Parent and Child Influences on the Development of a Black-White Biracial Identity

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PARENT AND CHILD INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BLACK-WHITE
BIRACIAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study, the interactive process of exploring and developing shared, familial

meanings about biracial identity development was investigated from the perspectives of both

parents and children in Black-White multiracial families. Specifically, this study examined how

monoracial parents and their biracial children describe the influence parents have on the biracial

children's identity development process from the biracial individuals' youth into adulthood.

Monoracial parents and their children were also invited to share how they negotiated the

uniqueness of a biracial identity in both the parents' and the children's social arenas. Data were

obtained through in-person, semi-structured interviews with 10 monoracial mothers and 11 of

their adult (ages 18 to 40) biracial children. The data were analyzed using phenomenological

methodology. The analysis of participants' experiences of biracial identity development revealed

four major themes: that family interactions and relationships contribute to the creation of identity

for biracial individuals, that mothers intentionally worked to create an open family environment

for their biracial children to grow up in, that parents and children affect and are affected by

interactions with American culture and society throughout their development, and finally that

growing up biracial is a unique experience within each of aforementioned contexts. While there

were many shared experiences among the families, each family had its own exceptional story of

strength and adjustment to the biracial identity development process. Across cases, the

overarching theme was one of togetherness and resiliency for the mothers and their adult

children. Data from this study has important implications for research and practice among a

number of human service professionals.

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In loving memory of my granddaddy, Joseph Stone.

Dedicated with a grateful heart to my mother, Carla Stone
and my father, Ross Stone.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance

The terms biracial, multiracial, and mixed race are used to refer to a person whose parents are each from a socially distinct racial group or two or more socially distinct racial heritages (Herring, 1995; Laszloffy, 2005; Root, 1992). Between 1970 and 2000, interracial marriages between Whites and non-Whites have grown from 233,000 to 1.1 million (Qian, 2005). Social scientists attribute this increase in interracial marriages to the 1967 overturn of the anti-miscegenation laws against interracial marriage (Root, 1996; Spickard, 1992). Gallup Poll surveys in the years 1968, 1972, 1978, 1983, and 1991 have also revealed a surge in the acceptance of interracial marriage; which is thought to further support the increase in number of interracial marriages (Gallup Poll, 1991; Root, 1996). As a result of the growth of interracial unions, there has been an associated increase in births of biracial and multiracial children. The population growth of biracial and multiracial individuals has had a significant impact on the racial makeup of the United States (Root, 1992). Biracial and multiracial Americans are a subset of the population that challenges the typical monoracial categorizations of American culture. According to the 2000 Census, the first census that allowed individuals to select more than one racial identification, the mixed race population was approximately 7 million (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001; Miville, 2006), an increase of 260% since the 1970s (Root, 1996).

Growth in the number of biracial and multiracial individuals has raised questions about the possible unique aspects of identity formation for these individuals. The development of identity has been a widely explored topic among researchers across disciplines for decades (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Poston, 1990; Stonequist, 1937). Erikson's (1968) developmental

model of identity formation throughout the lifecycle describes life as largely a quest for identity (Kerwin, 1991). Consequently, identity development is considered a major life task that is intensively explored and solidified sometime during adolescence (Erikson; Marcia, 1980). Since the social acknowledgement of biracial people, numerous researchers have posed questions about whether or not the experience of identity development for biracial persons is unique (Hall, 2001; Poston, 1990; Stonequist, 1937). For non-White or minority individuals, there is the added complexity of understanding what it means to be a member of their minority or racial group (Mullis, Brailsford, & Mullis, 2003; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996). Therefore, implicit focus on the identity development of biracial individuals is rooted in the concept that a major life task for biracial individuals is establishing an identity that is inclusive of racial identity (Erikson, 1968; Poston, 1990). Because biracial persons do not fit into any one racial category, their racial identity and racial status differs from other minority or non-White groups.

Multiple factors influence the process of forming a biracial identity including race, culture, ethnicity, family, and the social and historical contexts biracial people are born and raised within (Field, 1996; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Poston, 1990; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). The process developing a racial identity usually begins during adolescence and continues until the early to mid twenties (LaFromboise, Coleman, Hardin, & Gerton, 1993; Root, 1992). Race, culture, and ethnicity may sometimes be difficult to negotiate for mixed race individuals and their families because of social pressure related to the social institution of racism (Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Miller & Rotheram-Borus, 1994; Phinney, 1990, 1992; Rockquemore, 2002). As a result, biracial persons may struggle with self-esteem, isolation, feelings of depression, and stress (Gibbs, 1987). These problems can lead to possible challenges for biracial individuals and their families, and clinical services from

therapists or counselors may help support a more positive development process. However, more information about the biracial identity development process and the interaction between biracial individuals and their families is needed.

By exploring the strengths and challenges associated with the process of biracial identity development, the current study contributes to the biracial and family studies literature as well the field of couples and family therapy (CFT). Whereas previous studies have mentioned the important influence of parents and families on an individual's identity development as well as racial identity development (Collins, 2000; Kerwin et al., 1993; Gillem, Cohn, & Throne, 2001; Laszloffy, 2005), no study has specifically asked parents and biracial children about their interactive experience of biracial identity development. The current study examined how parents influenced the biracial identity development of their children, delving into the experiences of interracial couples raising their biracial children. The current study also investigated biracial adults' perceptions of the parental influence on the biracial identity development process. In addition, through this study, biracial individuals were invited to share their personal perspectives about their biracial identity development, including their perceptions of the influence of extended family members, friends, and social arenas on their sense of identity. A final aspect of the current study involved asking participants for their feedback on ways that clinicians and therapists might improve their services to biracial individuals, parents, and families. The information gathered from the participants in the current study about the possible clinical needs of and ways to reach biracial people and interracial families provides an insider's perspective that is invaluable for training multiculturally competent therapists, in addition to teachers and counselors, working with the multiracial population (Laszloffy, 2008).

Justification: Black-White Individuals and Families

In a study examining the biracial identity development process, I could have elected to focus on many different racial combinations. I opted to concentrate on Black and White biracial individuals and their families because it seems that "the black-white [sic] divide is the most tenacious of all American color lines, and in many ways the regulation of black-white [sic] relationships and the taboo against them are unique" (Romano, 2003, p. 8). This Black-White border or divide is rooted in America's history of the enslavement of Black people and the concept of domination by one group (Whites) over other groups (Blacks or non-Whites) (Spickard, 1992). America also has a legacy of hypodescent, which has forced all people to identify with only one race (Davis, 2006; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Singh & Iwamasa, 2006). Hypodescent is more commonly known as the "one-drop rule," by which all children of mixed-race are assigned to the racial group of the "lower status parent" (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root 1996). Up until the late twentieth century, several states had laws mandating that any person with "one drop" of Black blood be classified racially as Black (Davis, 2006; Orbe & Harris, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). While currently there are more accepted race options for Black-White individuals, historically, they are one of the only groups of mixed race individuals who have had to contend with such strict racial identification rules (Davis, 2006, Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003).

While there are myriad possible racial combinations for biracial individuals, the focus in this study on Black-White individuals also stems from my belief, in sync with Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002), that

> …in the United States, blacks and whites [sic] continue to be the two groups with the greatest social distance, the most spatial separation, and the strongest taboos against interracial marriage….focusing on black-white [sic] biracials enables [me] to engage

profound and enduring questions about racial categorization. Specifically, probing into

racial identity among black-white [sic] biracials leads to questions about the meaning of

race, the efficacy of racial categorization, and how and why Americans have persistently

used the "one-drop rule" to determine who is black [sic] in America. (p. ix)

In this study, I invited the exploration of race and biracial identity development not only from the

perspectives of biracial individuals, but also from their mothers. I also explored the multiple

ways in which Black parents and White parents and their biracial children have come to

understand the child's racial identity given the unique sociocultural experiences of Black-White

biracial individuals in the United States.

Statement of the Problem

While research on the racial identity development of biracial individuals has increased

over the last two decades, there is still limited understanding of the influence of parents and the

parent-child interaction or relationship on the process of biracial identity development. In fact,

while parents or primary caregivers are thought to have some influence on the outcome of the

identity development of their biracial children (Basu, 2007; Collins, 2000; Gillem et al., 2001;

Herring, 1995; Kerwin et al., 1993; Milan & Keiley, 2000; Qian, 2004), most studies merely

mention parents or the parent-child relationship, and no studies have gone into depth regarding

the specific ways parents influence their children's biracial identity development. Rather, the

emphasis has been the outside social or group influences on biracial identity development,

specifically the way one socially experiences race with friends, at school, in society, and so forth

(DaCosta, 2007; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Renn, 2003; Rockquemore, 1998; Rockquemore &

Laszloffy, 2003; Schwartz, 1998; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). While the outside social

influences cannot be ignored, theoretically, racial socialization starts at home with the parents

(Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Rockquemore, Laszloffy, & Noveske, 2006). Another imperative aspect missing from previous research is the intersection of social influences from outside the family with parental and family influences on biracial identity development.

Monoracial parents can complicate the issue of biracial identity development for their biracial children by encouraging the racial and ethnic identity of the most obvious physical qualities or by simply denying any race at all (Hughes & Chen, 1999). Alternatively, monoracial parents can support biracial identity development by addressing the uniqueness of their child's racial category and offering various racial labels such as biracial, mixed race, and multiracial. There has been an increasing tendency for parents to support their children in developing a strong biracial identity (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). For example, some parents of biracial children do suggest or encourage their children to identify as mixed or biracial (Rockquemore et al., 2006; Root, 2001; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). While introducing multiracial options to children could be considered a supportive action from parents, the intentions for offering multiple racial options has not been explored from the perception of parents or their children.

In addition, many monoracial parents may not realize the importance of their involvement in the identity development process and the racial socialization of their multiracial children. Furthermore, monoracial parents cannot fully understand what it means to be biracial (Milan & Keiley, 2000), which can lead to challenges for the biracial child in negotiating his or her identity. Some of these challenges include conflict between parent and social definitions, needing to justify identity choices, social isolation, lack of role models, double rejections, and emotional and behavioral problems (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Singh & Iwamasa, 2006). Therefore, it is important for parents, especially those from the majority (White) culture, to know that understanding the unique racial category of their children is a critical component of their child's

healthy development. The current study opened the conversation between parents and children about the biracial identity development process from the perspectives of both mothers and children about the interactive influences each has on the child's biracial identity development.

The current study is an attempt to fill the gap between the research examining interracial coupling and the biracial identity development process for biracial individuals. Researchers have examined Black-White interracial romantic relationships (see Childs, 2005a, Childs, 2005b; Crohn, 1995; Johnson & Warren, 1994; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995; Root, 2001) and the effects of these relationships on the nuclear and extended families, as well as the individuals involved. The explorations examining interracial couples only broadly focus on the children conceived in the relationship. Researchers have also examined biracial identity development and the biracial person's experience in American society (see Basu, 2007; DaCosta, 2007; Field, 1996; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Herring, 1995; Miller & Rotheram-Borus, 1994; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Poston, 1990; Qian, 2004; Rockquemore, 1998, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Roth, 2005; Root, 1990, 1992, 1996; Suzuki-Crumley & Hyers, 2004;Williams, 1999; Wright, 1998). In both of these areas of scholarship, researchers have failed to consider the uniqueness of the biracial child's experience of race. In addition, there is a missing link that would address how parents navigate raising their mixed race children and how parents manage the issue of their children's unique racial identity as a couple and with their children.

Thus, in the area of biracial identity development, there has been little to no focus on parent-child relationships and how parent-child interactions might affect the biracial identity development of mixed race individuals. Moreover, according to Rockquemore et al. (2006), there has been no systematic investigation of how monoracial parents racially socialize their children

or how familial racial socialization affects children's biracial identity development. By examining how parents and children interact throughout the process of biracial identity development, the results of this study provide important information to families raising biracial children regarding the costs and benefits of offering multiple identity options for mixed race children. This study also gives voice to the unique experiences of Black-White multiracial families and provides much needed information about the multiple factors contributing to the racial identity development of Black-White biracial persons. More information about the personal experiences of multiracial families will also assist counselors, therapists, and teachers who work and interact with these families.

Purpose Statement

Because there has been limited research specifically focused on the influence of monoracial parents on their children's biracial identity development, this qualitative study investigated the phenomenon of biracial identity development from the perspectives of both parents and children in Black-White multiracial families. In addition, the study examined the interactive process of exploring and developing shared, familial meanings about race between monoracial parents and their biracial children. Finally, the study examined how biracial individuals and their parents expressed and solidified the biracial identity with others outside of the family.

Conceptual Framework: Symbolic Interactionism

When conceptualizing biracial identity development, symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework that captures the unique and variable world of multiracial families and supports personal (including familial, historically, and culturally influential) explanations and understandings about race and racial identity from multiple family members (McAdoo, Martínez,

& Hughes, 2005). The theory focuses on the subjective meaning of human behavior and social

processes (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). I have selected symbolic interactionism as a conceptual

framework to guide my study because it provides a foundation for understanding biracial

individuals by emphasizing the interaction between the biracial individuals and their familial and

social contexts. This emphasis is in concordance with my own viewpoint that it is out of

interactions with others that we shape our own self meanings about our identities as individuals

and how we see ourselves racially. Furthermore, symbolic interactionism is compatible with the

phenomenological perspective that meaning is created and understood between people (Bogdan

& Biklen, 1998). Symbolic interactionism is also traditionally used with and often considered

synonymous with qualitative designs (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Bogdan & Biklen). In order to

more fully understand the role of the theory in the current study, an overview of three core

themes of symbolic interactionism will follow.

     Importance of meanings for human behavior. The first theme of symbolic interactionism

is that meanings are important for human behavior (Blumer, 1969; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

People seek meaning and identities through their interactions or relationships with other people

(Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Klein, 2005). For many individuals, their first relationships and

interactions occur within the family. Families have their own unique set of developmental issues

and processes that are embedded within larger social constructs, which also influence their

identities (Killian, 2001). As individuals engage in social interactions outside of their families,

meanings and understandings about their own identities change (Funderberg, 1994;

Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Roth, 2005). Whatever the context, meaning is shaped through

interactions and created symbols within the culture which is defined as including racial and

ethnic ways of life, rituals, symbols, language, and the way one acts or behaves (Blumer, 1969;

Dilworth-Anderson et, al., 1993; Edles, 2003).

Families are usually the first place children learn the meanings of race and racial labels

and those meanings will have an impact on the child's overall development of racial identity

(Roth, 2005).When interracial couples come together, they bring the histories of their own

families into their newly created multiracial families (Childs, 2005). As a result of this merging,

interracial couples must determine and negotiate what race will mean in their interracial family.

Thus, the meanings attached to race will be shaped through interactions between individuals and

others in their family as well as society. Race is a social construction, but it is also an important

symbol within American culture. Some of the symbols of racial group membership accepted in

American society include physical features such as skin color, hair texture, and facial shapes

(Storrs, 1999).

In this study, I assumed that the meanings individuals, families, and society attached to

race were significant to the biracial identity development process. Therefore, I focused on the

unique meanings parents and their children co-created about the issue of race and racial identity

for their interracial family. I assumed that each parents' interactions with their families of origin,

society, and each other had an impact on how they perceived and responded to issues of race in

their interracial family (Childs, 2005a, 2005b). This, in turn, affected how they portrayed and

created meanings of race to and with their children. I also assumed that the parent-child

interaction, as well as the child's interactions with significant others in their lives and with

society, would also impact the child's perceptions of the meaning of race and their biracial

identity development.

The importance of self-concept. The second theme of symbolic interactionism focuses on the development and importance of self-concept, which is defined as self-values, beliefs, feelings, and assessments that affect behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Development of a healthy self-concept determines successful navigation through the identity development process (Erikson, 1968). Individuals are not born with a self-concept but develop it through interaction with others, particularly family members (Cooley, 1902). A developed self-concept is motivation for behavior. When a person has developed a healthy self-concept, they become confident to pursue actions in line with their values and principles and avoid those that are not (Cooley, 1902; LaRossa & Reitzes).

A resolved racial identity would be included in overall self-concept for biracial individuals (Rockquemore, 1998). "The identity work of [biracial] individuals entails the use of racial narratives, symbols, and processes to inform themselves and others of their racial belonging" (Storrs, 1999, p. 200). A biracial child with a healthy self-concept will learn to negotiate between his or her sense of self as an individual and racial being and those perceptions or assumptions of the family and society. A biracial child with a healthy self-concept will also be able to identify racially in the way that is comfortable for him or her and will not compromise his or her beliefs in various situations, even those situations that may conflict with his or her established values and principles.

The importance of social process. The third and final theme of symbolic interactionism focuses on the relationship between individual freedom and societal constraint. People work out their social structure through everyday interactions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). While family is extremely important in the development of self-concept, larger cultural and social processes also influence the family and its individual members. The context, or set of social and historical facts

that surround families, has an effect on the nature of connection between an individual and society (LaRossa & Reitzes). Just as a family is shaped by the current sociohistorical context, the sociohistorical context is also shaped by families. Identities are self meanings which are generated from experiences shared with others (LaRossa & Reitzes; Rockquemore, 1998). Interaction is an opportunity for individuals to apply shared symbols and to co-create meanings of self, others, and situations (LaRossa & Reitzes).

It is from this concept of shared meanings and interactions that families co-construct meanings about race. Interracial couples and their biracial children will influence and be influenced by their interactions in social situations. Because race is a social construction, interracial families are influenced by the meanings society attaches to race and race relations. Additionally, "because racial categories are defined by appearances, the logical enactment of racial categorization becomes questionable if individuals cannot be identified on sight. "One's skin color, hair, and facial features are strong member cues in socially defined racial groups" (Rockquemore, 1998, p. 204). "Social status and appearance are mediated by the types of social interactions an actor experiences. These interactions set the parameters of meaning, from which the biracial individual identity is constructed, negotiated, challenged, reshaped, validated, and ultimately sustained" (Rockquemore, p. 210).

Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

In order to more fully comprehend the complexities associated with biracial identity development, it is necessary to explain the terms utilized in the study. Providing the definitions may imply that these terms do not possess their own meaning for the study participants or the reader. My intention, as a researcher, was to understand the meaning of identity, race, and ethnicity as it emerged for the participants through the interview process. However, in order to

lay a basic foundation for the reader, I provide preliminary definitions of the key terms

associated with this study, as outlined in the literature.

Identity development is the process or set of developmental stages through which one

comes to know oneself and recognizes sameness with certain others (Thompson, 1999). Roles,

values, ideals, and norms of the community profoundly shape and are a part of personal identity.

A healthy or ideal identity has been defined as developing a positive personal self-concept,

accepting one's self while simultaneously accepting differences in others, understanding the self

in the context of society, and defining oneself in relation to family and others (Cooley, 1902;

Erikson, 1968; Hall 2001; McGoldrick & Carter, 1999; Phinney, 1990, 1992). An individual with

a developed healthy or ideal identity has an understanding of him or herself and has evaluated his

or her identity in relation to others and within the social environment (Rockquemore, 2002;

Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005).

Racial identity is considered a subcategory of overall identity. In addition to the typical

developmental stages individuals go through when developing their identities, minorities must

form a personal identity *and* a racial identity in order to form a complete self identity (Chestang,

1984, cited in Cooper, 1999). Race is a social construction that classifies people into categories

based on biological characteristics such as skin color, hair, and facial features (Porter, 1971;

Williams & Morland, 1976). The development of a racial identity is influenced by socially

constructed categories of populations in addition to race such as class, culture and gender

(Stanfield, 1998), as well as biological characteristics from the parents and an individual's

physical features. Racial identity is also influenced by personal experiences related to family,

culture, and treatment from society. Chideya (1999) states that, "Racial identity is shaped by

circumstance. Everything from skin color to family attitudes to national politics helps shape how

we interpret who we are" (p. 55). Thus, racial identity is an individual's personal recognition and reaction to his or her racial membership (Porter, 1971). It is an awareness, understanding, and valuing of the genotypic ancestry groups an individual has selected when asked to identify oneself racially (Herman, 2004; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004) as well as an acceptance of racial status, prestige, stereotypes, and racism in society (Thompson, 2006). Williams (1999) states that racial identity is ultimately an individual's own choice; it is centered in the person, not limited by societal constraints. This is especially true for mixed race people.

Ethnic identity, according to Cooper (1999), is a part of identity that is influenced by skin color and the dimensions of a person's culture. It may include, but is not limited to, traditions, language, religious expression, nationality, history, ancestry, and values (Fischer & Moradi, 2001; Phinney, 1990, 1992; Thompson, 2006). The strength or importance of the connection to particular cultures influences an individual's ethnic identity (Herman, 2004) in that culture encompasses race, ethnicity, and the interaction of their rituals, symbols, and language (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson, 1993). In general, race can contribute to ethnicity, but ethnicity is not limited to a person's race (Root, 1992), as ethnicity tends to denote a synthesis of biology, ancestry, and cultural factors (Stanfield, 1998).

In the current study, definitions of both racial identity and ethnic identity are included because scholars and the public tend to use the words interchangeably (Phinney, 1990). In her review of the literature on ethnic identity, Phinney found no widely agreed upon definition of ethnicity. In fact, she discovered significant conceptual overlap when authors discussed race and ethnicity. This, in turn, leads to further confusion about the topic. For the purposes of this study, racial identity is the primary focus, but it is not exclusive of ethnicity.

Race is a social construct founded on the economic and social climates of a time and place (Texeira, 2003; Root, 1992; 1996; 2003) However, within the cultural constructs of the United States, race is often generally defined by physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features; however, there is often greater variability within racial populations than there is between them (Chideya, 1999). That is, race is more about culture and social structure than biology (Spickard, 1992). Furthermore, the challenge of talking about race is that some people do not subscribe to racial categorization (Root, 2001). However, in spite of the conflict and debates over the value of racial categorization within American culture, race matters personally for many people (Glass & Wallace, 1996). As such, this study allowed for the significance and changing meanings of race to emerge for each participant. Additionally, for the purposes of this study, parent participants were asked to select the racial category they would most likely identify with: Black/African American or White/European American.

Monoracial is used to describe individuals who define themselves or who are socially designated within one race or racial category. While ancestrally speaking most individuals in the United States are likely "racially" mixed to some degree (Spickard, 1992), many individuals are identified with one race that is determined by the race of each of their biological parents. Monoracial would indicate only one known or accepted racial heritage for both parents and within a family (i.e., Black *or* White) (Renn, 2003).

The terms *biracial, multiracial*, and *mixed race* are used to refer to a person whose parents are each from socially distinct racial groups or two or more socially distinct racial heritages (Herring, 1995; Laszloffy, 2005; Root, 1992). In this study, I focused specifically on biracial persons born of one White parent and one Black parent. While I primarily utilized the term biracial, in an effort to recognize that the terms biracial, multiracial, and mixed race have

multiple meanings (Rockquemore, 1998), I welcomed other terms to evolve through the voices of the participants in the study.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do monoracial parents describe the influence they had on the racial and ethnic identity development of their biracial children?

2. How do biracial children describe the influence their monoracial parents had on their racial and ethnic identity development?

3. How do monoracial parents and their biracial children describe racial and/or ethnic identity as it has developed and changed from (the child's) youth into young adulthood?

4. How do monoracial parents and their biracial children negotiate the uniqueness of a biracial identity in both the parents' and the children's social arenas (e.g., school, work, friendships, and romantic relationships)?

5. How can couple and family therapists reach interracial families and biracial individuals who may be in need of clinical services and what topics and issues can couples and family therapists anticipate when working with interracial families or biracial individuals?

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the 2000 United States Census, at least 2.4% of the population identifies

with more than one racial category (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001; Miville, 2006). In response to this

reality, acquiring a more complete understanding of a multiracial identity and acknowledging

biracial people as a unique category of the American population deserves special attention

(DaCosta, 2007; Root, 1992, 1996; Winters & DeBose, 2003) and has become an area of

emphasis for researchers. An exploration of the literature on biracial individuals reveals that

understanding of biracial identity has moved beyond the original notion that biracial identity is a

cause for pathology or marginality (Brown, 1990; Poston, 1990). Prior to the 1970s, most models

of racial identity focused on a singular racial identity as the ideal (Cross, 1987) and implied that

assuming a biracial identity would leave individuals feeling conflicted and unresolved (Park,

1928; Stonequist, 1937). For example, Stonequist suggested that people of mixed race heritage

have problems with the normal process of identity development and that their duality of heritage

creates uncertainty and ambiguity in their identification with parents, peers, and social

identification with a specific racial group. Stonequist implies that a biracial person cannot

develop a positive self-concept, which is crucial to successful identity development (Erikson,

1968; Marcia, 1981). From the perspective of Stonequist, biracial individuals suffer from

rejection, isolation, and stigmatization from both the dominant group and the minority group

(Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Beginning in the early 1990s, scholars began to explore healthy identification models for

mixed race individuals (see, for example, Poston, 1990; Collins, 2000; Gibbs, 1998; Henriksen &

Trusty, 2004; Herring, 1995; Renn, 2003; Rockquemore, 1998; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002;

Root, 1990, 2003). At this time, there was also increased acknowledgement that biracial

individuals have a plethora of unique racial categories for identification within their families and

among themselves (Brandell, 1988). In this more recent literature, models of biracial identity

development suggest that individuals move back and forth through a series of phases as they

navigate their identities, and at different times, they may face tension or conflict related to their

racial make-up and identification (Renn, 2008; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Importantly, these

models imply that mixed race individuals are in a position to choose between multiple identity

options and that there is no one label that is applicable for all multiracial people.

One of the most difficult aspects of living as a mixed race person is the challenge of

determining which racial label to use. Historically, American society has had a very rigid and

singular way of thinking about race categories (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003) so that race

and ethnicity are classified as Black *or* White, *or* Asian. It is not uncommon for biracial

individuals to face categorical limitations throughout their lifetimes (Root, 1990). Examples of

these limitations include applications that require individuals to check only one racial category,

birth certificates, school enrollment forms, and identification cards. A conflict may arise for

adolescents and young adults of biracial heritage, as well as their families, because they do not fit

into any one category of race, culture, or ethnicity. These categorical limitations can also result

in invalidation of an individual's given or chosen racial self-identification and may consequently

lead to the development of clinical issues for multiracial persons (Rockquemore & Laszloffy,

2003). That is, it can be psychologically costly to biracial persons who feel pressured to identify

with only one side of their dual racial heritage (Wright, 1998). Psychological costs may include

marginalization, oppression, identity confusion, self-hatred, denial of self, feelings of guilt and

disloyalty, isolation, depression, and stress (Gibbs, 1987).

As a result of the stress associated with the pressure to choose between one race or the other, normal social pressures can be greater for biracial persons. Examples of these difficulties include incorporating two different heritages into one identity, experiencing racism from two or more ethnic groups, and dealing with and integrating two different parenting styles and beliefs (Cauce et al., 1992). Historically, Black-White children have been under pressure from the Black community, the White community, and society in general to identify as Black based on the "one-drop rule" (Bowles, 1993). In her evaluation of her clinical work with Black-White biracial adolescents and young adults, Bowles found that biracial persons who felt "forced" to deny one side of their parental line reported feelings of confusion or discomfort choosing one parent over the other. Similarly, in their grounded theory qualitative inquiry to better understand six biracial women's identity development, Henriksen and Trusty (2004) found that, during the process of developing a racial identity, biracial women's reactions to external pressures about race influenced their pathways to developing healthy racial identities. The women in their study who felt comfortable and confident in their biracial identity externalized the oppression they experienced. Studies such as Bowles's and Henriksen and Trusty's provide important insight into the challenges associated with biracial identity development. They also inform clinical practitioners of possible therapeutic issues biracial individuals and their families may present with in therapy and goals for therapy such as introducing the multiracial option for identity development and working with parents to support both sides of their biracial child's racial heritages.

That biracial and multiracial persons experience unique challenges does not imply that these individuals will always have an unhealthy identity development process. With the recent expansion of research on the topic of the biracial experience, awareness of the actual strength

and resilience these challenges instill in biracial persons is becoming more widely accepted

(Field, 1996). These positive aspects of biracial persons include, but are not limited to, healthy

self-esteem, a positive self-concept, and the ability to be racially flexible in various personal and

social situations (Field; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Identity Development

Defining and delving into the topic of identity development is complex. Most theorists

refer to Erik Erikson, the man who first employed the term identity, as it is generally understood

today. Initially, Erikson (1968) proposed that the development of a stable identity is one of the

major tasks of adolescence:

> We deal with a process "located" *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of*
>
> *his communal culture*…. In Psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of
>
> simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental
>
> functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be
>
> the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology
>
> significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in light of how he perceives
>
> himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. (pp. 22-23)

As adolescents reach physical maturity and become more cognitively mature, they experience

the reflection and observation that Erikson speaks of as one of the core components in the

creation of identity (Tatum, 1997). In addition, this identity creation happens within an

interactional process between the adolescent and others, including larger society.

In contrast to his earlier notion that identity stabilizes in adolescence, in his later writings,

Erikson went on to say that "identity is the rare attainment and ongoing process which captures

and sponsors one's investments throughout the long years of adulthood," (Hare, 2002, pp. 30-

31). The individual awareness and social explorations of identity begin in adolescence but continually evolve throughout adulthood. With this addition by Erikson, the development of identity would, therefore, be considered a lifelong process that may always be in flux. Actual completion or solidification of an identity may not be a concept easily assigned to one age range or category (Phinney, 2006).

Tatum (1997) expands Erikson's original notion of identity by explaining that identity creation is shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. In her discussion of racial identity, Tatum asserts that the many dimensions of oneself including gender, age, socioeconomic status, sexuality, ability, and religion mediate identity development. Questions raised by adolescents and young adults developing their own sense of self include: "Who am I? Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am?" (Tatum, pp. 18-20). What historical events have shaped my thinking? What has my social context been? Answers to such questions begin to influence individuals as they come to a clearer sense of who they are. An additional aspect of questioning that is particularly relevant for non-White or minority adolescents and young adults is: Who am I ethnically and/or racially? What does it mean to be Black? (Phinney, 1992; Tatum).

Much like the literature on general identity development, Phinney (1990) argues that there is a developmental progression of achieved ethnic identity that may begin in early adolescence and continue throughout the lifespan. Researchers suggest that, during middle and late adolescence, issues of ethnicity, culture, and race become more salient for individuals because they become more prominent for society (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Tatum 1997). However, in addition to Erikson, Kroger (1999), and Mullis, Brailsford, and Mullis (2003) suggest that general identity development may extend beyond the age of 21 (see also Parham &

Helms, 1985; Renn, 2003; Tatum; Waterman, 1982). In fact, in their study of 392 college

students ages 17 to 24, Phinney and Alipuria (1996) found that ethnic identity exploration was

still occurring. The notion that ethnic identity development continues beyond adolescence into

adulthood, and in some cases across the lifespan, lends support for the focus of the current study

on biracial individuals in early to middle adulthood.

Racial Identity Development

Racial identity is described by Parham and Helms (1981) as "a person's beliefs or

attitudes about his or her own race" (p. 251). As previously discussed, racial identity is

considered a component of overall identity development for non-White individuals. Families,

friends, social institutions, and organizations contribute to the creation of racial identity (Orbe &

Harris, 2001). Aspects of an individual's racial identity begin developing early in a child's life

and become a central part of the self over time. For minorities, racial identity includes both the

personal sense of the individual as well as group membership (Kerwin, 1991). In the case of

Black individuals, "Healthy [Black] identity formation must address the development of

understanding and acceptance of the group in the face of lower status and prestige in society,

stereotypes, and racism" (Sanders Thompson, 2006, p. unknown).

In light of the importance of developing a racial identity for non-White individuals,

several models of racial identity development have been proposed over the last few decades (for

examples see Cross, 1971; Parham & Helms, 1981; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander,

2001). For example, Cross, a well-known scholar in the study of racial identity development for

Black Americans, was one of the first to explain the developmental process of racial identity

utilizing a model format. Cross's model is known as "the Negro to Black conversion experience"

(Cross, 1971, p. 13). Cross's Black racial identity conceptualization is also the most widely

referred to model of racial identity development within the biracial/multiracial literature. According to this model of the psychology of nigrescence or becoming Black, there are five psychological stages of identity development for Black persons. They are *pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment*. The first two stages are considered most relevant for adolescents and the remaining three stages are thought to emerge in young adulthood (Tatum, 1997).

In the *pre-encounter stage*, Black persons view the world from a White frame of reference, which suggests that Whiteness is better or more ideal than Blackness (Cross, 1971; Parham & Helms, 1985; Tatum, 1997). In this stage, neither the personal nor social significance of one's racial group is realized (Tatum). The second stage, *encounter,* is believed to be ignited by a personal or social event or experience usually related to racism. It is during this time that a person will begin to examine what it means to be a member of a targeted group. During *immersion-emersion*, the third stage, the person immerses himself or herself in Black experiences (Cross; Parham & Helms). In this stage, everything that is important to individuals is relevant to the Black experience or Blackness and everything White loses its value. With the *internalization* that occurs during the fourth stage, persons have developed comfort with their Blackness and it becomes a positive and accepted part of their self-concept (Parham & Helms). According to Cross, there is little psychological difference between *internalization* and *internalization-commitment* (the fifth stage). However, the fifth stage of the model extends the acceptance and expression of Black identity in an effort for the sake of the group. With a positive sense of racial identity, an individual will be able to transcend race in multiple venues (Tatum). In the end, self-fulfillment is achieved by integrating one racial or ethnic identity into the overall identity for individuals (Poston, 1990).

It is important to review the general concept of racial identity as well as Cross's model of racial identity for Blacks because each acknowledges the significance of the racial component of identity development for minority individuals. Erikson (1968) noted that racial identity is an important aspect for a healthy overall identity for minority persons. Cross's model for the Black experience of racial identity development paved the way for scholars attempting to understand the how the Black experience of developing identity differed from the White experience. Further, Cross's model gave biracial scholars a framework for beginning to understand the experience of biracial individuals attempting to integrate race into their overall sense of self.

As biracial scholarship expanded, Cross's *Negro to Black conversion experience* would no longer be sufficient for describing the developmental task of establishing and integrating two distinct races into the overall identity for biracial persons. However, it would remain the example from which many models for biracial identity development originated. While it is important to acknowledge monoracial identity development models for what they have contributed to the field of racial identity development overall, it is critical to emphasize that these monoracial models cannot accurately or fully explain the experience of biracial individuals. Additionally, a stage model such as Cross's may remove the essence of an individual's personal experiences throughout his or her development and push too hard to put everyone into the same racial category or experience.

Biracial Identity Development

The racial identity of mixed race persons is unique and complex in distinct ways. Over the last 19 years, numerous theories and models have been developed regarding biracial identity development (Poston, 1990; see also Collins, 2000; Gibbs, 1998; Herring, 1995; Renn, 2003; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1990). Many theorists resist the notion of creating a

model of biracial identity development for fear of not incorporating all aspects of a biracial individual's experience. However, some have structured models based on their own research with biracial individuals (see Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Rockquemore, 1998; Root). In this section, I will review some of the most important models for biracial identity development and discuss how they contribute to expanding the understanding of biracial identity development as a unique experience that does not always end but is rather a continuous journey.

Poston's model of biracial identity development. Poston (1990) was first to indicate that biracial identity development is a complex and undefined process. According to Poston, racial identity development is important because it helps shape individuals' attitudes about themselves, other individuals in their racial/ethnic group, individuals from other racial/ethnic minority groups, and individuals from the majority. Furthermore, it dispels the cultural conformity myth that all individuals from a particular minority group are the same, with the same attitudes and preferences.

After a review of the scant literature and discovering only deficit models, Poston proposed a tentative model that was the first to encompass biracial individuals and many of their unique aspects in a positive way. Poston's model addresses the experience of having two racial heritages in one body, and the complexity of growing up with the possibility of accepting or denying one or both of those two distinct racial categories. Poston's biracial identity development model consists of five stages: *personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration*.

The first stage of identity development begins when children are young (Poston does not indicate a specific age) and is called *personal identity*. In this stage, the sense of self is independent of an ethnic group (Poston, 1990). Therefore, during this stage, biracial children are

aware of race and racial differences, but their focus is on self-esteem and self-worth based on familial and peer interactions. Brandell (1988) suggests that biracial children develop the capacity to identify themselves as being both Black and White as early as the age of four.

In the second stage, *choice of group categorization*, Poston suggests that children (again, no specific age range is indicated) will choose a racial group or specific ethnic category. Poston's second stage is in agreement with other theorists who, throughout history, agreed that biracial children would choose only one race to identify with at some point during their development; this would either be majority or minority (Bowles, 1993; Bracey, Bámaca, & Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Phinney & Alipuria 1996; Qian, 2004). Poston (1990) suggests factors that influence this choice are parents, peers, which side of the family that children are exposed to more often, the racial makeup of the neighborhood, interactions of the child with particular cultures or racial groups, and the individual's physical appearance.

The third stage of biracial identity development, *enmeshment/denial*, is thought to occur sometime during early adolescence. Poston (1990) suggests that the individual is conflicted about choosing one race or group that does not fully express one's background. Feelings of guilt, shame, and ambivalence surface in relation to choosing one parent over another (Sebring, 1985, as cited in Brandell, 1988). Another experience during this stage can be lack of acceptance from one or more racial groups.

The fourth stage is *appreciation*. Individuals begin to appreciate their multiple identities and broaden their reference group orientation (Poston, 1990). Whether or not children have accepted one or all of their racial identities, there can be more broad exploration of multiple cultures. The fifth and final stage of Poston's biracial identity model is referred to as *integration*.

At this stage, multiracial individuals are able to recognize and to personally identify with all of their ethnic identities.

Poston's (1990) model was one of the first attempts to address the fluidity that monoracial identity models lack when applied to biracial persons and represents a critical step forward in acknowledging that biracial individuals cannot be confined to singular models of racial identity. Poston's model also invited new areas for research, particularly deeper investigation of the concepts suggested in the model. While Poston's model made a significant contribution in terms of acknowledging the process of developing a biracial identity, it does have certain limitations. Specifically, Poston refers to more distinct stages of development rather than a continual process occurring across the lifespan. Moreover, the fifth stage of the model suggests success as integration, acceptance, and identification with all of an individual's racial identities, which may serve to isolate or pathologize biracial individuals who do not integrate as Poston has suggested.

Collins proposed Biracial or double identity model. Influenced by Poston's biracial identity model and others, Collins (2000) posed a four-phase model of the development of a positive biracial identity. This model was the result of a qualitative study that explored the complexity of biracial identity development of 15 men and women with one Japanese parent and one non-Asian parent. Similar to Poston's model, the phases are not limited by specific age groups. The author of this model emphasizes what Hall (2001) referred to as a lifespan focus, meaning that identity and racial identity are fluid constructs that may change and shift many times throughout life. Movement through the four phases of identity development is based on interaction with the environment, significant others, and life experiences (Collins).

In the first phase of the theoretical model, mixed race children experience a period of *questioning and confusion*. This experience of dissonance and feeling different is common for all biracial persons (Kich, 1992). Not only do mixed race people ask questions of themselves, but they also experience questions from the outside. During this self-evaluation period, individuals go through a process of assimilation and accommodation (Collins, 2000). Individuals will determine what dimensions of their racial selves to incorporate internally and externally into their identity.

During the second phase of the model, biracial persons attempt to define themselves. This phase is referred to as *refusal and suppression*. Initially, a biracial person will assume a label given by others. However, they will later reject this same label. Collins (2000) stresses that this is a crucial period and the opportunity to develop relationships with peers from many different backgrounds will help in facilitating a positive identity. This is a period similar to Poston's (1990) group categorization in which individuals tend to choose one group or race over another. The choice of group categorization is influenced by the individual's position in the social structure and the demographics of their environment (Collins). Family can have an impact on the choices biracial persons make; however, it is often the different subgroups of peers and other ethnic minorities that have the most influence.

As a result of choosing one race or ethnicity, in the third phase, Collins (2000) believes that biracial persons experience feelings of confusion and guilt. During the phase of *infusion and exploration*, mixed race people begin to change depending on the social context they are in. This is a way for biracial persons to protect themselves from the social limitations of choosing only one race or ethnicity. Oftentimes, mixed raced people will use their identity situationally based on which group they are interacting with. Additionally, individuals may make special effort to

appreciate both races or ethnicities rather than denying one (Collins). This phase might coincide with Poston's (1990) fourth stage in which appreciation for both races emerges for the individual and exploration of each race occurs. Individuals may move back and forth between racial identities without rejecting a part of themselves (Collins).

Resolution and acceptance, the fourth phase of Collin's (2000) model, is relatively complex. In this stage, a reevaluation occurs in which the individual must determine whether to accept the chameleon ability of his or her identity or choose to restructure the self. The process of restructuring the self means acknowledging both cultures as significant and equal parts of the individual self. This is what Poston (1990) referred to as integration or the ability to recognize and personally identify with all of their ethnic identities. *True integration*, according to Collins, is when the social interaction with a biracial reference group shifts to a multiple identity that is neither one, the other, or both but rather an identity in which individuals can recognize all of their ethnic identities as their own entities and be truly secure. There is no longer confusion about identity and the biracial self is fully nurtured.

The important contribution of Collins' model to the understanding of biracial identity development is the concept of "double," which is an integrative identity that blends both racial reference groups, but is also neither. Double is when biracial individuals synthesize both racial reference groups by recognizing the commonalities and appreciating the differences that a biracial person encompasses all at once. While Collins' model is limited because it focused only on mixed Japanese and non-Asian people, it did invite further research into identity formation of all multiracial people. Future research endeavors have also revealed the importance of the concept of a fluid racial identity, which lends further support to Collins' discovery of "double" (Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 2003). The major limitation

of Collin's model, as with Poston's, is the suggestion that, in order for a biracial individual to reach acceptance, they must declare both races or ethnicities as equally important parts of their whole self. This stance would not allow for true movement or fluidity back and forth throughout various phases of the lifespan.

Henriksen and Trusty Black-White identity development model. Henriksen and Trusty (2004) posed a model of biracial identity development based on qualitative research with seven Black-White biracials. This model involves six periods that are more fluid than fixed. "These periods identify an individual's movement toward the development of a racial identity. The individual may not encounter all of the periods and may revisit particular periods" at various ages throughout their lifetime (Henriksen & Trusty, 2004, p. 71). The first period, *neutrality*, which usually occurs during young childhood, is a time when awareness of racial differences is nonexistent or they are just becoming realized. In this period, biracial individuals are neutral to race. The next period, *acceptance*, usually begins during childhood and prior to adolescence and is a time when individuals recognize and accept that they possess race. Race becomes real as a result of communication with family and peers. During this period, Henriksen and Trusty identify family messages about race, such as the acknowledgement and acceptance of racial heritage by parents, as having the greatest influence on this racial identity development. It is also during this phase that first experiences of racial prejudice may occur for individuals.

Awareness is a period when individuals notice racial difference between themselves and others, usually sometime during early adolescence. Occasionally, this awareness is the result of a lack of an identified racial group, which also may lead to feelings of isolation. When individuals try to fit into only one part of their racial identity, Henriksen and Trusty (2004) described this period as experimentation, which occurred throughout adolescence for several participants.

Experimentation is a time that biracial individuals are actively involved in defining their own racial identity. During the phase of *transition*, which occurred sometime during adolescence, biracial individuals realize that they cannot choose between Black or White. Finally, the period of *recognition* is when "biracial individuals decide who they are racially and accept the racial make-up to which they born" (p. 75). This final period may occur in late adolescence or early adulthood for some biracial individuals.

A strength of a model such as Henriksen and Trusty's is that it acknowledges that biracial individuals may identify themselves in many ways over time and that their identities may shift depending on context. The movement back and forth between periods of identity development can be likened to a lifespan focus, which again is one of the important aspects of biracial development highlighted by Hall (2001). Another strength of this model is that there is no one racial identity that is considered ideal and individuals may come back to the various periods more than once throughout their lifetime. Both Henriksen and Trusty's and Collin's (1990) models of biracial identity support a more fluid identity for biracial individuals. The transition period or stage can be likened to that of Collin's concept of double, which indicates neither one race or the other is sufficient for a biracial individual's identity. Still, it may be considered a limitation that this model was developed from a small sample of Black-White biracials. Another limitation of the model was that all of the individuals selected had a White mother and a Black father, which does not account for possible differences of being raised by a Black mother and a White father.

Summary and conclusions. Each of the three models reviewed focus on several aspects of identity development for biracial individuals. Specifically, each of the models suggest that the experience of biracial individuals is unique when compared to those who are identified as

monoracial. There also appears to be agreement that there are some challenges inherent in the racial identity development process for biracial individuals. Overall, the models posit that biracial individuals have approximately six periods during their racial development, which begin in early childhood and continue through adolescence into adulthood. Movement or fluidity between these periods or stages has also become more widely accepted for biracial and multiracial individuals. Across the models, the first period or stage is a time when there is no racial distinction. The second period is a time of questioning race in self and others. The third period is a time when biracial individuals are influenced by the racial categorization of others. The fourth period tends to be one of conflict about self identification which may include acceptance or rejection of one race. The fifth period involves exploration around and within both or multiple racial categories. Finally, there is a period of resolution or acceptance of a multiracial or biracial label. During this phase, the concept of double is revealed and presents a positive perspective of the acknowledgement for biracial individuals of their dual racial heritages.

