CATEGORIZATION OF RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY FOR RACIALIZED AND MARGINALIZED BIRACIALS IN THE MAINLAND UNITED STATES

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CATEGORIZATION OF RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY FOR RACIALIZED AND MARGINALIZED BIRACIALS IN THE MAINLAND UNITED STATES

A Thesis

by

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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this Thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the Thesis.

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Abstract

of

CATEGORIZATION OF RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY FOR RACIALIZED AND MARGINALIZED BIRACIALS IN THE MAINLAND UNITED STATES

by

Estrella Valdez

There is no singular agreed-upon understanding of what it means to be identified as biracial in the mainland United States, especially when a person is the product of the union of two marginalized ethnicities. For decades, the hegemonic (white) group has set in place values and social forces that do not allow biracials to fully embrace all parts their ethnic identities. Marginalizing this group has not only led to a misunderstanding of their needs in social and institutional settings, but has caused confusion in the individual when they attempt to define who they are racially. This group of biracials is one of the fastest-growing segments of the United States population; they need to be understood and their needs met. In order to do this, changes in existing laws and social forces must be addressed. Twelve women, all products of minority-minority unions, were interviewed for this study. Using a qualitative approach, biethnic/biracial participants used their own voices to offer first-hand accounts of their life experiences without persistent hegemonic influences or the influence of the researcher. An examination of the historical construction of race through miscegenation laws, the United States Census, existing studies on biracial self-identification was also used to determine how and what processes and social conditions impact identity formation. What was ultimately learned from the results of the study is that social class and economics together—not just race—serve as the catalyst for the division of society. Participants who had a more stable economic base were more comfortable with their racial self-identity; participants who were raised by a single parent did not have a very stable economic base and struggled more in the formation of their racial self-identity.

Sponsor

Dr. Timothy P. Fong
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I dedicate this research to my daughter Anesa, who inspired me. Without her I would not have had the inspiration for a thesis.

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CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to present a better understanding of biethnic/biracial experiences outside of the hegemonic/ethnic union. One goal was to observe how the participants decided to self-identify ethnically and racially, and which processes and social conditions provided the impact in their decisions. This study also examined why it is, or why it is not, necessary to choose an identity and how that choice has affected their lives. This chapter begins with an explanation of how and why the idea for the study was formed. This is followed by a comparison of the ideas I had about race before and after the study, and how the results of the study held true at a recent public event. The chapter ends with a discussion of the next steps for this material and suggestions for improvements in future studies on this subject.

Reason for the Study

Approximately 20 years ago, I sat with my family at Kyoto’s restaurant in downtown Sacramento. After our waitress had taken our order, I remarked, “Wasn’t that girl gorgeous”? “All Hapas are gorgeous,” my husband replied disdainfully. “Do you realize that you have one sitting right here with you”? I said, not believing that he could use the Japanese term *Hapa*, or half-breed, in our daughter’s presence. He did not seem to care. His traditional Japanese family always excluded her at gatherings and made her feel like an outsider. Although I tried to raise her in a non-biased environment, there were problems with racial name-calling at school. The more I watched my daughter struggle with her racial self-identity, the more interested I became in the subject.
While trying to find information about children of biracial unions, I discovered that all of the studies dealt with a white person married to a person of color (usually African-American)—studies about children of minority-minority unions were nonexistent. The literature at that time always focused on the child having to select one heritage over another, and, if their skin was light enough, they would always attempt to pass for white.

Today, my daughter says she does not claim either her Japanese or Cuban/Latino heritage; she says she has transcended race. This made me even more curious. I wanted to find out what process other children of biracial heritages go through in the path to self-identification. When it came time to choose a subject for my master’s thesis, I already had a subject. I had thought that since Loving v. Virginia had been overturned, there must be new studies on biracial children of minority-minority-unions. I was incorrect. New studies had been published; only a handful had progressed beyond the white/black binary. I felt that I needed to explore the self-identification process by which children of minority-minority unions, not only to satisfy my own curiosity, but in the hope that others would be inspired enough to do even more studies on the subject.

I had always grown up with the idea that race is what divides society. What I ultimately learned from the results of my study is that social class and economics together—not just race—serve as the catalyst for the division of society. For years, I have always disagreed with the essayist Richard Rodriguez, who has always theorized that it is social class and economics that divides us more than race. (Rodriguez, 1997, p. 215). Although I hated to admit it at first, I found that this is my conclusion as well.
On April 20, 2009, I had the opportunity to see and hear the findings of my study validated in a public forum at a symposium given by the CSUS Ethnic Studies Department. In the symposium, held in Hinde Hall at the Student Union, a three-person biracial panel provided by Dr. Brian Baker spoke about what it was like to grow up as a biracial person. The panel consisted of two females and one male. All three panelists were in their twenties. One of the young women was African-American and Mexican; the other was white and Mexican. The male was white and African-American. I discovered through their life stories that they helped verify the conclusions to my study—when you can fit into a group you have a certain self-assurance and a sense of belonging. The two persons from hegemonic/biracial unions were from two-parent households. They both seemed to be more stable and confident in their self-identity because they could pass as white. In contrast, the woman who was African-American and Mexican struggled with her self-identity; she did not know where she fit in. She was raised by a single mom and is the first in her family to attend college. She said that she felt very displaced because she wasn’t black or Latina enough. The panelists who were raised in two-parent families were better situated economically and were able to have more opportunities. The young woman who was raised by a single parent was struggling with school, had issues with her identity, and felt very displaced. She lacked confidence when she spoke. She seemed to have more economic hardship than the other two panelists.

The panel for this symposium was put together without my involvement; this was a public event. I had no influence on the questions asked of the participants. What is interesting about the results was how the life stories of the panelists paralleled the
findings of my study. I found that participants who were raised in a two-parent home had a more stable economic base and were more comfortable with their racial self-identity, and participants who were raised by a single parent (in all cases, the mother) did not have a very stable economic base and struggled more in the formation of their racial self-identity.

Next Steps

The long-held social stigmas regarding race still holds biracials in check today. Even President Barack Obama, a child of a black/white union, remains uncomfortable with his identity. He discloses this in his book, Dreams from My Father, when he states that when people find out about his heritage, “They no longer know who I am. Privately, they guess at my troubled heart, I suppose—the mixed blood, the divided souls, the ghostly image of the tragic mulatto trapped between two worlds” (p. xv). In order to break these long-held beliefs and move forward to create a more positive space for biracials, more research needs to be done on the economic impact on mixed race, class, education, and gender and how those forces have an influence on mixed-race people.

Dissertations based on the groundwork provided in this study can enrich and expand the limited pool of existing information on the self-identification of biracial children. Future researchers can expand on the information by using a larger participant base so that interview findings can be examined via an expanded data and statistical analysis. There are many ways in which to study this subject; the method here is only a small exploration of a very large and complex subject. During the next phase of this study, researchers may want to interview both female and male participants; they may
want to perform an aggregate study using one or more criteria, such as gender, education, class, and regional location. Another idea would be to perform separate studies then compare the results. For example, perform one study using participants who are biracial children from two-parent, economically advantaged families and perform a separate study with participants who are mixed-race children from single-parent, economically depressed families, then compare the results. A new Census will be performed in 2010, which will provide updated data sets that can be compared with the data presented in this study.

I welcome and encourage future graduate students, masters and doctoral, to continue work in this area. The information they will provide is already needed in a world that is fast becoming more biracial and multiracial than ever before. In order to understand and properly accommodate these new Americans, we will need to understand their unique needs.
APPENDIX A

Research Subjects’ Bill of Rights

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is trying to find out.
2. To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes.
4. To be told if I can expect any benefits from participating, and if so, what the benefit might be.
5. To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complicate arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all or change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and
10. To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher. In addition I may contact the Sacramento City Mental Health (916) 875-1000 or CSUS Health Center (916) 278-6416.
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

I hereby give my consent for my participation in the current study, which will explore biethnic identity development in biracial individuals. I understand the persons responsible for this study are Dr. Tim Fong, whose phone number is 278-5856, and Estrella Valdez, whose phone number is 441-5552. It has been explained to me that the objective of this study is to describe the important features of identity in biethnic/biracial Americans.

Ms Valdez has explained to me that my participation in this study will involve a written questionnaire and verbal interview, which will focus on components of my identity and experiences growing up. The questionnaire will take about 30 minutes and the in-depth recorded interview will take about 90 minutes. The recordings will only be kept until they are transcribed, after which the tapes will be destroyed by shredding. As a participant, I can choose not to answer any questions, written or oral, which will make me uncomfortable. The information obtained in the questionnaire will increase the understanding of how biethnic individuals view themselves.

This study is “minimal risk” since no harm or discomfort is anticipated to me as a result of my participation in this study. As the participant, it is possible that I may experience some discomfort when asked about particular childhood memories or life experiences. Should counseling be needed as a participant, I have been informed that I can either call or go to Sacramento City Mental Health located at 2150 Stockton Blvd., phone number (916) 875-1000 or at CSUS Health Center and contact Wes Roberson at (916) 278-6416. I also understand there is no financial compensation for my participation.

Ms Valdez has explained to me that my participation in this study is voluntary and that there will be no negative consequences to me if I choose not to participate. She has also explained to me that any information that I provide will be kept confidential. Only Dr. Fong will have access to the information that I provide and my name will never be attached to any information that is produced from the study.

The investigator has agreed to answer any questions that I may have concerning the procedures.

I understand that I may not derive any personal benefit from participation in this study. I understand that I may discontinue my personal participation at any time I choose without penalty.

Signature of Participant

Date ______________________

Printed Name ______________________
APPENDIX C

Ethnic Self-Identification Inventory

1. The ethnic/racial category I check on OFFICIAL forms is:
   - White/European-American (not Hispanic/Latino)
   - Black or African-American (not Hispanic/Latino)
   - Hispanic/Latino
   - Eskimo/Indian Native-American (not Hispanic/Latino)
   - Asian/Pacific-American (not Hispanic/Latino)
   - Other
   - None

2. Identify the best answer to the questions below.
   For Hispanic/Latino also indicate:
   - White (not European-American)
   - Black (not African-American)
   - Indian (not Eskimo/Indian Native-American)
   - Asian/Pacific (not Asian/Pacific-American)

   Example:
   Latino White Mother
   Latino Black Father

   I am:
   _____ Biethnic/Biracial:
       _______ Mother
       _______ Father
   _____ Multiethnic/Multiracial:
       _______ Mother
       _______ Mother
       _______ Father
       _______ Father
   _____ Other:
       _______ Mother
       _______ Mother
       _______ Father
       _______ Father

3. My gender is:
   _____ Male
   _____ Female

4. My age is: ________ years.

5. _____ I am adopted. _____ I am not adopted.
MULTIGROUP ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE
Developed by Phinney (1992) and adapted by Cruz-Janzen

“Everyone “knows” what race is, though everyone has a different opinion as to how many racial groups there are, what they are called, and who belongs in what specific racial categories” (Omi and Winant, 1994, p.3).

In this country, people come from a lot of different cultures and there are many different words to describe backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Mexican-American, and White. Every person is born into an ethnic group, or sometimes two groups, but people differ on how important their ethnicity is to them, how they feel about it, and how much their behavior is affected by it. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or reach to it.

Select only one (1) statement for each question. Using the rating scale below, place a check mark in the corresponding box to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement you have chosen.

1: Strongly 2: Somewhat 3: Somewhat 4: Strongly 5: Does not agree agree disagree disagree apply

1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group such as its history, traditions, and customs.
   a) I am equally interested in both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I am more interested in this ethnic group from my own background:______.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I am more interested in ethnic groups other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my ethnic group.
   a) I am equally interested in both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I am more interested in this ethnic group from my own background:______.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I am more active in ethnic groups other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
3. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
   a) I have a clear sense of both of my own ethnic backgrounds.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I have a clearer sense of my own ethnic background as a member
      of this ethnic group from my own background:
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I have a clearer sense of other ethnic groups other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

4. I like meeting and getting to know people from ethnic groups other than my own.
   a) I prefer meeting and knowing people from both of my own ethnic
      backgrounds.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I prefer meeting and knowing people from this ethnic group
      from my own background:
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I prefer meeting and knowing people only from my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

5. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
   a) I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my membership
      in both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I think a lot more about how my life will be affected by my own
      membership in this ethnic group from my own
      background:
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I think a lot about how my life would be affected by my membership in other
      ethnic groups other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
1: Strongly agree 2: Somewhat agree 3: Somewhat disagree 4: Strongly disagree 5: Does not apply

6. I am happy that I am a member of the ethnic group I belong to.
   a) I am happy that I am a member of both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]
   b) I am happier with my membership of this ethnic group in my own background: ____________________.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]
   c) I would be happier if I had membership in any other ethnic group other than my own.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]

7. I sometimes feel it would be better if different ethnic groups didn't try to mix together.
   a) I sometimes feel that it would be better if people from both of my own ethnic backgrounds didn't try to mix together.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]
   b) I sometimes feel that it would be better if people of this ethnic group from my own background didn't try to mix together with other groups: ____________________.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]
   c) I sometimes feel that it would be better if I could mix together with people from other ethnic groups other than my own.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]

8. I am not very clear about the role of my ethnicity in my life.
   a) I am very clear about the role of both of my ethnicities in my life.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]
   b) I am clearer about the role of my ethnicity in this group from my own background: ____________________.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]
   c) I am clearer about the role other ethnicities in my life other than my own.
      1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] 4. [ ] 5. [ ]
9. I often spend time with people from ethnic groups other than my own.
   a) I spend equal amount of time with people from both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
      b) I spend more time with people from this ethnic group from my own background:
         1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
      c) I spend more time with people from other ethnic groups other than my own.
         1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

10. I really have not spent much time trying to learn more about the culture and history of my own ethnic group.
    a) I really have not spent much time trying to learn about the culture and history of either of my own ethnic groups.
       1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
    b) I really have not spent much time trying to learn about the culture and history of this one ethnic group from my own background:
       1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
    c) I really spend much time trying to learn about the culture and history of other ethnic groups other than my own.
       1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

11. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
    a) I have a strong sense of belonging to both of my own ethnic groups.
       1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
    b) I have a stronger sense of belonging to this ethnic group from my own background:
       1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
    c) I have a stronger sense of belonging to other ethnic groups other than my own.
       1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
12. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me, in terms of how I relate to my own group and other groups.
   a) I understand what both of my ethnic groups' membership means to me, in terms of how I related to both of my own ethnic groups and other groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I understand my ethnic membership in this ethnic group better than my membership in the other group from my own background: ________________.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I understand what my membership in other ethnic groups other than my own would mean to me.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

13. In order to learn about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my own ethnic group.
   a) In order to learn about both of my own ethnic backgrounds, I have often talked to other people about both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) In order to learn about my own membership in this one ethnic group from my own background, I have often talked to other people about my membership in this ethnic group: ________________.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I try to learn more about other ethnic groups other than my own and have often talked to other people about them.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

14. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments.
   a) I have equal pride in both of my own ethnic groups and their accomplishments.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I have more pride in this ethnic group and their accomplishments from my own background ________________.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I have more pride in persons from other ethnic groups and their accomplishments other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
15. I don’t try to become friends with people from other ethnic groups.
   a) I don’t try to become friends with people from either one of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I don’t try to become friends with people from this one ethnic group from my own background:
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I try to become friends with people from other ethnic groups other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

16. I participate in cultural practices of my own ethnic group, such as special food, music, or customs.
   a) I participate in cultural practices from both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I participate more often in cultural practices of this ethnic group from my own background:
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I participate in cultural practices from other ethnic groups other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

17. I am involved in activities with people from other ethnic groups.
   a) I am involved in activities with people from both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I am more involved in activities with people from this ethnic group from my own background:
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I am more involved in activities with people from other ethnic backgrounds other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
18. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
   a) I feel a strong attachment towards both of my own ethnic groups.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I feel a stronger attachment towards people from this ethnic group from my own background:
      ..................................................  
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I feel more involved in activities with people from other ethnic background other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

19. I enjoy being around people from ethnic backgrounds other than my own.
   a) I enjoy being with people from both of my own ethnic backgrounds.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I enjoy being with people from this ethnic group from my own background.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I enjoy being only with people from my own ethnic background.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

20. I feel good about my own cultural or ethnic background.
   a) I feel good about both of my own cultural or ethnic backgrounds.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   b) I feel better about my own ethnic or cultural background in this group:
      ..................................................
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □
   c) I feel better about the ethnic or cultural backgrounds of groups other than my own.
      1. □  2. □  3. □  4. □  5. □

21. Name five (5) biethnic/biracial role models in film, literature, entertainment, news, etc.
    Name | I learned about this person from:
    -----------------------------------
    ........................................
    ........................................
    ........................................
    ........................................
    ........................................
22. Name five (5) biethnic, biracial role models of YOUR SAME ethnic/racial background in film, literature, entertainment, news, etc.

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23. If it were up to me I would be born: ________________________
   (Please state ethnic/racial group.)
APPENDIX D
Biethnic/Biracial Long Interview Guide

I. Self and Family

a. When and where were you born?

b. Who is in your family?

Tell me about your family (parents, siblings, ages, place of birth of parents, relatives, religion, ethnic/racial origins, occupations, and education).

c. Describe your mother. Your father.

How do they identify in terms of ethnicity or race?

d. How did your parents meet?

What have they told you about that meeting?

How did they tell you?

Which parent told you?

Do you know your grandparents?

How did they treat your parents and yourself?

e. What kind of relationship do you have with your parents?

f. When was the first time you noticed a racial difference between yourself and your parents?

What happened?

(If awareness of differences occurred):

When and how did awareness of being different occur?

What does “different” mean to you? How expressed?
g. Which parent do you think or have you been told you are most like? Why?
(Skin tone, facial features, personality, etc.)

h. When in public with your mother, father, or siblings, how do strangers interact with you? Do they assume that you are related (or not related)?

i. What have your parents told you about racial and ethnic issues?

j. Have your parents or friends ever encouraged you to try to change your physical appearance? If yes, tell me about these times. What led up to this? What happened? What types of things were said? Why do you think it mattered to them? How did you feel?

II. Developmental History

a. What is your earliest memory?

b. What was it like growing up in your family?

Did you talk to your parents about your feelings...of differentness? Of...

Etc? Did your parent(s) talk about their own ethnic, racial heritage or identity?

c. What kind of neighborhoods have you lived in? Racial mix? Quality of friendships? Changes?

d. What kinds of friends did your parents have?

What kind of socializing did they do?

e. Growing up, how did your parent(s) talk about people being different?

What kinds of things did they say about interracial couples, about your ethnicity, about mixed heritage children, etc? Can you look back and see any general messages that they gave you?
f. Have you ever had someone you do not know or do not know well ask you about your ethnic or racial heritage and/or identity? If yes, what led up to this? What happened? Why do you think it mattered? How did you feel about it?

g. Have you gone through times in your life when you have been told that you had to choose to be one or another race? If yes, tell me about those times. What led up to this? What happened? Why do you think it mattered?

h. Has there ever been a time at school when your mixed heritage mattered or came up? (e.g., in class, an assignment, teacher comment, clubs, friends, etc.) If yes, tell me about this. What led up to this? What happened? Why do you think it mattered?

i. Have you ever had strangers or people you don’t know well make comments about how you look, positive and/or negative? If yes, tell me about these times. What led up to this? What happened? What types of things were said? Why do you think it mattered to them? How did you feel?

j. What do you think has shaped your ideas about racial or ethnic identity? If yes, how and why? Do you think they will change in the future? Why or why not?

k. What were the times of major changes in your life?

Follow sequence of years and ages (developmental time line), ask about various ages, filling in gaps, discrepancies, transitions, moves, changes, and starting /endings.
III. Self-Descriptions

a. What kind of questions have people asked you about your appearance, your race, or your ethnicity? How have you responded? Have you asked your parents about any of this? As a child or recently? For clarification? Argued with them?

b. How do you see yourself racially or ethnically?

c. Have you ever wanted to identify with all parts of your ethnic or racial heritage and not been able to? If yes, tell me about these times. What led to this? What happened? How did you feel?

d. What have you done with racial categorization items on forms?

e. Have you described yourself (how have you identified) over the years?

f. How do you represent yourself in social situations? Forms?

g. Have you noticed that there are times you change the way you talk or act depending in the context you are in? If yes, please describe. What does being Mixed Race mean for you and why?

IV. Cultural and Ethnic Roots and Identifications

a. How do you express your cultural or ethnic heritage?

b. What aspects of your cultural heritages or cultural issues have been significantly important to you or influential in your life?

c. Which parents have been more culturally influential?
d. What attitudes and traits do you experience as having come from each of your parents (e.g., likes, and dislikes; copies vs. repudiated; assumptions and life-philosophy; actions or habits; values; communicativeness; emotionality; sex-role typing, etc.)?

e. Have there been other influences that have determined how you express your cultural or ethnic heritages?

f. (If traveled aboard) or (if traveled around in U.S.): What has been your experience of your ethnicity or race in the areas you have traveled?

g. Do you know other people who are interracial (or use their word)?

h. Who are your role models?

V. Future and Evaluation

(Optional) What do you see yourself doing or not doing 5 years from now?

Aspirations and desires for the future, in areas such as work, lifestyle, relationships?

Personal conflicts, strengths, blocks?

What about your ethnic identification what would you definitely keep or let go of?

