US   ASHLAND (Corning)

OREGON / PORTLAND

~~NY. / NEW ENGLAND~~

STEAMBOATS

GRAND CANYON

Hawaii

SAN JUAN ISLANDS, WASHINGTON

Amusement Parks

Movie Palaces - West Coast

WESTERN DAMS

MEAT

Susan Spiegel
dissertation

GROWING UP BIRACIAL

A dissertation submitted to the
California Institute for Clinical Social Work
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Clinical Social Work

Abstract

Growing Up Biracial

By

Susan Spiegel

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 predominately 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.

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

We hereby approve the dissertation

Growing up Biracial

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Kourtney who was
the inspiration for this work and who adds richness and play to my life.
And
To the memory of my father
whose daughter could be anything she wanted, including a doctor.

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First, I would like to express my gratitude to the participants of this study who graciously agreed to share with me their stories of growing up biracial. I only hope I did justice to you in relating your experience.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Interracial marriage has grown by more than 800 percent (Lind, 1998) since 1967, when the last of the antimiscegenation laws was struck down by the Supreme Court in Loving v. Virginia. This phenomenal increase in interracial marriage led to a biracial baby boom (Root, 1992). The estimates of mixed-race people in the United States range from two to five million. "Demographer Reynolds Farley of New York City's Russell Sage Foundation estimates that these young people currently number at least four million. About a quarter of them are of Black and White parentage, but the majority--about 70 percent--come from homes where one parent is White and the other is either Asian-American, Hispanic, or Native American" (Gaskins, 1999, p. 8). This estimate refers to children under 18, and does not include individuals whose parents are each of a different minority, namely, Black and Japanese.

Many young biracial people have been able to integrate both sides of their racial heritage, but others are still struggling, especially those who lack the family, social and environmental support conducive to developing a healthy biracial identity.

Identity Formation

Identity formation is a life-long process that peaks in adolescence and young adulthood according to Erikson (1963). Without a positive, cohesive identity, individuals have difficulty with social functioning and psychological well-being. The social context in

which one lives profoundly affects this process because of universal needs to belong to a community and to be reflected by the society.

Culture impacts the identity formation of all individuals, but the racially mixed face unique challenges. While other people may face the issues of integrating two or more cultures, race is a very visible and a salient issue in the United States. Biracial people need to integrate two racial heritages as well as two cultural backgrounds. Issues of race will be significant throughout the life-span for people of mixed race (Root, 1990). The social context, therefore, is particularly relevant in this race-conscious society. One racial group or the other or even, at times, their extended families may exclude mixed-race individuals. They may be pressured to identify monoracially. "Membership in multiple groups increases the possibility of conflict for the individual, since behavioral prescriptions of different groups may be at variance with one another" (Saari, 1991, p. 54). Mixed-race people are frequently questioned about who they are and where they come from. The dual nature of their racial background may not be evident in their appearance, so part of their identity is not recognized. These factors all make identity formation for biracial individuals a difficult process.

Historically, it was believed that biracial people would lead a life of marginality, and that the psychological problems were inherent in the mixing of the races rather than a result of negative social factors, discrimination, and oppression (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937). The early studies on biracial identity (Gibbs, 1987; Lyles et al., 1985) looked at clinical populations and found that children from racially mixed couples had difficulties with adjustment and were at risk for delinquency, depression, learning problems, and isolation.

Until very recently, biracial and multiracial people were socially unacknowledged in our society, which meant they did not have the right conditions for developing a cohesive

interracial identity. The multiracial experience has cast them as a minority among minorities, without a larger community with which to identify. Mixed-race people were rarely portrayed in the media or literature, except as tragic, marginalized figures, eliminating potentially healthy role models. This often led to a negative identity or forced the individual to identify monoracially. For many biracial people the environment in which they live still does not reflect their identity.

In the last two decades biracial researchers have taken the lead in studying non-clinical populations of mixed-race people with the goal of understanding normative behavior. Recent studies have found that it is possible to integrate a positive interracial identity when the supportive family and social conditions exist (Poussaint, 1984; Poston, 1990; Jacobs, 1992; Kich, 1992; Cauce et al., 1992; Root, 1992, 1996). Unfortunately, this is not often the case. Due to both overt and covert racial discrimination, minorities in our society have difficulty developing positive identities. Biracial people, especially those of dual minority heritages, who are poorly represented in the political system or reflected in society, face even greater challenges in developing a positive and cohesive sense of self.

Today, there is a multitude of studies, books, multiracial organizations, on-line chat rooms, and other resources by and for biracial people. "Multiraciality was and is moving from being an individual isolated experience to one that is increasingly collectively organized" (King, 1996, p. 228). Organizations such as Multiracial Americans of Southern California, Interrace, and I Pride have worked successfully to change the 2000 Census so that multiracial people are no longer forced to identify monoracially or as "other." They offer services, resources, and activities for multiracial people on college campuses and within communities. These activities and organizations have helped create a sense of belonging and

community for some people of mixed race. They have stressed the need for understanding the societal issues multiracial people face and the need for more research on identity formation.

Overview of Biracial History

The United States has had a long history of minority discrimination. Historically, the government has divided people into separate racial categories as though they are distinct biological types. Most scholars agree, however, that race is a sociopolitical construct, not a biological reality. Scientists no longer believe race is determined by blood. Assumed visible characteristics of race, such as the shape of the eye and the nose, body structure, hair type and the like, are superficial traits. There is, in fact, more variability within race than between races (Spickard, 1992). In their variability and ambiguity, multiracial people challenge our views about race.

Since the inception of the census, there has been inconsistency in the categorization of race. The first classifications were White, slave, and other. Prior to the civil war some states allowed people of mixed-race Black/White descent to be defined as Mulatto. In 1870, the population was divided into White, Colored (Blacks), Mulattos, Chinese, and Indian (Spickard, 1992, p.18). In 1890, one was considered Black if one had three quarters or more Black blood. Mulattos were defined as having three-eighths to three-fifths Black blood; a quadroon, one-quarter; and an octoroon, one-eighth. (Los Angeles Times, 1996). In 1930, a more rigid criterion emerged. The "one drop rule" meant anyone with one-sixteenth Black blood was deemed to be Black. In 1880, California passed a law making it illegal for anyone of European descent to marry a Black, Mulatto or Mongolian (Williams, 1996, p. 197). Until

recently, most mixed-race Asian Americans had to present themselves as non-Asian because the Asian community would not accept them. On the other hand, anyone with as little as one-eighth Japanese heritage was interned during World War II.

Until the last third of the twentieth century, an interracial identity was not formally recognized in the United States. Census takers filled in the census forms, identifying children of interracial couples with the parent of color. An interracial identity was not formally recognized in the United States. When filling out an application for a job, a loan, or an educational institution, biracial people were forced to choose one racial category or "other."