Over time, it seems that biracial identity models have evolved to encompass the belief that mixed race persons contend with all parts of their racial heritage at all times (Root, 1990). In the beginning of the 1990s, those doing research in biracial studies attempted to dispel the notion that mixed race individuals were somehow doomed to incomplete identities or problematic personalities (Poston, 1990; Kerwin 1991). As a result of his review of the biracial literature, Hall (2001) discussed the need for a model of biracial identity development that extends across the lifespan of human development. He also indicated the necessity of not limiting mixed race persons to sociohistorical influences such as hypodescent. Hall suggests that the development of a biracial identity is not just limited by race, but that it encompasses the impact of historical events in the individuals' lifespan, in their families' lifespan, and within their communities.

Thus, variations within an individual's biracial identity encompass experiences of circumstances as well as an individual's ability to shape and change circumstances. Hall emphasized the value of personal preferences for racial identity across time for the biracial person, and encouraged the breakdown of the social constraints that limit those individuals to one racial category.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, models of biracial identity development have focused on the fluid aspect of identity as suggested by Hall (2001; Collins, 2000; Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Rockquemore, 1998, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002), and the reality that there is "not a single, clear path of racial identification but [rather] a set of racial identity options" (Roth, 2005, p. 36). In the end, these models demonstrate that there are great variations among multiracial individuals and the way they choose to identify themselves (Schwartz, 1998). However, these models include a more theoretical emphasis. As such, there is a limited amount of empirical research exploring biracial or multiracial populations (Bracey et al., 2004; Phinney, 1990; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). More importantly, existing models of biracial identity development indicate that family is important, but what they do not provide or reveal is the process by which families influence biracial identity development.

Racial Socialization: The Role of Families

Within families, meanings about racial categories are constructed and learned (Childs, 2006). Racial socialization refers to parents' race related communications with their children (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). According to Sanders Thompson (1994), racial socialization is a process by which values, norms, morals, and beliefs are passed on from one generation to the next in families. The process also "involves messages and actions that provide information on personal and group identity, interracial relationships, and social position related to race" (Sanders Thompson, p 176). Hughes and Chen suggest that "parents play a

particularly important role in shaping children's racial knowledge…As key socializing agents;

their values, attitudes, and behaviors transmit fundamental information to children about their

own and other racial and ethnic groups" (p. 467).

Empirical studies on racial socialization have shown that parents who themselves identify

with an ethnic or racial minority intentionally racially socialize their children and that it is an

important component of child rearing (see Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Phinney & Chavira, 1995;

Sanders Thompson, 1994). Within the literature, there is variation in race related communication

across racial and ethnic groups (Hughes & Chen, 1999). This is to say that, although race related

messages are thought to be communicated in all families, the underlying origins and intent of

these messages are not the same. Hughes and Chen explain that race related messages might

include several dimensions:

> (a) emphasizing racial and ethnic pride, traditions and history (termed cultural
>
> socialization); (b) promoting awareness of racial prejudice and discrimination (termed
>
> preparation for bias); (c) issuing cautions and warnings about other racial and ethnic
>
> groups, or about intergroup relations (termed promotion of mistrust); (d) emphasizing the
>
> need to appreciate all racial and ethnic groups (termed egalitarianism)(p. 473).

In her study of racial socialization and its relationship to racial identification among

African Americans, Sanders Thompson (1994) surveyed 225 African Americans age 18 or older

about the extent and content of discussions related to race in their families and the impact of

these discussions on their beliefs and attitudes related to race. Findings suggest that that 79% (n

= 178) of participants reported having some conversations about race with their parents (Sanders

Thompson). Overall, approximately two thirds of the sample indicated that their discussions

about race with parents and extended family members affected their beliefs and behaviors related

to racial issues such as racial pride, self-development, racial barrier awareness, and egalitarianism. Further, a multiple regression analysis revealed support for the hypothesis that more racial socialization in the family, parents and family members other than parents, is associated with greater racial identification. What the findings of this study demonstrate is that "the majority of African American [parents] and families provide race-related socialization to their children" (Sanders Thompson, 1994, p. 185).

In the current study, I assumed that both the African American parents and the White parents in the interracial families had race related discussions with their children. The current study expanded on the study by Sanders Thompson because it examined racial socialization within interracial families and gathered detailed information about the racial socialization practices of the White parent in the families as well as the African American parent in addition to including the perspectives of the children in interracial families. My study also included the perspectives of parents and children together. In addition my study examined the experiences of race related communication in interracial families which expands the current knowledge base on the topic of racial socialization within interracial families.

Parental racial and ethnic socialization has been demonstrated as an important factor in minority families. It has also been found to influence children's ability to cope with racial and ethnic discrimination. In their mixed method study aimed at understanding parental ethnic socialization and adolescents' ethnic identity and strategies for coping with problems related to ethnic identity, Phinney and Chavira (1995) conducted in-depth interviews with 60 monoracial African American, Japanese American, and Mexican American adolescents between the ages of 16 to 18 and one of their monoracial parents. Findings indicated that a significant number of parents report intentionally teaching their children about their culture. In addition, parents

emphasized achievement and concern about the prejudice and discrimination their children might face. Another key finding was that parents who said they prepared their children for living in a diverse society tended to have adolescents with a stronger ethnic identity. In this study, Phinney and Chavira did not follow up parent's responses about ethnic socialization with their children. Rather, with the children participants in the study, they examined issues related to their ethnic identity but did not directly ask about parental socialization on these topics.

While the study conducted by Phinney and Chavira (1995) affirms that parents intentionally ethnically socialize their children, it does not bridge the perspectives of the parent's ethnic socialization with the perspectives of their children. However, Phinney and Chavira do demonstrate a positive connection between parental ethnic socialization and the children's ability to cope with racial and ethnic discrimination. The contribution of my study bridges the gap between what information parents are providing in their ethnic or racial socialization practices and the outcome of such socialization from the perspectives of the children receiving the information. In essence, my study offers the children's perceptions of what parents are discussing within their race related communications with them.

In another study examining race related communication, Hughes and Johnson (2001) included 94 African American parents of monoracial 9 to 10 year-olds in order to understand racial socialization processes based on children's ethnic identity exploration as well as parents' ethnic identity. More specifically, Hughes and Johnson wanted to quantitatively evaluate parental racial socialization practices while considering children's experiences of discrimination. Most parents in this study reported racial socialization practices across several dimensions such as cultural socialization (i.e., teaching about one's own group's culture, history, and heritage), preparation for bias (i.e., teaching about prejudice and discrimination), and promotion of mistrust

(i.e., cautions or warnings about other groups). The findings revealed a positive correlation between parental racial identification and parental reports of racial discrimination. However, there was no evidence to support the hypothesis that the amount of parents' race related communication was associated with children's experiences of unfair treatment or discrimination. The information gathered from the Hughes and Johnson study influenced the current study because of their suggestion in the limitations section that racial socialization may be a transactional process between parents and their children rather than one that is based only on parental agendas about race. In the current study, I expanded and explored the concept that racial socialization is an interactional process between parents and children by interviewing both parents and children together about their perspectives of race related communications in their families.

A unique aspect of Hughes and Johnson's study was that about 9% of the sample was biracial, with one White parent and one African American parent. Within this sub sample, African American parents of biracial youth reported stronger ethnic identity and more discrimination experiences than did White parents. Although Hughes and Johnson mention this subset of their sample, they did not do any in-depth exploration or analysis of these data. However, such information might encourage further explorations of the racial socialization and communication practices of interracial parents and their biracial children. An additional implication of their data is that interracial families have different experiences with race related communication than monoracial families that need to be considered separately from monoracial populations. The current study focused intentionally on this interracial subpopulation, namely Black-White biracial individuals.

Summary and conclusions. This review highlights the interactional process of racial socialization between parents and their children (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Parents racially socialize their children based on their own experiences of race and race-relations or based on the broader social definitions of race and the socialization they received growing up (Rockquemore et al., 2006). Children bring their experiences from extra familial settings that may elicit questions about race that vary from the parent's socialization agendas (Hughes & Chen, 1999). This, in turn, may prompt additional parental conversations about race. Thus, as suggested by symbolic interactionism, "racial socialization is primarily contained within nuanced microsocial exchanges between parents and children" (Hughes & Chen, p. 470). While this review indicates the importance of the interactional process of racial socialization between parents and children, these studies did not intentionally address the racial socialization perspectives of interracial Black-White parents and their biracial children nor did they include multiple perspectives.

Overall, the literature indicates that, when parents communicate with their children about their race, ethnicity, and culture, it promotes positive racial identity development (Hughes & Chen, 1999) and well-being (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Parental communication about race also contributes to higher self-esteem and feelings of efficacy (Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Studies on racial socialization in African American and other ethnic minority families reveal the important connection between parents and children throughout the racial identity development and socialization process (Hughes & Johnson; Sanders Thompson, 1994). These findings informed the current study in two ways. First, they support the notion that parents' communication about race is an important component in a child's identity development process. Second, these studies highlight the need for further research in the area of the interactional process of racial

socialization between parents and children and highlight the gap between research on racial

socialization and racial socialization specifically in multiracial families.

Interracial Couples: Attitudes and Experiences

In the United States, interracial marriages or marriages between differently classified

individuals make up less than 13% of the population of married couples; however, rates of

interracial marriages have increased in the last 35 years (DaCosta, 2007). Up until 1967, Black-

White intermarriage was illegal in more than 30 states. In 1967, in a U.S. Supreme Court

landmark decision, the court ruled in favor of the Lovings, a Black woman and a White man

from Virginia who had been imprisoned for marrying interracially, that anti-miscegenation laws

were in fact unconstitutional (Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi, 2009). Nevertheless, before

and after 1967, Black-White intermarriage is still one of the rarest interracial unions in the

United States; Black-White marriages make up less than 3% of the total number of

intermarriages (DaCosta; Kouri, 2003, US Census 2000). Approval ratings of interracial

marriage have increased steadily over the years, but not specifically approval of Black-White

interracial marriage (DaCosta; Kouri).

Explanations for the lack of approval of Black-White interracial marriage have focused

on the negative history of Black-White relations in America (Roberts, 1994; Rosenblatt et al.,

1995; Spickard, 1992). America's roots in slavery and the horrific and "hypersexualized"

relations between Blacks and Whites, represented in the images of the rape of slave women by

White slave owners and the exploitation of sexual relationships between White women and slave

or indentured servant men, have pervaded the attitudes of our culture and continued to relegate

Blacks to the bottom of the racial and social hierarchy (Childs, 2005b; Roberts; Rosenblatt et al.,

Williams, 1996). The result of such presuppositions about Black-White miscegenation continues

to affect the social belief that Blacks and Whites are different sociologically and biologically and simply do not belong together (Williams). However, it is critical to note, that even despite the ever present negative images in our history and negative attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages, there are approximately 246,000 Black-White couples in the U.S. today (US Census 2000). Of those interracial unions, approximately one-third are between Black women and White men, while two-thirds are between Black men and White women. The contrast in numbers of couples involving Black men and White women versus Black women and White men is a topic for another study; however, the racial gender differences cannot be ignored in the families who participated in the current study. Possible reasons for more Black men marrying White women versus more White men marrying Black women may be rooted in the American history of Black women who were exploited by White men, and as a group, perhaps the Black community still fears Black women being mistreated by White men if they marry interracially (Childs).

In a brief review of the literature on Black-White interracial relationships, a few qualitative studies revealed some of the primary struggles faced by the men and women who enter into these marital unions: racial discrimination, challenging responses from their families, and concerns for the biracial children (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Childs, 2005a, 2005b; DaCosta, 2007; Donnell, 1998; Killian, 2001; Kouri, 2003; Root, 2001; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). In general, couples in Black-White interracial relationships and marriages bring about racialized responses from both Black and White communities because interracial couples live on the line between the social divide between Black and White (Childs, 2005b). For this reason, almost all couples in the research reviewed (Byrd & Garwick; Childs; DaCosta; Donnell; Killian; Kouri; Root; Rosenblatt et al.) shared stories of their experiences of racial discrimination for being a partner in a Black-White couple.

Negative responses came from both Black and White families and friends and ranged from receiving poor service or not being served at all, to being called a sell out to the Black community for dating White, to stares from others while out in public (Childs 2005a, 2005b; Killian, 2001; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). In most of the literature reviewed, couples also shared stories about the responses of their parents to their interracial relationship. Several individuals in these studies revealed that they were raised to embrace all others, which contributed to their own ability to date interracially without qualms (Kouri, 2003; Rosenblatt et al.). Interracial couples also reported both instances of support and resistance from family members. Resistance to the interracial relationship could reveal itself in numerous ways such as outright verbal disapproval, not attending the wedding of the couple, and cut off of the interracial couple from the family of origin (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Childs; Donnell, 1998; Killian; Rosenblatt et al.).

The literature on Black-White interracial couples also reveals familial and social concerns if the couple had or was planning to have biracial children (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Childs, 2005a, 2005b; DaCosta, 2007; Donnell, 1998; Rosenblatt el al., 1995). These findings are relevant to the current study because they highlight the potential positive or negative impact of the familial context on parents of biracial children, which in turn, can impact the biracial children born to these couples. In a number of studies, researchers described respondents who shared that their parents' primary concern about their interracial relationship was that they would have children who would be predisposed to psychological problems because of their biracial identity (the "tragic mulatto" concept) and who society would either see as Black or pressure the biracial children to choose between their two racial backgrounds (Childs; DaCosta; Rosenblatt et al.). An additional concern came from White parents and centered on the challenges they feared their White children would face raising "Black" children (Childs; DaCosta). This concern illustrates

the presupposition that Black-White biracial children are Black in accordance with the notion of hypodescent perpetuated in American culture. Interestingly, in many families with initial opposition to the interracial partnership and biracial children, it was the birth of the first biracial grandchild that often shifted the turmoil between family members into a more positive light (Byrd & Garwick; Rosenblatt et al.). How interracial couples chose to deal with their family's responses, especially in regard to their own children would ultimately have an impact on the biracial child's identity development. The next section explains the process of racial socialization process in interracial families in more depth.

Interracial Parents and Racial Socialization

Although there is a large body of literature addressing the possible challenges associated with socializing biracial children, there has been very little discussion of how monoracial parents actually help to socialize their biracial children into racial identities or how important the parental influence is in the development of biracial identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Laszloffy (2005) concludes that the focus of biracial research has been on the individual identity development for mixed race people, but very little attention is devoted to parent-child family relationships and how the interracial family system might be affected throughout the identity development process. There has been some speculation that a parent's effect on biracial identity might only be minimal because of a lack of understanding by parents of the challenges of growing up biracial or because of a color blind attitude that leads children to not seek their parents' support for issues related to racial identity (Collins, 2000; Gibbs, 1998; Gillem et al., 2001; Herring, 1995). Despite this speculation, there is no empirical data to support these notions.

Theoretically, racial socialization in multiracial families would be considered unique because parents of monoracial heritage are faced with the task of teaching their biracial children what it means to be biracial. The birth of mixed race children may bring more awareness of racial constructions and provoke (often for the first time) reflections on racial socialization for an interracial couple (Root, 2001; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Rockquemore et al. (2006) suggest that the racial socialization in multiracial families is actually complicated by several factors, especially the different racial identities and experiences of the monoracial parents. Parents enter into interracial marriage with different racial experiences. For example, the Black parent may be prepared for experiences of institutional racism while the White parent may have been taught about race, but not had any personal experience with racism. How those differences in parents' racial experiences are portrayed to their children has not been researched (Rockquemore et al.). A review of the biracial literature also indicates that multiracial families address issues of race according to interrelated factors such as the influence of parents, the relationship between the parents, how parents respond to their child's physical appearance, the personal philosophies of the family about race or racism, and the racial make-up of the neighborhood (Orbe & Harris, 2001; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Additionally, Rockquemore and Laszloffy speak directly to the complexity of monoracial parents racially socializing their children when those parents cannot personally understand a biracial reality. In essence, one of the biggest challenges for children of interracial parents is that they do not have a specific person in their family who can totally understand their racial reality (Rockquemore et al.).

Many parents see their biracial children as a way to defy the racial classifications of American society. Frequently, parents choose one racial label for their children or no racial label, which has also been framed as the denial of any race at all (Gibbs, 1998; Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Oftentimes, it is the race/ethnicity of the minority spouse that helps to predict the racial/ethnic identity of the children (Qian, 2004). For example, some studies have shown that Black parents tend to assume a Black label for their biracial children because of the socially handed down rule of hypodescent that automatically categorizes children with one Black parent as Black (Gillem et al., 2001; Kerwin et al., 1993; Qian; Rosenblatt et al.). Additionally, the literature also suggests that many Black-White biracial persons identify themselves as Black; the term biracial merely acknowledges the racial categorization of their birth parents (Rockquemore, 1998). Identifying as Black for Black-White biracial individuals may be related to the one-drop rule or other factors such skin tone and other physical features. It could also be connected to the home environments or the community and neighborhoods where the biracial individuals were raised. Unfortunately, the strategy of identification with only one race does not incorporate a consideration of the child's multiracial background and the fact that they have two biological parents, one Black and one White. Moreover, identifying with only one racial category may contribute to the denial or marginalization of one parent if the biracial child or parent only acknowledges one racial heritage in their child (Rosenblatt et al.).

In his quantitative study of racial identification options for children of intermarried couples, Qian found (2004) that parents play an important role in the formation of their children's racial identity. Using the 1990 Census data (n=24, 315), where only one category for race could be selected, Qian examined the racial categories that interracial parents marked for their children. Results of a logistic regression analysis suggested that parents instill a certain racial identity in their children based on the minority concentration of the neighborhoods where parents raise their children, the culture in which they choose to raise their children, and the racial make-up of their local schools. More specifically, the race of biracial children most often aligned

with that of the father and most children of Black-White couples were identified as Black. Regarding neighborhood composition, Qian found that the children of Black-White couples in communities with larger Black populations are less likely to identify their children as "other." In communities with larger college educated populations, Black-White couples tended to identify their children racially as "other." While these findings represent one of the few quantitative studies about biracial individuals, limitations of the study include a lack of information about why parents chose particular racial labels for their children, the personal factors that contributed to that decision, and not asking the children for their perspectives. My study expanded on the premise of Qian's study by asking parents and children for the underlying motivation for choosing racial labels and what factors contribute to such decisions for both parents and their children.

Another study that examined racial identity options for biracial individuals was conducted by Collins (2000). In this qualitative study, Collins investigated a small sample of 15 biracial Japanese Americans, aged 20 to 40 years old, who indicated that they were identified as monoracial by their parents. Participants in the study believed that their parents' attitudes and behavior in regard to racial issues were an important factor in how they felt about their own racial heritage. In particular, many of the participants were categorized as monoracial (usually Caucasian) by their parents, which resulted in their own lack of acknowledgement and minimal exploration of their multiple heritages. Participants also believed that being able to discuss their racial heritage with their parents influenced a positive biracial identity.

Although Collins's study supports the importance of parental influences on biracial identity development, he did not ask follow up questions regarding specific ways in which the individuals felt their parents influenced their racial identification choices. An additional

limitation of this study was that it did not incorporate a familial perspective, which might contribute to a better overall understanding of the interrelated factors between parents and children that influence the development of a biracial identity. My study expanded on the findings of Collin's study by considering the bi-directional influences of parents and children on the biracial identity development process and by interviewing parents and children together for a more in-depth understanding of familial influences on biracial identity development.

In one of the few studies to include interviews with parents and their children, Kerwin et al. (1993) interviewed 9 Black-White biracial children, ages 5 to 16 years, and their parents (six families total) to determine what variables contributed to the development of the children's racial identity. Most parents in the study indicated distress when filling out forms that forced them to choose one racial label for their children. With the exception of one parent, all considered their children both Black and White and each of the parents interviewed also indicated a general comfort with talking about racial issues with their children. The researchers also found that families with both parents involved did not have a problem acknowledging their children's biracial status positively.

Kerwin and colleague's study (1993) contributes to the field of biracial studies because of its intentional inclusion of both parent and child interviews. In addition, Kerwin et al. discovered that there are positive aspects for the biracial children when both parents agree to raise their children as biracial. Some limitations are also evident, including the relatively young ages of the children in the sample, which may have led to restricted responses from those participants, and the small sample size. Additionally, according to models of identity development (self-concept and racial), adolescence and early adulthood may be the ages when individuals have achieved a more solid sense of self and may be better able to answer questions directed at issues of identity.

In school age children, there may be less open ended responses to interview questions which could contribute to more leading questions from the interviewer, though unintentional, which may result in less spontaneous and accurate disclosure of experiences (Kerwin et al. 1993).

The Present Study

Within the literature there is an increasing tendency for interracial couples to support their children in developing a biracial identity (Kerwin et al., 1993; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Suzuki-Crumley & Hyers, 2004). Researchers have also examined interracial relationships and the effects of the interracial relationships on the families and individuals involved (Childs, 2005 a, 2005b, 2006; Donnell, 1998; Killian, 2001; Qian, 2005; Root, 2001; Rosenblatt et al.). There have also been inquiries in the areas of biracial identity development and the biracial person's experience in American society (Bowles, 1993; Bracey, et al., 2004; Brown 1990; Colllins, 2000; Gibbs, 1992; Gillem et al., 2001; Herring, 1995; Kerwin et al.; Miller & Rotheram-Borus, 1994; Rockquemore, 1998, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1992, 1998; Thompson, 1999; Williams, 1999).

Despite this important information, there has been limited exploration of parent-child relationships and how those interactions might affect the racial identity development of mixed race people. In most studies of biracial identity development, neither parental experience nor parental influence is assessed. There are also very few questions posed about how parents feel about their children's identity development and how they work with and react to their children throughout their children's biracial identity development process. Additionally, while researchers have established that parents are important to their children's racial socialization, the exact mechanisms and interactions through which this occurs from the perspective of the biracial individual are not clear. Another important limitation is that most of the studies mentioned have

not intentionally included both parents and children. Conceptually, including parents and their

children in a study of the interactional process of developing a biracial identity would allow for a

more in-depth understanding of the interactional influences from both perspectives. To address

these limitations, this study focused on perceptions of Black or White monoracial parents'

influences on their children's biracial identity development from both the parents' and their

children's perspectives. I attended specifically to how mothers and children constructed the

meaning of a biracial identity between them.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is a collaborative process between participants and researchers, the researcher is the key instrument (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and participants help to find and create meaning for the data collected (Morrow, Rakhsha & Castañeda, 2001). In this approach, the qualitative researcher strives to "[situate] and [recontextualize] the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study" (Janesick, 2003, p. 48). Qualitative methods also allow for studying the stories of a community of people and using the data to empower those participants involved and the greater community (Morrow et al.). As the primary investigator, I used "various techniques and rigorous and tested procedures in working to capture the nuance and complexity of the social situation under study" (Janesick, p. 49). More specifically, I conducted an in-depth literature review, reflected on the findings in the literature, examined my personal and professional thoughts regarding the population to be studied, and created a study that would allow me to meet with biracial families and support them in sharing their stories.

Phenomenological Inquiry

In this study, I used a phenomenological qualitative approach (Dahl & Boss, 2005; Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). I chose this approach because phenomenology is a method that is compatible with my already developed skills as a therapist: observation, creativity, intuition, empathic listening, and analysis (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996). In addition, phenomenology allowed me to approach my participants as experts on their experiences of biracial identity development and to interact with them as a biracial person myself. In order to do successful qualitative research with this population of Black-White interracial families, I established "trust,

rapport, and authentic communication patterns with participants" (Janesick, 2003, p. 54) by

being transparent about my assumptions and biases during data collection as well as data

analysis. In addition, my own transparency with the families reifies that the researcher in

phenomenological research is not separate from the phenomena she studies (Boss, Dahl, &

Kaplan, p. 85). It was also important to hear how biracial adults and their parents experienced,

perceived, and created meaning about biracial identity development in their everyday worlds.

Therefore, meeting with the family members and hearing the stories of both parents and their

children allowed me to understand the lived experiences of the mothers and their children "where

it naturally exist[ed] and from [each participant's] own perspective," (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan,

1996, p. 84), which is at the core of phenomenology to explore multiple views of the family.

Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective defined by the commitment to understanding

the social phenomena parent and child influences on the identity development process for Black-

White biracial individuals and how the world is experienced from the biracial person's and

family's unique perspectives (Moustakas, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In line with a social

constructionist perspective, phenomenological inquiry is the study of someone else's reality

through the researcher's eyes (Dahl & Boss, 2005; Mehra, 2001). Phenomenology is different

than other methodological approaches in that the goal is not to clarify discrepancies or make

large generalizations about a group of people; rather, the goal is to highlight what the meaning or

truth is for the participants being studied (Dahl & Boss). "Phenomenological methods of data

collection *allow participants to define phenomena for themselves,* and to describe the conditions,

values, and attitudes they believe are relevant to that definition *for their own lives*" (Dahl &

Boss, p. 72). Rather than collecting data to support preconceived notions, the purpose of this

study was to hear the narratives of the participants in order to develop concepts and insights

about Black-White biracial identity development. In this research project, I was interested in the perspectives of the monoracial (Black or White) parents and their biracial, young adult children. It was necessary to consider that race and racial identity can mean a variety of things to each member of the family, so I aimed to "elicit the perceptions and views of all family members to get the total picture of a particular family" (Boss et al.,1996, p. 87).

It was also important to collect the data within the participants' worlds, whether that is in their homes or in their neighborhoods, in order to provide an atmosphere that resembles a situation where individuals normally interact, naturally talk to each other, and feel relaxed (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The atmosphere for data collection was particularly important because I asked people to talk about themselves openly, and I wanted to assure participants' comfort and confidentiality when sharing the intimate details of their selves and their lives with me.

Subjectivity is significant in the study of families (Boss et al., 1996). As such, subjectivity is also acknowledged as this researcher's reality. It was impossible not to have some interaction with the stories being shared by the participants. As a qualitative researcher, I "attempt[ed] to capture the world of the research participants by understanding their perceived realities and interpreting them from [my] own subjective perspective as a researcher" (Mehra, 2001, p.74). In line with a phenomenological approach, I also acknowledge that there is no hierarchy of expertise (Boss et al.), but rather a co-construction of stories between myself and the participants. Through numerous strategies, which will be outlined later, I analyzed thoughtfully my inherent bias and was a participant-observer throughout the interviewing process. In this way, I explored the ways in which my identity as a biracial individual interacted with the research participants and the research setting. While phenomenology is inductive in nature, it

was necessary to identify my biases and ideology for the study at the onset (Janesick, 2003)

through writing a reflexive narrative.

In order to shape the current study, a literature review was conducted during the initial

stages of this project (Janesick, 2003). Reviewing the literature enabled me to "identify previous

gaps in [this] area, as well as to discover where there are gaps in understanding. It also

suggest[ed] theoretical and conceptual frameworks that might be used to guide [this qualitative]

research project and to interpret the findings" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 49). More specifically,

reviewing the biracial literature helped me to develop an awareness of what questions to ask as

well as an idea of concepts and relationships that may be relevant to my population of biracial

children and their monoracial parents. The literature review also allowed for a deeper

understanding of the historical, socio-cultural, and contextual factors that might be influencing

biracial individuals. For example, the 2000 Census was a historical landmark for multiracial

individuals in that it allowed persons to choose more than one racial category for the first time

(Miville, 2006). As mentioned previously, the 2000 Census revealed more than 7 million people

in the United States who checked more than racial category (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). This

sociohistorical context influenced my belief about the importance of studying this population

because of the large numbers of multiracial people affirmed in the Census. This sociohistorical

context also informed the research questions and qualitative format of this study because it

provided information about the current experiences of multiracial Americans and the continued

lack of social acknowledgement for these people as a unique group. I wanted to understand the

lived experience of my participants and the meaning of their multiracial experience in American

culture. A phenomenological framework allowed me to understand the construct of race as it is

lived within the family and the family within larger American culture (Dahl & Boss, 2005).

Sample

   Size and selection criteria. "The phenomenological approach lends itself to small sample studies in that it requires in-depth description of the experiences of each participant" (Boss et al., 1996, p. 95). As a result, in this research study, I used a purposive sample. A purposive strategy allowed me to select participants based on their relevance to the phenomena being studied (Schwandt, 2001) and their potential to provide rich information about the central issues in the study (Patton, 2002). Snowball or chain sampling was utilized to purposefully select information rich cases and was also a useful means of recruitment because participants were recruited from a Northwestern state where less than 2% of the population reports their race as Black (U. S. Census, 2000). Therefore, snowball sampling helped to "identify cases of interest from sampling people who know people... who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for the study [and were] good interview participants" (Patton, 2002, p. 243).

   In order to be considered for participation in the study, participants were required to self identify as Black or White parents with a biological Black-White biracial young adult child or to self identify as a Black-White biracial young adult with one Black and one White parent. Also, in order to be selected for participation in the study, at least one monoracial parent and at least one biracial young adult child had to be willing to participate in the interview. All participants were required to speak English. Parents could be single, cohabitating, married, or remarried. The adult children were required to be biologically related to the parent(s) and Black-White biracial. The minimum required age of the biracial participants was 18. The minimum age was selected because identity and racial identity is believed to become more solidified in late adolescence to early or middle adulthood (Kroger, 1999; Mullis et al., 2003; Parham & Helms, 1985; Renn, 2003; Tatum, 1997; Waterman, 1982. The sample was limited to Black-White families because

in addition to possible differences in experiences socially and within the family, other multiracial groups may also be contending with the effects of migration, immigration, language, and culture (Root, 1992). Thus, for this study, the ideal sample would have included parents of each gender, parental representations of both Black and White mothers as well as Black and White fathers, and both parents participating in the interview.

The resulting sample consisted of 10 sets of White mothers and one or more of their adult biracial children ages 18 and older. Nine mothers participated with 1 biological, biracial child and 1 mother participated with 2 of her biological, biracial children. In total, there were 8 mother-daughter interviews and 2 mother-son interviews.

Recruitment. Participant families were recruited in a Pacific Northwestern state using numerous strategies. First, I posted approximately 30 to 40 flyers (see Appendix A) at local college campuses in areas such as classroom buildings, academic offices, and public bulletin boards. Second, I sent email messages to approximately 40 faculty members involved with students of color or multicultural education at colleges and universities in two Pacific Northwestern states (See Appendix B). Third, I sent email messages to approximately 15 campus organizations specifically reaching out to students of color on approximately 10 college campuses (see Appendix B). Fourth, I visited one student meeting for a multiethnic student group at the local university. Fifth, I contacted approximately five local chapter leaders of interracial and biracial support organizations and requested that the leaders share my informational email with their group members who might be potential participants. Finally, I used word-of-mouth and snowballing techniques whenever possible to gather participants.

The first participant family was informed about the study from a friend who received the forwarded informational email from a multiracial organization. This participant family spread the

word to two other families within in their personal friendship group. Two other families received

a flyer from the leader of a multiracial organization. One of these families spread the word to a

family friend who participated. Another participant family contained the organizer of yet another

multiracial organization, who received the invitation to participate directly from me, and once

she and her family participated in the study, they spread the word to two other families in the

organization. Finally, one family was recruited through word of mouth when my personal friend

asked a member of her church to participate in the study.

Procedures

Prior to beginning the study, I received approval from the Institutional Review Boards

(IRB) of Virginia Tech (see Appendix C) and the University of Oregon (see Appendix D).

Individuals who were interested in participating in the project contacted me directly via

email or telephone. Upon initial contact, I responded to potential participants via email or

telephone and offered more in-depth information about the purpose of the study and described

the inclusion criteria, particularly the necessity of participation by both a parent and an adult

child. If the individual was still interested in participating in the study, I attempted to discuss the

project with other family members prior to scheduling the interview. Once a final decision was

made regarding participation in the project, a date, time, and location for the interview was

decided. Every effort was made for interviews to be conducted in the natural settings of the

participants. These settings included the participants' homes ($n = 8$), a local coffee shop ($n = 1$),

and my own home ($n = 1$). All participants were interviewed face-to-face.

I conducted all interviews. Prior to beginning each interview, the informed consent forms

(see Appendix E) were reviewed and completed by each family member. Each semi-structured,

in-depth interview was audio-recorded and lasted between 80 and 120 minutes. During the initial

phase of the interview, parents were interviewed together with their adult children. Once the

family interview was complete, I met with parents and their children separately in order to ask

follow-up interview questions and to allow for any further expansion of topics from the family

interview (See Appendix F). In cases where the child was raised primarily by only one parent, a

set of supplemental questions were used to inquire about possible effects for both the parent and

the child. Participants also completed a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix G)

developed for the purpose of this study while they were not participating in the individual

portion of the interview. Upon completion of the in-person interviews, each participant was

compensated with a ten dollar gift certificate to either Starbucks Coffee or Cold Stone Creamery.

Finally, during the data analysis process, participant families were contacted again for some

follow-up conversations, also known as member-checks (which will be discussed in greater

depth in the analysis section).

I conducted a total of 10 interviews with mothers and their children, 9 interviews with

mothers alone, and 9 interviews with biracial adults alone. In one interview, the mother and

daughter chose to stay together for the entire interview. However, questions were covered from

each section of the interview protocol (See Appendix F). Analysis of the interview completed

with the mother and daughter together revealed no content differences when compared to

families who completed separate and family interviews.

Prior to, during, and following each interview, I recorded field notes. These field notes

included personal thoughts, ideas, phrases, key words, and quotes that aided in providing a frame

for the data analysis (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Linville, 2003; Schwandt, 2001). These

handwritten notes were reviewed with interviewees at the end of each interview to ensure

accuracy. During this accuracy check, I asked clarifying questions of the participants when

necessary and followed up on anything causing confusion for me as the interviewer. More in-depth, formal field notes were written up at the conclusion of each interview for the purposes of noting revelations made during conversations with participants prior to the audio recorder being turned on, emerging themes, possible hypotheses, and topics or issues to pursue during data analysis or during member checks (Schwandt, 2001; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Other information in the field notes included details about the setting, observations about the interview and the interviewee, and reflections on the quality of the data (Patton, 2002; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Field notes were used throughout the process of transcription and data analysis, which will be described in more detail in the discussion of the data analysis.

Measures

   Demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix G) was used to collect demographic information such as the age, gender, and racial self-identification of each participant. The questionnaire also included items pertaining to participants' marital status and socioeconomic status. All participants were also asked to describe the racial make-up of their social environments growing up, including specific questions regarding the racial make up of the neighborhood and the elementary, middle, and high schools attended by the biracial children. If participants desired, they were also given the option of expanding on their responses to and of the questions included in the questionnaire; however, no participant added any additional information.

   Interview protocol. Qualitative interviews should flow like a conversation rather than a formal question and answer session (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As such, the goal of the interviews was to gather a rich and in-depth understanding (Fontana & Frey, 2003) of biracial identity development in lives of monoracial parents and their biracial children. I wanted to

understand the world from the perspective of each participant. To achieve this goal, I completed

a substantive review of the literature to help determine topics that were covered during the

interviews (Kerwin et al., 1993). I also used interview questions and recommendations for future

research from previous qualitative studies (R. C. Henriksen, personal communication, February

26, 2008; Kerwin, 1991; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002) to aid in the development of the

interview guide.

The interview guide (see Appendix F) consisted of eight open-ended interview questions

with supplemental probes for the family interviews, four to six open-ended interview questions

for the parent interviews, and nine open-ended interview questions for the interviews with the

biracial adults. Examples of questions for the family interviews are: What does it mean to your

family to be Interracial/Biracial? How does your family talk about race and what does that mean

to your family? How would you say your family's racial identity has affected your interactions

with others (extended family, friends, and community)? The following questions were asked

during the parent interviews: What has been it been like for you to raise biracial children? Please

talk about the ways your understanding of race and racial identity has evolved since you have

had/raised your children. A few of the questions asked during the interviews with biracial adults

included: How do you currently identify yourself racially and what does your racial identity

mean to you? Please tell me the things about being in your family that were/are important to your

racial identity development. What were some of the most important experiences you had with

your parents regarding your development of a racial identity?

My goal with the use of a semi-structured format was, at the outset of each interview, to

ask all participants the same set of pre-established questions (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Kvale,

1996) in the early part of the interview and then to have some freedom "to pursue subjects of

interest during the latter parts of the interview" (Patton, 2002, p. 347). This combination of questions utilizing an interview guide and then my pursuing other topics the participants brought forth allowed for further exploration of areas that arose during the interviews that I could not anticipate during the development of the interview protocol.

Role of the Researcher

"Interactions between the researcher and respondents cannot be removed from the research, even if one wishes to do so…The naturalistic researcher believes that the…knower and the known are inseparable" (Mehra, 2001, p. 69). Having selected a research topic that overlaps my personal life, it was necessary to acknowledge "the extent to which [my] study is a reflection of [my] inner life" (Krieger, 1991, p. 1). It was also necessary to keep in my awareness why I decided to study this topic and how my past and present experiences intersect with this study. As researcher and interviewer, I was thoughtful about my own curiosities during the interviews, but I also worked to keep the space open for participants to tell their stories on their own terms (White & Epston, 1990). To account for my biases, I used numerous strategies such as journaling before and after interviews and writing a reflexive narrative on my personal experience of growing up biracial.

Journaling. As stated previously, during the study, I kept my thoughts, biases, values, and interests (Henriksen & Trusty, 2004) at the forefront through the use of a field journal (Dahl & Boss, 2005). I used this journal throughout the process, as I read the literature, as I prepared the interview guide, as I advertised for and selected participants, before, during, and after interviews, and throughout the process of data analysis. I noted my biases by journaling my impressions and observations both before and throughout the interviewing process (Dahl & Boss). I wrote down my own feelings and behaviors that surfaced throughout and after each

interview as well as any emerging themes (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). In the journal, I also noted

any thoughts and questions that came up for me during the interviewing process (Linville, 2003).

Taking time to reflect in the journal allowed me to evaluate how my own life experiences

interacted with and influenced the entire research project.

Reflexivity and personal narrative. Reflexivity is another method for accounting for the

researcher's personal perspectives. It is the process of explicitly naming the assumptions,

standpoints, and biases of the researcher (Allen, 2000). This reflexivity might be inclusive of the

autobiography of the researcher, as discussed by Denzin and Lincoln (2000). As a result of my

own life experience of living as a Black-White biracial individual, I have a personal and vested

interest in the Black-White biracial population being studied. To make my assumptions and

biases about my project overt, the following is a brief discussion of my assumptions as well as

my autobiography.

My familial and cultural experiences are unique and I believe that there are other

interracial families who have valuable information about their experiences and the development

of their racial and ethnic identities. I have no doubt that my biracial make-up had an impact on

the interviewing process, but I made this overt by disclosing information as it was appropriate. I

did not want my experiences to overshadow the narratives of the participants, but I also knew

that we were co-creating a new narrative through our interaction and their re-telling of their

stories. As a therapist, I have learned to discern the appropriateness of self-disclosure, and feel

that this skill aided me in respecting the stories of those willing to share with me.

I am a relatively young female researcher, with a Black-White biracial identity, born to a

White mother and a Black father. I was raised in a middle-class community in Southern

California. Growing up, I was not surrounded by or exposed to many multiracial people. I

believe that being raised primarily by my White mother and in a non-racially diverse neighborhood influenced how I saw myself. In particular, my interactions with others outside of my home are what brought forth my consciousness about my "different" racial make-up. At home, we did not discuss issues of race at length or in-depth. Occasionally my parents would speak of the challenges they faced as an interracial couple in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, I do not believe that my parents understood the impact a biracial heritage would have on their children because neither of them was biracial. My parents did not believe that the impact of their children's biracial identity individually and socially could overshadow the love that they would have for their children. While my parents were always supportive, our experience as one of the only interracial families in our community led to many complicated interactions about our race. Some of these interactions included being questioned about my skin color or my hair or just constantly being asked the question: What are you?

As a child, I began elementary school in a more racially diverse community. There were kids of various different races in my neighborhood and in my classes. One of our closest family friends included a single White mother and her mixed, Black-White son. On the playground and outside playing, my brothers and I threw around such terms as "Oreo" and "half and half." We always knew, even at a young age that we were mixed race. In that neighborhood, with those kids, I don't recall race ever being an issue for us.

At age nine, we moved to a part of town with a safer neighborhood, as the gang activity was increasing in our other neighborhood. With safety came less diversity. Though this was not intentional, we were no longer sharing classrooms and playgrounds with a racially diverse group of kids. It was at this new school and in this new neighborhood that I became very aware of my mixed racial heritage and the fact that most people around me just assumed that I was White. I

was about 9 years old when I learned about racism in my very own fourth grade classroom. My teacher would blatantly disregard the students in the classroom who were not White. He would seat all of the Asian boys and the one Black boy in the back of the classroom. Somehow I gained an understanding of his actions and realized he did not see me for the mixed girl I was, but rather he saw me as a White girl, like all the other White children sitting in the front row of the classroom. I had a certain sense of pride about my mixed race status and so decided to invite my dad to a parent teacher conference (which he did not usually attend) at school. And to this day, I can still remember the look of disbelief on my teacher's face when I walked into the classroom holding the hand of my Black father. While race was not always at the forefront of my mind in elementary school, I did always have a personal sense of my unique race, even when others dismissed it.

In junior high school, I experienced a lot of discrimination which included teasing and bullying by Black girls. The school I attended was in a White neighborhood, but kids of all races and ethnicities were bussed in from all over the city. So while the number of White students far outweighed the number of Black, Mexican, or Asian students, there was more racial diversity within the school. Most of the insults I would get had to do with that fact that I was a "wanna-be White girl" or not "Black enough." On several occasions, a small group of Black girls would wait for me after P.E. and hurl threats at me and taunt me. I eventually had to be transferred to another class to avoid them. In high school, I was never really singled out or picked on, but on occasion, I would want to be more involved with the special organization on campus for African American female students. However, I was never invited to participate and after my experiences in junior high, I did not think I would be accepted by the group members.

I remained close with the same group of friends from age nine all the way through high school and I am still close with some of them today. Most of my closest friends were and are White, and this may be because they were the people who never really questioned me or my identity and who accepted the fact that I was of mixed race. While I do believe that my White friends accepted my mixed race identity, over the years a few of them have commented that they did not and still do not really think about it much, and that sometimes they just see me as White like them.

As a biracial individual, I began to examine my biracial heritage on a deeper level after leaving for college. It was in my late adolescence and early adulthood that I explored what it meant to be considered Black. During college, I was in the minority as a mixed race person, and considered one of the Black students on campus. However, unlike in my youth, in college, other Black students accepted me, despite my light skin and wavy hair. The unique aspect of my college years that influenced my desire to understand biracial people in more depth was that this group of Black students who accepted me at my college only saw me and themselves as Black; even the Black-White biracials. My entire life, though it had not been specifically emphasized, I considered myself biracial or mixed. It was not until college that I was faced with the "one-drop" rule. It was then that I wondered how these men and women from communities all over the country had come to know themselves as Black. How did their parents teach them to think about race? What did they learn at home that carried into how they presented themselves to the world? It was during my college years that I began developing my idea that parents of biracial children must have an impact on the racial identity development of their children.

This is the lens through which I conducted my study, as a biracial woman with personal experiences in an interracial family and in American society. I believe that my desire to know

and understand the life experiences of Black-White biracial individuals and their parents is both a personal desire to know more about the experiences of others like me, and a belief that conducting a study with this unique population could inform families and our culture about how to better support and acknowledge this unique subset of the American population.

My bias and assumptions in this research were multilayered and continued to be revealed as I moved through my data collection and into my analysis and writing of the findings. One bias I was aware of at the start is that I strongly believe that parents influence the racial identity development of their children; however, the purpose of this study was to hear and share the stories of other biracial individuals and their parents and to not only discover similarities with my own experiences but also differences. As I began interviewing families for my study, I noticed that I was accepted more warmly when participants learned of my own biracial identity. I did not know at the start of my research and with the implementation of my study that I would feel a kindred connection between the biracial individuals and myself, but from the start of the first interview to the last, I began to expect some automatic sense of connection with each participant. As I got more into my research process, I realized that by choosing a study so personally significant to me, I desired to meet and connect with other biracial individuals. And I was desiring to meet others, who like myself also identified as biracial, since in my life I had only know biracials who identified as Black. In addition, I also realized that I was immediately comfortable with the mothers who contacted me because they were not unlike my own mother personally and racially; especially the mothers who spent many if not all of their lives raising their biracial children on their own.

Another bias that became apparent after the interview period was my own realization, during conversations with the mothers and their daughters, that I held the belief that the

experiences of biracial children raised by Black mothers and White fathers would be different

than the experiences of biracial children raised by White mothers and Black fathers. This belief

came to the surface when some of the biracial participants expressed their perceptions that they

were different from their counterparts because they were raised by White mothers. However, my

study never allowed me to dispel this bias or explore the experiences of biracial children raised

by Black women because I did not have Black mothers and their biracial children as participants.

