WHITE/MINORITY MULTIRACIALITY: AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT

Melody Marie Antillon Hazzard
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Student: Melody Marie Antillon Hazzard

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Susan Talamantes Eggen, PhD., MSW
Graduate Coordinator

Date

Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

WHITE/MINORITY MULTIRACIALITY: AN EXPLORATION OF
SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT

by

Melody Marie Antillon Hazzard

There is contention in multiracial studies as to whether multiracial people perpetuate or
challenge the current racial hierarchy. This study explores the sociopolitical
consciousness of white/minority multiracial people. The themes explored are the
connection between the personal and the political, and the positive and negative impacts
of passing on dominant culture identification and worldview. Participants had ambivalent
attitudes regarding personal attitudes about racial identity and their relationship to the
sociopolitical issues. Exploration into the issue of passing suggests that there are new
ways to think about the concept. Also included are a discussion about the implications for
practice and suggestions for further research.

Maria Dinis, PhD., MSW

April 16, 2009

Date
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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The tragedy for ‘mixed’ people is that powerful social lie, the assumption that at the heart of ‘race,’ that a presumed biological essence is the basis of one’s true identity . . . The emphasis on and significance given to ‘race’ precludes any possibility for establishing our premier identities on the basis of other characteristics . . . In this sense it may be argued that the myth of ‘race’ has been a barrier to true human identities. (Smedley, 1998, p. 696)

I became aware of the racial paradox I embody at a young age. In an experience that has acted as a guiding metaphor for the way I understand myself in the context of our (United States) society, the racial, and therefore, the perceived social and class differences between myself and my Mexican father were forced upon me at the U.S./Mexico border in San Diego, California at age six. My father and I were making one of our routine trips across the border into Tijuana to send part of his wages home to his tiny home town of La Junta in Chihuahua, Mexico. In 1989, crossing the border was vastly less complicated than it is now, there was no need for passports, birth certificates, or statements of intent—only a driver’s license or, for suspected immigrants, a green card. We were usually waved through after a quick look from a U.S. border patrol agent, but this time we were stopped and the agent began asking questions—of me. I was asked to recite my home address, phone number, spell my first and last name, and one final and most important question, what my “relation” to my father—or as the agent called him, “this man,”—was.
For the first time I noticed what was obvious to others, that my father and I were different colors, he brown, and I white. Because all the ways that I felt connected to my father and the culture that he represented—the food, the language, the music, the sense of community—were internal, and could not be authenticated by my appearance, I became whatever others saw in me. In the border patrol agent’s eyes, I was white, and therefore did not belong with my father, a brown man. His questioning of my relationship to my father illustrates the fact that there exists in our society a deeply ingrained racial hierarchy with specific meanings.

For me the U.S./Mexico border represents the multi-faceted nature of understanding the biracial experience, therefore I consider it an appropriate place to mark the beginning of my journey through identity. Just as Mexicans who happened to live north of the Rio Grande were forced to choose a new and unknown national and cultural identity in 1848, to recognize their new status as other in an increasingly Anglo society, so I was forced to recognize the difference between myself and my father. There is a popular saying among Chicano/as (American-born Mexicans) “no cruce la frontera, la frontera me cruzo a mi,” I didn’t cross the border, the border crossed me. Prior to the day I was questioned about my relationship to my father, I felt wholly confident in my identity as my father’s daughter. Afterwards, however, I was forced to recognize that my father and I were different in the eyes of others, and that I represented confusion and possibly even fear for people who saw the world in the same way as the border patrol agent.
The intersection of race, culture, class, language, and nationality plays out on the surface of borderlands; lines long-drawn are blurred, meanings are questioned, and what emerges are “hybrid” cultures, uniquely interpreted by each individual that passes through these “boundaries.” Although I had the privilege to come of age next to a physical and pulsating national border to help illuminate and evoke internal questions of identity, it would have sufficed just to look in the mirror.

My phenotype allows me to “pass” as white, meaning that most people assume that I am European American, and that I can claim this identity without incurring any doubt. If so choose, I could go through the rest of my life identifying and being identified as monoracial white. While passing is clearly the less confusing option for others (Gilbert, 2005; Senna, 1998b; Smedley, 1998), for me it only serves to further complicate the issue. In situations where I am conscious of passing, I often feel guilty. As I wonder what this guilt represents, the following questions come to mind: is “passing” a conscious choice?; do half white “mixed-race” or “biracial” people have a moral responsibility to claim their “minority” side?; and, is it wrong for those who can pass to either consciously or unconsciously benefit from white privilege (Gilbert)?

When I am asked about my experience as a biracial person, the questions usually seem to be framed in terms of rooting out where my loyalties lie. I find that most people want me to pick a side, so to speak, in order to simplify for them what is a puzzling at best, and abnormal at least, concept. As a Chicano/a Studies major at UC Davis, I was often greeted by contrived smiles and what I considered a general feeling of coldness on the first day of class. When the topic of “race” inevitably came up in conversation—
usually via the question “So, why are you taking this class?” — I would dutifully pronounce my last name with the appropriate Spanish accent, explain that I was half Mexican, and the room would warm considerably. However, I would then have to admit that I do not speak fluent Spanish, and it was time to put my sweater back on.

Further complicating matters was the way the University of California system’s required diversity mantra of “race/class/gender” seemed centered around the fact that the dominant/majority culture, or white America, has historically and presently systematically oppressed people of color. This notion seemed to divide society and my ethnic studies classrooms neatly into two categories: oppressors and the oppressed. Even in the most simplistic situation, with only two possible molds to conform to, I could not make myself fit. Who, exactly, I wondered, counted as a “person of color?” If my mom is white, and my father is Mexican; should I be counted as an oppressor or one of the oppressed?

If whites had had the power to oppress and control, constructing notions and functions of race, it seemed logical that they would also have the power and the responsibility to undo, or at least, redo these things. As representatives and potential insiders of majority and a minority culture, what, if any, responsibility and power do “mixed” and/or “biracial” people who can pass as white have in negotiating positive change in American racial ideology?

Background of the Problem

Although undoubtedly on the rise (Johnson, 2003), biraciality and multiraciality are not new phenomena. And although there has been a recent surge of textbooks,
memoirs, and articles published on the subject, entitled in ways that suggest nothing short of racial revolution, biraciality in the form of mixed white/minority has a long history in the United States. Indeed, the existence of "mixed-race" persons in the United States predates the founding of the nation, as intermarriage among whites and Native Americans is well documented (Berger, 1997). An increase in the biracial population paralleled the founding and early years of the United States as slave masters often raped their black female slaves in order to assert their power and dominance as well as to increase the slave labor force (Harris, 1996). Because this biracial population uniformly had black (slave) mothers and white (free) fathers, laws were created to establish one’s racial identity as maternally-determined, thus protecting the white man’s property value (Lopez, 1994). In 1806, however, this law was challenged by three generations of enslaved women who claimed to be descended from a free Native American woman (Lopez). Although they could not provide proof of their Native American predecessor, the judge was compelled to free the women because “[their] hair was long and straight” (p. 102), thus demonstrating that racial formation is both a construct and a choice.

The United States has maintained its racial hierarchy via fiercely guarding the construct of (white) racial purity vis-à-vis antimiscegenation laws, the first of which was passed in Maryland in 1662. The United States Supreme Court did not abolish such laws until 1967 (Johnson, 2003). Our country has “pursued racial classification relentlessly since the first census in 1790,” (Welland, 2003, p. 32) creating such conventions as the “one-drop rule,” stipulating that any African lineage classified a person as “monoracial” black, in order to help preserve white privilege (Welland).
As we approach the next census year, the stakes of racial identification remain personally and politically high. In 2000, for the first time, the Census Bureau allowed U.S. citizens to check more than one box in the racial demographic section of the census (Johnson, 2003). Whereas the census has historically provided all bi and/or multiracial options—for example, “octoroon,” “quadroon,” and “mulatto” (Johnson; Colker, 1996)—the 2000 census allowed citizens to pick and choose their racial identity. A “some other race” category was also included for those who found there was not an accurate or suitable representation from the thirteen racial choices provided. The reaction to this development was mixed: some heralded this breakthrough as a step toward racial equality vis-à-vis a shift in focus from race to ethnicity (Leamon Robinson, 2000); others hoped that it would set a precedent for the creation of a separate biracial or mixed race category for which only one box need be checked, thus ensuring psychological security for bi and/or multiracial children (Graham, 1996); and still others argued that a “check all that apply” or a bi and/or multiracial one-box category approach would reinforce the misconception of race as indicative of culture (Hernandez, 2003).

The numbers of “two or more races” (Johnson, 2003) reported were lower than expected—less than three percent of the total population—it is significant to note that 93 percent identified two races, and of these numbers, 72 percent reported a combination of white and a racial minority (Johnson, 2003). Among multiracial individuals, most people identify as biracial, and among biracial people, most identify one of their two races as white. Even among the biracial population, itself a minority group, white still constitutes a majority, or, dominant culture.
The fact that such controversy exists regarding how the seemingly small numbers of bi and/or multiracial people should identify themselves lends credence to the facts that bi and/or multiraciality is a complex issue in our national consciousness. The 2007-2008 primary and general elections further demonstrate that bi and/or multiraciality is an undeniable part of the American experience. Prior Democratic Party primary candidate Bill Richardson and current Democratic Party presidential candidate Barack Obama represent the majority of biracial individuals—half white, and half racial “minority.” Obama’s running for presidential office has compounded the “rediscovery” (Morning, 2003) of bi and/or multiracial people that became fashionable after the 2000 census.

Although Obama’s “faith in the American people” campaign tenet illustrates his strategy of unifying in the name of nation in order to downplay race as a central issue, Obama himself admits that his biraciality allows him to view the country in a unique way and bring its people together across racial lines (Obama, Ramirez, Conant, Kliff, Murr, & Ohtake, 2008). In his memoir, Obama describes the seemingly contradictory nature of embodying both majority and minority cultures, citing both the privileges he benefited from as the son of a white woman and the discrimination and internalized racism he struggled with as the son of a black man (Obama, 1995). While Obama has been alternately criticized for being either “too black” or “not black enough,” endorsed by the likes of both Oprah and white actress Scarlett Johannsen, he seems content to occupy the “borderlands” of his racial identity, utilizing his ability to “move between many worlds” (Obama, 2004, p. 23) for the purpose of creating “positive change [the United States] can believe in.”
The advent of “mixed race” theory was surrounded by social and moral distaste for interracial marriage and reproduction (Gilbert, 2005). The legacy of anti-miscegenation laws and the “one-drop rule” clearly influenced much of multiracial theory’s preoccupation with attributing any problems mixed-race people experienced to race. Premier theorists of the early 20th century postulated that “mixed race” people were social outsiders who inherently experienced greater psychological and interpersonal difficulties than “monoracial” individuals (Gilbert). A common theme in 1990’s mixed race theory was the claim of unique psychological, emotional, and social problems for mixed race people, “exist[ing] on the border of social and cultural groups,” (Gilbert, 2005, p. 61) which stemmed from what Gibbs (as cited in Gilbert) called an inability to “integrate both racial backgrounds into a cohesive racial identity” (p. 61).

Mixed race people do not have an intrinsic propensity for identity crises, but rather experience similar processes of identity as most people, regardless of race; with “multi-dimensional” emotional, social and ideological processes flowing back and forth” (Gilbert, p. 66). Furthermore, given that critical race theory claims that “‘white’ has always remained the single un-fragmented identity,” (Welland, 2003, p. 33) using race as a primary identifier is for all minorities, including multiracial people, a Catch-22, in that it is “both and at once the basis of oppression and of political power” (Van Wagenen, 2007, p. 161). Any new identification classifications for multiracial people—either provided by the government via a census form or self-imposed—must be understood as parallel to the construction of “monoracial” classifications.
It is arguable that the multiracial movement could not be happening at a more opportune moment in history with regards to popular culture, politics, and critical race theory. Barack Obama's ability to appeal to people across race lines exemplifies the idea that multiracial people represent a challenge to our society's construction of race and racial hierarchy (Welland, 2003). Given that multiraciality posits a direct contradiction of traditional notions of racial identification, multiracial people are commonly confronted with the question "what are you?" (Welland), and therefore, identity politics is a central concern for this growing population. Because multiraciality is perceived as a relatively new and popular phenomenon—many campus and community organizations focused on multiracial identity began springing up in the 1990's—this population is still in the beginning stages of developing its defining language and politics (Welland).

For half white/half minority “mixed race” persons, the identity politics issue of “passing” requires further critical exploration. The question of whether there exist moral and ethical implications of passing has been presented primarily in the form of personal narrative. For example, this author noted in the introduction section experiencing guilt while cognizant of passing, and authors such as Danzy Senna (1998) describe experiencing instances of passing as “an act of betrayal” (p. 78). Because there are obvious social benefits associated with whiteness, “passing” is viewed by some scholars as the norm, while those who can pass but instead decide to claim a “multiracial” identity—which includes the asserting one’s status as nonwhite or “other”—can be seen as making what Daniel (as cited in Welland, 2003) calls a “weighty” choice to subvert the arbitrary racial hierarchy in the United States.
Clearly the issue of white privilege is a confounding one for multiracial half white/half minority persons, yet it is also critical for this population to understand and acknowledge white privilege if a more equitable society is to be created and sustained. For this population, the contradictory nature of embodying both majority and minority cultures may provide the temptation for “excessive self-reflection” (Welland, p. 35). We must take care however, that we do not become distracted from the “real questions of power” (Senna, 1998, p. 78) implicit in all race-based identity politics movements.

Statement of the Research Problem

There is a need for further exploration of the issue of passing and its potential moral and ethical implications for half white/half minority “mixed race” persons. As passing has been cited as the easier option (Welland, 2003) in terms of societal acceptance and the benefits of white privilege, there appears to be no material incentive for these individuals to claim their minority status. Indeed, in order to claim their minority side, these persons must consciously choose to assert their non-whiteness, and be willing to endure the inevitable doubts and questions this assertion will incite. If the benefits of passing are presupposed, research is needed to explore whether there are also benefits to not passing. Research is also needed to explore whether these individuals use their “mixed race” identity for the purpose of consciousness raising, using themselves to exemplify the constructed and contestable nature of race.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to increase the body of knowledge about the experiences of half white/half minority “mixed race” persons and the implications for
social work practice. This study will explore the moral and ethical implications of passing, identity politics, and the possible contributions of this population to critical race theory and promoting social justice. Through exploratory interviews with different combinations of half white/half minority “mixed race” persons, the data will provide insight into the way these individuals are seen both by themselves and by society. It will also provide a more holistic look at multiraciality in our society via the exploration of personal, social, and political issues.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study is composed of the complementary theories of feminism and constructivism. The core of feminist thought is its adage “the personal is political,” or the belief that “private” matters illustrate larger social, or “public,” phenomena (Hall, 1992; Van Den Berg & Cooper, 1987). While the original focus of the feminist movement was unequal power relationships between men and women in society, its anti-patriarchal nature quickly became applicable to all situations of oppression, on micro and macro levels. Feminism places the individual within larger social and political movements, for the purpose of consciousness-raising and inciting social action. This does not mean, however, that the importance of the individual is de-emphasized. Indeed, the process of consciousness-raising vis-à-vis the telling of one’s own story allows for each person to create one’s own meanings using language of one’s choosing, for the purpose of defining and situating oneself as both unique and part of community. Similarly, constructionist thought emphasizes the importance of how and by whom language is
created, as language holds great power in influencing the ways members of society define themselves and others (Blundo & Greene, 1999).