(Optional) Do you see yourself raising a family?

What’s important to you about raising children?

a. What would you tell other interracial people (or other words) about what is important about ethnicity or race?

What would you tell them about yourself or your experiences?

What would be your message to them?
b. Did you have any expectations about this interview?
   Were they fulfilled? Not fulfilled?

c. How did you feel about the interview?
   Are there questions that are still left unanswered?
   Would you answer any of the questions differently?

d. Is there anything else you wish to say or ask?

Thank you
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

What are you? What is your ethnic background? These types of questions are often posed to biethnic/biracial individuals, perhaps in part due to the long-standing misconceptions surrounding them. Charles Davenport, one of the first American geneticists to believe in the dangers of race mixing, felt that if a person from one racial group would interbreed with a person from another racial group, the children who would come forth would have discordant results (Tashiro, 2002). Ideas such as those posed by Davenport and other researchers set a precedent on how biethnic/biracials would be viewed and treated for many decades. Most studies on mixed race, for example those conducted by George Kitahara Kich (1982) and S. I. Murphy-Shigematsu (1988), focused solely on African American and Western European unions. These studies, although valuable, do not address the needs of the offspring of mixed-race households in which both parents are of marginalized racial origins. Because there has been a rapid increase in the number of people of color, including those of multiethnic and racial ancestry, there is a greater need to understand what factors shape their ethnic and racial self-identities and self-concepts. This study is an important step in understanding how people of multiracial ethnic and racial ancestry form their self-identities and which sociopolitical forces (for example laws, beliefs, parents, educational systems) help to shape them. The findings presented in this study will add to the small number of existing studies published in this area and hopefully inspire others to add to it as well.
Race is a sociopolitical construct that is difficult to define. Because of stresses placed upon it over time due to customs, phenotype, laws and beliefs, the term remains fluid. On the surface, it seems that the term race is used to unite and define groups. Instead, it does just the opposite. The term separates groups based on many factors, including, but not limited to, observable physical characteristics (such as skin color) of oneself or one’s ancestors, geographic region of origin, and primary language of oneself and/or one’s ancestors. Because of this, the term race can cause rifts in identification within families. For example, Clara Rodriguez, a Professor of Sociology at Fordham University, had a student who was Dominican. The student and her husband, also a Dominican, had three children. Although the children were from the same two parents, each identified as a different race based on his or her physical appearance. One identified as black, one as white and one as Dominican (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 19). These three children came from the same two parents. What social forces influenced them to identify as being from three different ethnic groups?

This study will present a better understanding of biethnic/biracial experiences outside of the hegemonic/ethnic union. Using a qualitative approach, biethnic/biracial participants will use their own voices to offer first-hand accounts of their life experiences without persistent hegemonic influences. One goal of this study is to observe how the participants decide to self-identify ethnically and racially. What is the path or process they undertake? The larger questions are: Is there a need for these subjects to choose an ethnic identity, and why should it be important to do so? What are the processes and social conditions that impact identity formation? This study will explore why it becomes
necessary to select an ethnic identity at all and, if an identity is selected, how it affects their lives. Self-identification is important because it gives a person a sense of belonging and place in the world, however, social conditions set in place by the hegemonic group did not make the path to self-identification an easy one to navigate.

Racial Designations

In October 1997, the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued revisions to its Directive 15, changing the federal racial identification process to expand the number of racial categories and to include the option for respondents to choose more than one category on Census forms (OMB, 1997). Because of this change, the federal government changed its regulations and allowed individuals to check more than one race on Census forms from among five official categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and white.

According to the 1997 Census revisions, “respondents shall be offered the option of selecting one or more racial designations. Recommended forms for the instruction accompanying the multiple response questions are ‘Mark one or more’ and ‘Select one or more’ (OMB, 1997, p. 2). According to the 2000 Census, children under the age of eighteen reporting in two or more races resulting from interracial marriages numbered 2,981,079 and the number of all people who identified with two or more identifications numbered 7,270,926 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

The classification of people into races still causes problems within color lines. It causes infighting within racial groups (Takaki, 2008, p. 238). This infighting weakens the
ethnic bonds within members of racial groups; it does not allow the group to advance.

Racial classification is an established custom that is used for opportune moments to justify racial stratification. The boundaries of race are not set, definite, accurate, precise or correct. Our ideas of race can and do change over time (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 104). The issues of welfare, crime and national concerns are vehicles for the problems that are still with us today and are still viewed as issues of race. Race continues to shape social practices in the United States (Philogène, 2004, p. 5).

The concept of race, and the terms used to define it, are mercurial. They flow and change over time and social circumstance; they change by definer and definition. In order to standardize these terms for this study a list of these terms are included below for clarity.

**Definition of Terms**

**Bicultural** - being of two cultures.

**Biracial** - an individual whose parents are of two “different socially designated” racial or ethnic backgrounds (Root, 1996, ix). Persons who identify with more than one race group.

**Blended** - to combine two or more racial or ethnic backgrounds.

**Cosmic** - individuals of this universe do not want racial catégories.

**Half** - being of two racial backgrounds.

**Hegemony** - to the power of a society’s ruling class to exert control – state power, economic resources, and ideas – over subordinate classes (Gramsci, 1971).
Hybrid - of human parents of different races; mongrel, cross-breed, half-breed (Sollors, 2000).

Hybridity - to combine two or more racial or ethnic backgrounds.

The concept of hybridity was an attempt to include Asia within the definition of American cultural citizenship. It does not suggest the assimilation of Asian or immigrant practices to dominant forms. Instead, it marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination (Lowe, 1996).

Marginalized - placed barely within a lower standard or limit (American Heritage Dictionary, 1994).

Melded - to merge two or more racial or ethnic backgrounds one.

Mixed - combining of two or more racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Mixed Race - an individual whose parents “are from more than one federally designated racial or ethnic category.” (Renn, 2004, p. 383).

Multicultural - being of two or more cultures.

Multiethnic - individuals who are products of relationships between Japanese and members of various ethnic minority groups (Murphy-Shigematsu, 1986, p. 61).

Multiracial - offspring of three or more racial or ethnic backgrounds (Calleroz, 2003, p. 4).
Racialized - to combine two or more racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Remix (Generation M) - offspring of two or more racial backgrounds who do not want racial categories.

Although the term race is fluid, it can be controlled by definitions assigned to it by the hegemonic group. People who are of mixed race heritage should not let others define who they are; they should be able to choose or create their own self-identification. They should not be bound by definitions assigned to them by others (Bill of Rights, Root, 1996, p. 7).

Most of the existing literature on biracials focuses on the black/white binary. There are many gaps in research literature regarding ethnic and racial self-identity (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 180). It is time to expand the focus to include mixed-race people outside of the hegemonic/ethnic union. With the rapid population increase of people of color, including those of double or multiethnic and racial ancestry, there is a greater need to understand what factors shape their ethnic and racial self-identities and self-concepts.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the paths biracial children of minority-minority unions may follow in their quest for ethnic and racial self-identity, as well as the influences that guide them in their search. This study also examines if it is necessary to choose an identity and when a choice is made, how it affects their lives. In order to understand the processes that influence their choices, it is necessary to examine the multitude of forces (social, institutional, legal) by which these choices are made. The literature in this section examines and explains those laws and rules. It is important to the topic of this study to understand their effects because they are a significant contribution to the processes by which biracial individuals construct their self-identities. This literature review is divided into three main sections: The historical construction of race; the relationship of identity formation in the United States; and the construction of identity formation. Literature reviewed under these headings will help build a foundation that will assist in the discovery of the processes and the forces that drive them.

There has been a great deal of research conducted on the topic of being biracial. To date, studies on this subject to date typically included one parent from a hegemonic (white) group and the other parent a person of color (Calleroz, 2003; Hall, 1980; Kich, 1982; Lyles, 1985; Nero, 2001; Thornton, 1983). The research that is currently available fails to address the differences between minority-minority biracial identities. Given that most of the research on biethnic and biracial persons studied are of African-American and European-American unions (Funderburg, 1994; Kerwin, 1991), many questions
remain unanswered regarding people of other ethnic and racial heritages (Funderburg, 1994; Root, 1992). For example, few studies have examined Asian and Mexican unions or African-American and Puerto Rican unions. This literature review consists of journal articles and books that focus on theories of biracial identity, historical construction of race, and the relationship of identity formation in the United States. This thesis is important because it adds to the limited number of studies that exist on minority-minority biracials to date.

Since 1967, we have lived in a post-miscegenation law society. In the forty years following the eradication of those laws, minority-minority unions have flourished, and the population of biracial children from minority-minority unions has grown. The National Academy of Science reported that the levels of intermarriage are so high that the multiracial population could rise to 21% by the year 2050. Of the multiracial population, 93% reported being of two races, and 6% reported being of three races (Lee, 2004). An analysis of the U.S. Census data by the Population Reference Bureau shows that the percentage of mixed-race married couples in the United States has grown from less than one per cent in 1970 to five per cent in 2000 (Pew Research Center, 2006, p. 1). Biracials are one of the fastest-growing sectors of the United States population. The 2000 Census allowed United States residents to choose to report two or more races—something that had not been allowed in many years. In the 2000 Census, people reporting two or more races numbered 7.3 million. That number is expected to grow exponentially for the 2010 Census. It is important to understand the contribution biracials bring to the American
social fabric; it is equally important to understand the processes by which they fit into society.

**Historical Construction of Race**

*Subjugation of people of color*

In order to understand how existing social forces were put into place, we need to look to the past. The ideas and values that historically drive social forces were formed when white researchers constructed the concept of race in the 1700s. The ideas that were put into play at that time still have an effect on biracial identity formation and ethnic people in general more than 300 years later. The idea that the hegemonic (white) race is the dominant and, therefore, the model race, did not happen accidentally. This section examines how scientific findings contributed to the subjugation of people of color and how those contributions affect biracial identity construction today.

Race did not exist as a scientific idea until the eighteenth century, when Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist and taxonomist, created, classified and categorized most living things in his *Systema Naturae* (1735) by genus and species (Root, Spickard, 1992). In Linnaeus' system, all human beings were members of the kingdom *Animalia*, the phylum *Chordata*, the class *Mammalia*, the order *Primates*, the family *Homididae*, the genus *Homo*, and the species *Homo sapiens*. He theorized four existing types of humans: (Native) American, European, Asiatic, and African, which were set up as categories but not in a hierarchical manner. According to Root and Spickard (1992), Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, (1865), a follower of Linnaeus, refined Linnaeus' system. Blumenbach felt Caucasians were the original people. He then revised the four-race Linnaean system by
placing the Caucasians at the center, and placing Asians and Native Americans on one intermediate symmetrical line and Africans and Malys on the other. The races were then placed into distinct subunits with distinctive physical, genotypical and moral characteristics. Both Linnaeus and Blumenbach divided humans into groups and placed them into a hierarchical system with Caucasians as the dominant group.

The idea of Caucasians as the dominant group had far-reaching effects on people of color. Humans who did not belong to the hegemonic group were viewed as inferior. Once people outside the hegemonic group were conveniently labeled as inferior, Caucasians saw fit to use them to do tasks such as hard labor, and they were denied education and treated as less than human. One of the best examples of this power structure can be found in the slave trade. The racial relationship and separation between blacks and whites began with slavery. American settlers needed free labor to produce sugar and tobacco. The use of the indigenous for labor was unsuccessful. Many indigenous people were wiped out after contracting diseases the Europeans brought with them to the new world. Also, it was too difficult to keep the American Indians enslaved because they knew their surroundings and would escape. At the same time, the white indentured labor population dwindled, and not many were willing to come across the ocean and work in someone else’s fields.

The justification for the use of Africans as slave labor was based on practical and religious reasons; it slowly became a system in which only Africans and their descendants could be enslaved. Whiteness became an identity as the categories of Englishness and class status were abandoned. There was a time when Englishmen in the
colonies distinguished themselves from Africans on the basis of religion; the institution
of chattel slavery provided the shift from genotype rather than religion. This was done in
order to justify blacks as inferior for the purposes of socioeconomic stratification. Once
slavery was set up, it was easier to create laws. By 1670, a law was passed declaring that
non-Christian servants arriving in Virginia by ship were to spend the rest of their lives as
slaves. Sexual interaction was prohibited between blacks and whites as early as 1622
(Cruz-Janzen, 2002).

The laws prohibiting sexual interaction between blacks and whites eventually
extended to interactions between whites and any other racial group. The laws also created
a third group, one even more inferior than any ethnic group: the person of mixed race.
The hegemonic group wanted to keep all races pure, especially its own. In order to
enforce this, the hegemonic group published literature claiming that people of mixed race
were weak, psychologically and emotionally unstable and inferior. People of mixed race
were shunned and pushed to the outskirts of the social margin because they represented
the forbidden. In his book *Mulattoes and Race Mixture*, Menke states, “In 1875, Jedediah
Hyde Baxter published the findings of the Provost Marshall-General’s Bureau stating,
‘the mulatto was clearly incapable of enduring hardship and was weaker than either the
pure black or the white’” (Menke, 1979, p. 39).

Racially blended people were usually seen as socially marginal (not allowed full
participation with others), culturally and politically in their relations with other groups
(Gist and Dworkin, 1972). Hybrids were viewed as having psychological and emotional
problems (Marnach, 1992). They were characterized as depressive, moody, discontent,
irrational, impulsive, fickle, criminal, emotionally unstable, nervous, and uncontrollable. This can be observed in American fiction, in which these characters are portrayed as the "tragic mulatto." They are also viewed as promiscuous, immoral, and uncivilized. The approach casts the multiracial people’s experience as problematic because they are "between" races and cultures. Because they had to move back and forth between the color lines, hybrids were seen as maladaptive. This allowed for mixed-race theory identity research by Thornton and Wason (1995) and augmented by Renn (1998) to cast mixed-race people differently in relation to self, family, and society (Renn, 9).

By characterizing mixed-race people as problematic, the hegemonic group was also able to control immigration. America was a new country and the founding fathers, part of the hegemonic group, wanted to keep the Caucasian race as pure as possible. The Anglo-Conformity ideology was later used to justify and change immigration policies that would further restrict entrance to the United States (Postiglione, 1983).

The literature in this section is important in understanding how social values and beliefs were formed and how and why they still fuel and affect the social forces surrounding construction of self-identification of biracial persons today. The literature presented in this section shows how race was constructed; it explains how Caucasians became the hegemonic group, how people were divided into races, how those races were to be kept pure, and the consequences of race mixing. Scientific theories were used as the basis for laws. Because of these laws, mixed-race persons were viewed as more inferior than any other race. This is important in understanding why biracials still struggle with
self-identification, which is the subject explored in this study. One of the major laws affecting attitudes and beliefs regarding mixed-race persons was the rule of hypodescent.

**Relationship of Identity Formation in the United States**

*Literature Supporting the Role and Rule of Hypodescent as an Influence in Identity Construction*

The laws put into place in 17th Century America continued to develop during the next two centuries. Attempts were made to further divide race by skin color; mixed-race individuals were still viewed as the most inferior. In order to keep the hegemonic race in social and economic control and deny mixed-race people privileges, additional rules and laws were developed. The Rule of Hypodescent claimed that persons of mixed race could not claim to be white; if a person had one drop of blood from another race, he or she must claim the identity of the lower race. Miscegenation laws were created and put in place to help keep the white race pure. These laws disallowed people of mixed-race unions to legitimize their union and their offspring or enjoy the same privileges as the hegemonic group who created the laws. These laws were eventually challenged and struck down, but only after they had done their damage.

The United States Census contributed to pushing people of mixed race to the edges of society by not recognizing them. Early Census forms forced people to choose only one race; because of the one-drop rule, many people chose the lower-class race. This information was used to control and deny full citizenship to those of mixed race. Forcing people to choose only one race also kept mixed-race individuals invisible; if they could not be counted, they did not exist.
During the nineteenth century, more ideas and theories evolved in an attempt to separate humans by skin color. These colors were known as red, yellow, black and white. The times of intense colonialism and slavery were a time to justify economic policies and social attitudes, when racial distinctions were a necessary evil in order to maintain dominance. Spickard states,

From the point of view of the dominant group, racial distinctions are a necessary tool of dominance. They serve to separate the subordinate people as Other. Putting simple, neat racial labels on dominated peoples—and creating negative myths about the moral qualities of those peoples—makes it easier for the dominators to ignore the individual humanity of their victims (1992). An example of this dominance occurred with the enforced policy of Hypodescent, also known as the “one-drop rule.”

Hypodescent worked to ensure that the offspring of any union between differing racial groups would always assume the identity of and status of the lower-ranked group (*hypo* meaning *under or lower*) (Spencer, 1999). This legal definition of who was white allowed white racial purity and denied mixed-race people access to privileges, including freedom from slavery. The one-sixteenth to one thirty-second “Black blood” identification made a person legally African-American. Also, someone with one-sixteenth “Japanese blood” was subject to being placed into a U.S. internment camp during World War II. The Rule of Hypodescent was used as an excuse to create the miscegenation laws that were set up to keep the white race pure and withhold privileges to persons of mixed race.

*Literature Supporting the Effect of Miscegenation Laws as an Influence in Racial Identity Construction*
The word miscegenation comes from two Latin words—*miscere*, which means, "mix," and *genus*, for "race." When researching literature for this thesis, the word miscegenation and anti-miscegenation were used interchangeably by legal and scholarly sources alike. For the purposes of consistency in this thesis, the word miscegenation will be used.

Miscegenation laws forbade marriage between whites and members of other races. These laws were based on theories of nineteenth century scientists, who claimed that human races evolved separately and that interbreeding would produce genetically inferior offspring (Nash, 1997). Because of the fear created by these theories, much of the country has not tolerated or even permitted marriage between members of the black and white races (Gunthorpe, 1998).

At their core, miscegenation laws were set up to keep the white race pure. Whites were to marry whites only. Laws forbidding minority-minority unions were put into effect as early as the colonial period (1630). In the 1870s, judges declared that the law was constitutional because the law covered all racial groups "equally." In 1883, the Supreme Court upheld miscegenation laws in the case of *Pace v. Alabama*.

Even though the concept of race is a social construct and has no biological foundation, race still continues to have a strong social effect on the economic and social climates of the particular time and place in American life. Social categorization is still a consequence of history. In 1923, the Supreme Court's decision of *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) legitimized the government's refusal to accept scientific definitions of race and to opt instead for a definition of race that was more socially acceptable for that time. An
East Indian immigrant named Thind challenged the courts by stating his skin was whiter than many other white people. The court unanimously ruled, “The words white person are synonymous with the words Caucasian race.” Thind used this ruling to argue that he was Caucasian; if he was white, he was then eligible for citizenship. The court disagreed with Thind’s argument. The court’s final decision was that white was what people believed it to be or as the court said, “What the common man thought” (Rodriguez, 2000). Even though Thind believed he was white, the “common man (hegemonic group)” did not. Rulings such as this continued to create barriers and confusion to those trying to define themselves ethnically and racially.

Miscegenation laws remained status quo until the 1920s. Then in 1922, *Kirby v. Kirby* became one of the first Supreme Court cases to challenge miscegenation laws as constitutionally unjust. Several cases caused Supreme Court justices to re-examine miscegenation laws as a denial of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed all United States citizens equal protection under the law. In *Kirby v. Kirby*, Mr. Kirby wanted an annulment from his marriage. He said his marriage was invalid because his wife was of “Negro” descent, which would violate the miscegenation law in Arizona. The Arizona Supreme Court judged Mrs. Kirby’s race by observing her physical characteristics and decided that she was of mixed race, and granted Mr. Kirby an annulment. Although Mrs. Kirby lost the initial case and the appeal, the circumstances caused for a re-examination of the Fourteenth Amendment. Mrs. Kirby was a United States citizen, however because of miscegenation laws, she was not allowed equal protection.
Another case that challenged miscegenation laws occurred in 1933 in *Roldan v. Los Angeles County*. In this case, Solvador Roldan, a Filipino man, wanted to marry Marjorie Rogers, a Caucasian woman. At that time, California law sections 60 and 69 forbade any marriages between Caucasians and Mongolians, however, since Roldan was Filipino (Malaysian) they were allowed to marry. Two months later, on January 27, 1933, the marriage was declared void when California’s miscegenation law was changed to include all marriages between Caucasians and persons from all Asian groups.

Despite the challenges, miscegenation laws continued to be adopted and used. Between 1913 and 1948, 30 out of the then 48 states enforced miscegenation laws. The Supreme Court ruled that miscegenation laws did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment because both races were treated equally; both whites and blacks were being punished.

The battle for and against miscegenation laws continued. In 1948, the California Supreme Court declared miscegenation laws to be unconstitutional due to the outcome of *Perez v. Lippold*. Andrea Perez, a Mexican-American, and Sylvester Davis, an African-American, filed for a marriage license in Los Angeles County. Because people of Mexican ancestry were considered white under California law at that time, Perez had to state her race as “white” and Davis stated his race as “Negro” on the marriage application. Perez petitioned the California Supreme Court; she and Davis were Catholics and wanted to marry in the church. The Court held that marriage is a fundamental right and laws restricting marriage must not be based solely on prejudice. The California Supreme Court became the first court in the twentieth century to state that miscegenation laws violated the Constitution. Another major case to challenge miscegenation laws as
unconstitutional occurred in 1952. In *Naim v. Naim*, a Chinese sailor married a white woman from Virginia in the state of North Carolina. North Carolina allowed the marriages between Caucasians and Asians but not between whites and blacks. In 1953, Ruby Elaine Naim filed a petition for an annulment and it was granted. In 1964, more than 10 years after *Naim v. Naim*, another case, *McLaughlin v. Florida*, again challenged miscegenation laws. In this case, an interracial couple, identified only as McLaughlin, were cohabitating and wished to be married. The court’s decision found the Florida state law of cohabitation between whites and non-whites to be unconstitutional.