In the year 2000 census, biracial and multiracial individuals can check whatever categories define their racial heritage. For the first time, they did not have to choose one racial category or the box labeled "other." The new racial categories are American Indian or Alaska native, Asian, Black or African-American, native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and White. There is also a Hispanic ethnic category. The movement to include a "multiracial" category was not successful, but many believe these changes will lead to a more accurate picture of the multiracial composition of our society. The latest figures in California show that the majority of mixed-race births involve Latinos. The rate of interracial births involving African Americans in California was more than three times the national rate (Boxall & Herndon, 2000, p. A1).

Statement of the Problem

Erikson (1968) emphasized the interconnection between the individual and the culture and the need for individuals to see themselves reflected and acknowledged by others in the society. Erikson stated, "In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of

simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them" (p. 22). Biracial people are not often mirrored in this society, and the norm by which they are judged is monoracial. Their skin tone and physical features are ambiguous and don't fit the monoracial typology. Even within the same family, children do not mirror their parents racially and siblings may vary considerably in phenotype and identification (Root, 1997).

Many theorists and researchers believe that a sense of belonging to a cultural group and an integrated, cohesive sense of self are essential to psychological well-being. In order to develop a cohesive sense of self, it is imperative that mixed-race individuals be knowledgeable about both of their racial heritages (Poston, 1990; Root, 1992, 1996; Wardle, 1996; Bowles ,1993; Brown,1995). (See Chapter Two, A Review of the Literature for the findings of these studies.) Bowles emphasizes that the lack of acceptance of one's dual heritage in response to the societal lack of acceptance may lead to disowning a part of one's self and, therefore, to a sense of emptiness and shame. Brown found in a study of Black/White individuals that an interracial identity was associated with the least amount of internal conflict.

When there is little or no acknowledgement for their biracial identity and when the community and the family do not provide a supportive environment, these issues become problematic for children of mixed race and may lead to feelings of isolation, self-consciousness, depression, anxiety, and lack of cohesion (Root, 1994; Gibbs, 1987; Bowles, 1993). In her study of a clinical population in San Francisco, Gibbs (1987) found the adolescents in her study were in conflict over their social marginality, sexuality, autonomy

from parents, and educational and career aspirations. In Gibbs' view, the conflict over racial identity leads to conflict over life choices. Root (1994) adds physical appearance and uniqueness as areas that are particular dilemmas for women. The lack of identity resolution in these young people appeared similar to what Erikson (1950) called "identity diffusion," which occurs when the adolescent cannot resolve the tasks of the psychosocial stage of identity versus role confusion. All adolescents and young adults are challenged to form a cohesive identity. This process is more challenging for biracial individuals given environmental stresses. "When multiracial children are not accepted by relatives of both of their paternal and maternal heritages and when the family does not live in a multiracial community, the challenge to identify with all of their racial roots may be magnified" (Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999, p. 56).

The process of identity formation for biracial persons is complex. Erikson defines ego identity as "the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (p. 261). For biracial people, inner sameness and continuity in the way Erikson described it does not exist. Today, new theories of development other than Erikson's take into account the developmental process for biracial people. These theories will be detailed in the literature review. Biracial identity development is not linear (Poston, 1990; Kich, 1992; Jacobs, 1992). Individuals cycle back and forth through the developmental stages in an effort to resolve their racial identity. Ambivalence about one's racial identity is an important and necessary part of biracial identity development in these models. It is also common that biracial people have "situational identities" based on the social context at the time. They may emphasize one of their racial heritages over another at different times in their lives or in different

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environments. More than one racial identification is possible for mixed-race persons. According to Root (1990), they may identify with one or the other of their racial designations, accept the societal designation, accept themselves as both races, or choose a distinct multiracial category.

Significance of the Study

It is important to understand from the internal perspective of the individual how they organize two racial and ethnic heritages in a society that still has racist beliefs and attempts to categorize people into distinct racial types. The purpose of this study was to understand the subjective experience of identity formation of biracial young adults of dual minority heritages and the strategies they use to cope with two different racial heritages. What factors influence identity formation? How does being biracial of a dual minority impact one's career, friendships, family, and relationships from the perspective of the biracial individual?

As the United States becomes more multiracial, it is essential that social workers become knowledgeable about the social functioning, growth, and development of biracial people. Clinicians need to know how biracial people construct and articulate their identities. It is important to explore the process of identity formation and to see what internal cohesion looks like for biracial people of dual minority heritages. They need more knowledge about the normative experience of biracial individuals in order to help those who are at risk due to the lack of societal and family supports and to distinguish reasonable responses to an unreasonable environment from dysfunctional responses.

The experience of being biracial of two minority heritages living in this society is still largely undocumented. This study contributes to a growing body of knowledge for parents,

educators, and mental health professionals, especially social workers, in order to more effectively facilitate a healthy, well-adjusted interracial identity and cohesive sense of self. Since 1990, there have been a number of studies on biracial identity formation and the societal factors that impact mixed-race people. The majority of the studies, however, have focused primarily on Black/White and Asian/White populations and not the internal, subjective experience of biracial individuals of dual minority backgrounds as this study did. With the growing numbers of minorities, especially in California, there is more intermarriage among racial groups; therefore, it is important to learn about the subjective experiences those who have a dual minority background.

Narrative Framework

Identity formation is an active and constructive process that continues through adulthood. Narrative research is an effective means of studying identity formation or "identity when one is concerned with the active states of becoming as opposed to static states of being" (Mishler, 1992). It looks at the "process through which individuals define and resolve...problems over the life course as identity formation, which is made visible and becomes available for analysis through personal narratives--that is, individual's retrospective 'tellings' of their histories" (Mishler, 1992, p. 22). McAdams (1989) states, *"Identity is a life story--*an internalized integration of the past, present and anticipated future which provides lives with a sense of unity and purpose" (p. 161).

A narrative, self-narrative, or life story is an account of one's life that puts life events in a perspective in order to give them meaning. Individuals are embedded in their culture and are imbued with narrative forms from early childhood. Gee, a linguist asserts, "One of the

primary ways--probably *the* primary way--human beings make sense of their experience is by casting it in a narrative form...This is an ability that develops early and rapidly in children, without explicit training or instruction" (as quoted in Mishler, 1986).

The idea of studying an individual's story is not new. Freud's case studies were early examples of narratives as explanations of one's life. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in narratives, that is, life stories, as a way to understand individuals in their life context.

> In the same manner that many theorists, notably Freud, formed their views about mental life, the personality and its development from "case studies" of women and men in psychotherapy--so too can the researcher interested in normal identity construct it from self narratives gathered in research interviews. (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7)

Patterns and themes emerge from looking at past actions and events. The more complete and coherent the story, the more the self is integrated. Fiese states, "The coherence of the narrative is considered a benchmark for evaluating the integrity of the self" (Fiese, 1999, p. 7). Saari (1991) also addresses the connection between the cohesiveness of the narrative and of the self. She says, "From this perspective it becomes clear that experiencing the self as a well-functioning unit is highly dependent upon the ability of the individual to construct an integrated and coherent narrative about the self..." (p. 143).

