical Frameworks

The research conducted on mixed race people has spanned in content, design and results, nonetheless, these studies continues to be the foundation for the development of theoretical frameworks. The development of these theories provides evidence that researchers and practitioners area aware of the need to (Kich 1992; Root, 1992; Poston,

1990; Rockquemore, 2002). One of the earliest scholarly attempts at interpreting the experience of mixed race people was published in the late 1920's by sociologist, Everett Stonequist and further elaborated on shortly thereafter by Robert E. Park (Herman, 2008; Wright & Wright, 1972; Poston, 1990). Stonequist and Park perpetuated the ideology of the existence of the "tragic mulatto", which they referred to as the "Marginal Man". The "Marginal Man" was defined as a person that was from two different groups sometimes racial and sometimes cultural in a society that is defined by very distinct racial and cultural grouping (Wright & Wright, 1972). In Herman's (2008) critique of the "Marginal Man" theory, she highlights the fact that such a theoretical framework "[takes] a deficit model approach, arguing that multiracial people were perceived as marginal by both groups, and therefore stigmatized by all monoracial people" (p.205).

The Marginal Man theory described biracial identity, as an absolute, rather than an evolving process. In addition, it pathologized and marginalized mixed race people claiming that they were at risk for psychological dysfunction. Theoretical models to follow further contended that individuals declaring their membership in more than one racial group were suffering from a fragmented identity and identity confusion (Root, 1992). However as research expanded on biracial people new frameworks of understanding this population began to surface. This expansion has been cited as occurring,

By the mid 1980's and throughout the 1990s, [when] the alleged pathologies associated with biracial individuals marginality drew the attention of a new generation of researchers, who sought to explain psychologically, clinically, and developmentally how these individuals developed a biracial identity and how they could maintain a healthy, integrated sense of their biracialism. (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002, p. 21)

Stonequist and Park were the first scholars to attempt to convey the biracial identity development process experienced by mixed race people. However, as research progressed and frameworks evolved theories about biracial identity split into two distinct perspectives. Theorists that created frameworks from a developmental psychology lens (Jacobs, 1992; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) aiming to describe the process of biracial identity development as an exploration through a variety of sequential stages, all working towards an integrated biracial identity. That is a racialized identity, in which individuals of biracial ancestry can value and proclaim their membership of both racial groups. On the contrary other scholars (Root, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunson, 2002) developed such theories from a sociological framework, exploring racial identification and the factors that may influence these identifications.

For the purpose of interpreting the findings of this research study, I will reference W.S. Poston's as well as K.A. Rockquemore's theories on biracial identity development. Poston's model follows a developmental psychology trajectory, while Rockquemore's model employs a sociological approach. These two theories both complement each other and can be easily integrated to provide an all-encompassing view of racial identity development and racial identification in biracial people, across the lifespan. W.S. Poston (1990) asserts that the exploration of a racial identity in biracial peoples is that of a detailed and lengthy evolutionary journey. From the standpoint of Poston's model, biracial people travel through five distinct developmental stages. Poston's model begins in the stage of *Personal Identity*, which is when a child has a "sense of self that is somewhat independent of his or ethnic background (Poston, 1990, p. 153)." Followed by *Choice of Group*, the second stage of this model contends that there are a variety of status

factors, social support factors and personal factors that influence this choice. During this stage, biracial people are, for the first time, confronted with choosing a racial group to identify with and belong to. Poston contends that this decision on group membership is heavily influenced by status, social support and personal factors. He further argues that once an individual has decided on a group membership they often feel experience feelings of *Enmeshment/Denial*, the fourth stage of the process. During this stage the individual may feel some discomfort and guilt with having to choose one racial group membership over another. Poston contends that once an individual has resolved these unpleasant feelings they will move into the fourth stage, the stage of *Appreciation*. During this stage individuals may seek out information about both of his/her racial ancestral traditions. The final stage presented in this model is the stage of *Integration*. This stage marks the period when an individual identifies themselves as bi/multiracial, as the result of being able to fuse their two heritages together in a positive way.

Conversely, K.A. Rockquemore developed a theoretical model for interpreting biracial identity development that focuses solely on the racial self identification of this population. This model reflects four options for the way in which biracial people commonly racially self identify. These options for racial identity are (1) a singular identity, choosing only one race, (2) border identity, choosing to identify as biracial, (3) a protean identity, choosing to switch between racial identities, (4) a transcendent identity, choosing to reject any racial classifications (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002, p.336). Rockquemore refers to her theoretical framework as a biracial identity development model, although it only focuses on racial identification in this population. Rockquemore's model differs from Poston models, because it does not suggest that

individual's progress through developmental stages nor does it place value on reaching a racial identity that is incumbent of both ancestral races. However, a comparison of the two models suggests that the theories are interrelated. Both theorists discuss racial identification as a key component to the biracial identity development process. Furthermore, both theorists highlight the influence of social factors on the process of biracial identity development and racial identification. Poston suggests the impact of social factors in his actual model whereas, Rockquemore chooses to focus on the impact of social factors in her research, which she almost always often incorporates her biracial identity development model.

Rockquemore's theory of biracial identity development illustrates the differing ways that biracial people may choose to identify based, which can be correlated with the stages offered by Poston. For example an individual in stage three of Poston model the stage of enmeshment/denial are likely individuals that would self identify with what Rockquemore refers to as a singular identity and identification with one race. Conversely an individual in stage four of Poston's model, appreciation may be likely to claim a protean identity, that is sometimes racially identify with one of their races and sometimes racially identify with the other race. On the contrary a respondent in stage five of Poston's model, the stage of integration will likely mirror a border identity, racially identifying with both racial groups.

This literature review provides evidence that there has been a multitude of interest and slowly growing investigation into the experiences of bi and multiracial people for decades. However, it also appears that the research conducted on this population has been done through small samples of subjects of convenience, with very little variation among

racial combinations and the lack of qualitative or quantitative standardized assessment tools for understanding the experiences of this population. Nonetheless, empirical data has been instrumental in the development of a small set of theoretical frameworks, which strive to interpret and standardize the racial and psychological development of bi/multiracial people. On the contrary, reasons for learning more about this population appear to vary across discipline and role of the investigator. Advocates for the rights of bi/multiracial people seek more data on this population in an effort to lobby for increased rights and, in addition to, identifying population needs and measuring service based outcomes. While, bi/multiracial people continue to seek the culmination of more published data so that their stories of existence can be told. Nonetheless, researchers, practitioners, advocates, bi/multiracial peoples, as well as the alike and the different continue to seek a deeper understanding of the spectrum of experiences of bi/multiracial people.

Scholars, researchers and theorists concentrating on better understanding the needs and experiences of mixed race people argue that there is a lack of research on this population, regardless of the fact that it continues to be one of the fastest growing groups (Baysden, et al, 2005). Therefore, in an effort to contribute to the already existing empirical research and literature that aims to illuminate this deeper understanding, I have decided to embark on a research project, committed to further exploring, the biracial identity development and racial self identification of biracial young adults. This research study will be conducted through use of an anonymous online survey, which consists of multiple choice and short answer questions. The data collected will be interpreted through the use of the theoretical frameworks proposed by W.S. Carlos Poston (1990)

and Kerri Rockquemore (2002), both of which were presented in the theoretical framework section. These theories will be used to interpret the findings, because they provide frameworks for understanding biracial identity development and racial self identification across the lifespan. More specifically these theories can be infused with one another to reflect a clear understanding of this population's experiences and process. This study will be guided by the following questions of interest: How do and have biracial young adults come to racially self define themselves in the context of their social world? How do and have biracial young adult's experience/d the process of racial identification by self and by others? What are biracial young adult's attitudes towards being ancestrally biracial?

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Formulation

This descriptive research study is designed to investigate the ways in which biracial young adults come to develop and negotiate their racial self identification, while navigating the process of bi racial identity development. This investigation was lead by the following research questions: How have biracial young adults come to racially define themselves in the context of their social world? How have biracial young adults experienced the process of racial self identification by self and by others? What are biracial young adult's attitudes towards being ancestrally biracial?

Subject Selection Criteria

Individuals eligible to participate in this study were male or female, young adults, between the ages of 18 and 35 years old, who were proficient in reading and writing in English. In addition, participants in this study were biracial, which was determined by the racial group membership of their biological parents as reported by the participant. Subjects were considered biracial if they were the biological offspring of parents that differ in their racial group membership. Participant's biological parents were identified members of one of the following racial groups: Black, White, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander and Latino/Hispanic. It should be noted that currently the U.S Census recognizes Latino/Hispanic as an ethnicity; however, prior to the 2000 U.S. Census

“Latino/Hispanic” had been recognized as a race for quite some time. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Latino/Hispanic is being considered a race.

Recruitment took place through the circulation of a flier that specifies the eligibility requirements for participation as well as the web address for accessing the online survey. The recruitment tool was circulated in one of three ways. First, it was sent out through a mass message to members of the social networking site, Facebook. Facebook is an online networking site, which primarily services young adults. In addition, to a large number of members, Facebook also hosts a variety of online groups that are dedicated to providing a space for biracial people looking to connect with one another.

Second, the recruitment tool was sent to the Executive Director of Swirl. Swirl is a “national multi-ethnic organization that challenges society’s notions of race through community building, education, and action (<http://swirlinc.org/>)”. Swirl currently has an active chapter in the Boston area. This chapter of Swirl hosts a local website that provides networking opportunities for bi and multiracial/ethnic people in the greater Boston area. The Executive Director of Swirl agreed to send the recruitment tool through the method of an Evite to all those on the Swirl list serve. Lastly, I sent out an email to my fellow Smith College School for Social Work students as well as other colleagues and friends, which included the recruitment tool and a request for individuals to forward the information to potential candidates for the research study.

Data Collection

The data for this research study was collected through the use of a mixed method, anonymous online survey tool that was created by the researcher. The survey tool was

constructed and managed through the use of the survey monkey online computer program. The survey remained opened to interested participants for a period of one month. The questionnaire consisted of a combination of 51, multiple choice and open ended questions. The questions on the survey were created based on themes prevalent in some of the scholarly literature reviewed on this topic. The literature reviewed for this study was retrieved from a variety of electronic referred databases, which included ERIC, Ethnic Watch and Psych Info. The survey inquired about respondent's demographical information, the racial demographics of their family, neighborhood, schools and friendships, quality of relationships with their family members, experiences with the process of racial identification as well as their attitudes towards being biracial. The scale located at the end of the questionnaire was developed to measure how positive participants were about their biracial identity. This scale was modeled after the *Rosenberg (1995) Self Esteem Scale* and the Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) *Satisfaction with Life Scale*.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected the survey monkey computer program produced the results in a variety of ways. First the program made each respondents survey with the accompanying answers available for the researchers review. The principle investigator went through each survey and documented the race/racial combination of each participant based on the identified race of each biological parent. She also reviewed each survey to assess the multiple ways in which respondents answered the three questions in the survey that related to racial self identification. This was done in an effort to explore how and if respondents changed the way that they racially self identified, throughout the course of

the survey, particularly when the options and questions for racial self identification were modified or altered. Second the survey monkey tool summarized the response rate for the answer options made available, per each question. The program did so by calculating the percent and raw number of participants that answered each question and each answer response. Lastly, the survey monkey program converted the data into an excel workbook. The excel program coded each of the questions and the corresponding answers. This format of the data was used to assess survey questions 34 through 50. This portion of the survey consisted of a Likert scale that aimed to measure how positive each respondent was about being biracial. Each question on the scale was reviewed to determine whether it was going in the right statistical direction. The answers to the questions that were in the reverse statistical directions were reversed coded as to follow the direction of the other questions. Thereafter the answers to each question were calculated to reflect the minimum, maximum and mean score of the corresponding answers as well as the cumulative scores of the entire sample. An Anova Test was run on the four groups that had been constructed based on the way each respondent had racially identified. The Anova Test was used to measure as to whether there was a difference in how positive each group was about being biracial. In addition, a Cronbach Coefficient Alpha Test was run on the scale to test its internal consistency.