*McLaughlin v. Florida* not only helped break long-standing miscegenation laws—it set the stage for another major case, *Loving v. Virginia*. After *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia* and the civil rights movement, the number of interracial marriages increased from 651,000 in 1980 to 1,464,000 in 2000. People were now allowed minority-minority marriages and to produce biracial offspring, however old values and social constructs remained in place. Although people of different racial backgrounds were now allowed to marry, they carried the effects of those old constructs; it is the lens by which they viewed their own lives. The development and effect of miscegenation laws is important to this study because it explains the effects these laws have on the construction of ethnic and racial self-identification in biracial children. It explains the effects of social forces outside the home and social forces inside the home and how they were created.

Miscegenation laws were finally eradicated when the Supreme Court ruled the laws unconstitutional in 1967. The Supreme Court declared that miscegenation laws were
There is patently no legitimate overriding purpose independent of invidious racial discrimination which justifies this classification. The fact that Virginia prohibits only interracial marriages involving white persons demonstrates that the racial classifications must stand on their own justification, as measures designed to maintain White Supremacy (388 U.S. 1).

Literature Supporting the Effect of the United States Census as an Influence in Racial Identity Construction

The United States Census contributed to pushing people of mixed race to the edges of society. For many years, people were forced to choose only one race on Census forms. Because they were not counted properly, mixed-race people remained invisible. For a large part of Census history, state racial classification has been used mainly to place people in categories so that it could decide who to exclude and exploit from and who would be entitled to the full benefits of citizenship (DaCosta, 2003).

The United States Constitution did not initially refer to color in counting the Census (Rodriguez, 2000). Thomas Jefferson did not defer to the ideals set out in the Constitution when he supervised the first Census in 1790. Initially, the racial categories were “free White males,” “free White females,” “other persons” (which included free Blacks and “taxable Indians”), and “slaves” (Williams-Leon and Nakashima, 2001). The next Census, in 1850, had categories of white, black and non-white. There were clear instructions that Census takers should “take special care in reporting ‘Mulatto (including quadroons, octoroos, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood)’ because “Important scientific results depend upon the correct determination of this class”
(Goldberg, 1997, p. 240). In 1860, Indian and Chinese were added and, in 1870, Japanese were included. By 1880, a category for “Indians” was refined to account for various mixtures of white, black, and mulatto within the indigenous population. The Bureau of Indian Affairs includes those with at least one-quarter degree of aboriginal ancestry (Perlmann and Snipp, 2002).

By 1930, the Census included racial categories of white, Negro, Indian, Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese. In 1930 and 1940, the word Hindu appeared and has not been used since. After 1969, the terms black or Negro appeared in the Census. In the 1970s, citizens were able to self-identify on the Census but could not refuse to identify in one of the designated racial categories; if they did so, they would be automatically assigned the category of “Other.” These events are significant because they initiated separation of the races and allowed socioeconomic stratification. Since mixed-race people were viewed as “other,” they were relegated to lower rungs of the social scale and were viewed as marginal, unusual, unacceptable, and less than.

As time progressed, the fact that interracial marriages existed could no longer be discounted. Julia Cole wrote that, according to a U.S. statistic, there is a 30% rise in black and white interracial marriages. The more education one attains, the higher the odds that he or she will choose a partner from a race other than their own. Yet with the growing number of marriages, a recent poll reported by Harry McDonald in the Observer (Sunday, November 25, 2001) newspaper found that 80% of 18- to 24-year-olds would consider mixed marriage while only 27% of persons 65 and older would. The same poll found that only 14% would reconsider mixed marriage due to the many obstacles,
controversies, and conflicts endured. In the same vein, by breaking down barriers of race, there can be joy and enrichment as long as one prepares him- or herself in advance.

Eventually, interracial marriages and persons of mixed-race heritage were recognized and counted. According to a report on the Census by the Pew Research Center (2005), Asians and Latinos intermarry in the highest percentage; Asians marry 86.8% whites and Latinos marry 90.0% whites. Latinos may be any race. Latinos are an ethnic group that includes persons of different races, ranging from white, black, and mestizo. Latinos are able to mark both their Hispanic origin (for example Mexican or Cuban) and racial group (for example white or black). In this study, a note was included on the questionnaire asking respondents to complete both the question on Hispanic origin and the question on race.

Although mixed-race individuals were recognized in the Census, racial stratification caused by historical laws and beliefs still continues within ethnic groups. Marta Cruz-Janzen points out, “Racism continues to be part of everyday life between Latinos in the U. S. U. S. racial classification continues to perpetuate an “us” versus “them” ideology in a power structure known as the “Colorline.” In her journal article “Lives on the Crossfire: The Struggle of Multiethnic and Multiracial Latinos for Identity in a Dichotomous and Racialized World,” (2002) Cruz-Janzen explains that racial classifications are “sociopolitical constructs.” They are not supported by scientific or anthropological findings, nor are they grounded on genetics and heredity. Cruz-Janzen reveals that, because the 2000 Census attempts to let people believe that multiple heritage and identity have been legitimized, racism among Latinos still exists in the form of a
pecking order of how light or dark the color of the skin is. Many Latinos believe that the social stratification is socioeconomic, but the darker the Latino the more it is believed one is related to the African bloodline. This belief upholds that the darker the skin, the more likely a person is relegated to the bottom socially, economically, and politically. Cruz-Janzen wants to unmask this internal racism so that all Latinos can see how United States racism causes interethnic and interracial racism.

The multiracial population continues to grow. Is there still a need to try and separate people by race? Herman’s article in the journal *Childhood Development* “Forced to choose: some determinants of racial identification in multiracial adolescents,” (2004) mentions a study in which the goal was to discover how racial identification among multiracial and monoracial youth is selected. In the 1970s, 1 in 100 children were born to parents of different races. Thirty years later, the National Center for Health Statistics found the ratio to be 1 in 19. According to the 2000 Census, children and youth made up 42% of the American multiracial population. Although phenotype can affect the determination of racial identity and social environment plays a big role, identity changes across the context of time, family, and peer environment. In Herman’s study, 10,275 youth were asked to participate; 8,732 responded as multiracial based on their own racial self-identification. The respondents in Herman’s study readily identified as two or more races when given the opportunity; however, when they were forced to choose only one race, they lost interest. The lack of attention was possibly due to classification of multiracial individuals as monoracial according to Rule of Hypodescent.
Because the effects of the old laws still exist, progress in recognizing multiracials is slow. Even slower is the idea of allowing them to choose their own identities. Tamar Jacoby’s article in *Commentary*, “An End to Counting by Race”? (2001) explains that until 1970, the Census Bureau would determine a person’s race by either looking at the individual or at times asking the person what race they were. In the 1990s, a small group of interracial families lobbied on behalf of their children and prevailed: In 2000, Census forms posed two questions: the first question asked if a person was Spanish/Hispanic/Latino, and the second question asked, specifically which race and told the person to mark one or more. The impact of the added boxes has caused an uproar in organizations like the National Urban League, NAACP, and National Council of La Raza, since funding from the government is allocated to them, and the additional count would cause a reduction in funding and in their political influence. This may not be the solution, but Americans can now choose their own identity without it being imposed or enforced by the government.

Recognizing multiracials and allowing them to identify themselves helps to break down long-held racial stereotypes. In her journal article “beyond black and white: remaking race in america,” *(Contexts, 2004)* Jennifer Lee said that the 2000 Census allowed Americans to label themselves and their children as members of more than one race. The manner in which people reported themselves racially provided data that was used to enforce legislation such as the Voting Rights Act. It also showed social and economic disparities among racial groups. The multiracial population revealed a merging of races and caused a change of the color lines. Many individuals felt that if racial
labeling was omitted, discrimination would be as well. However, the United States still practiced discrimination based on physical characteristics. Eliminating racial labels did not allow us to know about the deprivation.

America's founding fathers may have been Caucasian, but this nation was not built by one racial group (Chideya, 1999). There are many different perspectives regarding what influences racial identity construction. The purpose of racial categorization in the Census is a political process which sets up and allows for accessibility to employment, housing, social programs, disbursements of local, state, and federal funds for political concerns and disputes (Omi and Winant, 1994). Sociopolitical constructs are ideas and beliefs created or invented by the hegemonic group in order to keep its power structure in place. Race and mixed-race in the United States are used as sociopolitical constructs to support the argument that a mixed-race category should not exist. Renn says that if we do not fully comprehend multiraciality, we cannot move beyond racial categorization (2004). On the one hand, Naomi Zack claims that a mixed-race individual cannot self-actualize if the government does not first recognize them (Texeira, 2003).

Zack proposes in her book Race and Mixed Race (1993) that we rid ourselves of black and white thinking and start to look also at the grays. She says that a third category, that of mixed race, needs to be added to the choices. She states that this additional category might be used as a wedge against racism because "if individuals of mixed-race are granted a separate racial identity, then all of the myths of racial purity and stability break down because there is then such a large universe of possible races that the
historical contingency of any group's racial identity becomes transparent.” She does not state who would be considered multiracial.

There is much to be learned after color barriers are broken. What is of immediate importance is learning how to break them down. Zack states in *American Mixed Race*, (1995),

The modern idea of biological race was invented during a time of European colonialism in order to establish and perpetuate European domination over the inhabitants of Africa, Asia and the Americas. It is in this social, economic, and political context that demands for a different system or order of racial recognition, by individuals who view themselves or their children as mixed, must be addressed (p. 20).

According to George Lipsitz in “Noises in the Blood: Culture, Conflict and Mixed Race Identities,” Liz Guillon, American Legal Defense and Education Fund argues, “the fact that so many people checked the mixed race box signifies a cry for the census to capture who I really am, not to ignore race completely” (2003, p. 27). The term multiethnicity must be addressed and recognized on the other hand. Such recognition is necessary to empower those who do not see themselves as a sum of parts, but as whole persons who embody all aspects of their identity (Guevarra, 2003).

**The Construction of Identity Formation**

What does it mean to be biracial? How do biracials define themselves? How do others describe them? In order to understand the process of identification, the term “identity” must be defined. According to Gregory Stone in *Appearance and the Self*, “identity refers to a validated self-understanding that places and defines the individual; it establishes what and where an actor is socially.” Using monoracial identity as the preferred identity, Park (1928) presents the phrase “marginal man” which represents a
person who lives in two cultural worlds but does not belong to any (Hall, 1992).

According to Cynthia Nakashima in her essay “An Invisible Monster: The Creation and Denial of Mixed-Race People in America,” (1992) Park describes the “marginal man” as a person having no biological problems with race mixture. Park says that being of mixed race would only cause social problems, which would explain the inferiority of a multiracial person might have. In 1937, Park’s student, Stonequist, described and popularized the phrase a “marginal man” as a “racial hybrid” and as inferior with identity problems and identity crisis (Phoenix and Tizard, 1993).

It has taken many years for researchers to stop labeling biracials as “problematic” or “marginal” and instead examine the process by which they come to identify themselves. It should not come as a surprise that so many years were misspent focusing on the wrong side of identification, since biracials could not be put into one box or another and their very existence flew in the face of miscegenation laws. White males, the same hegemonic group that initiated and enforced miscegenation laws and controlled the Census, and whose opinion was unfailingly regarded as the truth, performed all of the early studies on biracials. They used their “findings” from these studies to declare biracials as non-persons. Later studies began to explore how children identify each other racially and, as studies progressed, attempts were made to find out how biracials, usually the product of black/white unions, identified themselves. The latest studies explored the influences that shaped these self-definitions.

White ethnic identification takes place by choice and constraint. According to Mary C. Waters, “Ethnic Identity changes in both importance and content over the course
of one’s life and intergenerationally. The choices are both conscious and unconscious” (Waters, 1990, p. 51). The factors that influence these choices are knowledge of ancestors, surname, looks, and the ranking of the ethnic group. According to Spencer, “It isn’t merely the hierarchical structure of the American racial paradigm that is hegemonic, but the underlying system of racial categorization itself that serves to structure society in such a way that people do not realize they are the objects of oppression” (Spencer, 1999, p. 45).

The majority of studies presented on biracial identity influences fall into four categories: Social, Peer, Parents, and Individual. There are also many studies that explore two or more of these categories at once. Although this study focuses on biracials from minority-minority unions, much of the research found on biracials is exclusively on white-black unions. Because the majority of research available focuses on offspring from white-black unions, it was used in this study. The research found is important in understanding how biracial individuals shape their ethnic identity.

Biracial individuals sometimes use social location as a means of self-identification. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) explain that individuals who explore and understand their social location as biracial fall into four identities. The Border Identity incorporates both heritages within as a unique hybrid category of self-reference. The Singular Identity is exclusively either one or another but not both. The Protean Identity depends on situations and showcases fluidity of identity. Finally, the Transcendent Identity identifies beyond race and does not identify with any racial
category. These four identities and their characteristics help explain how mixed-race identity is formed.

There is still a great deal more to be learned about biracial identity development and its emotional consequences according to Collette Leyva Nero (2001). Researcher Kristen A. Renn realized that importance. In her dissertation titled *Mixed Race Students in College/The Ecology of Race, Identity, and Community on Campus*, (2004), she explored how mixed-race college students identified, and what the identities meant to them. Her exploration of the subject includes the voices of 56 mixed-race students from six college campuses. She feels that the findings of her research will be extremely important within the next decade, especially for those in the arena of higher education. It is important to understand the how and why of biracial self-identification in order to present a full learning opportunity to the growing number of biracial students.

Renn suggests that changes in three major areas will be necessary in order to accommodate the educational and emotional needs of these students. Suggested changes in the first area, institutional administrative practices, include an assessment of student populations to determine the actual number of mixed-students and how they identify racially, the development of a two-step question that asks the student first for both his or her racial (parental) heritage and, second, how they self-identify racially. Other changes in this area include the awareness of mixed-race persons through cultural programs and speakers. These programs will help build an on-campus community and a support system for mixed-race individuals. The second area of change addresses the promotion of a peer culture that encourages mixed-race students to move among all racial groups without
feeling as if they have to choose one over the other. Educators (faculty and administration) will be responsible for fostering this culture and encouraging its growth within the system. Finally, changes in the third major area, national policies, will allow multiracial persons to choose more than one race on official forms. According to the findings in Renn’s work, the ability to self-determine ethnic or racial background is of extreme importance to students in higher education.

The way biracials are perceived by outsiders is also as important as how they view themselves. According to Maria P. P. Root’s *Amerasia Journal* article, “Multiracial Asians: Models of Ethnic Identity” (1997), outsiders view biracial/biethnic persons as confused. The multiracial person must be aware that how one is perceived or categorized by others is not how they may construct their own reality; they must allow for duality and multiplicity. Race is not the core of their existence; sexual orientation, class, gender, or nationality must also be considered. Paul Spickard feels that physical appearances should not determine one’s experiences. His *Amerasia Journal* article, “What I Must Be? Asian Americans and the Question of Multiethnic Identity” (1997) explored the experiences of two siblings of Japanese and Black parentage who were treated differently because of their physical appearance. Although they were from the same parents, the girl looked Japanese and, based upon her last name and appearance, was treated as a person of Japanese descent. Her brother looked African-American and spoke Black English. He identified as black and was treated as such based solely upon his appearance. Spickard felt that “choosing a biracial identity is healthier than making an artificial choice” (p. 55).
Biracials who are comfortable with their identities also exhibit healthier self-esteem. Bracey and Umana-Taylor published an article in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2004) titled, “Examining ethnic identity and self-esteem among biracial and monoracial adolescents.” Their work examined a total of 3,282 male and female students from three different high schools in a large southwestern city. This study had a 50/50 gender split and included respondents ages 13 to 20. The study examined self-esteem and ethnic identity between biracial and monoracial adolescents. Latinos are an ethnic group, but for this study Latinos are included as a separate racial group. The research findings showed that adolescents who measured higher in the area of ethnic identity also scored higher in the area of self-esteem. Overall results were mixed and only one method of classification was used in the study. More longitudinal studies are needed, however the analysis did show that there was a positive correlation between ethnic identity and self-esteem for all involved.

The comprehensive studies in this literature review give a global explanation of how biracials self identify. It is important to have a general understanding of the overall process before examining the social forces that shape and drive the processes of ethnic self-identification. The majority of studies presented on biracial identity influences fall into four categories: Social, Peer, Parents, and Individual. The forces in these four categories drive the process by which biracial individuals self-identify. For purposes of this literature review, Peer and Social were too close together to separate. They appear together.
Literature Supporting the Influence of Social and Peer Forces in Racial Identity

Construction

This study looks at the paths biracial children of hegemonic/ethnic unions follow in their quest for ethnic and racial self-identity and the forces that guide them in their search. Social forces—marketing, media, the educational system, the neighborhoods, schoolmates, laws and politics—affect biracial individuals from his or her outside world. They determine how biracial individuals choose to view themselves and their place in the world. It is important to understand the role social forces affect how biracials choose to identify ethnically and racially. It is equally important to understand these forces in order to know how to break them.

Sometimes, biracial individuals measure themselves against accepted social values to determine their identity; they become chameleons try to change their identity to fit certain social scenarios. Cathy Tashiro performed a qualitative study of 20 people of mixed race titled, “Considering the Significance of Ancestry through the Prism of Mixed-Race Identity” (2002). The results were published in the journal Advances in Nursing Science. Participants were from African-American-White and Asian American-White unions, ranging in age from 45 to 94. In the study, Tashiro attempted to understand racial identity: She wanted to know how older mixed-race people self-identify, what influences racial identity (how mixed-race people self-identify formally, such as when filling out official forms) and identification (how mixed-race people identify themselves through the social experience), what similarities and differences in experience of being mixed race were and if age is a factor in mixed-race self-identity. She found that mixed-race people
are often outsiders who exist in two or more social worlds. Tashiro also found that there were multiple dimensions to matters relating to race and identity. She discovered that mature mixed-race people are able to change their identities from one social encounter to the next.

The ability to change identities is a survival instinct that is developed from an early age. There is a great pressure in society to assimilate and not be different; to stick out from the crowd is not seen as desirable. It can make one an outcast. Horowitz first explored identity development in children in 1939. She showed line drawings of a black boy and a white boy to a group of young black and white children. She asked the children to point to the drawing that looked most like themselves. All of the black children pointed to the drawing of the white boy. Even though the children were black, the desire to belong to the dominant group overshadowed their own racial identity. Then in 1947, Kenneth and Mamie Clark confirmed Horowitz' finding, except Clark and Clark expanded upon Horowitz' idea of “wishful activity.” This time, the experiment implemented the use of line drawings that included one black and one white, blond, and blue-eyed child. The Clarks found that identity is not static; it changes depending on the time and situation. These studies point out the power of social forces and the need to belong to the dominant group. The black children in these studies wished to belong to the hegemonic (white) group so much that they chose the drawing of the white child instead of the one that represented them most accurately.

Children view differences in themselves only in terms of gender before social forces begin to influence the way they see the world. In her work How Young Children
Perceive Race (1995), ethnographer Robyn Holmes decided to study children—kindergartners—in their natural habitat. Holmes acted as a participatory observant in this study. The teacher introduced her as just another student, and the students treated her as such. It was in this manner that she studied five classes totaling 102 children: 12 Latino, and the remaining split fairly evenly between European and Black heritage. Using pictures and much observation, Holmes came upon very interesting results. These children—still not indoctrinated into the world of racism—viewed gender as more important than race and although there were three colors, black, brown and white, the children did not differentiate this among their friends. During the study, Holmes asked a child named Stephan, “How does it feel to be black”? He told her that he did not know how it felt; all he knew is that he was just a person. Holmes found that she came to the same conclusion about herself.

As children develop and become more social, the idea of “differentness” changes. External forces, including the educational system, teachers, neighbors and peers begin to exert pressure on them. For mixed-race individuals, the pressure becomes even greater. They walk a thin line between being stereotyped and being true to themselves. Their need to belong to the dominant group becomes greater as their world expands. In “Black and White Self-Esteem: The Urban School Child,” Morris Rosenberg (published in the American Sociological Association, 1968), proposed that if individuals in a group are seen disparagingly or if they are stereotyped, belittled or ridiculed then those individuals will more than likely see themselves as such. In time, this individual or group will see itself in this demeaned manner and will have a low concept of themselves as well.
(Rosenberg, 1968). In *Multiethnic Teens and Cultural Identity* (2001), Barbara Cruz explores identity the turbulent, explosive times of regular teen angst—body awareness, sexuality, college prep and moving into the adult world. She found that teens of multiracial backgrounds have the added pressure of facing the experience of racism head-on. Using the lens of cultural history, Cruz examines how those early racial inequalities have shaped the ones still in place today.