Data Analysis

According to Dahl and Boss (2005), the process of phenomenological data analysis must

include "immersion in the data to observe and define what is there and to notice what is not

there; it must include incubation and reflection to allow intuitive awareness and understandings

to emerge; and it must include creative synthesis that enables accurate and meaningful

communication of the participants' experience" (p. 75). In this study, data collection and analysis

occurred simultaneously throughout the entire research process; each step informed the other

(Patton, 2002; Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). Analysis of the data began during the process of

conducting interviewing by writing memos after the interviews (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Data

analysis continued with transcription of the taped interviews, then reading and re-reading the

transcripts, and then moving back and forth between the data transcripts and my field notes,

journals, and the literature.

I conducted and transcribed a total of 27 interviews: 10 family interviews, 9 interviews

with biracial adults, and 9 interviews with the mothers of the biracial adults. Verbatim

transcription of the interviews was an ongoing activity during the 7 months that I conducted the

interviews. In the interview transcripts, all identifying information for participants and their

family members and/or friends was removed and replaced with pseudonyms selected using a

random name generator (see www.behindthename.com). Upon completion of each transcription, I printed three hard copies. One copy of the transcript was archived in a secure location in my home office, and the other two copies were used for data analysis.

Data analysis for this study began first with an in-depth review of the family interview data, and then expanded across all individual interview data and family interview data. Data analysis followed the modified version of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data as outlined by Moustakas (1994). The steps in data analysis included the Epoche process, phenomenological reduction, clustering and thematizing invariant constituents, and final identification of the invariant constituents and themes through validation and member checks.

Epoche. The first step in my phenomenological analysis involved taking the perspective of Epoche. According to Patton (2002), epoche involves the researcher realizing personal bias and attempting to bring into awareness assumptions about the phenomena being studied. The underlying goal of Epoche was to suspend my own judgment, biases, and preconceived ideas in an effort to see the experience of the biracial identity development process of the participants for itself (Moustakas, 1994; Patton). Epoche was an ongoing process throughout data collection and analysis.

Attempting to realize my personal biases and assumptions about biracial identity development began with the reflexive process of writing the study proposal and continued with journaling throughout the process of data collection and analysis. I believe that tracking my reflections throughout the process as well as intentionally returning back to my journal to evaluate how my thoughts and feelings affected my interpretations of the data allowed me to achieve Epoche. During the data collection process, I journaled my feelings of frustration

regarding the challenges I faced gathering participants. At times during the process, I wanted to give up or felt hopeless about the importance of my selected topic and population. I also journaled about my emotional responses following some personal conversations with participants. For example, with one participant, I spent an additional 25 minutes on the phone with her after we had already scheduled the time and place of our interview. Our discussion was more personal and left me with a feeling of true connection with her as we discussed articles in magazines about being biracial and the race to the White House for Barack Obama. I wrote down my feelings of excitement after the conversation and the feeling of connection went with me into the interview with this particular participant. Afterwards, as I transcribed the interview, I noticed that it was more conversational and much less formal, which I attributed to the phone conversation. Epoche was also evident in the writing of my personal autobiography as well as the writing of my personal reflection of the entire process in the discussion and findings section.

Phenomenological reduction. The second step in my data analysis involved reduction of the phenomena in order to determine the invariant constituents, which are defined as the unique qualities of the experience that stand out and also called meaning units of data (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction is a way of seeing the data "in [its] own right, with [its] own textures and meanings" (Moustakas, p. 92) in an effort to explain the phenomenon.

Phenomenological reduction could only begin after I gained a sense of the whole data set. Therefore, I began by reading and rereading, in their entirety, all of the family interview transcripts and then proceeding to read the biracial adult transcripts and the mother transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Dahl & Boss, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). The reflective process of phenomenological reduction lasted several weeks, and involved immersing myself in the data, reading and re-reading the transcripts, stepping away from the data for extended periods (hours

and/or days) and returning to the data with a fresh perspective to re-read it again. Throughout the

process of phenomenological reduction, I marked the transcripts each time I read through them

with my own thoughts, responses, and notes in the margins, and I highlighted and underlined

words, sentences, and entire passages.

Bracketing was achieved by locating within the transcripts key phrases, words, or

statements that spoke directly to the phenomena in question, biracial identity development

(Patton, 2002). I accomplished bracketing by marking the transcripts, making notes in the

margins, and highlighting passages. For example, key phrases such as "best of both worlds" were

highlighted or underlined. Key words such as married, divorce, mixed, passing, Obama,

categorization, and hair stood out and were written in the margins. Key statements such as "I

mean I definitely think that hair is probably the biggest issue with mixed families…" were

highlighted across the interview transcripts. While bracketing, I also returned to my field notes

and journal entries. Also, I reviewed my research questions and purpose statement as a constant

reminder to myself of the root phenomenon under investigation.

Once I completed the process of bracketing, I moved to listing all of the expressions

relevant to the experiences of the participants. In order to highlight each statement that I marked

or made notes about on the transcripts during the readings of the transcripts, I created one large

document listing every marked statement which included my own thoughts and as well as direct

quotes of the participants from each interview. This document allowed me to have all

participants' statements in one place rather than moving between 27 transcripts. The creation of

this document also assisted me in arriving at invariant constituents or meaning units of the data.

By noticing and removing statements not pertaining to the root topic, and removing those

statements that were repetitive or overlapping across the data, I was able to establish an initial set of 53 meaning units, also described by Moustakas (1994) as invariant constituents.

During this stage of the analysis, I wanted to begin ensuring the trustworthiness of my initial findings. Therefore, I enlisted three masters-level graduate students, who were members of my research team and trained in qualitative methods, to cross-code 3 or 4 of the family interview transcripts (one student coded 4 transcripts; two students coded 3 transcripts each). Each student was randomly given 3 or 4 interviews to read and re-read, noting their own thoughts and reactions as well as highlighting and underlining meaning units that stood out to them within participants' stories. I met with each student individually to discuss their findings and to compare their meaning units of data with my own. These meetings affirmed my own perceptions of the data and refreshed my perspective of the meaning units.

As I continued with the process of phenomenological data reduction, I began organizing the meaning units or invariant constituents into themes by making lists of possible themes that would eventually lead to textural descriptions of the participants' experiences of biracial identity development (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout this organizing stage of the analysis process, I returned to the transcripts many times to seek confirmation and disconfirmation for the themes I believed I had discovered in the data. This allowed for further refinement of themes or propositions and ensured accurate descriptions of the stories shared by participants (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996).

The first draft of the themes (See Appendix H) came out of the initial set of 53 meaning units and primarily consisted of repeated words, concepts, or brief phrases drawn directly from the interview transcripts. It was arranged into four themes that included approximately 31 sub-themes. The first draft of themes was shared with and reviewed by my dissertation committee

chair, Dr. Dolbin-MacNab. After this review, I went back to the transcripts and the large

continuous document of participant statements to further reduce and refine the themes by moving

words and phrases around and expanding phrases and descriptors for each theme. I also deleted

themes that did not relate to topic of biracial identity development in addition to those themes

that were repetitive or overlapping (Moustakas, 1994). I repeated the process of discussing

themes with Dr. Dolbin-MacNab, and returning to data to re-sort and further refine the themes.

This process involved two more drafts of themes, which were refined by re-reading the

transcripts and lists to enrich and clarify the point and meaning of each theme. This final part of

the initial data reduction process resulted in *organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent*

textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas) consisting of a more clearly representative

third draft of themes and sub-themes relating directly to the topic and the research questions.

    Clustering and thematizing invariant constituents. The third step of data analysis is

referred to by Moustakas (1994, p. 121) as "clustering and thematizing invariant constituents." In

this step, the invariant constituents were clustered together under a larger label or theme. I

literally cut up the transcripts into quotes or expressions and sorted them into piles that seemed to

go together thematically (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In this way, I was

looking for direct quotes from the transcripts to cluster within the themes I came up with during

the reduction process. This involved an intense scrutiny of the data to determine when "one unit

of data ends and another begins" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 183). During this process, I noticed

times when particular "units of data" (Bogdan & Biklen) overlapped into more than one theme.

Once I sorted the cut up meaning units or quotes within themes and was able to collapse several

of the sub-themes, I arrived at the fourth draft of the themes, which was organized into 4 themes

and 19 sub-themes and drafted textural narrative descriptions and definitions for each theme and

sub-theme out of the concrete language and stories of the participants. "The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience" of parents and children's experiences developing a Black-White Biracial identity (Moustakas, p. 121).

Verification and validation. The fourth step of the phenomenological data analysis involved verification of the invariant constituents and themes through validation (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, validation in qualitative research is achieved when the interpretation of the data is arrived at through immersion into the descriptions of the participants. It is the thick/rich descriptions that allow the researcher an "understanding of the meanings and the essences of the experience," (p. 84).

Validation is also achieved via member checks (to be discussed at length in the following section). Member checks were performed during data collection and data analysis to verify participant responses and to make sure that I was not making assumptions about the participant's experiences. I began the process of member checking after the fourth draft of the themes and the narrative descriptions of each theme were completed. Member checks corroborated the trustworthiness of this study because it allowed me to verify findings by ensuring they fit for the participants (Schwandt, 2001).

Synthesis. The fifth and final step of the data analysis process involved synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). In order to complete the data analysis, I needed to determine if I had represented the information provided by the participants respectfully and accurately via member checks, and I needed to ascertain if I had answered the research questions. Upon receipt of the feedback from participants, I reviewed their comments and returned to the data analysis with the new information and reexamined the data using the participants' feedback. I made changes where information had been misrepresented or

misinterpreted and I revised some aspects of the narrative themes to arrive at a sixth and final

draft of themes. This version included 4 themes and 17 sub-themes (See Appendix I).

The information gathered regarding Research Question 5 (How can couples and family

therapists reach interracial families and biracial individuals who may be in need of clinical

services and what topics and issues couples and family therapists can anticipate when working

with interracial families or biracial individuals?) is not presented within the findings section

because, there was little usable data collected. During the interviews with all participants I asked

questions regarding the role of Couples and family therapists and how they might work with

interracial families, couples, and biracial individuals in clinical practice. However upon

completion of the data analysis process, I determined that there was not enough thick, rich

description provided in the responses of the participants to analyze for themes and sub-themes.

Therefore, the information collected about constructive ways therapists might approach the topic

of race or racial identity with multiracial families; some of the possible issues multiracial

families and individuals may be facing when entering therapy; and suggestions for therapists

attempting to reach this unique subgroup of the population is included in the Practice

Implications section of Chapter V.

Trustworthiness

Triangulation. The goal of triangulation is to examine phenomena from multiple vantage

points (Schwandt, 2001), in order to show consistency about the conclusions from data from

those multiple view points as well as multiple analytical perspectives (Patton, 2002).

Triangulation establishes trustworthiness because it is a process of checking the integrity or

validity of the inferences I drew from my data (Schwandt, p. 257). In this project, triangulation

was achieved by verifying data with the literature on biracial identity development, with my

dissertation chair, with other qualitative researchers on my research team, with a colleague experienced in qualitative research methods, by completing interviews with various members of the participant families, and by going back to the participants via member checks. Throughout the interviewing, transcription, and data analysis experience, I held regular meetings with my dissertation chair and a colleague to discuss emerging themes, concepts, and my personal reactions to the process. After participating in these meetings, my examination of the data was often refreshed and, at times, I was able to gain more insight into the meaning of the data. At one point during data analysis, I became stagnant and unable to move through a portion of the reduction process. It was only after a meeting with a colleague, to share and discuss my ideas and receive positive affirmation that I was able to move forward. In addition, I continued to keep notes in my journal throughout the analysis process and kept an audit trail providing in depth descriptions of the entire data analysis procedure. Journaling and keeping an audit trail was reassurance to me that I was being clear about the analysis procedures I was following. Checking in with my dissertation chair and a colleague, as well as completing member checks, also instilled more confidence in my findings.

Member checks. Member checks helped emphasize the trustworthiness of this study as a way of verifying findings and ensuring that my findings were valid according to the participants in the study (Schwandt, 2001). This study included both informal and formal member checks. As discussed previously, informal member checks were accomplished by asking participants follow-up questions during the interviews and summarizing what I thought I was hearing from the participants. Some follow-up questions included asking participants more specific questions about the members of their family and who was involved at the various points of the participants'

lives. I also asked follow up questions about the relationships with parents and siblings who were not involved in the interview in order to understand each participant's context better.

Formal member checks were completed after all initial interviews and field notes were transcribed and the preliminary data analysis was complete (Spradley, 1979). I shared the preliminary themes and sub-themes across the data as well as a summary of the findings for each family with those participants who had agreed to participate in the member check process during their interviews (18 out of 21 total family members). The goal of the member check was to confirm or disconfirm my primary notions of the data and the family, as well as to invite responses or reactions from the participants. In order to gather the information from the participants, I sent an email reminding them of their agreement to review the data as well as to confirm their interest in participating in the member check. After confirmation from the participants, I sent another email to 18 family members with detailed instructions, a 14 day timeframe to complete the review (See Appendix J), and a set of open-ended prompts. The three prompts included (a) Please respond to your family summary and the overall summary of themes across all of the data with any thoughts or feelings that may have come up for you as you read through them; (b) Please clarify or add to any part of your family summary or the summary of themes across the data that you see fit; and (c) Please share any thoughts, comments, or ideas that may have come up for you since your participation in the interview process. I re-contacted all family members who did not respond after 10, 14, and 21 days to remind them of the importance of their feedback. After I received and reviewed participant responses, I made every attempt to incorporate participants' additional comments or desired changes into the final version of the themes and sub-themes and utilized their responses to verify my findings in the final analysis.

Of the 10 participant families, at least one member from each family agreed to participate in the member check, which represented 85% of the total sample. I had an 83% response rate from participants who agreed to participate in the member check. I collected member check data from 15 participants (9 mothers, 6 biracial adults) over a four week period. In 6 families, both mother and adult child responded to the member check request, in 3 families only mothers responded, and in 1 family only the adult child responded. In every family, at least one participant offered thoughts and feedback about the initial themes and sub-themes across the data as well feedback about the data pertaining specifically to their family descriptions. As discussed previously, adjustments were made to the family descriptions such as corrections on the number of children and marriages. Minor adjustments were made to the definitions of the themes as appropriate to incorporate the feedback of the participants.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of both parents and adult

children in Black-White multiracial families about the interactive and unique process of

exploring and developing a biracial identity. Parents and their children were invited to share

distinct family stories and experiences that had an impact on the process of the adult children's

biracial identity development. Through semi-structured interviews with 10 families, White

monoracial mothers and one or more of their Black-White biracial adult children shared their

experiences of race and biracial identity development from inside the family and expanded to

include members from both the parent and child's social arenas.

The analysis of participants' experiences of biracial identity development revealed four

themes: (a) Multigenerational Family Relationships, (b) Familial Perceptions of the Biracial

Identity Development Process, (c) The Interactive Experience of Our Racial Identity with the

"Outside" World, and (d) The Experience of Growing up with a Unique Biracial Heritage. In this

chapter, each theme is presented, along with relevant sub-themes, which are outlined in Table 1.

For each theme and sub-theme, I present a narrative description and in-depth quotations from the

participants in order to ensure the vital connection between my own interpretation of the data and

the actual stories of the families. In order to protect the identity of each participant in the study,

pseudonyms were selected using a random name generator. No participants selected their own

pseudonyms.

Table 1

Summary of Themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition
Multigenerational Family Relationships	• Family Constellations and Parental Dating Practices	Partners, stepparents, and the presence of various father figures
	• Supportive and Close Parent-child Relationships	Creating a safe and positive space for their children to explore their biracial identity, exposure to both sides
	• Supportive Siblings Sharing the Biracial Experience	Importance of having a sibling or multiple siblings to share the biracial experience with
	• Grandparents and Great-Grandparents	Evolution from Nonsupport to Support: Not supportive at first and then evolved over time into advocates for their children and grandchildren
		Rejection and Distance: Never truly accepted their child's choice of interracial partners and the resulting biracial children
		Privately Connected, Externally Rejected: Connected to the families in private, but did not proclaim support for the interracial family socially

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition
Familial Influences on the Biracial Identity Development Process	• The Intentional and Unique Responsibility of Raising Biracial Children	Parents intentionally worked to create an open family environment
	• Racially Labeling Children	Overtly representing a biracial label to their children and others
	• Acknowledging Potential Challenges for Biracial Children	Preparation for potential discrimination and racism
	• Pride as an Interracial Family	Pride in interracial family and child's biracial identity
Negotiating Our Racial Identity with the "Outside" World: An Interactive Experience	• Friendships	The importance of supportive relationships with others outside of the family
	• Neighborhoods and Local Community	Choosing neighborhood and/or community for diversity
	• Trying to Fit Me into a Box: Pressure to Choose Black *or* White	Pressure from outsiders to choose one race or the other
	• Fighting Discrimination and Racism as a Family	Offhanded questions and comments; stories of racial discrimination
	• The Impact of Racially Historical Events	Discussions in the family about the election of Obama
The Experience of Growing Up with a Unique Racial Heritage	• How I Describe My Racial Identity	Words and descriptions for biracial identity
	• The Color of My Skin Matters	The impact of the color of skin for biracial individuals
	• "The Biggest Issue I've had is Hair"	The challenge of learning how to work with and accept biracial hair
	• Stuck in the Middle *and* "The Best of Both Worlds"	The challenges of being a part of two worlds and also some where in between the two
	• Resiliency: My Racial Identity Makes me a Stronger Person	Growing up biracial has made me a stronger and more open minded person

Introduction of the Participant Families

Participant Demographics: Mothers

In total, 10 family units participated in the study. Seven of the families were from Metro areas of Oregon while three were from a suburban area of Central Western Oregon. All participant families described multilayered family constellations incorporating members of the extended family, the nuclear family, and for some the step family. Each family in the study consisted of mother-child constellations with every mother self identified as White. The ages of the mothers ranged from 38 to 74, with a mean age of approximately 53 years ($SD = 10.35$). Of the mothers, 9 out of 10 were no longer in relationships with the father of the biracial child participating in the study. At the time of the interviews, six mothers were currently married or remarried, one mother was in a long-term relationship, and three mothers were single, with two having been divorced in the last 5 years. Of the mothers currently in relationships, two were married to White men, four were married to Black men, and one was dating a White man. All but one of the mothers reported being a single parent at some time while raising their biracial child or children. Four of the 10 mothers contributed to raising one or more step children. The number of children mothers reported, including biological, step, and adopted ranged from two to nine. As family structure was relatively complex in these families, Table 2 presents more detailed information about mothers and their families.

Table 2

Mother Demographic Information

Mother	Corresponding Biracial Adult	Age	Race	Number and Ages of Children	Current Relationship Status (Race of Partner)	Highest Level of Education	Annual Household Income
Kat	Bree	38	White	1 daughter (18) 1 son (14)	Married (Black)	Some college	$80k – $100k
Cory	Ella	47	White	2 daughters (18, 13) 1 son (10)	Dating (White)	Graduate Degree	$35k – $50k
Dianne	Jo	74	White	3 daughters (43, 40, 28) 1 son (40)	Married (White)	Some college	$50k – $65k
Maggie	Felicity	46	White	3 sons (34, 24, 14) (2 step) 1 daughter (20)	Married (Black)	Some college	$65k – $80k
Priscilla	Alan	50	White	4 sons (26, 22,18, 16) 1 daughter (24)	Single	Associate degree	$35k – $50k
Lillian	Kiana	60	White w/ Seminole	4 sons(42, 42, 29, 22) (1 step) 4 daughters (43, 35, 33, 27, 25)	Married (Black)	Bachelor's Degree	$20k – $35k
Annie	Tina	47	White	1 son (28) (step) 2 daughters (25, 19) (1 step)	Married (Black)	Some college	>$100k
Esther	Mary	62	White	3daughters (1 step) 4 sons (1 adopted, 1 step)	Married (White)	Bachelor's degree	> $100k
Evelyn	Brian Glen	55	White	3 sons (34, 24, 22) 1 daughter (36)	Single	Some college	$10k – $20k
Nora	Carolina	47	White	1 son (21) 1 daughter (23)	Single	Some college	$10k – $20k

Participant Demographics: Biracial Adults

There were 8 biracial adult female and 3 biracial adult male participants in the study. The ages of the biracial adults ranged from 18 to 40, with eight between 18 and 24 and three between 35 and 49. The mean age was approximately 25 years old ($SD = 8.55$). Seven of the 11 biracial adults were born in Oregon, while three were born in California, and one was born in Africa. Although not all of the biracial individuals were born in Oregon, all of them spent a significant part of their childhood and most or all of their adolescence in Oregon. All of the biracial adults in the study identified themselves as multiracial individuals using labels such as mixed, other, Black-White, Biracial, or Black Irish. Three of the biracial adult women participants were currently raising their own biracial children as single mothers (two mothers with two children and one mother with one child) with shared custody with the fathers of their children. Eight of the 11 biracial participants described themselves as dating or partnered and three described themselves as single. Additional demographic information about the biracial adults can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Biracial Adult Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age	Chosen Racial Label	Biracial Siblings	Current Relationship Status (Race of Partner)	Children	Highest Level of Education
Bree	18	Biracial	1 half brother (14)	Dating (Biracial)	No	College student
Ella	18	Mixed	1 half sister (13) 1 half brother (10)	Dating (Mixed)	No	College student
Jo	40	Biracial	1 sister (43) 1 twin brother (40)	Single	1 son (10) ¾ Black ¼ White	Some college
Felicity	20	Black Irish	1 half brother (14)	Dating (White)	No	Some college
Alan	22	African American	3 half brothers (26,18, 16) 1 half sister (24)	Dating (Native American/White)	No	Some college
Kiana	35	Mixed (Black, White, Seminole)	2 half brothers (29, 22) 2 half sisters (27, 25) 1 step sister (33) 1 step brother (43)	Single	1 son (13) Mixed 1 daughter (9) Mixed	Graduate Degree
Tina	19	Mixed	None	Single	No	Some college
Mary	40	Mixed	1 sister 1 step sister 1 adopted brother (35) 1 half brother (33) 1 step brother	Domestic Partner (White)	Yes 2 sons (13, 9) Mixed	Bachelors Degree
Brian	24	Other	1 brother (22)	Dating (White)	No	High School Diploma
Glen	22	Black/White	1 brother (24)	Dating (White)	No	Some college
Carolina	23	Black/White	1 brother (21) 3 half sisters (23, 18, 14)	Dating (White)	No	Some college

Descriptions of Participant Families

The Vincent family. Kat is a 38 year-old self-identified White biological mother of two biracial children, one daughter and one son. Bree is Kat's 18 year-old biracial daughter and oldest child. Kat and Bree live in Metro, Oregon with Kat's third husband, his biological son, and Kat's youngest son. Kat and Bree's father were close friends, but never married. Bree had occasional in-person visits with her biological father until he passed away a few years ago. Bree's father also had other children who Bree refers to as half or step siblings. Bree has had contact throughout her life with other significant Black male role models, including two Black stepfathers and her mother's current Black husband. Both Kat and Bree were attending college at the time of the study.
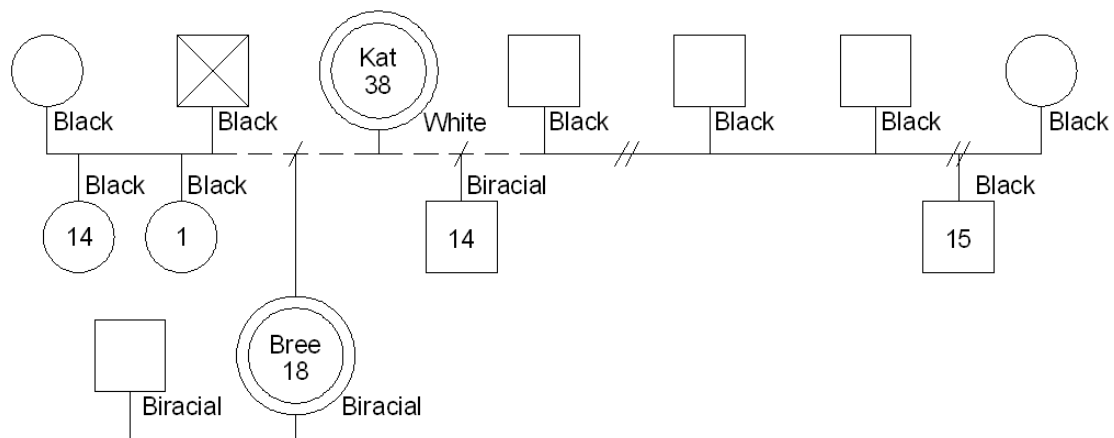
Figure 1. Vincent family genogram.

The Nelson Family. Cory is a 47 year-old self-identified White biological mother of three biracial children. Ella, age 18, is the oldest daughter. Ella and her mother live in Metro, Oregon along with Ella's two biracial half siblings (although not referred to as half siblings by Cory or Ella) through her mother, a 13 year-old sister and a 10 year-old brother. Ella was raised from the approximate age of 5 until the age of 13 by her mother and her Black stepfather. However, after

her mother and step-father they divorced 5 years ago, Ella cut off contact with her stepfather.

Currently, Ella is building her relationship with her biological father, who is Black Creole, and

his children, her other four half siblings, who live in another state.
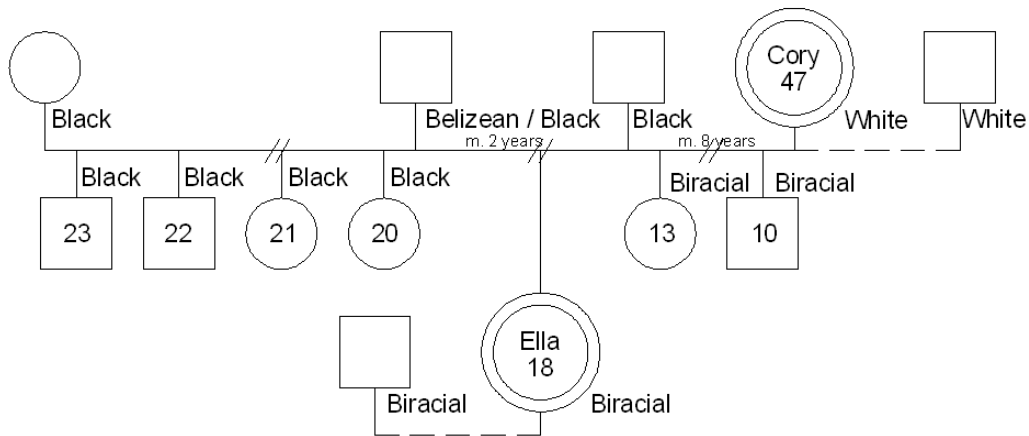
Figure 2. Nelson family genogram.

The Simon family. Dianne is the 74 year-old White mother of four biological children.

Her three oldest children are biracial, while her youngest daughter is White. Jo is Dianne's 40

year-old middle daughter. Jo has a twin brother and one older biracial sister. She also has a Black

half brother from her biological father. Dianne was married to Jo's father in 1965 before anti-

miscegenation laws were struck down. They were married for 7 years before they divorced.

Dianne was the primary caregiver for all four of her children and Jo has had sporadic

involvement with her biological father throughout her life. Dianne is currently remarried to a

White man and lives with him in Metro, Oregon. Jo is a single parent raising a biracial son (¾

Black, ¼ White) whom she identifies as Black, simply because she believes that is how the

world will see him. Dianne and Jo spent the entire interview together.
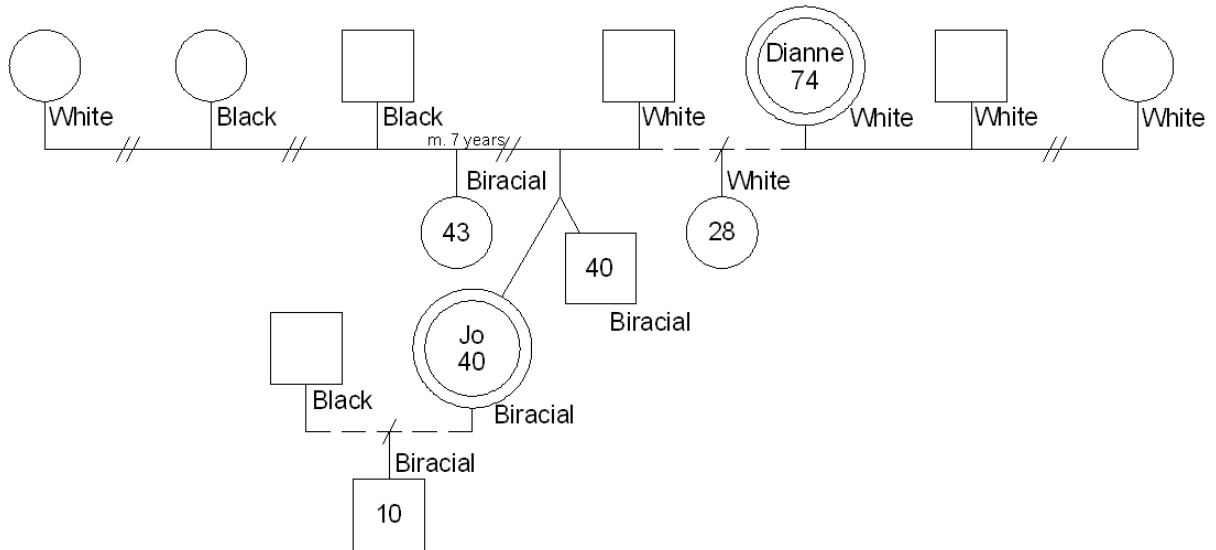
Figure 3. Simon family genogram.

  The Edward family. Maggie is a 46 year-old self-identified White mother of two

biological biracial children and stepmother to two of her husband's children, who are Black.

Maggie has been married to her Black husband for 15 years. Felicity is Maggie's oldest

biological child at age 20, and the only child with Felicity's biological father. Felicity has been

raised by her mother and stepfather, whom she refers to as "dad." Neither Felicity nor her mother

have had any contact with Felicity's biological father. Felicity self identifies as Black Irish.

Maggie and Felicity currently live in Metro, Oregon but no longer in the same household.
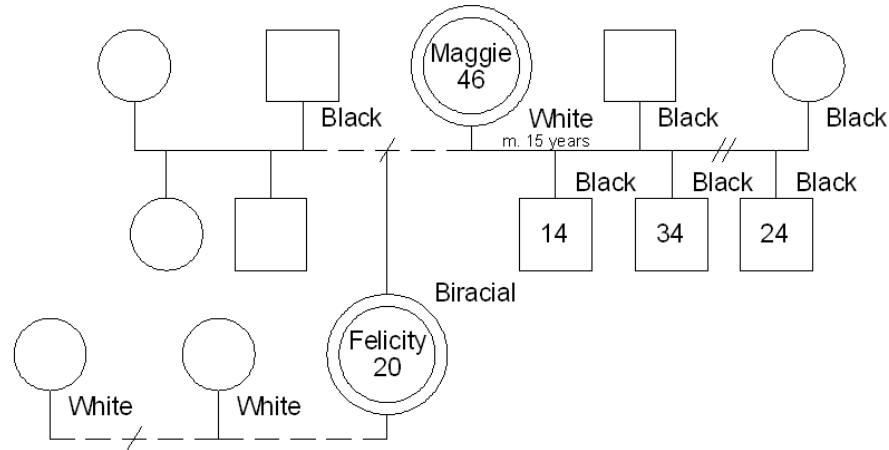
Figure 4.

Edward family genogram.

The Rule family. Priscilla is the 50 year-old White mother of five children, all of whom are biracial. Alan is her 22 year-old middle son. All of Alan's siblings are half siblings, as he is the only child by his biological mother and father. Alan does not currently have a relationship with his biological father and considers himself as being raised primarily by his mother. However, he has developed relationships with the significant men, who were primarily Black, in his mother's life over the years. He grew up in a household with one older half brother, one older half sister, and two younger half brothers. Alan currently lives in Central Western Oregon with his mother, two younger siblings, and a Tunisian female roommate. This was one of only two participant families that included male biracial individuals.
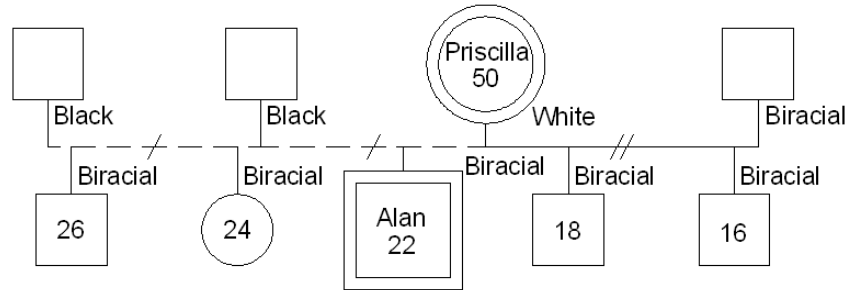
Figure 5. Rule family genogram.

The Collins family. Lillian self-identified as White and Native American. She is a 60 year-old mother of two step-children and seven biological children: two White children, two biracial step children, and five biological biracial children. She currently lives in Central Western Oregon with her Black husband, whom she has been with for 32 years. Kiana, the oldest of Lillian's biracial children, is 35. Kiana has not had contact with her biological father and was raised by her mother and stepfather. Kiana specifically identifies herself as mixed: Black, White, and Seminole. Kiana's significant partners have been Black. She has two mixed race children of her own, a 13 year-old son and a 9 year-old daughter. She identifies her children, who are ¾ Black and ¼ White, as Black, White, and Seminole. Both Lillian and Kiana are active in their community in a multi ethnic group as well as dealing with multiracial issues in the local and national level.
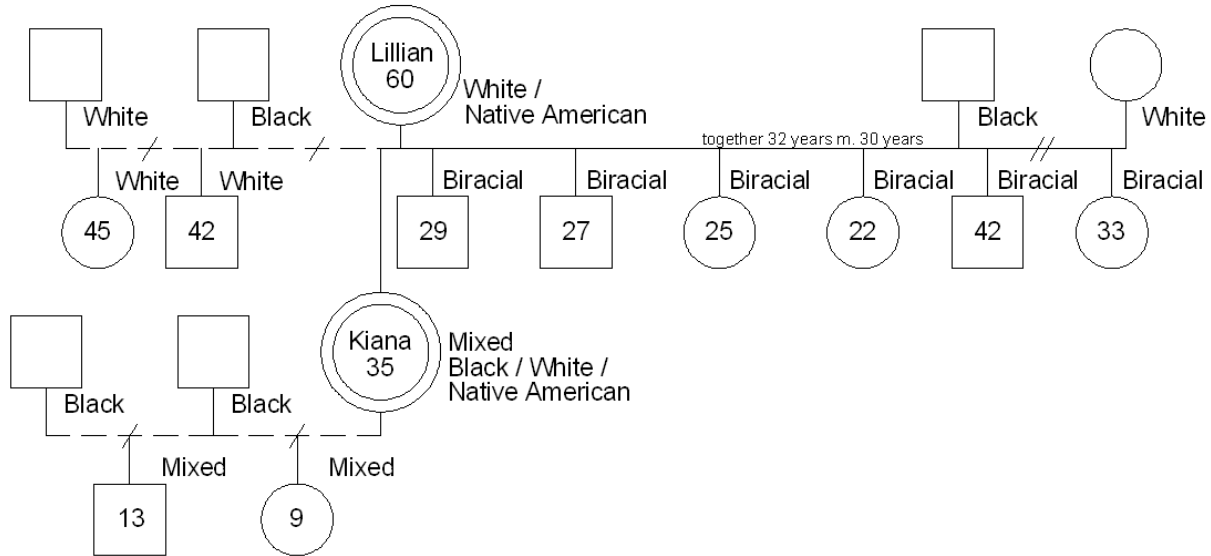
Figure 6. Collins family genogram.

The Jacobs family. Annie is the 47 year-old White mother of 19 year-old Tina. Annie has been

married to Tina's biological father for 20 years. Annie has also assisted in raising her husband's

biological children, who are Black, a 28 year-old son and a 25 year-old daughter. Tina is the only

biological and biracial child from her parents' union. She considers her father's children to be

her siblings rather than her "half" siblings. Tina self- identifies as mixed and both of her parents

accept her chosen racial identity. Tina was born and raised in Metro, Oregon, where she is

currently attending college and living with both of her parents.
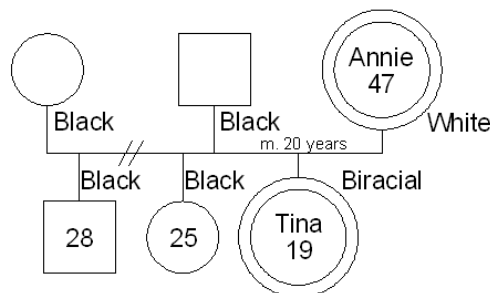
Figure 7. Jacobs family genogram.

The Olson family. Esther is the 62 year-old White mother of Mary, age 40, and six other biological, adopted, and step children. Esther has been married to her current husband, who is White, for 22 years, but was married previously to Mary's father who is Black, for five years and another Black man, the father of two of her other children, for 10 years. Mary's father is an African native and Mary has a significant relationship with him as well as relationships with the other important men that have been a part of her and mother's life. Mary has one older White half brother, one older mixed race biological sister, a younger mixed race adopted half brother, a younger mixed race half brother, a younger mixed race adopted step-sister, and a younger White adopted step-brother. Mary is the mother of two biological sons, ages 13 and 9. Her son's father is of mixed racial background and identifies as Black. Mary's oldest son identifies as Black, while Mary's youngest child identifies as mixed. Both Esther and Mary live in different areas of Metro, Oregon.
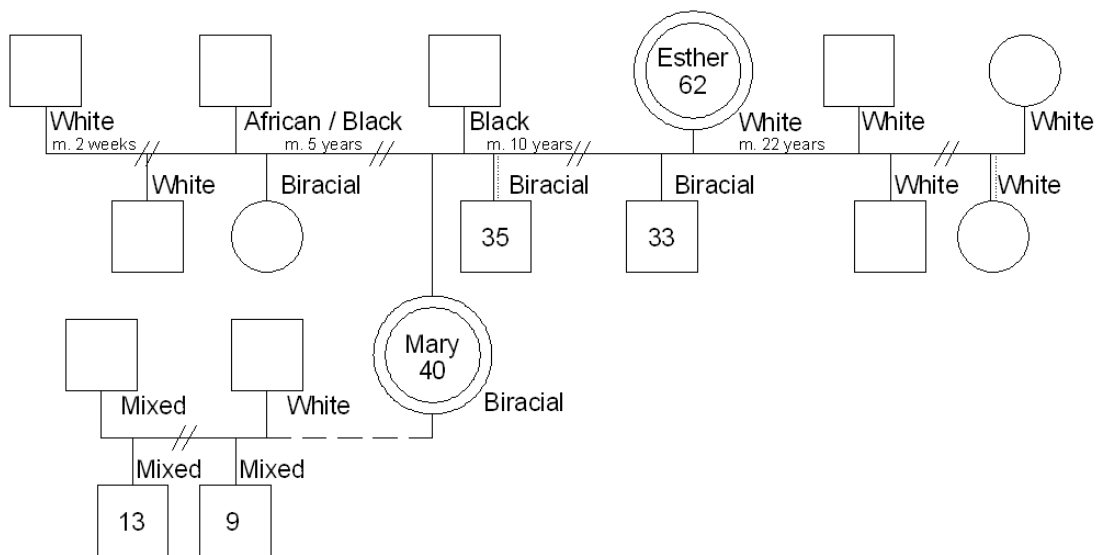
Figure 8. Olson family genogram.

The Monroe family. Evelyn is a 55 year-old, White, single mother of two White children from her first marriage and two biracial children from a significant long term relationship with a Black man, whom she never married. Both of Evelyn's biracial sons, Brian, age 24, and Glen, age 22, participated in the interview. Brian lives on his own while Glen is living at home with his mother. The family lives in various parts of Metro, Oregon. Although Evelyn was married to a Black man for a period of 9 years while her biracial children were little, she has been the primary caregiver for her two sons since their teenage years. Each son has had some contact with his biological father over the years, but neither of them describes a close relationship with him, their previous stepfather, or any other extended family members. All of them describe their family unit as bonded and close.
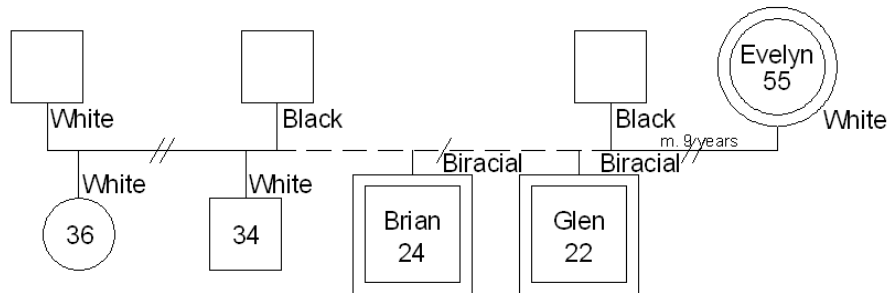
Figure 9. Monroe family genogram.

The Brooks family. Nora is a 47 year-old single White mother of two biracial children, a 23 year-old daughter and a 21 year-old son. Carolina is the oldest sibling. She identifies as Black-White, and was raised primarily by her mother with her younger brother. While growing up, the family lived with Nora's mother. Carolina has established a solid relationship and regularly visits her biological father, who lives in Metro, Oregon and has two biracial children,

Carolina's half siblings. Carolina has lived in Central Western Oregon her whole life and

currently lives on her own with a roommate while her brother is still living at home with their

mother.
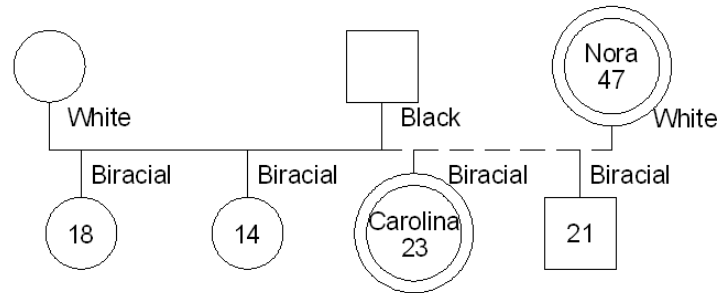
Figure 10. Brooks family genogram.

Multigenerational Family Relationships

The theme, Multigenerational Family Relationships, reflects how shared family

interactions and relationships between family members contributed to the creation of biracial

identity for the adult biracial participants. Specifically, interactions around race and racial topics

among multiple generations of family members affected meaning making and the construction of

biracial identity for mothers and children in these families. The messages about race transferred

across generations sparked conversation and some controversy within the family, which

motivated parents and children to discuss or confront racial issues together and at times with

extended family members. The quality of the relationships within which these interactions

around race occurred ranged from supportive and close to disconnected or distant. Many of these

multigenerational relationships changed and shifted throughout time in terms of closeness and

supportiveness of the biracial identity development process because of the interactions and

discussions that occurred regarding race and racial identity. The many layers of interactional

processes occurring within these multiracial families, highlighted previously in the family descriptions, and the presence and flux of the various family members over time, ultimately influenced conversations about race between parents, stepparents, and children; between siblings; and between parents, children, and grandparents and great grand-parents because family members expressed and explored their ideas and interpretations of race and racial identity with each other. Such interactions among family members about race and racial identity influenced the biracial identity development process of the biracial individuals because it served as an exercise in expressing their sense of what it means to be biracial to others, and indubitably as practice for asserting their biracial preference.

The first sub-theme within the theme *Multigenerational Family Relationships* is *Family Constellations and Parental Dating Practices,* which reflects how mothers evaluated the impact of their dating choices on their children's biracial identity development process. *Supportive and Close Parent-Child Relationships,* the second sub-theme, exemplifies the significance parents placed on creating a safe and positive space for their children to explore their biracial identity. The actions of mothers specifically exposing their children to both sides of their racial heritage contributed to the biracial children exploring their biracial identity openly within their family and ultimately adopting a biracial identity. The importance of sharing the experience of growing up biracial was revealed in the third sub-theme, *Supportive Siblings.* The final sub-theme within the first theme, *Grandparents and Great-Grandparents,* illustrates the complexities and impact of grandparents and great grandparents on the biracial identity development process within these families. Grandparents and great-grandparents could be advocates for their children's interracial relationships and their grandchildren's choice to identify as biracial or they could reject their children and grandchildren. In other families, grandparent and great grandparent response subtly

affected the biracial identity development process because the grandparents and great-grandparents were not involved or close. Still in other cases, the influence was overt because the grandparents and great-grandparents made their support or disapproval very clear through their actions and words.

Family Constellations and Parental Dating Practices

The complexities of family descriptions, presented previously, highlight the multiple generations and many layers of familial influences on the biracial identity development process. Some of these influences included but were not limited to: stepparents, children and siblings, the presence of various father figures, and the racial identity of various family members. The presence and flux of the various family members over time ultimately influenced the nature of the conversations and interactions between the mothers and their biracial children about the topic of race. They also shaped biracial identity in the family.