Second, the survey monkey program also summarized the responses for each question, providing the data in raw numbers and percentages. Therefore, the data was assessed by viewing each response as a group. The groups were then ranked by the number of responses, which were reflected as the size of the group or percentage of the sample. This allowed for noting the most and least popular responses. Three questions

that aimed at assessing how respondents defined their racial identification were compared to see whether and how respondent's racial identification may have changed throughout the course of the survey.

Third, the responses to the open ended questions were transferred by hand into a Microsoft Word Document from The Survey Monkey Website. The data was organized by question and each response was numbered. Then the responses were reviewed for themes that were parallel to the overarching themes, which also mirrored sections on the closed ended portion of the questionnaire. For example one respondent commented on having a non-existent relationship with her father and her paternal extended family. This data coincided with the section of the standardized questionnaire that inquired about the quality of familial relationships and therefore was placed in this section of the findings. For example, a respondent's account of what it was like to have a non-existent relationship with one side of her family was used to enrich the quantitative data. More specifically, the data collected that focused on the impact of the quality of familial relationships on racial identity and racial self identification. Overall, the formula used for reporting the findings fused and then presented qualitative and quantitative data together by common themes and similar responses.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Demographic Data

The sample for this study included fifty three young adults, ranging in age from 18-35 years of age (Appendix G, Figure 1). Most of the participants had biological parents that were from two different racial groups as listed on the participation criteria. However, at least 2% of the population identified themselves as biracial, because one of their parents was biracial and the other monoracial. These participants considered themselves biracial, because their biological parents did technically differ in race. Participants varied in ethnicity, racial combinations and how they racially self identified. In terms gender, 21% of the respondents were male and 79% of the respondents who were female (Appendix G, Figure 2). The majority of the respondents, which was equivalent to 70% of the sample, reported that they had spent the bulk of their childhood and adolescence in the Northeast region of the United States (Appendix H, Figure 3).

However, also notable was that 18.4% of the respondents had been reared outside of the United States in countries such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Bermuda, where racial categorization and perceptions of race may have differed from those most prevalent in the United States (Appendix H, Figure 4). Additionally, the highest educational level completed by respondents varied from high school to Post graduate. However, the majority of the sample consisted of individuals that at minimum, had earned an undergraduate degree from a college or university (Appendix I, Figure 5). Respondents

varied across reported earned income levels. Slightly fewer than 20% of the population reported earning \$35,000 or less a year, while approximately 30% of the respondents reported earning \$35,000-\$55,000 and 51% of respondents report their yearly earnings as succeeding \$55,000 (Appendix I, Figure 6). Finally, a substantial number of respondents, approximately one-third of the sample, reported that they spoke more than one language.

Racial Identity Development & Racial Self Identification

Respondents provided quantitative and qualitative data reflective of their navigation of the process of racial identity development and racial self identification/s. In these findings, participants often mentioned a number of factors in relationship to the evolution of their racial self identification and the process of biracial identity development. These identified factors included life stage (age); the racial composition of social environment; family and phenotype/ physical appearance. The following section will focus on the role of these factors in participant's process of traveling through biracial identity development and the molding of their racial self identification.

Life Stage (age)

When participants were asked about the process of forming their racial self identification, the majority of the respondents, 62% of the sample, reported that their racial self identification had changed throughout the course of their lifetime. When asked to estimate how much their racial self identification had changed over time 17% of the respondents reported that it had changed very much, while 45% of respondents reported somewhat of a change (Appendix J, Figure 7). Further inquiry into this process of change revealed that respondents were more likely to identify as biracial rather than monoracial as they progressed in age. One respondent wrote, "The older I get, the less I feel like I

have to identify as EITHER black or white. I am both”. While another participant further echoed this theme noting, “I accept being half white more now that I’m older. When I was younger I would only say black”.

In addition, the sample also expressed that as they aged their seemed to be more options, to identify as biracial rather than monoracial. One respondent noted “Now I’m able to select both of my races. Before, I always had to choose one, which would usually be Black”. Another participant further elaborated by incorporating thoughts about desired racial group membership and acceptance, in addition to, life stage. This respondent wrote,

Growing up I sometimes wanted to be one race or the other to be more accepted, by a certain race. Now that I am older, I embrace my multi heritage and love being two different races. I get the best of both worlds.

On the contrary, another person reported always self identifying as mixed and another race. This person further explains that their racial self identification changed in regards to their reported racial group membership. They note “[My racial identification changed] from White/Mixed (elementary to junior high) [and] to Asian/Mixed (high school and beyond)”. Participants in the sample noted that life stage and age were markers for changes in their racial self identification. These changes appeared to take form in variations of racial group membership, fluctuation between monoracial and biracial self identifications. These changes seemed to be related to respondent’s level of comfort with owning particular racial self identification labels as well as the availability of multiple racial self identification options (i.e. on official forms).

Racial Composition of Social World

Respondents varied in their descriptions of the racial composition of their neighborhood and schools during elementary and high school (Appendix K, Table1). However, overall, the majority of the sample identified the racial demographics of their school, neighborhood and friendships as predominately white from elementary school through high school. The reported racial demographics of respondent's schools and neighborhoods exhibited a 0% to 10% change from elementary school to high school. This suggests that in general the racial demographics of these two sectors of respondent's environments remained the same throughout these two periods of their life. Conversely the racial demographics of client's close relationships with peers did change significantly from elementary school to high school. One of the most observable changes was the 13% decrease in close friendships with predominately white peers. The second apparent change was the 10% increase in participants reporting having close friendships with predominately multiracial peers.

Participants engaged in offering additional comments about the way in which the racial demographics of their social environment impacted their experiences growing up as mixed race people. Respondents echoed moment's of alienation and rejection, which they connect to being mixed race and therefore, racially atypical. Yet instill, others illustrated how they have made meaning out of these challenges. One person commented on her experience noting,

Being biracial growing up was difficult because I was in a predominant white community, but it also made me stronger. I grew more appreciative of my background once I was exposed to a mixed community and realize how great it is to come from a two different backgrounds and share the story of how my parents met. I enjoy the differences in my parent's background.

Another participant noted their process of seeking out and securing racial group membership and acceptance, while engaging in the parallel process of seeking out and securing a racial self identification. They wrote,

Growing up in a predominantly white community, I tried to fit in with the people. I always recognized that I was different from the rest and was singled out during specific lectures pertaining to African Americans. Nonetheless I defined myself as mixed, but "acted" white. While in college my friends were predominantly black and I became more in tune with that part of me and associated more with mixed and black, along with white.

Another individual further noted some of the psychological stress of being ostracized as a mixed race child living in a predominately black neighborhood in the Caribbean. He or she commented,

Growing up in a predominantly black neighborhood in Jamaica was a tough experience; I was teased and made fun of because of my colour and my father's colour. In my earlier years I wanted some normality; that being one race or the other, not both. As I grew older, I was thankful of what I received; I see it as a wholesome blessing to have experienced both worlds.

Similarly to the above participant a portion of the sample stated that their mixed heritage impacted the quality of relationships with peers. Participant's responses continued to exemplify feelings of alienation and rejection experienced through attempts at "fitting into" monoracial peer groups. One person noted that this was the only issue that they struggled with growing up as a biracial person. They further elaborated,

The only issue I would say was not being looked at as Black by my Black friends and not being looked at as White by my White friends. If there was a discussion about how it is to be "Black" My friends always made sure I knew that it couldn't affect me like them because 'Your not really Black'. I would always have to defend myself on that note, but really that's it.

Another respondent also commented on this issue stating, "...Sometimes ya [you] to black for the whites kids and to white for the blacks kids so you question what if?!?!?"

Participant's responses suggest that seeking out racial group membership is related to the

process of seeking and securing a racial self identification. The racial demographics and quality of relationships, present in participants' social environments from elementary through high school, appear to be sources for increased stress for some and opportunities for liberation and learning for others.

Family: Racial Composition and Quality of Relationships

Respondents were also asked about the role of family in their process of journeying through biracial identity development and racial self identification. The majority of the sample identified their biological mother and father as their primary caretakers, during their childhood and adolescence. However some participants did identify other primary caretakers, which included biological paternal and maternal extended family members, adoptive mother, step father, domestic worker (cook/cleaner) and boarding school house parent. The races of participant's biological parents varied spanning five racial groups (Appendix L, Figure 8). An overwhelming number of participants had parents that were racially Black and White, which could suggest that this sample consists of individuals that reflect the black and white racial combination. Most participants described their relationship with their biological parents as 'very' to 'somewhat' pleasant (Appendix L, Figure 9). The majority of respondents also reported having a good to excellent relationship with their extended family (Appendix M, Figure 10). In addition, most of the sample identified their extended family as 'very' to 'somewhat' accepting of their mixed race heritage (Appendix M, Figure 11).

When provided with the space to comment, a significant number of participants chose to further elaborate on the quality of their relationships with their extended family. The individuals that chose to share seem to have been representative of participants that

had less positive relationships with their extended family. The following excerpts reflect respondents who attribute the poor quality of their relationships with their extended family, to family member's disapproval of interracial relationships and births.

My mother was disowned by the majority of her family for having my brother and I. I only know about 4 people in my mother's family, not only was this hard for her, it made it hard for me to trust "white" people and their motives for a very long time.

Another participant further commented honing in on their experience having a non-existent relationship with one side of their extended family. She/he wrote, "It was challenging being a brown person raised in a white environment with NO black family accept my sister! She is the reason I was able to have a "normal" life." Similarly, another person noted their experience of being biracial, with no contact with their father or paternal extended family and also what it was like sharing this experience with a sibling. This respondent commented,

My twin sister and I are bi-racial (Black and White) raised in an all white family with no contact with our biological father or his family. We were like the Sesame Street skit, 'One of these things is not like the other...' We were grateful to have each other. Our mother and family were incredibly loving and accepting. Yes, there were incidents when they may have exhibited some internalized racism (a great grandfather who wanted us to date white, a grandmother's battle with our kinky hair, an aunt who referred to grown black men as 'boy') but I never felt anything but loved and adored. My sister and I although raised in the same family have different opinions as adults. My sister identified strongly with her father (despite his absence) and has been very angry and bitter throughout her life. We have both battled our weight. I carry an extra 100lbs worth of 'issues'. Sometimes I wish that I could get in touch with my rage. Maybe then I could drop the pounds. (My sister has battled her weight and won.)

Respondents provided information about the racial demographics of their nuclear family and the quality of relationships experienced with their extended families. The majority of participants reported having a positive relationship with their immediate and

extended family. This was marked by self reports of primarily pleasant relationships, in which their mixed race heritage was accepted and welcomed. However, data collected through open ended questions revealed that some participants had more negative relationships with their extended family. The climate of these relationships was evident through verbal and non verbal signals, which highlighted differences, while yielding a tone of alienation and rejection.

Phenotype/ Physical Appearance

In addition to the racial composition of the social environment, respondents also commented on how their physical characteristics connect/ed to their process of racial self identification and biracial identity development. One participant commented on racial group membership, the racial composition of their school and family as well as phenotype/physical appearance. This respondent reports,

When I was younger I was confused about it, because everyone around me was white and I was light enough to blend in, but my mother was black and my brother was biracial, also but his skin was much darker than mine. By high school, I had gravitated toward the minorities in school, who basically all stuck together.

Another person further commented on their physical racial identification as well as their personal ideology about their race. This respondent writes,

Physically I still identify with being black, but mentally I have realized that it's ok to identify with both white and black. When I was young this really used to confuse me, because I was never white enough for white people or black enough for black people.

One participant documented, how they have found a happy medium between their racial identification, biracial ancestry, and desired racial group membership. This respondent remarked,

I consider myself a Black man. I came up black, I identify with black culture, society treats me like I'm black, and I relate to the struggles and causes of Black people. That being said, I am proud of my Finnish ethnicity and heritage. I consider myself a Black man (racially) of African-American and Finnish descent/ethnicity.

A different individual commented collectively on their navigation of their racial identity, desired racial group membership, racial identification and phenotype. This respondent wrote,

My experience, I am both African American and Puerto Rican. Often African-Americans do not consider me black enough and since I cannot speak Spanish fluently I was not Latina enough and have found it hard to learn about that side of my cultural. In the Latino community language is your key in, can't speak forget about learning your heritage. This has been my lesson and continued struggle. Therefore, the world (predominantly white Americans) always sees me as black, until they read my last name and then I become Latino. In some parts of America like the west coast it's a bad thing, I was permanently on the random "strip search" list when I traveled. On the east coast I was [viewed as] a strong up [and] coming Latino leader and given all the help I needed to rise to the top. As biracial, I was guaranteed a full college scholarship. It's a mix bag.

