

## **GROWING UP BIRACIAL**

*By Susan Spiegel, 2001*

This qualitative study, using a narrative research approach, explored the subjective experience of growing up biracial. The purpose of the study was to examine identity formation in biracial young adults of dual minority heritages from the point of view of the individual and to understand what factors affected the process for each individual. The researcher analyzed the stories the seven participants told about their racial identity in two ways: to identify dominant themes across narratives and to assess the coherence of each individual's narrative as an indication of self-cohesion.

Four dominant themes were identified from the narratives. Each theme was dynamic and represented a range of responses by the participants and an evolution over time of these responses. The first theme described the blending of their dual heritages, initially leaning toward one and adding the other. The second theme described how the participants dealt internally with experiences of difference from others and overt discrimination. The third theme looked at how the participants developed and utilized internal and external sources of support for their self-esteem. The fourth theme described the diversity in the lives of the participants, who learned to navigate three or more cultures, and the benefits they derived. All but one participant in this study grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods and attended predominantly White schools. It appeared that moving into more multicultural environments was more conducive to connecting with both of their parental heritages.

This study found that although the participants asserted a biracial label, there was no one biracial experience. Analysis of coherence of each story revealed that it is possible for biracial individuals to form a coherent story about the formation of their identity. This is significant because a cohesive narrative is considered reflective of internal cohesion, which is essential for psychological well-being. Each narrative revealed how the individual integrated the lived experience of his or her racial and cultural identity. It is this richness and depth of detail that is important for clinicians.