This internal narrative and the factors that influence it are relevant for therapists who are trying to help biracial individuals develop an integrated sense of self. "The recognition that humans use narrative structure as a way to organize the events of their lives and to provide a scheme for their own identity is of importance for the practice of psychotherapy and personal change" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 178).

Research Design. The design of this study is narrative research, a specific type of qualitative research, which is reflective of how human beings understand and make sense of their lives. The interview in narrative research is unstructured and encourages storytelling by respondents rather than by asking formal questions. Many researchers (Polkinghorne, 1988; McAdams, 1989; Mishler, 1986; Reissman, 1993; Gergen & Gergen, 1997) believe that the analysis of narrative is particularly well suited to studies of identity formation. Narrative researcher assumes that the narrative will reveal valuable information about the process of identity formation and the factors that affect the process from the point of view of the individual. This will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

"One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experiences in reality" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7). Subjects are empowered to tell their own story in the form of the narrative, which is a more natural and comfortable means of communication.

Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes between an analysis of a narrative, which is descriptive, and narrative analysis, which is explanatory. This study uses an analysis of a narrative approach in which the aim is to document and describe the narratives of biracial individuals. The researcher discovers themes through interpretation of the interview data. The plot of the story makes the events meaningful. It is not simply a chronicle. "Listening for how the stories are structured reveals how the respondent has organized and made meaning of her experience..." (Strickland, 1994, p. 29). The similarities between analyzing the narrative and the therapeutic process make this research particularly relevant for clinicians. It has been suggested that personal narratives are the means by which individuals make sense of their lives. In both narrative research and therapy the researcher and the clinician listen for

how the individual tells his or her story along with the content of the story. The goal of

research differs from the aims of therapy in that it seeks to understand what the narrative is,

not to reconstruct the narrative into a more adaptive whole. However, as Polkinghorne states,

"The practitioners of the human sciences are involved in the descriptive research process

when they attempt to uncover and understand the narratives used to construct their client's

schemes of meaning" (1988, p. 178).

CHAPTER TWO

A Review of the Literature

Chapter Two contains a review of the literature relevant to the topic of biracial identity development. For mixed-race people the formation of a cohesive personal identity, considered crucial to psychological well-being, is complicated by the need to integrate two racial identities, which may include two different ethnic, religious, and cultural heritages. Daniel (1996) defines biracial as first generation identity derived from having one parent who is socially designated and self-identified as one race, for example, Black, and the other as socially and self-identified as another race, for example, White.

It is only in the last two decades that there has been any systematic research on biracial identity development and what it means to be biracial in this society. Research has shown that there are several ways for biracial individuals to identify. They can accept the identity assigned by society, identify with a single racial group, identify with both racial groups, or identify as a new racial group depending on the social, political, and environmental factors present at the time (Root, 1990, 1998).

Early Studies

The early studies (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937) on biracial identity argued that mixed-race individuals were doomed to marginality, low self-esteem, and problems of identity development. These problems were believed to be inherent in the mixing of the races. The impact of sociocultural attitudes and racism on the mixed-race couple and the biracial child was not taken into account as a source of the psychological difficulties.

"Mixed-race had been considered inherently damaging to identity formation (Stonequist, 1937) because conflicts of dual race membership were assumed to undermine the integrity of the individual's self-concept and contribute to moral and general inferiority" (Bradshaw, 1992, p. 79). The prevailing view was that there was a psychological problem rather than a societal problem that impacted psychological functioning (Daniel, 1996, p. 134). Marginality, that is, being neither Black nor White, was in itself pathological, according to Park.

Studies which reflected problems for multiracial teens, such as feelings of confusion, disloyalty, shame, depression, and anxiety, were based on clinical populations (Gibbs, 1987; Lyle, 1985). This gave the impression that all biracial teens have psychological problems.

Prior to the 1980s, professionals and many families believed that acceptance of one's self as Black led to more stability for Black/White biracial children. "Most of these professionals stressed the importance for blended children to cope as African-Americans, because society is going to view them as such. Consequently, they defined the children's mental health in terms of how successfully or unsuccessfully they achieved an African-American identity" (Wardle, 1987, as quoted in Root, 1996, p. 385).

"The old literature was situated in an era marked by linear models of identity, rigid thinking about race and racial boundaries and overt racism" (Root, 1992, p. 181). The assumption that it is healthier to identify monoracially is no longer considered valid. Rather most professionals believe in the importance of accepting one's whole identity. The current stance among professionals is that psychological well-being depends on acknowledgement of both racial heritages. Dorcas Bowles (1993), a clinical social worker and researcher on biracial identity, puts it this way:

(When) there is dual parental ethnicity, the child ideally embraces both heritages so that intrapsychic autonomy can be achieved. The embracing of both aspects of her ethnicity will allow the child to retain the relationship with both parents, to see both parents as they really are. The child's ability at this time to assimilate parental functions into the identity system contributes to the child's feelings of confidence, positive self regard, security and self esteem." (p. 426)

Francis Wardle says, "Even if interracial families choose to raise their children with a single identity, children must be taught about their full genetic and cultural heritage. Children need this information because mature mental health is dependent on accurate self-knowledge" (1996, p. 385).

The newer studies, such as those of Brown (1995), Kich (1992), and Thompson (1999), found that embracing both racial heritages is positive for one's self-concept. Brown (1995) studied the racial self-identification of 119 Black/White young adults. Her data showed an interracial identity was chosen as the most preferred identity when subjects were given the option (66.4%) and was associated with the least internal conflict. "These results suggest that interracial identity is the most conducive to the emotional well-being of interracial children" (p. 129).

Thompson also found a biracial identity to be beneficial. "As they were able to validate and assert their biracial identities, participants felt increasingly positive about their heritage and were able to maintain a healthy sense of self that incorporated both sides" (Thompson, 1999, p. 138)

Research on Issues Related to Biracial Identity

Biracial people face many challenges in our society. In order to develop an integrated sense of self they often must overcome obstacles presented by an unaccepting social environment. Mixed-race people must contend with many of the issues minorities in this

country face, plus the possible lack of social support from either of their heritages. Researcher Christine Iijima Hall (1996) interviewed parents of mixed-race children over a two-year period. She was told that discrimination is still prevalent. "Their children are not accepted by White groups and they are also ostracized and taunted by monoracial children of color" (Hall, 1996, p. 408).

It is inevitable that the biracial individual will face some discrimination, conflict and isolation, but it is possible for them to develop a positive sense of self and an integrated identity. Since the 1980s, it has become increasingly clear that being biracial does not necessarily portend pathology or maladjustment. Contemporary studies (Poussaint, 1984; Cauce et al.; Hall, 1992; Mass, 1992; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Field, 1996) of non-clinical populations show that mixed-race people have a positive sense of self and good social and academic adjustment.

These studies indicate the possibility for a positive and healthy adjustment for mixed-race individuals, given the right family and social environment. Researchers and theorists agree regarding the optimal conditions for a strong biracial identity development.