Respondent's accounts display themes of racial identity confusion, the distinction between racial ancestry and racial identification, the addition of ethnicity and appearance and language as a determining factor in racial group membership. Additional, participants comments on phenotype further reiterate the ambiguity that exist within the physical appearances of mixed race people.

These results summarize participant's thoughts about the connection between racial self identification, biracial identity development and the aforementioned factors of life stage (age), racial composition of social environment, family and phenotypes/ physical appearance. In addition to the role of these factors, this research also sought to investigate how participants would respond to questions related to racial self

identification throughout the course of the survey. The next focuses on their responses to these questions.

Racial Self Identification and Forced Group Choice

At the onset of the survey respondents were asked their racial self identification. They were asked to do so by answering the following question? “How do you racially identify? (Please choose all that apply)” The questioned aimed to gather data about the way in which the sample viewed their own racial identification, when provided with a multitude of options. Respondents answered this question in one of ten ways (Appendix N, Table 2). The majority of respondents racially identified themselves by identifying in one of three ways: (1) By marking both of their races (30%), (2) By marking bi/multiracial and both of their races (21%) and (3) By marking bi/multiracial only (19%). Therefore, at the onset of the survey 70% of the respondents indicated a racial self identification inclusive of both of their racial ancestries.

In an effort to explore whether and how respondents may have changed the way that they racial identified throughout the survey process, two additional questions regarding racial identification were also asked. Question # 24 sought respondent’s racial identification, while also omitting the previously available answer options of Multi/Biracial and other (Appendix N, Table 3). Responses to this question reflected a 6% decrease in the respondents self reporting as members of two races.

The final question that was assessed in an effort to see how respondent’s racial identification may have changed, throughout the survey, was Question #30 (Appendix O, Table 4). This question asked respondent’s to choose only one answer option as their racial identification. The answer choices continued to be void of the options of other and

multi/biracial. However, this question option also offered respondent's the opportunity to provide comments in regards to this specific question. The table below illustrates how respondents chose to answer the question.

When asked to choose one racial group most of the respondents obliged in doing so. However, 11% of the participants skipped the multiple choice portion of the question, while elaborating on their reason to do. Most of the respondents that offered comments reported that they could and would not chose one race over the other. One respondent noted,

I don't think I could ever do this. I understand the reasoning behind the question bit I truly identify with each side equally. I look black, so I get treated that way, but more of my personality is white because I was raised that way. And when interacting with both cultures I always feel an equal amount of comfort as well as apprehension.

Another respondent reported that when they are confronted with a question like this on a form they "Check off 2 races or leave it blank. I cannot choose just one I as much one race as I am the other." However, the majority of respondents were able to choose one race, which was equivalent to 89% of the sample. Some of these respondents offered additional comments that justified their decision to choose the racial group. Overall respondents seemed to vary in their reasons for selecting the race that they did. Some respondents reported that they decided on their singular race based on a variety of factors including, the racial group that they were most comfortable with, racial group that was in sync with their physically appearance, the race of the family members that they grew up around or what they perceived as the dominant parent's race. Moreover, individuals from both groups commented that they could see their choice of this one race changing, depending upon the reasoning behind the inquiry. One respondent noted, "Sometimes, I

put black, sometimes I check “other.” Depends if I can get a scholarship for being a minority. Since society sees me as a black woman, I put black.”

Respondent’s varied in their monoracial classifications (Appendix O, Table 5). When asked to choose one racial identification 79% of the sample opted to self identify as Black compared to 62% of the sample that identified as so on Question # 2. Additionally, when respondents were asked to identify their race in Question # 24, which omitted the options of other and multi/Biracial 85% of the respondents selected Black as their race. Therefore, it is observable that the majority of the respondents were products of mixed race relationships, in which at least one parent was racially Black. In addition, respondents were more likely to narrow their racial identification to the most targeted racial group.

A comparison between Question #2, Question #24 and Question #30 (Appendix P, Table 6) illustrates that as racial identification options narrowed so did the way that people chose to racially self identify. In addition, when given limited options for racial self identification, most respondents opted for a less desirable racial identification over refusing to provide a racial identification. It also highlights the diversity in the way in which people choose to racially identify independent of available racial group options. Finally this comparison illustrates how this population is impacted by the availability of racial identifications options as well as the societal perception of their expected racial group membership.

Living in the World as a Mixed Race Person: Inquisition into Racial Identification

Frequency of Occurrence

When respondents were asked how often others inquire about their racial identification, 3.8% of the sample reported that they were almost never asked about their racial makeup. Nonetheless, 34% of the sample reported that are asked sometimes, while 61.5% reported that they are asked about their race almost always. One respondent commented that

I get daily questions like ‘what are you?’ because people don't know how to approach the question. People confuse nationality with ethnicity... or make assumptions... or ask because they don't know how to treat you till they can "box" you. Most questions stem from relatively harmless curiosity, yet it amuses me, that today people are still so curious about how someone can have mixed features...

Motivation Behind Racial Group Membership Inquiries

One of the largest themes apparent in respondent’s comments regarding the inquiry of others into their racial identity was that they believed this inquiry was driven by their phenotype including skin complexion, hair texture and physical features. Respondents seemed to further comment that others seemed to be confused by their appearance, which motivated them to ask respondents about their racial group membership or to automatically assign them to a racial group that matches their perceived physical appearance. Respondents further commented on how they have experienced societal responses to their appearance. Below are some of their comments:

Participant: “People have a hard time figuring out my race b/c of my hair texture and skin coloring.”

Participant: “My appearance is white but the question usually arises as I have very strong black links with both family and friends.”

Participant: “[People ask] less and less as I get older - however, since moving to NYC I’ve been mistaken for Latina more and more.”

Participant: “I phenotypically look Latina”

Participant: “People always ask "what are you" You can't be black because of your hair. You can't be white because "your to dark". "Spanish" is always the assumption.”

Participant: “I make people guess because it always astonishes me that people can't conceive of a mixed race person; instead they give me a one liner like "Puerto Rican" or "Hawaiian" never "you are a mix aren't you?”

Inquiry Into Racial Group Membership

Respondents were asked to use reference a prepared list of feelings (Appendix D) to describe how they feel when others inquire about their race. Participants were invited to choose multiple descriptors to identify the feelings that they experience when others ask them about their race (Appendix Q, Figure, 12). Approximately half of the respondent’s equivalent to 51.9% of the sample, identified feeling indifferent, which was interpreted as respondents feeling like such inquiries left them unmoved. However, Subsequent popular responses to this question included 30% of the sample feeling appreciative; 23.1% of the sample feeling annoyed; 13.5% feeling excited and an equal number of participants feeling aggravated. When the response options were divided into two groups, 56.6% described the experience as being a positive one and 55.6% of the respondents described the experience as negative. The answer options of appreciative, excited, glad and relieved were considered adjectives that described a positive experience. Whereas answer options aggravated, frustrated, annoyed, discouraged and disappointed were indicators of more negative and stressful experiences. In addition, respondents also commented that such experiences evoked feelings intrigue, suspicion,

pride, humor, encouragement, curiosity, insult and sadness and indifference. This suggest that the sample was split with respondents viewing such inquiries as positive and liberating, while other respondents viewed such inquiries as negative and unsettling

Respondents were also asked if the manner in which a person inquired about their racial identification impacted how they felt about the racial identification inquiry experience. Notably, 62% of the respondents reported that the way an individual inquired about their racial identification impact how they feel about being asked. Comparably, 7.7% of the sample reported that it may have an impact and 32.7% reported that it would have no impact on how they felt about being asked. Respondents were also asked to think about how they feel when their racial identification is assumed or ascribed. Over half of the respondent's, 59.6% of the sample reported being annoyed by such interactions. In addition, 28.8% of the participants identified being aggravated and 28.8% noted frustration and 28.8% declared themselves as indifferent (Appendix Q, Figure 13). The data collected in this section revealed that respondents were less likely to describe the experience of racial inquiry by others as a positive experience. Based on the options that were made available, the sample identified overwhelming with feelings of being aggravated, annoyed, frustrated and disappointed, which indicate these interactions as unpleasant and possibly emotional stressful. However, slightly over a quarter of the participants continued to report feelings of indifference during such interactions.

Content

When respondents were further invited to elaborate many respondents reported that how they felt about being asked about their race depended upon the context, in which the question was being asked. One respondent wrote, "It depends on the context--

sometimes I welcome it, other times I resent it, depending on who's asking and how they ask it.”

While another yielded the following response, [it depends on whether]

“I have a sense of WHY they want to know... like they or their children are mixed and they are looking to connect on that level, versus if they are just ignorant and ask nationality and seem unsatisfied when my answer of ‘American’ doesn't explain my skin color or hair.”

Additionally, one participant, further reported on the ignorance that can be indicated in a persons desire to know about their [the respondents] racial identification. This individual noted that “It depends on the situation. If I am being discriminated against, I'm aggravated. If I am not being targeted by discrimination, then I will be pretty indifferent.” While another respondent further commented on how they address issues of ignorance. This respondent stated that, “It all depends. If it's a stupid question then it's annoying, but I feel I need to discuss it because someone else might misguide them.”

Ascribed Racial Group Membership

Many respondents also noted that their experiences with others inquiring about their race have not been enjoyable. They attributed these negative experiences to other people inquiring about their race by assuming the respondent's racial group membership. In these instances, respondents felt like they had to convince others of their mixed race ancestry. Moreover, even after declaring their racial identification to the inquiring person, that individual seemed to frequently continue to respond in disbelief. One respondent gave a specific example of such an experience. This respondent reported that they are often annoyed when their racial identity is assumed. They wrote,

[I am] annoyed because they typically don't ask me what is my race. Usually they make assumptions (i.e. I bought a bowl of ramen noodle soup and the Indian cashier asked me why I was buying that and offered to make me Indian food and asked if I knew how to make Indian food. I told him, no, I'm not Indian and he was shocked.

Other respondents made similar comments about being annoyed by being assigned a racial group. One respondent further commented on what they perceived as absurd about others assuming his/her racial group membership. She/he wrote,

The assumptions are always based on what their narrow minded perceptions are... ex: because I am light skinned and have curly hair, I am assumed to be Latina or Cape Verdean (depending on what part of the country I am in) like I can't be Kenyan or from the Netherlands.

Like the respondent above, an overwhelming number of respondents commented on being mistaken for Hispanic and Latino. The following comments illustrate some of the respondent's thoughts on being assigned to this racial group. One respondent reported, "They always think I am Hispanic. I get it all the time at work. It disappoints me because I do not get credit for my race and I get it from the black race more."

Another respondent noted that she liked her looks, but did get annoyed, by others interpreting her looks as evidence of her Latina racial group membership. She wrote, "[I] love the fact that I'm light skinned [and] hate the fact [that] everyone assumes I'm Spanish...urgh!!!"

Another respondent further commented that she gets annoyed, because not only do others attempt to assign him/her to a racial group, but they also expect that he/she is lingual in the assigned racial group's native language. This respondent commented that, "People always think I speak Spanish, its offensive to Spanish speakers that I do not. It makes me want to wear a t-shirt that says: 'Contrary to what you think, I'm not Latina.'"

Another respondent further commented on how they feel discouraged about their chances at ever being viewed as a member of their actual ancestral racial groups, because of their physical appearance.

One respondent noted, “the Asian community is not always very accepting of mixed-race people, so it is discouraging when Chinese people respond to finding out about my Asian ancestry with a response such as, ‘Oh, you don't look Chinese at all.’” However, another respondent’s comments speak to a different reason for feeling discouraged when others inquire about their race. This person reported that when they were asked about their race it reminded them of how little they knew about their racial background. This respondent wrote,

My father died when I was young so I don't know a lot about his side of the family. My mother never knew her father (he left after she was born) so I have his side of the family that I have never met before. I don't even know if they know of my existence. A lot of the time, I feel I can't satisfy people with an answer and so I often feel discouraged.