Because this study deals with issues such as race, identity politics, and power, a feminist orientation is critical. The existence of multiracial people is a challenge to the false dichotomy (Van Den Berg & Cooper, 1989) of race our society has historically created and striven to maintain. As was mentioned previously, biracial people are often confronted with the question “what are you?,” which amounts to external pressure to engage in the zero-sum game of denying one or more integral components of one’s identity. This is problematic for this study’s population of half white/half minority individuals because the false dichotomy of oppressor/oppressed is applicable. This could lead to the ranking of oppressions that Hill Collins (1989) warns against when engaging in highly contestable issues such as race and identity, when what is really needed is to recognize what Lorde (as cited in Hill Collins) calls “the piece of oppressor within each of us,” (p. 1) and to “work collaboratively against a common oppressor” (Van Den Berg & Cooper, p. 4). This challenge illustrates both the power that racial categories and labels maintain in our society, and the need for biracial people to engage in the process of renaming (Van Den Berg & Cooper) in order to “conceptually broaden” and change the—clearly inaccurate and inadequate—language used to define and describe biraciality.

Similarly, studies regarding the psychosocial realities faced by biracial individuals have contributed to the prevailing clinical ideology that biracial people have a higher prevalence, or innate disposition towards, identity crisis due to an inability to form what Gibbs as cited in Gilbert, 2005) calls “a cohesive racial identity” (p. 61). From a both
feminist and constructionist stance, this study is concerned with the power inherent in creating and perpetuating this ideology, as it clearly seeks to define biracial people as predisposed to mental health problems and insecurity of identity. Constructionist theory identifies the ways in which racial identities, categories, and definitions have been socially constructed within specific political contexts (Platt, 2007a). Therefore, any discussion of biracial identity in the context of mental health, or psychosocial realities, must be approached as a non-problem (Smedley, 1998). Acknowledging that race and racial identities are social constructs rather than biological determined negates race as a primary identifying characteristic, removing an oppressive “barrier to true human identities” (Smedley, p. 696).

While this study explores issues of half white/half minority biracial identity, it does not seek to establish this population as a unified or cultural group. While examining this group, as with any racially identified group, differences around race, gender, and class are to be both expected and appreciated (Platt, 2007b). For example, one of the central themes of this study is the issue of “passing.” It is to be expected that each subject questioned about their experiences and ideas about passing will have different feelings and interpretations, and may racially identify themselves differently than the author or the reader may expect given a participant’s demographic information. Operating from a constructionist framework while both conducting and reading this study will guard against making generalizations that perpetuate limiting and oppressive thinking.

Definition of Terms

Biracial: 1) Any person who identifies as being of two “races.”
Majority (or dominant) culture: 1) Persons belonging to the ruling/wealthiest/most powerful class in society. 2) People who identify as monoracially white and share the cultural and political values of power, dominance, and wealth common among the middle and upper classes.

Minority: 1) Any person identifiable as non-white. 2) Any person who self-identifies as non-white and does not share the cultural and political values of power, dominance, and wealth common among the middle and upper classes.

Mixed Race/Multiracial: 1) Any person identifiable as “racially” ambiguous. 2) Any person who self-identifies as being of more than one “race.” For this study the term refers to any person who identifies as half white/half minority.

Monoracial: 1) Any person identifiable as being of a single “race.” 2) Any person who self-identifies as being of only one “race.”

Other: 1) Any person identifiable as non-white. 2) Any person who self-identifies as non-white.

Passing: 1) The act of self-identifying or being identifiable as monoracial white. 2) Refusal to self-identify as “other” via consciously or unconsciously maintaining a monoracial white identity (Gilbert, 2005).

Person of Color: See definition for “other.”

Race: 1) Category of identification based on phenotype, the most common component of which is skin color, for the purpose of suggesting biological determination. 2) Socially constructed, politically determined, dynamic category of identification.
White privilege: 1) the social, political, and economic advantages built into a systemically racist society to benefit members of the majority culture. 2) Any real or perceived benefits of being identifiable or passing as monoracial white (Platt, 2007a).

Assumptions

Race is a sociopolitical construct and not a biologically determined reality. Race exists as a primary form of identification in order to socio-politically stratify societies, and any meanings given to the term are socially created and imposed (Smedley, 1998).

There exists a sociopolitical hierarchy in the United States based on the intersecting factors of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The dominant or majority culture—that represent normative beliefs and behaviors—in our society are monoracial whites of the middle and upper classes.

Identity is a dynamic condition that changes throughout the life cycle according to the political, social, economic, psychological, sexual, and gendered evolution of the individual. An individual’s identity should never be assumed or asserted by anyone other than the individual.

Justification

Through exploring the potentially unique political, social, and class standing half white/half minority biracial individuals possess, this study seeks to assert and legitimate this population’s place in the fight for social justice alongside other racial minority groups. Through demonstrating this population’s commonalities with other racial minority groups, this study will further solidify the structural social work view of the futility of ranking oppressions (Carniol, 1992) in the hopes of bringing diverse people
together to work on confronting structural issues of power and oppression. The linking of this population to other racial minority groups may also serve to limit the reification of race among social—especially clinical—workers, social work education, and social work research.

The National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics states that "attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living" is foundational to the profession, with "social justice" as a core value (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1999). One of the primary environmental forces that cause "problems in living" in our society is racism—personal, cultural, and institutionalized. Because this study seeks to explore the concepts of race and racism from a constructionist standpoint, it will not perpetuate traditional notions of race and racism as fixed and necessary elements of life, and will therefore propose a more socially just means of identifying self and others.

Limitations

Because this study is exploratory, its findings are limited to the subjects interviewed. The sample size is small due to limited methods of finding members—convenience and snowball sampling will be employed—of the specified population. The findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond the subjects interviewed in this study, but may serve as a legitimate starting point for other studies of this nature.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of the literature is organized into four sections that elaborate on the themes briefly discussed in the previous chapter. The first theme is an overview of the sociopolitical history of mixed race individuals in the United States. This literature is foundational to the study. Mixed-race issues are not a new phenomena—as is often presented by the media and academic culture—but rather a central theme in United States history. It is clearly documented that race and its ascribed meanings are socially constructed, dynamic rather than fixed concepts. The second theme examines current events and the cultural climate with regard to mixed race individuals and reviews the literature on the current state of critical race theory, with regards to the development of identity politics among the mixed race population. This section will focus on the biracial 2008 Democratic Party presidential Candidate Barack Obama, situating this study in the shift from mixed race people viewed as minority and/or abnormal to the current heightened awareness of mixed race people in United States society due to their increasing numbers and visibility. This section further situates this study in the current shift of language creation and use among critical race theorists and burgeoning minority populations in United States society.

The third section deals with the notions of white privilege and passing. These concepts are central to the specified half white/half minority population of this study and create a basis for the questions this study explores. The last theme reviews literature on
the past and present views regarding psychosocial concerns for the mixed race population. This discussion further establishes race and its ascribed meanings—this time in terms of psychosocial realities—as socially constructed rather than inherent in the individual. This section will include autobiographical, biographical, and anecdotal information.

The Sociopolitical History of Multiracial Individuals in the United States

The evolution of mixed-race populations in the United States can be viewed as representative of the progression of social, political, economic, and moral values of the dominant culture (Root, 2003; Texeira, 2003; Van Wagenen, 2007). Indeed, fluctuations in racial definitions have historically been directly determined by the degree of necessity for the dominant culture in “defining and unifying the white population” (Morning, 2003, p. 49) for the ultimate purpose of maintaining economic power (Root, 1996).

*Constructing Race: The Black/White Mixed-Race Population*

Whites’ belief that blacks were inferior (Duckitt, 1992; Smedley, 1999; Texeira, 2003; Warren & Twine, 1997)—based on the English-imported racist ideology that blacks’ skin color demarcated them as the sexually deviant descendents of Ham of Genesis (Saks, 1988)—coupled with their fierce motivation to politically, economically, and socially dominate, led to the legal institutionalization of slavery in all of the South and the prohibition of all white/black sexual relations (Higginbottom & Kopytoff, 1967; Smedley, 1998). These policies virtually institutionalized the routine rape of black female slaves by slave masters for the purposes of increasing the labor force (Higginbottom & Kopytoff; Root, 1996; Saks) and satisfying their desire for sex in an era
in which sex was socially acceptable only between man and wife, and for the purpose of reproduction (Katz, 1990).

Laws prohibiting black/white sex were rarely enforced—only two cases reached the Virginia high court during both the colonial and antebellum periods—and the reasoning for the court’s blind eye to these “crimes” is simple: fornication with black women was not considered miscegenation (Hollinger, 2003). It simply did not count. When such laws were enforced, they were applied only to the white offender; this practice demonstrates the belief that whites were morally superior and responsible for legally ensuring the purity of their race (Higginbottom & Kopytoff, 1967).

The children of these many sexual encounters, however, did count, and the growing numbers of black/white racially mixed people presented a more pressing concern for the dominant culture—the potential loss of political and economic power (Saks, 1988). With the ideology of blacks’ inferiority firmly in place, the Virginia House of Burgesses simply applied the same rationale to all black “stock” in 1662, and decreed that a child’s slave/free status resulting from white male/black female liaisons was to be determined by the status of the mother (Higginbottom & Kopytoff, 1967; Saks). Because race at this point was synonymous with class—and in this case, caste—this meant that the majority of white/black mixed-race children, “whose parents represented two distinct races and two extreme statuses,” (Higginbottom & Kopytoff, p. 13) were born slaves.

While the dominant culture in Virginia did its best to maintain an “ideal conception of their slave society,” (Higginbottom & Kopytoff, 1967, p. 14) there were nevertheless individuals who presented a challenge to the seemingly black and white
nature of slave status laws. Throughout the course of nearly two centuries of slavery in
the United States, there were in fact many racial "anomalies," including slaves who
appeared to be white, descended from distant maternal black relatives and free "mulattos" who were black in appearance. All such anomalies challenged the basic racial equation that governed the South: black equals slave, white equals free (Morning, 2003; Texeira, 2003).

Racial parameters for classifying blacks and "mulattos" became increasingly, even mind-bogglingly, confounded after the Civil War and the end of legalized slavery. Whereas during slavery the dominant culture had not bothered to guard against the "lightening of the Negro race," (Higginbottom & Kopytoff, 1967, p. 16) they were extremely concerned, even "obsessed," with possible "visible darkening of the white race." Thus began a system of racial classification characterized by the idea of hypodescent, or, the "one-drop" rule (Fernandez, 1996; Morning, 2003; Texeira, 2003; Hollinger, 2003).

This meant that any individual with "any perceptible trace of black blood," (Morning, p. 45) was classified as black. While there were many ways to be classified as black—"mulatto," "quadroon," "octroon," "Creole"—there was only one way to be considered legally white, and that was to have "no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian" (Wadlington, 1998, p. 53). There are many documented cases in which all "classifications" of blacks appealed to the courts for the purpose of being declared legally white (Gross, 1998). In contrast, there is not a single documented case in which
any person who appeared to be white tried to become legally black. Clearly, there was nothing to gain through blackness, except stigma (Hollinger, 2003).

An Exception to the Rule? Native American/White Mixed Race

Classification for mixed-race Native American persons—whether mixed with white or not—was, and still is, called the “blood quantum” system, and was devised by both whites and Native Americans to serve specific and similar purposes (Berger, 1997; Woods, 1999). First, it is critical to note that whites had a significantly higher opinion of Native Americans than they did of blacks (Hollinger, 2003). Due to their demonstrated dexterity in agriculture, trade, and tribal politics, Native Americans were believed to be primitive yet capable of assimilation to the white way of life (Berger; Morning, 2003; Woods). Most importantly—and in contrast to the situation of blacks—Native Americans had something whites wanted—land (Berger; Woods). Similar to the gender-skewed nature of the black/white mixed-race population, white males also made up the majority of persons engaging in interracial sexual relations with Native American women (Berger; Woods).

Because Native American women were permitted to hold property within their tribes, the United States government encouraged white men to marry these women without assimilating to tribal life. Tribal marital customs were interpreted in such a way that allowed the men to leave their wives without fear of legal retribution from the United States government (Berger, 1997). These men were simultaneously considered white and Indian, according to the sociopolitical purposes of both the United States government and the Nation into which they had married. In this way, white men and their “half-breed”
children were able to appropriate vast amounts of land from Native Americans between 1830 and 1934.

The “blood quantum” system was used by tribal leaders to prevent mixed-race persons of low Indian blood from appropriating property, while it was used by the United States government via the Dawes Act to ensure that mixed-race individuals of any “blood quantum,” preferably low, indeed appropriated land (Berger, 1997; Woods, 1999). Therefore, a mixed-race white/Native American person could be considered simultaneously Indian by the United States government and white by a tribal counsel, depending on the political purpose of classification.

Racial Classification and the United States Census

While the term “mulatto” was used most commonly in reference to mixed-race black/white people, the term was also a catch-all for mixed-race persons of all kinds (Morning, 2003). It would seem, therefore, that until the Census of 1870, when officials were instructed that “the class mulatto included quadroons, octoroons, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood,” (p. 45) differentiation among the nation’s mixed-race individuals was considered inconsequential. After the Civil War and the demise of slavery, however, classification of mixed-race black/white individuals became very detailed as scientists depended on the data for research on hybridity, the “benefits” of slavery, and social Darwinism (Duckitt, 1992; Morning, 2003). A return to the simplicity of hypodescent was employed during Reconstruction; faced with potential loss of political and economic power, the United States government scrambled to classify any
and all black/white mixed-race people as “negro” (Hickman, 1997; Morning; Texeira, 2003; Wallenstein, 2003).

It was possible for mixed-race white/Native American people to be legally classified as white (Hollinger, 2003); however, it was dependent on the “half-breed’s” total assimilation to white “habits of life and methods of industry” (Morning, 2003, p. 46). This assimilation had to be recognized by a census official. Possibility for assignment to the “higher status” (Morning, 2003, p. 46) of two races was unique to Native Americans, and illustrates that the stigma associated with blackness did not apply to Native Americans due to the potential political and economic benefits to which Native American/white mixed-race persons had access.