A multiracial, multicultural community is most conducive to developing a strong sense of interracial identity. Gibbs and Hines (1992) found that living in integrated neighborhoods, attending integrated schools, and having a multicultural lifestyle were factors in positive identity formation. In their study of 12 young people recruited from non-clinical settings, they found positive outcomes were associated with supportive families who communicated openly about racial issues, cohesive social networks, and integrated communities. The community proved to be an important variable in the self-concept of interracial Japanese Americans in the study by Mass. She says that families "contributing to

the development of a positive self-concept in their children includes trying to choose a home community where the sense of being different or unacceptable is minimized" (Mass, 1992, p. 277).

Family support is crucial to the development of an integrated identity. It is essential that the family provide opportunities to learn about both racial heritages and tolerate the stages of ambivalence and fluctuations the child needs to experience. Kich (1992) states, "In valuing each of the child's racial and ethnic heritages, parents structure emotional safety and confidence through a positive interracial label and through modeling an ability to discuss racial and ethnic differences openly" (p. 308). Thompson (1999) found that "feeling connected to Black and White family members and experiencing acceptance by both sides helped them to develop positive feelings about being biracial" (p. 144).

Biracial people need reference groups with which to identify. Thompson (1999) found that all of her participants discussed the importance of good peer relationships and that connecting to other biracial people was particularly valuable in maintaining a positive biracial identification. "Participants relied on positive connections with family and sought affiliation with accepting others as they encountered difficulties with social perceptions of what it means to be biracial" (p. 177).

These studies point to the circumstances that are conducive to developing and maintaining a biracial identity. However, too often the right family or social circumstances do not exist, making it difficult to assert an interracial identity and develop a cohesive sense of self, especially for teens.

Several factors contribute to the complexity of forming an integrated racial identity and sense of self. According to Bradshaw (1992), these are the absence of role models, a lack

of social acceptance, the compromised emotional state of the family because of the social stigmatization, and the absence of biracial referents within the family.

Williams (1996) asserts that mixed-race people learn about their racialized selves through social interaction. Being racially ambiguous leads to being stared at and questioned about one's identity. This puts an exaggerated emphasis on appearance. "The problem of not being recognized and accurately identified by others also creates significant problems at a personal level. Even when interracial Japanese Americans explained their racial backgrounds, they found that many people placed them in either one category or the other. Some people even argued they could not be part Japanese (or part Caucasian) because they did not look that way" (Mass, 1992, p. 274). Society expects people to identify themselves racially according to their physical appearance. "...the reality is that the biracial person has to fight very hard to exercise choices that are not congruent with how they may be visually and emotionally perceived" (Root, as quoted in Deter, 1997, p. 376).

Mixed-race people continuously have "What are you?" or "Where are you from?" experiences. These questions can lead to a feeling of not fitting in and being different from one's peers, especially for an adolescent for whom acceptance and belonging to the group are very important as they separate from their families. "Questions regarding the origin of physical features can lead to a devalued sense of self and may increase the individual's external focus for a sense of acceptability" (Bradshaw, 1992, p. 77). In addition, biracial children and teens are often called names like Oreo, zebra, half-breed, or mutt. One young woman describes her feelings:

> It is frustrating to think of so many people looking at you, and that's all you are to them--just something to look at. It's dehumanizing. I'm just an object to people. I'm not a person. I have no feelings. I have no thoughts. I'm just an object, basically. That's how many people make me feel." (Chau in Gaskins, 1999, p. 39)

In this society, both groups to which biracial people belong may marginalize them, which adds to their difficulties in forming a cohesive identity. People need to feel included and to feel a sense of belonging. Since belonging and identity are interconnected, being excluded can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, depression, and anger (Root, 1994).

We have seen how government has forced people of mixed-race to choose only one "legitimate" racial category on the census form, but this happens on a personal level as well. Many biracial teens feel the pressure from one group or another to act, dress, or talk in a certain way. Brian Courtney, a young college student, describes his experience in a Newsweek essay. In his predominately White high school he was expected to act and dress one way. At the university he felt the expectations of the African-American students. He says, "This time it's my African-American peers exerting pressure to choose. Some African-Americans on campus say, 'I talk too White. I dress like the boys in the White fraternities. I have too many White friends.' In other words, I'm not Black enough. I'm a White wanna-be" (Courtney, 1995, p. 16).

Kevin Johnson, a professor of law at the University of California at Davis, wrote about his experiences at Harvard. "Latinos wondered who I was, whether I was authentic, or simply a 'check the box' Mexican attempting to cash in on affirmative action benefits. All this made me extremely self-conscious about my identity" (Johnson, 1999, p. 22).

Dating is another arena that can be difficult for the biracial teen and young adult. Gibbs and Mosowitz-Sweet (1991) see this as particularly true for girls. "Females, particularly, perceived that their dating options were limited more to their own racial/ethnic minority group, whereas males felt they could easily date across racial/ethnic lines" (p. 583). Even if the dating couple is comfortable with the relationship, either set of parents may not

be accepting of the interracial relationship. Dating may expose covert racism that was not an issue when only friendship was involved.

Claudine Chiawei O'Hearn (1998) is a writer and the editor of a book entitled Half and Half: Writers on Growing up Biracial and Bicultural. She describes the issues around dating and her parents very poignantly.

> My parents' difficulty with my recent choices of partners has exposed their belief that I will marry Caucasian and that my brother will marry a Chinese, an assumption based on some vague and undefinable notion of what we look like and how they see us. My brother, it happens, is dating a Chinese woman, whose parents ironically, don't approve of him because he isn't Chinese enough. "Why make life harder for yourself than it needs to be? Different cultures will make marriage difficult", is what my father says when he sees me getting angry. Exasperated, I point out his own marriage as a sign of his illogic. "Have you forgotten that you are married to a Chinese woman?" But, more important, I wonder whose racial and cultural background will match my own. I get silence for an answer. (p. xiii)

Sometimes it is the family of the biracial person who does not provide the support that is conducive to forming a biracial identity. Extended family members may disapprove of the interracial marriage. As an example, Sallyann Hobson who was interviewed by Funderburg says about her mother, "Apparently, once she married my father, her brothers were infuriated, and for the most part she is dead to this day to many members of her family" (Funderburg, 1994, p. 61).

Divorce complicates identity resolution for interracial children. A major factor in any divorce is how the divorcing parents treat each other and what they tell the child about the other parent. This, of course, can be intensified in an interracial marriage where race can be used as destructive issue in the marital battle. This conflict can be very harmful to the biracial child and can hinder resolution of a biracial identity. Another factor is whether or not the child has consistent and positive access to the non-custodial parent and therefore the racial heritage of that parent.

Frequently, families encounter situations where members of the family are not seen as related. One mother described being mistaken for the nanny. Kim McLarin admits, "I wouldn't mind if she were darker, dark enough so the white people would know that she is mine and black people wouldn't give her a hard time" (The New York Times Magazine, 1998, p. 58).