Another respondent commented on what it’s like to have a relationship with their biological parent, but phenotypically look very different from them. This respondent reported that they get most annoyed when “[I am] telling people that I am my mother's biological daughter-people have often made negative comments, which annoys me.”

Educating the World

Many respondent’s described the experience of others inquiring about their race as an opportunity to share their positive thoughts about being biracial, providing evidence that biracial people exists and educating the world about the experiences of mixed race people. One respondent noted

I have no problem when people ask me about my background. I love sharing that I am the product of a successful and strong mixed marriage. I especially enjoy seeing the looks on people's faces when I tell them I'm American (not from the Caribbean, Cape Verde or any other country), I'm half black and half white and was born in Maine. Priceless.

Another respondent further commented on how much they enjoy sharing their racial background with others. They wrote,

I love when people ask b/c I usually get to surprise them when they hear the Italian side. I like it because sometimes it means we have something in common AND/OR they are not as perceptive as they thought. A lot of white people get to learn that I am very much similar to them if they take the time to ask.

Declaration of Biracial Identification

When respondents were asked to estimate how often they inform people of their biracial ancestry over 66% of the respondents noted that they did so most of the time. When respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on the frequency of their disclosure of their biracial ancestry one major theme surfaced. Of the respondents that commented almost all of them noted that they generally shared information about their biracial ancestry, when others directly inquired about it. Sixty four percent of the respondents reported that it was very to somewhat important for them to inform others about their mixed race ancestry. Furthermore, when participants were asked to think about the importance of being able to document their racial identification on an application, rather than simply communicate it verbally over half of the sample noted that it was very important for them to be able to do so. When asked to elaborate on this inquirer's responses varied. One respondent noted political reasons stating, "My increased understanding of issues relevant to multiracials in the United States has led to my increased attachment of importance to having the right to document both."

While another respondent reported that it was important because [their] “My mother is as much a part of me as my father. She [her mother] went through a lot due to having bi-racial children and she deserves to be acknowledged for that.” Additionally, one respondent wrote that people knowing their biracial identity might help them better understand them. They wrote, “I come from a mixed background and I want people to know that there is a white/French side of me and a black side of me; it'll help explain why I'm the way I am.” Furthermore, other comments signified that it was important to be able to document their race/s, because it had not been an option in the past.

On Being Biracial

A seventeen question Likert Scale was developed to measure respondent's thoughts, feelings and perceptions about being biracial. Once respondent's answers were retrieved, the scale was further assessed for internal consistency among the questions through the use of a Cronbach Coefficient Alpha test. The questions that produced poor alpha numbers, which were also the questions that produced the lowest correlation scores, were omitted to strengthen the scale. The Cronbach Coefficient Alpha Test was then conducted on the nine remaining questions. The results produced a standardized number of 0.8, which indicated that the remaining nine questions were significantly internally consistent. Therefore, the end result was a nine question scale that aimed to measure how positive respondents felt about being biracial.

Respondent's responses to the questions on the scale were coded using the values number one through number four. Number one represented the highest score, which was equivalent to having an extremely positive attitude about being biracial. On the contrary number four represented the lowest score, which was equivalent to having an extremely

negative attitude towards being biracial. The mean score based on all of the respondent's answers was 1.46, while the minimum score was 1.0 and the maximum score was 2.0. These results indicated that overall participants had mostly positive attitudes towards being biracial.

Further analysis was conducted to measure, whether the way in which respondents racially identified could be an indicator of how positive or negative respondents would be about being biracial. For the purpose of these analyses the respondent's answers to question 2, "how do you racially identify? (Please choose all that apply)" were categorized into ten groups as mentioned earlier in the racial identification section of the results. These ten groups were then collapsed into four groups, A, B, C, D (Appendix R, Table 7). Group A consisted of respondents that only chose to claim one of their ancestral races. Group B, consisted of respondents that choose more than one race, but also opted to identify only one of their ancestral races by name. Group C consisted of respondents that identified that they were multiracial rather than biracial and respondents that did not specify any race. Group D consisted of respondents that did identify both of their ancestral races by name or by the multi/biracial label. The ideology utilized to decide on the grouping reflected the thought that the way that respondents identify their race may be reflective of the racial groups that they most feel a member of. An ANOVA test was conducted on each group to access whether there was difference in how positive respondents were about being biracial amongst the four groups. The results indicated that there was no significant difference amongst groups in relationship to how positive they were about being biracial. Overall, most respondents were positive about being biracial.

Qualitative data collected at the end of the scale further highlighted some of respondents' positive thoughts about being biracial. Their comments are noted below.

Respondent: "Personally, I would never want to be any other way, I have always said that I have been blessed with the best of both worlds."

Respondent: "I have been given many wonderful opportunities and experiences; opportunities that I believe, are as a result of the fact that I am of mixed Race."

Respondent: "I consider myself lucky to be part of two distinctive cultures and races. I always had good experience being biracial."

Respondent: "I love being biracial. I call myself a "half-breed" around friends and family, even if it makes some people uncomfortable. I'm comfortable with who I am. I love seeing biracial couples and families together. I married a Peruvian man and I can't wait to have beautiful little 1/4 black, 1/4 white, 1/2 Peruvian babies. Mix it up - makes the world a more beautiful place.

Respondent: "As I am biracial I believe I have lived some of the best moments and worst moments of racial equality! We are gifted with a unique perspective! I wouldn't want to change that for the world! "and "Being biracial is a blessing, no matter who you are or what race you are, you are a blessing! So love to live with it!"

However, it is important to note that respondents did vary in their assessments, of their experiences, growing up and navigating the world as biracial people. Respondents, through an open ended question, were offered the opportunity to share thoughts and stories that spoke to their joys, struggles and triumphs as they relate to them being people of biracial ancestry. In this section of the survey a significant number respondents commented, further addressing the majority of questions that were asked in previous sections of the survey.

However, one piece of additional information was really illuminated in this section. Some respondents opted to comment on how they have explored and embraced the complexity and ambiguity of being a biracial person. Participants did so by sharing

the ways in which they have coped with the challenges and frustrations that have surfaced as the result of their biracial ancestry. Some individuals may sift through this process, by becoming involved in politics in an attempt to increase awareness of the existence of biracial people. One respondent provided an example of taking political and social action,

I think that President Obama should have it where it should be a box to check for biracial mixed heritages in every state in America, rather than other. I'm writing him a letter right now about this concern. I feel that it is important to embrace both sides of your heritage no matter what you're mixed with. The people of mixed race have a voice also. I think if your mixed you should write a letter also. People think they can label a person based on the color of their skin, which is so wrong. America is suppose to be this big melting pot but it's not when it comes to the issue of race relations.... I hope you can spread the word about getting letters out to President Obama about being Biracial in America. He knows the importance, because he his self is not black 100 %.

Two other respondents commented on using the Arts as a tool to sifting through this process. One respondent elaborated on their use of creative writing as tool to exploring their biracial identity: "I find such inspiration in reading the stories of other biracial people - Rebecca Walker for instance. Our voices are important and our stories need to be shared... much like the stories of any other group of individuals."

Another also commented on their process in depth as well as their use of poetry in as tool of use in their process of identity exploration:

I am an optimistic person who is very happy with who I am, however, I recognize that being bi/multiracial can be both a blessing and a curse, both better and worse-- I think too often people view biraciality as either one extreme: 'best of both worlds/hybrid vigor' or the other: 'hopelessly confused/tragic mulatto'--- but I think the truth is somewhere in the middle. I am proud of my identity and proud to be a person of color and I strive to unite in solidarity with other people of color, regardless of their exact racial background. I write poems that speak to my own racial identity as well, which I find to be a good way to own and celebrate my identity.

The findings in this research study cover a variety of topic areas as relates to evolution of racial self identification and biracial identity development in biracial people. Respondents answer choices and comments included influential factors, variations in racial identification, public responses to physical appearance and the emotional impact as well as attitudes toward being biracial. In the next section, I will summarize these results, document limitations to this study and provide implications for clinical practice and future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study examined how biracial young adults have navigated the process of racial identity development and racial self identification. Biracial young adults were surveyed about the racial demographics and quality of relationships in their social networks, their experiences with ascribed (assigned) and self declared racial identifications, as well as, their thoughts, feelings and attitudes about being biracial. The results of this research study suggest that (1) Racial self identification in biracial people can vary across person, time and place (2) Social Factors and Racial Group Membership can be important to biracial peoples racial identity development and racial self identification (3) Inquiry into a biracial persons racial identification can evoke a variety of emotions (4) Biracial people's attitudes about being biracial can range from negative to positive.

This chapter will further summarize and synthesize these four core findings. This will be accomplished by comparing observable patterns and themes present in the results of this study to findings highlighted in the literature review located in chapter two. In addition, the section will also focus on analyzing the results of this study from the lens of two biracial identity development models. The goal of this analysis is to make meaning out of the data that was collected, by exploring some of the possible reasons behind patterns in responses. This chapter will also emphasize the limitations of this study, the

strengths and insight gained from this study, as well as the clinical and research implications inferred from this study.

Summary of Findings

Variance in Racial Self Identification

The majority of participants reported that their racial self identifications had changed during their lifetime. Alterations to respondent's racial self identifications were also observable throughout the course of the survey process. These findings are in line with the literature written about racial self identification in biracial people, which indicates that racial self identification can vary and is usually an evolutionary rather than a fixed process (Baysden, Constantine, Miville & So-Lloyd, Rockquemore, 1999; Brown, 1995; Graham, 1996; Hitlin, Brown & Elder, 2002). These changes have been attributed to phenotype, changes in social and political climate, socialization, desired group membership, quality of relationships and racial composition social environment (Herman, 2004; Noble, 1999; Brown, 1995.) As in the literature, respondents indicate that life stage (age), racial composition of social world, social and political climate, family socialization impact biracial self identification and biracial identity development.

Rockquemore's (1999) model for biracial identity development illustrates a model of conceptualizing variations in racial self identifications amongst this population. She offers four variations in racial identification: singular, border, protean and transcendent. From this framework the majority of participants in this study claimed a border identity at the time of the survey. However, other participants did mention employing racial identifications that were reflective of the additional three categories. These identifications were most visible in the qualitative data collected through the question that asked

participant's to narrow down or modify their racial self identification. Furthermore, additional qualitative data also provided examples of respondents adopting one of these three racial identifications, at different points in their lives. In this study, when individuals were asked to choose a singular racial identity they most often chose that of the race most incumbent of a target status¹. This was most visible in participants that were racially mixed with black. These individuals tended to choose black as their monoracial identity as oppose to their other racial ancestry.

Poston's theoretical framework of biracial identity development also provides insight for interpreting variations if biracial racial self identification. Using the lens of this model, participant's responses may be reflective of the stage of biracial identity development in which participants were in when declaring their racial self identifications. For example an individual in stage three, the enmeshment/denial stage of this process, is likely to identify with one racial group over the other, while a participant in stage five, the integration stage, may be more likely to racial identify as a member of both races. In this sample the majority of respondents appeared to be in the last two stages of Poston's model, the stage of appreciation or integration. In addition, this variation may also be indicative of the influence of social factors such as those identified by Poston in stage two of his model, choice of group categorization. This stage suggests that racial self identifications are influenced by what he describes as status factors, social support factors

¹ Target Status is the part of a persons social identity that "places a person with a group that is discriminated against, marginalized, and oppressed" (Miller & Garran, 2008, p.7).

and personal factors, during the time in which the individual is deciding on a racial identification.

Social Factors and Racial Group Membership

Participants in this study connected their racial identification and racial identity development to social factors such as the racial demographics of family, schools, peer groups and neighborhoods, as well as the quality of relationship with family members and peer groups. Overall respondents appeared to be seeking out some form of racial group membership, which seemed to be related to the racial and relational dynamics of their social environment. This search for racial group membership seemed to include periods of racial group acceptance as well as periods of racial group rejection. These findings were in line with previous research (Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Cruz-Janzen 2000; Baysden, Constantine, Miville & So-Lloyd, 2005; Renn, 2003; Root, 1990; Poston, 1990; Gibbs, 1987, Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Rockquemore & Brunnsma ,2002; Crawford and Allagia, 2008; Wijeyesinghe, 2001; Hitlin, Elder, Brown, 2006) , which contends that social factors can influence and are related to the way biracial people choose to identify and experience the process of biracial identity development.