One of the ways racial inequalities continue to exist is in the arts. In *The Melancholy of Race* (2001), Anne Anlin Cheng, a professor of English at Princeton University’s Center for African-American Studies, focuses almost entirely on the politics of racial grief. Cheng uses a variety of ways in which to explore the subject, including looking at the arts via examinations of Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man* and Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Flower Drum Song* and psychoanalyses such as Sigmund Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*. Cheng’s interpretations of these subjects show that she is unwilling to dismiss the role of the racially oppressed person in a still-racist society. She wants us to understand that when people speak of the “internalization” of a racist society, especially through the arts, that the “internalization” goes much deeper into the realms of the psyche. The complexity of her work forces readers to slow down and think about the real damages this “internalization” can cause. Sometimes racism is covert; sometimes people internalize and promote racism without realizing it. School administrators and teachers promote racism through required readings and assignments. For example, required readings include the canon of literature in which racism exists. In order to assist
the acceptance of multiracial children in schools, these required readings must expand to include readings about and written by multiracial people.

The inclusion of readings written by multiracial authors will expand the awareness of multiracials and make it easier to be accepted—and to accept themselves—in the educational system. This awareness is important. Administrators and teachers need to be aware that the needs of these children are different from the hegemonic group; if they are not recognized, they tend to fall through the cracks. In Jane Chiong’s book *Racial Categorization of Multiracial Children in Schools* (1998), she points out the deficiencies still occurring in United States schools in regard to the treatment of multiracial children. Chiong explains that these children have unique needs that are not being met by teachers and other school personnel, who assume that these children have the same needs as monoracial children. Chiong also points out that the treatment of these children is a microcosm of the American cultural identity. Just like the United States Census and individual state voter forms that force adults to identify by one race only, federal and other school forms only have check boxes for monoracial children; this gives the message that multiracial children, since they cannot be categorized, do not belong. Chiong brings up a good point: As America becomes more and more diverse, the “one-race-only” thought process in America is deficient and needs to change.

If this thought process does not change, biracials will become even more marginal than they are now. The United States population is becoming more multiethnic; the acceptance of the value and existence of biracial persons must change in order to create a level playing field among all people. In her thesis “Ethnic Identity of Biethnic
Mexican/American European American Raised in Texas,” (2005), Kristal L. Menchaca expounds upon Kerwin and Ponterotto’s theory: Since society will ultimately treat a biracial person as a person of color, children who are the product of one white parent and one parent of color should identify with the racial or ethnic group of the non-hegemonic parent. Ultimately, biracial persons will be rejected by both groups of their ethnic/racial makeup; they will be considered marginal, and not a member of either group.

In order to break the cycle of racism in the educational system, it is important to first understand it. Marta I. Cruz-Janzen’s dissertation *Curriculum and the Self-Concept of Biethnic and Biracial Persons*, (1997), is an examination of the treatment of biethnic and biracial students. These students were not being included within the school system nor were the schools encouraging them to succeed. The participants of her study felt marginalized. They felt they were not given full membership into the culture; their needs were not being fulfilled because the school was ignoring them. These sentiments were carried out into their daily lives. Once the cycle of racism is broken in the educational system, mixed-race persons will become socially accepted and their contribution to society will be recognized. They will no longer be ignored and their needs will be fulfilled.

In the *Social Theory and Practice* journal article, “Being and Being Mixed Race” (2001), Ronald R. Sundstrom explored the political and ethical questions affiliated with the concept of mixed-race identity in the United States. He enforces the theory that people are expected to fit into racial categories. He finds that life is difficult enough, but when one is of mixed-race, questions are raised about the relationships between people,
groups and what is thought of the parents of biracials. Sundstrom says metaphysical pluralism is sensitive to the social forces and allows for the varied to be real. The mixed-race goal is that of social recognition and acceptance of mixed-race identity and categories.

The level of education a person attains also plays a role in self-identification; so does generation. Yu Xie is a professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan. In 1997, she presented a study of educational effects in biracial Asian children (Social Forces Journal) that tends to agree with Lieberson’s 1985 finding that white males who are highly educated will identify as white. The education level of the Asian parent only affects identification in children of the third generation. First generation children identify as Asian across all educational experience in order to minimize conflict within the family and the home. In contrast, second-generation children do not identify as Asian but stay with tradition. Tradition dictates that, although the father is usually white, they take the father’s name and racial identification as their own. These children are rarely identified as Asian in the same manner as their first-generation counterparts; they reject their cultural roots in order to assimilate. Unlike second-generation children, third-generation biracials embrace their Asian roots. They are more knowledgeable about their choices; the education level of the Asian parent greatly increases the likelihood of third-generation children being identified as Asian.

We must also define racial identity as the adoption of the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of a group and the development of an affinity, loyalty, and feeling attached to membership within it (Phinney, 1992). According to Christine Catherine Iijima Hall,
(1980) there are other factors that influence ethnic identity. These factors include demographics, ethnicity of friends, age, racial groups of parents, generation of mother, cultural knowledge, participation and language, political involvement, physical characteristics, acceptance and racial resemblance.

The final stage of acceptance as a biracial individual is not easy; it is a struggle in trading social expectations for one’s own expectations. In 1993, Phinney proposed a model of ethnic identity development in adolescents. In his model, Stage One examined ethnic identity, whereby the subject accepts the values and attitudes of the hegemonic group. Stage Two deals with ethnic identity search/moratorium. During this time, the adolescent encounters a situation that causes them to begin an ethnic identity search. Finally, Stage Three examines ethnic identity achievement, in which the person who is able to come to terms with their issues is able to handle the future and is at peace and acceptance with themselves. Although the two studies have different theories in their stages of development, the results are the same: both groups came to an acceptance of themselves as biracial individuals.

Christine Catherine Ijima Hall studied black Japanese Americans in 1979; she found that the racial climate had a stronghold on biracials. In her dissertation, she asked 30 Japanese African-American participants to define their racial and cultural identity. When asked to choose through Standardized Racial Category, 19 chose “black” and 11 chose “other.” She found that when forced to choose, multiracials will choose what society wants them to be. When asked to rate their blackness and their Japaneseiness, 28 out of 30 rated themselves as both.
Nearly 20 years after Hall’s study, multiracial persons are beginning to find their voice. Kathleen Odell Korgen presented her theory of the transformation of racial identity in her work (1998). She showed that, through historical accounts, approval of identity has changed from white, black, and neither to both. She proposed multiracials have demanded new classifications; instead of fading the concept of race is shifting. The transformation in biracial identity of biracials is an example of the transmutation of race. *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*, explains that identity choices for Asian American youth are lacking and far-reaching compared to that of white American youth. Previous studies in this group showed that nativity, generational status, bilingualism, gender, neighborhood context, and perceptions of discriminations play a large role in identity choice. Asian American youth determine how others view their cultural identity by first assigning themselves an identity. (Lee, 2004).

According to Cynthia L. Nakashima, identity theory has three major approaches within multiracial politics (1992). Although the three overlap and many multiracials use all of them simultaneously, they are all distinct steps that will assist in the development of a more multiracial world. The first approach is the struggle for inclusion in traditional communities. This approach exists in an individual’s desire and ability to switch racial identities in order to fit into the social group that they are in at the moment. This attempt to fit in includes adjustments in clothing, hair, language, mannerisms, etc. The ability to fit in provides legitimacy. If they can fit in, they are accepted as full members of that particular community; they belong to an already established racial group. For example, a biracial of an African-American and Asian union will take up the mannerisms of his or
her black friends when in that group, and that of the Asian friends when with them. When the biracial is accepted as a full member of one particular community even though this approach, while useful, does not allow the biracial individual to celebrate both of their heritages equally.

Nakashima’s second approach involves the reshaping of both halves into a shared identity and the establishment of a common agenda among racially mixed people. This approach promotes the formation of a new multiracial community and involves a new recognition for multiracial people. Instead of trying to “pass” or fit into an already-established group, biracials are recognized as a legitimate group. This allows biracial persons to be fully accepted in social circles and to themselves; there is no longer a need to choose sides. Once mixed-race persons are recognized as a group, they will gain political, then economic, power.

The third approach in the process is to dismantle the dominant racial ideology and boundaries in order to create a community of humanity. During this phase, racial oppression and dominant racial ideologies based on race and ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality will no longer exist. This will result in a more harmonious world in the end. Mixed-race people are made even more visible in this step by reaching out to community organizations. According to Nakashima, this approach is well on its way in the United States. Magazines such as *Interrace*, *New People*, and *Biracial Child* are already in print; biracials are also becoming more visible via books and films.

One powerful social force, advertising, is helping the perception and value of the mixed-race individual and promoting the ethnic community in a positive light. The
advertising world was one of the first groups to recognize and promote the value of mixed-race persons and the ethnic community. Although their intent may have been financial, it continued to break new ground and shatter old thought patterns and ideas about biracial individuals. In her book *Shopping for Identity, The Marketing of Ethnicity*, (2000) Marilyn Halter states that consumerism simultaneously disrupts and promotes ethnic community and can be subversive and hegemonic. Commercialism can do away with tradition and a sense of community and ultimately bring about interethnic social cohesiveness.

Interethnic cohesiveness can also be achieved by focusing on the importance of cultural affiliation instead of race. In an article for the journal *Discourse Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* “Fastening and Unfastening Identities: negotiating identity in Hawai‘i” (2001), Gay Reed explains that the United States categories are not normalized. In Hawai‘i, cultural and ethnic identity is accommodated, adjusted and constructed in changing social, historical and cultural contexts. Hawai‘i has a long history of interethnic and interracial marriages that does not allow people to focus only on what one looks like but instead that they align to cultural life affiliation. But does avoiding the fact that you are of mixed race in favor of culture mean that racism disappears?

According to Minelle Mahtani, in the article, “Interrogating the Hyphen-Nation: Canadian Multicultural Policy and ‘Mixed Race’ Identities,” (2002) it does not. She performed a qualitative study of 24 open-ended interviews of mixed-race women in Canada. She wanted to show that national or ethnic identity cannot be separated from its nation. Mahtani defines mixed race as multiracial, bicultural, biracial, multiethnic,
racially mixed or of mixed ethnic origin or ancestry. The women were socioeconomically comfortable, professional and educated. Multicultural policy could cover up racial resentment. How one is racialized changes over time in one’s life and geographical space. One’s place of residence can affect his or her ethnic experience on their ethnicity. Mahtani states that multiculturalism has both helped and impeded the sense of belonging for the people in this study. The women also felt multiculturalism was a way of life instead of a movement. It seems that multiculturalism policy maintains stereotypical views.

The research in this section is important in understanding how social forces affect biracial individuals from his or her outside world. These forces are very old, very powerful and very entrenched in United States society. These forces affect and impede self-identification. Initially, children view differences between themselves by gender; they do not view race as a difference. Once in school, their views of others and of themselves begin to change and they continue to struggle for identification until sometime in adolescence or adulthood.

*Literature Supporting the Influence of Parents as Forces in Racial Identity Construction*

Social forces cause mixed-race children to struggle for years to find their ethnic and racial identity. These forces not only affect the children, they come from the institutions in which they learn to socialize. When these institutions do not recognize the existence of mixed-race persons, they get lost in the social fabric. However, if these children have a strong sense of self before they leave the home and enter the educational system, they can navigate the social forces and build upon their sense of self-esteem. The
influence of parents is even stronger than the effects of social forces in identity
construction.

Even mixed-race individuals who are raised in white communities by parents who
did not stress racial differences struggle with identity. Stephen L. H. Murphy-
Shigematsu’s dissertation, titled, *The Voices of Amerasians: Ethnicity, Identity, and
Empowerment in Interracial Japanese Americans*, (1986) included a research group of
thirty people. Participants included first-generation Japanese mothers and white fathers
and their offspring. The offspring, called Amerasians, were between the ages of 23 and
33. They were raised on the East Coast or the Midwest in non-Japanese American
communities, and attended colleges on the East Coast. The respondents described their
attempts at dealing with often confusing and painful feelings and experiences, stemming
from influences including family issues, assimilation, and race and culture. Parents of
mixed-race children make concerted attempts to raise their children without racial bias,
however, they themselves struggle with the biases they learned while growing up. The
home—and the parental experiences within it—is first place in which mixed-race
children start their journey of racial self-identification.

Richard Wright, a professor of Geography and Public Affairs at Dartmouth
College, uses the home in his study of mixed-race children; he feels that the household
serves as the eye of the storm for all social forces. It is the place that all public and
private discourse about mixed-race is collected and discussed. These social forces include
such influences as neighbors, schools, integration, segregation, and diversity. Wright
studies mixed-race couples and their biracial offspring as a whole; unlike other
researchers, he does not focus on one particular group of mixed-race couple (for example, all black and Japanese couples, all Asian and white couples). In his paper “Crossing racial lines: Geographies of mixed-race partnering and multiraciality in the United States,” (published in the journal Progress in Human Geography, 2003) he examines how mixed-race partners live, how place affects the identities of mixed-race children and what racial identities emerge in a mixed-race household. Wright explains that mixed-race rhetoric delegates the hierarchal structure that gives privilege to whites. He identifies the different racial groups and interracial patterns of mixed-race partnerships. He wants new and different research to open up in order to better understand mixed-race household identity and the social dynamics to be able to learn more about identity development in mixed-race children.

Ultimately, what Wright discovered is that children go through three stages of self identification: In Stage I, children play with color freely; in Stage II, they arrive at the idea of color; and in Stage III ambivalence toward the concept of color is absent and they realize that skin color is determined by parents.

The forces that come from inside the home can be the most effective in shaping ethnic and racial self-identity. If forces in the home are strong, the children will be strong as well. Marguerite A. Wright, author of I’m Chocolate, You’re Vanilla (1998), feels that the idea that racism produces low self-esteem in black children has received more attention than it should. She has conducted research that shows that if black children are raised in households with healthy attitudes toward race, they will have healthy self-esteem. She cautions black parents to balance concerns about instilling racial pride
against the risk of heightened sensitivity to the point that it is “as crippling as the racism they fear.”

Although parents of biracial children make a conscious effort to raise their children to embrace and appreciate both of their heritages, outside social forces can find a way in. In her *Transformations* journal article, “Biracial Identity: Mythical or Meaningful”? (1998) Donna Crawley says that she raised her children with a blended concept, which allowed them to have a sense of pride in all parts of their backgrounds. But after reading *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness* (1996), and *Crossing the Color Line* (1994), Crawley found that these two books identified the children by their racial color identity. Crawley discovered that her political consciousness determined how her personal relationship would be defined and constructed. She did not think of her children’s racial identity in terms of public and societal roles, but instead in an individual context. She is a white woman with biracial children. She realizes that the child as an adult might self-identify differently than how the parent identifies.

Sometimes, parents attempt to embrace an all-inclusive attitude, while others look to the past for inspiration in how to raise their children in a non-biracial world. In the feminist journal *Lilith* article, “The New Identity Challenge: Are You Black or Are You Jewish”? (1996) Sarah Blustain wrote that she is a product of a biracial marriage, whereby her mother was a Christian black woman and her father a white Jewish male who were able to adhere to categorization by race. But for the children of biracial marriages, it is not so easy to answer the question “what are you”? Blustain writes that, as a result of 1960s liberalism, a grassroots movement for a “multiracial” category is to be
added to the 2000 Census. Many parents of biracial children raised their children with a non-racial ethnic identity, while others insisted that the child be raised under the Rule of Hypodescent (1996).

If mixed-race children have a strong sense of self before they leave the home and enter the educational system, they can navigate the social forces and build upon their sense of self-esteem. The influential forces of parents are even stronger than the effects of social forces in identity construction of mixed-race children, however, just because parents have decided to engage in a mixed-race union does not mean they have rid themselves of their own racism. If social forces still enforce racism and parents have their own ideas about race, how do children come to choose a single identity?

*Literature Supporting the Individual as Force in Racial Identity Construction*

Although mixed-race children eventually choose an ethnic and racial personal identity, they are chameleons when in public or in groups. They have the unique ability to change their identity in order to fit comfortably in social situations. Peter Yuichi Clark wrote an article for the journal *Pastoral Psychology* titled, “Exploring the Pastoral Dynamics of Mixed-Race Persons” (2004). In it, he found that one’s racial and ethnic identity is shaped by life experiences: people one associates with, knowing one’s history, awareness of bloodlines and sharing one’s global perspective with people like oneself. However, mixed-race people are like chameleons, ever-changing to their situations and from the desire to belong. Due to this ability to adapt, mixed-race people grapple with identity. Clark wonders if they can ever be a part of an ethnic group. He realizes there are differences and commonalities and he acknowledges and accepts them.
Educational and financial status does not erase the ability to become a chameleon. No matter what their social status, people of mixed race tend to feel both of their identities separately and will adapt to any social situation. In Claudine Chiawei O’Hearn’s book, *Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial and Bicultural* (1998), she presents a collection of 18 essays from authors who answer the question: “Where are you from”? Malcolm Gladwell summarizes the book when he writes, “I never feel my whiteness more than when I’m around West Indians, and never feel my West Indianness more than when I’m with whites. And when I’m by myself, I can’t answer the question at all, so I just push it out of my mind (p. 123).”

But according to Kim Buxembaum, identities change in social circumstances. In her completed doctoral dissertation titled, *Racial Identity Development and its Relationship to Physical Appearance and Self-esteem in Adults with One Black and One White Biological Parent* (1996), she “found that 36% of her subjects had different public and private identities.” According to Blustain, “multiracialism is new, and the face of multiracial individuals is just beginning to be recognized.” In Stacy Lavilla’s *Asian Week* article “Hapa Issues Move Into the Spotlight: Children of partial Asian descent express common concerns” (1998), she states that Hapas, also known as mixed-race people of Asian descent, felt they had no place to voice their issues. Hapas do not feel that they fit into the older structure paradigm of “issei,” “nisei,” and “sansei.” The Japanese American community has to look towards a more inclusive future for Hapas.

Mixed-race individuals attain self-acceptance in stages; these stages correlate with the social forces they face while in different age groups. For most, acceptance becomes
easier as they age. In a dissertation titled, *Eurasians: Ethnic/Racial Identity Development of Biracial Japanese/White Adults*, (1982), George Kitahara Kich did a research sample of 15 biracial adults of white and Japanese heritage ages 17 to 56. The study consisted of seven males and eight females and was conducted in semi-structured, clinical interviews. He found there were three stages to their development. In Stage I, he discovered that between the ages of 3 and 10 there was an "initial awareness of differentness and dissonance between self-perceptions and others' perceptions of them." In Stage II, he found that from age 8 through late adolescence and young adulthood there was a "struggle for acceptance from others." Stage III included the ages of late adolescence throughout adulthood, in which Kich found "acceptance of themselves as people with a biracial and bicultural identity."

Breaking these long-standing social expectations is not easy. In Michael Charles Thornton's dissertation titled, *A Social History of a Multiethnic Identity The Case of Black Japanese Americans*, (1983), he presents an exploratory field research that included a total of 84 contacted and 61 interviewed. The interviewees were gathered by the snowball technique. This study gives us a historical account of the racial climate in Japan and the U.S. in the mid-to late-1940s. In the final chapter of Thornton's work, he presents various identity strategies for people of mixed race. Historically, it was assumed that biracial people who "passed" or switched their ethnic identities to fit into social situations did so because of self-loathing and hatred. Thornton feels that the ability to switch is beneficial not only to biracial individuals but to society as a whole. Today, individuals who switch identities do so out of practical necessity; "passing" can gain
them a better economic and social status. According to Thornton, individuals who can possess chameleon-like identities “actively participate as subjects, not objects in identity formation and do not positively acquiesce into categorization.” In other words, they choose to categorize themselves. Thornton used the theories of researchers Paulo Freire and Frantz Fanon to support his study: It is important for human beings to have control over their lives rather than allow themselves to be placed into ill-fitting categories by political, economic and racial ideals of the hegemonic group.

This study, *Categorization of Racial/Ethnic Identity for Racialized and Marginalized Biracials in the Mainland United States*, examines how biracial children of minority-minority unions learn to self-identify ethnically and racially. In order to understand the processes that influence their choices, it is necessary to examine the forces by which these choices are made. The literature reviewed in this section is necessary to this study. It provides a foundation by which we can examine the role of ancestry and the social forces that both consciously and unconsciously shape the paths to identity construction. Social forces—marketing, media, the educational system, the neighborhoods, schoolmates, laws and politics—affect biracial individuals from his or her outside world. They determine how biracial individuals choose to view themselves and their place in the world. The literature reviewed in this section points out that much of the struggle biracial individuals face when trying to find their own identity comes from the educational system and the standards placed there by the hegemonic group. It is discovered that before going to school, children only view differences between themselves in terms of gender. However, once they enter the educational system, race
becomes a difference as well. Parents also play an important role in shaping ethnic self-identification. Although minority-minority parents take more care to raise their children in a non-biased environment, they still carry with them the racial attitudes they themselves learned from peers, parents and the educational system. It is also discovered that no matter how comfortable biracials are with their own identity, they tend to act in the manner that is expected of them in order to fit in when faced with social situations. Most studies on mixed-race identity formation focus on only black and white unions. It would have been important to this study to be able to include research that addresses identity formation of children from minority-minority unions, but there has not been much research conducted in this area to date.

Summary and Conclusion

Racial identity was not accidental; it was promoted, planned, constructed and enforced by the hegemonic group to maintain social and economic control. As a result, mixed-race individuals were not recognized nor given full privilege of citizenship. The literature reviewed in this section is important in understanding and supporting the findings of this study. It assists in explaining how and why biracial individuals struggle in their attempts to construct their own self-identification.