Models of Biracial Identity Development

Establishment of a stable identity is the main task of adolescent development. The developmental model proposed by Erikson (1968) assumes that this developmental process is universal. He defines identity as "the creation of a sense of sameness, unity of personality now felt by the individual and recognized by others as having consistency in time--being, as it were, an irreversible historical fact" (p. 168). This definition, however, is not applicable to multiracial persons who are perceived ambiguously and need to integrate two or more racial identities into their self-perception. Biracial identity development is complex due to the impact of family and social influences, but it is not inherently pathological. It is possible to negotiate the environmental factors successfully and develop a healthy sense of racial identity.

The current models of biracial identity development assume that an interracial identity is optimal for a positive sense of self. "When individuals identify with only one of their multiracial heritages, they do not integrate the other heritage into their racial self-identity. Sooner or later these individuals will feel the loss of the missing part of their identity and will suffer the loss" (Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999, p. 56).

These models also indicate that a biracial identity is not static. It is part of the developmental process to try on one, then the other racial identity as one moves toward a resolution of biracial identity. Fluidity of identity, depending on the social context, is also seen as an adaptive strategy.

Poston (1990) was the first to develop a model of biracial identity development that posited a process of healthy biracial development. Poston makes it very clear that identity problems are not inherent in the individual. They are the result of the lack of community support for one's interracial identity. Poston's five stages of biracial identity development are (a) personal identity, (b) choice of group categorization, (c) enmeshment/denial, (d) appreciation, and (e) integration.

In the first stage of personal identity, the young child develops a sense of him or herself in the family, independent of ethnic background. Identity is based on issues of self-esteem and self-worth developed within the family.

In the second stage, choice of group categorization, the child is pushed to choose a public identity, usually of one ethnic group. This can create an identity crisis. Whether one chooses a biracial identity or the race of one parent depends on the particular community and family in which the child lives. Other factors that influence the decision have to do with physical appearance and economic and educational status of the parents.

Stage three, enmeshment/denial, is one of confusion and guilt associated with choosing an identity. The adolescent may be ashamed of having friends meet the parent whose racial background is not in sync with how they identify themselves and at the same time may experience profound feelings of disloyalty to that parent.

During stage four, appreciation, the individual begins to resolve the feelings of guilt and shame. They begin to appreciate the heritage of both parents even if they continue to identify with one racial or ethnic group.

In the last stage of integration, the individual experiences a sense of wholeness and belonging. The mixed-race person is able to develop an integrated sense of identity as biracial.

Poston's model takes into account the unique issues and difficulties related to being biracial in this society and highlights the need to integrate more than one cultural, racial, and ethnic heritage.

George Kich (1992) proposed a three-stage model of progress toward a healthy acceptance of biracial identity based on his 1982 study of Japanese/White biracial adults, on his clinical experience with many different racial and ethnic heritages and on his involvement in the multiracial community. He stresses that, "Ethnic identity is not a given, but rather, a dynamic product over one's lifetime" (p. 272). A person may move in and out of identities throughout life, especially during times of crisis or transition. Kich's three stages are (a) initial awareness of differentness and dissonance, (b) struggle for acceptance from others, and (c) self-acceptance and assertion of a biracial identity.

The first stage is the awareness between ages 3 and 10 that one is different from others and that there may be a discrepancy between how one sees oneself versus how one is seen by others. Children become aware of their differentness when they begin to interact outside the family.

Stage two plays out in school, where children become very aware of their racial difference. The process of making friends and feeling accepted may lead to a sense of

separation between home and school. In the desire to fit in, the child may over-identify with one parent or devalue parts of their ethnic heritage in order to gain acceptance. It is a time of exploration and experimentation.

Stage three, the acceptance of a biracial identity, is an ongoing process toward a sense of wholeness that is independent of the acceptance of others. There is an integration of a sense of self based on knowledge and awareness of both heritages. This process generally begins after high school and during college. "Rather than a process of dissociating and separating off aspects of the self, the development of a biracial person who achieves a biracial and bicultural identity is marked by an on-going integration of different and sometimes contradictory heritages, histories, and parental, social and community messages" (Kich, 1992, p. 317).

Jacobs (1992), Phinney (1993), and Kerwin-Ponterotto (1991) also proposed biracial identity development models. In these models, like those described above, there is a progressive movement toward a biracial identity as the child matures with periods of ambivalence in response to societal pressures.

Recent Models of Identity Formation

Newer models of identity formation focus on how external factors influence identity at any given time. The research of Standen, Thornton, Zack, Daniel, and Williams (1996) all describe the phenomenon of "multiple fluid identities" or "situational identity" as common for interracial people. "Thus, research has shown that simultaneous and multiple group membership is possible for racially mixed individuals" (Hall, 1996, p. 399).

Root (1990) developed a complex "schematic metamodel" of how multiracial identity is resolved. According to Root, there are four possible resolutions of biracial identity. One may accept the identity assigned by the society in which one lives, identify with both racial groups, identify with a single racial group, or identify with a new racial group, a mixed-race group. This model "takes into account the forces of socio-cultural, political, and familial influences on shaping the individual's experience of their biracial identity" (p. 186). Root argued that it is important for the people to accept both sides of their racial heritage whichever strategy they chose at any particular time. For Root, biracial identity is fluid and based on the context in which the individual finds him or herself. "That identity can be situationally determined is not evidence of instability but might be evidence of situation saliency for certain roles, behaviors and expressions of attitudes and beliefs" (Root, as quoted in Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999, p. 67).

Standen's research on Korean/White young adults also found fluidity of racial identity based on circumstance. "Thus, for the Korean/White individual on a microlevel, racial identity is fluid and allows for the expression of many different, specific racial identities depending on the context of the situation" (Standen, 1996, p. 255). In Brown's (1995) study of young adults she noted that, participants defined themselves differently publicly and privately.

In 1998, Root proposed an Ecological Identity Model based on her own research and that of others (i.e., Kich, Thornton) on Asian Americans. It is a psychosocial model that looks at the interactive influences on identity formation at any given time. According to Root, there are three major areas: inherited influences, traits, and social interactions. These influences in turn are affected by the history of race relations.

Inherited influences that are influential in identity development are languages at home, parent's identity, nativity, extended family, names, home values, sexual orientation, and phenotype. Traits influencing identity are temperament, social skills, talents, and coping skills. Social interactions with community that influence identity include those experienced at home, at school or work, in the community, with friends, and outside the community. (Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999, p. 146)

The mixed-race person's fluid identity and simultaneous group membership is seen as an adaptation to encountering a racialized society.

Critique of the Research

The existing literature on biracial identity, particularly from a clinically relevant theoretical perspective, is limited. Those studies done prior to the 1980s presumed that a monoracial identity was preferable for mental health. The studies overlooked the internal experience for biracial individuals, both the difficulties and the benefits. More recent studies show that while mixed-race people may experience many difficulties and conflicts, they are often well-adjusted and high-achieving.