The findings in this study are also aligned with stage two of Poston's biracial identity development model, choice of group categorization. Poston argues that individuals choose or are forced into a racial group membership based on how they are experiencing the world around them. For example a number of participants commented on growing up in monoracial settings where they felt alienated by peers and family members, because of their mixed race heritage. For some respondents such experiences eased them into stage two of the Poston's model, the stage of enmeshment/denial. During

this stage biracial people sift through the emotion of choosing the racial group that they feel most connected and accepted by. For these individuals at this time in their life they may be more prone to a singular or protean identity (Rockquemore, 1999, 2005).

Simultaneously for other respondents experiences of alienation may have not occurred or did not foster strong feelings of rejection and isolation. Therefore, these individuals may have been more likely to transition into the stage of appreciation or integration, bypassing the stage of enmeshment/denial. These individuals may be more likely to have adopted a border identity at this time in their life. This study further emphasizes that social factors can relate to a biracial persons perception of their race, racial group membership and racial identification. Furthermore, it continues to shed light on the fact that biracial people are a heterogeneous group. Therefore social factors can influence the process of racial identity development in this population, in a variety of ways, on a case by case basis.

Attitudes Toward Being Biracial

Participant's attitudes about public inquiry about their racial group membership were consistent. Findings highlighted that frequent inquiry into participant's racial self identifications were experienced as oppressive, stressful and in some cases upsetting. This seemed to be the case most often when racial identifications were assumed or ascribed to participants by others on the basis of their phenotype (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Conversely, appropriate and less intrusive inquires seem to offer respondents opportunities to declare pride in their racial heritage, while experiencing some sense of liberation. Nonetheless, it was important to most participants to have the option of accurately declaring their decided upon racial self identification.

Overall the scores solicited through the biracial identity attitudes scale indicate that most respondents were generally positive about being biracial. That is living in the world as a biracial person separate from how they racially self identify. These results are in line with the research conducted by Gibbs & Hines (1992) that contended that biracial people can be positive about their biracial identity. Furthermore, research has suggested that when biracial people are positive about their biracial identity they also may have a healthier self esteem than those who feel more negatively about this part of their identity (Umana-Taylor, 2003; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers 2004). On average respondents scored high when it came to measuring how positive they were about their biracial identity. This suggests that respondents were likely in the biracial identity developmental stages of appreciation or integration (Poston, 1990), as evidenced by their heightened positive attitude about being biracial.

The Role of Theory in Interpretation

Rockquemore and Poston's models of biracial identity development were useful in interpreting the data that was collected in this research study. Rockquemore's model served as a framework for understanding the ways in which biracial people racially self-identify. This theory was effective in offering an accessible language for discussing the multitude of ways in which biracial people racially self identify. The challenge in using Rockquemore's model is that it fails to name the factors that can impact the racial identification choices of biracial people. Rockquemore's model may be more useful if it incorporated a road map that connected patterns and themes leading to each racial identification choice. However, Rockquemore and some of her colleagues have centered much of their research on the investigation of factors that may influence biracial racial

self identification. Conversely, Poston's model provided an additional understanding of biracial racial self identification, in addition to providing a more elaborate model reflective of the process of racial identity development. Poston's model was also useful in highlighting themes and patterns indicative of this process, which was most useful during the construction of the survey as well as the interpretation of the results. However, Poston's model suggests that a healthy racial identification is that of a racially integrated identity. This differs from Rockquemore's model, because it places value on the integrated identity and identification over the other possible identifications. Therefore Poston presents biracial identity development as a destination rather than a process, a sentiment that remains debatable among scholars.

Limitations

There have been numerous limitations identified by scholars that have ventured to study this population (Root, 1992). These limitations were also present in this study. First, the biracial people in this study were assessed as one large group. Therefore there was no distinction made between the responses and experiences of individuals from different racial group combinations. Second, the sample solicited in this study was significantly homogenous, almost all participants identified as biracial, were college educated and had been raised in the northeast section of the United States. Third, recruitment for this study occurred through the solicitation of a sample of convenience. Participants were solicited through a flier and offered access to the survey through the internet. This may have left the sample without individuals that are biracial, but don't identify as so as well as those that are not literate or don't have access to the internet. Therefore, the sample was not random. Finally, the participant pool seemed to be

overwhelming reflective of individuals from black and white racial combinations, which indicates that the data collected may be skewed to primarily reflect the experiences of this particular sub-group.

Strengths and Insights

This research study is unique in that it attempted to research biracial young adults process and experiences with racial identification and racial identity development. This task is accomplished by developing and using an online survey that incorporated multiple choice and short answers questions. This mixed methods study was successful in surveying a large number of participants (N=53) in a month, a relatively short data collection period. Moreover, this study was able to identify themes and patterns that are salient for this population, in a format that allows for further analysis through more intricate statistical test and measures. Although the goal of this research study was to provide additional research on this topic, the data collected could be further synthesized to measure items such as the direction of relationships among variables and correlations between groups. Most noticeable was this study's intentional inquiry into the emotional components of these processes and experiences. Much of the literature written on biracial identity development and racial identification aims to reconstruct the process of exploring these two areas rather than highlight the emotional complexity of these experiences. Furthermore, this study was unconventional in its development and use of a scale aimed at measuring young adult's attitudes towards their biracial ancestry. The creation and use of this scale allowed for further explore this population's feelings, in addition to their process.

Implications

This research study has produced a plethora of information on the processes and experiences of racial identity development and racial identification in biracial people. This research project sought to gather more data on this topic in an effort to contribute to the small body of exiting literature. However, data collected in the core findings in conjunction with the information gathered from existing literature has informed a number of potential implications for clinical social work practice and research. These implications mirror the bridge that can occur between information gathering and action.

Social Work Practice with Biracial Adolescents and Beyond

1. Clinicians should gently inquire about a client's race. Clinician should avoid guessing or assuming a client's racial self identification, on the basis of their phenotype or racially ancestry (Sue & Sue, 1999 as cited in Aldarondo, 2001, p. 249). Therefore, it would be most appropriate to directly ask about a client's racial identification, in addition, to the racial group membership of client's biological parents and primary caregivers. This inquiry should take place, with all clients, during the initial assessment period. Throughout the treatment period a clinician can support a client's presents as if they are experiencing some turmoil around developing or racial identification or racial identity development. This support should come in the form of affirming the client's perception of themselves and their process, through active listening and mirroring (Lesser & Cooper, 2005; Aldarondo, 2001).

2. Biracial clients may not immediately identify their racial identity as a current or past place of turmoil. As with other multiple identities that accompany clients as they enter the clinical space, clinicians should be cognizant of the complexity that can exist for an individual as they make life long meaning out of their biracial identity and dual race ancestry. For some clients racial identity will not be a place of confusion, conflict or turmoil (Gibbs, 1987); however for others this may not be the case, regardless of their level of awareness. Therapist should hold questions about racial identity in their diagnostic formulation of a client, offering insight on this topic when relevant to client's work.

3. Clinicians should provide a safe space for client's to explore the liberation and oppression that can accompany interactions with others that center on race. Clinicians should work from non-oppressive framework acknowledging racism and how impacts clients experience of the world (Deter, 1997). This is crucial for biracial client's entering the clinical space, while they are struggling with making meaning out of the process of racial identity development and racial identification.

4. Clinicians can best serve their clients struggling to make meaning out of this process by inquiring about current and past social factors and environmental dynamics. This will allow client to gain a better understanding of how the world is receiving and responding to client. This should include exploration into quality of familial and other personal relationships, demographics of social environment, responses to phenotypes and physical appearance, opportunities and experiences

with racial group membership exploration, experimentation, rejection and acceptance (Wijeyeshinghe, 2001; Gibbs, 1987).

5. When trying to assess a client's feelings about their biracial ancestry a clinician may benefit from administering the biracial identity attitude scale to adolescents and young adults. Results from this scale would provide clinician with client's current attitudes towards being biracial. This scale may also be used as a reference tool for engaging a client about their experiences, perceptions and feelings about being biracial.
6. Clinicians should avoid attempting to fit biracial clients into the existing models of biracial identity development, when attempting to understand where they are in their process of exploration. Since biracial young adults experience this process in a multitude of ways, clinicians and clients would benefit from using existing models of biracial identity development as reference tools, for better understanding clients experiences. This is a must since every person experiences their own unique process.
7. Clinician's also should be mindful of the difficult emotions and internal conflicts that can accompany living in a racially polarized society with two racial ancestries and /or identifications. Therefore, clinicians may seek to check in with clients feelings evoked from cyclical experiences of confronting assumptions and addressing inquiries into their racial identifications.

8. Clients may also struggle with feelings of alienation and rejection as the result of a forced severance in relationship with one or more parent/s and /or extended family members from one or more of their ancestral racial group memberships. Client might seek support in exploring cultural norms and traditions of this part of their “lost” identity, possibly restructuring their story of themselves (Poston, 1990; Edwards & Pedrotti Teramoto, 2004). On the contrary client might need a space to simply vent about this alienation (Gibbs, 1987).
9. Most importantly, clinicians should be aware of the possibility that client may have negatively internalized the label of “other” (Root, 1990; Deters, 1997). Clinicians should attempt to support clients in confronting and working through feelings of marginalization so that they may develop a positive racial identity and self esteem (Gibbs, 1987; Root, 1990; Deters, 1997; Bracey, Bamaca & Umana-Taylor, 2004).
10. Clinician may also be helpful in working with client to secure reference groups and external supports, which are a crucial part of this process (La Fromboise; Gerton, 1993; Smith, 1991; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, all as cited in Aldarondo, 2001.) Clinicians can be instrumental in increasing awareness about the larger biracial population, including some of the issues that they struggle with. Blank offers a collection of short stories about biracial adolescents and young adult’s experiences of living in the world as biracial. If clients are not in a setting with a substantial number of biracial people surrounding them and they desire to build relationships with other biracial people, clinicians should refer them to local,

national and online networking organizations and sites for biracial people (Poston, 1990).

11. Biracial clinicians should reflect on their own process of biracial identity development and racial self identification. Their experience may or may not be a useful reference to access when working with a client. Therefore, in accordance with generally clinical social work practice, clinicians should work through transference and countertransference as they surface throughout treatment (Deter, 1997; Cooper & Lesser, 2005; Poston, 1990).
12. All clinicians should reflect on their feelings about interracial marriage and births, racial categorizations, race and stereotypes (Root, 1994 as cited in Deters, 1997; Werhrly, 1999 as cited in Aldarondo, 2001; Poston, 1990) in addition to also working through transference and countertransference that may surface through the treatment process.
13. The relationship established between client and clinician through cross racial dyads, in which the clinician mirrors the race of the family of origin that may have previously rejected the client, on the basis of their mixed race heritage or phenotype may can serve as corrective emotional experience (Teyber, 2000, as cited in Aldarondo, 2001).
14. Universities and Colleges hosting clinician social programs should may a conscience effort to include studies and refereed articles about working clinically with biracial people. There is a lack of visibility of this population in all levels of

educational curriculum (Renn, 2004; Cruz-Janzen, 1999), especially those guiding social workers in training. This limits even beginning preparation of clinician's working with this growing population of individuals (Deters, 1997). It is imperative that clinical social work and other counseling programs provide budding clinicians with foundational knowledge for working with this population (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008).

Future Research

Researchers should continue to work towards strengthening and increasing the body of knowledge that exist on this population. It is imperative that more studies be conducted and that more articles focused on biracial people's experiences and psychological development, be published as a way of improving clinical treatment for this population. Current research continues to lack knowledge about biracial identity in relationship to comparative variables such as deviance, self-esteem, mental health and academic achievement (Herman, 2008, p.221). Additionally, scholars have made minimal attempts at studying biracial people in comparison to monoracial people. Furthermore, researchers and theorist continue presenting studies that fail to consider the implications of this being a heterogeneous group. Literature continues to primarily focus on the experiences of black and white, biracial people when there are individuals birthed out of a spectrum of racial combinations. It would be interesting if scholars began to investigate the process of biracial identity development and racial self identification, in individuals whose racial mix is that of two racial groups of color. The data collected thus far tends to

focus on the experiences of those who are from a non-white and white racial combination.