Some mothers talked about how their children's racial identity had an impact on their own dating preferences. In particular, some mothers expressed concerns about how the men they might bring into their children's lives would respond to their children's biracial heritage. This was especially salient for those mothers who were not in a relationship with their child's biological father, as these mothers believed it was their responsibility to show their children both racial perspectives (i.e., Black and White). Some dating issues that arose as concerns for these mothers included the probability that, if they dated White men, there would only be White parental figures in their household for their biracial children to look up to and the possibility that the men they dated (whether Black or White) might be racist or prejudice toward their biracial children. That mothers were so selective in their dating choices speaks to the systemic and bidirectional nature of the biracial identity development process. For example, Nora was never

married to her children's father. Therefore, it was very important to her that she remain discerning in her dating so that her children would not be inadvertently exposed to racial discrimination or get the impression that one race, Black or White was better than the other. She said:

> I was never attracted to White guys, but I always knew, I felt like after I wasn't with their dad I didn't really want to be with a White guy either because I just always felt like White people could be harboring racism even if they pretend not to, I mean the fact that they're [children] biracial I didn't want a White guy raising my mixed kids. So I feel like I've always kind of been conscious of that.

Similarly, Cory, mother of three biracial children said:

> I have been dating a White man now for a couple of years and you know when I first met him I was kind of guarded like I didn't tell him—I told him I had three kids I didn't get into the whole race thing cause I wanted to see what his… You know, enough said.

One mother, Dianne, indicated that she did not consciously date Black men or White men after she divorced from her children's father because she did not want to present a biased preference for one race or the other to her children. Dianne wanted to remain open to both races as an example to her biracial children that both Black and White partners are acceptable.

A final aspect of the complexities of the family constellations pertaining to parental dating relationships (i.e., parents, stepparents, dating partners) was from the perspectives of some of the biracial adults in the interviews. For some biracial individuals, their parents' choices of who to date or remarry strained their relationships with their mothers or fathers and, as a result, influenced the biracial identity development process because some of the biracial children described how they did not discuss issues pertaining to their racial identity as openly with their

parents and their new partners. One of the critical stressors associated with parents dating or

remarrying for the biracial adults was the perception of racism or rejection from their parents'

partners or new spouses. Jo, whose father remarried a Black woman when she was a child, never

felt accepted as a biracial person by her father's new wife:

> He remarried a Black woman, which is the only Black woman that he was ever married
>
> to and that I can recall him ever being with. . . So he remarried a Black woman and they
>
> lived probably a mile or less away from our home that we grew up in…she wasn't very
>
> accepting of us, my dad's three mixed kids, at the time. She seemed very indifferent to
>
> us.

The feeling of not being accepted by her father's new wife contributed to Jo's struggle in

negotiating between the positive messages from her mother about being biracial and the negative

messages about being biracial from her step mother. On another occasion, Jo also talked about

her mother remarrying a White man when Jo was an adult. This marriage again contributed to

Jo's questioning of the messages she received about the value of her biracial identity from her

mother. Jo stated:

> And I will say this, not to make my mom feel bad or anything, but when my mom first
>
> married George, her [current White] husband, there was little bit of discomfort with my
>
> two biracial siblings and I… we hadn't really met him, we weren't invited to the
>
> wedding, and we kind of felt outcast, and I still do. I don't necessarily feel 100%
>
> comfortable in his home and I don't know how much of that is racial, I mean he's a nice
>
> guy but, it's just always been a strange feeling. And I don't feel like that is the case with
>
> my White sister. And my mom knows all of that. That's just one of the dynamics of
>
> having a biracial, mixed, blended family.

Supportive and Close Parent-Child Relationships

Mothers and their adult children talked about their mother-child relationships as mostly supportive and close, especially in the context of discussing, negotiating, and exploring issues of race and biracial identity. Mothers worked to create a safe and positive space for their children to explore their biracial identity in whatever ways fit best and without judgment. Furthermore, mothers also encouraged their children's healthy sense of overall identity, separate from biracial identity. Supportiveness and closeness was not only evidenced by the caring and nurturing environment created by the mothers, but also in the way that many mothers actively worked to expose their children to both their Black side and their White side. Additionally, some mothers demonstrated supportiveness for their children's biracial identity by making sure their children knew or were exposed to knowledge about their absent or uninvolved biological fathers. For example, Cory's statement illustrates actively exposing her children to both sides:

> It has been a joy, my life's most important work, and sometimes my life's hardest work. I've strived to make race an open and casual topic of conversation from the very start, and to always expose my children to cultural practices and differences between their two Black-White families, and (to a lesser degree, perhaps) cultures other than Black-White.

Priscilla also described how she has worked actively normalize her children's experience of being biracial:

> I have strived to make it [being biracial] not an issue and if things would come up and felt uncomfortable I would strive to make it [the discomfort about racial issues] where it became smoothed out, comfortable, and I really tried to go out of my way to make the kids feel that it [being biracial] was just totally a normal way to be.

> Lillian, mother of eight children, echoed Cory and Priscilla in an analogous way:

"I wanted them to know about the world, to know their, you know their place in it, whatever they want to be, they can be. And not to be held back by society, which still has a lot of influences." Providing a message to their children that being biracial was normal allowed biracial participants to make informed choices about their racial identity without fear of being judged within their family. In addition, the space created for racial discussions allowed for the development of a trusting and supportive relationship between mothers and their biracial children.

The biracial adults in the study talked about the supportiveness of their parents as important to their biracial identity development process because they were able to share their experiences with their parents and safely discuss issues as they came up throughout their lives. Bree, said this about the family environment her mother created for her related to exploring issues of race: "Yeah, supportive, not just open. It's also the support system." Later when we were talking one on one about growing up and how Bree's sense of racial identity was shaped through the supportiveness of her mom, Bree continued with the same sentiment stating, "my mom has been very supportive because I am part of her and it's not that she really didn't have a choice, I mean she does have choice to be supportive, but it's her wanting to be supportive that is more influential than anything." Bree's knowledge that her mother consciously chose to be supportive of Bree's biracial experience positively affected how Bree saw the value in herself as a biracial individual.

Brian, age 24, and his younger brother Glen, age 22, talked about how their mother supported their development of a healthy biracial identity by just treating each of them as her kids rather than her "mixed babies." Brian said, "She was always just telling us to be who we were. You know, not to freak out about it." Brian went on to say later, "I'd just say she's always been supportive of us being us." Similarly, Mary age 40, said about her mother, "We have a

good relationship, she's never pushed anybody to be anything they didn't want to be." For Mary

and Brian, they never felt judged or questioned by their mothers as they explored different

aspects of their racial background.

A few of the biracial adults also talked about the support and feelings of closeness they

had with both of their parents while growing up. Tina, age 19, was particularly expressive when

she talked about her relationship with her parents:

> They were very supportive; they were just supportive of me, period. But like any time I'd
>
> have a question [about racial issues], my dad would be all ready there to answer it and…
>
> I would usually put them both together… but they were very supportive…

Later, Tina went on to say, "I guess there's so many instances where they'll sit down and listen.

Their ears are ready to listen, to hear what I have to say about that. About other things, too, but

about the race issues and how I feel on it…" Kiana, age 35, also talked about the supportive

relationship she and all of her siblings had with both of her parents growing up:

> I think that because we had open discussions and we were just allowed to be ourselves, it
>
> felt supportive. I never felt like I wasn't supported. I knew …who I was, and could just
>
> talk about it…I know that my parents had my back if there was a racial incident, I knew
>
> that if I couldn't handle it by myself they were going be there to help me.

These and other adults emphasized that, because each of their mothers or both parents remained

supportive of their explorations of racial identity, they and their siblings were able to find their

own level of comfort with being biracial individuals.

Although the closeness between the mothers and children received the most attention in

the interviews, mothers and their children also talked about the adult children's relationships

with their biological fathers and/or stepfathers. The quality of these relationships ranged from

close and supportive to distant and cut-off. The quality of father-child relationships also influenced the racial identity development process for some biracial individuals. This was because some mothers facilitated the process of providing knowledge to their children about their fathers or helping their children to get to know their fathers, which contributed to the biracial individuals' exposure or sense of knowing their Black side.

A few of the biracial adults indicated their mother's supportiveness by the way their biological mothers acknowledged and shared stories about their biological fathers even though they were cut-off. Kiana, the oldest and only child from her parents' union, described how she appreciated that her mother told her about her father and who he was even though neither she nor her mother kept in touch with him; "It helped. Knowing where I came from, even though my biological dad isn't part of my life, I know he's from Chicago, I know he has 13 brothers and sisters and stuff like that, and I don't really want anything to do with him, but knowing where he came from was really important." For Kiana, her identity as a biracial individual was deepened by the connections she had to the story of her father and knowing her father's family history.

Cory, divorced Ella's father when Ella was a baby and proceeded to distance them from him. Many years later, when Ella was a teenager, her biological father reestablished contact with Cory in order to build a relationship with Ella. Cory realized the importance of this connection for her daughter and has been supportive of her daughter building a relationship with her biological father. While Ella's relationship with her biological father was cut-off growing up, she is currently rebuilding a relationship with him, though they are still "not in contact that often." Throughout the interview, as Ella talked about her biological father, she indicated that it has been significant for her to get to know her father's family (he and his other biological children) and

culture (Belizean) and to figure out ways to incorporate her father's heritage into her own sense of identity.

Supportive Siblings: Sharing the Biracial Experience

Most of the biracial adults talked about the significance and importance to their biracial identity development of having a sibling or multiple siblings to share the biracial experience with on a more personal or intimate level. For many adults in the study, having someone else in their life that was also going through the exploration of what is means to be biracial helped the biracial adults to negotiate some of the challenges they faced. In some cases, being a biracial role model to younger siblings was important in terms of sharing and explaining their biracial identity with others. Adult children's experiences with siblings varied depending on the racial composition of their families (i.e. biracial siblings only, or biracial and monoracial siblings together). For example, in most families, biracial siblings were close and had a unique and shared understanding of the biracial identity development process. However, where monoracial siblings and biracial siblings were brought together through remarriage, some challenges arose around the siblings understanding the differences between monoracial and biracial identity that had to be worked through over time.

Brian, who participated in the interview with his younger brother Glen, emphasized the importance to his biracial identity development experience of having each other while growing up and negotiating their biracial identities:

> We both knew that we were going through the same thing… pretty close, so there wasn't much difference with me and him [Glen], race wise at least…I guess just being supportive, like Glen has always been my support no matter, and without him I would probably need more [outside] support just trying to, you know, be myself. With Glen I

always knew I wasn't the only one [who was biracial], there was two of me out there…

and I think that would probably be you know something that could trouble somebody,

just being an only child, but from two different worlds and not having anybody really to

understand exactly what you're going through—which I can always know Glen

understood what I was going through because he was doing the same thing.

Kiana, the oldest of four biracial half siblings, talked about how much she valued being a

biracial role model for her younger siblings when she said, "I try and set an example of being

involved [in the multiracial community] and had I chose probably to go off on a different path

and just identify as Black, they may have done the same thing. But you know, their big sister was

mixed so they could be mixed, too, and it wasn't that big of a deal." Kiana talked specifically

about a time when she instilled a sense of pride about being mixed with her siblings: "I

remember making my siblings shirts that said, '100% Mixed' when they were little. I was

probably in high school, made them all the shirts, and they wore them, they were like, yeah! And

so we've always been free to talk about it." Similarly, Alan, the middle child of five biracial half

siblings, also talked about having biracial siblings and how it helped him negotiating his biracial

identity, "I guess just having [biracial] siblings…everything just kind of fit together. Having

other biracial you know, family members made it [being biracial] a lot easier, too."

Grandparents and Great-Grandparents: Impact on the Biracial Experience

Most mothers and their adult children talked about various reactions of the adult

children's grandparents or great-grandparents to the mothers' interracial relationships and the

birth of the biracial children. In some cases, grandparents and great-grandparents were not

supportive at first but, over time, became advocates for their children and grandchildren. In other

families, grandparents and great-grandparents never truly accepted their child's choice of an

interracial partner and the resulting biracial children. Yet in other families, the grandparents and great-grandparents supported the families in private, but did not proclaim support for the interracial family socially. The encounters of parents and their biracial children with grandparents, and great-grandparents were discussed as eye-opening experiences that encouraged the parents and their biracial children to stand strong for their belief in the value of their interracial relationships and the children's biracial identity. This standing up for what they believed in resulted in relationships with grandparents and great-grandparents that ranged from supportive and close to distant and cut-off. All of the families mentioned something about their maternal side of the family, which incidentally, was the White side of the family. If any of the mothers or their children in the interview spoke of the father's or stepfather's side of the family, most said they felt accepted.

Evolution from nonsupport to support. In a portion of families, grandparents and great-grandparents' thoughts and feelings about their children's choice to create an interracial family changed over time. In addition, old ideas about race mixing seemed to surface in some families and contributed to creating a stressful environment for racial identity development at times. However, it was also true that grandparents adjusted to their child's interracial relationship and their grandchild's biracial identity as time passed. These multigenerational family relationships set the tone for the possibility of positive change through the persistence and exposure from mothers to their parents about their interracial relationships and their children's biracial identity.

Throughout the family and individual interviews, both Bree and her mother Kat, expressed how facing such judgments within the family, regarding interracial relationships and biracial children, contributed to Bree's strong sense of herself and her ability to maintain her biracial identity in the face of adversity both inside and outside of the family. Kat, who had her

daughter, Bree, without marrying Bree's father, talked extensively about the reactions of her own grandparents when she revealed she was pregnant and after her daughter's birth.

> My grandma was born in the South, that's my dad's mother, and she came to Metro Oregon to live when we were a very young age. My grandma did not believe in race mixing at all. She was very concerned when I was pregnant but loved Bree like there was no tomorrow. I mean she just absolutely adored Bree. But that's the old school mentality and me having a child put pressure on the family just due to the fact that they have to readjust their line of thinking.

Bree, who was talking about her comfort with her racial identity within her family and extended family, commented on the changes in the perceptions of her grandparents since she was born: "It just, it makes me curious about their thoughts before I came along. But I mean now since I am here, and I've been here for 18 years, their perception has obviously changed."

Similarly, Cory, who was married to Ella's father for a short period of time, talked about her parents' initial negative reaction to her interracial marriage. In this family, the evolution of Cory's parents from non-supportive to supportive of the biracial children provided evidence for Cory and her children that changes in acceptance are possible even when old ideas about race-mixing exist:

> My parents were pretty old fashioned, but fairly open to it. My mom was more okay with it than my dad who was nervous. He was afraid, classic, of that generation, he was afraid that any children we had would suffer and he was really worried about that. But they accepted my husband and welcomed him with open arms and when Ella was born and my dad was so happy and made a real fuss over her.

Evelyn, mother of two biracial sons, also talked about the challenges she faced with her family once she had biracial children. She said, "My family did not know for a long time that my kids were mixed. I didn't tell them." Evelyn moved to the West Coast from the South and, because of the physical distance as well as what she perceived as differences in viewpoint on interracial relationships, she did not share her biracial children with her family. She described her experiences when she finally told her parents about her children:

My mom, it took her a little bit to get used to for a minute, but I didn't have to deal with it because I was out here [in Oregon]…because you know she was from a southern state, the south, and the whole south thing, and the way I grew up and everything… my mom, reacted for a minute, but she didn't say anything [directly] to me… But, just from what I heard from other people [in the family] and when I was out there visiting, I saw my picture'd been torn in half kind of thing in the family bible, but that's the way my mom was. She always reacted and then she would be like okay after that. So, ever since like they [my sons] were little she always considered them one of her grandkids and has pictures of them out and everything…but I didn't even like telling anybody for a long time.

As evidenced in the previous examples, in most families, the roles and responses of the maternal grandparents, or great-grandparents changed or evolved over time from unsupportive and negative to supportive and involved. Initially, grandparents responded with a disapproving reaction to their daughters marrying interracially or having biracial children for fear of the possible discrimination their daughters or their biracial grandchildren would have to face socially. Eventually, however, grandparents adjusted their thinking and accepted the interracial

relationship and their biracial grandchildren because their daughters were persistent and they fell in love with and developed bonds with their grandchildren.

For some mothers, the initial unsupportive or negative reactions of their parents and grandparents served as an opportunity for mothers to stand up to prejudice and discrimination based on race. The ability for many of the mothers to express confidence in their interracial relationships and biracial children set an example that asserting the biracial identity of the family was acceptable across multiple contexts. Such demonstrations on the part of mothers indicated to the biracial children that their interracial family and their biracial identity were vital to preserve and protect, and seemed to encourage a stronger sense of self for several of the biracial adults. As Annie, the mother of Tina explains:

> We don't on a day to day basis think much about the whole biracial thing. I mean I did in the beginning of course. In the beginning, it was a big deal on my side of the family. My grandparents didn't accept it and it wasn't until we actually made a decision to get married, and I wrote them this letter, and you know told them, ok I'm getting married, so either you accept or you don't. And then they did. And we were fine after that and they love her [Tina] to pieces.

Annie used her interracial marriage as an opportunity to stand up to prejudice in her family and it eventually resulted in her grandparents adjusting their attitude about interracial relationships. Similarly, Maggie, who was first in a brief relationship with her daughter Felicity's father, and then eventually went on to marry another Black man, said this about the effect of her interracial marriage on her entire family:

> Well it's interesting I think because my core, immediate family is White. But they've married multiculturally, my siblings have. Both my parents were White and when I first

started to date Black men both my parents were kind of surprised by that and not that

they were upset at it at all, and they weren't because they never taught me not to do

that… but they just were surprised by it. I think I lead the charge to branch out… I really

was the first one to do that in my family and then slowly there were others that did that as

well.

The eventual acceptance of the maternal grandparents and great-grandparents also served as

validations for parents and their children that negative perspectives about interracial relationships

and biracial children can shift and change over time.

Rejection and distance. While many of the families talked about a positive shift in their

family of origin's perspectives on their interracial relationships and biracial children, in other

families overt disapproval or prejudice from grandparents or great-grandparents resulted in

significant distance or cut-off within the family. For these mothers, distance or cut-off was a way

to protect their children and to demonstrate that prejudicial responses were unacceptable,

especially from family members. For some mothers in the study, lack of support from their own

parents left them to raise their biracial children without multigenerational support and, for some

biracial adults, the absence or rejection of their grandparents contributed to some struggle or

emotional pain about being biracial. When reflecting on her own parents' responses to her

interracial family, Priscilla, mother of five, described how her family was "not accepted:"

It's evolved over time [with other family members] . . . but my blood father was a

racist—he was a bigot. And my mother was more accepting…my father was just

definitely…there was never a strong connection there for these kids with their

grandparents on my side at least.

Dianne, who was pregnant before she was married to her biracial children's father in the 1960s,

said this about the impact of her own father's prejudice and exclusion of her interracial family:

> [Having] his daughter marry a Black man was another story. And when I was pregnant,
>
> he drove up and he wanted to meet my [soon to be] husband, you know my [now] ex-
>
> husband, he came up and he said, 'Well, I want you to know that I really don't approve of
>
> interracial marriage. But, since she is pregnant I hope you're going to do the right thing
>
> and marry her.' My husband said 'Well my father wouldn't approve either, and we are
>
> getting married.' And that was that…but we were never ever invited to their home.

Dianne's daughter, Jo, also talked about how her grandfather and step grandmother's rejection

resulted in her understanding that being biracial was unacceptable to some people:

> Throughout our childhood, I think they [my grandparents] only came up, they came up
>
> and visited us maybe once, long after my parents [divorce], maybe three times… We
>
> could never go to their house… and they were just very indifferent to us and then, it was
>
> very uncomfortable. And I remember asking why can't we go to grandma and grandpa's,
>
> to visit grandma and grandpa's house? And I can't remember what the excuse was, but
>
> even at that age I didn't buy it and I knew. I knew in my heart that there was a reason
>
> why we couldn't go there and what the reason was.

Upon further reflection of her family's response to her biracial family, Dianne said, "The

rejection we received from my father and step mother was very painful." For Dianne and her

children, as well as other interracial families in the study, the lack of support from grandparents

made it difficult to navigate the biracial identity development process at times and led a few of

the biracial adults to some periods of self doubt in their youth.

Privately connected, externally rejected. In a few participant families, the interracial couple and biracial children received mixed responses from grandparents or great-grandparents. In these families, the mothers of biracial children struggled with the notion that their own parents were harboring prejudice or shame about their interracial relationship and their biracial children, but still maintained some connection to their children and grandchildren. An additional hardship of these experiences was that the response of the grandparents was a painful and unresolved topic, even after the death of the grandparents. For some of the biracial adults in these families, the relationships with their grandparents were never close, but they did have some contact with grandparents at different periods in their lives, versus no contact at all, as in the previous sub-theme. For the biracial children, they noticed how their grandparents did not publicly acknowledge them, which resulted in silence on the topic between parents and children. This was one area of the familial relationships that was not candidly processed between parents and their children during the biracial identity development process. Lillian, who was encouraged by her daughter, Kiana, to talk about her own father during the interview, illustrated the impact of the strained relationships between her own family and her parents when she said:

He was never comfortable with interracial marriage and then I find out from my aunt years later, that my mother defended me from the rest of the family and I had no idea. You know I thought her views were like his, but I guess not. And I would've liked to have known that before she passed away. But he passed away in '91, and with my dad though, we went to visit him, he was comfortable as long as other people didn't know. He seemed to interact fine; I mean this man can't be a racist. But, if he thought like, when he was dying in the hospital, if he thought that I was going to bring the, my whole family in there, he's like 'No. No.' And I have no contact with his whole entire side of the family.

Esther, who was married interracially in the 1960s and 1970s, struggled to identify her mother's

response to her interracial family as prejudice:

> She'd [Esther's mother] come out to our house. And I could tell she really cared and
>
> loved us but I could always tell she was embarrassed. So, I think she was prejudice
>
> because, she was prejudice—she wasn't prejudice though—it's so hard to explain to you
>
> what I mean. I think if we lived on a desert island, she could care less. But because she
>
> cared what people thought, society, there's got to be another word besides prejudice. I
>
> think prejudice is when people really do not like another race or another type of people
>
> on purpose. And she did not feel that way, but she cared about society what people
>
> thought.

After distinguishing between racism and prejudice, Esther agreed her parents were prejudiced

and indicated the impact it had on her children's identity development. "Uh, I think it, the ones

[her biracial children] that noticed it, it probably hurt their self confidence a little bit and that was

probably a weak link in our whole raising the kids, was my parents' prejudice."

Nora, single mother to two biracial children, who was raised in an area of Oregon with

few Black people, said about her own parents' views on race and biracial identity, "I definitely

never felt like my parents were racist, but again there were never Black people for them to be

racist about." Nora went on to say that, "Another thing with my mom, she had a tendency to

want to make Carolina [Nora's daughter] White." Carolina agreed saying, "Yeah, she's like oh I

just think of you as White. Like I don't even think of you as Black. Which on one hand, I'm kind

of like cool, but on the other hand that seems kind of weird." Because Nora and her children

lived with Nora's mother, the relationship between them was stable and Nora took opportunities

to educate her mother about race and her children's racial identity. Living with her

grandmother's lack of acknowledgement of her biracial identity on a daily basis allowed

Carolina to address the inaccurate assumptions of her grandmother directly. Along with her

mother's support, Carolina was able to explain her biracial identity to her grandmother on many

occasions, which gave her confidence to address similar incorrect assumptions about her biracial

identity in other areas of her life and with other people she encountered as well.

<div align="center">Familial Influences on the Biracial Identity Development Process</div>

The theme, Familial Influences on the Biracial Identity Development Process, addresses the

interactions, communications, and meaning making parents and children had about race and

racial identity and how parents perceived they influenced the biracial identity development

process of their children. This theme and its associated sub-themes support the notion that

families co-create meanings about race and racial identity, which reflects a process of open

communication and interactions between parents and children about racial issues, racial heritage,

racial discrimination, and racial pride. Within the first sub-theme, *The Intentional and Unique*

Responsibility of Raising Biracial Children, mothers described how they intentionally worked to

create an open family environment for their biracial children to discuss and explore aspects of

their biracial experience and developmental process. As a result of this intentionality, biracial

individuals and their mothers had a mutual influence on each other throughout the biracial

individual's biracial identity development process, because mothers talked to their children, and

the children came to their mothers to talk about the topic of race and their own racial identity.

The second sub-theme, *Racially Labeling Children*, exemplifies how mothers raised their

children as both Black *and* White and overtly represented a biracial label to their children and

others, which determinately had an impact on their children's choice of a biracial identity.

Within the third sub-theme, mothers and their children shared how it was necessary to them to

address potential challenges (*Acknowledging Potential Challenges for Biracial Children*) in preparation for potential discrimination and racism. This sub-theme includes how mothers consciously racially socialized their biracial children as a part of the biracial identity development process in preparation for bias they might face as biracial persons. The fourth sub-theme, *Pride as an Interracial Family,* reveals the significance of pride for these families of being interracial and in the child's projection of a biracial identity. This sub-theme also demonstrates the instillation of pride as a part of the intentional aspect of the racial socialization process parents shared with their children throughout their development.

Raising Biracial Children: An Intentionally Unique Responsibility

Mothers talked about the importance throughout their child's biracial identity development process of teaching their children about both sides of their racial heritage, and their children recognizing both sides of their racial heritage in themselves. The mothers in the study, all of whom were White, were the most consistently present parental figures to their children. In several families, it was single mothers who took responsibility for teaching both the White side and the Black side of their child's racial identity. With this group of mothers, in particular, it was critical to them personally to be sure their children knew about their Black heritage. Mothers wanted their children to feel free recognize and understand all parts of their racial heritages. This sub-theme is also reinforced by the open, supportive family environment discussed in the previous theme. Additionally, this sub-theme reflects a sense of pride these mothers instilled in their families, which will be discussed in more depth later.

Mothers talked about the importance throughout the biracial identity development process of talking with their children about their Black heritage, involving them in multicultural groups, teaching them that they are biracial, and teaching their children do not have to choose

between either race. Lillian, mother and stepmother of nine, described how she emphasized a multiracial heritage for her children:

> One person said, and this is kind of a theme I grabbed onto, she said 'I want my child to be proud of his Black heritage, his White heritage, and his multiracial heritage—all of it.' It's a way of saying all of it too. Like you can be a part of it, too, you don't have to be this or that, so…"

> In an effort to support both cultures as a single mother, Nora said, "It was a conscious decision to have biracial children and deal with it and do it well," She also described how she was active in teaching her children about Black history:

> I feel like I've been really committed to raising my biracial kids [to be] knowledgeable [about] Black stuff because …when a certain thing [television program or special] comes on, we have to watch it from day one, since they were little... I've been really committed to it [teaching them about their Black heritage]. Kind of my path in life is just really caring about interracial relations in general.

Later in the interview, Nora continued talking about how she has tried to inform her children about both sides of their racial heritage and particularly the non-White side, as Nora is White to be sure her children acknowledge their biracialness:

> Just by offering as much exposure to pretty much being biracial or more the Black side because I feel like they're so exposed to the White people and my side that I feel like I've tried really consciously to expose them to as much of their [Black] other side as possible.

Like Nora, Kat, who has been the constant primary caregiver for her children, talked about her biracial children's experience as the best of both worlds, emphasizing the importance for the development of a biracial identity of showing her two children both sides of their background:

I mean it's such a diverse background from two different perspectives and with a child being able to relate to both sides they have the ability to have a wider and wider variety of everything... I mean its not like just being stuck in White world or a Black world, as long as they are being showed both sides, you have more perspective… that means pretty much the best of both worlds. Most definitely she was raised to know both sides.

Priscilla, also primarily a single mother, said something similar to Kat about wanting her children to know and to acknowledge their multiracial heritage:

Well, I have wanted them to feel proud about their heritage and their background, and not feel embarrassed by it… it's just something for them to be totally comfortable with... They're just part of being an American, above and beyond anything else, and you have a lot different things that make up your background, you're not just looking at a Black and looking at White person, you're Italian, you're French and you're Indian, and you're African, and you're a lot of different things, and so you're pretty much a world citizen.

Although mothers seemed to have primary responsibility for teaching their children about their racial heritages, some mothers and children talked about receiving racial socialization messages from both parents in the household. However, when two parents were present in raising their biracial children, each monoracial parent tended to assume responsibility for teaching about his or her own racial heritage. For example, Tina talked about her father making sure she knew about her Black heritage: "My dad's very into, like you can see [referring to the home décor] African things. Like, Black things, Black history, African artifacts, he wants me to know my roots." Tina went on to say how important it was to her biracial identity development experience that, together, her parents showed her both sides of her racial background:

I just like who my dad is, that he's in touch with Black history. He likes it and he likes to

bring that to me. And that my mom …isn't trying to act like something that she's not. I

guess that's really what it means to me, is that I have two parents that know who they are,

what they are, and they're okay with that…. they're strong within themselves, and it

comes through, just because they're strong within their own race. Where he's a strong

man, he's a strong Black man, you know, my mom's a strong White woman. So, I'm a

strong mixed young lady.

Similarly, Maggie, mother of two and stepmother of two, talked about how her family, "is very

much a blend of both cultural influences. You know, we, both of us, me and my husband bring

different perspectives to things so the kids kind of see both sides of that." Both parents in this

interracial family made an intentional effort to expose their children to both races because they

felt it was important that their children know and recognize both racial heritages. Such messages

from parents, that both sides of their children's racial heritages were equally important, gave

biracial individuals fortitude in their dual heritages and a positive view of being biracial during

their developmental process and into adulthood.

Racially Labeling Children

In taking an intentional responsibility to teach their children about both sides of their

racial heritage in an open and accepting family environment, mothers also talked about

purposefully finding a racial label for their children that would encompass both sides equally. In

essence, this label was selected to support their children's biracial identity development and send

a message to others that their children are not one race or the other, but both Black and White.

Additionally, mothers were also intent on giving their children the space to explore their racial

identity and to decide which racial label they believed fit best for them. Altogether, mothers

labeled their children as biracial because they believed it was best for their children and would contribute to the healthiest identity throughout their lives.

When asked specifically how they viewed their children racially, mothers in the interviews all suggested a biracial identity. For example, Kat, mother of two biracial children described the label she selected and impressed on her children:

I describe them [my children] as biracial because to me they are biracial. I've explained both to them, like 'I would like you to identify as both; you know you have the best of both worlds. You have people who love you and you need to know your cultural differences and understanding and respect both sides but yet society people are probably going to put you into the African American category because you are half black.' Now if there's a place on an application that says biracial, check it, because by all means you're biracial. You know you have both. If you feel that you need to check box African American and Caucasian, then you do that, too. But you are the best of both.

Similarly, Maggie emphasized that her two biracial children are a blend of both Black and White and this is the message she and her husband intentionally gave to them:

I do say that they're biracial. And I guess the term biracial in my mind has become a word that I [use to say] they identify with both, there's not a separate and different racial identity, they're a blend of both of our different races. And so in my mind I think of them as partly White and partly Black and they're not separate from that, they are not something completely different.

Lillian, mother of nine, said, "I always refer to her [Kiana] as you know, interracial." Acknowledging both races in her child was particularly important to Lillian because she was told by peers in her life when her daughter was born that Kiana was Black, which dismissed the fact

that her daughter was, in fact, biracial. Later in the interview, as she was discussing her

involvement exploring "interracial" identity over the years in order to give her children more

understanding of the biracial identity development experience, Lillian went on to say:

> And we started exploring, what is the identity development thing and all that. So then we
>
> like, explored language, you know the biracial, multiracial—I go with mult—my kids are
>
> multiracial because I do have Indian heritage, so does my husband, although we aren't
>
> sure what ancestors, we don't know them or anything, but we um, we know that exists in
>
> our [racial backgrounds], and so we honor it…

Cory, mother of three biracial children, took into consideration how others might view

and perceive her children when deciding how to label her children. Cory explained how she put

thought and energy in to how she would teach her children about their race and what message

she would share with others about the race of her children. Cory explained:

> First, I think it's important for my child/children to feel secure and confident in their own
>
> identity, regardless of the label they choose to identify with. Second, but also important, I
>
> believe it is healthiest if my children identify as biracial, to relate to both sides of their
>
> family, and to not feel like they must choose one over the other or that one side of their
>
> family is less a part of them than the other.

For Priscilla, it was important to her that her children recognize all parts of their heritage.

Therefore, she chose a description not necessarily about race, but rather about the complexion of

her children. In a way, this was an intentional defiance of racial categories overall: "I've always

kind of called my kids honey kids because their skin is kind of honey, or shade of honey, so a lot

of times I talk about my honey kids…"

Inherent in the choice of a biracial label for their children were some challenges for mothers and their children at times within the family. Dianne, who remained in contact with her biracial children's father throughout their children's childhood, talked about how she and their father disagreed about the racial label to use with their children. "And her dad and I had some discussions about that and he said, 'Well you better tell them they're Black.' I said 'Well that would be like saying that I don't exist. And yes they might be considered Black by this society, but they are not [just] Black.'" For Dianne, as a single mother, it was particularly important that her children know both sides of their racial heritage and not deny either part of their racial identity. Dianne was clear about the racial label she used with her children when she said: "I always called my kids 'mixed,' unlike some White mothers I knew who called their biracial kids Black."

While all of the mothers said that they view their children as biracial and some mothers emphasized that their children use a biracial or mixed label as well, there were a few mothers who also stated that their children may choose what fits best for them racially, despite their own view of their children as biracial. This was an important aspect of empowering their children as they grew up and explored for themselves what it meant to them to be biracial, to be able to choose how they would identify; as opposed to forcing a choice on their children as society might. Nora talked about the importance of giving her children a choice in their racial identity, "I believe it's up to them individually. And like I said I've tried to expose them to as much options as possible, like it's up to them to identify however they want." Lillian echoed something similar, "I'm fine with whatever they choose." One mother, Annie, said that she defines her child as biracial because that is how her child sees herself, "I think probably she picked being biracial, we would've probably gone more towards Black…but I think she's pretty strong in that she's

mixed and that's what she is. It doesn't matter what people see, it's just what she is." Evelyn said the same thing about her sons, "I've kind of taken on whatever identity they had for themselves."

Acknowledging Potential Challenges for Biracial Children

Although mothers raised their children to be identified as biracial individuals and to know both sides of their racial heritage, part of their role in their children's biracial identity development also involved discussing the possibility of encountering social judgment for having a biracial identity. These discussions mainly focused on preparation for possible discrimination and teaching their children how they might handle it. Most mothers saw their role in preparing their children for bias as a countermeasure to protect their children from shock and prepare them for how to handle such interactions. However, some mothers also taught their children the concept of being color-blind or trying not to see color as a barrier in the world. Many mothers made an effort not to promote separation of races, or that one race or racial identity is better than any other, but rather all people are equal. Mothers did not want their children to see their unique racial heritage and identity as something that would hold them back from opportunities in society, as race has historically been a limitation for many non White groups. This parental stance of racial equality empowered the biracial children to see themselves as able to be or do anything, in spite of possible racism and discrimination. It also invited the biracial children to be open to other people of different races and cultures as well.

As previously discussed, mothers worked hard to create an open environment for their children to grow and develop their biracial identities and encouraged them to embrace both sides of their racial heritage. In the context of this nurturing and safe environment, some mothers explained how they talked with their children ahead of time to let them know of the challenges they may face regarding their race and that home is a safe place to talk about those challenges.

Mothers did this to contribute to the healthy processing of the biracial experience for their

biracial children. For example, in response to her daughter sharing a story about a racist remark

from a childhood friend, Kat illustrated how she prepared her daughter for the bias she would

face when she said:

> I tried to prep her to let her know that these were things that you are probably going to
>
> experience. That, you know, 'I'm not trying to scare you, but you need to be aware that
>
> this could happen. I'm hoping they don't.' You know, of course as a parent you hope that
>
> this doesn't happen to your child but reality is that it very well probably could... 'Be
>
> prepared and we will talk about it as they come up.'

Because of their recognition of the possible objections or rejections facing their biracial children,

mothers also talked about the importance of racially socializing their children to respect the

diversity of others or getting their children to look beyond the race or skin color of others. For

example, Lillian said this about the race and racial messages she sent to her children:

> By respecting everybody's race and background, and culture…you know it was very
>
> important to me that my kids were respectful… I wanted them to know about the world,
>
> to know their place in it, whatever they want to be, they can be and not to be held back by
>
> society, which, still has a lot of influences.

Similarly, Kat expressed the importance of not holding someone's race against them before you

can get to know them:

> We talk about race and the appreciation of races and that everyone should be treated as
>
> equal regardless, it's not the color of your skin, it's the person's content, content and
>
> character as to whether you like them or not.

In an effort to support a colorblind perspective of the world to her children, Maggie said:

I think I purposefully tried to blur the lines. Because I didn't want my kids to grow up in a world where they, the first thing they thought of a person was the color of their skin. I really wanted them to look at people for what was inside their skin, and what was in their hearts and in their minds, and not necessarily the color of their skin… I like to think that I raised my kids to look beyond color, and I think it's proven to be true.

In addition to their mothers ideas about racial socialization and preparation for bias, a few of the biracial adults also had something to say about the messages they received from their parents about race and the impact those messages had on their perspectives of themselves as biracial individuals and their sense of the world around them. For the biracial individuals the impact of their parent's practices was the desire to see everybody as equal and to treat all people with respect. For Tina, the work her mother and father did to blur the color lines gave her the desire to not see color. However, based on her experiences and sensitivity as a biracial individual and racial minority, Tina was consciously aware of the race of others most of the time. Therefore she was consciously aware of her own race and racial identity in many social situations. Tina explained:

I saw color since I was little—and in certain things I don't see color, but in certain things I do notice color. Like sometimes when I walk in a room, like if it was like the funeral yesterday, I would notice she's [my mom] the only White one. Which is kind of frustrating because I don't want to see that color, but I do. It doesn't affect me, like this is a bad situation, but I still see the color line.

In contrast, Felicity said she was thankful for the way her parents raised her to view race because it allowed her to relate to all kinds of people in her life:

I identify with anybody. I mean if you're cool to me, you're cool. You know. Well like

my mom was saying, she didn't raise us that way [to see color], you know. And I feel bad

for the people who were, because you miss out on a lot of stuff if you go around judging

people by their color. You know you miss out on their personality. This could be your

future, like, best friend, it could be the love of your life, but you choose to blindside that

because you know he's Asian or he's Ukrainian. I don't think it should ever be a

problem.

Family Pride: We are Comfortable and Proud to be an Interracial Family

The fourth sub-theme addresses the ways that parents and adult children talked about the

sense of pride they felt being a part of an interracial family. In many interviews, mothers and

their children expressed the sense that being a part of an interracial family was being a part of

something bigger, both culturally and socially. The pride in their interracial family stemmed

from going against the accepted social norm of being a part of a single race family. In addition,

adult children also talked about their sense of their family environment and the notion that,

within their family, there was no pressure to think about being biracial on a daily basis. The

expression of pride within the family for their interracial status contributed to a strong sense of

dignity and honor in developing and proclaiming a biracial identity for the adult children. In one

way, instilling a sense of pride was a part the racial socialization process for these parents with

their children.

Many mothers overtly expressed their pride in having chosen to have a biracial family in

spite of the possible stigma and challenges they might face by being in an interracial relationship

or by having biracial children. For these mothers, choosing to have a biracial family meant

choosing to stand out and be different, which also contributed to their sense of intentionality

when it came to racially socializing their children. Cory, mother of three, illustrated this when she said, "I mean I certainly knew I was going to have a biracial family by continuing my relationship with [Ella's father], and part of that was, you know I was proud of that. I thought it was a good thing." Similarly, Esther, mother of seven, described her feelings about the conscious commitment she made to raising biracial children:

> For me, being a mixed family has added some interest and fun. I think it's been wonderful and if I could change it, I would never change it because I love it all…I have really, really, really loved having a mixed family. I just think it's the coolest thing in the world…And I've always been proud of it…I'm their mom and I'm proud of that. Maggie, mother of two, said, "I am proud of my family, I have an awesome family and we've taken two distinct families and blended them together, and that's not easy to do. Not when you're both stepparents."

Parents were not the only family members to feel pride in their interracial families. In most families parents and children expressed their pride in tandem. When interviewing Jo and her mother Dianne together, Jo said, "We loved that, we loved being mixed. My brother and sister and I, we were proud." Dianne said, "Oh they were proud of it. And I encouraged that because I thought it was neat, you know both races." The sense of pride for Dianne and her children came from standing up to the people in their community who stigmatized them for being different. While, at times, the harshness of others could be difficult to face, Jo never backed down from claiming her biracial heritage, and enduring this gave her a sense of pride still today. Similarly, Alan shared his sense of pride when asked about what it means to be a part of his interracial family, "I mean that's who I am and I'm proud of it…I mean, it just makes me feel good I guess to have a different background than everybody else." Felicity summed her feelings

up this way, "I think to me, what it means to my family, I think it's a privilege and it's cool to

you know, have different things from different parts of people's backgrounds. It's cool!" Pride in

their racial identity for these individuals is a demonstration of a positively developed self-

concept and perspective of what it means to biracial in an interracial family.

Although many families discussed their feelings of pride, some mothers and children

alluded to the fact that naturally they really do not think about being an interracial family on a

daily basis, which meant they did not have to focus on the racial aspects of their identity all of

the time. This was helpful to the children, to feel proud of their racial heritage, but to also have a

neutral place to be accepted as they were without focusing only on their racial heritage. Their

home environment was so comfortable that their racial identity typically came up when others

outside of the family brought it up. For example, Maggie, who is currently raising her two

biracial children with their stepfather and his son said:

> …it's interesting because we don't often think of ourselves as a biracial family. We're
>
> just a family… It almost takes somebody else to point it out to us for us to remember that
>
> we are biracial. It's definitely true of my husband and I. We're just a couple. We don't
>
> think of ourselves as being, most of the time we don't think of ourselves as being a Black
>
> man and a White woman. We just don't think in those terms. We have had occasions
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> where it's been brought to our attention, where somebody has said something, and then
>
> it's like, 'Oh yeah, we are.'

Annie, who has been married to her biracial daughter's father for 20 years, also described how

race wasn't the primary focus of their family interactions when she said:

> Well I don't think about it. We don't on a day to day basis think much about the whole
>
> biracial thing. I mean I did in the beginning of course… but, you know, just on a day to

day basis it doesn't really mean a lot to us. You know every once in a while we'll notice

people noticing us, which we don't think about.

In describing how their families did not focus on race, some of the biracial adults described how this resulted in a sense of relief about not having to think about their or their family's biracial identity on a daily basis. In many ways, it was nice for the biracial children to just feel normal within their family. For example, Carolina, the oldest of two said: "For me as much, I guess I don't… think about it as much. Just because to me it seems normal …" Along these lines, Alan said that while he feels proud to be a part of a unique interracial family, on a day to day basis he feels like any other family: "I don't know, it's who we are. Pretty much like any other family. I don't like think anything of it. Maybe other people do, but I don't." Just as it is important for the family to be a place to talk openly about race and biracial identity as it comes up, it was just as important for these individuals that their primary focus not be about race all of the time. Throughout the interview, Felicity, the older of two biracial children, expressed a constant re-realization that she was a part of an interracial family. Many of the thoughts she expressed illustrated that being a part of her family meant she was a part of something important, but also that her family felt so at ease that she did not think about it daily.

Like, there's been times where it's popped in but it's never hit me until like right now for

some reason that we are so culturally, racially intermingled in our family... I see my mom

almost everyday and she's the same color she has been since I've been born and my dad's

been—I mean you know, I think after a while it just goes away, you know. Like it was

never an issue with me.

Negotiating our Racial Identity with the "Outside" World: An Interactive Experience

The theme, Negotiating our Racial Identity with the "Outside" World: An Interactive Experience, contains five sub-themes and addresses the ways cultural and social experiences influenced the development of identity for biracial individuals and the parental racial socialization process. That is, this theme covers the truly interactive and bidirectional relationship between the interracial families and larger society. This theme also addresses the influences of greater culture and society on the family and the biracial individual's identity, as well as the ways in which the family and the biracial individual influence their cultural and societal context.

The first sub-theme, *Friendships,* reflects how the friendships of both the mothers and their children had an influence on, and were influenced by, the biracial family. Mothers and biracial adults talked about the importance of having peers and friends outside of their family to bolster their biracial identity development process and to accept the family and biracial individuals. The *Neighborhoods and Local Communities,* the second sub-theme within this theme, that surrounded these biracial families while the biracial adults were growing interacted with how the families and the biracial adults shaped and maintained their sense of what it meant to be biracial. Standing out racially in neighborhoods and schools influenced the choices parents made about where to raise their children, all of which had significant influences on the biracial identity development process and whether or not the social experiences growing up were positive for the children. Within the third sub-theme, *Trying to Fit Me into a Box: Pressure to Choose Black or White,* the social response to the family's racial identity was cause for conversation and education about being biracial both within the family and with others outside of the family. Family members united together to proclaim their biracial identity and to inform others about

their biracial identity. Within the fourth sub-theme, *Fighting Discrimination and Racism as a Family,* mothers and their children shared stories of the discrimination they faced as racial individuals and an interracial family and how they came together to get through these difficult times. This sub-theme not only reflects the challenges mothers and their children navigated because of being in an interracial family, but it also reflects the strength of these family's to stand up for their interracial status and biracial identity. Finally, the fifth sub-theme, *The Impact of Racially Historical Events,* demonstrated how the interracial families in this study were influenced by their social and historical contexts. How these families discussed and negotiated the impact of their social and historical contexts throughout the biracial identity development process helped to shape a more positive perspective of being biracial, in spite of the challenges. Events in the media could be interpreted as resources for mothers to draw on for difficult discussions about the persistence of race and racism in society as well as positive discussions about how America has evolved regarding race relations.