Most of the research on mixed-race people has been on Black/White families in spite of the fact Black/White marriages comprise only 2.2% of all Black marriages. White males marry Asian, Latina, and Native American women with much greater frequency. There has been almost no research on dual minority identities and issues. Most respondents are middle class and the research is conducted in primarily urban areas. As Thornton says, "Perhaps grappling with these sorts of questions is limited to those who have the luxury to contemplate them and may be thus a class-based phenomenon" (1996, p. 118).

Most of the qualitative research samples are very small, but what they lack in numbers is made up for in the richness of the life history interviews. The most descriptive and colorful information on the experience of growing up biracial in the United States is

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anecdotal from books such as Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial and Bicultural, edited by Claudine Chiawei O'Hearn; Black, White, Other by Lise Funderberg; What Are You? by Pearl Fuyo Gaskins; and How Did You Get To Be a Mexican by Kevin Johnson. The narratives and interviews in the qualitative research and the anecdotal literature provide rich data on the complexities of being biracial that a quantitative study cannot. Learning that the identity status of biracial Asian Americans is as stable as Whites or monoracial Asians (Grove, 1991) is reassuring, but does not describe the process of identity formation over time. It is important to understand the obstacles, struggles and fluctuations that a biracial person experiences and the attempt to achieve positive self-esteem and a cohesive sense of self, personally and racially. Although there has been an increase in studies on biracial identity, the research has lagged behind the popular literature in describing the internal experiences of mixed-race individuals. The research that has been done is on Black and White and Asian and White biracial people.

Thornton (1996) criticizes much of the research on mixed-race people for following monoracial paradigms. He believes that, "What is missing are models of truly multiple identity...Previous models of mixed ethnic identity ignore the effect of how combining two different identities may create something that is more than the sum of its parts" (p. 114). He goes on to indicate that race is only one part of an individual's identity. Thornton questions how mixed-race people are unique. He urges exploration of the relationship between personal identity and group identity and the changes that occur with age. Thornton asks, "Where in our range of life roles do we place mixed identity: And does this change over the life course? Perhaps adolescents and young adults place it at the top of their list, but older multiracials

may find it less of an issue, devoting their time to parenthood, taking care of parents, and so on" (p. 118).

Biracial sociologists, psychologists, and ethnographers are conducting the majority of the current research. Hall, Root, and Thornton (1996) believe that interracial researchers are more sensitive to the issues multiracial people face. Root brought much of this research together for the first time in her book Racially Mixed People in America (1992). Root makes a strong case for using qualitative research methodologies associated with sociology, anthropology and ethnology for understanding the experience of multiracial people. She emphasizes the need to study non-clinical populations in order to determine what constitutes normative experience. Discussion of the results must take into account the sociopolitical context and the racial history of the population being studied.

There are many issues that need to be explored. Currently, we do not know about the marital patterns of biracial people, how dominant/minority mixes may differ from a minority/minority mixture or what impact increased numbers of self-identified, racially mixed people will have on American society. What will the offspring of biracial people experience? We need to explore how the answers to these questions will affect identity formation in the next generation.

Conclusion

The increasing presence of mixed-race people in America challenges our notions about race and the role of race in identity formation. As the numbers of this population increase there will be more biracial people seeking therapy for any number of reasons. It is therefore imperative that therapists learn about issues that mixed-race people confront and

how to support the dual nature of their heritage. Few therapists are knowledgeable about multiracial identity formation. Deter (1997) found that "most had no background or training about how to understand developmental tasks for mixed-race individuals. All articulated a sense of helplessness that they felt at different points in the therapy with their multiracial clients" (p. 380).

Social workers as clinicians and caseworkers need to be sensitive to the socio-cultural issues that exist in the lives of their biracial clients. The difficulties mixed-race people experience must be understood in the social context in which they live. It is important not to pathologize feelings of self-consciousness, sensitivity to rejection, or ambivalence regarding racial identity. These may be responses to the realities of the social and family pressures on the biracial individual. The "self" of a biracial person is constantly being challenged.

Mental health professionals need to distinguish issues pertaining to racial issues from those that are developmental. It is imperative that they understand biracial identity development and how it differs from monoracial development. Racial identity for biracial people is not a static one-time decision. "Situational identities" in which the individual may feel one race or the other or both simultaneously is a common phenomenon depending on the context (Daniel, Hall, Thornton, Zack, & Root, 1996). In light of this fluidity of identity, we need to learn how to help biracial individuals develop and maintain an internal cohesive sense of self.

Most of what we know about the internal world of the biracial person comes from the narratives of the anecdotal literature. These narratives need to be studied more systematically so that we might better be able to help multiracial people explore their identity and

understand what role race plays in their identity formation. In addition, there is need for more

qualitative studies.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Procedures

This chapter discusses the methods and procedures that were used in this study. It begins with a discussion of research design, specifically as it relates to the issues of narrative research, followed by the procedure used in the selection of subjects. Succeeding topics are the details of data collection, a description of the data, analysis of the methods, and the interview guide.

The purpose of this study was to understand the subjective experience of biracial people of dual minority heritages, and what they tell themselves about their racial identity as it has formed as of this point in their lives. Identity formation is a dynamic process that continues throughout life as one interacts with the social environment and is expressed in narrative form. "A storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7).

Design of the Study

Analyzing life stories or narratives has been gaining favor among qualitative researchers as a methodology that is well-suited to understanding human development, personal identity, and life experiences. Methods of analysis have been borrowed from the fields of literature, linguistics, history, ethnology, and anthropology. Narrative, as it will be used in this study, is a story that has a beginning, middle, and end. The plot of the story is the

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organizing theme of the story. "The plot functions to transform a chronicle or listing of events into a schematic whole by highlighting and recognizing the contribution that certain events make to the development and outcome of the story" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 19).

By understanding the narrative people tell themselves about their biracial identity, we can better understand the meaning that being biracial has for them and how it has changed over time, as well as the factors that have influenced their identity. "One's present identity is thus not a sudden and mysterious event, but a sensible result of a life story" (Gergen & Gergen, 1997, p. 162).

This study was exploratory and descriptive of the subjective experience of growing up as a biracial individual of dual minority heritages using a qualitative design with a narrative research approach. Root (1992) has suggested that qualitative research methods such as case studies and in-depth interviews allow for us to understand the experiences and developmental patterns of racially mixed people. The purpose of qualitative research is to explore areas where there is little knowledge and to describe subjective reality. Lieblich et al. explain that the narrative approach to research is useful for understanding specific subgroups in society. "From a social, cultural, or ethnic point of view, these social groups frequently are discriminated against minorities whose narratives express their unheard voices" (1998, p. 5).

Many qualitative researchers work from the assumption that "telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning" (Mishler, 1986, p. 67).

Based on her clinical experience in working with biracial individuals and knowledge gained from the literature on biracial identity, the researcher conducted open-ended interviews that encouraged participants to tell the story of how they have come to understand their racial identity. The researcher suggested the topics for discussion and encouraged

storytelling meant to extend the narrative flow by asking such questions as "Can you tell me more about that?" and "What was that experience like for you?" An interview guide served as a prompt to ensure that the important topics of interest were covered. (See Interview Guide)

Procedure for the Selection of Subjects

The sampling procedure for this study was purposeful rather than random. In purposeful sampling, according to Patton (1990), the participants are chosen for their ability to provide detailed data contributing to an in-depth study of the phenomena.