Finally, researchers and theorist in this field should continue to work towards developing additional models that interpret the identity development process and psychological development of biracial people. Similarly, attention should also be paid to continuing to work towards developing quantitative and qualitative assessment tools that solicits data about this population, from larger sample sets. The small sample sets secured in previous studies have made it challenging to identify patterns, themes and behaviors as well as other findings. The identification of common characteristics amongst this population can serve as useful reference tools, for the development of appropriate clinical practices, social policy and cutting edge research. Future research endeavors should also investigate similarities and differences among this population, with special attention to differing needs and experiences across racial combinations. Furthermore, researchers may also benefit from exploring ways in which they can interview random samples, as to include individuals that don't self identify as biracial in their participant pool (Root, 1992 as cited in Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004).

Conclusion

In closing, this study sheds light on the significance and emotional density of racial identity development for some biracial people. The biracial young adults in this study seemed to identify, a lifetime of meaning making, that has grown out of an experience that encapsulates a multidimensional set of meanings. The participants in this study brought voice to the multifaceted experiences of a heterogeneous and sometimes voiceless, faceless and stereotyped group of people. The colorful stories infused

throughout this study speak to the intensity of the feelings and emotions that accompanied these experiences and processes. These feelings and emotions varied consisting of shame, guilt, rejection, isolation, acceptance, celebration, pride and liberation. However, most magical was the way in which these feelings inculcated life into the evolutionary story of people, whose way of being in this world, has just begun to unfold.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Committee Approval Letter

February 14, 2009

Dana Benton

Dear Dana,

Your revised materials have been reviewed. You did an excellent job in their revision. Your letter describing your careful revisions was very helpful. Your recruitment has been streamlined but I don't think the quality of your findings should be affected and the project will be much less burdensome for you. We are glad to give final approval to your study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your very interesting and timely project. I would think that our bi-racial President will very much alter people's attitudes toward bi-racial people. He carries his complex identity publicly and with pride. The group of relatives that attended the inauguration was fascinating!

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Jennifer Perloff, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Informed Consent

February 17, 2009

Dear Participant,

My name is Dana L. Benton and I am a student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am currently conducting a research study on the thoughts, feelings and experiences of biracial young adults, as part of a larger Thesis project. The research collected through this study, will be used for publication and presentation, in an attempt to share the new knowledge that I have gained from this research with others. As a participant in this research study, I ask that you complete this consent form, in addition to a 15-20minute survey.

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be the biological child of two individuals who are members of differing races. In addition, you must be between the ages of 18-35, have access to a computer and be able to read and write in English. By participating in this research study you do run a small risk of experiencing emotional stress. In an effort to support you during this process, I have created a list of resources that you might find useful. These resources will be located on the following page. By participating in this research study, you are contributing to the production of additional knowledge about the experiences of biracial young adults. As a participant, you will not be provided with monetary compensation. Therefore, I would like to thank you in advance for your time and effort.

The information that you contribute, through your responses to the survey questions, will be combined with information collected from other participants. Your participation in this study will remain anonymous. All of the information collected through the surveys will be kept in secured computer files for a period of three years as mandated by Federal Research Guidelines. If I have use for the information collected beyond this three year period, I will continue to keep it safe from the view of others. The information collected will be properly destroyed once it is no longer of use.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to discontinue participation in this study, you must do so before submitting the survey. In this case, you would simply discontinue answering questions and close out the survey. However, once you have completed and submitted the survey you no longer have the option of leaving the study. This is, because it would be impossible to identify your particular survey. Finally, if there are any questions in the survey that you wish not to answer, you will not be penalized for doing so. In this case, you are more than welcomed to skip the question and continue on with rest of the survey.

If you have additional questions related to participating in this research study, please feel free to contact me through email at bornbiracial@yahoo.com. In addition, if you have any concerns about your rights as a participant or any questions about other aspects of the research in which you are not comfortable contacting me about, please feel free to contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

To complete the process of consent, please check off each item below, if you both understand and agree with each statement.

- I have read and understand the above information
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, my participation and rights
- I agree to be a participant in this study

Appendix C

Recruitment Tool



✚ Are you over the age of 18-35? **Y E S**

✚ Are your parent's members of two different Ancestral Races? **Y E S**

✚ Are you willing to complete a 15-30min online survey about your experience?

Y E S

Then, become a part of cutting edge research, by filling out an anonymous survey @

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=3hYImpLrpwb8fzTu1s9Mmw_3d_3d

Appendix D

Referral List

Resource Guide

Websites: These online sites provide opportunities for biracial people to network with other biracial people locally and nationally.

www.multiracial.com/

www.fusionprogram.org/resources.php

<http://www.mavinfoundation.org/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/secret/portraits/>

<http://www.mixedfolks.com>

<http://www.ameasite.org/>

www.swirlboston.org

Mental Health Counselors: these professionals may be useful in process some of the difficulty emotions that you may be experiencing

Dr. Suze Prudent
675 Massachusetts Ave
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
(617) 969-7670

Avenue Monica O'Neal
264 Beacon Street 5th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02116
(857) 654-3775

Cambridge Health Alliance
1493 Cambridge St.
Cambridge, MA 02139
307617-665-1000

Sasha (Alexandra) Juravleva
Harvard Square Office
1158 Massachusetts Ave Suite
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
(781) 526-2435

Thrive Boston Counseling
875 Massachusetts Ave., Suite 83
Cambridge, MA 02139
617-395-5806
ThriveBoston@gmail.com

Appendix E

Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographic Data

The section below consists of questions that will provide me with some background information about you. Many of these questions may be familiar to you. They are likely similar to general questions that you may have answered on past survey tools or applications. Let's get started!

1. How do you racially identify? (Please choose all that apply)

- Black
- White
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- multi/biracial
- Other

Please feel free to list your ethnicity/ies here

2. Please select the most appropriate gender

- Male
- Female
- Transgendered

3. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- Less than High School/GED
- High School/GED
- College
- Graduate
- Post Grad

4. What region of the country did you live in for MOST of your combined childhood and adolescence?

- Northeast

- Northwest
- Midwest
- Southeast
- Southwest
- Outside of the U.S

Other (please specify if you would like to)

5. Please select the category that best describes the average annual income earned by your family while you were growing up?

- Less than \$15,000
- \$15,000-\$35,000
- \$35,000-\$55,000
- \$55,000-\$75,000
- \$75,000-\$100,000
- Over \$100,000

6. Do you speak any other languages besides English?

- Yes
- No

If yes, (please specify)

7. Please choose the answer that best reflects your current age

- 18yrs-20yrs
- 20yrs-25yrs
- 25yrs-30yrs
- 30yrs-35yrs

Section 2: Familial Relationships

Congrats! You have just completed the first section of the survey. Section 2 will focus on family members and family relationships. Most of the questions listed below, ask that you describe the quality of your relationships with biological

families members, while you were growing up. I know that it can be difficult to summarize a relationship in one word. However, I encourage to answer the question based on how you perceive the relationship to have been the majority of the time.

1. Whom would consider your primary caretaker/s while you were growing up? For the purpose of this question a caretaker is any person/s that were responsible for caring for you on a daily basis.

- Biological mother
- Biological paternal family member/s
- Biological maternal family member/s
- Adoptive Mother/s
- Adoptive Father/s
- Foster Mother
- Foster Father
- Other (please specify)

2. What is the race of your biological mother?

- Black
- White
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Pacific Islander

3. How would you describe your relationship with your mother while you were growing up?

- Very pleasant
- Somewhat Pleasant
- Neither Pleasant or Unpleasant
- Somewhat Unpleasant
- Very Unpleasant
- Not Applicable

4. How would you describe your relationship with your extended family on your mother's side of the family while you were growing up?

- Non -Existent
- Problematic
- Satisfactory
- Good

- Excellent

5. How accepting of your mixed race heritage was your extended family, on your mother's side, when you were growing up?

- Very Accepting
- Somewhat Accepting
- Not Accepting
- I am not sure
- Not Applicable

6. What is the race of your biological father?

- Black
- Asian
- Native American
- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Pacific islander

7. How would you describe your relationship with your biological father while you were growing up?

- Very pleasant
- Somewhat Pleasant
- Neither Pleasant or Unpleasant
- Somewhat Unpleasant
- Very Unpleasant
- Not Applicable

8. How would you describe your relationship with your extended family on your father's side of the family while you were growing up?

- Non -Existent
- Problematic
- Satisfactory
- Good
- Excellent

9. How accepting of your mixed race heritage was your extended family, on your father's side, when you were growing up?

- Very Accepting

- Somewhat Accepting
- Not Accepting
- I am not sure
- Not Applicable

Section 3: Racial Demographics & The Social Environment

Okay great! We are moving right along. In section 3, I am looking to gather some information about the racial make up of your social environment including peer relationships, your school and neighborhood. One thing that I would like to clarify, is that the answer option, racially mixed, should be understood to mean approximately evenly mixed with people of color and white people.

Definitions of Answer Choices

Predominately White: More than half of the student body was racially white or Caucasian.

Racially Mixed: student body consisted of approximately an equal number of students of color and white students.

Predominately of Color: More than half of the student body was of color that is Latino, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American or of Mixed Race.

1. What were the racial demographics of your elementary (k-6) school?

- Predominately White
- Racially Mixed
- Predominately of Color
- I cannot recall/remember

Additional

Comments:

2. What were the racial demographics of your High School (8-12)?

- Predominately White
- Racially Mixed
- Predominately of Color
- I cannot recall/remember

Additional

Comments:

3. What were the racial demographics of the neighborhood that you resided in while you were in elementary school?

- Predominately White
- Racially Mixed
- Predominately of Color
- I cannot recall/remember

Additional

Comments:

4. What were the racial demographics of the neighborhood that you resided in while you were in high school?

- Predominately White
- Approximately Evenly Racially Mixed
- Predominately of Color
- I cannot recall/remember

Additional

Comments:

5. How would you best describe the race/s of your closest friends during your elementary school years?

- Predominately White
- Approximately Evenly Racially Mixed
- Predominately of Color
- Predominately Multiracial (mixed race)

- I cannot recall

Additional

Comments:

6. How would you best describe the race/s of your closest friends during your high school years?

- Predominately White
- Approximately Evenly Racially Mixed
- Predominately of Color
- Predominately Multiracial (mixed race)

Additional

Comments:

Section 4: Racial Identification

You are now entering section 4, which means there is only one more section to go after completing this one. You are doing great! Keep hanging in there!

In this section, I am hoping to learn more about how you racially define yourself, rather than, how other people racially define you. In this section, there are some opportunities to provide a more personal perspective. Please utilize these spaces to share more detailed thoughts, opinions and stories etc. They are more than welcomed! Be sure to also check off an answer, in addition to, your comments. Thanks:)

1. Please identify your race.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander |

2. How much has the way that you racially define yourself changed over time?

- Very Much
- Somewhat

- Not At All
- I'm Unsure

Additional

Comments:

3. How often do people inquire about your race?

- Almost Never
- Sometimes
- Almost Always

Additional

Comments:

4. Which of the following describes the way/s that you most often feel, when you are asked about your racial background? (Please check all that apply)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciative | <input type="checkbox"/> Annoyed | <input type="checkbox"/> Discouraged |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aggravated | <input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent | <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Glad | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excited | <input type="checkbox"/> Relieved | |

Additional

Comments:

5. Does the manner or way in which a person asks you about your racial background, impact the way that you feel about them asking about your race?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Additional

Comments:

6. Which of the following best describes the way/s that you most often feel when others assume or assign you to a racial group or race? (Please check all that apply)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciative | <input type="checkbox"/> Annoyed | <input type="checkbox"/> Discouraged |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aggravated | <input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent | <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed |

- Frustrated Glad Other
 Thankful Relieved

Additional

Comments:

7. How would you identify your race if you could ONLY select one race?

- Black Hispanic/Latino
 White Native American
 Asian Pacific Islander

Additional

Comments:

8. How important is it for you to be able document both of your ancestral races on an application?

- Very Important
 Somewhat Important
 Neither Important or Unimportant
 Somewhat Unimportant
 Very Unimportant

Additional

Comments:

Section 5: Thoughts, Feelings and Perceptions on Being Biracial

You have done it! We are down to the last section in the survey. Here, I am looking to get an understanding of your thoughts, feelings and perceptions about being of mixed race ancestry. Once again, please simply try to answer the questions openly/honestly and to the best of your ability. At the end of this section, there will be space to add additional comments that you would like to share.