Friendships

Mothers talked about the importance for their well being as parents of the support and non judgment they received from friends while raising their biracial families. Some mothers also emphasized the importance of having relationships with other mothers who were raising biracial children so that they could share the challenges and the experiences of supporting their children's biracial identity development. Mothers found it helpful to share information regarding the biracial identity development process, such as recent research, as well as to gather information about the encounters of other biracial children in order to expand their own understanding of their children's biracial journey. For their part, biracial adults talked about the significance during their development and throughout their lives of having friends who did not put pressure

on them to choose one race or the other, but rather just accepted them and their biracial identity. For both the mothers and their children, some of these significant others included friends in the neighborhood, at work, and from school, as well as members of support groups or members of multiracial organizations.

Mothers talked about the relevance to the racial socialization process of supportive friends surrounding them and their family while they were raising their biracial children and navigating social arenas as an interracial family. These friends were others with whom mothers could share and process their experiences of raising biracial children. Some mothers talked specifically about the ability to be themselves without worry or concern that their friends harbored discrimination or judgment toward their interracial families. For example, Cory said, "My friends readily accept me and my children, and if I ever felt they didn't I wouldn't choose to maintain a friendship with them." For Maggie, mother of two, having friends she could specifically relate to because they too had biracial families gave her the support she needed for biracially socializing her children. Maggie talked about her friends this way:

> I have a lot of friends. I also have a lot of friends that have biracial children. So although
> a lot of people that are not biracial families, or mixed families, or blended families, I do
> tend to gather friends around me that have the same similar issues and challenges and
> family dynamics as I have.

Sharing the experience of raising biracial children with other mothers was significant because it gave parents a network of people to call on during difficult times but also to share in the pride and joy of raising biracial children. In addition, the accessibility of others with whom to discuss thoughts and feelings related to being a part of an interracial family and raising biracial children

allowed mothers to get their own support, which in turn, allowed them to better support their

children's biracial identity development process.

Although supportive friendships were important for mothers and their children as they

navigated their social arenas, for some mothers, friendships were lost because of the friend's

racial discrimination or judgment. The loss of friendships speaks to the bidirectional impact

between parents and children of being in an interracial family. For example, Kat talked about the

loss of some friendships over the years due to her friends' inability to accept Kat's interracial

family:

> Some people understand, some people don't. And the people who don't, I have to cut off
>
> from my life. I cannot have negative people who are not supportive as my friends and of
>
> my children, because they are so worried about my children's color of skin in my life. I
>
> just can't. So for me, it cost friendships, but does that mean that those friends were really
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> my friends? I'd have to say no. And it was a learning experience because people that
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> were true friends are going to stay there regardless.

The biracial adults also talked about the vital importance while growing up and

developing their sense of what is means to be biracial, of having friends in their lives that "got

them." For many of the biracial adults, being biracial influenced how they were treated in their

social arenas, but with friends, their biracial identity was accepted and was also not the focus of

their relationships. Many of the biracial participants mentioned their various friends, but a few

were specific about the role and level of understanding certain friends had and how they helped

normalize their experience growing up rather than focusing on their biracial identity. Alan said,

"Well, I mean race is there but I am always going to look different, than like their skin color, but

I don't think other people [my friends] look at it differently. Yeah, I mean I am who I am and

they know me, so it doesn't make a difference." Other biracial adults talked about their friends, sometimes describing the race of their friends, but mostly talking about the meaning of their friends not focusing too much on the issue of race while they were growing up and developing their biracial identity. The ability for biracial individuals' friends to accept their choice of a biracial identity positively influenced the experience of being biracial in their social arenas. For example, Tina said:

> I don't know, I just kind of latch on to people I like. It doesn't matter what you are. On the weekends it was just one person, the person that I hang out with the most now, she's my best friend, her name is Betsy, and she's mixed with like everything. So I don't know what you would call her but mixed…[I appreciate] just how much friends accepted it [my mixed race identity] …when I was older…we had our group and we were kind of focused on our group and our group just happened to be primarily Black with a couple White friends… I just liked that my friends always accepted me and how they accepted other mixed people and then once we got older how they began to accept mixed people… I think we've done, a pretty good job, because we're more accepting. So I like that aspect of social friends.

Similarly, Carolina, age 23, talked about the impact of her friends' acceptance of her race and racial identity on her experience of growing up biracial: "I feel like with my friends, and the people who know me, it's given them greater awareness of it [the biracial experience], where they probably wouldn't think about it ever at all. Like even with my boyfriend, I feel like he thinks about it more." For Carolina, she felt accepted by her friends as a biracial person. Additionally, she also felt that her friends, whether they were biracial or not, became more aware of racial bias and discrimination in her community and would stand with her to fight against it

when it would arise. These experiences helped Carolina as a biracial person because they allowed her to be comfortable with who she was racially no matter where she was or who she was with.

For some of the participant families, another significant aspect of friendship and support was belonging to groups or organizations for multiracial individuals and families. Two mothers in the study were founding members of one group (in Central Southwestern Oregon) and spoke of its role in their lives and the lives of their children. Having people like themselves around while growing up, and developing connections with families similar to their own, supported their children's biracial identity development process because it allowed the opportunity to share the biracial experience with others outside of their own family. For example, Lillian, who spoke about the significance of recognizing and bringing more awareness of Black culture into her kids' lives, put together a community celebration in the early 1980s for Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday (prior to it being a national holiday). In response to the large number of people who attended the event, the group realized they could do other things, and decided to form a multiracial organization. For Lillian, this group provided the opportunity for, "exploring, what is the identity development thing [for biracial persons] and all that. We explored language; you know the biracial, multiracial…" Later, Lillian alluded to the byproduct of the group, which was the support system that grew out of the multiracial organization for she and her children, but she went on to say, "but that wasn't the only [motivation]—my motivation was to create a better world ultimately for all the [multiracial] kids."

Similarly, Priscilla, who considers Lillian one of her close friends, also talked about the importance of the multiracial organization as a support system in terms of acceptance for her as a

mother raising biracial children and a place to talk about her children's biracial development process:

> My social network was other like individuals, so then we formed the organization back in 1982, [Multi Ethnic Group], and I was one of the founding members. I've met other families and other people and, and you know did volunteer work, to help support this. I was really more prone to be in that community because we come from a history where it [interracial families and biracial identity] wasn't a positive thing…it was just like we turned into this whole community that was tight and together and big.

The biracial adults who were involved with the [Multi Ethnic Group] also commented on the significance of the group to their sense of themselves as biracial individuals. While growing up, it was meaningful to have other individuals like them with whom to share the experience of being biracial. Alan, age 22, said, "I think that it made my life a lot easier to manage knowing I had, I guess comrades. People who were there, they were in the same situations, same backgrounds as me as well. It just makes you feel more at home I guess." Carolina, age 23, also talked about having kids her age in the [Multi Ethnic Group] and how she liked being exposed to other kids of color in her predominantly White community. Similarly, Kiana, age 35, whose mother was a founding member of the [Multi Ethnic Group] also talked about the impact on her sense of herself as a biracial person of "having her mom go out of her way to make sure [she and her siblings] had peers that looked like us." Kiana also shared that, even though there may have been only one other mixed kid at her elementary school, she knew there would be other mixed kids she could be involved with outside of school through events put on by the [Multi Ethnic Group]. The opportunity to share her biracial identity and the experience of growing up biracial

with other mixed kids positively influenced Kiana's expression of being biracial in her

predominantly White community.

Neighborhoods and/or Local Community

For some families, the lack of racial diversity in their local community influenced

parents' decisions to move to more racially diverse areas or to send their children to more

racially diverse schools in an effort to support their children's biracial identity development

process by exposing them to many races and cultures. Just as they attempted to expose their

children to both sides of the racial heritages within the family, parents wanted to expose their

children to multiple racial heritages outside of the family as well. For some mothers, the location

where they raised their children was an intentional choice based on diversity of the area and the

opportunity to expose their children to a variety of races and racial identity options. For others,

mothers and biracial adults alike, the location was a matter of circumstance which had its own

implications in terms of being an interracial family and growing up biracial.

Out of 10 families, seven were from Metro Oregon while three were from Central

Western Oregon. The families in the Metro area of Oregon talked about their various opinions of

the area, as exemplified with quotes below, and the impact of their location on the biracial

identity development process for their family. For example, Kat, mother of two biracial children,

described her choice to live in a more racially diverse neighborhood but sending her daughter to

a less racially diverse but better academically suited elementary school. Kat said:

> I mean you have to be aware of a [biracial] child that has other needs. They need to be
>
> able to relate to others like them... when Bree was in school, very little, I had her…You
>
> know her school was probably predominately White but it wasn't the predominately
>
> White, it was the scores of the schooling, it was the educational foundation that was most

important to me because what was brought to her at home-we lived in the inner city

Northeast- so she had the ability to see others [like her racially] around her at home. And

then once she did go to middle school they combined the schools. You know elementary

schools…middle school you know they got combined with a lot more [diverse student

population]—then I remember her coming home "Mom, there's kids like me there." So

you know she was really excited about that.

The lack of diversity at the elementary school affected Kat's daughter in that Bree was acutely

aware that she was unique in her biracial identity. Not having others like her in school

contributed to an isolating feeling during her biracial identity development process. However,

once she transferred to a more racially diverse school, Bree was able to identify with other

biracial kids, which shaped a more healthy biracial identity development process.

Similarly, Cory said that when her daughter first started school, they lived in a

predominantly White area and eventually moved to a more diverse area specifically so her

daughter would not feel isolated and would have other biracial peers to share her identity

development process with:

Our neighborhood school was still very White and I remember meeting with the principal

who said 'Well it would be more diverse if you send her here.' And I thought I don't

want my daughter to be the only one. Anyway, so we looked around, got statistics from

the school districts, and the new school, which is near the center, had 1/3 Black, 1/3

White, and 1/3 biracial populations, and I just thought, 'This is where I want my kids to

go.' Applying to go outside your neighborhood schools required some justification, and it

was easy to justify why that was important to us. And from the time Ella started there, her

whole attitude changed. No more crying about 'I don't look like the other kids.'

Experiences such as these demonstrate the importance these biracial children placed on having other children in their environments to relate to in terms of their biracial identity.

Jo talked about the impact of the neighborhood she grew up in changing from predominantly White to predominantly Black on her own sense of identity, because she went to a predominantly Black elementary school and the kids would pick on her for having a White mother. Eventually she went to predominantly White schools where she felt ignored by the White kids. As Jo got older, she talked more specifically about the impact of the changing neighborhood on her own identity process, noting how supportive her mother was through it all:

…but we did grow up in a predominantly Black neighborhood, and so inside behind these closed doors I felt like I was living in a White household because all of my mom's upbringing was what we were seeing and hearing. But then we went out the door you know, it was the Black music, the Black culture, and the Black—Black everything. So we went through our phases where we would want to talk a little more hip, a little more ghetto, you know because that's what fit in with where we were... And of course then we were in the White school… where we probably picked up on their dialect or whatever and my mom never condemned any of that or really batted an eye at any of that. She understood it was all a part of growing up.

In addition to Jo, some of the other biracial adults talked about the impact of the neighborhood where they grew up presenting the challenge of feeling different than everyone else racially while developing their biracial identity. Mary, who moved from a mixed neighborhood in Metro Oregon to a more predominantly White neighborhood during her teen years, said this about how the move affected her racial identity development process:

When we first came here we lived in the Metro Oregon area and I kind of hooked up with the wrong crowd at that time. I think that I was trying to find an identity and [chose] some Black people that probably weren't the best people to hang around, and then we moved to this new area of Metro Oregon area, so then it was like the whole opposite side, a White community. So for me, I didn't really feel like I fit in at all at that point, and I felt like I stood out…when I was younger it was just kind of hard to fit in, because you're trying to fit into both cultures, but your hair's curly, but your trying to do this, and you're trying to look this way. So in my younger times I think it was harder for me…

In reflecting on their neighborhood, Mary's mother Esther said:

I regret that David [my current husband] and I lived and raised our children in a "White" community. David's job was there so we just did not give it much thought. But I think we did a great disservice to them [my biracial children]. We could have chosen a more culturally diverse environment, schools, libraries, doctors, and etcetera.

Mary believed that, in some way, her biracial children may have had an easier time with their biracial identity development when they were younger had they been exposed to more diversity and possibly more mixed race people in their neighborhood and school.

As stated previously, three of the families lived in a smaller city in central western Oregon. This meant there were not as many options of living in more racially diverse areas. Nonetheless, two of the mothers and their children still considered the impact of living in predominantly White areas on the interracial identity of the family and the biracial identity of the children while growing up. For example, Lillian said: "I think more thoughtfulness needs to go into it [raising biracial kids], you know… I had to consider when they went to school what—you

don't just send them to the neighborhood [school] necessarily, you have to investigate their schooling."

Lillian's daughter Kiana talked about the impact of little racial diversity when she went to school, "Since I was the only kid of color …until high school, no one ever wanted to date me or anything like that because I was… different, yeah." She went on to talk about being 1 of 2 mixed kids in her entire elementary school:

> Most of my friends were White growing up, but in elementary school there was one kid a year younger than me that was mixed, too, and we definitely—I mean he was a boy I was a girl—but we knew that we had each other's backs… having him in my class just had an instant bond being—I think we might've been the only mixed kids in the whole school.

For Kiana, knowing there was somebody else like her racially in school felt supportive because she never felt alone in her experiences.

Nora and her daughter Carolina also talked about the impact of the minimally racially diverse neighborhood they lived in on Carolina's identity development. Nora explained her efforts to involve her children with the multiracial organization so they would have interactions with more diverse groups of people because the neighborhood and schools in the area they lived were mostly White. Carolina talked about ending up at a less diverse middle school because of the convenience of the location, but she would have rather gone to a school with other kids from the multiracial organization they belonged to feel more similarities racially with others: "Well I did want to go to [a different] middle school [because that] was the middle school where all my [mixed race] friends from Diversity Club, Kiana's brother and stuff went if I would have had a choice…" Later, when Carolina went to high school, she chose based on the diverse population and knowing there might be other students and friends there that she might identify with racially:

Especially in this community. Like I went to ____-high school and I just feel like they had more population of Black people and Hispanic people and everything, and my counselor he was Black, that's why I wanted to go there, I know him, he was one of my mom's good friend's husbands.

In sum, most of the families in the study commented on the effect of the diversity or lack of diversity on their experiences of the biracial identity development process. The more exposure to diversity and diverse groups of people, whether in schools or community organizations, the easier it was for these families and biracial individuals to maintain their comfort socially as an interracial family and the individual's security in their biracial identity. Many mothers made intentional efforts to expose their children to more diverse populations either by choosing a specific neighborhood or a specific school, especially when they lived in areas that weren't racially diverse. Biracial adults noticed when they were the only children of color and noticed when they had peers around who looked like them. Having peers who looked like them or at least having peers who could identify with being different racially, felt supportive of the biracial identity development process for the adults in the study.

Trying to Fit Me Into a Box: Pressure to Choose Black or White

Mothers and biracial adults talked about various times when people put pressure on the biracial individual to choose one race or the other. This pressure came mostly from strangers; however, there were occasions when acquaintances or friends applied pressure as well. However, the biracial children clearly indicated that their "real" friends did not make them choose. For most of the biracial adults, the pressure to choose one racial label over another inspired them to stand up for their choice to identify as biracial in social situations. Still, for some of the biracial

individuals, this pressure to choose also caused stress and internal conflict about having a biracial identity.

For example, Ella talked about her experiences with friends and acquaintances who put some pressure on her to identify as Black:

And we talked about that in [high school student group for African American girls] which the conversation was just based on me, cause somebody said, one of the girls said, 'You're so light Ella.' And Danielle said, 'Yeah but she's not, she's not light enough to be White. She's a little bit dirty, which makes her dirty. She's a little bit Black which makes her Black.' You know Black people are like well you're a little bit Black, so you're Black.

Ella reflected on the conversation between the girls in the group as an example of the pressure acquaintances might put on her to choose one race over the other. Before Ella started going to a predominantly Black high school, Cory, Ella's mother, worried that her daughter would be pressured to choose one race over the other:

I was just worried, not that she was around the Black kids, of course, but I was just worried that they would make her choose, 'Are you going to hang out with us Black people or are you going to hang out with those White people. Make your choice because, you can't be crossing that bridge all day long.'

Ella calmed her mother's fears telling her that, while some students made assumptions about her racial identity, she was never pressured to choose one race over the other by her true friends. However, she did share that there was some pressure in general: "I mean, you still make a choice there, the books aren't wrong. I guess I didn't ever really choose, but to a lot of people that's still a big issue. A lot of people think you have to choose."

Similarly, Tina shared her experience of not being pressured by her friends to choose, but getting the sense from the people around her that biracial people do choose or that people will choose for you:

There were people in my circle of friends that if there was another mixed person hanging out with White people, it was kind of unacceptable, like, you're Black. You know, because of your skin color you're Black, so why are you with White people?

Jo, who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, talked about her experiences with other kids questioning why her mother was White when she was dropped off at school:

…and we'd get out of the car and we'd get on the bus and the first thing the Black kids would say to us 'Is that your momma?' 'Why is your momma White?' And then we would have the questions in school like, 'Which would you rather be? White or Black?' Are you, you know all this, you know, and then the whole zebra, and the whole Oreo thing, what ever slang term was in fashion at the moment.

Jo always chose to defend her mixed race heritage. Even today, Jo explained that the pressure to choose only one race to identify with has come up at various times and with various people throughout her life. She shared a conversation she had recently with her son's (who is ¼ White, ¾ Black) grandparents (who are Black):

I can't remember how he [her son's grandfather] put it, but at some point he brought up Halle Berry, and he said, 'Halle Berry is, Halle Berry, she said she's Black! She's Black.' And I said well… I'm mixed, and then she [her son's grandmother] said 'Halle Berry says she's Black.' And I said well 'I say I'm mixed. I'm biracial.' And of course, they were trying to tell me [otherwise]…'My mother has always raised me to know that I am mixed. And that's what I am. To me saying that, saying anything else, would mean that

       my mother didn't exist.' And so they weren't buying it and we got into this huge

       discussion about it as it always ends up happening. So I still have that issue with people

       from time to time.

From childhood through adulthood, Jo still says, "I'd always had the argument with Black,

White, whomever wanted to bring it up, I was not gonna back down. To this day I have people,

still trying to tell me that 'You're Black.'" On a regular basis, Jo confidently proclaims her

biracial identity.

       In her interview, Kiana also talked about times in her life when people would

automatically assume her race:

       I obviously am not White so people put me in a category of Black more often. But I've

       always identified as mixed instead of one race or the other, but I know when people see

       me and look at me, it, most times they're like that's a Black girl.

Similarly, Brian talked about the assumptions and expectations of others regarding his racial

identity:

       I'd say most of the pressure comes from …strangers, or people you just met. They want,

       they're confused, so they want you to kind of pick one or the other, they can't really

       comprehend just being something different, completely different.

       While overall social responses ranged from the pressure for biracial individuals to choose

one race over the other or the assumptions of others about the biracial individual's racial identity,

the biracial individual's racial identity came up with known friends and as well as complete

strangers. Most mothers and biracial adults spoke about those times as an opportunity to inform

others about the biracial experience and that they saw themselves as a group of people who do

not fit into a box. Parents taught their children that they did not have to choose one race or the

other. While the pressure to choose in social arenas could be stressful at times for parents and children, more often than not, biracial children asserted their biracial identity because of explicit parental socialization and supportive messages received at home about the child's right to determine how they would present themselves as racial beings. As Tina, age 19, put it, I'm kind of teaching my friends and stuff, and even my grandparents and anyone who really listens, that just because society looks at me as Black doesn't mean I am."

Fighting Discrimination and Racism as a Family

Part of the families' experiences with the outside world involved dealing with insensitivity, prejudice, racism, and discrimination, which were challenges that the biracial individuals had to learn to handle as a part of their biracial identity development process. Mothers also faced such issues for being in interracial relationships and raising biracial children. One aspect of the disrespectful comments noted by participants was offhanded questions from others outside the family such as, "What are you?," "Is he adopted?," and comments such as "She's so exotic." In addition to these insensitive comments, mothers and biracial children also shared their experiences of racial discrimination or racism and the impact of these experiences on the biracial children's sense of a biracial identity and their family. Growing up in an interracial family meant that socially, individual family members or the family unit would have to face scrutiny. While the negative experiences did not remove the desire, preference, or pride for a biracial identity, it was an aspect of interracial families' experiences that most non-minority, monoracial families and individuals may not have to contend with. The family environment provided place to work through these experiences together.

To illustrate the insensitive responses from strangers outside of the family, Kat talked about how she didn't really think about her children being mixed on a daily basis, but there

would be times she would notice people staring at her and her children and she would think, "Oh they're staring because they're trying to figure out something or they're staring because they don't like what they're seeing. And you can tell by people's facial expressions." Similarly, Cory said this about more than one stranger's responses to her daughter:

> But what I found early on was the typical you know, 'She's so cute.' 'She's so beautiful.' People stared, stared, stared, stared. And then it was almost always that they would offer this explanation for their staring, that she's so beautiful… But it also got to the point, one of my sisters would say, 'Yes, and she's smart, too.' You know like, don't just make it about her exotic looks, there's a person in there, you know.

While these responses to her daughter were not overtly discriminatory, Cory did not want her daughter's racial identity or physical features to be the focus of attention during her daughter's development. It was important to Cory, that her daughter not suffer from unwanted attention, but also that she teacher her daughter to learn how to handle undesirable focus from others as well.

In another example of disrespectful social responses to interracial families, Priscilla said, "I can remember like being with Alan when he was really small and some people would say 'Oh, did you adopt him?' You know, that kind of a thing…Getting looked at in a grocery store mostly, with him in a cart." For Priscilla, the looks did not directly impact her son's racial identity development because he was so young, but it brought into her awareness that her child and her family would get unsolicited attention for their interracial identity, which made her more conscientious about discussing such issues with her children as they grew up.

An example of gaining awareness for the disrespect from others in relation to her biracial children, Cory shared a story of experiencing discrimination and judgment from women at a

Black salon. In this situation, Cory relayed the importance of leading her daughter by example in

terms of racial socialization and appropriate responses to mistreatment by not overreacting:

> And we walked in there, and I was holding Ella's hand when we walked in, and nobody
>
> would talk to us. Nobody would talk to us! And I waited for a long time at the desk and
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> the woman just kept, she would look around, you know past me to the next person, and
>
> the next person. And at first I thought… you know I have to wait my turn, but after a
>
> while it was obvious they just weren't going to help me. And then it got to the point
>
> where I thought, well I could make a stink and insist that somebody talk to me, except I
>
> don't want to stay here.

Some of the biracial adults in the interview talked about the offhanded questions and comments

in the form of inquiries into their racial identity from outsiders. Most handled it with ease, as

they were used to it from a lifetime of questions and were secure in their sense of themselves as

biracial. Felicity said: "But, I'm a Heinz 57 straight up I guess. I get the 'What are you?' or you

know, because I get asked that all the time you know." She went on to share her typical answer,

"Every person I come into contact with automatically knows that I'm not full this or full that. I

mean the question that I always get asked is, 'Now is your dad White, or is your mom White?'

My mom's White, not really White, she's like, more like tan, peach." Glen talked about the

inquiries as well, "People always ask us where are we from. I mean that's what they always want

to know, like people that get to know us. People ask where are you from, you know." Glen's

brother Brian also shed light on the questions asked about his racial identity when he said, "What

nationality are you is usually what I get. And that's just because people are you know, they don't

know how to deal, they have to put you in a category, one way or the other." As a process,

developing a biracial identity occurred inside and outside of the family environment. The

inquiries about race and racial identity, often from outside the family and from complete

strangers, presented biracial individuals with multiple opportunities for asserting their biracial

identity in the social arena. Such opportunities also instilled resiliency in their biracial identity

for the biracial adults as they regularly dealt with such inquiries throughout their lives.

One twist on the social response to her biracial identity was a positive reaction from some

men and women that Ella came in contact with when she volunteered at retirement home as

child. For Ella's mother, this experience emphasized to her the significance of racial

stigmatization that still occurs and the effect her healthy, happy biracial child could have on the

assumptions people have about biracial people or interracial families. As Cory, Ella's mother,

explained:

> Three times that summer three different people stopped me independently, and each time
>
> two women and a man were practically in tears and all of their stories were very similar,
>
> how they had a son or a daughter who had an interracial relationship and offspring, and
>
> all three of them said that they didn't accept their grandchild and three of them said,
>
> having gotten to know Ella opened them up and they thanked me and thanked Ella. You
>
> know, she made this huge impact in some lives just being her.

In addition to offhanded comments or insensitive inquiries, families also shared racist

incidents regarding their race and racial identity. While many stories were shared, only a few

will be highlighted that demonstrate the impact the racist encounters had on the family as well as

how the family handled the situation. The biracial children were not the only individuals in the

family who endured discrimination and generalizations. Parents had to negotiate their identities

as well, as parents of biracial children and partners in interracial relationships. Several mothers

shared some of their personal experiences of racism directed toward them for being in interracial relationships.

For women in the study, mothers and biracial adults alike, the discrimination they experienced was from members of the Black community. Jo talked about a response she got after going into a Black beauty salon with her mother:

She [my mother] would take us to the Black beauty salon... to get our hair pressed, and then later we started getting perms, but we would walk in and these Black beauticians would look at my mom like she was from Mars.

This experience was particularly difficult for Jo and her mother, and at the time, it contributed to Jo feeling isolated in terms of her biracial identity. However, her mother did not accept the discrimination, but rather confronted it by continuing to bring her daughters back, as she felt her daughters deserved the same service the other women in the salon received. Jo's mother asserting herself against the discrimination she and her daughters experienced sent the message to her biracial children that they should be treated equally as an interracial family.

Two mothers talked about the social response to their Black partners and a certain stigma they felt because of their previous interracial relationships. In some way, the confrontations mothers experienced positively contributed to their ability to understand the confrontations their children faced from others about their biracial identity. For example, Cory shared:

When I divorced my daughter's Black father, I didn't intend to date more Black men because our relationship had occasional cultural differences that caused stress. However, I did eventually date and marry another Black man. We went on to have two more children, and I worried that people would label me as someone who would ONLY date Black men. People usually assumed that my second husband was the father of all three

children. What irritated me the most was when people asked 'Do they have different

fathers?' not because my children look radically unlike siblings, but because they

assumed I had several 'baby daddies'.

Evelyn shared a similar experience of stigmatization for dating interracially:

I get this thing about 'Oh you only date Black guys.' I detect things you know as a

person. It's kind of a disadvantage to me like in my workplace and things, you know you

get listed as one the woman who dates Black men… I deal with the stigma or whatever

about being with a Black man. It's like they are just thinking about the Black and White

issue.

These experiences of racial bias influenced mothers to be more assertive in teaching their

children to be prepared for racial discrimination during their biracial identity development

process. Specifically, for some mothers, confronting blatant and unwarranted racial

discrimination was eye opening and, for some children, the newfound awareness from the

perspectives of their mothers, made talking about discriminatory experiences more open in their

family. One mother, Annie, shared the personal awareness she gained about racial discrimination

when she and her husband were pulled over by the police for no apparent reason other than the

color of her husband's skin. She was sharing the story after her daughter, Tina, talked about

being pulled over herself for what seemed to be no reason.

I never understood it, but we got stopped this last summer. He [my husband] was making

a left hand turn and the cop was really belligerent about it. And it was the first time

firsthand I had seen it. I had always heard [my husband], you know part of me was

thinking, ok he's just making more of it than it really was. But the guy was, the cop was

really belligerent, and Jake didn't do anything—I think he went in the far lane rather than

the closest lane. You know, so yeah, stuff like that, it took a while for me to understand.

Annie indicated that her newfound awareness to the amount of discrimination her husband and

daughter endure enabled her be even more sensitive and supportive of the challenges her

daughter encountered as a biracial person. Later, Annie's daughter, Tina, talked about the

importance of sharing the experiences of racial discrimination, such as being pulled over by the

police or followed around a store by sales clerks because of the color of her skin, with her

mother and father and being validated and able to talk through it. Sharing her experiences at

home helped Tina to feel more confident and comfortable in her identity when navigating

challenges in the outside world.

In a similar story, Kiana talked about a time in her childhood when she experienced

discrimination at school and how she knew her parents would support her whenever she needed

it regarding racial matters. The support she received at home gave Kiana confidence to stand up

for herself and her racial identity in socially provocative situations. She specifically stated, "We

talked about it; we processed it and went on."

> … at school one time I was told, we were told to bring dolls for some … some play, but I
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> brought my Black doll from home, and one of the girls was like 'we can't use that doll,
>
> Snow White wasn't Black,' and so luckily I went to a school [where] that was dealt with
>
> it in a productive way, like right then, it was stopped, it was talked about. And they used
>
> my doll. …it had never dawned on me that they shouldn't use it [my Black doll]… but I
>
> could go home and have healthy discussion about it and be like guess what happened at
>
> school today, you know. And if they [the school] hadn't dealt with it with on their own, I
>
> know that my parents would've been there to make sure that it was dealt with.

In another example of a racially charged incident and the subsequent parental support, Bree shared an experience from her childhood as well, where her best friend at the time called another child the N-word. Bree was devastated, but was able to talk about the incident with her mother, even at such a young age, which reiterated Bree's confidence and pride in her biracial identity and her mother's supportiveness.

> And then, there was another situation back in, it was either pre-school or kindergarten. Where my best friend, he was actually a White boy and he had said that- He um, he didn't like; I think he said "Niggers." And I, you know, I had already been introduced to nigger being a term, you know a racial slur toward Black people and I in fact was Black. So I kind of said you know 'You don't like me?' and he was like 'No, no it's not you.' And then I kind of went down hill from there. So um— I know I did [handle it well], but he was who got mad and walked away. But I was only in kindergarten, you know so it was crazy. I can remember that clearly, were out on the playground- It was crazy. Yeah. We [my mom and I] talked about all of the experiences, very much so.

While these are only a few of the many stories the families shared about their encounters with racial discrimination while negotiating a biracial identity, they clearly demonstrate the shared family experience of discussing and working through the challenges of being an interracial family and a biracial individual in a mostly monoracial culture. While this sub-theme specifically covers the stories of some of the shared negative experiences of these families, it also connects to the previous theme, *Supportive and Close Parental Relationships,* highlighting the importance of a supportive and safe family environment for these processes to take place. Parents racially socialized their children by teaching them ahead of time about possible discrimination they may face and establishing relationships with their children in which they

could talk about those challenges as they arose which was facilitative of a positive biracial

identity process.

The Impact of Racially Historic Events

In addition to their immediate social environments, historical events also had an effect

on the experiences of the interracial families and biracial individuals as they negotiated the

uniqueness of a biracial identity within the family and within social arenas. Because racial

relations in America are still a heated topic, racially charged events brought about much

discussion and commentary from the participant families. These discussions illustrate the ways

in which mothers racially socialized their biracial children, by talking about the realities and

events in American culture that may positively and negatively impact the biracial identity

development process. Examples of such events included the OJ Simpson trial, the beating of

Rodney King and the subsequent riots in Los Angeles, and Barack Obama's presidential race and

eventual election. In particular, the election of a Black-White biracial president provided a

prominent example for the biracial participants to look up to and truly identify with in terms of

race. For many biracial adults in the study, socially and within their own families, the main icons

to revere as racial examples tended to be peers or friends. This is in contrast to most monoracial

individuals who typically have multiple cultural figures to emulate or model themselves after

racially throughout their lifetime.

Most participant families viewed Barack Obama's presence in the media as promoting

the visibility of biracial individuals and giving biracial people a role model to emulate. In

addition, Obama's election as president demonstrated for participants that racial barriers can be

overcome. Another important aspect of Obama's presence in the media was participants'

perceptions of the public assuming he is Black, as this highlights the on-going issues for

individuals navigating the biracial identity process with identifying as biracial. In response to a question about times when her family talks about race and racial identity, Kiana, the oldest biracial child in her family, said she and her family talked a lot about Obama. Kiana shared her feelings on Obama's racial identity:

> Definitely, like Obama running for president. That was you know, because he would be identified as Black, by some news media, but we all knew he wasn't Black, he's mixed. …And comments that he would make—us, me knowing that he has the right to identify however he wants as a mixed person, but me also wanting him to identify as mixed because I'm a mixed person, you know it's—that kind of dual, like knowing that that's his right as a mixed person to identify how he wants to, but then also just really wanting him to be like, 'I'm mixed and I'm proud!' You know? But definitely, it was a discussion quite often during this whole election period.

Similarly, Carolina and her mother, Nora, talked about the significance of Obama's racial identity for both of them. During the interview Carolina's mother responded, "I want him to talk about be being multiracial." For Carolina and her mother, they believed that Obama recognizing or acknowledging his biracial identity would give voice to the experiences of multiracial people in a very public way, which might make negotiation of a biracial identity socially less difficult. The public acknowledgment, that Black-White biracials are not just Black would be significant culturally for biracial individuals because it would emphasize and support the unique racial experiences of biracial people and negate the assumptions of others that Black-White biracials only identify as Black.

For some biracial individuals and their families, Obama, as a prominent cultural figure, was helping to make mixed race people more visible, which in turn might result in better

acceptance of multiracial individuals. For example, Lillian, Kiana's mother, talked about the importance of Obama's presence for bringing more awareness about multiracial individuals, not just for her children, but also into American society:

> I think Barack Obama running for president, whether he won or not, really made a lot more people accepting interracial people. I really do. More awareness.…even though, you know everybody's kind of debated his race what it is or isn't, what he is or isn't doesn't really matter, the fact that it [his biracial identity] was actually talked about was kind of a healing for our society.

Maggie, mother of a biracial son and daughter Felicity, also expressed the significance of the election of Obama for her children, finally a person to represent options and a strong biracial example for her children:

> I will say that with the election of Barack Obama, that was very poignant for William [my husband] and I in particular, and our son watched the election returns with us. And I mean we cried, it was purely a sense of finally our nation has gotten to this point, finally, you know, we've reached this very momentous point in history. And just like that man in New York said— William told Matt [my son] that, 'This truly means you can be anything in this world.' And that, for me, that was really very heart wrenching, because I thought, you know, I often forget that my kids do, the world does put limitations on people. I don't have barriers to me [as a White woman] the same way that my [biracial] kids face barriers and so that was for me a real awesome moment, that we elected an African American president. And that's why when Matt said, 'You know he's biracial,' well yes he is…

Jo, age 40, who talked about the significance of having a biracial president, shared her thoughts after the interview about the frustrations she still experiences with the lack of acknowledgement of biracial people:

Since the interview and the subsequent election of Barack Obama as President of the United States, I have been thinking a lot about my biracial identity, as well as the President's identity, and the need for our country to acknowledge biracial people and stop categorizing us as Black. I have had some subsequent discussions with both distant family members as well as acquaintances who were Black, who strongly disagree with my assertion that Barack Obama is biracial, and should be acknowledged this way. I am more frustrated than ever by the fact that it is the year 2009, and we have a biracial President, but our society simply won't acknowledge it. It makes me angry, and makes me wonder if my ethnic [racial] identity will ever be fully acknowledged by this society in my lifetime.

Although the election of Barack Obama was the main historical event discussed by the families, some participants also talked about the impact of other racially significant events in the media on their experiences as individuals and as a family during the biracial identity development process. In particular, a few families highlighted the OJ Simpson trials and how the family talked about race and racial discrimination. A few families also talked about the significance of anti-miscegenation laws being struck down only 42 years ago. For some parents, this was just prior to their own interracial marriage and for some biracial adults, not too long before they were born. The reality that merely 40 years ago interracial marriage was illegal and that racial minorities continue to face discrimination in their daily lives compelled these families to talk about these topics as they pertained to theirs and their children's experiences in the world.

These dialogues that occurred were a form of racial socialization and discussing such events as they came up helped support biracial individuals in the challenges they might face as a racial minority within society.

<div align="center">The Experience of Growing up with a Unique Racial Heritage</div>

The theme, The Experience of Growing up with a Unique Racial Heritage, addresses the biracial adults' perceptions of themselves as biracial individuals, as being part of a biracial family, and how they continue to negotiate their biracial identities. This theme does not stand on its own. It intersects with all other themes and sub-themes discussed prior to this section. That is, biracial individuals did not come to their understanding of themselves as biracial beings on their own; they did it through interaction with their family members (i.e., parents, stepparents, siblings, grandparents, and great-grandparents), friends, and communities. Similarly, biracial individuals did not tell the stories of their biracial identity development without sharing the significance of the supportive and open environments their parents created for them to be themselves and to explore who they wanted to be not only racially, but also as human beings. The first sub-theme within this theme is *How I Describe My Racial Identity.* This sub-theme exemplifies the myriad of words and descriptions biracial individuals used to talk about their biracial identity. The practice of naming their racial identity demonstrates personal acceptance of their dual racial heritages and also asserts their personal preferences to the outside world. *The Color of My Skin Matters,* the second sub-theme, addresses the impact of skin color on the adult children's biracial experience and sense of themselves. *"The Biggest Issue I've had is Hair"* is the third sub-theme. This sub-theme explores the challenges biracial daughters shared with their mothers in learning to work with and accept biracial hair. The fourth sub-theme, *Stuck in the Middle and "The Best of Both Worlds,"* addresses how, in spite of having a strong biracial

identity, the biracial adults in the study still experienced challenges in terms of living as a biracial individual as a part of two worlds and also feeling caught somewhere in between. Finally, *Resiliency: My Racial Identity Makes me a Stronger Person,* explores how growing up biracial has made the biracial individuals in the study stronger and more open-minded people. The thoughts and conclusions from the perspectives of the biracial adults, which will be explained in more depth within each sub-theme, about being biracial, are reflective of the significance of the racial socialization practices of their parents and interactions with other family members as well as their interaction with their historical, social, and political contexts.

How I Describe my Racial Identity: Mixed, Biracial, Halfrican…

The biracial adult children shared the terms they used to describe themselves and their racial identity. All of the participants strongly identify as mixed. This section is particularly notable in regard to asserting a biracial identity because it demonstrates how a myriad of terms and descriptions come together to represent the same phenomenon of what is understood as mixed or biracial for these participants. In addition, the biracial adults also talked about circumstances when they might select one race over the other, typically only when filling out forms where there is one choice. What influenced the biracial individual's choice to follow the one-drop rule was usually a message from their parents or their own personal belief in the importance of acknowledging their Black heritage, when declaring themselves as biracial was not an option. In some circumstances, some of the individuals and their parents believed that acknowledging their Black heritage would give them more opportunities, such as access to minority scholarships, than if they chose only White.

The following quotations are presented to emphasize the great variety of ways to represent and claim a biracial identity. Additionally, these direct quotations are a way of affirming the chosen racial identities of the participants in this study.

Well, if I have the questionnaire and in the past obviously I had SATs and on all the college applications, and if I only have one option, I put African American. And it's not because I relate more to my African American side, but it's just like I mean, learning more about history and how if you were even slightly darker than just a White person, then you were considered Black. [If I didn't have to choose] I'll always select White and Black or I'll put the other box and I'll write mixed. So to people mixed just automatically means Black and White among everybody I know. 'Oh you're mixed, right?' (Ella)

I mean, since you know, from the get go I was always raised you know 'You are mixed. But in this society you are considered Black.' You know, it's a whole lot of learning and when you have to test or whatever, you need to fill in what you are, I always put African American. But now after completing high school and coming to the realization, it's more to me just being to society considered Black, so now I am proud that I fill in other. …I feel like I'm supporting both sides. (Bree)

I always told people, "I'm mixed." And that was the term we most used. I've always been mixed. You're right, I'm not Black enough, I'm half White. You know… (Jo)

I'm Black-Irish…I'm a *halfrican…*(Felicity)

No I say I'm mixed; I'm not Black, because I'm not. My mother's White. (Alan)

I'm mixed. For me it means I get to be me. I've been pretty fortunate in my identity development just because I have been allowed to identify as mixed and not have to justify my existence. (Kiana)

I define my self as myself and if I was to have to explain my race, I'm mixed. Bottom line I'm mixed, I am Black and White, I'm my mother and my father, and what you see is what you get, pretty much. (Tina)

I'm kind of, I'm like multicultural…I mean I identify with being mixed. And if there's a form and usually there isn't mixed and I put Black so that people will see. (Mary)

Half Black half White. That's what I usually say but— Or Oreo. Oreo is usually what it is I say, with our own friends. Or I say my dad's Black. 50/50 bar. Halfrican. Whatever. (Brian and Glen)

I identify myself as both White and Black because I am. I'm mixed. (Carolina)

The Color of My Skin Matters

Half of the biracial adults talked about the color of their skin and the impact of their skin color on their sense of their racial identity, both internally and externally. Personally, all of the individuals identified as biracial or mixed race, but in social situations, others did not recognize or acknowledge the participants' biracial identity because of the light color of the biracial individual's skin. Because of the lack of acknowledgment, some biracial individuals were assumed by others around them to be White. Some of the biracial adults also talked about their skin color in comparison to their biracial siblings and how they have been mistook for not being related to their siblings because of their varying skin tones. For some biracial adults, skin color

did not have a major impact on how they viewed themselves racially, but for a few, the color of their skin almost removed their feelings of credibility regarding representing a racial minority and posed a challenge to their identity because their perception of themselves as racial beings was called into question by others.

An example of the impact of varying skin tones among siblings was related by Jo, who has an older biracial sister and a twin brother. She talked about the differences in experiences racially between her and her twin brother while growing up such as people assuming her brother was White while they thought she was Black. Jo explained the difference in treatment related to the fact that she has darker skin while her twin brother has lighter skin, which at times while navigating her identity, made it difficult for Jo to assert her biracialness with others. Jo's mother, Dianne, shared a story about Jo and her twin brother:

> I remember Jo coming home when she and Emily [her older sister], probably in about the first grade, and Joshua [Jo's twin brother], I don't know if you can tell by that picture, but when they were born, he was very, very light skinned, he looked White. So one day Jo came home from school and …she said, 'The kids at school think I'm Black and that Joshua's White and none of them believe we're twins.'

To which Jo responded, "Yeah, I always had the more Black hair, my brother had hair more like yours [relating to the interviewer]." For Jo, she felt particularly defensive that her brother was not always recognized as being biracial, especially because her racial identity was so important to her and he was her twin brother.

Similarly, Carolina also talked about the difference between her appearance and her younger brother's and how it has been frustrating for her as biracial person not always being recognized or acknowledged as biracial by others socially:

Also having Whiter skin [than my brother], people don't know with me what I am or whatever… so it's not something where I feel like people are automatically looking at me and [saying] 'Oh there's a Black person or, there's a Mexican person or whatever.' Like they don't have the same judgmental-ness [as they would if I were darker] I guess, and so I don't feel the same pressure [as my brother] thinking about it as much everyday. I feel blessed in a way that I don't have that pre-judgment, but on the other hand it's been frustrating sometimes because I feel like when there is an issue or conflict, because of race or whatever, people don't take me as seriously because I don't have dark skin. And I'm like, I care, just because I don't have dark skin doesn't mean my dad doesn't, my brother doesn't, and my sisters don't and so… that's been an issue.

Despite her frustration, Carolina acknowledged that being lighter protected her in many ways from the automatic assumptions and discriminatory beliefs people have that are based on a person's skin color.

Sometimes for biracial individuals, having monoracial parents made it difficult to relate to parents based on similarities in physical appearances because there were few between them. For Ella, in particular, her skin color, eye color, and hair texture set her apart from her White mother and her Black father in terms of physical appearances. While growing up, she struggled with identifying racially with anyone, even her own half siblings who were also biracial but darker than her. In some ways, Ella described how she still struggles with where she fits racially at times. Ella also talked about the significance as she negotiated her sense of herself as a biracial being, of her own physical features, "I got the lighter skin tone, but like I said over and over, the hair, and everything, the eyes I got lighter, so I don't know, I think that's a big thing."

"The Biggest Issue I've Had is Hair"

Many of the biracial women in the study identified their hair as having a significant impact on their process of biracial identity development. That is, for some biracial women, the process of learning how to work with their hair was a challenge not only for them but also for their mothers. This could be an issue because their hair was unlike their mother's "White hair" and also unlike their father's "Black hair." The biracial women who cited hair as having an impact on their identity development did so because it was sometimes isolating and made them feel especially different from their family or peers. In addition to the isolation and sometimes unfiltered responses from others regarding their unique hair, figuring their hair out was an ongoing learning process that could be difficult at times to navigate for some of the women. The stories and descriptions shared by the biracial women about their hair evolved and changed positively over time as they learned to work with and appreciate it.