Participants for this study were obtained through the researcher's professional networks: Multiracial Americans of Southern California and HAPA at the University of Southern California. Individuals were selected who fit the racial and age range criteria and who were interested in discussing this issue. It was a snowball sample, which is appropriate to an exploratory study. "This is an approach for locating information-rich informants or critical cases" (Patton, 1990, p. 186). The sample consisted of biracial individuals, independent of their self-identification, who have a socially-designated parent of one minority race, for example, Black, and one parent of another socially-identified minority race, for example, Korean. This population has rarely been systematically studied and therefore adds to the knowledge of identity formation among individuals of dual minority heritages. Sample size in narrative research is small and yields a large amount of detailed and rich information by the selected participants. The sample size was seven participants. This number was large enough to allow room for dropouts and yet was small enough to allow for in-depth interviewing and analysis of the narratives.

Participants were adults, age 20 through 35, who had experienced the adolescent racial ambivalence described in the literature. Most had separated from their families and were in the process of consolidating and maintaining their identity. The upper age limit was chosen because the experience of those born after the civil rights movement and the end of laws prohibiting marriage between races may differ significantly from older age groups.

Data Collection

Data was collected in face-to-face interviews that were audio taped. The interviews were scheduled for one-and-a-half to two-hours duration. They took place in a setting that provided for confidentiality and convenience for the participant, such as the researcher's private office and a reading room at the University of Southern California Library. It was the researcher's goal to interview and audio tape six to eight participants. The tapes were transcribed by a professional transcriber who was instructed to note pauses and stutters. "Not simply technical questions, these seemingly mundane choices of what to include and how to arrange and display the text have serious implications for how a reader will understand the narrative" (Reissman, 1993, p. 12). The researcher listened to the audio-taped sessions and read the transcripts. Changes in tone and the congruence of affect and content were noted during the interviews and in listening to the tapes.

Open-ended, informal interviews were used to allow respondents to tell their subjective stories. According to Mishler, if respondents are allowed to answer questions uninterrupted, they will tell stories. Reissman (1993) states, "Provided investigators can give up control over the research process and approach interviews as conversations, almost any question can generate a narrative" (p. 56).

The role of the interviewer is important in narrative research. Mishler (1986) describes interviews as "a discourse between speakers" (p. 36). Exchanges are not question-and-answer pairs. The researcher has an impact on how a story is told and what meaning the narrator wishes to convey. "The interviewer's presence and form of involvement--how she or he listens, attends, encourages, interrupts, digresses, initiates topics and terminates responses--is integral to a respondent's account" (Mishler, 1986, p. 82). In narrative research, the interviewee is a participant in controlling the interview. This empowerment of participants is important if respondents are to "speak in their own voice" and "tell their own story" in the form which is most natural--a narrative. This researcher's style in the interview was interactive and conversational. This allowed the researcher both to ask questions and to draw out the interviewees' responses more fully. The researcher attempted to avoid imposing her own ideas on the participant, but rather hoped to elicit each participant's story of his or her experiences as a biracial person.

Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix D) was made up of open-ended questions designed to encourage the participants to tell their subjective narrative about their racial identity. It helped the researcher probe for areas of interest that the respondent did not address spontaneously and keep the interview focused on the issues important to understanding their racial identity.

Reissman (1993) says she discourages students from making a question too specific because "analytic induction, by definition, causes questions to change and new ones to emerge" (p. 60). She advises an interview guide of several broad questions. The researcher

noted when an individual omitted feelings or an area of interest. Probe questions were asked at the end of the interview regarding any area not mentioned by the participants in their narrative. "When considering personal identity, a life story may include the domains of occupation, gender, race and family values" (Fiese, 1999, p. 7) The researcher was interested in what effect these areas had on being biracial. In addition to these topics the researcher was also interested in how race has affected their friendships and relationships.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were assigned fictitious names to protect the privacy and confidentiality. Prior to the interview, each participant signed a Statement of Informed Consent. They were informed of the nature of the study and that the interview would be audio taped. They were told that the audio tapes and any verbatim transcripts of the interviews would be destroyed at the end of the study.

If any respondent had experienced strong emotional reactions to the interview, the researcher was prepared to stop the interview and provide any immediate counseling support that might be needed and assist the respondent in seeking professional help if necessary. Participants were told that they were free to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Analysis

Polkinghorne (1988, 1995) distinguishes between two types of narrative research: descriptive or analysis of the narrative, and explanatory or narrative analysis. The researcher focused on the former since it is analysis of the narrative that is most conducive to this study.

In the analysis of the narrative the purpose is to describe narrative that individuals or groups use to make the events of their lives meaningful. It is the plot of the story that makes the events meaningful. It is not simply a chronology. "Concepts are inductively derived from the data" (1995, p. 13). The theme is not explicit. The researcher discovers the themes through interpretation of the interview data. "The researcher needs to move from the specific stories a person uses to account for particular episodes to more general life stories that provide self-identity and give unity to the person's whole existence" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 163). Analysis of the narrative looks at the content and the form of the story.

Lieblich et al. (1998) define four types of analysis of a narrative depending on whether the emphasis is on the content or the structure of the narratives: holistic analysis of form, holistic analysis of content, categorical-content analysis, and categorical-form analysis. The researcher used a combination of the holistic-content analysis and the holistic-form analysis. "In the holistic approach, the life story of a person is taken as a whole and sections of the text are interpreted in the context of other parts of the narrative" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 12). In the holistic-content analysis the researcher analyzed the content of the narrative into themes that emerged from the data. The holistic-form analysis looked at the structure of the story as a whole and its coherence. "The working assumption is that the formal aspects of the structure, as much as the content express the identity, perceptions, values of the storyteller" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 88).

This researcher looked at the coherence of the story and indications of self-understanding because "the ways in which a teller organizes her story narratively reveals much about psychological organization" (Strickland, 1994, p. 32). One aim of the study was to look at how the respondents subjectively resolve their racial identity and sense of self,

given two different racial backgrounds and the fluidity of identity. Whether or not the story makes sense and how the affect of the teller matches the content is important when the focus of the study is on identity (Fiese, 1999). The themes and patterns that emerged from the content were analyzed, as well as how the story was told. Combining the analysis of form and content, according to Lieblich et al. (1998), yields information that would be missed if only one dimension was analyzed.

In the first phase of the analysis, the researcher listened to the tapes and read the transcripts several times for the themes that emerged from individual narratives. "This kind of reading is familiar in clinical case studies" (Lieblich et al., p. 13). These patterns of experience were then compared across interviews and grouped according to similar patterns that formed into the dominant themes. The researcher read each transcript and then put each one on colored paper. Next, the researcher went through each transcript and underlined all of the sentences, phrases, and comments that seemed to be alike. The transcripts were then cut into pieces and put into piles based on the similarity of content. "Paradigmatic analysis provides a method to uncover the commonalties that exist across the stories that make up the database. It functions to generate general knowledge from a set of particular instances" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 14).