The introduction of other people of color—Mexicans, Filipinos, Chinese—to the United States led to an inevitable rise in both the mixed-race population and the consternation of the United States government (Volpp, 2000) as to how to classify these new people who were “of a racial mixture difficult to classify” (Morning, 2003, p. 47). For every other “mixture,” the general rule was that the child’s race was determined by the non-white parent. This practice served to strengthen the borders surrounding whiteness, driving a hard line between whites and people of color (Morning; Root, 1996). Indeed, many mixed-race possibilities were not acknowledged by the government until the “check-all-that-apply” phenomenon of the 2000 Census. The implications of these new “mixed-race” possibilities with regards to the census will be further discussed in the “identity politics” section of the literature review.
Anti-Miscegenation Law: The Intersection of Policy and Ideology

The black/white mixed-race population was the first to inspire legal regulation of "interracial" sexual and marital practices; the first "anti-miscegenation" law was passed in colonial Maryland in 1661, banning marriage between white women and black men (Saks, 1988; Wallenstein, 2005). During this period, race was not yet synonymous with class, and it was therefore hypothetically possible that marriages between middle/upper class blacks and middle/upper class whites could occur. It is critical to note that the earliest anti-miscegenation laws expressly named white women and black men, while leaving out white men and black women. The reasoning behind the genders specified as representative of each race set the tone for the ideology and rationale for all subsequent mixed-race policy.

Women were chosen to represent the white race because they “were viewed collectively as the keepers of white racial purity,” (Holden-Smith, 1996, p. 33) while men were chosen to represent the black race because they were—ironically—believed to “enjoy a sexual freedom that [white men] wanted but could not achieve without great feelings of guilt” (Holden-Smith, p. 33). The abolition of slavery marked the end of the systematic rape of black women, but not the end of whites’ dominion over matters of sexual morality (Jordan, 2000). Whites enforced a strict sanction against white female/black male sex vis-à-vis a brutal lynching campaign based on the white-created myth that black men’s deepest desire was to rape white women (Holden-Smith, 1996; Hollinger, 2003; Jordan).
Although anti-interracial marriage laws in some Southern states were briefly repealed during Reconstruction, by 1866 every state had miscegenation laws making interracial marriage a serious crime (Wadlington, 1998; Wallenstein, 2005). In 1888, marriage was deemed the institution “having more to do with the morals and civilization of a people than any other” (Wallenstein, p. 62) by the United States Supreme Court, and although not a case about interracial marriage, *Maynard v. Hill* was invoked to uphold the legality of state courts’ ruling against interracial marriages (Wallenstein) in the South.

In the West, California’s antimiscegenation law was considered “an old and almost forgotten state law” (Volpp, 2000, p. 88) until the influx of male Filipino immigrants after the Filipino-American war of 1898-1903. While whites were apparently unconcerned about Chinese and Japanese interracial marriage, their concern about Filipinos is well-documented (Bulosan, 1973; Volpp). Similar to myths created by the dominant culture for the purpose of unifying whites while subordinating blacks, Filipinos were characterized as “one jump from the jungle” (p. 88) and focused on sexually dominating white women. As white males felt increasingly threatened by the possibility of white women marrying Filipino men, the state court imposed sanctions against intermarriage, stating that “the dominant race of the country has a perfect right to exclude all other races from equal rights with its own people . . . large body of young men . . . under the guardianship and to some extent the tutelage of our national government” (p. 89).

In addition to the patriarchal reasons given for restricting interracial marriage, a plethora of “scientific” and ideological reasons were also invoked in defense of
prohibiting such unions, all of which centered around the ideas that "other races"—i.e. non-white—were inferior and therefore any mixed-race offspring would also be inherently inferior and a burden to society (California Supreme Court, 1948). California became the first state to overturn its antimiscegenation law in 1948 with the Perez v. Sharp case in 1948, almost two decades before the United States Supreme Court invalidated all such laws via the Loving v. Virginia case in 1967 (Johnson, 2003).

Multiracial Identity Politics, Critical Race Theory, and Current Events

The Rise of the Multiracial Movement

Multiracial identity politics are most visible in the form of the multiracial movement. The existence of the multiracial movement is credited to the "biracial baby boom" that began after the abolition of anti-miscegenation laws with Loving v. Virginia (Morning, 2003; Root, 1996; Root, 1999). For people who came of age in the early stages of the "baby boom," during the 1970's and 1980's, "multiracial identity is an invention of recent date" (Pelligrini, 2005, p. 531). Understandably, multiracial scholars who came of age during this era of the unknown and unacknowledged, such as Mara P. P. Root (1996; 1999; 2003), dedicated their work to "legitimating the biracial baby boom" (Sexton, 2003, p. 259). Through exploring multiraciality in an academic context, early multiracial scholars sought to bring the multiracial population to the forefront as a legitimate minority group, and in so doing create a nation-wide multiracial community.

What began as an effort by multiracial people to assert the presence of multiracial people in society has transformed over the past 20 years into a political agenda. Proponents cite the absence of legal validation of mixed-race/multiracial identity as
necessitating the organization of mixed-race people for the purpose of creating a racially distinct community (Graham, 1996; Hernandez, 1998). The politics of multiracial movement are centered on the demand for a separate “multiracial” classification added to the United States census (Childs, 2004; Dalmage, 2004; Foster, 2004; Graham; Pellegrini, 2005; Ramirez, 1995; Rockquemore, 2004; Sexton, 2003; Spencer, 2004). This demand is based on the claim that mixed-race individuals deserve the right to racially self-identify in a manner that reflects their psychological and social reality as multiracial people.

Beginning in 1993, the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which oversees all demographic data collection, conducted a four-year, multimillion dollar review/hearing to consider changing the racial identification portion of the Census to facilitate mixed-race self-identification (Spencer, 2004). Two leading multiracial organizations, Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) and the Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA), presented to the OMB as representative of a cohesive multiracial community (Childs, 2004; DaCosta, 2003; Spencer). The reality was and remains most multiracial organizations are not involved in the classification debate (DaCosta), and that the simultaneity of [multiracial] academic discourse and populist appeals made the “phenomenon of multiracial collective organization appear more coherent than it really is” (p. 72).

**Deconstructing the Multiracial Movement**

The leaders of the most outspoken multiracial organizations are white parents, particularly mothers, of multiracial children (Dalmage, 2004; Hernandez, 1998; Karis,
2004). These parents offer their interracial families as examples of society’s progress in race relations, and their children as proof that the end of race is near (Childs, 2002; Karis; Sexton; Walsh, 2004). White parents are viewed as having insight into minority communities because they are or have been in a relationship with a person of color and have a multiracial child (Childs; Dalmage; Karis). While there may be significant involvement and support from the partner of color’s family, it is also likely that the partner of color and their family represent the only people of color in the white partner’s social sphere (Childs; Dalmage; Karis). It has been suggested that because white partners of interracial relationships may lose (white) friends or family as a result of the interracial relationship and be exposed to racism and/or discrimination experienced by their partner and/or children, they are forced to renegotiate their whiteness (Childs; Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Dalmage).

Some white partners in interracial relationships politically and ideologically ally themselves with communities of color in civil rights struggles as result of insider experience with racism. These parents encourage their multiracial children to self-identify in any way they choose and understand should the child choose to identify as monoracial minority (Childs, 2002; Dagbovie, 2007; Karis, 2004). These parents understand that race is “a group-based experience of social differentiation that is not diminished by diverse ancestral heritage” (Hernandez, 1998, p. 207; see also Martinez, 1995).

Other parents choose to reassert their whiteness with other white parents in interracial relationships in the context of multiracial organizations (Dalmage, 2004).
These are the parents who lobbied—and continue to lobby—hard for a distinct multiracial classification on the census, and represent not only the political agenda of the multiracial movement, but the ideology behind the popularization of multiraciality in the mainstream media (Childs, 2002; Dagbovie, 2007; Root, 2003). All arguments made by the movement in favor of a separate—rather than a “check-all-that-apply approach—multiracial category are centered on an individual’s right to choose how to racially self-identify (Childs, 2004; Foster, 2004; Graham, 1996; Rockquemore, 2004; Sexton, 2003; Spencer, 2004).

White parents emphasize the importance of children’s ability to claim all aspects of their racial heritage, not just those that may be surmised by others based on physical appearance (Childs, 2004; Foster, 2004; Graham, 1996; Rockquemore, 2004; Sexton, 2003; Spencer, 2004). The fact that white partners in interracial relationships are often forced to confront a different racial experience—other than whiteness—can lead to the desire to protect children from racism and/or discrimination (Childs, 2002; Dalmage, 2004; Karis, 2004). A white parent’s demand that one’s child’s full racial background be legally recognized can be understood as an attempt to pass on the protection and privilege of whiteness.

The movement’s emphasis on self-identification is based on the philosophy of individual rights. Movement activists have stated that multiracial people should not have to explain their heritage to curious people and, regarding the check-more-than-one approach, that (monoracial) others do not have to, so they should not have to either (Graham, 1996). This is contrary to and the primary criticism from minority civil rights
groups (Colker, 1995; Foster, 2004; Hernandez, 1998; Ramirez, 1995; Robinson, 2000; Sexton, 2003; Walsh, 2004). Under Directive No. 15, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) collects racial demographic information for the purpose of allocating resources and tracking disparities in the administration of affirmative action policies, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Equal Opportunity Employment Act of 1972 (Payson, 1996). It logically follows that civil rights groups are concerned that the creation of a distinct multiracial category will "dilute" (Ramirez, 1995, p. 198) the political strength of minority groups, adversely effecting electoral representation, allocation of affirmative action benefits, and federal contracting rules.

There is evidence that multiracial people, whose social experience of race is that of white or dominant culture, have taken advantage of affirmative action benefits by self-identifying as monoracial minority on employment and educational institution forms (Ford, 1994; Martinez, 1995; Payson, 1996). Research has also shown that employers like to hire multiracial people because they can fulfill equal opportunity employment quotas and are likely to "not only physically look more white but be able to socially act more white as well" (Payson, p. 307). While such examples lend credence to the notion that racial classification is often arbitrary, they highlight the facts that institutional racism still exists and that the dominant culture is looking for opportunities to subvert the sociopolitical realities of race (Sexton, 2003).
The Multiracial Movement and Critical Race Theory

The movement privileges interracial families and multiracial individuals as “the only people capable of understanding and correctly dealing with race,” (Childs, 2004, p. 156) seeking to draw national attention to the farce of racial categorization. By drawing attention to multiraciality, which can only occur vis-à-vis the inter-mixing of racialized bodies, the movement “sets up interracial sex as the final frontier,” (Sexton, 2003, p. 250). This practice evidences the paradoxical nature of the movement within critical race theory (Foster, 2004; Sexton).

The movement claims that multiracial people do not fit into and inherently invalidate the traditional monoracial model of identification, however, demanding the creation of yet another racial category reinforces the essentialist and biologically-based racial ideology they purport to challenge (Graham, 1996; Foster, 2004; Sexton, 2003; Smedley, 1998; Spencer, 2004). Indeed one cannot be “mixed-race” unless s/he is made up of two or more distinct “races” (Foster; Sexton). Furthermore, movement activists cite the absence of a distinct multiracial category as infringement upon family rights to legally recognize genetic ties (Foster). Therefore, any arguments against the ideology of racial purity, of which the multiracial movement makes many, are automatically null and void for the precise reason that there can be no possibility of mixed/multiracial without first accepting the reality of pure/monoracial (Sexton; Spencer).

The multiracial movement represents an opportunity for the abolition of racial thinking through its conscious and unconscious promotion of the seemingly apolitical notion of colorblindness (Duster, 2001; Welland, 2003). The attractiveness of the
colorblind appeal is understandable given the current state of race theory, in which essentialism is widely acknowledged as outdated but constructivism is also found lacking (Foster, 2004; Van Wagenen, 2007). If the question of the hour is “do we have any epistemological basis for persisting in using the terminology of ‘race’ and ‘races’,” (p. 157) and if the fact that racial categorization has historically led to disadvantages and oppression for people of color (Baynes, 1997; Morning, 2003; Texeira, 2003), then it is easy to understand why the end of racial categorization is especially appealing to conservatives (Dagbovie, 2007; Foster, 2004; Rockquemore, 2004; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002; Sexton, 2003). Conservatives have co-opted the movement because it allows them to seem racially conscious or sympathetic to racial issues and matches their interest of ending race-based civil rights benefits (Pincus, 2000; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002). That the movement does not recognize conservative alliance as suspicious reaffirms the fact that the movement is concerned only with individual rights and evidences that the movement has no social justice context (Dalmage, 2004; Hernandez, 1998; Sexton, 2003; Senna, 1998b; Texeira, 2003). Through discursively leaving whiteness and white supremacy unchallenged, the movement perpetuates the people’s “neurotic need to place themselves and those around them in proper racial boxes” (Spencer, 2004, p. 112).

Another valid concern among critics of the movement is that a distinct multiracial category will create new racial hierarchies, expand the borders of whiteness, and widen the sociopolitical black/non-black gap (Sexton, 2003; Walsh, 2004). Civil rights activists warn against creating more racial categories, arguing that all a multiracial classification
will do is redefine some non-whites as closer to white than others (Foster, 2004). This concern is particularly salient given the historical privileging of whiter or lighter-skinned black multiracial people (Morning, 2003; Texeira, 2003). Major movement organizations do not have alliances with traditional minority-led civil rights organizations (Childs, 2004), giving credence to the criticism that the movement considers itself a separate community with separate, individually-oriented rather than social justice-oriented needs.

*Multiraciality and Current Events*

The presidential campaign of Barack Obama is perhaps the most visible current example of multiracial politics. Obama and his campaign have been called “post-racial” and “race transcendent” by journalists and pundits, indicating that United States society is searching for a shift in racial thinking (Asadullah, 2008; Karenga, 2008a; 2008b; Walters, 2007). While Obama readily acknowledges his black/white multiraciality, he chooses to racially identify as black (Obama, 1995). This choice, coupled with his actions, has led to divided loyalties in the black community (Crowley, 2008; Walters). There are black people who believe Obama is not afrocentric enough, indicating a skepticism Spencer (2004) describes as “those of partial black ancestry who decline ideological constraints of unity and monolithic black identity [are] seen as denying their blackness and being willing to harm other blacks,” (p. 104). This phenomena was further exacerbated when Osama was forced to politically denounce the black liberation theological leader Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Ironically, this denunciation likely made whites feel more comfortable with Obama’s blackness for the same reason it angered some blacks—it
signaled that Obama’s primary identity and ideology is not rooted in an allegiance to his race and/or his blackness (Hill, 2008).