Kiana summed up the experiences of many of the mixed women in the study when she said, "I think my hair has been the hardest part of being mixed, because you know, if your hair doesn't look good people are [judgmental]." Kiana explained that, in her experience, Black women have emphasized the importance of presentation when it comes to Black women and their hair. When a biracial child has hair that is more similar to most Black women's hair, Black women have been known to comment on keeping the child's hair "kept." Kiana even admitted to having her own judgmental reactions when she observes other biracial children with hair that appears 'unkempt' or 'nappy.' The effect for Kiana of her hair on her sense of herself as a biracial person while growing up was that she felt different from her White peers and scrutinized by Black peers. The uniqueness of her hair and how her mother kept her hair was isolating for

Kiana as a biracial individual. Kiana talked about how her father's rule of only coconut oil in her and her sibling's hair continues to contribute to her struggle to maintain her hair today.

Similarly, Ella first mentioned hair in the interviews when she was reflecting on her desire as a child to have hair like other girls at her predominantly White elementary school. She recalled telling her mother, "I want my hair to do what their hair does. I remember now, not even as a joke, really focusing on the hair." For Ella, as a child, having hair like other girls at school would have allowed her to relate to the other girls based on commonalties in their physical appearance. In terms of her identity, having hair that was different from the other girls increased her feelings of isolation as a biracial individual. Carolina shared a similar feeling as a child:

> …my hair has always been the main thing for me as comparing to others. Just like the whole thing with your hair blowing in the wind, and stuff like when I was a little kid I had always wanted to be able to like have my hair blow out the car window. But like my hair was always braided up…

Carolina related the sentiment that her hair was something that made her feel different than her peers:

> So in a way… my hair has always kind of bothered me I guess. Because it's been the only thing that really made me feel different than like my other girlfriends. And like them being able to do their hair even just like sharing hair stuff. I'm like oh you probably don't me want to use your brush, because I'm just going to get it all greasy if you brush my hair with your hairbrush… you don't want your hair greasy. It's the complete opposite, so for me I guess that would be thing.

A few of the biracial women in the study acknowledged another side to their "mixed" hair. They talked about how their hair was considered "good hair" by peers and strangers

because it was mixed hair. At times, this was a positive attribute and at other times it caused

feelings of difference, both of which had an impact on their comfort with being biracial and

sense of fitting in with monoracial peers. Bree hinted at being picked on by darker skinned girls

when she was younger for having longer hair. Carolina described it this way:

> But then there's always that thing that I always feel like is weird where they say, 'Oh you
>
> have mixed hair,' it's like, 'Oh you have good hair.' And that always I think is kind of
>
> weird. I don't really like that.

As the interview went on, Ella talked more in depth about the impact of her hair throughout her

life:

> I know it sounds silly but the biggest issue I've had is hair. Um, kind of a funny
>
> example... Swimming, because when I was little I wore my hair curly, I could swim
>
> whenever I wanted. And then I started getting it straightened, and my friends would say:
>
> 'Why don't you come swimming?' That's $40! You can't just wash that away for some
>
> time in the pool, you know. Or, it took me a while to figure out I had to get shower caps,
>
> and I had to do certain things to it at night… I didn't wash my hair, which my mom found
>
> disgusting.

Ella, who mentioned times in her childhood when she struggled with her biracial identity

development, cited not seeing herself in her mom physically as an issue at times. When Ella

could not see the resemblance of herself in her mother, being biracial could be a lonely

experience. On the topic of hair, she and her mother also could not relate.

For mothers in the study, a part of the bidirectional socialization process was learning

how to care for their daughter's hair. Some of the mothers related stories about the challenges of

working with and understanding their daughter's hair. At times, this could contribute to the

inability for mothers to prepare their daughters for social responses they may face related to their appearances. Another contention related to how mothers and daughters had differing opinions for how to do hair. Some mothers preferred keeping their daughter's hair natural and curly, while some daughters wanted it to be permed or straightened. Carolina said this about her and her mother's differing preference, "My mom would get mad at me when I want to like straighten and stuff, she'd say, 'I had mixed kids so their hair would be curly.'"

Jo, also talked about how her mother struggled to care for her hair and how Black kids at school would make comments saying, "'How come you didn't comb your hair this morning?' because we had Black hair and my mom did not know how to deal with our hair, so that was huge problem!" Dianne, Jo's mother, said this about her endeavor with her both of daughters' hair:

> A big challenge for me was the hair of my daughters. Their hair was like their dad's, and I had great difficulty with it. I had Jo's in an Afro when she was young but she said some kids thought she was a boy! Joshua's [Jo's twin brother] hair was more like mine, and the girls envied his hair. Later, when their dad remarried, his Black wife knew how to handle the girls' hair and did a nice job with it. Later yet, I found a Black beauty parlor where I could take the girls and get their hair straightened or pressed. The down side was that the women who worked there looked at me like I was from outer space when I took the girls there!

Annie talked about her struggles with both her daughter's hair and her stepdaughter's hair and how her husband's family would react:

> The hair is a good one, hair is a really good one. Of course that was an issue. Because even before we got married his [my husband's] daughter was like 6, so I had to deal with her hair, and they still make fun of the way I did her hair. But it was different than Tina's

hair, you know, it's definitely a different texture and that was a big learning thing. Yeah, so the hair was always an issue, and you know I learned how to do it, but it's definitely different, and within my family that was always intriguing to my relatives who had never been around Black people, was her [Tina's] hair.

Lillian also talked about the stigma attached to her daughter Kiana's hair not being "kept." She specifically felt that Black women would make comments, "And there's[sic] still tough dealing with sisters, because they are, oh if the hair isn't done right, they're very critical, but I'm like hey, my husband doesn't want me to do anything unnatural to their hair."

Stuck in the Middle and the "Best of Both Worlds"

All of the biracial adults expressed a positive biracial identity that included feeling proud to have a unique racial identity, being able to relate to both the Black side and the White side, and being exposed to different cultures while growing up. Many described being biracial as the best of both worlds because they belong to and felt they could understand two different racial groups. However, many *also* talked about being biracial as a challenge because they do not fit into any one racial category or group. The central thrust of this theme is that, for the biracial adults in this study, being biracial meant feeling truly stuck in between worlds and experiencing the best of both worlds.

Many of the biracial individuals talked about the benefit they feel personally because of belonging to two distinct heritages. In a society where monoracial cultures are valued, this group of individuals also felt that their biracial identity enabled them understand perspectives from both of their monoracial heritages. For example, Bree said, "The best of both worlds. I was raised to appreciate both." Brian said, "I come from two different kind of legacies and that's kind of put together to make a new one… kind of the best of both worlds you'd say. Something

completely different." Brian's brother Glen said, in response, "It just made us who we are." For these individuals, being biracial is something special to them because they are a combination of two different cultures, which makes their racial identity something completely different. Mary also emphasized that her biracial identity made her distinct from monoracial people when she said, "I think it makes me a richer person because I have dual cultures and backgrounds and so I feel more diverse." She went on later in the interview in more depth about what she perceives as the benefit of being a biracial person:

> I think the benefits are that it helps you in that you're not coming from one walk of life, you're coming from two so, therefore, it doubles your cultures, you're this, you're that, whatever the case may be, and I think it makes you understand, maybe even weigh out, different things as opposed to just coming from one framework… You get two perspectives. It opens the world up.

Similarly, Felicity talked about feeling privileged in developing her identity to have exposure to what she perceives as two different worlds:

> I think to me, what it means to my family, I think it's a privilege, and it's cool to have you know, different things from different parts of the world, different parts of people's backgrounds… because I get the best of both worlds. Like you know, I get a little bit of everything…

Tina indicated that as a biracial individual, she felt she could understand or get perspectives from both the Black side and the White side of culture:

> Yeah, best of both worlds because I can understand both sides, I get the struggle on both sides…I guess that's the best of both worlds and I get two times the fun. I get two sides

of the family, different cultures, I get greens and I get ham. I get different, I have different cultures, so it's fun to be a part of that.

Some of the biracial individuals talked about a duality in their feelings on being biracial. More specifically, the biracial participants also talked about being in between two worlds and not always feeling understood by their monoracial parents and peers. For example, Kiana said: "My mom's White my dad's Black and I'm me, kind of thing. I can relate to both of them on different levels and I know that neither of them really know my perspective of the world because they are coming from two totally different—their worlds are different than mine." She went on to say:

It means the best of both worlds and worst of both worlds at the same time and having to navigate through that and picking your battles… Well, typically you get the good hair and stuff like that and people… at least with my friends, most of the mixed people I know are usually, strikingly more attractive than your average solid person. I mean not to toot my horn … but then again you kind of are that exotic, unfamiliar, not sure if people want to talk to you, kind of thing at the same time. You get to embrace all of the ethnic things of both sides and no one questions it, whereas if I was you know, solid Black going to Powwows, people are usually like why is she here? You know? So instead of being considered a cultural vulture, I'm just more accepted in both worlds.

Carolina shared a similar sentiment:

I don't know, I guess I feel pretty lucky, actually. I liked having parents of different races. I just think it's helped me to be a strong person, and to know who I am and what I perceive as right and wrong and also just having a different worldview of seeing both sides. I've been really blessed, I feel like, to have people that help me in life, I think a lot... I said before, I like it, I feel kinda cool. I like being both, I can kind of be on both

sides, or kinda anywhere. On one hand it's kind of a negative feeling not to feel like you

have any set place that you belong, but at the same time I view it as a positive, because I

can make my own decisions and I can be like, 'oh I understand what these people are

saying and be on their side,' or I can be on the other side or I can be on no side. So I'm

not just grouped into one are based on that, so I like having the opportunity to do

whatever.

For a few of the women who talked about struggles with their dual heritages their most

prevalent clashes centered on skin color and the debate for some of these women about their

right to speak up for their Black side. Ella shared the feeling that she doesn't have enough of

either Black or White to talk about an issue pertaining to one or the other:

[In] My humanities class we are talking race, and it's so upsetting to me to listen to our

[White] teacher talk about race, you know. I'm mixed in that class, and then there's one

Black girl in that class, and then there's one girl that's Asian and Black, everybody else is

White. And so it's really upsetting listening to our White teacher talk about how she

understands the difference or she sees how White people have been holding us back, and

I never feel comfortable saying, "You're being ridiculous." Because I feel like people are

looking and going you're not even, 'you're not even Black enough to be insulted by that'.

[So] I'm looking, waiting for one of the darker ones to say, "That's insulting." I mean

that's the biggest issue that I come up against, cause people talk about race and you're

not really qualified to speak about either race.

Carolina shared a similar feeling:

Not being taken seriously. If you're multiple races like maybe you don't look like one of

the races, so then people don't take you seriously if you get offended [by racist or

discriminatory remarks], or if you're trying to educate them about it. They're kind of like, what? Or I guess kind of not really having a place in way. I guess since you're not White and you're not Black, you're not like a specific thing, you're kind of just out there in the middle kind of floating around.

In addition to the external struggle, for some women, there was also an element of a personal, internal tug of war between their Black side and their White side. The struggle could involve feeling defensive for both sides of racial issues, like being able to understand the Black side and the White side of an argument and feeling caught in between. Tina talked about her internal conflict when dealing with the discriminatory behavior of others:

Some things I get offended by, too, even if they're not directed towards me, or just not even that serious, and I get, because I feel like I get both sides [Black and White], I understand, it's kind of like an argument where I get both sides. I understand because I'm stuck in the middle, but sometimes it just like, it offends me, but then it's like I'm fighting myself because I get why they said it or they understand—like she [my mom] said, the ignorance—but it still offends me.

Carolina shared her form of grappling with not always relating to both sides:

I guess as a whole I might say I identify more with my White side just since I grew up in that area. But I don't really think about it unless it's like thrown into my world. So like, if I'm around maybe some of my White friends and they say stuff that maybe isn't racist but it's more like ignorance, or different stuff then I might feel more connected to my Black side. Or if maybe I'm with my Black family and they're doing stuff that maybe I really don't understand than I might feel more connected to my White side. So, in

general I don't [identify more with one race than the other], but when it's coming into

play with something else I then think about it more.

Resiliency: My Racial Identity Makes Me a Stronger Person

Several of the biracial adults in the interviews talked about the ways in which they felt

being biracial contributed to their strength and open mindedness as an individual person. This

sub-theme specifically comes from the sense of resiliency these participants have gained from

their experiences of growing up and identifying as a biracial person. The feelings expressed in

demonstrated that growing up biracial results in a number of unique aspects contributing to a

strong sense of self. For example, Mary talked about her connection to her African father and

how "having that identity has always made me a little bit stronger." Bree stated, "I am what I

am…I'm comfortable with myself whether you're comfortable with me or not." Carolina said

that her biracial identity and connection to her grandparents and parents has "helped me be a

strong person." Carolina went on to say:

I think for me it's just helped me to be me, like I said, like more aware of who I am. I feel

pretty self confident in who I am and the things that I choose, and just accepting others

for their differences, too. Like, even if I think a certain way, I don't expect others to agree

with me.

For some biracial individuals, growing up biracial meant a stronger sense of self and for

others yet, growing up biracial led them to become activists in their community and to improve

the world for multiracial people. For example, Kiana said:

I definitely think it's made me somewhat of an activist, I mean I was president of the

Black student union and… when I was in high school I started a multicultural club, we

marched and we like gave fundraisers to feed the homeless, and had I just been the

average kid that wasn't striving to make the world different, I don't know that I would've

done those things. I mean I got an award when I went to community college for my

student activism and I wasn't doing anything out of the—for me—I was just doing what I

felt like needed to be done to make my world better.

Similarly, Felicity talked about how her experiences as a biracial individual gave her the

mentality that allows her to relate to many others:

I think I'm a Chameleon in a lot of the way because I can identify with African American

people, I can identify with Caucasian people, I can identify with everybody because

everybody's got a little bit of something in them. Whether it's their race, whether it's

their sexual orientation, whether it's their background, you know, everybody can identify

with somebody… I don't think I've ever had that be a problem or it be so blatantly

obvious to me.

Mary summed up the feelings of many participants in terms of the positive aspects of growing up

biracial and how her sense of her self has evolved and changed over time as she has gotten older

when she said:

Well, as I've matured, I've appreciated more being mixed than when I was younger. I

mean it was harder when I was younger. I mean now I feel like there's more benefits and

you know, I'm more proud of who I am and able to do, to say it freely. Not feel like the

minority but feel like the person that kind of stands out…

Summary of Findings

Although all of the biracial families in the study shared a common story in their

experiences as an interracial family in American culture, each of their stories had unique aspects.

Relationships within each family varied and changed over time. In some families, this meant that

mothers did not stay with the biracial child's biological father; therefore, nuclear family dynamics changed and shifted from dual parenting to single parenting. Some mothers in the study remarried, bringing new relationships for the mothers and their biracial children that included stepparents, step children/siblings, and half siblings. Relationships with grandparents and great-grandparents also changed over time, with some relationships evolving from non-supportive to supportive while others remained marked by rejection and cut-off. The relationships between parents, parents and children, siblings, half siblings and step siblings, and extended family members had various levels of influence on the mothers and their children throughout the biracial identity development process. Examples of influence include parents communicating with each other and other family members in order to send positive family messages to their children about race and racial identity, parents creating a safe space for their children to discuss and process their experiences while growing up biracial, siblings supporting each other and sharing the biracial identity development process together, and extended family members stepping in to support mothers and their biracial children through the celebrations as well as the trials of being an interracial family.

Most families in the study shared the perspective that families co-create meanings about race and racial identity. Mothers in the study talked about the significance of acknowledging that raising biracial children is a unique responsibility requiring thoughtfulness about teaching both sides of their child's racial heritage, even if they as parents were no longer interracially married. In addition, mothers took responsibility for preparing their children to deal with racial issues in society, including how their children would express their racial identity. In general, the families, mother and children alike, expressed a strong sense of pride in belonging to this unique sub-group of the population.

Negotiating their biracial identity socially proved to be a challenging and rewarding experience for both monoracial parents and their biracial adult children. Friends and/or multiracial support groups played a significant role in the lives of all participants in the study as a place outside of the family to share experiences and connect socially. Location of the family, including community and school, played an important role for the parents and the children when negotiating biracial identity because of the social opportunities to be exposed to diverse others as well as to share their interracial family and their biracial identity with others outside of the family. Many families came together to mediate the reactions, both positive and negative, of others. The historical context of American culture was also central in the lives of these families because of the recentness of the anti-miscegenation laws being struck down. Additionally, the running and subsequent election of the first biracial president of the United States, Barack Obama, gave these families hope for more public recognition and representation of multiracial people in America.

The biracial individuals in the study appeared to have a strong sense of themselves and their biracial identity. The participants shared the terms they use to describe themselves which ranged from Black and White, to biracial, to mixed. For many of the women in the study, their identity was also affected by their hair because of the way it made them stand apart from others, including their own mothers and many of their peers. While there were several challenges growing up biracial, such as facing discrimination and a culture that does not acknowledge biracial identity in a formal way as of yet, in the end, most biracial individuals expressed a sense of pride and resiliency in their racial heritage.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of developing a Black-White biracial identity from the perspective of both monoracial parent(s) and their biracial adult children. I also examined the interactive process of exploring and developing shared, familial meanings about race between monoracial parents and their biracial children. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 monoracial mothers and 11 of their biracial adult children. The data gathered during the interviews were analyzed using a symbolic interactional conceptual framework and phenomenological methodology. The conceptual framework and methodology facilitated my ability to hear and understand these families as related to the mother's and child's interactions that took place while navigating the child's biracial identity development.

The findings from this study provide insight into the unique experiences of Black-White multiracial families and offer much needed information about the multiple factors contributing to the racial identity development of Black-White biracial persons. In addition, the information related to many of the distinctive and personal struggles of these multiracial families may assist counselors and therapists who work and interact with multiracial families in clinical settings, as well as teachers and administrators who work with interracial families in schools and other community settings. Finally, the findings of this study also have important implications for public policy and society.

Reflexivity and Personal Reflection

Reflexivity is an opportunity to account for the researcher's personal assumptions, viewpoints, and biases (Allen, 2000). Throughout this research process, I prioritized remaining aware that my personal experiences would interact with and influence the process of gathering and analyzing data. In order to maintain awareness of the impact of the self of the researcher and keep the purpose of the study and the participants' perspectives at the forefront, I include the following personal reflections about the research process and this study.

As a biracial woman raised in an interracial family, studying the experiences of Black-White biracial families was extraordinarily important to me. Not only was this research deeply inspiring on a personal level, but I also found myself challenged and invigorated professionally. The sense of inspiration derived from meeting the 11 biracial individuals and their mothers who I connected to on so many levels, who stood strong and proud to be a part of unique a family constellation, and who invited me into their lives. The primary challenge I faced was related to my seven month struggle to recruit the families to participate in the study. However, once I completed the interviews, I found myself invigorated with every transcription. As I read through each transcript, I was excited to discover the common experiences shared by each family and was compelled to find a way to properly and rightfully represent their stories.

As the primary investigator for this study, I have been through many emotions as I proposed this study, conducted the interviews, and analyzed and prepared the findings. It was with much energy and excitement that I began the literature review for this study at the beginning of my doctoral program five years ago. I will long remember how these families opened not only their doors to me, but also how they shared the personal intricacies of their family life.

Each of the families gave me something to reflect on personally. After my first interview, I realized that, in my life, I had not ever really connected with another biracial female about being biracial. Even though my first interview was with a biracial female, ten years younger, I was overwhelmed by the sense of connection I had with her and how much I related to her experiences growing up. It was apparent she also related to me when she would share a story and say things like, "skin like ours," or "she had hair like yours," referring to me. Growing up as a biracial female without other biracial friends, I felt acknowledged and validated. In addition to my ability to relate to the biracial participants, I also found myself connected to several of the mothers as they shared their stories of being a part of an interracial family and raising biracial children. Because my mother and I have had very open conversations about her experiences raising my brothers and me, I could also see her story being represented by these women.

One of the most personally rewarding experiences related to conducting this study was discovering the reassurance that many participants felt when they learned that I too, was biracial. For a few of the participants, my biracial identity gave them a sense of comfort and trust. One biracial female, in particular, stated, "I was really glad to hear that you're biracial and that you're doing this study." For her, knowing that I was biracial made a difference in her desire to participate in my study. With this female, I felt an overwhelming sense of connection as we talked on the phone while scheduling our interview. We chatted for over 20 minutes about various topics related to multiracial people in America. I actually cut off our conversation, as I was not sure how to balance my role as a researcher and my personal feelings of excitement in talking with someone who seemed to really understand my own experiences of being a biracial woman. Later, while interviewing this woman and her mother, hearing both of their perspectives and stories I was filled with many emotions. So much of what they shared sounded like the

stories I had heard about my mother's experiences with my dad, when they were dating in the 1960s, and my own experiences of being taunted for acting "too white" by the Black girls I encountered in junior high school. After the interview and follow-up contacts with this woman, she told me she would like stay in touch if it was appropriate.

My last interview for this study was conducted in my own home with a mother and her daughter. When I answered the door, I saw a younger version of myself staring back at me: a light skinned, light brown haired female. I questioned in my mind if the family I was seeing before me was, in fact, interracial. This was profound, as the questions I had in my mind about this young woman and her mother were the same ones I had faced with my mother my entire life: "Is she mixed?" This interview was the longest of all the interviews and felt more like an interactive conversation rather than an interview. In fact, I had to cut the interview off at just over 2 hours because of another engagement. I have no doubt we may have continued the interview and sharing stories for hours longer.

As a researcher who developed bonds with the families I was studying, I wanted to make sure I was conscious, inclusive, and subjectively aware as I analyzed and represented the data. To maintain some degree of objectivity, I journaled my thoughts and feelings as they arose throughout the research process. I also discussed many of my research experiences and personal reactions to the families I was interviewing with trusted colleagues and peers. These conversations allowed me to remain aware of the interaction of my personal feelings and the data throughout the entire research process. As a phenomenological researcher who considers herself an instrument of the research process, I also viewed my participants as co-researchers. Therefore, I went back to my participants via member checks to be sure their stories were represented

thoroughly and accurately. Ultimately, the personal connection I felt to my participants motivated me to ensure their stories came through clearly in the findings.

In many ways, this study provided me with an opportunity to understand my own experiences growing up biracial. It enabled me to recognize that my interracial family and I do have shared experiences with other interracial families. And while every family who participated in my study had their own unique experiences, there was interconnectedness between all of the families, including a connection to my own interracial family's experience. Hearing from others like me and hearing their stories enriched my life as a biracial individual and allowed me to identify parts of my family's story within the stories of other interracial families. I no longer felt alone in my experiences growing up biracial; I actually felt understood.

At the start of this study so many years ago, I felt that is was important to find a way to reach biracial families and illuminate their stories and experiences to other biracial families as well as to mental health professionals. After completing this study, I believe even more in the significance of the unique experiences of biracial people and the importance of their stories becoming a part of the American consciousness. It is no longer just a personal endeavor for me to learn more about myself and teach others about what it means to be biracial; it is about achieving social recognition and acceptance as a unique population in America.

Discussion of the Findings

This phenomenological study of the interactional process of developing a biracial identity in Black-White interracial families garnered a meaningful glimpse of the lived experiences of a small sub-sample of the larger multiracial population. The overarching theme resulting from the interviews was that of self-described "ordinary" families coming together to support a biracial identity and an efficacious biracial experience. The description of feeling like a normal family

with the added complexity of being interracial is similar to what Byrd and Garwick (2006) found

in their study examining the family racial identity for Black-White interracial families.

Specifically, mothers in this study truly considered themselves as ordinary people coming

together with their family members to facilitate a safe and healthy developmental experience for

their biracial children. Given the diversity of participants' family constellations and the

challenges associated with separation and divorce, single parenting, and loss of direct paternal

contact for some biracial adults, the sense of cohesiveness and resiliency in these families was

remarkable. For the mothers in this study, they perceived their own families as special because

they were thriving as interracial families and their children had strong biracial identities. Raising

their children with a sense of normalcy and security was of utmost priority for the mothers in this

study. While they all saw themselves as ordinary, there was still something special about the

families in this study and their resiliency to instill and support a biracial identity in the face of

adversity and scrutiny from a culture that has not entirely embraced such a concept.

In this study I sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do monoracial

parents describe the influence they had on the racial and ethnic identity development of their

biracial children? (2) How do biracial children describe the influence their monoracial parents

had on their racial and ethnic identity development? (3) How do monoracial parents and their

biracial children describe racial and/or ethnic identity as it has developed and changed from (the

child's) youth into young adulthood? and (4) How do monoracial parents and their biracial

children negotiate the uniqueness of a biracial identity in both the parents' and the children's

social arenas (e.g. school, work, friendships, and romantic relationships)? Four major themes and

eighteen sub-themes emerged from the process of data analysis addressing matters pertaining to

each of the research questions stated above. These themes included (a) Multigenerational Family

Relationships, (b) Familial Perceptions of the Biracial Identity Development Process, (c) The

Interactive Experience of Our Racial Identity with the "Outside" World, and (d) The Experience

of Growing Up with a Unique Racial Heritage. Themes and sub-themes will be discussed within

the context of the first four research questions.

Mothers' Perceptions of Their Influence on Biracial Identity Development

Mothers reported assurance about their influence on the biracial identity development of

their children. In several circumstances, mothers described the ways in which they (and at times

their husbands or partners) interacted with their children as they were growing up and

establishing their identities as individuals and racial beings. From a symbolic interactionist

perspective, individuals make meaning and create identities in interaction with other people, and

parent-child relationships represent some of the first relationships in which people begin the

process of creating their identities (Dilworth-Anderson et al., 2005). As suggested by the theory,

mothers in these interracial families clearly attached meaning and significance to their

commitment and endeavor raising biracial children. According to the mothers in this study, being

biracial meant being apart of a cultural shift in understanding and attitudes regarding race and

racial identity The unique meanings mothers attached to race and racial identity had a significant

impact on the biracial identity development process for these mothers and their children because

it enhanced both the experiences of the mothers and their children personally and socially.

Because families are usually the first place children learn the meanings of race, racial

labels, and what it means to be a racial being (Roth 2005), it makes sense that mothers would

describe what they believed to be the impact of their family constellations, their dating choices,

the nature of their relationships with their children, and the relationships with their parents (i.e.,

their children's grandparents) on the biracial identity development process of their children.

Additionally, within mother's descriptions of the influence of these factors, the interactive aspects of their relationships with their children were also revealed, which highlights how meaning is shaped through interaction with others (Blumer, 1969; Dilworth-Anderson et al., 2005; Edles, 2003).

Family constellations. The influence of the family constellations on parental socialization and the biracial identity development process can proceed in a variety of ways, such as contributing to poor adjustment or low self esteem for biracial persons, as other researchers have suggested (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Singh & Iwamasa, 2006). For most of the families in this study, family constellations were used to illustrate the importance of supportiveness and closeness to each other for supporting a healthy biracial identity, specifically for mothers and their biracial children and biracial adults and their siblings. Since the interviews were conducted solely with mothers and their adult children, most of the information collected about family relationships pertained specifically to the impact and interactional prospect of the mother-child relationship versus any other parent child relationships.

In previous studies on biracial identity development or interracial couples, the impact of family members on interracial family processes and discussions about race and racial issues has been explored (Basu, 2007; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Previous studies have only focused on intact couples and families versus single parent families. In research conducted with intact interracial families, race related conversations as well as what messages to send to children about their biracial identity, were cited as sources of contention between parents (Kerwin et al., 1993; Rosenblatt et al.). Several studies also indicated that parents in interracial couples differ on whether or not to teach their children to identify as biracial or monoracial (Kerwin et al.; Rosenblatt et al.). On the contrary, in the current study,

mothers were the only parents interviewed and were also often the primary caregiver for their children. As a result, most mothers made their own decisions about socializing their children as biracial individuals. In other studies where biracial individuals were interviewed and their separated or divorced parents were discussed, the negative impact of those situations was often highlighted (e.g. Bowles, 1993; Gillem, et al., 2001; Rockquemore, 2002). Within my study, the descriptions of family constellations, such as separated or divorced parents, did highlight challenges the family sometimes faced. However, unlike previous studies, within their families, and most specifically with their mothers, children reported feeling supported for who they were racially despite their parents' relationship status.

Parental dating practices. Another significant aspect of how mothers influenced their children's biracial identity development pertains to parental dating, marriage, or remarriage. For some mothers, dating required special consideration because of possible negative responses, such as discrimination or racism, from dating or marriage partners toward their biracial children. Behaviors such as these, from other adults present in the household, could be harmful to their biracial children's sense of confidence or pride in their racial identity. This is not something single mothers of monoracial children typically need to consider when dating and, as such, contributes to the notion within these families of feeling ordinary on a daily basis but facing extraordinary circumstances and special considerations based on the racial make-up of their family. It also speaks to the interactional influences between parents and children in terms of biracial socialization; mothers considered how their dating practices would impact their children's biracial identity development and their child's comfort with identifying with both races if parental figures did not represent both Black and White.

In Rosenblatt el al.'s study (1995) on Black-White interracial couples, one White mother who had been divorced from her biracial son's Black father expressed concerns about her son having a White stepfather because he would then only have White racial figures to identify with racially. Similarly, one mother in my study specifically said she would never date White men because she had biracial children and did not think it would be fair to them to be raised by a White mother and a White father. This mother also indicated that she was worried that White people might be harboring some sort of racism without realizing it, and she wanted to protect her children from that. In some way, this finding suggests that White mothers of biracial children believe they need to protect their children from potential racism at home. An additional conclusion is that the mothers in this study recognized the value during their child's biracial identity development process of their biracial children having parental figures representing both parts of their racial heritages.

Close mother-child relationships and absent fathers. In the context of the parent-child relationship, mothers took responsibility for developing supportive and open relationships with their children to facilitate a biracial identity development process that was positive and healthy. Mothers were determined to represent both sides of their children's heritage regardless of whether the biological parents remained together. This stance was important for facilitating closeness between mothers and their children because children knew they could to share and explore all aspects of their racial identity and be supported by their mothers.

In the current study, all but one mother was a single parent at some point during their biracial child's life. At no time during the interviews or throughout the child's life, as has been revealed in other studies (Laszloffy, 2005; Rockquemore, 2002; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003), did mothers imply negativity or disregard about their children's biological fathers or their

father's race. In previous studies, researchers have found that when parents separate on bad terms, the parent raising the biracial child or children may attribute negative qualities about the absent parent to that parent's race (Laszloffy; Rockquemore & Laszloffy). Such attributions have been found to have a harmful influence on the child's biracial identity development process because the child may internalize the negative perspective about that part of his or her own racial heritage. In this study, the mothers' non-reactive stance toward the biological fathers was a key factor in the formation of a supportive relationship between mothers and their children. This stance also positively influenced the biracial identity development of the children because it invited the children to embrace all sides of their racial heritage without fear of judgment from their mothers. Children knew that if they were to choose a biracial identity or Black racial identity over a White racial identity they would be supported by their mothers.

Much of the literature reviewed for this study revealed the importance of supportive family environments and parent-child relationships while children are negotiating their racial identity; however, the previous research did not overtly examine the direct effect of maternal supportiveness on the biracial identity development process (Basu, 2007; Collins, 2000; Gillem et al., 2001; Herring, 1995; Kerwin et al., 1993; Milan & Keiley, 2000; Qian, 2004). In this study, both mothers and their children connected supportive parenting and supportive family environments to a positive biracial identity development process. For these families, being able to talk openly at home about all issues pertaining to growing up biracial facilitated a healthy developmental process. What the findings of this study also demonstrate is the purposeful effort that mothers put forth to guarantee supportiveness and security for their children at home.

In many of the families, biological fathers were not actively involved in raising their biracial children. Therefore, the endeavor of representing both the White side and the Black side

to the biracial children fell on the shoulders of the mothers. For the biracial adults, they knew

who their biological fathers were and could freely discuss issues related to their fathers with their

mothers. This influenced their identity development because the biracial adults did not have to

deny any part of themselves, but rather were able to acknowledge the parts of themselves directly

related to their fathers. Additionally, mothers supported their children by purposefully

encouraging them to explore their racial heritages and by exposing them to both sides as equally

as possible. This sub-theme adds to the understanding of biracial families, as there has been no

discussion about what supportive single parenting would look like in interracial families. The

particular type of supportive and close relationships the mothers and children described in this

study suggested a level of intimacy not often associated between parents and children in

interracial families but rather as related to couples in interracial relationships (Root, 2001;

Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

The absence of biological fathers in these families raises questions about the unsuccessful

nature of Black-White interracial couples. Regardless of the outcome of the parents' marriages or

relationships, this study does demonstrate the possibility of successful outcomes in terms of

biracial identity development, in spite of parental marital success or failure. In addition, the

findings reveal that when parents are informed about the unique aspects of raising biracial

children, single [White] parents can adequately provide the necessary support for their children

to negotiate multiple aspects of their racial heritage openly and confidently.

Grandparents and great-grandparents. Experiences with various family members

provided an opportunity for mothers and their children to share the biracial identity development

process with others outside of the nuclear family; resulting in increased support for some

families and rejection for others. Most mothers talked about the various roles and reactions of

their parents (i.e., the biracial child's grandparents) to their interracial relationships and their biracial children. The responses of grandparents and great-grandparents influenced conversations between mothers and their children about race because, as symbolic interactionism suggests, mothers brought the meaning of race and the histories of race relations from their extended family of origin into their newly created interracial families (Childs, 2005). How mothers racially socialized their children would depend on how their own parents racially socialized them while they were growing up (Rockquemore et al., 2006). The responses of these extended family members ranged from non supportive and rejecting to supportive and close, not unlike findings in other studies that similarly cite grandparents' varied reactions to their child's interracial coupling and/or having biracial children (DaCosta, 2007; Kerwin et al., 1993; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

In families where grandparents evolved from non supportive to supportive, mothers and the biracial individuals described grandparents reacting to the interracial relationship of their children out of shock that their child chose someone not White, not necessarily from a racist or discriminatory perspective. This finding is similar to the finding of DaCosta (2007) and Rosenblatt et al. (1995) in that mothers in this study struggled to identify their parents' reactions as racist but, rather, discussed it as ignorance, generational, or not knowing better. Another perspective of mothers in the current study was that their parents were from the South, and as such, believed that the region they were raised in explained their parent's perspectives and enabled mother's to better understand the origins of their parents' perspectives.

When mothers in the current study excused their own parents' behaviors, rather than acknowledging their parents as discriminatory or racist toward their grandchildren, it raises the question of the messages about race and negative meanings attached to being biracial that may

have been relayed to the children. How do the children in these families interpret their mothers' denial of their grandparents' behavior as discriminatory or racist? It is possible, though it was not discussed during the interviews, that some level of internalization of their grandparents' oppressive views occurred for these children? Internalized oppression can be described as "rationalizing the subtle racism of white (sic) people and [giving] white (sic) people the benefit of the doubt, even when it is undeserved" (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005, p. 65). Such views were evidenced by the descriptions of some of the biracial adult participants in this study as they told stories of racist or discriminatory actions by White people in their lives, particularly their grandparents. However, they rationalized the behaviors, describing them as "ignorance" or "not knowing better." In an unfortunate and more than likely unintentional way, the mothers in the study who did not address these issues with their parents may have actually sent the message to their children that some racist and discriminatory behavior is acceptable or justified. Answers to questions such as these, about the impact of not acknowledging familial racism or bias, deserves additional future investigation and exploration.

In some families, grandparents feared their biracial grandchildren would suffer from racism or discrimination because of their mixed race heritage. Again, this notion was also attributed to a generational understanding related to the old cultural message that mixed raced children will suffer on the margins as rejected or caught between two worlds (Childs, 2005a; Childs, 2006; DaCosta, 2007; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Grandparents' concerns may also be related to the symbolism inherent in the "one-drop" rule that mixed children will be considered Black by society and therefore their family heritage would be "tainted." In these families, it could be troubling for some grandparents in relation to social standing, that their own family heritage would be "tainted" or no longer belong to White society, because of their child's biracial

children (DaCosta). As suggested by Kilman and Madsen, (1999), these grandparents may relate

to the commonly understood class discourse in the United Sates, which equates "White with

middle class and Black with poor" (p. 92), and may be judging their child's involvement in

interracial relationships and having biracial children as choosing to give Blackness permanence

in their family line (via the one-drop rule) and also a lower class standing for their family. The

interesting aspect with many of the families in the present study is that although grandparents did

not agree initially with the concept of interracial marriage and race mixing, they shifted their

attitudes and behaviors with the actual birth of their grandchildren, and their feelings of disparity

melted away, which has been cited in other studies as well (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; DaCosta;

Donnell, 1998; Kerwin et al., 1993; Rosenblatt et al.). In the families where grandparents were

reported to evolve from non supportive to supportive, the shift in the attitudes of the

grandparents likely had a more positive impact on the biracial identity development of the

children.

Finally, in some interracial families, grandparents and great grandparents never accepted

their child's choice to be in an interracial relationship and, as a result, also rejected their biracial

grandchildren. In these families, the mothers and their children were essentially cut off, with no

contact, from the grandparents or great-grandparents. In the few families who experienced a

distinct cut-off from relatives, the feelings associated with the loss were not discussed in-depth

during the interview but, rather, only acknowledged. In one family, the resulting cut-off was

particularly hurtful for the biracial adult, but she did not go into depth about how the hurt

affected her identity development. She just said that she always knew the truth even if she and

her mother never discussed it openly. Most families in the study did not openly discuss the

rejection of the biracial children by their grandparents. For many of the mothers who may have

considered themselves progressive, it may have been too painful to acknowledge that their parents were prejudiced. For the children, the racial discrimination from their grandparents and great-grandparents may have been their first experiences of oppression and possibly too overwhelming to address openly with a strange researcher.

For some of the mothers in this study, facing judgment and discrimination from their parents gave them an intimate opportunity to defend their choice of partners as well as the biracial identity of their children. In terms of the biracial identity development process, the experience of some mothers choosing to raise their children as biracial in the face of adversity from their families of origin, suggests a strong belief and confidence in their chosen interracial family which would be important to how they approached raising their children. The message here, from these mothers to their children, is one of strength and defiance in the face of rejection. These mothers stood against their families of origin in order to support their children and promote a healthy sense of biracial identity. Yet, for other mothers, they did not overtly stand up to their parents regarding their racist and discriminatory attitudes toward their interracial families. Some of these mothers continued contact and interaction and encouraged relationships between their children and their parents, which raises the question of the messages being internalized by the biracial children in these families and the impact of these relationships on their identity development.

The intentional and unique responsibility of raising biracial children. Mothers emphasized that raising biracial children required intentionality regarding teaching their children about both sides of their racial heritage, as well as encouraging their children to recognize that they are both Black and White, not one without the other. The supportive and close parent-child relationships previously discussed enabled mothers to shape on open family environment for

these types of racial discussions to occur throughout the biracial identity development process. This factor, teaching children about both sides of their racial heritage, has been found to be a critical component for positive biracial identity development in previous studies (Chideya, 1999; Kerwin et al., 1993; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1990; Rosenblatt et al., 1995) as well as the current study. In Byrd and Garwick's study (2006) examining Black-White interracial family identity, the authors found that parents who invited discussions of race with their children openly and healthily had children who came to them as issues arose throughout the child's life. This was true for the families in the present study. Race and topics surrounding race were safe to discuss within the family at all times throughout the biracial individuals' lives. Considering that families are usually the first place children learn about the meaning of race and racial labels (Roth, 2005), the effort of mothers, to maintain open and positive family environments, was critical for their children's positive developmental process.

Racially labeling children. A part of the intentional responsibility for mothers in raising biracial children was to adopt a racial label for their children that would encompass both sides of their racial heritages equally. The mothers who participated in this study overtly selected the biracial label for their children and represented this option most often to their children throughout their biracial identity development process which ultimately contributed to a concrete biracial identity for the biracial adults. This finding is consistent with findings in others studies that presenting a biracial option to children helps create a positive racial identity (Bowles, 1993; Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Kerwin et al., 1993; Wardle, 1987). A few mothers in the current study also talked about the importance of racially labeling their children according to how their children chose to identify. This seemed to be especially important to their children's personal sense of identity because these mothers did not want to contribute to societal pressure that their

children must choose a racial identity or that one racial identity was the right one. Two mothers, in particular, felt it was important to be accepting of their child's preference because they believed that their child's racial identity might vary and change during their lifetime depending on context, which has been supported by the literature reviewed on biracial identity development models (Basu, 2007; Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). In the current study, for the mothers who emphasized their children's preferences, their children coincidently identified as biracial. The finding that biracial adults in this study selected a biracial label, in spite of social pressure to choose otherwise, is consistent with other studies, which indicate that when families talk openly about racial self-definition, biracial people most often choose the biracial label (Kerwin et al., 1993; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Overall, mothers in this study viewed their children as mixed or biracial. Several mothers also kept themselves informed of the latest research regarding biracial or multiracial identity development. For these mothers, their awareness of the fluidity (Hall, 2000) that can occur for biracial individuals allowed them to remain open to their child's racial identity preference. This finding reveals the bidirectional influences of racial labeling between parents and children throughout the biracial identity development process. Mother's intentionally taught their children about both sides of their racial heritage and introduced a biracial label, and children kept their mothers informed of the outside influences on their choice of racial category. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, while families are the initial socializing agents that influence racial identities, as individuals engage in social interactions outside of their families, meanings and understanding of those racial identities can fluctuate and change (Funderberg, 1994;

Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Roth, 2005), which would explain why biracial individuals might identify differently depending on social context.

Acknowledging potential challenges for biracial children. Mothers in the present study talked about the necessity of teaching and discussing with their biracial children issues related to racial discrimination and possible bias they might experience. For many of the mothers, these conversations began when the children were young, usually in response to an experience of discrimination in a social arena. What makes this finding significant is the fact that, in several other studies (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Rockquemore et al., 2006; Rosenblatt et al., 1995), preparation for bias has been attributed to the Black parent in interracial families. In this study, the caregivers who were most constant in their children's lives were White mothers. As a result, the White mothers assumed full responsibility for teaching about and preparing their children for possible racial discrimination. Still, it is interesting to note that, in the one family in my study who was intact for the entirety of the biracial adult's life, her Black father, rather than her White mother, taught his biracial daughter about what it means to be Black and also prepared her for dealing with racial discrimination in society. This is not to say that her mother was not involved or supportive, but both mother and daughter agreed that her father explicitly dealt with the issues pertaining to racial bias pertaining to the Black experience. Perhaps the dynamic in intact interracial families is that each parent teaches their child about their own race and racial experience, because the other parent cannot be an expert on what it means to be Black or White (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Each parent recognizes the importance of their child knowing and understanding both sides of their racial heritage, so they each take responsibility for what they know personally and look to each other as experts on their own racial experience.

Notwithstanding, in single parent families, one parent has to take responsibility for both; a responsibility mothers in this study accepted consciously.

Instilling pride as an interracial family. The families that participated in this study consistently made statements indicating their pride about being an interracial family. For two of the mothers, having biracial children meant that they were a part of something bigger culturally. They saw themselves as going against the norm of being a monoracial family and also contributing to making American society less Black and White and more "golden brown." In these families, a colorblind society was the ideal. For other mothers, the sense of pride about being an interracial family was related to successfully raising biracial children in a society that does not readily accept such racial classifications. For these mothers, pride in having an interracial family was more about their families and their child's ability to thrive as opposed to changing the face of America racially.

The contribution of this finding is that, in racially socializing their children, mothers had to make up for the counteractive messages their children might receive while navigating their biracial identity in larger society. Instilling pride in their children for who they were, and reminding them that how they identify racially is their personal choice, demonstrates how hard these mothers worked to create a safe space for their children, throughout their lives, in order to negotiate their biracial identity. Mothers led their children by example, which in turn, left their children with a strong sense of pride about who they were as biracial individuals and as members of interracial families.

Neighborhood or local community. Another important way that mothers described their influence on their child's biracial identity development process was evidenced by their selectivity of the neighborhood or community where they would raise their children. The choices

mothers and their partners made were based on the racial make-up of the neighborhood or the diversity of the schools their children would attend. For many families, living in an area where they felt accepted by their neighbors positively affected the experiences of both the parent(s) and their children as they were developing their biracial identities. In addition, going to a school or living in a neighborhood where there were racial minorities as well as biracial or multiracial individuals had a positive impact on the biracial participants' experiences growing up because it meant that there were others in the social environment with whom they could relate to as racial minorities. Previous studies as well as the current study have confirmed that the neighborhood where biracial individuals grow up does influence their racial identity development (Collins, 2000; Cauce et al., 1992; Funderberg, 1994) and, the more integrated the neighborhood, the less pressure there is to choose between races.