This study examines the paths biracial children of minority-minority unions follow in their quest for ethnic and racial self-identity and the forces that guide them in their search. It also examines why it is or why it is not necessary to choose an identity and how that choice affects their lives. The literature reviewed in this chapter supports the premise of this study. It builds the foundation necessary to understand the paths to
self-identification and the origins that cause the struggles found along those paths. To understand this, it is necessary to examine how and why the social forces from which these choices are made were created and put in place. It is equally important to understand these forces in order to know how to break them.

One’s ethnic identification comes from the knowledge of one’s ancestry; it is the foundation upon which identification is constructed. Biracial persons are affected in their choices from social forces from the outside world. Social forces determine how biracial individuals choose to view themselves and their place in the world. These forces not only affect the children, they come from the institutions in which they learn to socialize. When these institutions do not recognize the existence of mixed-race persons, they fall through cracks in the social fabric and are lost. However, if these children have a strong sense of self before they leave the home and enter the educational system, they can navigate the social forces and build upon their sense of self-esteem. The influential forces of parents are even stronger than the effects of social forces in identity construction.

The ideas that were put into play by white researchers still have an effect on biracial identity formation. In order to keep the hegemonic race in social and economic control and deny mixed-race people privileges, additional rules and laws were developed. The Rule of Hypodescent, the effects of the Census, and miscegenation laws kept this control for more than 300 years.

Attitudes about mixed-race individuals are changing. With mixed-race individuals making up 2.4% of the United States population, is it still necessary to try and categorize race or choose an ethnic identity? The advertising world was one of the first groups to
recognize and promote the value of mixed-race persons and the ethnic community; others
will follow. The literature in this chapter serves as a guide to answer that question. The
findings, combined with the methodology explained in the next chapter, will provide an
even clearer picture of what paths biracial individuals take in their quest to answer the
question "What are you"?
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how a biracial person self-identifies ethnically and to explore if there is a need to select an ethnic identity. The goal was to explore and identify what influences an individual's choice of racial identity. The study focused on how biracial persons are influenced by family, economics, education and culture. This study's intent was exploratory and not to test formal hypotheses. In order to accomplish this, a multi-method approach was used.

This chapter describes the research methodology used to explore the biracial experience of children of minority-minority unions. Both the qualitative and quantitative method were used for this study because they allow the researcher to look at his or her subjects beyond the information that is offered in the mainstream. Both are valuable in their ability to acquire knowledge and contribution. The qualitative approach is more scientific. It begins with a hypothesis; data is then collected and reduced to statistics. These numbers are then measured against the hypothesis, and a theory is developed from that comparison. The hypotheses are stated before the research begins, making it a deductive process of research (Creswell, 2003). Quantitative research ideas are disconnected from the researcher; the results are constant and governed by rules. The research is believed to be impartial and value-free (Creswell, 2003). The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) used in this study was developed by Phinney in 1992 and adapted by Cruz-Janzen in 1997. Because there has been little research conducted on
biracials who are not combined by African-American and European ancestry, the MEIM was given to the participants in this study in order to obtain more information to help clarify and support the data that was attained through the in-depth long interviews.

The qualitative approach, on the other hand, is used to gain insight into a specific phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2003). This approach is based upon the human experience. Data is gathered from individual’s experiences through vehicles such as interviews, ethnographies, case studies and theories are drawn based upon the perspectives of the participants. The qualitative approach is based on the participants’ meanings and their experiences, which are influenced by their gender, race, social class, and environment (Creswell, 2003). This study will be conducted in a qualitative manner which is defined as follows: It will focus on the experiences of the participant’s lives and how they define themselves (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990; Locke et al., 1987; Merriam, 1988, as cited in Creswell, 2003), and on the outcome of these experiences as well as how the experiences are continually evolving throughout their lives (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990; Merriam, 1988 as cited in Creswell, 2003). Using the in-depth interview allows the subjects to give their own perspectives instead of having someone without the same unique experience speak for them (24). The stories of these individuals, told in their own voices, are critical because their histories and experiences are usually excluded from the mainstream.
Research Design

Criteria

My original intent was to select five females between the ages of 20–25 to participate in this study. However, when the study was conducted there were 12 females interviewed and surveyed instead of five. In order to create a level playing field for all involved, the participants selected were to be from similar economic backgrounds and have similar levels of education. Because the focus of this study was on mixed-race persons from minority-minority unions, and in order to have a standardized sampling, participants were also required to have one parent of Japanese descent and one parent of any other ethnic minority group, excluding white Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP)/European descent. The participants in this study were required to tell their stories in their own words so that it was their voices, not mine, that were heard.

All of the participants in this study were females between the ages of 18 and 29 who were born and raised in the United States. Figure 3-1 shows the breakdown of respondents’ ages:

Figure 3-1

N = 12

Average Age=23
All the participants are considered educationally successful because they completed high school and are at different levels of higher education. Figure 3-2 shows the educational levels of the respondents.

**Figure 3-2**

The participants were selected via several recruitment strategies. Recruitment efforts included sending e-mails to professors who were teaching at California State University, Sacramento. The departments participating in recruitment efforts were:

- Bilingual Education Department
- Ethnic Studies Department
- Multicultural Center
- Women’s Resource Center
- Women’s Studies
Professors were asked to make announcements to their classes regarding the study. A professor in the UC Davis School of Education also participated in the recruitment effort. In addition, the snowball technique, in which participants direct the interviewer to additional participants, was explored via the *California State University Newsletter* and a sports rehabilitation center in Sacramento. These announcements explained the study, asked for referrals, and asked who might be interested in participating.

All participants read and signed an informed consent form (Appendix B) and were given a copy of the Research Subjects’ Bill of Rights (Appendix A). Each participant completed an Ethnic Self-Identification Inventory, which included demographic information. The Inventory was used to gather information about the participant’s age, place of birth, and gender (Appendix C). The questions on the Inventory began with a survey of what ethnic group each participant identified with on official forms.

The Inventory section was followed by a 23-question Multigroup Identity Measure (MEIM), (developed by Phinney (1992) and adapted by Cruz-Janzen). In it, respondents were given a series of statements and asked to record their agreement or disagreement to each on a scale of 1 to 5. Responses were used to determine which ethnic group participants identified with in their daily lives with family and friends. These statements explored participants’ agreement or disagreement with how their ethnicity plays a role in the following areas of their lives: interest in culture/history; participation with and within people and groups, and their level of comfort within their own ethnic groups. The Inventory and MEIM were used in order to help clarify and support the data that was attained through the in-depth long interviews.
Participants recorded their reaction to statements such as:

1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group such as its history, traditions, and customs.
2. I like meeting and getting to know people from ethnic groups other than my own.
3. I am not very clear about the role of my ethnicity in my life.
4. I participate in cultural practices of my own ethnic group, such as special food, music, or customs.

Disclosure

Participants were wary of the interviewer at first. The participants wanted to know why the interviewer was interested in them. At first, they answered the questions with intrepidation, but it was found that the participants were willing to respond without hesitation when they knew that the interviewer was an insider. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer did not tell them that she has a daughter who is a racialized biracial. The interviewer found that participants would not really answer the questions freely, but as soon as the interviewer explained and admitted to them that the interviewer had a daughter who is biracial, they would open up and allow the interviewer in.

Description

It was difficult to find participants for the study. The criteria had to change so that the parents of the minority-to-minority offspring did not have to include a parent of Japanese descent. Instead, the criterion was changed. As long as both parents were minority-to-minority, the criterion was fulfilled. When the actual study was conducted, there were 12 females interviewed and surveyed instead of five. Seven of the participants came from the Lambda Kappa Sigma Sorority at California State University, Sacramento; the remaining participants were referrals through the snowball technique, in which
participants directed the interviewer to additional participants. This occurred when two participants were referred from friends from the sorority, two referrals from the interviewer’s daughter and one referral from the daughter’s boyfriend.

Table 3-1

The breakdown of participants’ biological racial backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological Background</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black/Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/Japanese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/Latina</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipina/Black</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese/Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese/Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/Asian Pacific</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One participant is of Native American descent biologically, however, her mother divorced when she was under the age of four and the participant claimed the ethnic identity of her adopted stepfather. It was also found that race (socio-constructed concept) and ethnicity were used interchangeably but are not necessarily viewed as one and the same to everyone. The problem that was discovered is that participants did not always agree with the concept of defined biological races.
For example, one participant stated:

My biological father, what I know of him, is Native American. My stepfather, who I
grew up with since the age of 3 or 4, is Portuguese. Full-blooded Portuguese. And that
was, and actually he was born in ... they were both born in California. And are native to
California and lived here all their lives.

| Table 3-2 |
|-----------------|--------|
| The breakdown of participants’ self-identity on official forms | |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 5 |
| Black | 5 |
| Eskimo/Native American | 2 |
| Hispanic/Latina | 1 |
| Other | 3 |
| None | 1 |

It was found that of the 12 women, six were raised by a single mother and the
other six were raised in a two-parent, heterosexual family. The ages of the participants
ranged from 19 to 29 and the mean age was 23.

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed for approximately fifty to ninety minutes, and were
tape-recorded for accuracy. The interviews were semi-structured—participants were
interviewed in a public place instead of isolated in an interview room—it allowed the
researcher access to the interviewees and allowed for in-depth explorations of their life
experiences and attitudes toward their biethnicity.
**Interview Process**

At the time of the interview, there were brief introductions, a presentation of how the interview would be conducted, and an explanation of the project. Participants were also given an explanation of the Protection of Human Subjects Protocol. A copy was presented to them for their records. Participants were then informed that the interview would be recorded and that the recording would be transcribed. After transcription, the participants could review their responses and make changes as required or as necessary.

**Survey**

The survey tool was submitted to the Division of Research at California State University, Sacramento, and was approved by the Protection of Human Subjects Protocol. Four basic areas were explored to assist in understanding biracial identity. They were: demographic data, ethnic/racial identity descriptions, ethnic and racial attitudes, and developmental history.

The demographic data was needed to evaluate the participants’ historical, social, and economic context. Self-descriptive and self-labeling answers were used to discover ethnic/racial identity. Self-descriptions and self-labels explored each person’s feelings about their own biraciality.

The interview itself was designed and organized as a guide so the researcher could move from general questions to questions that delved more in-depth and that helped to clarify any data that the respondent may not have provided. The respondents
were asked to delve into their lives and share intimate experiences and sometimes unresolved conflicts with the interviewer.

**Research Questions and Guiding Questions**

The questions used in the Oral Biethnic/Biracial Long Interview were developed from both personal experience and from extensive literature review. Questions ranged from general to intimate, which allowed the researcher to gain deeper insight into the participants’ lives and experiences. The researcher is a mother of a biracial daughter. Disclosing this information to participants seemed to evoke trust and rapport with the respondents. The overall intent of the questions were to find out what experiences and events shaped each of the participant’s ethnic identities and why. In order to get a complete picture of each person’s experiences, the questions covered five different subject areas: Self and Family, Developmental History, Self-Description, Cultural and Ethnic Roots and Identification, and Future and Evaluation.

Each of these sections explored a different facet of the participant’s life and progressed from earliest life to present and beyond to future influences. The questions in the Self and Family section focused on first influences—family. Participants were guided from the first question, “When and where were you born”? through queries about siblings, parents, if racial differences were noted and discussed, which parent the participant identifies with, and how racial differences were treated in the home.

Section two, Developmental History, was an exploration of outside influences that extended from the home into the world, including neighborhoods, friends, major life changes and how participants reacted the first time they were asked by an outsider about
their ethnic identity. The questions in the Self-Description section asked participants to embellish on experiences involving strangers asking them about their appearance and racial identity, then led to a self-exploration about how they see themselves ethnically and racially, how they identify in official situations such as the Census, and if they find themselves changing the way they talk or act to fit in depending on the situation. In section three, Cultural and Ethnic Roots and Identification, participants were asked how and why they express their cultural heritage, which parent was more influential, and about their experiences when traveling in-state or abroad. The final section, Future and Evaluation, explored each participant’s plans for the future, including education, family, and job status, and what message they would pass on to other interracial individuals. The interview concluded with a few questions about the interview itself. The participants were also encouraged to come forward with additional information at that time.

Participants were voluntary and were not offered inducements nor paid any money for their participation. The researcher personally conducted every phase of the interview. At the end of the interview, the respondents made general comments about their feelings and asked the interviewer why this subject was being explored. All respondents were enthusiastic about the interview, gave names of potential respondents, and were excited about their self-explorations.

Constraints

The study is limited by the number of participants (too small of a sample) and failed to obtain participants statewide or nationally. The participants sampled were a targeted group. The selections were based on gender, age group, socioeconomic status
and college education. It should be noted that the participants’ sexuality and sexual orientation became an important topic. There were times when the recordings were stopped but conversations continued due to the sensitivity of the subject matter on sexual orientation. It shows the either/or limitations in which race is viewed. One assumes that romantic relationships are based on heterosexual desires and attractions, not on same-sex attraction.

It was difficult to find participants. The criteria in the study was adjusted so that the parents of the minority-to-minority offspring did not have to include a parent of Japanese descent. As long as both parents were minority-to-minority, the criterion was fulfilled. When the actual study was concluded, the interviewer had surveyed 12 females instead of five. One participant is of Native American descent biologically. Her mother divorced when she was under the age of four and the stepfather adopted her. She chose to identify with the ethnicity of her stepfather. The stepfather is Portuguese, which she does not consider white, but according to the Census reports, Portuguese are identified as white. It was discovered that race and ethnicity were used interchangeably but are not necessarily one and the same. The problem that was discovered was that participants did not always agree with the concept of biological races.

A major problem with an interview is the inability to replicate it. The interview relationship between the researcher and the respondent is not entirely objective and may not be duplicated by other investigators. The data is not always uniform nor standardized. There is also the chance that the experiences of the interviewer could guide the data of this study in a different direction, because, although the qualitative approach allows the
participants to tell their own experiences in their own words, the method is basically interpretive—the interviewer still has to interpret the data (Wolcott, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2003). As objective as researchers try to be, they are essentially human, and will look at the data with influences from their own life experiences, something that is unavoidable (Creswell, 2003). While interpreting the data, the researcher has to be aware of his or her place in the study and remain open to the values and experiences offered by the participants, even if he or she does not agree with their beliefs (Mertens, as cited in Creswell, 2003).

**Data Analysis**

After each interview was completed, the audio tapes were transcribed. Copies of the transcription and written questions were sent to each participant for review. Participants were allowed to add or edit the material as needed. Once all of the interviews were complete, they were reviewed and noted.

The participants were also given a Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) questionnaire. The MEIM provides a measure of ethnic and racial self-identity and self-concept. The ethnic identity scale focused on several areas: Ethnic Behavior and Practices, which involves social activities with members of one’s group and participation in cultural traditions; Affirmation and Belonging, which includes feeling of belonging to an ethnic group which also refers to as pride or positive feeling toward one’s group; Ethnic Identity Achievement, having a secure sense of self; and Other-Group Orientation, one’s attitude toward other groups. These findings were then reviewed and conclusions were made based upon those findings. The data was reviewed and commonalities and
differences were compared and contrasted, counted and mean scores calculated to support the data. The mean results cannot be applied to the general population due to the study sample being select and of a small sample size.

Summary and Conclusion

Why is this researcher interested in biracial minority-minority ethnic identity in females? The researcher gave birth to a biracial daughter who is the product of a Japanese and Cuban union. The development of this young woman was observed through the years, and it was interesting to see how this individual’s racial identity evolved in relation to that of her friends. The interest of the researcher became more formalized as she continued her own education at the university and discovered that biracial individuals were not given an equal voice. In addition, research and literature found on the subject was limited and dated.
Chapter 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Race is ever evolving in time, history, and space in the United States of America. This study examines the paths biracial children of minority-minority unions follow in their quest for ethnic and racial self-identity and the forces that guide them in their search. It also examines why it is or why it is not necessary to choose an identity and how that choice affects their lives. In order to understand the paths that the respondents in this study chose in their quest for self-identification, it was necessary to examine their experiences on a more personal level.

This chapter will examine how the respondents identify racially and how those identities were formed. Included in this chapter is an interpretation of the combined data of the oral interviews and the results of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992) survey. Utilizing both oral and MEIM surveys allowed the interviewer to get a clearer, well-rounded understanding of the respondents’ experiences. In addition, the data gathered in the MEIM survey was compared to the oral interviews to ensure accuracy and consistency in responses.

Narrative Portraits

Because the identities of the survey participants are to remain anonymous, fictitious names have been assigned to each individual. There were a total of 12 participants interviewed for this study; the responses of five were chosen and included in this chapter. The first time I met with each participant, I was unable to determine race or ethnicity from her physical appearance. In addition, their first or surnames were
sometimes indistinguishable as to their race or ethnicity. The responses of these five women were chosen because they present a global representation of the experiences of all 12 participants.

1. **Morar Suave**

   Kids can be really cruel, and it has a major reflection on my parents because you’re going to learn racism. As a child, you’re innocent, you start off very brainwashed, you start off very fresh and caring. I see children as very innocent. I feel that it’s the racism as far as ethnicity goes off from, from outside of who are the people in their lives. And just that I think I would hope that school, you know, schools too may incorporate diversity especially books and games and stuff like that, they don’t have, they still don’t. But that was a major, major influence in my life, the fact that there are so many, you know ignorant people out there that taught their kids to hate, that made it difficult for someone biracial to grow up to be confident about who they are. Luckily, it didn’t affect me as an adult but it did as a child.

   Morar is 22 years old. She is single and does not have children. She was born in Fresno, California, in 1983. Her immediate family includes her mother, grandfather, grandmother, and aunt (mom’s sister). She says her aunt is a tiny lady physically but has a powerhouse of a personality, which she describes as laid-back and black. Morar’s aunt is her role model; she always wanted to be just like her. Her mother is either 38 or 39 years of age and identifies as black. Her father is Mexican and she thinks he is about 50 years old. Morar does not know him nor does she know what he looks like.

   When Morar asked her mother about her father, her mom quite briefly and only once said, “oh it was a phase when we met.” She says they fell in love, she ended up getting pregnant, and that was about it. According to the stories that she was told, Morar’s mother and her father met in a club, dated for about a year, and then she came
along. It was all very hush-hush. She thinks her grandfather was the only person that met her father. No one else in the family met him.

Morar’s grandparents are black. She says she was raised in a black family. She says her grandfather is about 58 and her grandmother is 56. Morar’s mother was 15 when she was born. Morar’s grandfather is her father figure and her rock. Her grandparents have been very supportive of her and have played a major role in her life. She says that if it weren’t for them, she would probably be very different.

Morar says that she was 7 or 8 the first time she noticed a racial difference between herself, her mom, and her grandparents. About that time her skin started to get darker, and when she was in public with her mother, strangers didn’t think or assume that the woman she was with was her mother. People would ask, “Is that your daughter”? Morar does not really feel that she looks like her mother. Morar and her mother interact with each other more like friends instead of mother and daughter.

Morar had to contend with much from a very young age. Her mom and grandparents tried early on to explain to her about racial and ethnic differences. They told her that the world has much racism in it. They tried to teach her to not pay attention to it—nor to let it make her feel bad about whom she was. They tried to teach her self-respect and self-love as much as possible. They tried to explain those issues to her as best as they could because she really did not know what certain words meant or what things existed, or were done to her, that were racist. They told her that it would probably be white people who would treat her in this demeaning manner, but the treatment could come from people of mixed race as well.
Morar and her mother do not have a very close relationship. She feels that because her mother had her at such a young age, she did not know how to care for her emotionally and physically. Because of this, she grew away from her mother. There was much family dysfunction in her childhood. Morar describes it as a time of working through issues and figuring things out. She has some happy memories, but there were family issues during that time as well, so growing up was difficult and they had to get through them the best way that they knew how, and they tried to help her as much as they could. The order of priority was her mom, her aunt, and then Morar.

Morar has lived in about six cities; most of her family and extended family lives in Fresno. She grew up mostly around blacks, but then her family moved to Salinas, where her father’s family lives. Because of the high immigrant population of the city, she found herself surrounded by Mexicans. She came into contact with some aunts, uncles, and cousins while there, but then her family moved to San Ramon, which is an all-white community. Her family moved once again, this time to Livermore, which is also predominantly white. Finally, they moved to Sacramento, where there is a little more diversity. As far as friendships are concerned, Morar says she had a lot of black friends in Fresno and many Mexican friends in Salinas. She says she found a difference in community when they moved from the East side of Salinas, which was fairly poor, to the West side, where there was more money. Her friendships on the West side were mixed. She started hanging out more with biracial kids and, she says people who were “more just all over the map.” Her friendships within the black community became more limited as
she got older. If her friends were black, they were mixed. She says she probably didn’t have any black friends for a period time.

Morar says her mom liked to go dancing to the clubs and her mom’s friends were mainly Latina women. Her grandparents are family-oriented homebodies. Their friends were their family. If her grandmother did anything social, she hung out with her seven sisters and seven brothers. Her grandfather had the same number of siblings. That’s why they were with family. Her grandfather worked all the time. Her aunt had many white friends; she was a cheerleader so she had all her cheerleader friends over.