Multiracial celebrities also represent an opportunity for the dominant culture “to superficially embrace the ‘other’” (Dagbovie, 2007, p. 232). The fact that HR 830, a bill to add a distinct multiracial category to the 2000 census, was dubbed “the Tiger Woods Bill,” (Rockquemore, 2004) evidences that the multiracial celebrities appeal to a society that does not “really want to confront racial issues” (Dagbovie, p. 232). When Tiger Woods racially identified himself as “cabelasian” (a mix of white/Caucasian, black, and Asian) on the Oprah Winfrey show, he became the poster boy for the multiracial movement and a wildly popular icon of the new racial reality in the United States (Dagbovie; Rockquemore). That Woods could construct his own racial label and have it validated as a legitimate racial classification—he demands exclusive application of the term in characterization of his racial identity—illustrates that the way in which the multiracial movement has glorified the individual nature of multiracial identity as exclusive, special, and better than (Sexton, 2003; Spencer, 2004).

Multiracial celebrities who choose to identify as monoracial minority are denied acceptance into the multiracial community (Dagbovie, 2007). Operating from the framework that race is socially constructed and experienced, the actor Halle Berry views racial identity as a sociopolitical statement and chooses to identify as black. As a result, Berry is stereotypically characterized as confused and overly sexual, a tragic mulatto by the multiracial movement (Dagbovie). Berry’s beauty is the characteristic most commonly cited in the media, illustrating a persistent fascination and uniqueness
associated with mixed-race people (Buchanan & Acevedo, 2004; Buckley & Carter, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). Racially ambiguous celebrities such as Vin Diesel who refuse to assert any racial identity are the most widely accepted because they represent a de-politicized and colorblind approach to racial thinking (Dagbovie).

The Current State of Whiteness

White supremacist ideology in the United States originated in the eighteenth century for the purpose of “rationaliz[ing] European attitudes and treatment of conquered and enslaved peoples” (American Anthropological Association, 1998, p. 712). Domination of African and Native American peoples required moral justification based on inherent differences between people groups (American Anthropological Association; Bender, 2006; Duckitt, 1992; Smedley, 1998). Unsurprisingly, myriad “scientific” research exists to support the idea that whites are intellectually, spiritually, and morally superior to non-whites (Duckitt; Vera, Feagin, & Gordon, 1995). Such scientific exploration of the biological or genetic nature of race continues today, despite the American Anthropological Association’s official statement that “all humans living today belong to a single species, Homo sapiens, and share a common descent” (p. 714).

Modern conceptions of whiteness as race, culture, or ideology from the perspective of white people are often elusive due to the normative status of whiteness in United States society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Gallagher, 1996; 2003; Graham, 1993; Perry, 2007). Non-white scholars assert that whiteness is not defined by what it is, but rather by what it is not (Duster, 2001; Perry; Ware, 2001; Warren & Twine, 1997). Indeed, whiteness as described by whites has been described as normal, nothing in
particular, normal, empty, and devoid of culture (Perry). The belief among whites that culture or ethnicity can only be attributed to non-white racial minorities is easily explained by the immigration histories of the many non-English European white ethnic groups that migrated to the United States during the nineteenth century. Groups such as the Irish, Italians, and Eastern Europeans Jews became white through assimilating to English white ideology (Brodkin Sacks, 1994; Takaki, 1994; Warren & Twine). A critical piece of becoming white for these ethnic groups was learning the existing racial hierarchy and appropriating the associated ideology of white superiority. The Irish in particular actively participated in the oppression of black people in order to protect their economic and political interests in their new country (Takaki; Warren & Twine). Therefore, whiteness can be understood as “formless in and of itself, tak[ing] shape in relation to others,” (Warren & Twine, p. 207).

It is no surprise then that whites’ uncertainty about whiteness is a central theme in American literature throughout the nation’s history (Winant, 2001). Pratt (1984) speaks of fear as an innate characteristic of the dominant culture, describing it as “the terror of a people who have set themselves apart and above, who have wronged others, and feel they are about to be found out and punished” (p. 17). Uncertainty, fear, and ambiguity continue to influence whites’ thinking about the self as racialized, or not, beings. In particular, whites’ current group identity crisis can be understood as a reaction against threats to the collective “ontological security” (Perry, 2007, p. 375) of whites as a once powerful and unquestioned group that “possess[ed] a divine right to the perks of power” (Graham, 1993, p. 3).
The official end of *de jure* racism forced attention to and action against the historically spurious nature of whiteness in United States society, creating a “post civil rights anxiety” (Winant, 2001, p. 97) among the general white population. Civil Rights or affirmative action policies acted as the catalyst for the significant decrease in overt racism at the policy and individual or relational levels, however the general consensus among those who study whiteness from a critical perspective is that both structural and individual racism persist under the guise of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Jensen, 2005; Pincus, 2000; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002; Vera & Feagin, 1995). The real or imagined belief in “the end of the great white male” (Graham, 1993, p. 3) underlies the colorblind perspective, and is often the justification for expressing racist sentiments.

Colorblindness, or what Winant (2001) calls the new neoconservative white racial project, is the product of a white group identity crisis. Traditional racism, characterized by overtly racist actions and an arrogance or pride in bigotry (Zamudio, 2006) is widely considered unacceptable among whites, yet colorblindness is rampant among both conservative and liberal whites due to its virtual invisibility (Perry, 2007; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002). Instead of overtly expressing racist attitudes or beliefs through the use of racial epithets or hate crime-type actions, whites today express discriminatory ideas through colorblind language, via what Bonilla-Silva (2006) calls “semantic moves,” (p. 57) verbally avoidant and incoherently subtle diction. Expression of racist opinion are usually precluded by such qualifications as “I’m not racist, but . . .,” “Some of my best friends are [insert non-white racial minority] . . .,” and “I’m not black, but . . .,” “I don’t
know, but...” These verbal caveats allow whites to simultaneously express distaste for racism in general and specific racist beliefs, to “talk nasty about minorities without sounding racist” (Bonilla-Silva, p. 53).

Today whites are still more likely than non-whites to: have smaller class sizes in primary and secondary education; have access to computers in school and in the home; attend four year college or university; earn higher salaries; retain employment in downturn economy; have health care; survive serious illness; have better housing; spend a smaller percent of income on housing; have easy access to home loans, own a home; own stocks, mutual funds, and IRAs; and have an overall greater net worth (Duster, 2001; Jensen, 2005). Despite these seemingly glaringly obvious facts, many whites today believe that non-whites have the same or greater material opportunities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gallagher, 2003; 1996; Pincus, 2000; Zamudio & Rios, 2006; Ross, 1990). Furthermore, many whites also believe they experience racial discrimination at both the personal and policy level. The concept of reverse racism is as ironic as its name suggests. Using the same rhetoric of non-whites during the civil rights movement, whites today claim the denial of material resources, such as employment and educational opportunities, based on their race (Gallagher; Perry, 2007; Ross).

Continuing structural disparities among racial groups have prompted some whites to adopt an antiracist or new abolitionist perspective towards white group identity (Winant, 2001), while others, such as the authors of The Bell Curve, present inequities as empirical evidence of the superiority of the white race (Hernstein & Murray, 1994). White antiracists such as Noel Ignatiev (Postel, 1996) and Robert Jensen (2005) believe
that self-hatred is the first step in collectively debunking and liberating the self from white supremacist ideology. There is indeed some evidence to suggest that teaching whites about the persistence of racial disparities from a focus on white privilege can produce collective guilt among whites (Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005; Wahab & Gibson, 2007). A group identity centered on guilt and responsibility is likely to cause whites to feel apologetic and can motivate positive actions. Winant (2001) questions white antiracists insistence upon self-hatred and denial of whiteness, asserting that it is critical for whites to participate in deconstructing whiteness. The most crucial piece of potential racial reformation, however, is to convince whites that racism is just as hurtful for whites as it is for non-whites because the ideology of whiteness denies whites of their full humanity (Jensen, 2005).

Psychosocial Concerns and Realities of Multiracial Individuals

Research regarding psychological and environmental concerns for mixed-race people has focused primarily on black/white biracial people, secondarily on white/other minority biracial people, and least often minority/minority mixed-race people (Gilbert, 2005). These research agendas reflect the enduring legacy of hypodescent and antimiscegenation ideology (Gilbert; Hollinger, 2003), as well as the black/white racial dichotomy that continues to prevail in academic, social, and political racial discourse (Thornton, 1996).

Black and white “races” are polar opposites in the national consciousness of the United States, a paradigm that began with slavery, maintained vis-à-vis extreme political and social marginalization, and underwritten by the ideology that black people are
inherently inferior (Duckitt, 1992; Smedley, 1999; Texeira, 2003; Warren & Twine, 1997). Not surprisingly, then, research on the psychological aspect of black/white mixed-race people post-Civil War and prior the civil rights movement, when said marginalization was legally sanctioned, portrayed them as inextricably bound to a life of mental strife and perpetual identity crisis (Campbell, Eggerling-& Boeck, 2006; Gilbert, 2005; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Root, 1996). Stonequist (as cited in Gilbert) asserted that Black/white mixed-race people were defined as permanent outsiders, belonging to neither “world” they represented. While it was theoretically and socially rare for black/white mixed-race persons to gain acceptance into white communities (Warren & Twine, 1997), black communities generally accepted these biracial people because they were socially and politically identified as monoracially black in accordance with the “one-drop rule” (Morning, 2003).

The civil rights movement of the 1960’s raised awareness about all minority groups, and created a space for minority groups to claim pride in their ethnic and racial identities (Root, 1996; 2003). Yet it also allowed for the confounding of race with culture and ethnicity, ultimately establishing essentialist racial thinking among the majority and minority groups (Thornton, 1996). The government’s, and correspondingly, society’s rigid views about race and “interracial mixing” reinforced minority groups’ essentialist ideas about race, making gatekeepers out of minority groups and their members (Jimenez, 2003). During this era, mixed-race people were limited to choosing one racial identity (Root, 2003), and which race was usually dictated by physical appearance (Duster, 2001; Gross, 1998; Morning, 2003). For the growing numbers of the racially ambiguous,
(Northern, 2004) cultural markers such as behavior, lifestyle, and language, in addition to phenotype, produced what is known as the authenticity test (Jimenez; Pelligrini, 2004; Root).

Authenticity testing is a process in which mixed-race—and sometimes monoracial (Jimenez, 2003)—people must “prove” they are a legitimate and desirable candidate for racial group membership (Pelligrini, 2004; Root, 1996). The mixed-race person submits his/her ethnic “credentials” (Johnson, 1999, p. 94) for the monoracial person, community, or group’s review for the privilege of claiming—full or partial—the racial identity of that person, group, or community (Northern, 2004). Because authenticity tests rely on essentialist notions of race, mixed-race people who are engaged in such tests are often forced to exaggerate caricatures of ethnic and racial stereotypes resulting in a loss of dignity for everyone involved (Root, 2003).

While the authenticity test may have emerged during the civil rights era, it is still an overwhelmingly common experience among mixed-race individuals today (Dhooper, 2003; Root, 1996; 2003). The reason for authenticity testing of biracial white/minority by monoracial minorities is simple. Historically, lighter, i.e., whiter, mixed-race individuals have received preferential treatment over darker mixed-race or monoracial individuals (Baynes, 1997; Morning, 2003; Texeira, 2003). Lighter slaves were often assigned to house work or appointed to oversee field work (Texeira). Unsurprisingly, this resulted in divineness that continues to plague the black community today (Gladwell, 1998; Senna, 1998c). The advent of affirmative action legislation during this time furthered the need for authenticity testing among all minority communities (Dunning, 2004; Jimenez, 2004;
Johnson, 1999), leading to a type of skepticism toward mixed-race people from those who are monoracial (Buchanan & Acevedo, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Root, 1996). Affirmative action in the context of identity politics is further explored in the Identity Politics section of this chapter.

Many biracial white/minority authors who grew up during or immediately after the civil rights movement write of the seemingly oppositional nature of their racial identity. For example, as a child Johnson (1999) recognized his culture and ethnicity as Mexican American, however he notes that because others had trouble racially categorizing him due to his light complexion and “anglo” last name, he worried about being viewed as a (racial) impostor. Johnson characterizes the differences between living with his white, middle class father and his poor, Mexican single-mother, and the opposing worldviews these experiences provided, as resulting in a border identity, living in two worlds. Alvarez (1998) describes trying to reconcile the oppositional social and class realities represented in the differences between her Nicaraguan father’s brownness and her mother’s whiteness. Obama (1995) recalls questioning whether he was black enough to participate in the militant, Afrocentric black student organizations in college. All of these authors write of feeling pressured to monoracially identify, and of not belonging to either racial group they represented, an unsurprising phenomenon in an era in which neither the Census nor society allowed for the checking of more than one box.

While the civil rights era and the advent of affirmative action stratified racial groups, possibilities for mixed-race peoples’ responses to authenticity testing, or the questioning of one’s racial identity by “strangers” (Root, 1996, p. 7), expanded in
conjunction with changing political and social attitudes about race (Duster, 2001; Perry, 2007; Root, 2003; Winant, 2001). The most current research suggests that there are essentially five possibilities for mixed-race identification: hypodescent; choosing to identify as monoracial minority; a mixed identity; a new race identity; and a white racial identity (Gilbert, 2005; Root, 2003). Scholars differ in their thinking about the social realities that allow for each identity choice and their theoretical practicalities, the language used in discussing each choice varies, yet each choice is well-represented in the literature (Dhooper, 2003; Gilbert; Root; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002).

The hypodescent identity reflects the biological deterministic ideology of the one-drop rule, and represents the beginning of mixed-race identity evolution (Root, 2003; Sexton, 2003; Spencer, 2004). Hypodescent is not a self-identification, but rather an identity imposed by society for the purpose of maintaining rigid and essentialist parameters of race, especially whiteness (Hollinger, 2003; Root). While the idea of hypodescent has historically applied to black/white mixed-race people and is no longer a legal reality, Fernandez (1996) argues that the rule “continues to apply to anyone whose surname or appearance suggests a particular ethnicity” (p. 23).

The monoracial (minority) identity is a self-identification choice, and is based on a number of environmental factors such as family upbringing, community, and phenotype (Root, 1996; 2003). A mixed-race individual is likely to choose a monoracial identity if the minority culture “dominates” (Dhooper, 2003, p. 30) in the home. For example, in a study involving white/Mexican American biracial individuals, Jimenez (2004) found that the majority of his interviewees gravitated toward a Mexican American identity because
they were immersed in the Mexican American community via family, community, and culture (Jimenez, 2004). Jen (1998) calls this tendency an “ethnic trump,” in which the ethnic minority piece of a white/minority biracial individual’s identity is emphasized. The ethnic trump phenomenon evidences the reality that in the United States whiteness is considered both devoid of ethnicity and the default ethnic group (Jen, 1998; Root, 2003; Northern, 2004; See, 1998; Thornton, 1996; Van Wagenen, 2007). Prior to the civil rights movement, the monoracial identity was socially and politically the only available option; today, this identity is often decided upon as a political choice after experiences, such as discrimination, in which the mixed-race individual feels compelled to identify primarily with the minority part of one’s racial identity (Johnson, 1999; Root).