Other studies have concluded that parents believe that the racial composition of the neighborhood and the receptiveness of the community toward interracial families matters for raising biracial children and could have an impact on the experiences of their children growing up biracial (Childs, 2005b; Kerwin et al., 1993; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). This belief then influences parents' decisions about where to live. Previous authors have also discussed how parents emphasized that their biracial children be exposed many races while growing up, or at the very least growing up in neighborhoods with other Black families (Kerwin et al., 1993; Rosenblatt et al.). In the current study, several mothers talked about choosing a community or school that would not only expose their children to diverse groups of people, but that would also acknowledge and reinforce their children's biracial identity and support it in the classroom. Selecting supportive and safe neighborhoods and communities, as well as researching school environments, was considered a critical part of the intentional

responsibility for these parents raising their biracial children. The conclusion of this study, that mothers considered the diversity of the neighborhoods and at the schools their children attended to be important factors having an impact on their children's identity development process, match the conclusions of other studies in the biracial literature (Childs; Kerwin et al.; Rockquemore & Laszloffy; Rosenblatt et al.).

For some families, their choice of where to live was limited either by financial constraints or simply by the local demographics. In these families, the lack of diversity in their neighborhoods or schools created difficulties such as feeling different or outcast for the biracial adults that lasted throughout childhood and adolescence. Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) discuss the impact of racial composition of the communities in which biracial individuals grow as having a profound effect on biracial identity development. More specifically, they explain that when biracial individuals are raised in social contexts that allow a biracial identity option, assuming a biracial identity is not uncommon for such individuals. In contrast, Rockquemore and Laszloffy also discuss that, in communities where a biracial identity is not an option (e.g., all White communities or all Black communities), individuals and their parents may be more inclined to select a Black identity for their children rooted in the one-drop rule or by the nature of the child's physical appearance. In the present study, the location of the family and the racial make-up of their neighborhood and school did not change the biracial individual's perspective of him or her self as biracial, but it did mean being confronted with their racial identity almost everyday when at school or out in their neighborhood. In some instances, living in less diverse areas fostered more situations in which the interracial family or the biracial adult had to overtly claim or defend their biracial identity socially.

An additional aspect of the importance of local neighborhood and local community to biracial children's identity development, not typically discussed in the biracial literature, is the impact of social class on mothers' ability to choose where they would raise their children. While the demographics of the participants in this study were not explored in depth, social class and privilege may be critical components influencing mothers in this study to be so adamant and selective about where they raised their children. In the United States, class structure is mediated by social phenomena such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, geography, and mental and physical ability (Kliman & Madsen, 1999). If the mothers in this study were raised in privileged, White middle to upper middle class families that valued education and exposure to various cultures and attitudes, it would make sense that these mothers would want the same for their biracial children. Furthermore, a privileged background could have allowed mothers to choose a partner outside of their race as well as to encourage a biracial label for their children because they were raised in a social class that would allow them to flourish in spite of their choice to interracially marry and have children. In these families, the mothers carried tenacity with them from their upbringing that allowed them to persevere in spite of the hardships they faced such as separation or divorce, discrimination, job loss, and single parenting. In several families, the mothers single parented at some point while raising their child or children, and even in spite of the suggestion that single mothers often suffer in terms of class standing (Kliman & Madsen), most mothers in this study still made choices about how and where to raise their children based on the standards instilled in them by their privileged (White, middle to upper middle class, two parent households, etc.) upbringing.

Biracial Children Describe the Influence of their Parents and Families

The biracial individuals in this study shared many experiences in their families that helped them to shape and construct their biracial identities. The interaction children had with their parents and other family members contributed to the development of a racial identity inclusive of a healthy self-concept, which is a critical component of identity development from a symbolic interactionist perspective (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Most adult children described their relationships with their mothers as supportive and close. As was discussed in the previous section, these parent-child relationships were a critical component of the positive identity development process these individuals reported. However, other factors such as relationships with extended family members, also contributed to their identity development.

Grandparents and great-grandparents. The biracial adults in this study discussed the impact of their grandparent and great-grandparent's responses to their interracial family on their mixed race identity. Many aspects of the impact of the intergenerational responses were discussed previously from the perspective of several participant mothers. There were also some unique aspects of these relationships that were described by the biracial adults. As stated earlier, for some of the children in the study, the negative response of their grandparents or great-grandparents was their first experience of rejection racially. Nonetheless, these experiences did not appear to deter the biracial participants from asserting their biracial identities. This would support the concept of resiliency among biracial individuals in the face of adversity (Cauce et al., 1992). Additionally, while the biracial adults in the study did not directly discuss the impact of their mothers choosing or not choosing not to stand up for them, in the families in which mothers discontinued contact with the grandparents, it would seem that such a stance could influence the biracial individual's perception of themselves positively because their parents elevated their needs over their own parents. Symbolic interactionism supports the notion that parents of biracial

children would be influenced by their family of origin's perspectives on race; however it also suggests that parents of biracial children would also be influenced by their interactions with others outside of the family as well (Childs 2005a; 2005b). For these parents of biracial children, whose own parents rejected their biracial grandchildren, the importance of social process (i.e. exposure to acceptance of race mixing) outweighed the influence of family of origin in shaping beliefs about race, race mixing, and racial identity (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). It would also seem that such a stance, against their grandparents, would influence biracial children's trust and faith in their mothers to remain supportive during even the most trying times. Finally, another important contribution of maternal racial socialization related to standing up to grandparents from the perspective of the biracial individuals, would be preparation for handling such negative treatment from others outside of the family. Mothers demonstrated to their children by standing up to their own parent's racism and discrimination, that their children should assert their choices of a biracial identity, even in the most intimately challenging circumstances both inside the family and in society.

Few studies of biracial individuals discuss the effect of cut-off from the extended family for monoracial parents and their biracial children. From a family systems perspective, cut-off and rejection from extended family members can result in significant emotional pain and contribute to nuclear family strife (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; DaCosta, 2007). The results of this study note the stress resulting from family rejection and cut-off, but it does not offer in-depth insight into the impact of these interfamilial prejudicial experiences on the biracial identity development process. In addition, this study indicates the significance of nuclear family bonds, closeness, and supportiveness for monoracial mothers and biracial children as being protective when extended family relationships (such as those with grandparents) are strained. Finally, when mothers

commit to raising healthy biracial children, it appears that mothers find a way to utilize negative family of origin messages to teach and prepare their children for hardships they may face socially as well.

Overcoming potential challenges and fighting discrimination as a family. In situations of discrimination and racism, mothers and their children came together against challenges, at home and also publicly. The experiences of racial bias for many biracial individuals appeared to make them stronger in their self-concept and racial identity as time passed. As children and teenagers, facing racial discrimination was difficult, but surviving and standing up for their biracial identity increased their confidence and perseverance. This theme has not been highlighted in previous biracial literature, but was brought up for discussion multiple times by several of the biracial adults in the study. It is reasonable to expect that, when living in a world of dichotomies and facing questions about who you are and what you are, a biracial person would either lose confidence in themselves or stand strong. Given the fervent, supportive family environments created by the mothers, and the supportive interactions between parents and children throughout the biracial identity development process, it makes sense that this particular group of biracial individuals would persevere and grow up with a healthy self-concept as secure biracial individuals. From symbolic interactionist perspective, a healthy biracial self-concept is developed first in interaction with family, and when raised in a supportive family environment, individuals will develop confidence to present themselves as biracial even when in situations that might be in conflict with their personal sense of racial identity (Cooley, 1902; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

The stories of racial discrimination for the biracial adults ranged from being picked on by schoolmates for having White mothers , to being rejected by Black peers for their part-White

identity, to being called a "nigger" by a friend in childhood or a complete stranger as an adult. The biracial adults in this study shared their stories facing adversity with strength and humility. They also reported that home was a place where they could talk about such occurrences and work through the effects of such experiences with their supportive parents and their siblings. For most families, facing such challenges meant coming together to stand against the transgressions. In addition, the coming together signified standing up for and expressing their pride in their interracial family and their biracial identity. The role of the family in dealing with racism directly at home enables children to defend themselves against racism in society (Bradshaw, 1992). The families coming together in this study symbolized the positive impact and influence of parents and families on the biracial identity development process from the perspectives of the biracial adults.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the ability for interracial families to stand up against racism and discrimination can be directly linked to the parental racial socialization process throughout the development of their children's biracial identity. The mothers in these families prepared their children to handle challenges according to the sociohistorical context and racial climate in the United States (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Moreover, as mothers and their children shared meanings and interactions about race as a family, those familial interactions also influenced the family's interactions with society. With a supportive family environment perpetuating strength and resilience, mothers and biracial individuals could be counted on to not compromise their values and principles regarding their meaning of racial identity in the face of social adversity (Rockquemore, 1998).

Biracial Identity from Childhood into Adulthood

Although this study revealed valuable information about the interactional influences of parents and children throughout the biracial identity development process, the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis provided indirect insight into the how the racial identity of the biracial adults evolved from childhood into adulthood. According to theories of identity development and biracial identity development, developing an identity is a life long process in which individuals move back and forth through a set of stages or phases (Hare, 2002; Kroger, 1999; Mullis et al., 2003; Parham & Helms, 1985; Phinney, 2006; Renn, 2003; Tatum, 1997; Thompson, 1999; Waterman, 1982). As such, it would make sense that, although the participants in this study did not make direct references to change or evolution of their biracial identities over time, their stories inadvertently illustrated their experiences as ongoing processes as opposed to stagnant in a particular time period. Several themes emerged in this study that address the ongoing impact of certain life experiences throughout the course of the identity development for biracial individuals such as sibling relationships, skin color, hair, the perception of being caught between two worlds, and resiliency.

Sibling relationships. Relationships with biracial siblings had an impact on the process of biracial identity development for the adults in this study throughout their lives. In particular, the varying experiences of biracial siblings, such as the variation in choices of identifying as biracial as well as the impact of variation of skin color among siblings, while growing up together within the family and socially regarding developing a racial identity were discussed. One issue that several mothers and biracial adults talked about was the very fact that some of their siblings identified as Black rather than biracial. Root (1998) conducted a biracial sibling study and found that within the same family, biracial siblings often identified in different ways. Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) suggest that such differences could be related to the children being treated

differently within the family based on their physical appearance (i.e. a biased grandparent treats the lighter skinned child differently than the darker skinned child). While only one set of siblings was involved in this study, this finding contradicted the mothers' and children's reports in this study of equal treatment of the biracial children within their nuclear families.

The biracial identity development models provide another possible explanation for varying identities among biracial siblings. Some biracial identity development models indicate that there are multiple ways for multiracial individuals to identify throughout their lives (Poston, 1990; Collins, 2000; Henriksen & Trusty, 2004). Over time, biracial identity development models have evolved to show that there is not one better or correct way to identify racially. Rather, there is movement or fluidity throughout the lifespan (Collins; Hall, 2001; Henriksen & Trusty; Rockquemore, 1998, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). As a result, racial identity for multiracial individuals encompasses experiences and circumstances, such as social responses to one's identity, and therefore, biracial persons should not be limited to one racial category.

While mothers and children in this study reported consistent, positive message about adopting a biracial identity, differences in racial identity among siblings may be attributed to repeated experiences outside of the family or other factors. For example, physical features such as hair texture and skin color have an effect on how people are treated socially within our culture (Spickard, 1992). Perhaps children in the participant families who had features that are considered more Black, experience the world as Black individuals; so identifying as White or biracial would be unreasonable given how they experienced the world and how the world perceives them. Given that there are great physical variations among multiracial people, it makes sense that physical variations among multiracial siblings in the same family would contribute to the existence of variable racial identities among them. Additionally, it would seem that with

consistent social experiences pushing biracial individuals to identify as a Black individual, over time the individual, even in spite of the messages they receive at home, might choose a singular racial identity. Taken together, the findings from this study imply that biracial persons will be influenced by the meanings society attaches to their race, based on responses to their appearance (skin color, hair, facial features) which will then mediate how that individual ultimately chooses to identify racially (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Rockquemore, 1998).

The color of my skin matters. For half of the biracial individuals in the study, the shade of their skin color came up as having an impact on their racial identity at various times throughout their lives and their responses to these experiences has changed and shifted over time. For some, the shade of their skin led to assumptions that they were only Black or only White. Skin color affected the experiences of the biracial individuals all through the biracial identity development process both within their families and while negotiating their racial identities outside of their family as well. For example, one participant discussed how her own biracial half sister thought she was White like her mother, while she saw herself as Black like her father because of the light color of her skin. For this same participant, her maternal, White grandmother admonished that she viewed her granddaughter as White because of the color of her skin, in spite of the fact that her granddaughter identified as biracial. For this particular participant, and others with lighter skin like her, she felt she had to work harder to be acknowledged as a biracial individual.

Physical appearance for mixed raced people is a topic much discussed by researchers in the multiracial literature (DaCosta, 2007; Nishimura, 2004; Rockquemore, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Root 1998). These studies have explored the correlation between the color of a biracial individual's skin and the biracial individual's chosen racial identity (one race or the other, both, neither, etc.) and concluded that many

multiracial individuals choose a racial identity based on how the world perceives them in response to their physical appearance. This finding differs from the biracial individuals in my study because despite their physical appearances, which varied among the participants, the biracial individuals reported that they consistently identified as biracial throughout their lives. This finding may be linked to the supportive and open environments in which these individuals were raised, which as mentioned previously, has been demonstrated as important for the positive outcome of the biracial identity development process (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004).

Another aspect of appearance revealed in this study was the impact of skin color socially. This concept, called colorism, is defined as occurring primarily within the Black community (Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Colorism implicates the importance and impact of skin color for the experiences of Black individuals as well as the use of the color of ones skin by Blacks to discriminate against each other. For a few of the women in this study, the lighter color of their skin led to negative experiences, beginning in childhood and continuing into adulthood, of isolation specifically from Black women, which is not unlike findings in other studies with biracial individuals (Rockquemore 1998, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). In her study, Rockquemore (2002) concluded that Black women and biracial women are in competition for marriageable Black men, and because of the statistics indicating that educated Black men often marry White women, biracial women may be preferred over Black women as well. Such preferences by Black men might trigger negative feelings between Black women and biracial women. A major concern with Rockquemore's finding is the assumptions that are made about the mate selection preferences of Black women, biracial women, and Black men. Female participants in the current study did not report feeling competitive with Black women for Black men. On the contrary, they reported challenges with dating overall in adolescence as well as

during adulthood, because they were "too light" to be selected as mates by Black men and "too brown" to be selected as mates by White men.

Female participants in this study shared stories of mistreatment by Black women for "thinking they were better" because of their light skin, their hair type, or just simply because their mother was White. The concept of colorism may also help to explain these experiences between Black women and biracial women. For example, historically in American culture, lighter skinned Blacks and mulattos have been privileged over darker skinned Blacks and mulattos as a result of the dominant discourse that White beauty standards regulate what is beautiful (Russell et al., 1992). Russell and colleagues go on to explain that often in Black communities, Black beauty has been determined by the shade of skin color; and typically lighter shades have been considered more beautiful; the direct result of a culture ascribing to White beauty standards. Feasibly, the Black women who mistreated the biracial women participants in this study may have been reacting to their own experiences with colorism (being mistreated for their darker skin color) that contributed to experiences of oppression in their personal lives (Johnson-Bailey, 1999). For all of the biracial women who shared stories of mistreatment such as these, their thinking was not that they were better or more beautiful than their Black counterparts or any other race. Rather, they saw themselves as *different* because they had one Black parent and one White parent. In essence, these women saw themselves as individuals who could relate to Black women as minorities but also as something completely different because they do not fit into any one racial category.

Another particularly difficult experience for two women in my study was the feeling that they could not address issues regarding Black people in the company of other Black people because of their light skin color; symbolically the lightness of their skin discounted their

blackness. In many ways, these biracial women felt that they were not "qualified" to speak for or about the Black experience. This phenomenon speaks to the issue other researchers have related to marginal aspect of being biracial (Stonequist, 1937; Williams, 1999) as well as the social impact on racial identity. That is, while the women in my study identified as biracial, depending their social context they felt more or less able to assert all parts of their racial identity. These experiences underline the struggles that some biracial individuals may encounter during their lifetimes, no matter how confident they are in their identities or how supportive their family and friends may be.

"The biggest issue I've had is hair." Half of the biracial women in the study presented their hair as a unique aspect of their process of negotiating and solidifying their biracial identity beginning in childhood and evolving over time into adulthood. Individually, a few of the women struggled with having hair that was different from their White mothers or their White friends, particularly as children. For others, it was not the struggle of having hair that looked different from those around them, but rather the struggle of figuring out how to manage and style their hair. For a few of the women in the study, the venture of learning about and coming to understand their hair was a shared experience between mothers and daughters. For other mothers and daughters, hair was a source of conflict based on disagreement for how hair should be cared for and styled. Several mothers struggled with their daughters wanting to straighten their hair for various reasons. Some of these reasons included concerns about the chemicals required to straighten it, to wanting their daughters to wear their hair natural, to not knowing where to take their daughters to have their hair styled. Hair also had a social impact for some of the mothers and their daughters, including a few negative encounters with Black women expressing that White women should not have "Black" children if they could not handle their hair. These

comments were often made in reference to White mothers asking questions about where to go for hair styling or about tips for hair care. In many ways, hair was symbolic of the larger process of biracial identity development. The experiences and challenges women had in relation to their hair paralleled other arduous aspects of their identity development process within the family as well as socially.

If hair symbolizes the identity development process of biracial women, the significance of hair for biracial women may also be explained using biracial identity development models. Henriksen and Trusty (2004) discussed the concepts of *acceptance* and *awareness* in their six stage development model of identity for biracial individuals. *Acceptance* is a period when biracial individuals recognize and accept that they have a racial heritage. During this period, racial categorization tends to be influenced by other people outside of the family. For some women in this study, their unique or unusual hair is what separated them from their peers at school and brought to the forefront their different racial background. It is during the following period of *awareness* that biracial women might begin to understand what it means to be racially different from others, including their parents. This could lead to some feelings of isolation for some women. In the case of this study, not only was women's hair (and other physical features) different from most of their peers, it was also different from their parents or even other family members such as siblings.

Another issue related to hair was idea that mixed hair is "good hair." One biracial woman, in particular, talked about her experiences of being stigmatized by Black women because she had long hair. Another woman in my study associated mixed hair with "good hair," and feeling lucky that she had "good hair." The concept of "good hair" has been briefly explored in previous studies with biracial women (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; 2005); however until

it was explored in this study, no focused explorations have occurred for this topic as related to

the biracial experience. In some way, the fact that messages of "good hair" exist within

American culture speaks to the divide that still occurs between races. Rockquemore and

Laszloffy (2005) address the notion of "good hair" as internalized oppression for Black and

biracial women. Internalized oppression is defined as the internalization of "negative attitudes

and beliefs about black (sic) people" from oppressive institutions (such as racism, sexism, and

colorism) by black individuals (p. 64). The internalized oppression, in this case, is Black and

biracial women valuing hair types more commonly associated with White America as better than

hair more commonly associated with Black America. When a biracial individual devalues Black

features by indicating that her mixed hair is "good hair," it could be interpreted as evidence that

she has internalized the oppressive message that White is better. Despite these possibilities, for

the women in this study, they were not overtly expressing shame for their Black physical

features. Rather, it seemed that they valued these features. Several women even described certain

physical features as inherently *mixed*, which seemed to positively denote what they received as a

combination of both Black and White from each of their parents.

A final topic related to hair for female participants in this study was the notion that Black

women expressed a vested interest in the state of biracial women's hair. One biracial adult shared

that she was criticized by Black women for her "unkempt" hair, which was not maintained with

hair products commonly used by Black women. Similarly, a mother in this study shared her

experience of criticism by Black women for not knowing how to take care of her biracial

daughter's "Black hair" because she kept it in its natural, kinky state. One possible explanation

for these reactions might be that these Black women view Black-White biracial children as

Black, and therefore, see these children as representative of Black Americans. And as such, when

White mother's maintain their biracial child's hair in it's "natural" state, some Black women may interpret the result as a throwback to slavery when black hair was commonly covered in a rag and considered negatively as "unkempt" or "nappy" (Banks, 2000). Additionally, in American society, many Black women have gradually adjusted their hairstyles to White female beauty standards (Hutchinson, 1998), which as suggested in the research presented by Banks, is the direct result of historically socializing Blacks to reject natural and "nappy" hair as beautiful. Therefore, if Black women have conformed to this White ideal by pressing, straightening, or perming their hair, when White women have "nappy haired" biracial children, they may perceive the mothers and children as counteracting the effort Black women have put forth to change this "unkempt" and negatively perceived image of Black hair.

Stuck in the middle and "The best of both worlds." This sub-theme addresses the aspects of a unique biracial identity that gave the participants a sense of pride about being able to move between Black and White worlds throughout their lifetime. This sub-theme also illustrates the feeling, at various times over the lifespan of the biracial adults thus far, of not belonging to either a Black world or a White world. For some individuals in the study, being biracial meant not having a racial group to belong to and not being accepted by Black or White sub groups (Quillian & Redd, 2009). Shih and Sanchez (2005) discuss "double rejection" for multiracial individuals as the concept of being susceptible to rejection and discrimination from both White racial groups as well a minority racial groups. Within this study, the experiences of double rejection often occurred for the female participants in that they reported being primarily rejected by Black female peers as school children and adolescents, and for some also in adulthood. The rejection by Black female peers may be related to instances of racism Black females personally experienced for their darker skin, which over time, might result in rage toward lighter skinned

girls and negative interactions with biracial females (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Another possibility for double rejection could be as a result of competition for Black mates, as discussed previously. While these challenges with double rejection could have negatively affected the self-concept of the biracial individuals while growing up, they did not diminish the biracial individuals' overall feelings that being Black and White is in fact getting the opportunity to be a part of two different racial worlds as well as a multiracial world all their own. This way of identifying racially, which was reported by most participants in this study, reflects the concept of "double" revealed in Collin's biracial identity development model (2000). While Collins did not explain the challenges associated with feeling stuck in the in between Black and White, the concept of double does incorporate the notion of biracial individuals ability to coalesce both Black and White racial groups by recognizing the commonalities and appreciating the differences that they as a biracial person encompass all at once.

All of the biracial adults in this study reported a supportive family environment. A result of these supportive family environments was that the biracial individuals in this study could sort through the challenges of feeling caught in between two worlds openly and honestly at home and over time. As biracial individuals worked to deal with the stresses of being in between racial groups, dealing with such adversity throughout their lives may have actually increased their resilience (Cauce et al., 1992). Moreover, as Shih and Sanchez (2005) present, while multiracial persons may feel "rejected by others because of their racial identity," (p. 577) there is also the benefit, as the biracial adults in this study reported, of having access to more racial communities because of the ability to be in and relate to multiple racial worlds.

Resiliency: My racial identity makes me a stronger person. For several biracial adults in the study, belonging to a unique sub-group of the American population contributed to their sense

of strength and open mindedness as a person. Facing questions and being accosted with rude or unsolicited comments throughout their lives about their racial heritage and racial identity gave the biracial individuals in this study repeated opportunities to practice standing up for themselves and what they believed in regarding racial identity and race related issues. Many of the biracial participants also shared that they did not believe they would be the strong person they are today if they had not faced adversity while growing up. This finding is not unlike the finding in a study completed by Cauce et al. (1992) that demonstrated that multiracial individuals' encounters with challenges and discrimination helped them to develop a more resilient self-esteem. Laszloffy (2005, p. 38) highlighted the strengths gained growing up biracial perfectly:

> Many multiracial people by virtue of their marginalized and often ambiguous social status, are adept at managing complexity, and can entertain multiple perspectives simultaneously. Many also possess a spirit of resiliency that is cultivated by having to exist within a racially alienating environment.

Negotiating Biracial Identity in the Social Arenas of Mothers and Children

The families in this study exist within social and historical contexts that have had a direct impact on their experiences as interracial families and as biracial persons developing their biracial identity. Throughout the life of the biracial child, the racial identity of the family had been questioned, declared, and supported by strangers, acquaintances, friends, family members, and society. The interactive experiences of these interracial family members within the context of American society influenced the ways in which family members established and maintained friendships with others, where they lived, how they responded to the social pressure to choose a single racial identity, how they experienced racially significant events, and how biracial individuals proclaimed their biracial identity.

Friendships. Every family in the study mentioned the importance and significance of friends outside of the family in bolstering and supporting the parent, the child, or the entire family throughout the biracial identity development process. For some mothers, having friends who did not judge their choice to take a Black mate and have biracial children was especially important in light of the times they were living in. The historical context of the 1970s and 1980s, when most of the parents were coupling and the biracial children were born, was not accustomed to interracial relationships, and some mothers reported losing friends because of their choices to date or marry interracially. In some ways, the losses that mothers experienced in terms of friendships reflected losses they experienced with their parents. The main difference between friends and family is that mothers opted out of friendships that were not supportive, while they may have fought or struggled to maintain relationships with family members.

Several of the mothers in the study also talked about the significance of their friendships with other women and families that were interracial. The friendships and shared experiences of raising biracial children gave some mothers in the study support as they encouraged and sustained a healthy biracial identity development process for their children. An additional aspect of the friendships that stood out was the mothers' feelings that the friendships they shared with other women raising biracial children were not unlike family relationships. One mother even said her women friends raising biracial children were her family of choice. DaCosta (2007) discussed the likeness of interracial couples revealing their interracial relationship to their parents to that of homosexual couples revealing their same sex partners (i.e., the process of coming out). Along these same lines, within the gay community, the concept of family of choice is widely understood as a group of people chosen because of their supportiveness of lifestyle and partnerships (Johnson & Colucci, 1999). Similarly, for some interracial families, having a family

of choice was imperative to their growth and development process, especially in those

circumstances where the family of origin shunned or rejected the interracial family. Thus, an

important contribution of this study to the biracial literature, which has not been addressed in

previous studies on biracial individuals and their families, is the notion and value of family of

choice practices for interracial families.

The biracial individuals in this study also discussed the significance of their friends for

supporting and substantiating their choice to identify as biracial and just be themselves. Further,

several of the biracial adults talked about the relevance of having close friends who were also

biracial or mixed to share the experiences of growing up biracial. Yet, for a few others, they did

not have a set of close biracial or mixed friends, but they did have biracial comrades as a result

of their involvement in a multiracial organization, and those comrades were able to share in the

experience of growing up biracial and establishing a biracial or mixed identity in a similar

environment as the biracial adult.

Several studies on the biracial experience mention the importance of peer influence

during the process of negotiating a biracial identity. However, those studies only mention the

impact of monoracial peers and focus more on the pressure to choose (Bowles, 1993; Gibbs,

1998; Herring, 1992; Kerwin et al., 1993). For this group of biracial individuals, relationships

with biracial or multiracial peers were an important piece of their process of developing a

biracial identity. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, interactions with multiracial others

allowed the biracial individuals in this study to share and expand meanings about the biracial

experience and to fundamentally sustain their identity as biracial persons within social contexts

outside of the family.

The friendship factor as a means for supporting biracial identity development was also discussed in terms of the racial composition of their friendship groups while growing up. A few of the participants specifically talked about their ability to cross the bridge between Black groups and White groups of friends. In their quantitative study on the friendship networks of multiracial adolescents, Quillian and Redd (2009) investigated the diversity composition of friendship groups and whether or not multiracial adolescents actually "bridge" friendships among their single race friendship groups. What they found is relatively high bridging between Blacks and Whites by Black-White multiracial students. While my study did not go into depth on the specific topic of the racial composition of the biracial participants' friendship groups or their roles as "bridges," the information I gathered does support Quillian and Redd's findings regarding bridging in that biracial individuals in this study had friendship groups comprised of both Black and White peers.

Pressure to choose Black or White. Throughout the lifetimes of these interracial families, both mothers and their children faced social pressure to choose one race or the other for the biracial individual. A few mothers even shared stories of being told their children were Black by strangers and people close to them. This sub-theme reflects the longstanding notion that Black-White biracials are or should be raised as Black or at the very least as non White (Childs, 2005; Qian, 2004; Root 1990, 1996; Storrs, 1999). For several mothers in the study, the message they intentionally sent to their children as well as strangers was, "If I raise my children as Black, it is like saying that I, their White mother, do not exist."

Many of biracial adults in this study adopted a stance similar to their mothers and defending their choice to identify biracially. For the biracial individuals, the pressure to choose one racial label came from complete strangers, acquaintances, and even close friends. The

pressure to choose manifested itself in multiple ways. The most common descriptions were people asking directly whether the biracial individual was Black or White or what they would rather be, Black or White. Another way biracial individuals were pressured to choose came in more subtle forms, such as friends and acquaintances making their own choice about the individual's race, indicating that they were Black or White based on their own set of assumptions rather than accepting the biracial person's preferences or reality. The life long experiences of being asked the question: "What are you?" and the constant pressure to choose one race was a common thread among multiracial participants not only in this study but also in several previous studies on biracial identity development (Collins, 2000; Gillem et al., 2001; Schwartz, 1998). The impact of such encounters may lead to arduous feelings, loneliness, and isolation for biracial individuals which could hinder the positive development of a biracial identity.

Another aspect of the pressure to choose that biracial individuals and their families are faced with on a regular basis occurs when filling out governmental or institutional forms (DaCosta, 2007; Kerwin et al., 1993). A few of the mothers and children in the current study spoke directly about this issue during their interviews. Mothers and children agreed that when faced with a forced-choice situation (e.g. no biracial/multiracial category, or other, or both, etc.) the biracial child always chose Black or African American. For some parents and children, they believed this would afford their children opportunities as members of a minority population and would also account for their non-White status. These statements made by participants are consistent with one previous study in which parents and children indicated choosing Black when forced to choose one race (Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

To cope with the pressure to choose, some mothers and their children became social activists regarding forced choice paperwork at the local and national level and fought for

inclusion of a multiracial category on school as well as other government forms. The topic of forced choice is particularly complex for Black-White biracials, given the history of hypodescent. The multiracial movement (DaCosta, 2007) in America, which started to allow for marking one or more racial categories on the U.S. Census (U.S. Census 2000), seems particularly salient for the participants in my study because they each identify as biracial or mixed race and have faced numerous times in their lives when they had to choose one race. This movement toward wider acceptance of multiracial Americans on a social and cultural level ultimately contributes to affirming biracial identity as a positive and indisputable option. The fact that some mothers and their children became activists speaks to the bidirectional influence between parents and children regarding the biracial identity development process. Mothers demonstrated to their children that they would stand up for their child's right to identify as biracial, and so children also felt compelled to take action for their rights as well.

A final aspect of pressure to choose came from the perspectives of the biracial adults in this study who were mothers of biracial children as they discussed the challenges of selecting a racial label for their own children. For some of the biracial mothers, the racial make-up of their children was not simply half White and half Black, but other numerical combinations (e.g. one quarter White, three quarters Black) and, as a result, some of their children specifically identified as Black. The mothers in this study reported a desire that their children identify as biracial, but indicated more complexity when the combination of race embodied in their children was less than or more than half Black or White. The topic of the experiences of multiracial children of biracial parents is something just now arising in the biracial and multiracial literature; however, there is not much research to indicate the unique experiences of these multiracial families confronting issues of identity (Basu, 2007; DaCosta, 2007). Thus, the findings of this study raise

the question of how multiracial identity will change as racial combinations in families become increasingly complex. One biracial adult in my study, who identifies strongly as multicultural, wondered how a study like mine, examining biracial identity of people who are half Black and half White, will be relevant to her children and other biracial individual's children in future generations as the numerical values attached to biracial identity become more diluted with increased multiracial interracial partnerships. A question the arises from this study is whether or not this younger generation of multiracial children will feel the same pressure to choose as their parents have.

Racially historical events. When specifically asked about times when family members talked about race and the impact of race on the experiences of biracial identity development, many parents and children pointed to racially significant events in American culture. Some of the events discussed included slavery, the concept of the tragic mulatto, and anti-miscegenation laws. These events signified the distance American culture has come in Black-White racial relations. Other events addressed by the families were more current and reflected some of the struggles that still exist today in American culture surrounding race. These events included the Rodney King beating, the OJ Simpson trial, and the shooting of a Black man in a subway station in Oakland, California. Conversations about race issues in American culture kept these interracial families connected and grounded regarding current racial realities, which also aided parents and their biracial children as they navigated their racial identities in their social arenas. These racially charged events may have also influenced how connected or disconnected biracial adults felt in their own experiences as minority individuals dealing with racism and discrimination. For some adults, racialized current events may have encouraged a stronger identification with their Black or minority status. Additionally, inviting discussions about

current, racially charged events, signified the openness for other discussions about race as it pertained to the biracial individuals' and the interracial families' personal experiences. From a symbolic interaction perspective, the context, or set of social and historical facts that surround families, has an effect on the nature of the connection between an individual and society (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Just as these interracial families influenced their environments, they too are influenced by their sociohistorical context.

The historical event that all but one family mentioned during the interviews was Barack Obama's presidential race and eventual election. For most of the families in this study, their discussions about Obama centered on his race, racial identity, and American culture's proclamation of Obama as Black. Several biracial adults viewed Obama as a positive, symbolic representative of a strong biracial person and the public's constant referral to him as the first Black president was infuriating and symbolically discounted his biracial background. For others, just having Obama's biracial origins in the public eye, whether he proclaimed them or not, meant something to them. While the election of Obama was a symbolically meaningful representation of the possibilities for non White America, for several people in the study, Obama was specifically one of the first prominent and positive Black-White biracial figures for the biracial individuals of the current historical cohort to emulate. Some mothers and their children described Obama's election as a cultural awakening, that multiracial people truly can do or become anything they put their mind to. In regard to biracial identity development, the meanings attached to such a historical event occurring at this time in American history had a profound impact on how biracial persons perceived their capabilities in their social world and their sense of pride. Additionally, it gave biracial individuals and their families a public representative to refer to when sharing their own stories and challenges with others related to the multiracial experience.

How I describe my racial identity. A symbolic interactionist perspective suggests that identities are constructed through an "interaction between our self and others in our environment" (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005, p. 4). It makes sense then that the power to name the self racially is imperative to developing and establishing an individual's overall sense of identity. Being empowered to name one's self racially can be easily removed when multiracial individuals are faced with forms indicating that they must check one box for racial identity or when asked by friends, strangers, or employers to pick a racial identity. Disempowerment can also occur when others around biracial individuals do not accept the biracial identity as the biracial person proclaims it. For example, this occurred for a study participant when a Black Student Union did not accept the individual as biracial, but rather, labeled that individual as exclusively Black.

Within this sub-theme, biracial individuals shared their chosen self-descriptions, which most often included *Mixed*, followed by B*iracial*, *Black-White,* and *Other*. The biracial individuals also shared other terms they have encountered and may have also used in their lifetime. These included *multiracial, half and half, half Black half White, interracial,* and *mulatto.* They also shared other descriptors they had come across such as *Oreo, zebra, 50/50 bar, half breed,* and *Halfrican*. Some interpreted these names as positive while others interpreted them as negative. Much of the difference between positive and negative perceptions had to do with the context in which the name or label was used. For many, the term *mulatto* was considered offensive, while one person indicated that using the term in a positive way gave her a sense of removing the power of negative association from the word.

All of the racial labels had powerful implications for claiming a biracial identity for each of the biracial participants in this study. Stating their chosen racial label out loud asserted the

power of their choice of a biracial identity. Sharing their biracial identity in interaction with others suggests a resolved racial identity and a healthy self-concept which enables individuals to identify racially in whatever way is comfortable for them without compromising their beliefs in variable social situations (Rockquemore, 1998; Storrs, 1999). In Henriksen and Trusty's (2004) study of Black-White women's biracial identity, a participant said it best when she stated: "To me when I say I'm Biracial…it's just letting people know my history" (p. 70). Akin to the lyrics of the James Brown song from 1968, *Say it Loud-I'm Black and I'm Proud,* naming themselves and proclaiming a biracial identity exemplifies the empowerment and self reliance of this multiracial sub-group of the American population. Claiming a biracial identity by naming it is an attempt for biracial individuals to authenticate racial group belonging. The significance of sharing a chosen biracial identity with others is an opportunity to generate new meanings about race and racial identity and to substantiate the multiracial experience within society.

Limitations

While the findings of my study provide insight into the phenomenon of the interactional process of developing a biracial identity from both the mother and the biracial adult's point of view, participants shared stories about family members who were absent: fathers, siblings, and grandparents. This is a limitation of the study because the mothers and their children describe the significance of these people throughout the biracial identity development process. Therefore, hearing the perspectives of the absent family members might enrich the understanding of the biracial identity development process from the perspectives of parents and their children. As a phenomenological researcher examining parent-child relationships, I would have liked to include both or all parents (stepparents as well), if they were involved in raising the biracial children which might have enriched the data on the familial influences on the biracial identity

development process. In addition, the impact of siblings was discussed by all of the participants in this study and future studies might also include the direct perspectives of those family members in the biracial identity development process as well. Another direct perspective that was missing from this study that was shared during almost all of the interviews was the influence of parents' parents.

Common limitations in qualitative research are the lack of representative samples and generalizability (Patton, 2002); however, phenomenological research is often more about the stories and experiences of the participants rather than the ability to generalize those experiences to all participants from the same reference group. The generalizability of my study is limited by the demographics of the participants. While I advertised for Black-White interracial parents and their adult biracial children, I only interviewed White mothers and their children. In addition, of the 10 families I interviewed, only two interviews included sons while eight included daughters. The perspectives of both Black and White fathers is noticeably absent from this project as well as the perspectives of Black mothers of biracial children. This is a limitation of the study, even though population statistics reveal that the number of White women who partner with Black men is much higher than the number of White men who partner with Black women. In addition, the sample size of this study is also a limitation. While the sample size was sufficient for the purposes of this phenomenological inquiry, it provides a limited representation of the number of Black-White interracial families in the Pacific Northwest.

The geographic location of the study serves as both a limitation and strength. A review of the literature on biracial studies reveals that, out of numerous studies completed with the multiracial population, very few have been completed in the Pacific Northwestern United States. While the locale is a unique aspect of this study and contributes the perspectives of interracial

families located in Oregon to the biracial literature, it also limits the applicability of the experiences found here to interracial families living in other parts of the United States. Another aspect of the location that may be limiting is related to the small percentage of racial minorities in the state where the study took place, which may contribute to unique experiences growing up, however, I did not ask questions specifically regarding the impact of regional location for these families.

Another limitation of this study is the sampling bias reflected in the families who self-selected to participate in the study as well as the families who were eligible but did not elect to participate. The primary respondents to my advertisements were mothers who are very involved in the multiracial community and truly motivated to share their story about being a part of an interracial family and raising biracial children. While this perspective reveals many of the positive aspects of interracial families and the biracial identity development process, it may be biased in that it leaves out information on families who are not involved in the multiracial community, who may be more isolated and possibly experiencing more challenges. There may have also been some advertising bias as I utilized the phrase "Black-White biracial" as the descriptive criteria for biracial participants, and as the literature review and my own research demonstrates, there are several ways for biracial individuals to identify and my word choice may have deterred a certain portion of this population from responding to my call for participants (e. g., biracial individuals who identify with only one race, or who do not ascribe to racial labels at all).

Another strength and limitation of this study was the choice to interview only Black-White biracial participants and their parents. The strength of concentrating on Black-White biracials would be utilizing the findings of this study to compare with findings from other studies

with Black-White biracial individuals, to determine if the experiences represented in this study are represented with other groups of Black-White biracials. In addition, Black-White interracial relationships and biracial children have a unique history in American culture, and focusing on this unique sub-group of the population allowed me to incorporate and consider those sociohistorical factors in greater depth throughout the analysis. A limitation of focusing on Black-White biracials is that the findings of this study may not be applied to the experiences of individuals with other biracial combinations. This study did not consider ecological factors such as migration, immigration, and language that may impact the experiences of biracial individuals of different combinations (i.e. Asian-White, Latina-Black, etc.). Finally, focusing on Black-White biracials permits only the assessment of the Black-White experience of developing a biracial identity in determining the applicability and accuracy of the biracial identity development models for biracial persons.

A final limitation of this study may be my self as the researcher. Several of the participants expressed concern with participating because they did not know me personally or understand my purpose in doing the research and they did not want to contribute to a study that emphasized the problems of interracial families and biracial people (as so many have before). The fact that I am not from this part of the country and that I was unknown in the local and mixed race community made most of the participants skeptical of participating until they heard, via word of mouth, that I was friendly and positive. Additionally, a few participants made their decision to participate in the study only after finding out that I was a biracial individual myself. Possible bias arising from my own biracial identity, as the researcher, is the influence on participants to only share the positive or socially desirable aspects of their experiences. Further, some participants may have made assumptions about my experiences as a biracial individual, and

therefore, may have left out details or more in-depth explanations because of an assumed shared understanding between us.

Practice Implications

Over the last three decades, the research examining biracial identity development has expanded to dispel myths that multiracial Americans live in the margins and suffer from poor psychological adjustment (Miville, 2006; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Stonequist, 1937; Wardle, 1987). In their extensive review of the literature examining the positive and negative implications of having multiple racial identities, Shih and Sanchez (2005) found the evidence to support such claims for psychological problems is inconsistent. In fact, most of the literature supporting negative psychological outcomes for biracial individuals came from research studies with clinical populations (Gibbs, 1998). In contrast, evidence supporting positive outcomes such as healthy self-esteem and strong self-confidence were derived from studies with non-clinical samples (Collins, 2000; Gillem et al., 2001; Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Kerwin et al., 1993; Renn, 2000; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

The findings from this study provide support for positive outcomes associated with growing up biracial. In the families interviewed, both mothers and their children shared stories of togetherness and strength regarding their family's interracial identity. Whereas past studies have highlighted possible dichotomous viewpoints about race within a family (Gillem et al., 2001; Kerwin et al., 1993; Laszloffy, 2005; Rockquemore, 1998, 2002; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003, 2005; Rosenblatt et al., 1995), the participants in this study demonstrated a solid sense of unity regarding their claim of an interracial family identity and their children's biracial identity.

The key factors associated with positive biracial identity development fit for the participant families in my study as well. These factors include having a supportive family

environment recognizing all of the racial heritages as equally as possible, encouraging family members to openly engage in conversations about race and both racial heritages, and providing opportunities for mixed race individuals to openly explore and claim their own racial identity (whether it be a single race, both races, varying between single races, or their own unique racial category) inside and outside of the family (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Gibbs, 1998, Herring, 1995; Milan & Keiley, 2000; McGill, 1998; Poston, 1990; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003, 2005). These factors have several implications for mental health practices and social and political policy involving interracial families and biracial individuals.

Mental Health Implications

During the course of the family and individual interviews questions were presented to the participants to gain an understating of the role couples and family therapists (CFTs) as well as other mental heath practitioners may play in advocating for healthy interracial families and biracial individuals. Some of the questions covered during the interviews were (a) would you offer some constructive ways therapists might approach the topic of race or racial identity with multiracial families? (b) Will you please describe some of the possible issues multiracial families and individuals may be facing when entering therapy? (c) Please describe any suggestions you have for therapists attempting to reach this unique subgroup of the population. While there was not enough depth in the answers provided by participants to sufficiently analyze the data, mothers and their children offered useful information for training multiculturally competent therapists, for possible ways to reach out to multiracial families, and for possible clinical issues interracial families and multiracial individuals may present in therapy. Each of these topics will be discussed in the following section.

Training multiculturally competent therapists. This study implicates important factors to cover when training multiculturally competent therapists and other mental health professionals to work with multiracial families and individuals. Beginning with the training of therapists, several participants in the study emphasized the importance of therapists examining their own biases in regard to interracial relationships and multiracial people in general. This suggestion has been supported in the literature for therapist training (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1998; Laszloffy, 2005). Additionally, several individuals said it would be advantageous if the therapist has had personal or professional exposure to biracial individuals or interracial families. If the therapist does not have this experience, the families in my study suggested that the therapist remain open minded and respectfully curious about the unique situations and stories of their clients. This is an approach to working with these families that also been cited in the literature for training multiculturally competent therapists (Hardy & Laszloffy). A few families highlighted the importance of therapists not making the assumption that being a part of an interracial family or being a multiracial individual is inherently problematic. Furthermore, the participants in this study also recommended that therapists become informed of the possible issues interracial families and multiracial individuals may be facing through continued education and reading current literature. Finally, a few participants discussed the need for training programs to provide specific information and resources to therapists about interracial families and multiracial individuals' experiences and needs.

Reaching multiracial families and individuals. In this study, I directly asked participants for suggestions on how to reach biracial people and interracial couples and families as a therapist or mental health professional; that is, how to let potential clients know that therapists support multicultural clientele. Overall, it was difficult for participants to come up with ways therapists

might let members of their community know they are multiculturally competent and accepting. A few participants suggested that, by doing my research, I was getting my name out in the community and snowballing and word of mouth might be most effective. For several of the biracial participants, they specifically stated that talking with a therapist who was biracial would help them to open up. Several other participants indicated that as long as the therapist was open-minded and supportive, they would likely discuss their racial identity with a non multiracial therapist. One participant, who is a practicing social worker in her community, said the need for biracial/multiracial therapists is significant. She offered to advertise for me.