When Morar was young, she knew her mother did not like interracial couples, specifically black and white couples. Morar knew that her mother did not like interracial couples because she would say a lot of things even though her last husband was white. Morar says her grandparents are very open-minded, yet she knew they didn’t necessarily like the interracial idea either. They did not announce it or protest it in front of her, but she says she could tell. Morar knew that her aunt dated black men as well as men from other races. Morar would overhear comments from her grandfather, such as, “I don’t like him because he’s this or that,” but says she thought he probably would prefer her with a black man. She says that he would probably never admit to saying something like that, but he probably would. She says her grandmother doesn’t care. Her grandmother would say, “If you love, you love whom you love.” Morar feels that as a child she was confused because she knew she was mixed and her mother and grandfather didn’t necessarily like certain mixed couples. She felt baffled by the whole race thing although she never really
questioned it. As she got older, their feelings changed and her feelings changed, and she says it was her fault.

Morar says that people are constantly asking her what her ethnic or racial heritage is. People have guessed her ethnicity to be everything from Fijian to Ethiopian. Most of the time people think she is East Indian. She says that although they can never figure out what she is, everybody wants to know. She says at first it used to bother her but now she finds it rather comical. Now, she actually asks them, “Well ... what do you think I am”? She enjoys hearing what people think—she finds it pretty amusing. She does not have a problem with it any longer.

There are times, Morar says, when she has had to choose one ethnicity or one has been chosen for her. This usually occurs when she is filling out forms and she has to select only one box. She remembers one particular teacher who was racist who told her she was black. Morar agreed with him. She never fought or argued about it; most of the time she was too young to argue.

The effects of Morar’s mixed heritage came to the forefront when she was in the third grade. She was placed in a class where all the students were Mexican. Morar spoke Spanish, and it was a class for those who could speak both English and Spanish. The same teacher with whom she had a prior conflict kicked her out of the class because she considered her black. She kicked Morar out of class in front of the other students, which made the students look at her differently. From that point on, she was treated differently. She says that was very difficult.
Morar has had strangers who do not know her make comments about how she looks. There were several times, she says, that she would be walking home from school or to school and somebody would be in their car and scream out "nigger" to her, and she did not know what it meant at the time, but she would ask her mom and her mom freaked out. After that incident, her mom started driving her to school. While Morar was growing up, there were many major changes. Her mom had mental issues and would have to be in the hospital for long stretches of time. Morar dealt with her mom on her own for a couple of years and eventually her grandparents took care of both her and her mother. Morar was about 10 years old at the time; this was a big turning point for her.

In high school, Morar developed an eating disorder while she was attending a Caucasian high school. She had moved to a new school; her friends were stick-thin and she wanted to fit in.

Morar says that all of the racism she has experienced is what shaped her ideas about racial or ethnic identity. Her family also played a large role in how she views race. They raised her with the idea that color does matter; they did believe in the colorblind concept—lines do not blur together and color does matter. They would also tell Morar that many people are ignorant. They would tell her that she was both, and "if people tell you that you must choose one [ethnicity] you say, don’t have to choose one, you are both." She sees herself as part of two very distinct and special cultures. She identifies with both of them at the same time. She says that although she was raised by her black family, she identifies with both sides. Some people have told her they see her as more Mexican than black, but the majority of people don’t see her that way. She has asked her
grandparents why people feel it's so important for her to want her to choose one ethnicity. On racial forms, she still puts black or “other.” It just depends on what mood she is in.

Morar feels that ethnically, she is not the typical black, nor is she the typical Mexican girl. She thinks that other people in her life have made her feel like she is different. She says she is both and everything else in between. She has a work voice and a social voice, but when she is around her black family or her black friends she says she loosens up a bit. Her slang changes and it’s the same thing that happens when she is around her Mexican friends—her slang changes. She says that she feels lucky to be of mixed race; she wouldn’t change it.

She says that she keeps in touch with her black side by trying to model and by going to step shows in Berkeley, where there are African exhibits. She tries to keep involved within the black culture. She says that she does not feel like she has to because she is black; she does not make it a point to do it. She also tries to get in touch with her Mexican side. She has taken classes to learn Latino history and has gotten involved with a Chicano theatre company. She feels there is no need to be with either one or the other side.

Morar says that having contact with people in her life from both cultures is as important as having a close bond with her black family. She says it was equally important for her to have a bond with her friends and family that took her in even if they were not her Mexican blood family.
Morar feels that her cultural influences and many of her values come from her grandparents. They taught her that basically when people say that they don’t see color it’s bullshit, and she truly believes that. She thinks everything does have to do with race in some way or another, and that people who say it doesn’t matter are lying. She says that she is a black and Latina woman although people probably don’t see it. “They see black before anything and people are ignorant and people are racist “but she says, “keep living your life and let them live theirs.”

Morar is a lesbian. She says her mom and grandparents never really talked about homosexuality, and for that reason she didn’t come out for a long time. She guesses that she was kind of scared of how they would react because no one in her family had ever brought up the issue. Then one day, out of nowhere, she just popped up and announced it. She thinks it took everyone by surprise, but says right now they are very open to it. She didn’t have any value system associated with that; it was something else that she dealt with on her own. When she dates, Morar says, she has her ethnic preferences. She says she didn’t think she did at first. She always thought that she would date someone black, but it has not happened that way. She found herself attracted to Asians, then Latinos, and then, she says, probably to people of mixed race.

Morar says television is one of the other influences that helped her determine how she expresses her cultural or ethnic heritages. That’s one of the main reasons she majored in media and mass media. She says that television portrays both races in a not so positive light—you’re either the victim, or the villain, or the drug addict.
She says that people tell her, “Wow, you’re so articulate” or “You don’t talk like other black people” or “You don’t talk like other Mexicans” and she replies, “OK, like how is, how is a black person, how is a Mexican person supposed to talk”? She says she gets typecast with that aspect, if you’re black or if they find that you’re Mexican they just put you in a general category with everybody else.

Morar wants to keep everything about her ethnic identification. She has issues with her nose—she says it has a little hook. She says she is learning to live with it.

Morar feels that it would be scary to bring a little person into this crazy world—she wouldn’t want them to go through the things that she went through. The important thing about raising children, she says, is not to shelter them. She wouldn’t be afraid to put them out there into the world, and definitely would want them to experience life so that when they get older that they won’t have a problem leaving home and they won’t have a problem being independent and being on their own.

Morar’s message to other interracial people is that color is definitely an issue. She feels that interracial couples who have children need to tell the children about both sides. They need to teach them as much as possible about both of their cultures, what it means to be biracial, and what can happen when they do go out there in the world and somebody says something to them that is hurtful.

2. Mercy Lamb

People assume I’m white. When I tan, people will say, “Oh you just tan a lot.” When I tell people why, they’ll say “Gosh, how do you tan so dark?” Or sometimes it kind of goes along these lines: It’s always about color and then I tell them, “No, I’m Native American,” “You are”? they reply. They say they would never have known. It’s funny because a lot of people, I mean how would you know and I don’t have long black hair and I don’t fit the ideal image of a Native
American and when I tell people they are like, “How much are you”? It always is the question of the whole, you know. “Oh are you a third or a fourth”? Which is funny because not a lot of people ask a Latino “Oh how much Latino are you”? But they’ll always ask an Indian “How much Indian are you”? A lot of it has to do with the measurements of the blood quantum, which the country has evolved to. So when I am asked that question it’s kind of like I almost feel like people aren’t going to believe me. I get a little annoyed, but I think I am so used to it that I just kind of “whatever.” I am to myself who I am. I am strong enough in myself that I know that I can’t, I don’t need to justify it to anybody.

Mercy Lamb is 29 years old. She is married with no children. She was born in Willows, California, in 1977. Her mother is a 54-year-old Native American Indian, *Pomo* and *Wailakii* and *Choctaw*. Mercy’s stepfather, with whom she has grown up with from the age of three or four, is a full-blooded Portuguese born in California. She considers him her father, so he will be referred to as that in this narrative. Both of Mercy’s parents are native to California and have lived here all of their lives. Her mother identifies as full-blooded Native American Indian and her father as Portuguese, from the Fifth Island of the Azores, *Terciera*. Mercy does not know her biological father. He is Caucasian or white of European descent. Her mother has another daughter from a previous marriage who is six years older than Mercy. Her mom was already pregnant with Mercy prior to moving to Willows. She was to be married but broke off the engagement. After Mercy was born, she married her current husband and, as far as Mercy is concerned, he is her father.

Mercy knew her father’s grandparents up until about the age of five or six, and then her grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and died soon afterward. Nine months later, her grandfather passed away. Mercy knew her aunts and uncles and great aunts from her mother’s side, but never met her grandparents.
From the stories that Mercy heard from her mother, her grandparents treated their kids very differently. They would take her aunt to events and take all kinds of trips, almost like family vacations, and leave the two younger siblings with their grandparents. There seemed to be some kind of secrecy behind it. But Mercy always felt it was because this particular aunt looked lighter than the rest of her siblings.

Mercy’s older sister’s biological father is full Native American and has a darker complexion, so she is much darker than Mercy. Every time Mercy and her sister are together and go anywhere other people ask, “That’s your sister”? They smile and laugh but other than the same smile, her sister has dark black hair and dark olive skin, which are much darker than Mercy’s. Mercy says that she never has had any encounters with anyone saying “Oh that’s your mom,” but she says when she’s with her sister, people ask, “You guys are sisters”? She knows that her sister has had a lot of problems with men. They get upset with her and say thing such as, “Oh, you’re Latino, why don’t you speak Spanish”?

Mercy says that the first time she noticed racial differences was when she was in elementary school. She remembers the time her sister was a cheerleader and the whole team was going to go to a cheerleading event in Oroville. Oroville is fairly racist, Mercy says, and she remembers something was going on up there. They were kind of scared and fearful for some of the kids to go up there, especially the Latinos and, of course, her sister. That was the first time Mercy realized racism existed because her mom explained to her that if her sister went to the event she or some of the other kids could get hurt. Mercy says that all she heard her mother say was “Oh my gosh, you’re going to die
because you are dark-skinned.” That was her first realization that something could happen to her, but mom said, “No, no, you’ll be fine.” That’s when Mercy realized “Wow, there’s a difference. Like I could go but she couldn’t”?

Mercy says that although people think of skin color as being different, that has never really been a big issue since her family is so mixed in color. To Mercy, the term “mixed-race” referred to the culture and the personality, not the difference in appearance.

It’s been tough for Mercy because, rather than embrace their Native American history and culture, her sister and her mom push it away. They try to assimilate because it’s easier. Mercy would rather have them embrace it and be happy with who they are, and be able to learn more about their history and their heritage. She says that she never grew up in a house in which she experienced Native American culture through rituals, food, singing, or other cultural practices; they never did any of it. Her Portuguese father embraced his culture. That is why Mercy feels a bit more comfortable asking him about the Portuguese culture more so than she does asking her mother about the Native American culture since she was subjected to it more as a child. Her family is not big on talking about their feelings.

Mercy grew up in Willows, which is a small, predominately white town with not a lot of racial make-up. In high school there were Latinos and Hmong. There were also Laotians. A big group of Laotian families moved into town; they weren’t welcomed and were discriminated against. Mercy says that people in Willows understood why the Laotians were here. They helped this country out, then they were brought here for asylum, although there was a lot of comments like “oh they don’t speak English.” Mercy
saw a lot of that kind of discrimination growing up. As far as she is concerned, she felt a lot of the Laotians were her friends and she felt very comfortable around different ethnic groups and has always had a mixture of friends regardless of their color.

The majority of Mercy’s parent’s friends were family and mostly Portuguese family. They were very social in the past; now they stay at home. Her father is still social but her mother is not. When Mercy was young, they had parties quite often and were very welcoming and hospitable and she has many memories from those gatherings. She remembers many people at her house—big parties each summer and pool parties and having kids over, however as time went on, her mother got sick. When that happened, the family, and her mother, became isolated.

Mercy’s parents are still married but are separated. Her mother talks about her first marriage and how the man she was supposed to marry was her true love. He was full Native American and that’s the kind of relationship she never feels she’ll experience again. Mercy says her mother never seemed to be concerned about race; she was more concerned with emotions. Her mother always talked about how she was never racist and how she embraces different ethnicities and cultures. Mercy says her mother was the person who shaped her ideas about racial and ethnic acceptance. She says her mother is also very tolerant and has been a role model for her in many ways because she has had a hard life and despite all that she worked so hard to support her in everything that she has ever done. Mercy feels education is key—she thinks there is a great need for education. Mercy thinks it is interesting that her lighter-skinned aunt had more problems with race than her mother did.
Mercy has a roll number with the Round Valley Tribe in Coldoro. She receives some medical benefits through her Indian health because since she currently does not have any herself. While attending undergraduate school, she received some grants, however, they have been few and far between. Some of the scholarships and grants disappeared through the Bureau of Indian Affairs since it is going through some lawsuits. Her funding was taken away from her in her last year of study.

Mercy feels that unless people are of an ethnic culture they feel they can say things to her such as, “You know I thought you might be.” But anyone who is white would never guess—they are always surprised, “You—Native American”? But other people, for example, Latinos or Asians say “Oh, OK. That makes sense.”

Mercy says that she doesn’t see how ethnicity could change because she is accepting of all cultures. She thinks that the blending of cultures is great. She feels that all cultures are so rich and everyone can get so much out of it, as long as one embraces them. She wants to embrace her own Indian culture.

A major change in Mercy’s life occurred when she left her home to go to school. She went to school in the Bay Area and was the first one in her family to get an education and get a degree. Her mother didn’t finish high school, so graduating from high school was a major accomplishment. Her sister graduated from high school through a continuation school; she had a lot of problems with school and she just didn’t like it. It was a big deal for Mercy to actually go through the high school ceremony and then she did her undergraduate and just completed her masters degree. She says that, aside from getting married, those were probably the biggest events in her life.
Mercy’s husband is Caucasian and Potowatomi. She finds it funny because he is the only one in her life to actually say he is an Indian. No one else really identifies, or they say “Oh I’m so tiny bit of Indian that it doesn’t really matter.” But her mother-in-law is pretty—she embraces her Potowatomi heritage.

Mercy finds it difficult to identify racially. She sees herself as Native American but at the same time when she is not around her family for awhile, she tends to lose some of it, especially since so many people either don’t identify her as Native American. Because she is light-skinned, sometimes she feels like “well I’m not as much of color as they, so-and-so I see on the street and that is truly just because of the way I look.” On the other hand, she says, she finds it funny because when she is around her family she feels connected, but then when she is not around them as much, she feels like an outsider.

Mercy wants to identify with all of her ethnic and racial heritages. On racial categorization forms, she most often marks Native American, Indian. When she was in high school she always marked herself as white, mainly because she did not embrace her culture so she felt she must be white. If people ask her in a social situation she will respond always as, “I’m Native American or Indian.”

Mercy says she changes the way she talks or behaves depending in the context she is in. She feels that if she is in a setting where she needs to speak in a more educated manner, she will. The setting determines her manner of behavior—not because of the culture, because of relaxation. If she is with friends, she is relaxed and then she will talk in any way she wants. But if she is in a workplace or place of business, she’ll definitely be more cautious in her manner and speech.
Another influence that has determined how Mercy expresses her cultural and ethnic heritage was the death of one of her aunts. She knew it was the coming together of everyone and seeing “ah ha, this is really where she is from.” She met people she had never met in her life and saw a vulnerability in her mother that she has not seen since. Her mother, who always does everything on her own and very independent, was vulnerable after all. It was the first time she had seen it.

Mercy has a friend that she talks to who completed her thesis on multiethnic studies of different mixes of Asians. Mercy has never felt pushed away. She never felt like anybody didn’t accept her because of her color; it was more of seeing other family members going through it. Mercy says she is so light-skinned that it probably made it easier for her to be able to observe things from a distance.

Mercy says she would like to learn more about her ethnicity. She would definitely like to let go of the stigma that surrounds Native Americans. She sees attitudes toward Native Americans starting to turn around to one of more acceptance, but feels more needs to be done. She says there is a need for more Native Americans to embrace their own culture, especially urban Indians because they are not surrounded by a tribal reservation and are not around the culture and family and people aren’t kept together. She says more people need to learn to dispel myths.

Mercy would tell other interracial people to stay connected—to continue to stay connected to continue to keep the culture living through practices and customs and to embrace it. She would tell others that she knows what it is like to be raised away from it and how being raised that way could be detrimental because so much can be lost. She
thinks that her culture is very rich and can be very strong—strong in a way that it could really be helpful to many people who have lost their culture because they are to trying to be so independent and trying to be like “I can’t lean on anybody.” Some of the Native American cultures that she has studied and learned about thus far focus on your environment and looking at the people around you to make things better. This is done not because better would just benefit you, but because that’s just how things need to be done. If we don’t study our culture, Mercy says, we lose it.

No one has really talked to Mercy in-depth about her culture. She says it’s always been, “Oh well you’re Native American,” but you don’t have dreamcatchers in your home; you don’t wear feather earrings.” She says that if you were to walk into her house you wouldn’t be able to tell she was Native American, although that doesn’t erase the fact that she is. She explained that many people talk about “it’s color it’s color” but it’s also culture and what you get from it.

Mercy says she didn’t miss her Native American culture as much while growing up because she grew up with Portuguese influence in her family. She would hear conversations going in Portuguese and she’d go to the Portuguese festas each year so there was still a strong attachment to a culture. During the interview, Mercy realized why she might have checked “white” on her form—because that was the kind of culture she lived in. She thinks if I had asked these questions of her when she was 10, she would be not know what I was talking about. There was one incident she remembers in which she realized color did have an impact, and that she was not their color nor as dark as her mother or her sister but she did have culture and experience. Mercy’s life philosophy:
She is here for a certain amount of time and only a certain amount of time, so she needs to do the best with her life in the amount of time she is given.

3. *Jenny Jones*

There are always going to be stereotypes and in order to crush those stereotypes we need to learn. When people question you, you start questioning yourself and you’re like “hmm” and I know that’s one of my biggest things. I lean one way and then I lean another. I can never be set. I can never set things in stone. Your community also shapes you as well to become the person you become and the way you identify yourself.

Jenny Jones is single and 23. She was born in Redding, California, in 1983. Her nuclear family includes her mother, stepfather, and two siblings. Jenny is not familiar with her biological father. Her siblings are approximately ten and three in age. She has not met her siblings from her biological father, however she has heard they are the same ages as her two other siblings.

Jenny’s mother grew up in Redding and is Mexican-American. She was a single parent with Jenny for about ten years. She is about 44 years old and works as a nutrition assistant for the WIC Program.

Jenny’s biological father is Japanese and African-American. He’s in his early forties. He lives in Australia and used to play and coach professional basketball. Now, he is retired. He identifies as Australian.

Jenny’s mother and father attended Shasta College together. Her father transferred to Bakersfield State while they were still dating and then her mother got pregnant with Jenny. Jenny has not spoken to her father in 15 or 16 years. The last time Jenny’s mother heard from him was in 2005.
Jenny does not know her grandparents on her biological father's side. Her mother's parents, who are both from Mexico, are the ones who raised her. They came to the United States sometime between 1950 and 1960. Her grandmother got pregnant with Jenny's mother when she was in her late 40s. Her mother is the youngest and is the only one of their children who was born in the United States. No one in their home spoke English. Jenny's grandfather worked in the mill and in the fields; her grandmother worked in the fields as well.

Jenny's grandparents spoiled both she and her mother. Since her mom was the youngest and the only one born in America, they wanted to Americanize her so they gave her everything they could. They did the same for Jenny; they spoiled both of them with love and financial help.

Jenny and her mother have a very close relationship, especially since she grew up in a single-parent home. Jenny says that she and her mother are best friends.

Jenny noticed a racial difference between herself and her family at age five, probably about the time she started school. She went to school and she was the only person of color there. Redding has a predominantly white population; there aren't very many minorities. She noticed everyone else was white; she looked at herself and noticed her hair was different. Then, she would look at her grandparents and her mother and she noticed that she looked a lot darker, like her father. She noticed many things but mainly the color of her skin.

Jenny has African-American hair. When Jenny talks about being “different” when she was young, she is referring to her hair. Now she relaxes her hair chemically, but
when she was young it was very kinky. She was much darker than everybody else—that was why she was considered different. She was a lot darker than the rest of her family, so going to school, being around the white children, she saw herself as very different plus she was much taller than everybody else. Jenny does not like using the word “different.” She does not see anyone as being different, especially living in Sacramento, because one can see so much diversity. She does not use the word “different” at all. Different is not part of her vocabulary.

Many people look at Jenny and her mother with confusion because her brothers are a lot younger. Many people think that they’re Jenny’s children. Jenny’s 3-year-old brother has very light skin, blue eyes and straight black hair. The 11-year-old brother looks a little bit more like her, but since they have different fathers she thinks people look at them and wonder, “How does this work”?

Jenny says she learned about racial and ethnic issues while in college. Her mother always told her what ethnicities she belonged to, but always she stressed more Mexican traditions.

Some of Jenny’s friends and family have encouraged her to change her physical appearance. She thinks about it now, but thought about it even more when she was younger. She says that it was difficult to maintain her hair because her mother did not know how to do Afro-American hair, especially how to apply a chemical relaxer. The encouragement she gets from others has kept her to maintain her hair straight. Also, comments such as, “Oh, that looks good” encourage her to want to look a certain way.
Jenny lived in Redding until she was 18 years old; she then moved to Sacramento to attend California State University, Sacramento. She was probably one of only three African-Americans in her high school and only one of six Mexicans. She tended to have a more close-knit relationship with people who she thought were minorities. Now, while living in Sacramento, she says she is very integrated; it doesn’t matter what ethnic background someone is from. You just tend to have relationships with someone who is diverse whether it be work-related or school-related.