What Root (2003) refers to as a mixed racial identity is referred to as a border identity, a protean identity, or situational identity by other scholars (Gilbert, 2005; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Root, 1996)? The individual who self-identifies as mixed-race or biracial asserts this identity to others, and chooses to embrace and participate in all ethnicities, cultures, and/or races they represent (Root, 2003). These individuals are thought to feel comfortable and be competent in seamlessly crossing the borders between communities, organizations, relationships representative of both (or all) their ethnic and/or racial identity. Individuals who choose this identity often report feeling connected to, but not fully a part of, both or all racial groups that make up their identity—a constant feeling of being “lost in the middle” (Gladwell, 1998, p. 112; see also McBride, 1998). Situational identity refers to the ability, or changeability of these mixed-race individuals to behave differently—i.e. utilize knowledge of multiple cultures
and racial groups—given the racial and/or ethnic social demands of a situation (Root; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). It is important to note that this phenomenon is also common among all ethnic and racial minorities in the United States, who must navigate, or “shift,” (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) both their own group norms and those of the dominant culture (Root, 2003; Thornton, 1996). Similarly, Gilbert (2005) defines the protean identity as “multiple racial identities, black, white, and biracial,” (p. 64) providing an individual with the acceptance into multiple groups at different times (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2005).

The “new race identity” (Root, 2003, p. 15) represents an individual’s conscious choice to subvert traditional racial discourse vis-à-vis refusing to claim—i.e. name—any particular racial identity. While these individuals will usually acknowledge that they are multi and/or biracial, in response to the question “what are you?” these individuals are likely to simply reply “just mixed” (Root, 2003). Also called a “transcendent” identity (Gilbert, 2005, p. 64), individuals who choose this “non-racial” identity may avoid personal experience with racism and discrimination by choosing to opt out of racialized thinking (Dunning, 2004). Individuals who choose this identity are often mistakenly viewed as naïve, and are criticized for their ignorance of the social realities of racism (Gilbert; Root, 2003).

The reasons a white/minority mixed-race individual would choose Root’s (2003) final identity possibility, a white identity, are multiple and representative of the differing realities these individuals face. Because the white “race” encompasses many different ethnic groups and cannot claim the kind of common historical experience in the United
States that has served to unite racial and/or ethnic minority groups, ethnicity for the majority of whites is often symbolic (Perry, 2007; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002; Root; Warren & Twine, 1997). Ethnic and cultural origins are often unknown and unexplored, and because whiteness is the racial norm, race is not a primary identifier for those who identify as white (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). There are many reasons a mixed or biracial individual would choose a white identity: no emotional connection to an ethnic heritage; whiteness the dominant culture in the home; ability to “pass” as white based on appearance and/or class standing; and, negative experiences with minority family members or close friends (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Dhooper, 2003; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Root).

While all five identities are indicative of personal choices and consequences (Gilbert, 2005; Root, 2003), research suggests that the feedback of others, especially monoracials, is positively correlated with all self-identification choices of mixed-race people (Dhooper, 2003; Gilbert; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Root). Many case studies, clinical and non-clinical, conclude that whether or not a mixed-race individual identifies with or claims the minority, or ethnic piece of one’s identity is dependent on the acceptance and/or rejection of monoracial others (Buchanan & Acevedo, 2004). Clinical research tends to focus on case studies in which biracial individuals recount experiences of rejection from minorities, resulting in emotional trauma and identity crisis. It is critical to note that clinical studies provide a bias towards biracial identity as problematic because their conclusions are drawn from individuals who are already feeling conflicted about their identity (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004).
Rockquemore and Brunsma (2004) refer to the impact of acceptance or rejection on the mixed-race individual’s identity as interactional validation. From research with biracial black/white women, they conclude that whether or not the women claimed a black identity was dependent on others identifying them as black. Affirmation from outsiders, or external validation, affirmed these biracial women’s blackness, resulting in their feeling that claiming a black identity was “meaningful and legitimate” (p. 93). The most positively correlated factor for validation of the women’s blackness was phenotype. Women who did not physically appear black enough experienced rejection of their claim to blackness from monoracial black outsiders, leaving that piece of their identity invalidated. Lack of external validation did not rule out claiming a biracial identity. Indeed, those who experienced rejection from monoracial blacks had a better understanding of dominant and subjective social narratives about race, and deliberately chose a biracial identity in order to subvert said narratives.

Buchanan and Acevedo (2004) classify women who racially self-identity in a way that is “incongruent” (p. 119) with their phenotype as “invisible minority persons” (p. 121), implying that one’s true ethnic, racial, or cultural identity and worldview is not wholly dependent on—but is indeed impacted by—external validation. Common factors contributing to racial identity development in the literature are largely centered on family dynamics, due to evidence that the strongest opposition to interracial marriages/relationships comes from within the family (Childs, 2004). Parental understanding and affirmation and familial communication about race is critical for biracial children in feeling supported and accepted, and helps prepare children for the
different social realities that they face as biracial individuals (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008). Exposure to negative racial messages, especially within the family, and negative or discriminatory experiences—again, especially within the family—can influence biracial individuals to reject a piece of their racial identity, and may even result in internalized racism (Jimenez, 2004).

One’s gender can also influence the way race is experienced and/or conceptualized both by the mixed-race individual and others (Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004; Dhooper, 2003). Mixed-race women in particular are often sexualized as exotic and tragically lascivious (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Root, 1999; Dagbovie, 2007). Racial loyalties may be asserted and/or called into question based on the race of an intimate partner, and resentment—real or imagined—may arise among monoracial individuals and groups. The intersection of skin color and gender is particularly important among monoracial and mixed-race Black women (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Rockquemore & Brunsma; Root, 1999). Historical leftovers of special treatment for lighter skinned blacks, as well the anger of black women as a result of a perceived preference of black men for white women, contribute to—real and imagined—resentment and suspicion among black women against typically lighter-skinned mixed-race black women (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004).

One’s community is also highly influential in racial identity development (Buchanan & Acevedo, 2004; Root, 1996; Root, 2003). A biracial individual may identify more strongly with one piece of his/her racial identity due to the environmental dominance of this racial community. Living in and being accepted by a particular racial
community is positively correlated with claiming the minority piece of biracial identity, and some research evidences that those that choose to self-identify with a racial or ethnic minority have higher self-esteem than monoracials or mixed-race individuals who claim a monoracial white identity (Dhooper, 2003; Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Therefore, moving to a new community can cause an identity crisis because the mixed-race person must endure authenticity testing and interactional invalidation in the new environment (Buchanan & Acevedo).

Summary

The brief history of multiracials in the United States debunks the notion that multiraciality is a new phenomenon. An exploration of antimiscegenation policy and the evolution of Census demographic reporting practices with regard to multiracial people illustrated the fluid and arbitrary nature of racial classification, as well as the material and sociopolitical consequences of racial classification. The achievements of the civil rights movement, specifically non-white racial minority pride, inspired white parents of multiracial children to advocate for a separate multiracial category in the United States Census. The multiracial movement is problematic because it is based on individual rights, has no affiliation with traditional civil rights groups, and lacks any social justice context.

The multiracial movement appears to be apolitical, but in fact operates from a colorblind, or neoliberal, racial perspective which is in reality, politically conservative. The colorblind perspective is based on the belief that antidiscrimination policies resulting from the Civil Rights Movement negated a history of structural racism, restoring meritocracy in the United States and making affirmative action policy unfair and
discriminatory towards whites. While many whites operate from a colorblind perspective, other whites choose an antiracist perspective and advocate for the end of white supremacy.

There are many self-identification options available for multiracial people given the sociopolitical changes that have occurred since the civil rights movement. Factors that influence racial self-identification are: gender; age; social and familial environment; and racial background, but the most important factor in self-identification is interactional validation, or, one’s self-identification choice affirmed and acknowledged by others.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter explains the research design and the methodology used for this study. Participants and the criteria for selection are explained, and a description of the sample population and the sampling method. The data collection instrumentation and reporting method are included in this chapter, as well as an explanation of the protection of human subjects.

Research Question

The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of whiteness on multiracial people’s racial identity formation through exploring the sample population’s views on whiteness, multiracial identity, and identity politics. These themes were explored to answer the research question: what kind of sociopolitical consciousness is produced by white/minority multiracial experiences and identities?

Research Design

This study used an exploratory qualitative design; specifically, content analysis was used to identify emergent themes. Qualitative research is based in grounded theory, meaning that the researcher’s conceptual theory is developed during the process of data collection and analysis (Neuman, 2004; Royse, 2008). Research begins with an idea or concept of interest to the researcher and a qualitative approach is chosen because the researcher wishes to explore and explain a certain population’s lived experiences and worldview.
The theoretical framework of constructivism and feminism, discussed in greater
detail in Chapter One, supports the qualitative method’s progressivism paradigm, in
which the researcher approaches the research process with the belief that because their
subjects construct the social world, the researcher also constructs the social world
through their interpretations (Holliday, 2002). Therefore, qualitative methodology allows
the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the human experience in a specified
context and provide readers with a “thick description” (Holliday, 2002, p. 115; see also
Neuman, 2004; Royse, 2008).

The researcher is personally involved in the collection and analysis of data,
informing and influencing the data collection process in ways not possible in quantitative
research. Researchers gather information via “face-to-face social interaction[s] with ‘real
people’ in natural social setting[s]” (Neuman, 2004, p. 267). In this study, the structured
interview was used, which may be described as an in-depth or “planned” (Royse, 2008, p.
273) conversation. It is common practice for the researcher to ask direct questions of,
converse with, and even joke with their research participants (Neuman). The opportunity
to be immersed in one’s research is what often draws researchers to a qualitative
methodology, yet it can also be a drawback in that the researcher is likely to influence
their participants’ responses via their personal involvement through words and/or body
language (Holliday, 2002).

All data in this study was in the form of transcribed interviews, which were
analyzed using content analysis methods of open, latent, and manifest coding (Bohm,
2004; Holliday, 2002; Neuman, 2004; Royse, 2008). The literature review process
illuminated certain themes that the researcher identified as important for exploration, and these themes provided the basic framework for the organization of the data. In-depth interviews explored themes and assertions identified by the researcher during the review of the literature for the purpose of “build[ing] a theory faithful to the evidence” (Neuman, p. 30; see also Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In contrast to quantitative research which relies on numerical data, qualitative research focuses on the analysis of text in its many forms (Bohm, 2004; Holliday, 2002; Neuman, 2004; Royse, 2008). There are several methods for organizing textual data into categories or themes. It is important to acknowledging that all qualitative researchers begin with general research questions or themes they wish to explore, and their theoretical leanings influence the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Holliday, 2002). It is not only possible, but very likely that one set of raw text data would be interpreted differently by different researchers, according to their theoretical orientation and method of analysis (Holliday). It is up to the researcher to make ethical decisions about the manner in which the data will be interpreted, creating a strong sense of responsibility in the researcher towards their participants.

Manifest coding was used to track repetition of words and phrases, and latent coding was used to identity the deeper meanings conveyed in the text. Theoretical memos were written throughout the coding process for both the confirmation and modification of initial categories of organization, making the coding process a “constant process of writing and revision” (Bohm, 2004, p. 271).
Content analysis is a research technique that allows for thorough and in-depth analysis, and can lead to the discovery of findings that might go unnoticed with the use of another methodology (Neuman, 2004). Content analysis is an appropriate method of analysis in studying a body of data in which message are “difficult to see with casual observation” (Neuman, 2004, p. 220). The most severe limitation of content analysis is the way in which “the realities of the research setting and its people are easily distorted by the discourse of qualitative research itself” (Holliday, 2002, p. 175). Because content analysis is highly subjective to the interpretation of the researcher, it is sometimes difficult to know if a researcher’s claims are appropriate (Holliday, 2002). Claims made by the researcher via the process of content analysis must be analyzed within the context of the entire study. Therefore, a significant limitation of content analysis can be the competence and honesty of the researcher.

Study Participants

The study included ten adult participants, six females and four males. The two study criterion were that a participant must self-identify as multiracial, mixed-race, or biracial, and must also identify “white” as part of their racial background. Many ethnic and racial minority backgrounds were represented, and all participants identified one of their parents as monoracial white. Half of the participants, three females and three males, represented an Asian/White multiracial identity. Four participants, three females and one male, represented a Latino/White multiracial identity. There was one female participant who represented a Black/White multiracial identity. Half of the participants, three males and two females, had achieved at least a Bachelor of Arts of Science degree, and these
two female participants were also in the process of attaining a Master’s degree. Four participants, three females and one male, were enrolled in undergraduate degree programs, and one female participant identified “some college” as their highest level of educational attainment. All participants identified some form of Christian religious or spiritual affiliation. Four participants, all female, reported annual incomes in the $0-$10,000 bracket; one male participant reported an annual income in the $20,001-$35,000 bracket; two participants, one male and one female, reported annual incomes in the $35,001-$50,000 bracket; one male reported an annual income in the $80,000-$100,001 bracket; and two participants, one male and one female, reported an annual income in the $100,001+ bracket.

Sample Population

This study utilized the non-experimental, convenient method of snowball sampling to recruit participants, with a sample size of 10 (N=10). Snowball sampling is used when a researcher wishes to study an interconnected network of people (Neuman, 2004). In this study, the researcher compiled an initial list of acquaintances known to self-identify as multiracial and self-identify whiteness as part of their racial background. The people on the initial list were geographically accessible, with all participants living within 60 miles of the researcher. People on the initial list were asked to recommend other members of the target population that were also geographically convenient. Referrals were also provided by acquaintances of the researcher who were aware of the research study and knew people that fit the selection criteria.
Advertising on the California State University, Sacramento and The University of California, Davis campuses was planned as a recruitment method; however, the snowball sampling method produced an adequate number of participants for this study. The snowball sampling method has been described as a method that is used when locating respondents is difficult (Neuman, 2004); although in this study it was possible to locate more respondents than could be interviewed in a timely manner. The criticism that snowball sampling produces a group of respondents that is likely more homogenous than a group produced by probability sampling is paradoxical in this study, in that due to the nature of the research topic, the homogeneity of the group was not as severe as can usually be expected when utilizing the snowball sampling method. There were however some aspects of the respondent group that were homogenous; for example, all but one participant had already attained or was in the process of attaining a college degree and all reported a “Christian” religious or spiritual affiliation.

Instrumentation

Research subjects participated in one face-to-face semi-structured interview in a private location of their choice. Interviews were audio taped using a digital recorder.