1. I enjoy being a member of two races.

- Agree

- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

2. If I were a member of one race, I would enjoy life more.

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

3. I wish that my parents were both members of the same racial group.

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

4. I believe that I am unattractive because I am biracial.

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

5. I do not consider myself biracial.

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

6. Being biracial I get to experience the best of both worlds.

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

7. I hate being biracial

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

8. People treat me differently because I am biracial

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

9. I am extremely attractive because I am biracial.

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

10. I think my life is the same as it would be if I were not biracial

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

11. I am embarrassed about being biracial

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

12. I am proud to be biracial

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

13. I prefer to be around people that are members of one of my ancestral races.

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

14. People are not accepting of me because I am biracial

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

15. Being biracial is an important part of who I am.

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

16. I am most comfortable around other biracial people

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

17. Being biracial makes me special in a good way

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree

18. Below, you will find a blank space. I offer this space to you, as an additional opportunity, to share thoughts and stories that speak to the joys, struggles and triumphs etc. as relates to your experience/s as a person of biracial ancestry.

Appendix F

Figure 1: Age of Respondents

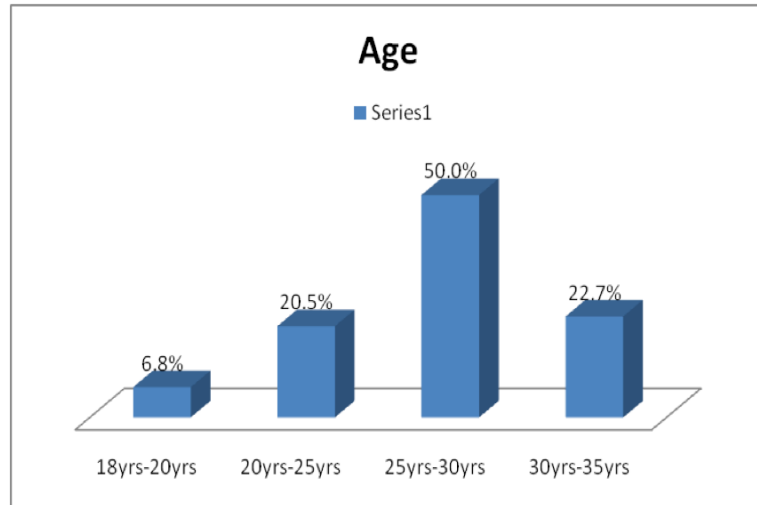
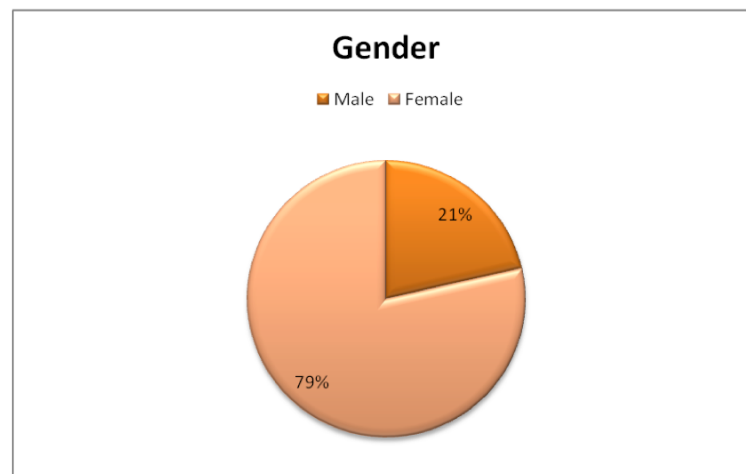


Figure 2: Gender of Respondents



Appendix G

Figure 3: Respondent U.S. Region Reared In

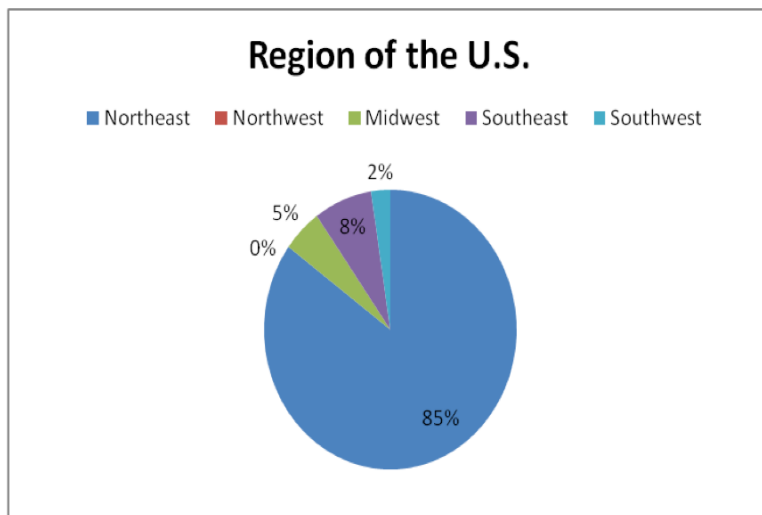
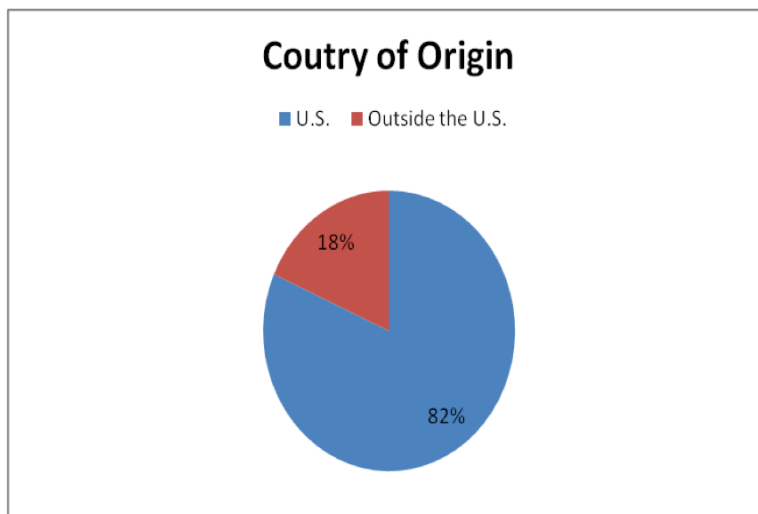


Figure 4: Respondents Country Reared In



Appendix H

Figure 5: Educational Level of Respondents

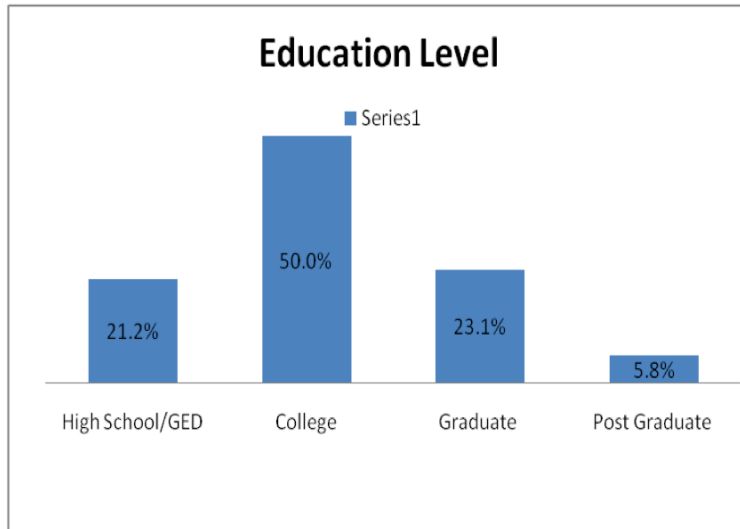
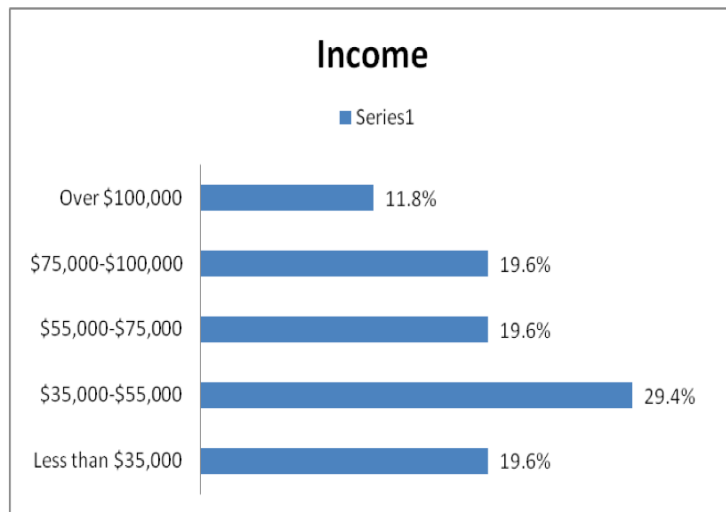
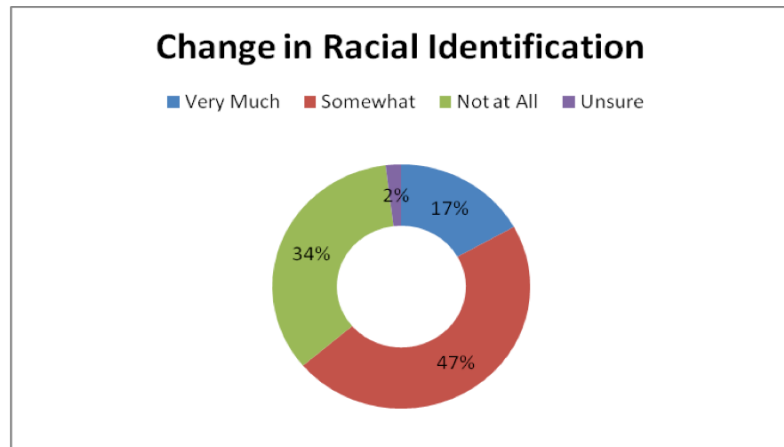


Figure 6: Income Level Of Respondents



Appendix I

Figure 7: Change in Racial Self Identification



Appendix J

Table 1: Racial Composition of Social World

	<i>Elementary School</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>High School</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>School</i>	Predominately White	44%	Predominately White	43%
	Evenly Racially Mixed	25%	Evenly Racially Mixed	36%
	Predominately of Color	29%	Predominately of Color	21%
	Do not recall	0%	Do not recall	0%
<i>Neighborhood</i>	Predominately White	46%	Predominately White	45%
	Evenly Mixed	28%	Evenly Mixed	21%
	Predominately of Color	23%	Predominately of Color	34%
	Do not recall	0%	Do not recall	0%
<i>Friends</i>	Predominately White	43%	Predominately White	30%
	Evenly Racially Mixed	19%	Evenly Racially Mixed	19%
	Predominately of Color	36%	Predominately of Color	40%
	Predominately Multiracial	2%	Predominately Multiracial	12%
	Do not recall	0%	Do not recall	0%