When Jenny was about 5 years old, she and her mother lived in Sacramento. Many of the relationships her mother had were with African-Americans. But when they moved back to Redding, she was more involved with the Mexican population, partly because of her grandparents and at that time she was with a person of Mexican descent. Jenny feels her mother tried to give her the best of both worlds, but she always wanted her to lean more towards the Mexican side. It was difficult for Jenny then because she looked more African-American. When they went places, the differences were very noticeable between her mother and herself. Jenny says, “it was noticeable so it seemed like some people would think they’d know she’s not Mexican, she’s black.”

Jenny has people asking her all the time about her racial heritage or ethnic identity. This questioning began when she was very young. She thinks that at first people just automatically assume she is African-American and white and when she speaks Spanish, they think maybe she is Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Columbian. Now, she feels like she is more accustomed to the questions and takes an “oh whatever” approach to it, but when she was younger it used to upset her. She asks questions back such as, “Why do
you care? What does it matter”? She says that there was always a follow-up question that irritated her because she felt she had to give people explanations. They would ask, “oh what ethnic background are you”? and then they ask, “Oh how did that happen”? Jenny also says people ask, “Oh where do you get your hair done at”? She does not want to talk about her hair. Jenny feels that’s the thing that gives it away to people that she is mixed.

Now that Jenny’s mother has explained to her more about the relationship between her and her father, she says, “I raised you so this is how it needs to be” or “you need to go to Chicano Latino graduation because that’s what you are.” If anybody has told Jenny that she has to choose an ethnicity, Jenny says, it is her mother. Jenny thinks people knew she was a mixed child so they would say, “oh she’s so cute.” When she was younger, many people also said things underneath their breath, like “how does that happen? People should stick to their own kind.” She thinks that happened more in Redding. Jenny thinks her classes have shaped her ideas about her ethnic identity. School has taught her a lot and she thinks that not only her classes but also her experience as a college student has really shaped her to be the person she is now.

Jenny feels that what she knows right now is just a step in her life, and that later on she will be looking at things from another perspective. When her mother started dating her stepfather, it was a really big change for her. It had always been just her mother and herself. Although her stepfather was always inclusive of her, she excluded him.

Jenny says that every once in awhile someone will tell her that she is behaving more black than usual or acting more Mexican. She does not feel that she does it on purpose; she thinks it is qualities of who she is ethnically. Jenny notices that there are
times when she recognizes when she is with African-Americans she behaves more “black” than she usually does, but says it’s probably because she is more comfortable or maybe because if she speaks that way to a person of Hispanic background they might not understand it or get what she is trying to say.

She relates more to her Mexican side because she was raised by her Mexican family. She never had a close relationship with her father so she has no idea about the black side of her life. She is not familiar with it at all and she resents saying it. She speaks Spanish and her beliefs are of the Mexican culture because that was how she was brought up.

Jenny says she identifies with all parts of her ethnic heritage, especially even her Japanese side, even though it’s just a small portion of her ethnic background. Her grandparents were from Japan; she wishes she could identify more with them, especially when she communicates with others and realizes she does understand some of the things that they talk about.

Jenny usually marks “other” on her racial categorization forms. She tells people she is Japanese, black and Mexican. She says what has been influential in her life are all the stereotypes that there are. Also, many of the statistics that minorities are a part of have influenced her because people are always telling minorities that they can’t advance. They underestimate minorities in regard to their statistics in college. She says what has influenced her as a minority in general are the stereotypes and statistics that are held right now because they have influenced her to continue into higher education and not be part of that statistic.
Jenny likes her appearance now; before, she did not. At her high school, the guys would go out for the girls who were blonde and blue-eyed. But while attending CSUS, Jenny thinks of herself as beautiful. She says guys approach her since she moved here; she is like a magnet. Now, she really likes her traits and the way she looks.

Jenny’s grandparents are her role models. Her grandfather went to school until sixth grade and he always told her, “make sure you are going to school *mija*, make sure you are going to school.” Jenny’s grandfather is the one she remembers the most because she was very close to him. Since she didn’t have a father; he was the father figure in her life. He passed away from cancer during her first semester in college. During his last days he told her, “Make sure you go to school, *siga adelante*, keep going.” Jenny says he was her role model because he worked, he came here from Mexico with nothing and he brought her entire family here. She sees how successful her cousins are.

Jenny would tell other interracial people that it is important to know about ethnicity or race; it’s important to know who you are and where you come from. She also would tell them about the experiences she had while so they would not make the same mistakes. She would not do what her mother did; it was a mistake on her part and her grandparents to push her one way versus the other. They should have waited until she was older and told her their beliefs and then let her choose her path. She definitely would want to reach out more and be able to learn more about her other ethnic make-ups.

Jenny’s message to other mixed-race people would be not only to learn about yourself but to learn about others as well, because we are becoming more integrated and diverse. As a nation we are going to have to be working hand-in-hand with people who
are of different ethnic make-ups or who have different beliefs and customs and if we
don’t know about their cultures, there are going to be barriers.

4. **Ella Bee**

I check both on racial categorization items on forms! Pretty much the same way—
black and Chinese, black and Chinese, and at one point I came up with
Blackanese, and I say that, and people are all. ... In social situations I represent
myself as Blackanese because I don’t think I should have to deny either of my
heritages.

Ella Bee was born in 1985 in Fremont, California, to a 16-year-old Chinese girl
whose boyfriend was black. Ella’s mother was pregnant, unwed, and wanted to keep the
baby. Her parents were threatening to throw her out of the house. Her boyfriend wanted
her to keep the baby also, but she realized that she would not be able to provide a very
good life for Ella as a 16-year-old without family support, and so she put Ella up for
adoption. Ella’s adoptive parents wanted a baby, but couldn’t conceive one of their own
due to so many miscarriages. All along, Ella knew she was adopted; being adopted was
never a huge deal. She is an only child.

Ella’s father drives a street cleaner and her mother is an assistant school
superintendent; before that she was a principal and before that a teacher. Her mom has a
masters degree and a teaching credential. Her father went to the community college for
awhile.

Ella says her mother is a good role model. She is kind and understanding, funny,
and straight-laced. She has a good sense of style. She’s got her head on her shoulders and
she takes care of business. Her father is stoic. He is shy and quiet and sometimes he is
cranky. He loves small animals. They have a chinchilla and he loves her. He picks her up in his arms and he kisses her.

Ella’s mother is black and her father is Chinese, and that is how they perceive themselves. They met at a party through mutual friends. Her mom’s mom was open and so was his family. Their respective families were happy, but her dad’s family was glad that their shy son had met a girl. Her grandparents treated them like family; there never were any issues. Ella’s parents don’t really care about biracial couples; it’s not an issue to them.

Ella says she has a pretty close relationship with her mom. She is not as close to her father because he does not relate to her and because of the customs of the Asian culture. One way he shows love is by feeding people. Ella is a vegetarian. He worries that Ella will starve to death so he shows his love by bringing Ella food and asking how she has been eating. He also wants to know how she is doing in school.

Ella did not notice a racial difference between herself and her adoptive parents. People say Ella looks a lot like her mom. She has never met her biological parents. Is she curious? She’s not sure. Her biological mother would be 36 now. Ella worries that her biological mother is married now and she hasn’t told her husband about her. If Ella popped into her life and if she hadn’t said anything to anyone, that could cause some stress. Ella is really not sure what she would say to her other than, “Thank you for being Catholic and against abortion.” She says she would not know what to say to her father other than, “Do you have anything else in your family besides diabetes that I should know about”? Ella wonders about her genetics.
When she is with her mom, she says it is obvious that they look like they are related. People look at her funny when she is with her father because Ella is darker than he is. Her mother is a pretty, light-skinned African-American and her father is a big Chinese man.

Ella’s mother received excellent grades in college. People would suggest to her that she drop out and re-enroll under affirmative action. However, if she could not get in because of her merit, it would have reflected upon her and upon other African-Americans. Her mother said, “Well if you can’t hack it, then why are you here”? Her father is a second-generation Chinese. His mother came to the United States when she was 14, when the Japanese invaded China. Neither of her parents made a huge deal out of race, and, therefore, neither does Ella.

Ella says that the weirdest thing for her is when people say, “Oh, I love your hair, it’s so curly and so pretty, have you ever thought about straightening it”? She responds, “Why”? because, she says, if she wanted to straighten it she could flat iron it. She says she doesn’t need to chemically straighten her hair. Sometimes she flat irons her hair but because she has a lot of hair she says, “it is a pain in the butt.”

One of Ella’s earliest memories as a child was hearing her parents arguing and her father expressing regret over adopting Ella. Her mother said, “Well, you should have said that about five years ago.” Ella did bring this up last year, but her father doesn’t remember saying it. Her mom remembers him saying it.

Ella’s father does not talk about his own racial or ethnic heritage or identity, but her mother does. Her great-grandmother was part Native American, part black, and part
Irish. That may be why her mother is very light-skinned, and her brother and sister are
dark. Her grandmother was very big on speaking correctly. She would not allow black vernacular English to be spoken in her home.

Ella grew up in the Sunset District of San Francisco, which is mainly an Asian community. At that time, they were trying to change the racial distribution in neighborhoods by sending people to different schools. Miss Buchanan was a white teacher in Ella’s school. Ella was having a difficult time with one of her classmates, and Miss Buchanan assumed that the reason why Ella was not getting along with the girl was because she wasn’t “Asian enough.” Although she had gotten that feeling from people before, this was the first time that Ella was told she was “not Asian enough.” She never really goes out of her way to be with people of a particular ethnic group. Most of her friends are Caucasian, but not by plan. She has friends of many ethnicities. She does not go out of her way to be friends with any particular group of people—she just wants to be friends with who she desires to be friends with.

When Ella was in the fourth grade, somebody told her she had nappy hair—she had no idea what that meant.

Ella feels her mother shaped her ethnicity. She always impressed upon her that she was both black and Chinese; she stressed that no one should ever make her pick one. From the first time she can remember when taking a standardized test, she would check both boxes, unless there was on “other” box, and sometimes even when there was an “other” box she would fill in both, because to her race is not “other”—her race is Blackanese. People often ask Ella about her ethnic and racial heritage and identity. She
finds it occurs in various situations. For example, at school people just come up ask, “Oh, well, what are you”? Her response is, “I’m ... a person”? They then re-evaluate the question and ask, “Oh. What ethnicity are you”? Ella is racially ambiguous-looking. Some people think she is Hispanic, Samoan, or Hawaiian—they are genuinely curious. She doesn’t detect any duplicity in their questioning. She really does not think that it matters to them.

Ella prefers when people ask, “What ethnicity are you”? or “What race are you”? Her grandparents shaped her ideas about her ethnic identity. Her grandmother would tell her what it was like for her when she was going to school and they were desegregating. Schools were segregated when she was going to school, and she’d tell Ella what life was like then.

Going to Australia was a huge experience for Ella. Australian concepts about race are interesting. They refer to an aboriginal person as colored. The half-caste children are half-Australian and half-aboriginal. The government takes the kids away from their parents. Ella never really looked into race outside of the American context before going to Australia. It was a life-changing experience.

When people ask Ella about her ethnicity, she says, “I’m black and I’m Chinese.” She would love to be able to identify more with being Chinese. Her grandmother does not to talk about what it was like for her, and her father is reserved and does not talk about what it’s like being Chinese. She feels like she hasn’t entirely gotten the grasp of what it means to be Chinese. She feels the same way about being black. That side of her family is not the typical blackness that is portrayed in media culture.
Ella is interested in immigration because of her grandma on her dad’s side. She is interested in civil rights, suffrage, and abolition. Most of the cultural issues that are important to her have no bearing on her ethnic identity. She says that she is a very liberal person and she agrees with her mother on how she thinks about affirmative action which is counter to what many would expect from someone of her cultural background. She is a part of Lambda Sigma Kappa sorority, which makes her a queer rights activist. She feels very strongly about equality for everybody. She feels that people are people and that her feelings may have to do with her ethnic upbringing. She says she is a person and gay people are people, black people are people, and she does not really see why there is a need for all of the categorization because that is not what is really important in the social scheme of things. Ella thinks that people get too hung up on labels so much that they forget they are people too.

Ella’s father thinks that she thinks and votes the way she does because that’s how her mom thinks. Ella says she does it because that is how she feels, about equality and trying to help people. She says that instead of giving people things, they should be giving them the tools to make a better life for themselves; one has to give people a chance. Ella says, “It’s like the adage, if you teach a man to fish, then you’re feeding him for a lifetime whereas if you give him a fish you’re only feeding him for a day.” She volunteers for WEAVE and at the San Francisco Zoo.

Ella would tell other interracials that your ethnicity is not necessarily important; a really good support system is. It can be rewarding and interesting but she doesn’t really think it should be the only thing that defines you. Ella says there’s a girl in her fraternity
who is half-black and half-white. She decided that she was black; she felt she had to choose. Ella can’t really say that she would choose. Ella wants to tell her she does not have to choose. Ella would tell other biracial people who are having problems not to let other people make you define yourself and not to let other people define you.

5. Hilary Mahler

I like to say I’m Chinese and black. I don’t like to say that I’m half Chinese and half black. Because I’m not half of anything. So it just didn’t make sense to say that even though that’s how ... I did say it before when I was younger. People would ask, “What are you”? and they would expect me to say “Half this, half that.” So ... I like to say I’m both. I’ve always thought of myself as both. A lot of my friends through elementary school and high just weren’t black, so there ... there just wasn’t a population there so I think I did identify more with ... and although I ... before high school it was mostly Caucasian ... there just weren’t that many Asian or Black students for me to hang out with or you know, so it didn’t seem ... it didn’t seem weird to me cause I just never saw that there was the disparity there.

Hilary was born in Sacramento, California, in 1984. She is 22 years old and has an older brother. Her mother is Chinese and her father is black. They are both architects. Her father attended graduate school and obtained his masters degree in architecture. Her mother has a bachelor’s degree in architecture. They met while attending the University of California, Berkeley. Her father likes to joke about how when he met her mom she had a boyfriend. But they were friends before they started dating, and their relationship grew from a friendship. They own their own architectural firm.

Hilary has a good relationship with her parents. She never really thought that there was a racial difference between her parents and herself. She says that they really have been very good about race issues because she has never felt like she was different from them. She is not sure how they did that, but it was never a question for her why she
looks the way she does—she sees her parents and she looks like both of them, so it seemed to make sense to her.

Hilary thinks she gets more double-takes from people if she is with her mother, because there is a more obvious difference in their skin tones. She feels her parents shielded both her and her brother. When people looked at them funny, they just turned them away from that so they wouldn't see it.

Hilary’s parents never told her about racial/ethnic issues. It was never really a discussion. She thinks they didn’t want her to think that there was anything to worry about. They let her feel “this is just the way you are and it’s normal, so there shouldn’t be anything to talk about in-depth.”

Hilary says it was fun growing up in her family; they always like to have a good time. Her parents travel a lot; she has seen much of the United States as a result of family vacations. She has traveled abroad a couple of times and has visited Paris and Thailand.

She has lived in the same house her entire life. It is located in Curtis Park, which is considered an uppity neighborhood. Most of the families who reside there are older Caucasian couples. When Hilary was growing up, there were not very many children that were her age.

Hilary’s parents never said people were different; she does not remember having that conversation with them. Her parents did not say anything about interracial couples nor about her ethnicity and mixed heritage. The subject was not brought up until recently. In the last six years, Hilary had questions about what her grandmother said when her mother and father asked for her permission to marry. Both grandmothers and both
grandparents said that as long as they were happy, that’s what mattered. Hilary’s
grandparents treat her and her parents very well. She has never observed any
discrimination.

People would ask Hilary about her racial/ethnic heritage when she worked at the
Old Spaghetti Factory. She would get many people who would look at her and would
always say, “What … what...are you”? She says that was just something she got used to.
She says it was never like they would look at her and say something like “What’s wrong
with you”? Instead, it was always just an interest. She got quite a few of these types of
questions but says they were never asked in a bad way.

Hilary has been told by people that she does not act the way she should. She has
several male friends who are black and if they had friends who thought she was cute they
would say, “Well, why don’t you try and dating him”? Many of the young men that
Hilary has dated have been Asian. She says she does not know why but it is just a
preference.

If Hilary does not find a person attractive, she won’t go talk to them or date them.
She has been told she acts white, but she laughs at that. She would say, “Just because I
speak English? I’m not going to act ghetto because I’m not from the ghetto, so that’s not
acting white, that’s just being who I am.”

There was a time when she was in school when her mixed heritage mattered—in
elementary and middle school with the standardized tests. She always had to ask her
teacher “Which box should I mark”? since it said only mark one. One teacher did tell her,
“Well, mark black, because that’s what you look like.” And it didn’t seem wrong to her at
the time, but she went along because she was very young. She marked it not thinking that it would really matter. She told her mother later on, and she was pretty upset about that. She thought that was kind of interesting; it never really occurred to her that it would be an issue.

Hilary finds that strangers will comment about how she looks but the comments are usually positive. She thinks she does not hear it if they’re saying something negative. People tell her she looks different than most people they’ve seen. They like to use words like “exotic,” but she does not think she looks exotic.

Hilary says that her parents definitely helped shape her ideas about racial and ethnic identity. They never really stated anything; she feels they did a good job in with her and her brother. What they looked like was fine. It wasn’t bad, it wasn’t different, they just looked this way because they had to look like both of their parents, which would make sense, so it was never a big issue. Her parents were really good about making their children feel comfortable in their own skin.

The most common question Hilary gets asked is “What are you”? People ask her if her hair is naturally curly (she just got her hair straightened not that long ago). She tells them “yes” and they are amazed. It didn’t seem very amazing to her. When she is asked these questions, she just answers them.

She does feel like she identifies more with her Asian background. It seemed harder for her to find friends that were black in the classes she took or in the places she was going. She was part of the HISP Program at McClatchy High School. Hilary thinks
there might have been three or four other black students in that entire program for her grade.

Hilary says that when filling out questions of racial identity on forms, she would mark both if it didn’t say choose one ethnicity. Sometimes, she says, she would also mark that she had Native American blood. Other times, if she felt like it, she’d even have a little bit of Irish, so sometimes she says would get a little bit crazy with it, just because they let her, so she would mark everything that she was. Now, she selects African-American and Asian American because she has identified over the years as both.

She has noticed that there are times she changes the way she talks or acts depending on the situation she is in. For example, when she was playing basketball for the Asian League in Sacramento, the other players would joke with her, saying “Uh oh, she’s going black” because she was just upset and didn’t know really how to handle the frustration, so she swore a lot; she wasn’t speaking, just using a lot of slang. It was funny. One of her friends likes to come up to her and say “What’s up, dog”? and she answers, “What’s up”? Hilary says her friend does that because she thinks she’ll connect to her more. In some ways, Hilary finds it amusing, because she’s not black, she’s Asian. But to her other Asian friends she doesn’t say that. Hilary finds it more amusing than anything else.

At Sacramento City College, one of her black male friends told her there’s always an area on campus where a lot of the black students hang out. Sometimes, Hilary would go over to that area to say hi to some of her friends. He told her, “You shouldn’t come
over here.” She asked him why, and he said, “I don’t want you to get sucked into the
black hole.”

He told her to make sure that she didn’t become like a lot of the other students
that were there, who were not going anywhere with school. They go, but they don’t pay
attention; they’re not really trying to do anything so they’re just hanging out a lot. And he
knew that he didn’t want Hilary to be part of that group even though he was. She thinks it
probably would have been harder if she was a guy because it just doesn’t seem cool to go
to class and to want to go to college at that time. That was one thing that she says she
really remembers and was really interesting for her to hear that from someone.

Hilary knows that being of mixed race makes it harder for her to be accepted into
places. She also knows that people will look at her differently, but she tries not to focus
on it. When she was applying for college, her brother told her “Oh, just put down that
you’re black, because a lot of the schools are trying to make sure that their races are more
even.” Then he told her “Don’t put Asian because there’s a lot of Asians at the UCs right
now and that might ruin your chances of getting in.” Sometimes, she says, you can use
biraciality to your advantage. You can choose which one you want to put down because
of what people want, or need, from that.

Hilary thinks she defines herself as being more American than anything else. She
thinks she is more willing to accept people as they are because she has always had people
accept her as she is. She does not think one parent or the other has been more influential
culturally. She thinks that it has been pretty even.
Hilary says that if she had the chance she would tell other interracial people to just to accept all of it. She would tell them not to be shy, or to be scared, or worry about what people think. She knows that she does, but when you don’t have to worry about that, it makes everything so much easier. Just to be proud of who you are. Her message to them would be “you’re the way you’re supposed to be.

Who Am I?

If we examine the literature from the early 1900’s, specifically books written by Stonequist, Park and others, we find the idea that being biracial meant being marginalized. However, if we look at some of the present-day literature written by Thornton and Williams, we are offered different avenues for individuals to identify with several groups with positive results. According to Thornton, “universal human-ness” was developed by multi-ethnics not out of invalidating or erasing cultural differences, but instead “by preserving and applying them to enable them to respond to their ever-changing social environments and to reconfigure their ever-transforming identities” (Williams, p. 170).