Participants were asked a series of interview questions (see Appendix A) after consenting to be interviewed and audio taped (see Appendix B). While each participant was asked all of the interview questions, some participants were also asked additional questions based on their answers to the pre-set interview questions, allowing for greater flexibility in the interview process, as opposed to a structured interview (Bryman, 2004). A semi-structured interview was chosen for this study because it allows for theoretical
“pre-assumptions” (Schmidt, 2004, p. 253) and is characteristic of a “theory-oriented approach” (p. 253). The questionnaire contained seven demographic questions and 16 open-ended questions related to the individual’s worldview about race, identity politics, whiteness, and multiracial identity formation.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher first identified all members of her social circle that fit the selection criteria for this study. She then contacted these people, explained her study to them and asked if they would like to participate in a one-time interview that would be audio taped. Seven out of the ten study participants were identified by the researcher in this manner. Three out of the ten participants were referred to the researcher by an acquaintance that was aware of the study and knew people that fit the selection criteria. The researcher contacted these three participants via email or phone, explained the study, selection criteria, the time commitment necessary for the one-time interview, and then asked if they would like to participate in the study.

All interviews were conducted in a location of the participant’s choice; four interviews were conducted in participants’ homes and four were conducted in the researcher’s home. Each participant was given a consent form which the researcher read through with them. The researcher drew special attention to the fact that in signing the consent form, participants agreed to be audio taped. The researcher had two consent forms for each participant, one for the participant to take with them, and one for the researcher to keep. After both consent forms were signed by both the participant and the researcher, the digital recorder was turned on and the interview began. Participants were
asked all questions on the questionnaire and follow-up or clarifying questions as necessary. The researcher responded to questions, but purposefully did not answer some questions so as to get each participant’s unique interpretation of words, concepts, or phrases. Following the interview, the researcher tuned off the digital recorder, made sure the participant had their copy of the consent form, and thanked the participant for participating in the study. Consent forms were then filed in a secure location.

Data Analysis

The interview questions were organized under four basic themes: 1) Worldview about race and racial issues; 2) Worldview about dominant culture or whiteness; 3) Worldview about identity politics; 4) Worldview about multiracial identity formation. Analyzing the data under these four umbrella themes guided the identification of three emergent themes that are presented in Chapter four. The three emergent themes were: 1) ambivalent attitudes regarding the connection between the personal and the political, 2) positive effects of passing on dominant culture identification and worldview, 3) negative effects of passing on dominant culture identification and worldview. The text of the interview questions under each theme were then compared and open coding was used to identify additional emergent sub-themes and categories (Holliday, 2002). Manifest and latent coding were used to analyze the data.

Protection of Human Subjects

The Protection of Human Subjects application (see Appendix ) was submitted to the Research Committee of Division of Social Work, and approved as a “Minimal Risk” study. All participants were consenting adults over the age of 18. Participants were given
an informed consent form (see Appendix B), which they read and signed prior to participation. Participants’ contact information, including names, email addresses, and phone numbers, were kept in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher explained to all participants that their participation in the study was confidential, but not anonymous, and that pseudonyms would be used in the study to protect their identity. The consent form informed participants that they may experience minimal psychological discomfort as a result of answering interview questions. The researcher verified that all participants had access to psychological counseling services in their community prior to conducting the interviews. All participant interviews were conducted in private locations approved by the interviewees. All participants consented to having their interviews audio taped. The researcher reminded participants before the interviews that they could withdraw their participation in the study at any time.

Audio tapes were stored in a locked filing cabinet until the researcher transcribed the tapes. The taped interviews were transcribed in a private room in the researcher’s home. The transcribed interviews were then printed and stored in a locked filing cabinet. The electronic versions of the transcriptions were stored on a flash drive, which was also stored in the locked filing cabinet. All electronic and printed data was kept in the locked filing cabinet when not being analyzed by the researcher. Data was destroyed at the completion of the project.

Summary

This chapter explained the qualitative research design utilized in this study. The research question was reported, followed by descriptions of the research design, study
participants, sample population, and instrumentation. Data gathering method and a
description of the content analysis methods were also reported. Finally, the chapter ended
with a description of the protection of human subjects. The next chapter will provide an
analysis and the researcher’s interpretation of the data results.
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

Structured interviews were held with ten individuals, all of whom self-identify as multiracial, biracial, or mixed-race, and all of whom identified white as part of their racial background. All participants are adults, representing an age range of 19 to 32 years. The purpose of this study was to answer the research question: what kind of sociopolitical consciousness is produced by white/minority multiracial experiences and identities? The purpose for exploring this question was to gain insight into the factors that influence the sociopolitical perspectives of white/minority multiracial people and to "fact check" some of the assumptions and claims made about multiracial people explored in the literature review. The participants were asked 16 questions about their worldview on race and racial issues, identity politics, multiracial identity formation, and whiteness or dominant culture ideology. Several main themes emerged that may begin to explain the complex nature of white/minority sociopolitical consciousness, whether this consciousness may be called unique, and what if any unique potential may be tapped for sociopolitical action among this population. The three main themes that emerged during data analysis were: 1) ambivalent attitudes regarding the connection between the personal and the political, 2) positive effects of passing on dominant culture identification and worldview, 3) negative effects of passing on dominant culture identification and worldview.
Ambivalent Attitudes

Ambivalence emerged as a theme expressed by nearly all participants, across almost all discussion topics touched upon throughout the interviews. The literature review addressed ambivalence in the context of racial identity formation and self-identification choices; however, further exploration of ambivalence was necessary with regard to an individual’s ability to connect the personal and the political.

Seven out of ten participants reported having no personal experiences of discrimination. Most participants acknowledged that discrimination is part of the monoracial minority experience, and that because they could not identify with this aspect of the minority racial experience, they could not legitimately or fully claim a minority racial identity.

Kelly, a 19 year old female, who self-identified as half Chinese and half white, reports never experiencing any discrimination due to her Asian minority background, “I have people who are of my ethnicity who are undergoing such, like, tribulation, and I don’t suffer from any of that.” Kelly reports her obliviousness to structural inequities and their effects on minority populations, further demonstrating her social experience of race as white or dominant culture. For example, she stated, “Like I didn’t, I took a class last quarter and I was kinda shocked to realize that if you’re like of some ethnic race, they you’re less likely to get a job.” She also said:

He [her friend] said, “Kelly, can you name one famous singer who’s Asian or who’s a leading actor or actress,” . . . and I realized I couldn’t, and it was kind of like, because I’d never realized that before, it was like oh man, that’s sad.
Similarly, Phyllis, a 20 year old female, who self-identifies as half Mexican and half white, reports never experiencing discrimination due to her Latino minority background. She matter-of-factly stated, “I never [italics added] feel oppressed.” Phyllis went on to state that because she never experienced personal discrimination like other monoracial Latinos, she did not feel like she could legitimately claim a monoracial Latino identity. She stated, “I’ve never had to deal with that at all and I don’t think it’s fair to be like ‘I’m Latina.’ It’s just not fair at all.” Kevin, a 27 year old male, who self-identified as half white and half Thai, not only reports no personal experiences with discrimination, but also dismisses instances of discrimination experienced by his mother as having a negligible impact on her quality of life.

I have to think hard because I don’t think there are things that I readily recall.

Yah, absolutely nothing specific. I think my mom would probably tell me times when she was treated disrespectfully or give some anecdotes, but I don’t think they were very consequential to her and how she operated.

Kevin also said, “So, I basically I didn’t have like the sense that I’m a minority that, you know, needs to struggle for justice,” further demonstrating that his social experience of race as white or dominant culture.

While participants were able to identify that the intent of affirmative action policies are to, as several participants described “even the playing field,” these participants also expressed general beliefs that their minority racial background was novel or entitled them to benefits that monoracial minorities are intended to receive under
affirmative action policies. Kelly describes her Asian background as novel or more special than a monoracial white racial identity.

So whiteness is like a white canvass, right? So, obviously there’s gonna be a canvass there, but when you offer up or explain your ethnic or racial identity, it’s like putting some kind of color on that, or some kind of portrait of what you are. ‘Cause it seems to me like that kind of tends to stick out more.

Kelly’s description of her racial identity is consistent with literature that posits multiracialism as a current fad (Dagbovie, 2007; Rockquemore, 2004; Sexton, 2003; Spencer, 2004). Like Kelly, Phyllis characterized her minority racial background as novel or special:

In middle school I think I very much tried to pass for white, “I’m white!” But I think from high school to now if I were to pass for something, I would do Mexican cause it’s more interesting... It’s a fun concept, it’s different... . I wish I could speak Spanish with that accent, with that attitude, but I can’t. But the reason I want to is just because, oh, that’s part of my family’s history. It’s cool, it’s interesting, but I don’t really need it where I’m living.

While Kevin did not describe his minority ethnicity as novel or special, he did describe how his sister took advantage of an affirmative action policy, illegitimately gaining a college scholarship because, based on her last name, the school assumed her to be of a certain ethnicity.

So, I can tell you that my sister passed as a Hawaiian on paper and got a scholarship for Hawaiian Americans. She is 100 percent Thai, and on my dad’s
side the name is Finnish, but the name sounds like a Hawaiian name, and so she got that, which I thought was amusing.

In short, even though Kelly, Phyllis, and Kevin reported having no personal experiences of discrimination or oppression, they felt justified in seeking to benefit from policies they understand do not apply to their social experience of race.

These participants reported either past use or intended future use of their minority racial background in an effort to take advantage of affirmative action policies. Reported examples focused primarily on college and employment applications, with participants reporting that they intentionally checked or would check a minority racial group box, while not checking the white or Caucasian box, because they believed this would improve their chances. Participants also reported being prompted by parents or school counselors to choose a minority racial category instead of a white racial category when filling out applications. Kelly described the conscious and strategic prompting of her parents to shift back and forth between racial categories in order to better her chances of acceptance, “Cause like SAT scores, my parents are like ‘check the white box’ because Asian scores are higher, right? And then they’re like ‘for college applications, check Asian because that’s a minority.’” Phyllis discussed her decision to use her minority Latino racial background, demonstrating her and her parents’ belief that she is entitled to access affirmative action benefits.

I think this is a funny story, you know it happens, and whether it’s good or bad [sic]. My dad is a really big role model figure for me, he’s very wise. When I was filling out college applications, my name is Phyllis Kathryn Smith, my mom kept
the Velasquez cause like “You can’t ever forget, you can’t ever forget,” and I’m like, “O.k., mom.” And my dad’s like “Phyllis, put that on your application, put Velasquez.” I never use Velasquez, and he’s like “Put Velasquez, put that in there cause it’s not supposed to help, but it does.”

These findings are consistent with Sexton’s (2003) assertion that the dominant culture has found opportunities to subvert the sociopolitical realities of race within the context of multiracial identity politics. Kevin reported that he would use his minority racial background to attempt to benefit from affirmative action policies, “Because who knows, maybe somewhere somebody thinks I could be some sort of Asian who’s disadvantaged.” Statements made by Meredith, a 22 year old female, who self-identified as hapa (a term that originated in Hawaii, meaning half white and half Asian), exemplify an ambivalent attitude towards the connection between the personal and the political.

Yah, I’ve done it before, mostly as a kind of added bonus to myself, like, “Hey guys, not only do I have the credentials, I add diversity to your job force,” or whatever. So I am conscious of that, yah. Especially if all they see is my name, because I have a Caucasian name . . . . I think would [use minority background] if I knew I wouldn’t be discriminated against because of it. I see that as a potential added bonus that people might like to know about. Like, “Oh, she’s mixed, that’s cool.” . . . I have mixed feelings about affirmative action; it can be good, it can be bad.

These findings are consistent with research from the legal affirmative action era, before the policy was overturned with the passing of California Proposition 209 in 1996 (Ford,
1994; Martinez, 1995; Payson, 1996). Clearly, multiracial people continue to use their minority status as a technicality that allows them to take advantage of affirmative action policies.

While Kelly admits to personally attempting to take advantage of her minority background, she also questions the legitimacy of affirmative action policy, stating, “You have Asian people who’ve been here for a long time or they’re really wealthy and they’ll slack off, too, but they’ll take advantage of the minority thing.” Although Kevin is “amused” by his sister’s benefit from affirmative action and would attempt to benefit from it himself, he, like Kelly, is also critical of affirmative action policies.

[I’m] Not so much a fan of it because I think it’s problematic for society to compromise the quality of people in positions. And who knows . . . how serious the level of difference could be between the highest level of applicants . . . In principal, I don’t think it’s a good idea.

Kevin’s beliefs about affirmative may be based on principle rather than prejudice, but could also be indicative of resentment towards minority groups whom he believes do not try hard enough to overcome difficulties (Feldman & Huddy, 2005). Phyllis provided a rationale for her contradictory beliefs and actions, stating:

Whether or not I really feel like my lifestyle’s Mexican, I am descended, you know. I’m not trying to justify what I did . . . but I am a descendent of Mexican people . . . I think whether or not it affects me day to day, I am the product of that . . . I think it’s important for me to identify myself as Mexican . . . I’m not saying
I've risen up . . . but like, I'm an ethnic person. If I didn't put my name in there then, like, "I'm white now?" I don't think people would know.

Phyllis's claims to utilizing affirmative action policies can be understood in the context of authenticity testing. Authenticity testing demands that the multiracial individual prove their ethnic or racial authenticity via making overt claims to the minority racial background (Jimenez, 2003; Johnson, 1999; Pelligrini, 2004; Northern, 2004; Root, 1996). In the context of affirmative action policies, intended to benefit structurally oppressed and economically disadvantaged individuals, this kind of authenticity testing results in a loss of dignity for everyone involved (Root, 2003). Almost all of the seven participants who indicated past or intended use of their minority status to gain employment or educational opportunities were able to acknowledge that the intent of affirmative action policies was to correct for racial discrimination, however most ultimately stated that people should be granted opportunities based on merit rather than their minority racial status.

Traditionally considered a negative characteristic used to describe people with weak attitude strength, the concept of ambivalence has undergone a discursive shift, and is currently viewed as a complex phenomenon. Scholarly literature in political psychology posits ambivalence as characteristic of people who are more likely to engage in more in-depth and complicated thought processes and less likely to rely on pre-existing beliefs or opinions when making value judgments (Armitage, 2003; Rudolph & Popp, 2007). The above examples demonstrate that multiracial individuals can hold contradictory or competing values. For these multiracial individuals, ambivalence may be
understood as the “failure of individuals to organize their value commitments across ideological lines” (Rudolph & Popp, p. 564).

Positive Effects of Passing on Dominant Culture Identification and Worldview

The examples that follow illuminate the positive impacts of passing on multiracial individuals’ identification with and worldview of the dominant culture. In the context of this study, a dominant culture worldview is evidenced by an individual’s expression of dominant culture beliefs and values, such as colorblindness, meritocracy, the denial of structural inequality, and aversion to racial policies or programs (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gallagher, 2003; 1996; Pincus, 2000; Zamudio & Rios, 2006; Ross, 1990). Adhering to a dominant culture worldview can be appealing for individuals because it supports and rationalizes current social arrangements (Korgen & O’Brien, 2007).