While participants' suggestions for ways that therapists could reach out to this subgroup of the population to meet their clinical needs was helpful, the general consensus seemed to be that being a multiracial therapist was most important to the biracial individuals. I also believe that CFTs and other mental health professionals can reach these families by making connections with local community groups that support multiracial families and informing group members that there are professionals trained to address the needs of these families sensitively. I believe CFTs and other mental health professionals can encourage advertising within private practices and agency settings using images of multiracial individuals and families. Additionally, having reading materials, dolls and toys of various shades, and psycho-educational handouts that pertain to multiracial experiences or that contain images of many different kinds of families would be helpful. Lastly, I believe that as CFTs and other mental health professionals get more exposure working with diverse clients, it will be imperative to ask directly for client feedback about their experiences working with the clinicians and to encourage clients to refer other clients in need in good faith.

Possible Clinical Issues

In this study, parents and children discussed several possible challenges facing interracial families and biracial individuals. Some of the ideas were drawn from their own personal experiences, but they also generally reflect the clinical issues described in the literature. Some of the probable issues offered by participants were a) social stigmatization as an interracial family or for a biracial identity, b) forced racial categorization (forced choice dilemmas), c) internalization of negative social messages regarding racial identity (internalized oppression), d) managing differences or tension between both sides of the family, e) not having parental support or parental understanding of experiences associated with the biracial identity development process (resulting in possible isolation), and f) lack of support with family transitions such as marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Within the biracial literature, there are a myriad clinical issues presented as possibilities for clinicians working with interracial families and biracial individuals which match and expand the suggestions made by participants in the current study (Shih and Sanchez, 2005). Some of the clinical issues noted in the literature are a) conflict between how biracial individuals define themselves and how the public elects to define biracial individuals (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Herring, 1995), b) forced-choice dilemmas in which individuals are faced with the message that they need to pick one racial identity over another (Standen, 1996), c) a lack of role models to guide in understanding multiracial identity because role models are so often categorized into single race categories socially (Wardle, 1987), d) difficulty finding same race peers (Collins, 2000; Gibbs, 1998; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Renn, 2000), e) conflicting messages within a family when parents are not unified in their perceptions of their child, which can result in a fragmented sense of self, a lower self-esteem, and feelings of being misunderstood and isolated (Gillem et al., 2001; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Rosenblatt et al., 1995), and f) susceptibility to experiencing rejection from majority groups *and*

minority groups socially (Basu, 2007; Gibbs, 1987; Poston, 1990; Root, 1996). Within the

parameters of my study, possible approaches for how to deal with such issues in a clinical setting

were not discussed. However, there is an abundance of literature covering clinical approaches for

working with multiracial clients and/or their interracial families, which heavily influence my

treatment suggestions for working with interracial families and multiracial individuals in the

following section.

Treatment Suggestions

     Assessment. In this study, it was revealed that a supportive family environment and

strong parent-child relationships contributed to a positive and healthy biracial identity

development process. Participants demonstrated that the ability for parents and their children to

discuss racial identity issues as they arise and for children to discuss all aspects of their racial

heritage, whether or not both biological parents were involved was imperative to the success of

these families. Additionally, parental support in dealing with the social contexts, within which

these families exist, was also critical for successful identity development. Participants in this

study indicated that relationships with various family members could be an explicit source of

stress. Thus, when working with interracial families and biracial individuals in a clinical context,

it would be crucial to consider during the assessment the impact of multiple family relationships

including parents, step family members, siblings, grandparents, and great-grandparents. During

the assessment it would also be important to explore the values and beliefs of the parents who are

raising the biracial children regarding race and racial identity. Inviting conversations about race

and racial identity early in therapy would enable clients to clarify with the therapist whether or

not their problems are centered in racial issues. Therapists should also consider the impact of the

social and historical context within which the family and individual live. For example, some

interracial families live in areas with few or no other interracial families which may have a negative influence on the experiences of these families and individuals which would be important to explore. Another area for assessment would be racially charged events in the media which may interact with the experiences of these families and might be important to discuss. Assessment questions with interracial families and multiracial individuals might also explore what it has meant to the biracial individual to grow up with a unique racial heritage. Several participants in this study were clear that for some multiracial clients in therapy, their racial heritage may not have anything to do with their presenting problem, so it would be critical that therapists ask clients at the outset of therapy rather than assume.

Laszloffy (2005) also makes concrete suggestions for working with multiracial families in therapy and in particular, focuses on the importance of assessment. Similar to the suggestions made by the participants in this study, Laszloffy makes clear that multiracial families enter into therapy with the same types of problems as other families, but "the complexities of race in the United States can exacerbate the problems that multiracial families face" (p. 38). First, as was discussed previously in suggestions for training therapists, Laszloffy suggests that therapists examine their own beliefs and bias regarding race and racial issues. Laszloffy implores therapists to do such examining with others from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. Second, therapists should be sure to highlight family strengths throughout the assessment process. Third, it is critical that the therapist assess if the presenting issue is in fact related to racial issues. Laszloffy cautions that this portion of the assessment can be complicated and the therapist should approach the topic in an engaging and open-minded way emphasizing to the client that talking about race is acceptable and safe. The final aspect of assessment is to determine if there are any possible racial identity struggles for the children or adolescents within the family.

Clinical approaches. The most important factor when working with interracial families is safety and openness between the client family and the therapist in order for intimate conversations about race and racial identity to take place in therapy. In order to approach issues such as managing differences or tension between both sides of the family or not having parental support or parental understanding of experiences associated with the biracial identity development process, is has been suggested by Poston (1990) that therapists encourage interracial parents to talk about their own racial heritage as well as to acknowledge that their child's racial heritage is different than their own. In addition, when working toward a better understanding between parents and children, Poston recommends forming a family identity as an interracial unit, which signifies coming together at all times, but especially during times of difficulty and challenge. Coming together as a family unit and establishing open communications and a shared belief system about race and racial heritage allows families to succeed together in the face of family of origin and parent-child conflict (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Poston) which has been supported by the findings in this study.

The primary perspective held by several clinical researchers is approaching issues pertaining to biracial identity development from a relational narrative perspective (McGill, 1992; Milan & Keiley, 2000; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). Narrative therapy is a clinical perspective that invites therapists and clients to address the impact of dominant social narratives interacting with a person's lived experiences or preferred way of being (White & Epston, 1990). For many biracial individuals and interracial families, experiences of racism and discrimination have an impact on their daily lives. Rockquemore and Laszloffy outline their approach for using narrative therapy (informed by White and Epston) with biracial individuals who may be struggling with one or more aspects of their biracial identity. Such issues, as suggested by

participants in this study and also supported in the literature are, social stigmatization for a

biracial identity, internal stress arising from forced choice dilemmas, internalization of negative

social messages regarding racial identity, and not having parental or familial support of

experiences associated with the biracial identity development process.

Social and Political Implications

While questions in this study were not aimed to gather information regarding social and

political implications, the passion and desire of these families for school and community

involvement and social and political recognition cannot go ignored. The following implications

are issues intrinsically connected to the topic of biracial identity development according to the

participants involved in this study.

Schools

Outside of family, "schools are one of the most important socializing agents in the lives

of children," (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005, p. 88). Therefore, it would be important for

administrators and faculty of schools to be informed of the unique experiences of their

multiracial students. At the administrative level, school leaders can encourage open examination

of the racial climate within their schools and work to enhance teacher sensitivity to racial issues

via trainings and open forums with parents. Sensitivity trainings might encourage teachers to

become more aware of their own attitudes and beliefs regarding race and racial issues and how

those attitudes and beliefs might impact their interactions with students of color (Rockquemore

& Laszloffy). As was recommended with therapists and other mental health practitioners,

encouraging teachers to become more personally racially self aware, to become more aware that

race does matter, and to become more comfortable interacting with racially diverse people would

facilitate the process for teachers as they relate to their students about racial topics (Hardy &

Laszloffy, 1998).

Administrators can also encourage teachers to address race and ethnicity in their

classrooms, not only through their teaching, but also on a more personal level with the students.

At a curriculum level, teachers can invite students to explore family history, including the topics

of race and ethnicity, to help open conversations among students about similarities and

differences between various racial and ethnic groups, including interracial families. Furthermore,

teachers can utilize books, toys, and images that represent interracial families and multiracial

individuals. At a more personal level, teachers can encourage their students to acknowledge and

discuss racial topics and issues on a regular basis, in order to create an ongoing and open forum

for students to address their thoughts and feelings openly. Finally, when issues arise between

students regarding race and racial issues, teachers should be confident to encourage open and

direct dialogue about issues pertaining to race specifically, as opposed to avoiding or ignoring

them.

Parents should also be encouraged to become involved in their children's schools through

initiating contact with teachers, by volunteering in their child's classroom, or participating in

parent-teacher meetings. Involvement with their children's schools will enable parents to openly

address any concerns pertaining to race, if they should arise at school, more comfortably because

a relationship between the parent and the school has already been established (Rockquemore &

Laszloffy, 2005). Involvement with their children's school might also encourage children to

bring any issues arising at school into conversations at home with their parents.

A final implication at the school level would be openness of school administrators,

teachers, and students in creating clubs or social organizations that acknowledge students with a

multiracial heritage. Several participants in this study indicated their involvement with organizations for Black students or Black women, but also how they did not completely fit into these groups. Within most school systems, faculty are involved as facilitators or sponsors of such organizations. As such, faculty could be implored to support multiracial students within these organizations either by creating forums to discuss similarities and differences in experiences between monoracial and multiracial participants, or by supporting the creation of an organization specifically for multiracial students.

Community

The findings of this study indicate that interracial families are contending with many environmental stressors such as racial discrimination and pressure to choose one racial identity. Much of the responsibility for informing members of the community about the multiracial experience rests with interracial families and multiracial individuals. As parents and children share their stories of race and racial identity with their peers, their peers can also share those stories with others outside of those friendship circles. Parents can encourage their children to have open and honest conversations about their experiences growing up biracial with their friends and parents can engage the parents of their children's friends in such conversations as well. Additionally, parents can share their experiences of being part of an interracial relationship and raising biracial children with their friends, peers, and colleagues to promote more openness and engagement regarding race and racial issues.

Many parents in this study reported active engagement in their multiracial organizations. Such groups would be beneficial across multiple communities; however, there are often few resources available and little information for how to create and sustain such groups. If such organizations became more visible at the national level, perhaps via open acknowledgement of

the existence of multiracial identities and the realities of the multiracial experience by social and governmental agencies, funding might become more available for these groups. Another possible contribution of such multiracial organizations within communities is providing education and information about the experiences of interracial families and multiracial individuals to the greater population. Some multiracial organizations celebrate the landmark decision of *Loving v. the State of Virginia* annually*,* and with more overt public acknowledgement and funding, recognition and celebration of such pieces of interracial and multiracial history might be easier to share across communities.

Social Change

A major focus of the multiracial movement in America was to allow individuals to choose more than one race on the Census, which is also an effort to "make visible and legitimize the family relationships that are not often assumed by others," (DaCosta, 2007, p. 86). When parents and children are forced to choose one racial identity, they are forced to deny one racial identity and also one parent, which devalues the existence of interracial families. As public policy continues to expand to include counting and acknowledging multiracial individuals and families, so too, will understanding of the multiracial experiences in social arenas outside of these families and specialty groups.

The election of Barack Obama was a missed opportunity to represent a marker for multiracialism in American society. Instead, it seems, as culture, we are still not ready to embrace biracial or multiracial identity. The statement splashed across headlines after the election was: "The election of America's first African American president." It is widely known that Barack Obama was born of an African father and White mother; however, he has not publicly clarified as such. And neither does our media embrace him as biracial. What the

findings of this study reveal is that Black-White biracial Americans embrace Obama as America's first biracial president, and as such, desire this acknowledgement more formally from society. Several participants in the study emphasized their belief that biracial and multiracial people have the right to choose their racial identity (such as Black, or White, or biracial) (see *A Bill of Rights of for Racially Mixed People* in Root, 1996, p. 7), but what was important to them with the election of Obama was some social statement that underlined Obama's biracial heritage more clearly to the American people. Many groups claim Obama as a representation of change for our country: African Americans, Caucasians, families with young children, young people, old people, and etcetera. Obama represents change in the way America responds to race because we elected a non White president. On the other hand, he also represents the way Americans still ascribe to the rules of hypodescent. Perhaps one of the most significant implications of this study, in regard to social change, is that the general population is still not aware that multiracial and biracial people want a choice about their racial identity rather than having it assumed, as has been for icons such as Barack Obama.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study highlight numerous possibilities for future research on the topic of biracial identity development. Due to the limitations of my study only involving White mothers and primarily daughters, it would be useful to pursue a follow up study that would include a more representative sample of Black mothers-White fathers as well as White mothers-Black fathers, and to include more sons. This study did not yield in-depth information from the biracial children about the absence of their biological father during portions or all of their developmental processes, but future research should evaluate the impact of absent parents from the perspectives of the single parents and the biracial children. Additionally, interviewing the

entire family, including all parents and all of their children together, would provide a better sense of similarities and differences in perspectives of the interactive process within the same family. In some of my interviews, adult children revealed very different experiences growing up biracial than their siblings, which would be worth exploring further in terms of the perception and impact of family socialization on the biracial identity development process among siblings. A future study might include a multigenerational perspective of the biracial identity development involving members of the extended family such as grandparents and siblings of both the Black and White parent. Another study that could stand on its own would involve the perspectives of parents whose children marry interracially and have multiracial children.

Another aspect of my study that was revealed, but not in depth, was the concept of double discrimination for some of the lighter skinned biracial women in the study. Specifically, some females discussed how they not only experienced discrimination from White peers but also from Black peers, particularly Black female peers. Few studies have mentioned such a phenomenon. Questions for future research on this topic might include: "Do biracial women raised by Black mothers report similar experiences? When there are monoracial Black step siblings present, do similar experiences occur between the biracial step sister and her Black step sister? Do such attitudes present themselves between extended family members? Do experiences of double discrimination occur for lighter skinned biracial males with Black men or Black women?"

Another recommendation for future research stems from the sub-theme regarding the struggles with hair for biracial females. Almost every female participant discussed the impact of their hair on their relationship with their mothers, on their self-concept, and on their relationships with peers. In addition, a few biracial women spoke about being stigmatized by Black women for

their hair, something beyond their control. I wonder if biracial females raised by Black mothers report similar experiences with hair. In addition, I wonder about cultural messages regarding hair for biracial women and Black women and how those messages intersect with their personal experiences of identity development. Future research might investigate these questions. Further exploration of the concept of internalized oppression for biracial women may be useful in future research especially in relation to phenotypic signifiers (skin tone, hair, eye color, etc.) and the salience of such issues for identity development.

Another aspect of research only briefly mentioned within this study, but possibly warranting further exploration, would be that of dating, partnering, and marriage for biracial individuals. A few of the study participants alluded to some of the unique challenges of dating for them and their siblings. Some issues mentioned included "who to date" and not being "date-able" as the brown girl (too light for Black men, too dark for White men). An additional aspect of dating and partnering to explore in future research might include the impact of dating on the interracial family for parents of biracial children. Dating is a complex process interracially for parents as well as biracial individuals. When biracial individuals partner and have children, the racial combinations of the parents contribute to another unique aspect of the multiracial experience—multiracial children of biracial parents. Some biracial adults with children discussed the challenge of figuring out what racial labels to use for their own children, as they were sometimes even more racially mixed than either one of their parents. More specific research might examine the unique aspects of the racial identity development process for these multiracial children and their biracial and/or monoracial parents.

As I reviewed the literature on biracial identity development, I discovered multiple disciplines (psychology, sociology, family therapy, human development) utilizing clinical and

non-clinical samples to develop models and theories. I believe it essential to conduct a comparative analysis of the literature specifically on biracial identity development models. This would be useful because the findings of my study reveal the importance of familial interactions on the process of developing a biracial identity, but many of the models do not address these factors. In addition, narrowing the comparative analysis to studies only conducted with Black-White biracials might prove useful for understanding the unique aspects of growing up as a Black-White biracial. A more detailed examination of the Black-White experience might also contribute to a clearer conclusion about the role of interracial families in bridging the Black-White divide in American culture, if at all. While there is overlap evident in the experiences of all multiracial individuals, comparing information collected about Black-White biracials with other multiracial combinations and the identity development process would also be interesting. The literature review represents an abundance of biracial and multiracial development models with useful information about the process of growing up biracial. To date, researchers have not linked the models or attempted to replicate various study findings to determine the applicability of the models across multiracial groups or with multiracial populations in various regions around the country.

Finally, a longitudinal study on biracial identity development would provide a major contribution to the field of multiracial studies. There have been cross sectional studies conducted with biracial individuals at various phases of the lifecycle, but no study has been completed that examines the experiences of one group of biracial individuals from childhood into adulthood. A longitudinal study would provide information at the various stages of the biracial identity development process from the child's perspective as well as the parent's perspective. A longitudinal study might also yield more information about the effect of separation, divorce,

single parenting, remarriage, and blending families at the various life cycle stages for these interracial families as well.

Final Conclusions

This study brought together the stories of 10 interracial families with adult children who identify as biracial. While there were many shared experiences among the families, each family had its own exceptional story of strength, family dynamics, and enterprise. Across cases, the message embodied was one of togetherness and resiliency for these mothers and their adult children. The interviews provided unique insight into the phenomenon of the shared interactional experiences of monoracial parents and their biracial children throughout the biracial identity development process.

The findings of this study should be shared with other interracial families, family therapy clinicians, therapy training programs, teachers and school administrators, and community organizers. These stories may also provide insight and encouragement to families who are currently navigating the biracial identity development process. Moreover, these stories may also provide clinicians and other mental health providers, as well as teachers and school counselors, and policy makers with helpful information regarding the strengths and resiliencies of these families and the possible challenges with which this population may be contending. Finally, the findings of this study should be shared with other faculty of multiracial studies in human development, couples and family therapy, and other fields as a building block for future research endeavors with the multiracial populations in America.

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Appendix A

Advertisement Flyer

Participants Needed

The development of a Biracial/Multiracial Identity is becoming

a more widely discussed topic in American Culture. I am studying Black-White interracial parents and their biracial children's perspectives on the experience of developing a biracial identity.

I am looking for parent and adult children participants who meet the following criteria:

- ***Black-White biracial adult individuals (ages 18 & older) and at least one of their interracial coupled, single or remarried parents***
- ***At least 1 adult child and 1 Parent must agree to be interviewed***
- ***Children and parent(s) living or having lived in the Pacific Northwest (OR and/or WA)***

Interviews will last between 1 and 2 hours. Participants may complete the in-person interviews at a location of their choice. Each participant will receive a $10 gift card of their choice for Starbucks or Cold Stone Creamery as compensation for completing the interview.

If your family meets the criteria (or knows one that does) or wants more information about this study please contact:

Dana Stone, MA

Ph.D. Candidate, Virginia Tech at

BiracialStudy08@yahoo.com

541-463-XXXX

Your participation will help contribute to the understanding of biracial identity development for Black-White interracial families.

Appendix B

Recruitment Email/Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to request your help with a research study on biracial identity development. The study will examine the unique process of exploring and developing shared, familial meanings about race between monoracial parents and their biracial children.

In this study, I will be interviewing families about their experiences with the biracial identity development process. I'm interested in hearing from both parents and children in Black-White multiracial families. For the purpose of this study, I am looking for at least one monoracial Black and one monoracial White parent and one or more of their biological, biracial young adult (ages 18 and older) children. During the 1 to 2 hour in-person interviews, I will ask families to share their experiences of race and biracial identity development within their family and also in their community. Interviews will be conducted with all family members together and with parents and children separately. Interview locations will be determined with each family. Each family member will receive their choice of a $10.00 gift certificate to Starbucks or a $10.00 gift certificate to Cold Stone Creamery as compensation for completing the interviews.
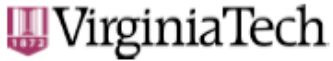
If you would be interested in participating in this study, or know some else who would, or would like more information, please contact me, Dana Stone, at 541-463-XXXX or BiracialStudy08@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,

Dana Stone, MA
Ph.D. Candidate, Virginia Tech

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter Virginia Tech

VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959
e-mail moored@vt.edu
www.irb.vt.edu

FWA00000572(expires 1/20/2010)
IRB # Is IRB00000667

DATE: May 15, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Megan Dolbin-MacNab
             Dana Stone

Approval date: 5/15/2008
Continuing Review Due Date:4/30/2009
Expiration Date: 5/14/2009

FROM: David M. Moore

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "Parent and Child Influences on the Development of a
             Black-White Biracial Identity", IRB # 08-309

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for
expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110.
As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a
period of 12 months, effective May 15, 2008.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research
   activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and
   investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated
   without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent
   immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events
   involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data
   analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration
   date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing
   review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's
   responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as
   closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and
   data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate
   apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:
If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, please send the applicable OSP/grant
proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has
compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB applicaton.

cc: File
    Department Reviewer: Joyce A. Arditti

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Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter University of Oregon

O | UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

June 2, 2008

TO: Dana Stone, Principal Investigator
             Couples and Family Therapy Program

FROM: Deborah Olson, IRB Chair
             Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects
             Social/Behavioral Panel – FWA 00005914

RE: Protocol #X651-08, entitled "Parent and Child Influences on the Development of a Black-
             White Biracial Identity"

Your protocol has been REVIEWED and APPROVED by the Committee for the Protection of Human
Subjects (CPHS). The materials enclosed with this notice are the official records and must be retained.
Only the approved materials may be used for this research.

The approval of the CPHS is based upon your representations of the nature of the project and the
involvement of human subjects. It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to report adverse
events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects to the Office for Protection of Human
Subjects (OPHS) within 24 hours. If during the course of your project you change your methodology in
any way you are required to submit a MODIFICATION FORM to the CPHS for approval prior to
implementation.

This approval is for one year, unless otherwise noted. Under the regulations, the CPHS will review
projects at least annually, or more often if it deems that the risks to subjects warrant a more frequent
review. Investigators will be notified approximately one month prior to expiration of the current
approval period that the CONTINUING REVIEW FORM must be completed and submitted, along with a
sample of the informed consent form in use, to the OPHS.

When the project has been closed [i.e., procedures involving human subjects are completed), the
investigator should complete the FINAL REPORT portion of the CONTINUING REVIEW FORM and send
it to the OPHS. All records, including signed consent forms, must be retained by the investigator for a
minimum of 3 years after the OPHS FINAL REPORT FORM is submitted to the OPHS or the final
expenditure report is submitted to the funding agency, unless otherwise specified by the funding agency.

If you have any questions, please contact the OPHS at (541) 346-2510. You may also consult the
Investigator's Manual on Research with Human Subjects, available on the OPHS website
(http://humansubjects.uoregon.edu/).

cc: Megan Dolbin-MacNab, Co-Investigator

COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS · OFFICE FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
5237 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403-5237 T (541) 346-2510 F (541) 346-6224
http://humansubjects.uoregon.edu

Appendix E

Informed Consent

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of Project: Parent and Child Influences on the Development of a Black-White Biracial Identity

Investigators:
Dana Stone, Ph.D. Candidate, and Megan Dolbin-MacNab, Ph.D., Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.

I. Purpose of the Project
The purpose of this study is to examine biracial identity development from the perspectives of both parents and children in Black-White multiracial families. In addition, the study will examine how monoracial parents and their biracial children share and create meanings about race for their own family. For this study, biracial families are being defined as at least one monoracial Black and one monoracial White parent and one or more of their biological, biracial young adult (ages 18 and older) children. Approximately 10 participant families will be interviewed about their experiences of race and biracial identity development within their own family. They will also be interviewed about how they express their racial identity to others outside the family. All interviews will be conducted by Dana Stone. Interviews will be conducted in two stages. First, all family members will be interviewed together. Then, parents and children will be interviewed separately. Participants will also be given the option to review the initial findings of the study.

II. Procedures
Participants will complete a 1 to 2 hour personal interview with Dana Stone. Interview questions are designed to invite exploration of the process of biracial identity development for parents of biracial children and their biracial children. Interviews may take place in the participants' home, workplace, or another comfortable location. If needed, interviews may also take place in the investigator's office. The interview will be digitally audio recorded and audio taped. After the interview is finished, a verbatim transcript of the interview will be completed. Participants who have given permission to review the findings will be contacted at a later date once initial data analysis is complete.

III. Risks
There are no more than minimal risks involved in participating in this project. The interview may cause anxiety or discomfort as participants think about some of the topics being explored. Participants can choose to not answer any interview questions. Also, they may stop or withdraw from the interview at any time.

IV. Benefits
This study will uncover the unique process of exploring and developing shared, familial meanings about race between monoracial parents and their multiracial children. Possible benefits include providing information to other multiracial families about the racial identity developmental process. In addition, the results of this study will assist therapists, counselors, and teachers who work with multiracial children and their families.

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. Participants may contact the researcher at a later time for a summary of the research results.

VI. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Results will be kept confidential. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the information you supply.

The investigator, Dana Stone, has been trained in procedures for ensuring confidentiality and will be transcribing each interview. Personal identifiers, such as proper names and locations, will be removed from interview transcripts.

Questionnaires will not ask for identifying information. All information related to the study will be given number and letter code. Participant identity will not be linked to any data output.

Tapes and transcripts from the interviews will be kept in a secure location until data analysis is complete. Only the investigators will have access to interview transcripts. All audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board
(IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

In some situations, it may be necessary for the investigator to break confidentiality. If child abuse or elder is known or strongly suspected, investigators are required to notify the appropriate authorities. If a subject is believed to be a threat to herself, himself, or others, the investigator will notify the appropriate authorities.

VII. Compensation

Each participant in the study will receive their choice of a $10.00 gift certificate to Starbucks or a $10.00 gift certificate to Cold Stone as compensation for completing the interview.

If as a result of this research project, the investigator determines that the participant should seek counseling or medical treatment, a list of local services will be provided. However, any expenses accrued will be the sole responsibility of the participant and not that of the research project, research team, or Virginia Tech.

VIII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You may ask that the audio recorder be turned off at any time during the interview. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose without penalty.

IX. Informed Consent

Participants will receive a copy of the consent form on the day of the interview prior to beginning the interview. The investigator will verbally review the informed consent and answer questions regarding participation. All participants will be asked to verbally indicate their agreement with the stated conditions and required to sign the document.

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Tech.

X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent Form for Participants and the conditions of this project. I voluntarily agree to participate in this project. I have had questions I have about the project answered to my satisfaction and comfort. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in this project.

_____
Participant Print Name

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher Signature   Date

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Dana Stone, Investigator, (541) 463-8260 BiracialStudy08@yahoo.com
Megan Dolbin-MacNab, Principal Investigator, (540) 231-6807 mdolbinm@vt.edu
Joyce Arditti, Departmental Reviewer (540) 231-5758 jarditti@vt.edu
Shannon E. Jarrott, Interim Department Head (540) 231-5434 sjarrott@vt.edu
David M. Moore, IRB Chair, (540)-231-4991, moored@vt.edu

Appendix F

Interview Guides

<u>Open Ended Interview Guide for Families</u>
1. What does it mean to your family to be Interracial/Biracial?
2. How does your family talk about race and what does that mean to your family?
3. What experiences influence how and when your family talks about race together?
4. Please tell me the things about being in your family that are/were important to your racial identity development.
5. How would you say your family's racial identity has affected your interactions with other (extended family, friends, and community)?
6. How comfortable do you feel with your family's racial identity?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to share that I have not specifically asked about in this part of the interview?
8. Couples and family therapists (CFT) work with families, couples, and individuals in clinical practice. It is important for therapists to be sensitive to the variety of ways multiracial families define their identities and any possible unique issues that may arise for these families, couples, and/or individuals.
   a. Would you offer some constructive ways therapists might approach this topic with multiracial families?
   b. Will you please describe for me some of the possible issues multiracial families may be facing when entering therapy?
   c. Please talk about the possible benefit of entering therapy to talk about the experiences of being apart of a multiracial family and raising multiracial children.
   d. Please describe any suggestions you have for therapist attempting to reach this unique subgroup of the population.

<u>Open-Ended Interview Guide for Parents</u>
1. What has been it been like for you to raise biracial children?
   a. How do you describe your child's racial identity?
   b. As a parent, how have tried to shape your child's racial identity or tell your children how to identify him or her self?
   c. As a parent what do you believe to be the importance of your child identifying as black/white/ or biracial, etc.?
   d. Please talk about the possible advantages, disadvantages, both, or neither you believe your child has by being biracial.
2. At what age do you believe your child/children became conscious of race?
   a. Please describe any memorable experiences your child has had growing up when he/she became aware of race.
   b. Please recall and talk about times in your child's lifetime that you were very conscious of race.
   c. How does your family explicitly deal with the topic of race?
3. Please talk about the ways your understanding of race and racial identity has evolved since you have had/raised your children.

4. Please talk about the ways in which people typically react to you and your interracial marriage/partnership. What do they assume about you?
   a. Please describe your current friendship groups.
   b. Please talk about you involvement with both sides of your family.
   c. What is/was the racial make-up of your neighborhood while raising your child/children?

Open Ended Interview Guide for Single Parents

1. Please describe any challenges, in addition to being a single parent, about raising your biracial child(ren) on your own.
   a. How have you managed the issues of race that is not your own?
   b. How has the other parent been involved with raising your child(ren)?
2. Considering the role of CFTs described previously, would you offer some constructive ways therapists might approach the topic of raising multiracial children for single parent families?
   a. Will you please describe for me some of the possible issues single parents in multiracial families may be facing when entering therapy?
   b. Please talk about the possible benefit of entering therapy to talk about the experience of raising multiracial children in a single parent home.
   c. Please describe any suggestions you have for therapist attempting to reach this unique subgroup of the population.

Open-Ended Interview Guide for Biracial Individuals

1. What does it mean to have one Black parent and one White parent?
   a. Please tell me about times when you identify more with one race than the other.
   b. How do you view yourself in relation to your parents racially?
2. How do you currently identify yourself racially and what does your racial identity mean to you?
   a. How do you deal with living with two racial heritages?
   b. What do you see as the characteristics of your racial group(s)?
3. Please tell me the things about being in your family that were/are important to your racial identity development.
   a. What aspects of your family life contributed to your development of your racial identity?
4. Please describe an example of how your family was supportive or not supportive of your explorations of race. What were some of the most important experiences you had with your parents regarding your development of a racial identity?
5. What were some of the most important experiences you had socially, outside of your family, regarding your development of a racial identity?
   a. Please tell me about any experiences of conflict you had between your race and mainstream culture.
   b. What images or stereotypes do you believe most people have of your racial group and how do you respond to these images?
   c. To what extent, if any, have you encountered or experienced discrimination?
   d. How have you chosen to deal with discrimination?

6. Please tell me about times when you choose to identify with one race more than the other.
7. Please describe any significant experiences that have altered the way you think and feel about yourself racially.
8. Considering the role of CFTs described previously, would you offer some constructive ways therapists might approach the topic of growing up as a multiracial individual?
    a. Will you please describe for me some of the possible issues multiracial individuals may be facing when entering therapy?
    b. Please describe any suggestions you have for therapist attempting to reach this unique subgroup of the population.
    c. Please talk about the possible benefit of entering therapy to talk about the multiracial developmental process.

Appendix G

Demographic Questionnaire: Biracial Adults

1. Age: _____ Gender: _____ Racial Identification:_____

2. City, State or Country of Birth:_____

3. Please complete the following information about your sibling(s):

Sibling's First Name	Age	Gender	Relationship to You (Biological, Half, Step, Adopted)

4. What is your current marital status?
- ❑ Single
- ❑ Dating
- ❑ Married/Domestic Partner
- ❑ Separated
- ❑ Divorced
- ❑ Widowed

5. If you are or have been dating, married, partnered, separated, divorced or widowed what are/were the racial identification(s) of your partner / spouse /ex-spouse? Please list only the relationships you feel are relevant.

_____
_____

6. Please complete the following information about your children (if any):

Child's First Name	Age	Gender	Relationship to You (Biological, Step, Adopted)

7. How do you racially identify your children?_____

8. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?
- ❑ Less then High School
- ❑ High School or GED
- ❑ Some College
- ❑ Two-year College Degree (Associates)
- ❑ Four-year College Degree (BA, BS)

❑ Graduate Degree (Masters, Ph.D.)
❑ Professional Degree (MD, JD)

9. What is your yearly household income before taxes?

❑	$0 - $10, 000	❑	$50,001 – $65,000
❑	$10,001 – $20,000	❑	$65,001 – $80,000
❑	$20,001 – $35,000	❑	$80,001 – $100,000
❑	$35,001 – $50,000	❑	More than $100,000

10. In what type of area did you grow up?
❑ Urban (a city/metropolis or densely populated area)
❑ Suburban (an area located inside or just outside a city's limit)
❑ Rural (sparsely settled area outside large cities)

11. If you grew up in more than one area, please list each area and your approximate ages:

Area Description	Age(s)

12. How would you describe the racial make-up of the primary neighborhood in which you grew up? If you lived in more than one neighborhood, please describe each neighborhood and your approximate ages:

Racial Make-Up Neighborhood Description	Age(s)

13. How would you describe the racial make-up of your elementary school?
_____
_____

14. How would you describe the racial make-up of your middle or junior high school?
_____
_____

15. How would you describe the racial make-up of your high school?
_____
_____

16. How would you describe the contact with your mother's family while you were growing up?
❑ Frequent (weekly or monthly)

❑ Infrequent (holidays or special occasions)
❑ No Contact

17. How would you describe the contact with your father's family while you were growing up?
❑ Frequent (weekly or monthly)
❑ Infrequent (holidays or special occasions)
❑ No Contact

Demographic Questionnaire: Parents

1. Age: _____ **Gender:** _____ **Racial Identification:** _____

2. City, State or Country of Birth: _____

3. Please complete the following information about your children:

Child's First Name	Age	Gender	Relationship to You (Biological, Step, Adopted)

4. What is your current marital status?
- ❏ Single
- ❏ Dating
- ❏ Married/Domestic Partner
- ❏ Separated
- ❏ Divorced
- ❏ Widowed

5. If you are or have been dating, married, partnered, separated, divorced or widowed what are/were the racial identification(s) of your partner / spouse /ex-spouse? Please list only the relationships you feel are relevant.

_____

_____

6. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?
- ❏ Less then High School
- ❏ High School or GED
- ❏ Some College
- ❏ Two-year College Degree (Associates)
- ❏ Four-year College Degree (BA, BS)
- ❏ Graduate Degree (Masters, Ph.D.)
- ❏ Professional Degree (MD, JD)

7. What is your yearly household income before taxes?
- ❏ $0 - $10,000
- ❏ 10,000 - 20,000
- ❏ $20,001 - $35,000
- ❏ $35,001 - $50,000
- ❏ $50,001 - $65,000
- ❏ $65,001 - $80,000

❑ $80,001 – 100,000
❑ More than $100,000

8. In what type of area did you raise your children?
❑ Urban (a city/metropolis or densely populated area)
❑ Suburban (an area located inside or just outside a city's limit)
❑ Rural (sparsely settled area outside large cities)

9. If you raised your children in more than one type of area, please list each area and your children's approximate ages:

Area Description	Child(ren)'s Age(s)

10. How would you describe the racial make-up of the primary neighborhood in which you raised your children? If you lived in more than one neighborhood, please describe each neighborhood and your children's approximate ages:

Racial Make-Up Neighborhood Description	Child(ren)'s Age(s)

11. How would you describe the racial make-up of your child(ren)'s elementary school?
_____
_____

12. How would you describe the racial make-up of your child(ren)'s middle or junior high school?
_____
_____

13. How would you describe the racial make-up of your child(ren)'s high school?
_____
_____

14. How would you describe the contact with your family while your child was growing up?
❑ Frequent (weekly or monthly)
❑ Infrequent (holidays or special occasions)
❑ No Contact

15. How would you describe the contact with your spouse or partner's family while your child was growing up?
- ❑ Frequent (weekly or monthly)
- ❑ Infrequent (holidays or special occasions)
- ❑ No Contact

Appendix H

Themes Draft 1

Family environment
       Parent(s)
       Parent-child relationships
       Siblings
       Extended family networks

Familial experiences of the racial identity development process
       Parent's perceptions
          1. Raising Children
          2. Racial socialization or messages
          3. Teaching about racial heritage
          4. Family pride
       Young Adult's perceptions
          1. Racial awareness
          2. How I define my racial identity
          3. Mixed, biracial
          4. "Best of both worlds"
          5. Self image, physical descriptors
          6. Perceived gender differences
          7. Internal struggles
          8. Strengths/Resiliency

Family Stories: Experiences of race
       Growing up (childhood/adolescence)
       Don't see color/race, color-blind
       When we talk about race
       Racial discrimination/Racism
       Social response to racial identity
       Choosing/pressure to choose
       Physical descriptions of biracial people
       Talking about race
       Perceptions of other people regarding race or racial issues
       Historical cohort

Social contexts for understanding race and exploring racial identity
       Friends
       School
       Work
       Neighborhood/Local Community
       Media
       Groups

Appendix I

Themes Draft 6

1. **Multigenerational Family Relationships—**Family interactions and relationships contribute to the creation of identity for most individuals. This theme addresses the complex relationships within these multiracial families, including relationships between parents, relationships between parents and their biracial children, relationships between biracial siblings, as well as relationships with parents' parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Each set of relationships has changed and shifted in influence over time from the childhood of the biracial individual into adulthood.

    a. **Family Constellations and Parental Dating Practices**—Moms in the interviews did not simplify the relationships between parents as married, divorced, or remarried, etc. Many moms talked about the intricacies of the relationships between biological parents and between biological parents and stepparents. The relationships parents had with each other were instrumental in how one or both parents influenced their child's biracial identity development. In addition, some mom's talked about their children's racial identity having an impact on dating preferences over the years.

    b. **Supportive and Close Parent-Child Relationships**—Both moms and their adult children in the interview talked about their mother-child relationships as mostly supportive and close. The supportiveness and closeness between mothers and their children exemplified the importance of the relationship for discussing race and racial identity issues as they came up for the biracial individual. In addition both mothers and their children also talked about the adult child's relationship with their father and/or step-father(s), which ranged from cut-off to close and supportive, these various father-child relationships also had an influence on the racial identity development process for some biracial individuals.

    c. **Supportive Siblings: Sharing the Biracial Experience**—Most biracial adults who had siblings talked about the significance and importance of having a sibling or multiple siblings to share the biracial experience with on a more personal or intimate level. In some cases, the relationship was not emphasized but rather just having siblings going through similar things while growing up was acknowledged.

    d. **Grandparents and Great-Grandparents: Impact on the Biracial Experience**—Most moms and their adult children talked about various roles and reactions of their parents/grandparents or grandparents/great-grandparents to the interracial relationship or the birth of a biracial child. In most families the roles and responses of the parents/grandparents/great-grandparents changed or evolved over time. For some parents in the interview the roles and reactions of their parents and/or grandparents served as an opportunity for mothers to stand up against negative assumptions and discrimination based on race. The experiences of parents and their biracial child with parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were discussed as eye-opening experiences that influenced standing strong for their belief in the value of their interracial relationships and/or biracial identity.

      i. Evolution from Nonsupport to Support
     ii. Rejections and Distance
    iii. Privately Connected, Externally Rejected

2. **Familial Influences on the Racial Identity Development Process**—Families co-create meanings about race and racial identity. This theme addresses the communications parents and children have about race and racial identity with each other. Parents intentionally worked to create an open family environment for their biracial children to grow up in. As a result of this intentionality, biracial individuals and their parents share mutual influence on each other throughout the biracial individual's biracial identity development process, because parents talk to their kids, and kids come to their parents to talk.

    a. **The Intentional and Unique Responsibility of Raising Biracial Children**—Parents talked about the importance of teaching their children about recognizing both sides of their racial heritage. Many mothers in particular took responsibility for teaching both the White side and the Black side of their child's racial identity. this includes both Moms in the interview and biracial adults with their own multiracial children discussing both the ease and challenges of which racial labels and descriptions to use for their children.

    b. **Racially Labeling Children**— This includes both Moms in the interview and biracial adults with their own multiracial children discussing both the ease and challenges of which racial labels and descriptions to use for their children.

    c. **Acknowledging Potential Challenges for Biracial Children**—Parents and biracial adults talked about the specific messages sent and received about race within the family. This included preparation for possible discrimination. In addition some parents and their children discussed the concept of being color-blind or trying not to see color as a barrier in the world. The message here in most families is the openness in the family to talk about race as it comes up.

    d. **Pride as an Interracial Family**—Parents and adult children talked about the sense of pride they feel being a part of an interracial family. In addition adult children also talked about the comfortable environment their parent or parents created for them growing up and the idea that within their family they do not think about being biracial on a daily basis.

3. **Negotiating Our Racial Identity with the "Outside" World: An Interactive Experience**—Cultural and social experiences influence the development of identity. This theme addresses the influences of culture and society on the family and biracial individual's identity as well as the ways in which the family and the biracial individual influence their cultural and societal context.

    a. **Friendships**—Parents and biracial adults talked about the importance of supportive others outside of their family. Some of these important others included members of support groups and/or members of multiracial organizations.

    b. **Neighborhoods and Local Community**—Both parents and biracial adults talked about the importance of their interactions with the community and local neighborhood. For some parents the location where they raised their children was an intentional choice based on diversity of the area. For others, parents and

biracial adults alike, the location was a matter of circumstance which had its own implications.

c. **Trying to Fit Me into a Box: Pressure to Choose Black *or* White**—Parents and biracial adults talked about various times when others put pressure on the biracial individual to choose one race or the other. This pressure came mostly from strangers; however there were occasions when acquaintances or friends applied pressure. Most parents and biracial adults also talked about the opportunity to inform others in these circumstances about the biracial experience and that they saw themselves as a group of people who do not fit into a box.

d. **Fighting Discrimination and Racism as a Family**— Parents and their adult children talked about general social responses their race and interracial family. In general this section refers to the questions: "What are you," "Is he adopted," and comments such as "She's so exotic" and more and how the family member responded to such inquiries and comments. In addition, parents and biracial children shared their experiences of racial discrimination or racism and the impact of the experiences on both the individual and the family. The family environment provides place to work through these experiences together and to come together to stand against aggressions.

e. **The Impact of Racially Historical Events**— Most parents and their adult children mentioned or discussed in depth the impact of the Obama's presidential race and eventual election. Families discussed the significance of having a biracial president for their family's discussions of identity. Some families also talked about the impact of other racially significant events in the media on their experiences as individuals and as a family.

4. **The Experience of Growing up with a Unique Racial Heritage**—This theme addresses the adult's perceptions of themselves as biracial individuals. This theme does not stand on its own. It is intersects with all other themes and sub-themes. The biracial adult came to these thoughts and conclusions about being biracial through interaction with their parents and other family members as well as their interaction with their historical, social, and political contexts.

a. **How I Describe My Racial Identity**—The adult children in the interview shared the terms they use and how they describe their racial identity. They also talked about circumstances when they might select one race over the other, typically only when filling out forms where there is one choice.

b. **The Color of My Skin Matters**—Half of the biracial adults in the interview talked about the color of their skin and how it has an impact on their sense of their racial identity.

c. **"The Biggest Issue I've had is Hair"**—Half of the biracial women in the interview identified their hair as having a significant impact on their identity development process. Their stories and descriptions of their hair has evolved and changed over time as they learned to work with it.

d. **Stuck in the Middle *and* the "Best of Both Worlds"**—All of the biracial adults in the interview expressed the positive aspects of being biracial. However many also talked about being biracial as a challenge because they do not fit into any one

racial category or group *and* as the best of both worlds because they belong to two different racial heritages.

e. **Resiliency: My Racial Identity Process Makes Me a Stronger Person—**
Several of the biracial adults in the interviews talked about the ways in which they felt being biracial contributed to their strength and open mindedness as a person.

Appendix J

Email Letter for Member Checks

March 30, 2009

Dear [participant name],

I am writing this time with an attachment of the family summaries with pseudonyms and the themes across all of the data I have collected for my study on the biracial identity development process in Black-White interracial families.
In the first attachment you will see the summary I have written about your family as I believe you described your family to me. I will be including this summary in my final paper so that the reader will have a more complete picture of the families in the study.
In next section of the first attachment you will see highlights from your own family interview. These are just a few of the many quotes that stood out to me in your family and individual interviews.

In the second attachment you will see the themes I have come up with across all of the interviews with all participants in this study. These are the themes that I will be highlighting and writing about in the Results and Discussion sections of my final paper. I would like to make sure that you each agree with the themes as I have expressed them. Please note that all of the themes may not pertain to you or your family specifically, but hopefully you will see where you and your family fit within most themes.

In the third attachment you will find a worksheet to type in your responses to my questions about the summaries and themes I have sent. You may use this worksheet to respond to my questions and send it back to me as an attachment in an email or you may respond to the questions directly in an email. It is your choice.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions you have about this process. I would like to have your responses no later than 2 weeks from today: April 13, 2009. If I have not heard back from you in 7 to 10 days, I will send you a reminder email.

Your participation in this part of the process is very much appreciated. I truly look forward to hearing back from you in the next few weeks.

Thank you,
Dana Stone
541-463-XXXX
biracialstudy08@yahoo.com