Universal human-ness is not innate; it is acquired through a process that is as individual as the person who has developed it. Several of the respondents in this study felt their racial identities went through many changes during their childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Parents and family, the communities they lived in, the schools they attended and the friends they maintained influenced their ideas of racial identity despite their phenotypes, socioeconomic backgrounds, and levels of education. An analysis of the narratives showed that, as a group, respondents felt that racial
commonality, comfort, experiences, interactions, labels given to them by others and media influence also played roles in racial labeling.

This study uses ethnic and social race categories in its examination of why and how biracial persons learn to self-identify. Social race categories are based on physiognomy (judging what one looks like based on physical aspects) (Wardle, 1992) rather than genetic traits (inherited characteristics). These categories are too narrow; because they are based on physical appearance, they exclude, rather than include, people of mixed race.

Racial categories on official forms try to fit mixed-race persons into categories too narrow for their racial and ethnic identities. The United States Census is an excellent example of one of these official forms. Table 4-1 lists the categories preferred by participants in this study in the left column. In the right column is a list of categories on the United States Census forms from which they are made to choose:

**Table 4-1 List of categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH STUDY</th>
<th>UNITED STATES CENSUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity &amp; Social Race:</td>
<td>Race &amp; Ethnicity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European-American</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Black or Negro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino-American</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native-American</td>
<td>Indian (American)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biethnic/Biracial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 4-1, study participants presented a much more expanded list from which to choose. During the oral interviews, participants were asked how they respond to questions regarding ethnic and racial categories on official forms, for example, the U.S. Census and voter registration forms. Table 4-2 shows how participants have identified on official forms in the past:

**Table 4-2 How Participants Identify Themselves on Official Forms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Number (n)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskimo/Native American</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Although all twelve participants were asked to choose only one identity, four participants chose more than one.*

Next, participants were asked how they would describe themselves racially or ethnically if they had to choose an identity. Each had their own individual way of describing their racial and ethnic identity. Table 4-3 shows how participants in this study responded to this question.
In Table 4-2, participants were limited to choosing only one racial/ethnic identity. Since the participants are all of mixed-race, this means that they have to choose the identity of one parent over the other in order to fill out the form. In Table 4-3, participants were able to choose how to identify themselves. As shown, nine out of the 12 participants chose more than one racial category—a more accurate reflection of their mixed-race identity. The disparity between these two lists shows that there is a need for more racial identification categories on official forms so that mixed-race persons can be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian/Portuguese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese/Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/African American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Japanese American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican/Black</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese/Chinese American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackinese (Black and Chinese)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackican (Black and Mexican)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
counted more accurately. Being forced to choose a single racial/ethnic identity causes biracial persons to struggle in their search for self-identification. If they do not see themselves included not listed on official forms, it sends a message to them that they are not important. Overall, 91.6% of the participants said chose family as the strongest influence in the development of their racial self-identification. The category of family included the mother, father, grandparents and siblings. However, a closer examination of the responses shows that, in 66% of the cases, the mothers of the individuals were the ones who actually influenced the identity development of these young women.

Discussion and Analysis

Economics also plays a large part in racial self-identification. Used as an umbrella term, economics takes into account the education, marital status, and earning power of the parents, which influences the social situations the participants were raised in. The economic status of the parents influenced the neighborhoods the participants grew up in, the schools they attended, and their future educational opportunities.

New Census Overview

A 2001 and 2005 special report by the U.S. Census Bureau titled *We the People of More Than Once Race in the United States* and *The Two or More Races Population* focuses on the differences between figures reported for the total population and those reported for persons of two or more races. In order to understand the percentages reported, it is important to know the baseline for the population:

- 281,421,906 Total U.S. population (all races) (100%)
- 274,595,678 Total U.S. population claiming to be of one race (97.6%)
6,826,228 Total U.S. population claiming to be of two or more races (2.4%)

**Marital status:** Approximately 27% of the total population had never been married; slightly more than 37% of the population of people of two or more races had never been married.

**Two-parent vs. single parent:** 52.5% of the total population had two-parent households and 11.8% were single-family dwellings. 46.6% of households with people of two or more races were two-parent; 16.3% were single-parent households.

**Education:** Households representing the total population reported 24.4% had a bachelor’s degree or higher; 19.6% had less than a high school diploma. Households consisting of people of two or more races reported 19.6% had a bachelor’s degree or above; 26.7% had less than a high school diploma.

**Economic status:** The total median family income for all households was $50,046; the total median family income for households of persons reported as two or more races was $39,432. In the category of median earnings by sex, the median for all male workers was $37,057; the median for males of two or more races was $27,194. The median for all female workers was $31,035; the median for females of two or more races was $25,399.

**Statistics reported by participants in this study:** Of the 12 participants, seven came from single-parent (mother) families and five from two-parent households. In addition, 10 parents had graduated from high school, four had some college, and three had a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Consider the disparities shown by the numbers reported in the 2000 Census:
$10,614—Difference between median earnings for all households vs. median income of persons reporting two or more races.

$9,863—Difference between median earnings by all male workers vs. male workers reporting two or more races.

$5,636—Difference between median earnings for all female workers and female workers reporting two or more races.

$11,658—Difference between median earnings for males and females reporting two or more races.

A comparison of the transcripts of the oral interviews the researcher conducted with participants of this study shows that those who were raised in a single-parent home experienced more racism than those raised in a two-parent household. The presence or absence of racism influences how biracials self-identify; it helps to determine their comfort level and concept of self. The presence or absence of racism in these participant’s lives is in large part due to the economic status and earning power of the single parent (in all cases in this study, the parent was a mother of a minority ethnic background). Economics plays a crucial role in the development of ethnic self-identification.

The Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

Ethnic identity is related to self-concept. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992) is one of the few studies that allows researchers to measure a person’s sense of belonging. The scales that result from this study provide a measure of ethnic and racial self-identity and self-concept.
Questions on the MEIM regarding ethnic and racial self-identity and self-concept were broken down into four categories: behavior, belonging, security and other. Below is a breakdown of these categories and their corresponding items.

**Ethnic Behaviors and Practices (Items 2 and 16).** Questions in this area focused on two parts of ethnic practices which are shared with most groups including social activities with members of one’s group and participation in cultural traditions (Phinney, 1992, p. 159 and Cruz-Janzen, 1997, p. 111–112).

**Affirmation and Belonging (Items 6, 11, 14, 18 and 20).** This area concentrated on the feeling of belonging to an ethnic group and the attitudes toward that group. Responses in this area also related toward pride or positive feelings toward one’s group.

**Ethnic Identity Achievement (Items 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12 and 13).** “Identity achievement is the secure sense that is the optimal outcome of the identity formation process; an unsuccessful resolution of identity issues results in identity diffusion, indicated by a lack of clarity about oneself and one’s place in society. Similarly, the process of ethnic identity formation appears to involve an exploration of the meaning of one’s ethnicity (example: history and traditions) that leads to a secure sense of oneself as a member of a minority group” (Phinney, 1992, p. 160 and Cruz-Janzen, 1997, p. 112).

**Other-Group Orientation Scale (Items 4, 7, 9, 15, 17 and 19).** This section was scored the same as the items in the Ethnic Identity Achievement area. It also examined the participant’s attitudes toward ethnic groups other than their own.

**MEIM Scoring System**

A score of 1.000 indicates participants **Strongly Agree** about the topic.
A score of 2.000 indicates participants Somewhat Agree about the topic.

The overall Ethnic Identity Scale Measurement for all participants in this study is 1.643. This number indicates that participants in this study have a high measure of ethnic identity, behaviors, orientation, and affirmation.

Table 4-4 shows how participants in this study answered in all four areas:

**Table 4-4 Overall MEIM Scores for All Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Identity Achievement</th>
<th>1.714</th>
<th>closer to <strong>Agree</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Behaviors</td>
<td>1.583</td>
<td>closer to <strong>Agree</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Orientation</td>
<td>1.875</td>
<td>closer to <strong>Agree</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation &amp; Belonging</td>
<td>1.400</td>
<td>closer to <strong>Strongly Agree</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The processes that individuals use to develop and maintain racial identity are important. A deeper understanding of the participant’s responses can be examined through themes which show that socio-economics and community also played a role in how participants felt about who they were and how their racial identities were formed.

**Naming: Who am I?**

Although most individuals go through a period of self-discovery, biracials and multiethnics look at themselves more deeply because they are constantly asked, “What are you”? Many times, being seen as different is equal to being considered “not as good as.” Some participants bypassed the question by replying “I am American” or “I am a person.” By responding in this manner, they could disguise racial experiences or differentness. Situations and places also played a role on identity naming. Participants would select an identity depending upon the situation. The ability to be chameleon-like
allowed them the relief of inclusion. The ability to switch may be good enough for the short-term, however, when this occurs their other racial self, and, consequently the other parent, are momentarily denied. Participants came to understand the impact this switching ability had on their lives through understanding, interpreting their own and other’s family histories, and by lessons learned in ethnic studies classes.

**How do I Belong?**

In her dissertation, Teresa Kay Williams refers to the work of Charles Cooley (1902). He hypothesized that individuals learn and internalize conceptions about themselves based on what is reflected back to them during social interaction (p. 74). In both Williams’ dissertation and in this study, there were moments in the participant’s lives in which a very significant event made an impact on their racial identification and helped define who they are. Age also played an important role in their self-identification. In their earlier years, an incident would provide the impact. In their younger years, they did not recall race being pointed out to them, but when race was pointed out, it was done in a negative manner. Many of the critical moments that helped shape their racial self-identification occurred within peer groups or by non-family adult members outside the home.

Hope, a 23-year-old participant, shared her experience:

> My mom and me moved from Fresno, which was where we lived. We lived in the projects so it was pretty much a black neighborhood and we moved to Salinas, the east side which is just all Latino. I was raised there as a baby and I spoke Spanish. I didn’t look black at all. I was very light-skinned, probably until about 7 when I started getting darker, my skin tone. So everyone thought I was Mexican, just full, and then it was like, “who is this black woman with this little Mexican baby”? So I noticed that people looked at my mom differently. They didn’t look at me
differently but they looked at my mom. That’s when I noticed that there was something different between us, she … she … people would treat her different.

In *Socially Embedded Identities: Theories, Typologies, and Processes of Racial Identity among White/Black Biracials*, Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) examine the multidimensional model of racial identity options. Their findings support the hypothesis that persons of multidimensional racial backgrounds have approximately five options for racial identity: (1) The Transcendent Identity: Beyond Race; (2) the Border Identity; (3) the Singular Identity Option; (4) Non-Birth Ascribed Racial Identity; and (5) the Protean Identity Option. Identity provides, assists, and gives us an understanding of who we are. It can control and shape our identity and influence our purpose in this world. In short, our identity represents and symbolizes how we will live our lives. The participants in this study shared their childhood and life experiences with the interviewer. Out of the 12 participants interviewed, the responses of five were chosen to include in this chapter. Although the experiences shared by the small number of participants in this study represent a microcosm of the world at large, the five narratives included in this chapter fall into each of Rockquemore’s and Brunsma’s five options, or models.

Individuals who fall into the Transcendent Identity: Beyond Race Option refuse to have any racial identity. In 1925, José Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher, conceptualized the idea of *La Raza Cósmica* (the Cosmic Race), a future in which color and race would not matter. He believed that in the future there would be a fifth race—one which would not let the Darwinist ideological way of using creation, validation, and an explanation to justify ethnic superiority and repression of others.
In the 1990’s, the idea was generated that those who feel that race is transcendent are positioning themselves in a white racial social space. Those who feel that race is transcendent think that if they belong to a particular racial group they have not transcended. But according to Williams (p. 151), the truth of the matter is that by transcending they have put themselves into a white racial social position. Transcendents who see themselves as “human” are European American in racial orientation. They usually believe that race only matters to minorities and that minorities are racialized. According to Kerry Ann Rockquemore, by the millennium these individuals have “transcended,” or gone beyond racial categorization. They refuse to be placed into a rigidly defined box.

Hazel, a 26-year-old participant, stated:

I don’t ever use the word “race” because I took an Anthropology class and they said there was no scientific basis for race so, when I am asked what race I am, I always tell them like “just guess” and I like to hear you know, what people say and how they perceive me. Everybody goes through an identity search but I think for those of us who are of mixed ethnicities, I think it’s a bit harder for us to fit in and so I think, it was more troublesome in those years. But I think that it’s really shaped me to appreciate people from all different cultures.

Carol, a 20-year-old participant, said:

I don’t know that it means anything. It’s not a huge part of my personality. I don’t derive my personality or my identification primarily by what I am racially or genetically but by what I am in you know various contexts. Whatever the plural of context is! Cuz you know like if I’m you know more apt to describe myself by my political affiliation, or as an environmentalist, or it’s like … or just as a person.

Ella, a 20-year-old participant, said:

Just accept yourself as you are. Who cares what anyone thinks? Love yourself; get to know yourself.
Individuals who fall into the Border Identity Option are able to blend both of their racial identities into one. According to Maria Root, (1996, p. xxi), they have the “ability to hold, merge, and respect multiple perspectives simultaneously.” Although these individuals have the ability to combine multiple perspectives, their own identity is static. They do not switch between identities in order to fit within social groups.

Hilary, a 22-year-old participant, said:

I see myself as a black and Chinese woman who could use a little more tradition in her life. I am always very open with people about my ethnicity.

Paula, a 22-year-old participant said:

When I was younger, I would switch back and forth, I guess I didn’t know which one I was supposed to pick. Now I like to say I’m Chinese and black. I don’t like to say that I’m half Chinese and half black. Because I’m not half of anything, so it just didn’t make sense to say that even though that’s how I did say it before when I was younger. People would ask, “What are you”? And they would expect me to say “half this, half that.”

Biracials who fit into the Singular Identity Option exclusively select or have alliances to only one of their birth parents. This self-identity has a history of usually being the “sad mulatto of never belonging” discussed in Chapter Two. If we examine history through the black/white binary, historically the norm has been to adopt the black identity due to the one-drop Rule of Hypodescent. If a child was born from a black slave, he or she was automatically classified as black and as property. According to Rockquemore, assuming a singular black identity is the norm that is utilized in conceptual models of black identity to black/white biracials.

When asked how she identified racially, Janice, a 22-year-old participant, said:

I’d say black, I guess because the first thing I think people see is that I’m not Mexican, or that they wouldn’t guess that I was.
Morar, a 22-year-old participant, said:

People ask me all the time, “What are you? Are you white”? People assume I am one race or another. I still struggle with identity. Even though I look and act white, I still identify as Native American.

Individuals who utilize Non-Birth-Ascribed Racial Identity do not necessarily feel they belong to their ascribed racial background and felt a sense of belonging within another ethnic group. They also have a tendency to choose a singular identity group, which means they identify with one ethnic group that they prefer or feel they belonged to. These individuals seem to be more involved with more multi-ethnics than their biracial counterparts. They tend to have positive relationships within their own ethnic background, but are more comfortable in their non-birth ascribed racial group and identify within a singular ethnic group.

In the words of Sarah, a 22-year-old participant:

I think my earliest memories were elementary school and junior high because I grew up with my grandparents and my mom like I always knew that I have African American ancestry. My grandfather said, “No _mija_, you’re Mexican you’re not black you’re a Mexican, you’re not black,” so that had a great big impact on me. So I remember one time in junior high, I was in 6th grade, a girl called me “n word” and that was the first negative experience I’ve had with race. It was difficult because I looked more African-American. But then my mom and my grandparents and my immediate family were like, “no, you’re Mexican and you’re not black.” So when I went to Puerto Rico, I felt like I fit in. When I went I identified just right away, I saw people with my same colored skin and I just, felt like ok, this is where I belong.

Jenny, a 23-year-old participant, said:

It is important to establish a comfortable place for myself racially. It’s not necessary how others view me, but how I view myself.
The Protean Identity Option provides multiple choices that allow biracial individuals to move between their racial identities, making them interchangeable. They move with fluidity between one ethnic group and another. According to Cruz-Janzen, individuals who utilize this fluidity are becoming more visible and more acknowledged by ethnic and social science scholars. They are viewed as capable of “adjusting their self-perception to different cultural contexts (Miller, 1992) or to changes in roles and situations.” She says that this ability, named by Stephan (1992) as situational identity, allows these individuals to feel like part of one group at one time and part of another at a different time. “As such,” Cruz-Janzen says, “they also represent a break from the traditionally rigid and exclusive categories that prevail” (p. 86). Another name for a Protean Identity is Integrative Identity, in which individuals can identify and function in both communities.

Mercy, a 29-year-old participant, said:

My friends would try to get me to adapt depending on who I was hanging out with. If I was hanging out mostly with black kids, I looked a certain way to fit in. If I was with Latino kids, I looked more Latino.

Lucy, a 29-year-old participant said:

I think it gives me an acceptance that like so many different cultures that a lot of people I don’t think have because I’m more aware of the bias and I’m also aware of the privilege. Because being light skinned, I’ve had more privilege than say my mother or my sister and other people who are dark. And it’s not because I’ve ever hidden my culture or done anything to not, you know, show it, it’s how I look. I don’t. I’ve seen both sides of it, and I can understand people who have been white all their lives and haven’t had to deal with some of the bias because of the skin color and you’re not as intelligent that was another thing, you know, you’re almost taken to be not as intelligent if you’re of a different race. It’s hard because I see myself as Indian but at the same time when I’m not around family for awhile, I tend to kind of lose some of it because so many people either don’t identify me as Indian because I’m so light skinned, that I sometimes feel like
“well I’m not much as of color as they, so-and-so I see on the street” and what is truly just because of the way I look. And then it’s funny because when I am around my family a lot, I feel connected, that’s kind of how I am.

Where Do I Belong?

Most participants went through a time where they felt they did not belong to any one group and struggled to create their own ethnic and racial identity by attempting to belong to one of the parent’s family members. When participants were asked about the positive and negative experiences, the positive experiences outnumbered the negative. The bad experiences occurred mainly during their early years. Some still struggled with their identities, but the majority felt that being biracial was more difficult when they were young. Through self-exploration, many were able to work out the differences. They could recognize and appreciate who they are as individuals, and had an appreciation of being of dual ethnicity. Even if the participants generally identified with only one of their ethnicities, they agreed upon a sense of pride gained from being biethnic. They felt that their dual heritage gave them an opportunity to experience more than one culture and gave them path to a distinct history.

Where Do I Fit In With My parents?

Most of the participants’ relationships with their parents experienced changes when discussing racial and ethnic issues. There was lack of communication with the parents about interracial relationships and identity, especially with the fathers. The participants found that their parents were not just two different people but also people who possessed two distinct heritages and histories. At times, there were loyalty and value issues with the parents and families. One parent would talk about their family values and
be very one-sided. On the other hand, participants who had knowledge of both cultures felt more positive toward their ethnicities and were able to transcend race.

Hazel, a 26-year-old participant said:

I don’t ever use the word “race” because I took an Anthropology class and they said there was no scientific basis for race so, when I am asked what race I am, I always tell them like “just guess” and I like to hear you know, what people say and how they perceive me. Everybody goes through an identity search but I think for those of us who are of mixed ethnicities, I think it’s a bit harder for us to fit in and so I think, it was more troublesome in those years. But I think that it’s really shaped me to appreciate people from all different cultures.

Summary and Conclusion

The participants’ economic standing as children also helped determine racial identity. Feelings of not belonging arose when social and educational opportunities were not available, or their families resided in impoverished areas. The influence of the ethnicity of neighbors and friends also played a role in selection of ethnic identity as did racial tensions.

The purpose of this study was to explore the process by which marginalized biracials self-identify racially. Although there are many factors that contribute to identity formation, this study found that the majority of the participants viewed their racial identities through very individual lenses.

In the section of this chapter titled How Do I Belong?, I attempted to pair the responses that study participants gave during the oral interviews with each of Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2002) multidimensional model of racial identity options: The Transcendent Identity: Beyond Race; the Border Identity; the Singular Identity Option; Non-Birth Ascribed Racial Identity; and the Protean Identity Option. Not one
participant gave a response that fit neatly into just one concept. I found that there is no singular agreed-upon understanding of what it means to be identified racially biracial in America.

After comparing participants’ oral interviews to the findings of the MEIM survey, I found that identity formation is still highly individual. Although some study participants believe that they have transcended race and their responses fit into Rockquemore and Brunsma’s models, the numbers from the MEIM indicate that, because of existing social expectations left over from the days of miscegenation laws, they still feel the need to belong to a group and will become fluid in their identity in order to fit in.

There was, however, one set of influential forces that spoke far louder than Rockquemore and Brunsma’s models or the MEIM survey: Social Class, Education, and Family. These three drive the decisions and paths by which persons of mixed race learn to self-identify and were the most obvious influences for the participants in this study. What drives all three is one factor: economics.

Participants in this study who were raised in a two-parent home had a more stable economic base and were more comfortable with their racial self-identity. The parents of these participants also possessed college degrees, which allowed them access to a greater economic base, including better employment, neighborhoods, and schools.

In contrast, participants raised by a single parent (in all cases, the mother) did not have a very stable economic base and struggled more in the formation of their racial self-identity. The single parents did not have degrees; the families moved several times in the participant’s formative years. In addition, many of these participants had access to the
racial background of only one parent and encountered more racism than their two-parent counterparts.
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*Race and Society, 5.1*, 33–47.