Meredith, a 22 year old female, who self-identified as hapa, explained that passing is a complicated issue for her due to her ethnically ambiguous appearance.

I know that when I ask my white friends “What kind of face do you see when you look at my face?” they tell me “I see a Chinese face.” My Chinese friends when I ask them “what kind of face do you see?” they tell me “I see a white face.”

Although Meredith does not think she could pass for white based on her appearance, she ultimately believes she “could pass more as a white person... because... I’m American.” Meredith’s equation of whiteness with being American indicates a dominant culture worldview and echoes the way in which several other participants characterized whiteness as American or “mainstream.” For example, Stanley, a 29 year old male, who self-identifies as half Caucasian and half Mexican, said that he did not believe he could
pass as either Mexican or white, but reported identifying more strongly with whiteness because “[he was] raised in white America.”

Kevin, a 27 year old male, who self-identified as half white and half Thai, also recognizes his inability to pass as white based on appearances, but believes he could pass as white based on his knowledge of the dominant culture, “I think if you get to know me long enough it will come off... what I mean is the cultural element; I’m mainstream culture basically.” Similarly, Jim, a 30 year old male, who self-identified as half Japanese and half Caucasian, stated “I’m enough white that I feel like I fit in with the white crowd... I speak as a normal white person would speak, like I don’t have any funny accent, I use white people grammar.”

The majority of these participants were skeptical that white is the dominant culture, and expressed opinions that indicated a dominant culture worldview. A participant’s inability to describe, label, or define characteristics of whiteness is perhaps the biggest indicator of a dominant culture worldview. For example, when asked to describe characteristics that define whiteness, Michael answered “I guess, uh, I don’t really know, it doesn’t associate with anything, except for maybe my dad. It doesn’t really strike any chord with me.” A variation of Michael’s answer was the idea that whiteness is simply a skin color. Stanley, for example, stated, “I really believe in the human race, that we are all part of the human race, that we have different, I believe it’s melanin in our skin that tells us what pigment our skin is going to be.” Similarly, Kevin stated, “So I do view white as most commonly viewed and commonly understood by everybody as a biological factor or a short-hand, like you see a person and you say
‘they’re white.’” These findings support the idea that white people have difficulty conceiving of whiteness as race, culture, or ideology, due to the normative status of whiteness in United States society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Gallagher, 1996; 2003; Graham, 1993; Perry, 2007).

These participants expressed skepticism about white privilege. While participants were able to recognize that this kind of privilege may exist, they posited whiteness was as an association with, rather than a cause of socioeconomic privilege. Kevin stated:

There is some co-incidence between being, you know, ethnically or racially white and being privileged . . . and I mean that literally, there’s a co-incidence, but in terms of causation I’m skeptical that being white is a primary factor in people’s having privilege . . . I think that there’s groups that, who are in the U.S. that are not white and have privilege because of capital that’s been endowed to them by whatever culture they come from, it just happens to be in line with what is dominant here . . . so I’m not sure how useful it is to talk about white privilege when there may not be causation. There’s a correlation, but not so much causation.

Similarly, Michael was skeptical about white privilege, stating that the term itself “sucks.” He was adamant that he himself had never benefitted from white privilege, “I know I haven’t ever, like, hindered somebody because they weren’t white,” but also admitted that he was “sort of oblivious in that regard.” Michael and Kevin’s defensive and skeptical attitudes about white privilege are concurrent with Oldmeadow and Fiske’s
(2007) findings that many white people operate from a “Just World” theoretical framework, in which “people are generally motivated to endorse ideologies and stereotypes that reinforce the status quo, but doing so involves a complex process of balancing needs for self, group and system justification” (p. 1137). Branscombe, Schmidt, and Schiffhauer (2007) also found that encouraging whites to think about white privilege can pose a threat to the “moral value of the in group,” (p. 203) and that whites often denied the existence of white privilege by asserting their beliefs in equality. Michael states, “My parents were always very direct about saying everybody’s equal, no matter what color or anything like that.” Similarly, Stanley reported that his mother taught him about racial equality.

I was always raised not to judge people by what race they are. Um, my mom was very anti anything racist, you know, the skin-heads, the white powers, even the other extreme of the black panthers, black pride, even brown pride. She was like, “we’re all equals, you can’t say you’re greater than anybody else.”

Idealistic beliefs about racial equality evidence an individual’s belief in meritocracy, another key tenet of dominant culture thinking (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gallagher, 2003; 1996; Pincus, 2000; Zamudio, Rios, 2006; Ross, 1990). Meritocracy allows individuals to deny the existence of racial inequities through colorblind thinking, which presupposes racial equality and focuses on individual competence (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gallagher, 2003; Glaser, 2005; 1996; Pincus, 2000; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007; Zamudio & Rios, 2006; Ross, 1990). The above participants also expressed beliefs in
colorblindness and meritocracy. Michael stated his belief that if everybody would accept
the ideology of colorblindness, societal beliefs in racial inequities would cease to exist.

There would truly be quality, like, instead of inequality being based on skin color
or ethnic background it would be . . . at least it’s a little bit more fair. Like how
hard you work, more so the situation you’re in, more so than your ethnic
background. I mean, you’re given that, you know. If you decide not to make
something of yourself, it’s your own damn fault and you don’t get any sort of
advantages because of that, you know, you bring that upon yourself.

Meredith provided an example that illustrates the insidious nature of colorblindness from
her days of running track at a local community college.

I think my first test at trying to be colorblind was when I got on the track team at
City College. If you look at the picture of the team, almost everybody was African
American, inner-city. And I remember I walked out there on the first day and I
was like “Oh man, I am completely out of my element.” . . . I guess I kinda grew
up with this idea that maybe I had to be afraid of black people or whatever and
this was really great, I think that was my first test in learning to become
colorblind, like how do I see these, these are my teammates, they’re very talented
people and I wish that they cared more about school. Um, I think that’s probably
the best route to get them out of their socioeconomic situations that they grew up
in, to make to make more money so that they could. Well there’s that whole
aspect of not being ignorant, learning how to think aspect, but also learning the
money you earn from your intellect to invest it elsewhere so that other people
could benefit as well. I wish that I had seen more motivation to care about school and our coach was really adamant about it, he was like “Guys, you guys could stay here forever, but I don’t want you to, I don’t want to see you here in two years, I want to see you guys transfer and go to school somewhere else.” But it was really cool to run with them, they were really great people and I learned how to understand and talk street a little bit, so I think that was part of my education in becoming colorblind.

Meredith’s description is riddled with stereotypes about black people, including athleticism, academic laziness, the assumption of low socioeconomic status, “talking street,” and ignorance. Meredith’s example evidences that colorblindness is indeed a way for people to express distaste for racism in general while also expressing specific racist beliefs Bonilla-Silva (2001). The above examples from Kevin, Stanley, Michael, and Meredith demonstrate the varied effects of passing on the multiracial individual who identifies with and accepts the worldview of the dominant culture.

Negative Effects of Passing on Dominant Culture Identification and Worldview

In contrast to the findings presented in the previous section, this section focuses on participants who believed they could pass for white based on appearance, cultural elements, or both, and expressed a desire to be externally validated as non-white. Multiracial individuals who desire to be externally validated in a way that does not match their physical appearance are called “invisible minority persons” (Buchanan & Acevedo, p. 121). In examining the intersection of passing and worldview, the idea of invisible minority persons takes on a double meaning; these individuals have not only a minority
racial background, but also a minority, or anti dominant culture, perspective or worldview.

These participants were generally critical of dominant culture values, indicating an antiracist worldview (Winant, 2001). Pam reported her belief that although she passes for white based on her appearance, she desires to be externally validated as non-white, “I feel like most of the time people identify me as white, but then I sort of feel like that’s kind of unfortunate, I wish that I could, I wish there could be more.” Similarly, Jan, a 24 year old female, who self-identifies as Mexican, French, German, and Irish, reported her ability to pass as white based on her appearance, “Well, I do think I pass for white all the time, ‘cause that’s what people see.” Like Pam, Jan expressed her frustration that her minority racial identity is not externally validated.

I’m always very up front about my ethnicity and stuff, so I’d rather people see me as that than just my skin color. Rather than just assume . . . Socially, I think it’s easier for people to accept who I am when they know what I am . . . Like when I work out I wear my cholo loco shirts, you know the ones with the big old Mexican pictures on the back . . . so it’d be easier for me to feel comfortable in that shirt if everyone else in the gym actually knew that it was o.k., quote unquote, o.k. for me to wear that shirt . . . I feel like I need to say something, like blurt out a Spanish word or something.

Pam also recalled feeling out of place as an adolescent around her white friends because she felt there was a “huge gap” between her friends and her Mexican family members, who were migrant farm workers. Jan and Pam’s strong identification with their
minority racial identity is consistent with the ethnic trump phenomenon (Jen, 1998), in which the multiracial individual feels compelled to identify more strongly with their minority side, due to an understanding of the sociopolitical realities of race (Johnson, 1999; Root, 2003).

Pam reported a strong belief in white privilege, recalling an example about a high school friend’s family, who were white, and nonchalantly engaged in criminal behavior.

I know that people from all cultures do things wrong, but . . . I think that honestly they just thought that they could get away with it because they . . . were upper class and sort of had that privilege. Like “Well, we can do whatever we want and we’re not gonna get in trouble.” And I feel like sometimes, like, people who are white, and I mean I’m pretty white, but sometimes [people] who consider themselves white and don’t consider themselves as having some sort of other identification, they feel like they shouldn’t have to experience things that they see other people experience, like black people, or Mexican people, or whatever.

Jan said that although she “doesn’t like” the idea of white privilege, she believes it exists, stating, “I think it means that no one questions your abilities or your capabilities or your credentials or . . . like there aren’t really any obstacles put in front of you. Kind of things are handed to you.” Although Jim is different from Pam and Jan in that he is aware of appearing more “ethnic,” and therefore would not be able to consistently pass as white, he shares Pam and Jan’s belief in and criticism of white privilege, “The white culture does seem to be dominant, there seems to be more power with the white, you know, white people have more power . . . So, whites can, they can pretty much have whatever
job they want.” These examples are concurrent with Branscombe, Schmidt, and Schiffhauer’s (2007) findings that, in response to being asked to think about white privilege, some individuals accept the realities of racial inequities and express antiracist opinions.

Pam demonstrates her rejection of a dominant culture worldview, not only by criticizing its norms and values, such as colorblindness, which she called “a joke,” but also by stating her alliance with minorities against the dominant culture perspective.

[They think] that they’re different, or that they’re better . . . Like, this lady treating so and so like that at the grocery store, and I think I’ve always sort of felt . . . like even though I’m not full-on Mexican, I do feel like I’ve always been much more compassionate towards people generally of any other culture besides white. Because I feel like so often white people take that privilege . . . and I just get really frustrated and sort of angry about that attitude.

Jan expressed her skepticism about colorblind ideology, stating:

I think by doing that you are ignoring differences, good differences and bad. I think by saying that you’re colorblind, you are ignoring the obstacles that are still there, and the racism that still exists, and the ignorance that is still out there.

Jim is also critical of key dominant culture values and ideology, such as colorblindness and meritocracy, indicating his rejection of a dominant culture worldview.

So they would try really hard not to see that person’s skin color and maybe make some mental concessions in their head to try and balance out whatever initial prejudices might come up for them . . . And I think therefore it’s impossible to
really be colorblind... You still have those stereotypes, you're just not saying
them. So, everything's there, it's just under the surface.

Beyond expressing that she would not actively participate in "taking" white
privilege, Pam is also able to acknowledge that her life in some ways resembles that
which could be characterized as white or dominant culture.

I think how I reconcile it is I just try to be compassionate to other races, no matter
what they are, because John (Pam's husband) and I are definitely privileged in
certain ways, and we never wanna take that for granted... I wanna be
compassionate and identify, even if it's not the culture I'm from, have compassion
and understanding of somebody else's culture and somebody else's identity. I just
try to check my attitude, make sure I'm... not sort of taking on that world white
attitude.

Jan also acknowledges that she has likely benefited from white privilege, but also
expresses her desire to not receive benefits from white privilege, "I've been more aware
of me thinking, 'don't treat me better because of my skin color.'" Rather than accept a
dominant culture perspective or identification, Pam and Jan regard their white racial
appearance and what they perceive as privileges as reasons to guide their thinking and
behavior away from a "world white attitude."

Jim believes that racism is a "social, rather than an individual problem," and
characterizes racism as a "system," indicating his belief that racism is an institutional or
structural issue.
My dad was trying to assimilate, he thought of it [racism] as “This is something that’s bad for me, that’s unfair to me,” but then he went around and was unfair to others along the same way [sic]. So, he’s got to put up with it, but at the same time, he also gets to use it, so he’s also part of the system . . . he kind of put himself in the hierarchy . . . I’m thinking of it [racism] in terms of it’s a social problem, not necessarily a personal problem.

Pam also believes that racism is a social, rather than individual problem, and suggests structural solutions to ending discrimination.

Kids should be taught from an early age that there’s a lot of different cultures . . . you really have to start with kids and be like “Every part of the world has different ways of doing things, and people look different in every part of the world and that doesn’t make them better or worse, it’s just how it is.”

Similarly, Jan suggests the structural strategy of education to combat the social problem of discrimination, “Like in elementary school, let there be a section on ethnicities and talk about . . . struggles or how they came to the country as a group . . . I think that’s the first way.”

Pam, Jan, and Jim’s ability to recognize and think critically about dominant culture values demonstrates their awareness of the sociopolitical realities of race, and is concurrent with Winant’s (2001) call for whites to participate in deconstructing whiteness in order to become anti-racist. The findings in this section address the gap in the literature that neglects the “macro, political, cultural, and historical processes of structured racial
meanings” (Brunsma, 2004, p. 2) in which multiracial construct their identities and worldviews.

Summary

This chapter provided analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the study data. In chapter five, final conclusions will be drawn and recommendations for further research will be made. Chapter five will also include a discussion of the limitations of and implications for social work practice of this study.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

A common theme in multiracial studies literature is supposed end of race and racial thinking due to the presence of multiracial individuals in United States society. This study attempted to explore the validity of this claim by questioning multiracial individuals’ attitudes about racial issues. The findings presented in Chapter Four evidence that multiracial individuals can be very aware of the sociopolitical implications of their racial backgrounds, sometimes using it to their advantage. Findings also evidence that multiracial individuals do not generally choose to opt-out of racial thinking or take on a post-racial perspective, but rather tend to express either dominant culture values and beliefs or antiracist values and beliefs. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of multiracial individuals’ life experiences on their sociopolitical consciousness.