Appendix K

Figure 8: Race of Biological Parents

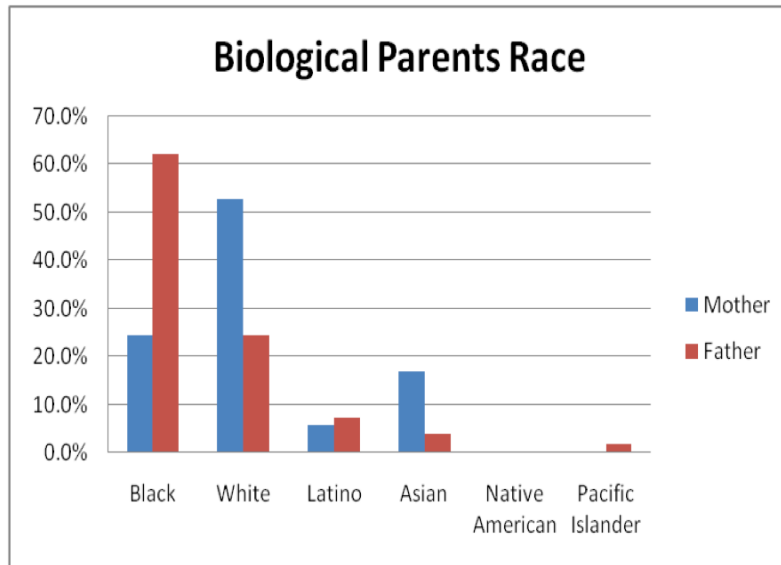
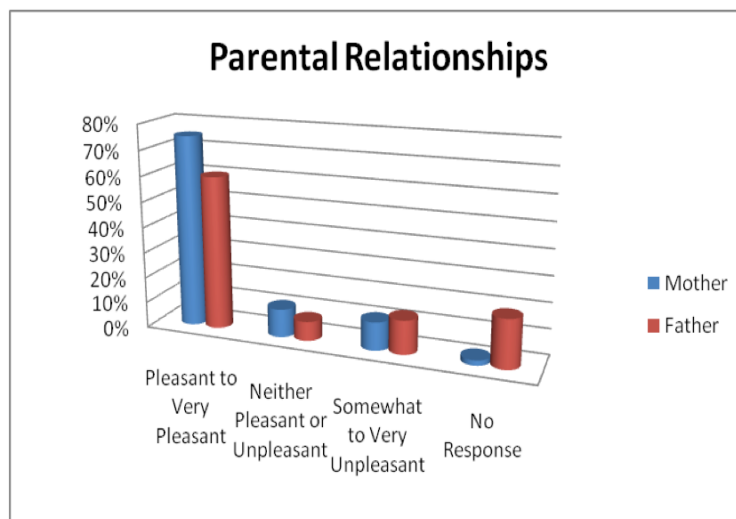


Figure 9: Quality of Parental Relationship



Appendix L

Figure 10: Quality of Relationships with Extended Family

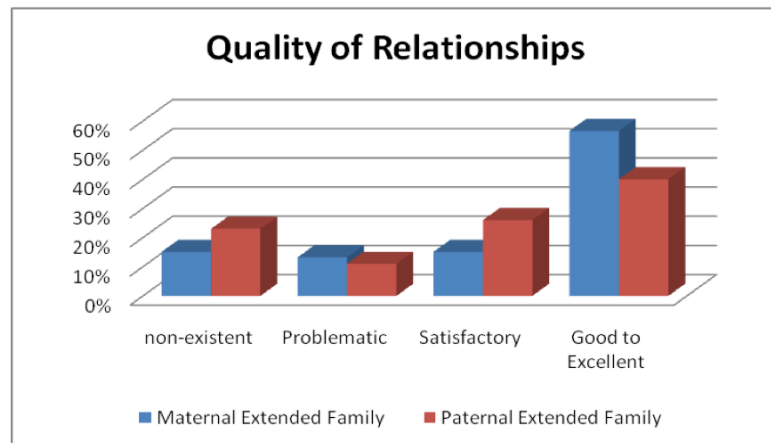
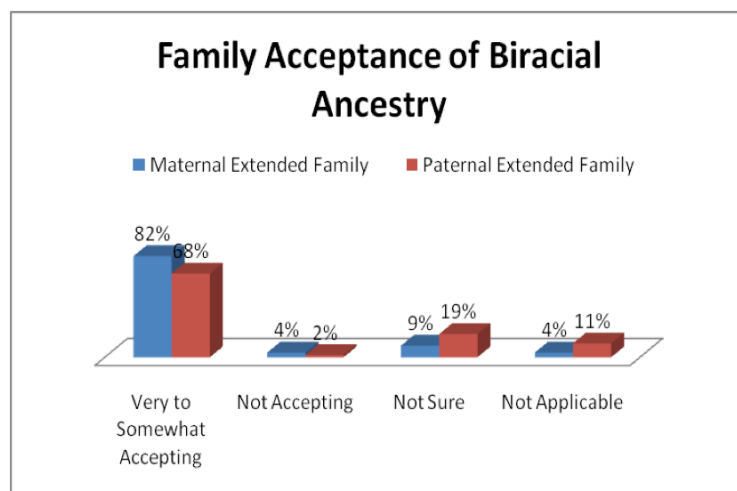


Figure 11: Familal Acceptance & Participants Mixed Race Ancestry



Appendix M

Table 2: Respondent Racial Self Identifications (1)

Responses to Question #2: How do you racially identify? (Please choose all that apply)					
Answer	Number	Percentage	Answer	Number	Percent
One Race	5	-1 %			
Two Races	16	30 %	Bi/Multi Racial, Race & Other	1	-1%
Bi/Multi Racial	10	19 %			
Bi/Multi Racial & One Race	7	13 %	One Race & Other	1	-1%
			Two Race & Other	1	-1%
Bi/Multi Racial & Two Race	11	21 %	Other	2	4%
			Three Races	1	-1%

Table 3: Respondent's Racial Self Identifications (2)

Responses to Question #24:		
<i>Response</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Two Races	34	64%
One Race	18	34%
Three Races	1	-1%

Appendix N

Table 4: Respondent's Racial Self Identifications (3)

Responses to Question # 30 Monoracial Self Identifications		
<i>Response</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
One Race	47	89%
No Race & Additional Comments N=53 Missing=7	6	11%

Table 5: Respondents Monoracial Identifications

Monoracial Self Identifications		
<i>Race</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Black	37	79%
White	3	6%
Asian	4	9%
Hispanic/Latino	3	6%
Native American	0	0%
Pacific Islander	0	0%

Appendix O

Table 6: Comparison of Racial Self Identifications

Question #2			Question # 24			Question # 30		
<i>How do you racially identify? (Please choose all that apply)</i>			<i>Please identify your race?</i>			<i>How would you racially identify your race if you could ONLY select one race?</i>		
Race	%	#	Race	%	#	Race	%	#
Black	60%	32	Black	84.9%	45	Black	78.7%	37
White	43%	23	White	54.7%	29	White	6.4%	3
Asian	17.0%	9	Asian	20.8%	11	Asian	8.5%	4
Hisp/ Latino	9.4%	5	Hisp/Latino	5.7%	3	Hispanic/Latino	6.4%	3
Native American	1.9%	1	Native American	1.9 %	1	Native American	0.0%	0
Pacific Islander	1.9%	1	Pacific Islander	0.0 %	0	Pacific Islander	0.0%	0
Multi/biracial	54.7%	29						
Other	7.5%	4						
N = 53 Missing=7 Comments= Option Not Available			N= 53 Missing = 7 Comments= Option Not Available			N = 47 Missing= 13 Comments= 15		

Appendix P

Figure 12: Emotional Responses & Racial Inquiries

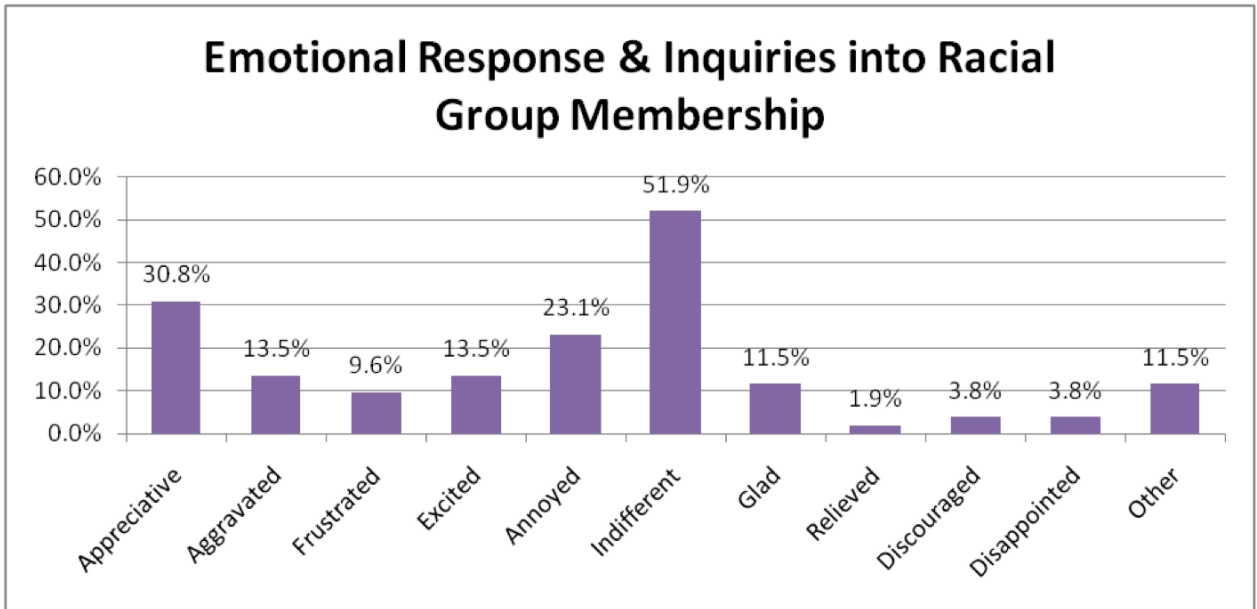
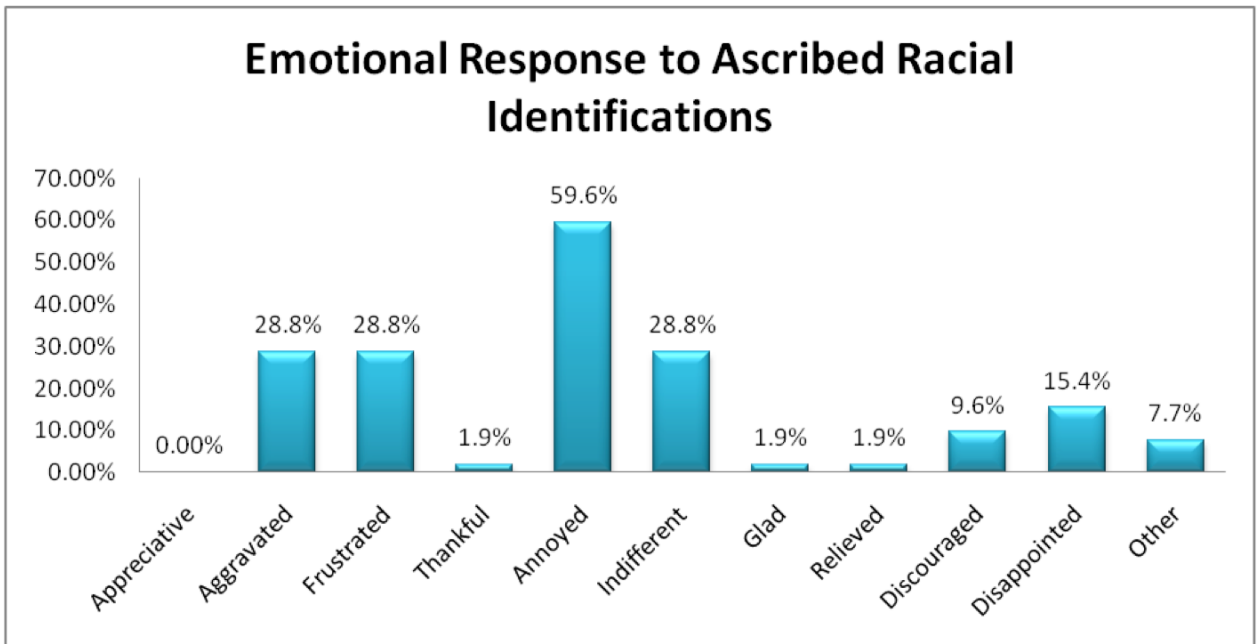


Figure 13: Emotional Responses & Ascribed Racial Identification



Appendix Q

Table 7: Grouping of Racial Self Identification Options

Grouping of Respondent's Answers to Question #2			
Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One Race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi/Biracial & 1 Race ▪ 1 Race & Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 Races ▪ Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two Races ▪ Two Races & Multi/Biracial ▪ Multi/Biracial Only ▪ Two Races, Multi/Biracial & Other ▪ Two Races & Other