Many participants expressed ambivalent attitudes about their racial identity, and were either unable or unwilling to recognize the political implications of their self-identification choices. While it may seem incorrigible that some participants chose to exploit their minority racial background in a conscious effort to access affirmative action policies, this must be understood in the current context of multiracial identity theory. Currently, multiracial individuals are regarded by society, largely under the influence of the media, as different, special, and in vogue (Dagbovie, 2007; Rockquemore, 2004; Sexton, 2003). It is not entirely surprising, then, that the multiracial participants in this study expressed beliefs that their minority racial background made them special,
interesting, or different. Society’s fascination with multiracial individuals, with particular fixation on the interracial sexual relationships that produce them, is an enduring legacy of the antimiscegenation era (Sexton; Texeira, 2003). Therefore, it is also unsurprising that participants also expressed feeling different, confused, and unsure of their racial identity. Perhaps, then, it should be expected that multiracial people express opposing feelings of unworthiness and entitlement, self-assurance and confusion—ambivalence—towards their identity and their place in the sociopolitical arena.

Ambivalence does not have the same discursive connotation it once had; it is no longer a marker of weak attitude or character strength, but rather a tell-tale sign of more complex thinking habits (Armitage, 2003; Rudolph & Popp, 2007). People who have ambivalent attitudes have are less likely to arrive at conclusions based on pre-conceived beliefs when thinking through an issue because they “are more likely to consult multiple, and potentially conflicting, schemata when evaluating an attitude object” (Rudolph & Popp, p. 573). Because white/minority multiracial people represent an oppositional majority/minority racial dichotomy, it would stand to reason that they have access to “multiple, and potentially conflicting schemata” (Rudolph & Popp, p. 573).

Special attention was given to the issue of passing because the literature reviewed focused on multiracial people passing for white or dominant culture, while only somewhat touching on possible reasons multiracial individuals might seek to pass using their minority racial background. The exploration of participants’ opinions about dominant culture values and ideology, such as colorblindness, meritocracy, and white privilege in conjunction to individual experiences about passing, was intended to provide
further insight into the sociopolitical consciousness of white/minority multiracial individuals.

This study explored passing in new ways, including: factors other than racial appearance that can contribute to one’s ability to pass, such as cultural, social, and political knowledge; multiracial individuals’ usage of their minority racial background to gain access to resources; and the impacts of passing on the sociopolitical consciousness. The participants’ responses to questions centered on the themes of passing and whiteness evidenced that assumptions about the sociopolitical consciousness of multiracial individuals are not easily generalized. Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) contend that society is currently in an “‘awkward historical moment,’” in which the concept of race is disintegrating while racism continues” (p. 26). Concurrent with this statement are the findings presented in the following section of Chapter Four, “Positive Effects of Passing on Dominant culture Identification and Worldview,” in which participants expressed common dominant culture beliefs and values, such as colorblindness, meritocracy, and skepticism about white privilege. These participants passed for white, not based on physical appearance, but rather based on adherence to dominant culture values and beliefs. On the other hand, participants who were aware of their ability to be externally validated as racially white, either based appearance or cultural knowledge, expressed antiracist values and beliefs, indicating their choice to opt-out of a dominant culture worldview.
Recommendations

The multiracial population and their experiences are legitimate and timely subjects for integration into bachelor’s and master’s level social work programs. Social work programs should integrate the multiracial experience into social work curriculum and be presented using a feminist approach, including information about multiracial history, identity formation, and identity politics (Brunsma, 2006).

As this population continues to grow, social workers at all levels will work with members of this population. Therefore, social work agencies, employers, and practitioners at all levels of practice must make themselves knowledgeable and competent to work with this population (Dhooper, 2003). Agencies and practitioners must consider the additional options for identity formation that are present when working with multiracial clients for assessment and intervention planning (Dhooper; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Root, 2003).

This study demonstrated that multiracial people can provide unique insight into the social experience of race. The concepts of attitude ambivalence and action incongruence, as well as different experiences of passing can help practitioners understand the ways in which external, or societal, factors shape internal feelings about the self and society (Dhooper, 2003; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Multiracial people share common traits of ambivalence and identity questions with other minority groups (Dhooper), a fact that has gone relatively unutilized by the social work profession. Therefore, the social work field can include multiracial people into existing social and political action that has traditionally been aimed at minority groups.
This study was an attempt to address the gap in multiracial studies literature about the ways in which multiracial individuals fit into the sociopolitical arena, and what, if any, are the social justice implications of ambivalent attitudes and passing. This study utilized a critical, feminist approach to “explore the dynamic relationship between public categories and private identities” (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009, p. 30); however more research from a similar approach is needed. The feminist approach should continue to be used in studying this population because it is non-oppressive and examines individual behavior as the product of sociopolitical and historical factors (Dhooper, 2003; Lee, 2001).

The interview questions used in this study explored beliefs and values without explicitly asking about them. Further studies, in which multiracial individuals are explicitly questioned about their political views and involvement, in conjunction with reflective questions about their multiracial identity could provide more in-depth insight into the development of the sociopolitical consciousness of multiracial people. Continued examination of the impacts of individual choices and attitudes about identity on sociopolitical behavior is critical for building a multiracial identity theory that “turn[s] around our societal and disciplinary retreat from racial justice” (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009, p. 31).

To provide objective insight into this issue, further studies should have a larger subject recruitment field, utilize an experimental sampling method, and utilize instruments designed to assess social justice and political values. Regardless of study design type, it is necessary to compare multiracial individuals to monoracial white and
minority individuals in order to make any conjecture about unique abilities and characteristics of the multiracial population. Comparing multiracial individuals to monoracial individuals is critical in order to avoid perpetuating the view that the multiracial population is a cohesive community that possesses the innate ability to change the face of race in United States society (Brunsma, 2006; Sexton, 2003; Texeira, 2003). Studies of this nature would decrease the vulnerability of multiracial identity theory to be co-opted by the dominant culture, and would also have the potential to be generalized to a broader population.

Limitations

This study focused solely on white/minority multiracial individuals, and cannot be generalized to minority/minority multiracial individuals. The small sample size (N=10) and non-experimental sampling method of snowball sampling were also limitations, in that findings cannot be generalized. All participants identified similar spiritual affiliations, Protestant and Catholic Christian; however, interview questions did not address the impact of religious or spiritual beliefs. All participants lived within a relatively small geographic radius; therefore findings are limited to the specific geographic area. All participants had either earned a Bachelor’s degree, were enrolled in a Bachelor’s degree program, or had some college education; therefore there is no information about individuals with lower education levels. Although the purpose of this study was to assess sociopolitical consciousness of multiracial individuals, the interview questions used in this study did not explicitly question participants’ political views;
therefore conclusions may not be drawn about the impact of individuals’ party affiliation, political views, or political involvement on their responses.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

There is contention within multiracial studies as to whether multiracial people perpetuate or challenge the current racial hierarchy of United States society (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Sexton, 2003; Texeira, 2003). Because a social justice is a core value of the social work profession (National Association of Social Workers, 2000), it is the responsibility of social workers to participate in this debate. If the discourse surround multiracialism is indeed vulnerable to co-option by the dominant culture, as scholars operating from a critical perspective (Sexton, 2003; Texeira, 2003) and this study have demonstrated, it is the responsibility of social workers working at all levels to participate in discursive change. As the multiracial population continues to grow, increasing numbers of social workers will have clients in this population.

At the micro level, there are multiple clinical implications for working with this population. The options for racial categorizations and identities within this group are expanding and becoming more complex with each census. Furthermore, multiracial theorists are now espousing a continuum model of identity development as opposed traditional either/or, neither/nor identity choices (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009), further expanding the boundaries of cultural competency for clinical practice (Dhooper, 2003). The findings on attitude ambivalence and passing in this study add new possibilities to the existing literature on multiracial identity theory, and allow for the supplementation of any existing assessment tools used for work with this population.
(Dhooper, 2003). Findings can help clinical practitioners normalize attitude ambivalence and action incongruence for multiracial clients and their family members.

At the mezzo level, practitioners need to understand the intersection of micro and macro level factors that influence the development of multiracial people’s sociopolitical consciousness and how it affects group and family systems. Identification options given to multiracial individuals by society and the government impact the ways in which these individuals will understand, adapt, and use their racial backgrounds in social settings. The findings presented in Chapter four could provide valuable insight into group and family therapy, adding new contextual levels for practitioners to consider during the group therapy phase of ambivalence (Corey & Corey, 2006). Practitioners operating from constructivist, feminist, and empowerment theoretical orientations are well-positioned to make micro-to-macro or personal-to-political level connections, and should seek to connect and mobilize members of this population for social action and change (Lee, 2001). The empowerment perspective group therapy model would provide an ideal supportive foundation for facilitating personal and social awareness and activism for this population (Lee).

At the macro level, practitioners must recognize that “micro-level decisions over race matter because the racial category that each student selects on his or her college admission form will result in concrete decision that will affect his or her opportunities, resources, and mobility” (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009, p. 29). Practitioners at the policy level should participate in the innovation of racial categorization options, programs, and policies that reflect the individual’s social experience of race, in order to
prevent resources from reaching those whose minority race or ethnicity is merely symbolic (Payson, 1996; Ramirez, 1995). As suggested by study participants, macro level practitioners could also advocate for the integration of the sociopolitical history of multiracial individuals in the United States into educational content standards.

Conclusion

This study provides new insight into white/minority multiracial identity and experiences. Because the theoretical framework of this study was constructivist and feminist, the research presented in this study focused on the sociopolitical implications of multiracialism. The emergent themes of this study explored the connection between the personal and the political, and the positive and negative impacts of passing on dominant culture identification and worldview. Participants were found to have ambivalent attitudes about the connection between their personal attitudes about their racial identity and the way they used their identity in the sociopolitical arena. Exploration into the issue of passing provided new ways of thinking about the term passing. Whereas passing has traditionally been regarded as based on physical appearance, findings in this study demonstrated that passing can be based on sociopolitical values of the dominant culture. In general, participants who identified with the dominant culture via sociopolitical values believed they could pass for white, while participants who believed they could pass for white based on appearances expressed antiracist sociopolitical values.

Further research is needed to fill the gap of social justice and macro-oriented issues in multiracial studies. Recommendations for further research include large, experimental study designs that utilize standardized instrumentation to assess multiracial
people’s sociopolitical consciousness in comparison with monoracial white and minority people. Based on the social work values of social justice and cultural competency, social workers should participate in advancing the literature in this area for the purpose of better serving this population at the micro and macro levels.
APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Demographics:
1. Racial/ethnic background
2. Racial/ethnic background of parents
3. Age
4. Gender
5. Religion or spirituality, if any
6. Level of education
7. Level of income: $0-$10,000; $10,001-$20,000; $20,001-$35,000; $35,001-$50,000; $50,001-$65,000; $65,001-$80,000; $80,001-$100,000; $100,001+

There are two basic perspectives about race as a useful form of human classification. One view is that race is biological, and therefore members of certain races inherently have certain characteristics. The other is that race is a social construction, that is, all meaning ascribed to members of particular races is socially created and defined.

1. Which view of race matches your personal beliefs and opinions, and why?
2. What personal experiences with people of races other than your own have led you to form that opinion?
3. How is race a valid or useful contemporary means of human categorization? Please elaborate.
4. How is race or racism generational? How are race/racism/race issues more or less important to you than to your parents, grandparents, or older or younger friends?

The current literature in race studies posits White as the dominant, or normative, culture in the United States.

5. How do you respond to this assessment? Based on your personal experience, please elaborate/explain.
6. What is your perception of “white privilege,” i.e. what does it mean to you? How would you define or describe it? How have you benefited or not benefited from it?
7. Do you think White is a race, a culture, or an ethnicity, or a combination of all three? Please explain.
8. What are the characteristics that define Whiteness?
9. Do you think ethnicity for white people is symbolic, meaning that ethnicity has no impact or consequences in daily life?
10. It has been stated that ethnicity and culture are richer, more meaningful, and/or easier defined for racial minorities?
11. How have you seen this to be true or untrue in your family and/or social life?
12. What is your understanding of the term “colorblind?” How is colorblindness a positive or negative approach to ending racial thinking and discriminatory social and political practices? Why? Please elaborate on relevant personal experiences.
13. How do you define your racial identity (i.e. what terms do you use when asked to identify your race/racial identity)? Why did you choose this identity/these terms?
Are your self-identification choices politically, socially, or personally (i.e. family loyalty) motivated, or a combination of all three? Please elaborate.

14. In what ways are your racial and ethnic identity problematic or conflicted? How do you psychologically reconcile an oppositional (majority and minority) racial identity?

15. How does your multiracial identity uniquely position you to understand and mediate racial issues?

16. What is your understanding of “passing?” Have you ever “passed,” or taken advantage of your minority racial identity to receive social, economic, or educational opportunities? What, if any, are the moral implications of passing?
APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate as a Research Subject

I ______________________ agree to be interviewed by Melody Antillon Hazzard, MSW II.

Purpose:
I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of whiteness or dominant culture ideology on the racial identity formation of people who self-identify as multiracial.

Duration and Location:
I understand that the study includes one interview that may take up to two hours of my time and that I will be interviewed in a private location.

Procedures:
It has been explained to me that I will be asked open-ended questions about my racial identity, including questions about my political and social views, and my general well-being.

Risks/Discomforts:
It has been explained to me that some of the interview questions are very personal, involving feelings about myself, my identity, and my worldview and may cause some discomfort in answering them. If needed, free counseling services are available for students at California State University, Sacramento 6000 J Street Sacramento, CA 95819, (916) 278-6416 or UC Davis Counseling and Psychological Services 219 North Hall, Davis, CA 95616, (530) 752-0871. If I am not a student, the researcher has verified my ability to access psychological services in the community in which I reside.

Benefits:
I understand that the benefits from participating in this study will contribute to the currently underrepresented body of knowledge of a critical approach to multiracial studies.

Confidentiality:
I understand that pseudonyms will be used in the study to protect my confidentiality. I understand that no identifying information will be used in the study. The data will only be accessed by the researcher and will be kept in a locked file in a secure location. It will be destroyed upon completion of the project, or no later than December, 2009.

Right to Withdraw:
I understand that I do not have to take part in this study, and my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of services or rights that I am entitled to. I understand that I am not obligated to answer any or all questions, and may terminate participation in the study at any point during the interview. I understand that I may withdraw my participation from this study at any time. I may withdraw my permission to be audiotaped at any time. I agree to have my interview audio taped.

Signatures:
I have read this entire consent form and understand my rights as a potential research subject. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research. I have been informed that I will receive a copy of this consent. Should questions arise and I wish to discuss my rights as a research subject, I may contact Melody Antillon Hazzard at (###) ###-#### or #__________ I may also contact the faculty supervisor, Dr. Maria Dinis at (###) ###-#### or #__________.

______________________________
Signature of Research Subject

______________________________
Signature of Investigator

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Date
REFERENCES