In the second phase of the analysis, holistic-form, the researcher listened to and read the individual narratives for coherence. Fiese and Sameroff (1999) define four qualities of narrative coherence: internal consistency, organization, flexibility, and congruence of affect and content. If the narrative is complete and "hangs together," it is considered to have internal consistency. "A coherent narrative includes an internally consistent theory that is supported by sufficient detail to allow the listener to determine whether actions were justified

and conclusions warranted" (Fiese & Sameroff, 1999, p. 9). The researcher listened for

contradictions which disrupted the consistency and organization of the story, for flexibility of

the narrator's perspective and ability to self-reflect, and for the congruence of affect and

content. In looking at the organization and flexibility of the story, the researcher was

interested in the narrator's ability to relate "what happened in the story and why he or she

thinks the events occurred in the way they did" (p. 9). The researcher listened for the

congruence of affect and content which "addresses the fit between actions or thoughts and

the emotions expressed with regard to them" (p. 9).

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter contains an overview of the methodology used in the study, an account of the themes that emerged across interviews, biographical descriptions of each participant, a description of the narrative structure of each interview, and a summary of identity formation.

Narrative Analysis

As previously stated in Chapter Three, this study used a qualitative, narrative research design. Each interview began with a description of the study and its goals and an explanation of the participant's right to confidentiality. The interview proceeded with a general question asking the participant to tell the story of his or her life, beginning with the first awareness of race and being biracial.

The interviews were analyzed sequentially in the order in which they were conducted. In the first phase of analysis, the researcher immersed herself in reading and listening to the interviews until the major life experiences of the individual were identified and understood. After this phase of the analysis, the researcher noted the participant's reactions to the life experiences. In this process the researcher noticed the evolution of subjective responses over time as the participant matured. Similar life experiences and the subjective responses were grouped together across interviews forming the dominant themes. The audio tapes, transcripts, and notes were reviewed again to evaluate the coherence of each narrative. The researcher used the elements of narrative coherence described by Fiese and Sameroff (1999)

to analyze the text for contradictions, congruence between affect and content, overall consistency of the story, and for self-reflection and the ability to see another perspective.

Demographic Information

The primary means of obtaining participants was through multicultural support organizations and colleague referral. All the names used in this chapter are fictitious to protect the participants' privacy. Some identifying details were changed to an equivalent in order to ensure confidentiality.

The participants were two men and five women who ranged in age from 20 to 35. At the time of the interviews, three of the participants were college students, two were graduate students working part time, and two were college graduates working toward careers in acting. All were of dual minority heritages, and all defined themselves as biracial. Five of the respondents had a foreign-born mother. Both parents of the other two were foreign born. Five respondents grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods and six attended predominantly White schools, at least for the elementary school years. Three were from intact families. Economically, the families ranged from lower middle class to upper middle class.

Themes

The researcher identified four dominant themes. The themes describe, define, and organize the participants' common thoughts, feelings, and experiences of growing up biracial. Theme One, An Unequal Blend, looks at how participants integrated their dual minority heritages. Theme Two, Odd Man Out, describes the experiences of being different and looks at societal reactions to the participants and their responses. Theme Three, I'm Not

Just the Color of My Skin, describes the role of personal identity on race. Theme Four, From Bicultural to Tricultural to Multicultural, reflects the diversity of the participants' lives and its benefits. Although all the participants talked about common life experiences, the degree and intensity of each experience varied, as did the participants' subjective responses to that experience. They represent a wide range of experience. The researcher thought of this range as a continuum of possible experiences and responses. Each theme also describes a process of evolution over time as the individual's perspective and circumstances changed. To illustrate the theme, the researcher selected two participants who vary in how they represent the theme. Taken as a whole, the themes reflect the process of identity formation, the factors affecting identity formation, and the subjects' reactions and responses to the challenges to biracial identity formation.

In the section following the themes, summaries of the individuals' narratives will describe each person's story in more detail along with an analysis of the coherence of the narrative.

Theme 1: An Unequal Blend

This theme illustrates how the participants have resolved their dual racial identity by merging their dual heritages into an unequal blend. The researcher observed a primary connection to one heritage and an increased connection to the secondary heritage over time with participant's maturity, comfort with biracial identity, and increased exposure to a multicultural environment. Although they state they are biracial, they did not relate internally to each heritage in equal measure. The amount of blending was not the issue. What was important was the individual's subjective comfort with his or her achieved blend of the dual

racial heritages. The participants talked about their racial identity starting with their first awareness of race. They described how they leaned toward one racial identity early in their lives and then added their other racial heritage over time. The degree to which the participants blended both of their racial heritages varied according to factors such as family involvement, environment, phenotype, and how they believe they were perceived by others.

In a public or official context, such as questionnaires, forms, and the recent United States Census, all the participants identify as biracial or "other." When directly asked, the participants named both of their racial backgrounds. By contrast, their private or personal self-identity favored one lineage over the other.

Initially, through their elementary school years, the participants tended to identify primarily with one parental heritage. Since these participants lived and went to school in predominantly White communities, exposure to either of their heritages was limited. As they got older and were exposed to more ethnic diversity in school and in the environment, they became interested in learning about the other side. For one participant this occurred in high school. For the others, college stimulated an interest in, and an exploration of, their diversity to varying degrees. The less dominant parental heritage became incorporated into their sense of self. Forming their racial identity to this point was a process that occurred over time. However, one racial and cultural background continued to dominate their self-definition. At one end of the spectrum, two of the participants "blended" or "meshed," as they said, their two backgrounds somewhat evenly. At the other end of the spectrum, two participants had little connection to or knowledge of one background. The others ranged in the middle of the spectrum.

Physical appearance, family connections, and languages spoken at home were factors that impacted how the individual first self-identified as he or she was growing up.

Knowledge or lack of knowledge of the at-home parent's first language reinforced how the individual viewed him or herself. The three part-Hispanic women in the study all spoke Spanish and mainly identified with their Hispanic heritage. For example, one participant said, "My whole life I thought of myself as Hispanic because of the fact that I speak Spanish." Another participant who did not speak his mother's language felt, "I can't really identify myself as Korean just for the language barrier."

Another important influence on the participants' racial self-concept was their perception of how others saw them, that is, how they racially identified them. People make assumptions based on the appearance of biracial persons and direct their responses accordingly. These responses may or may not be congruent with the individual's self-perception. As an example, one woman explained, "I'd have to adjust to the society telling me I'm Black because of the way I look on the outside...I don't identify with being Black." In college she began to explore her Black identity because people saw her that way, which then led to the unequal blend of her Black and Korean identities. The biracial person's process is to blend their racial identities over time, but other people's view of them may remain the same based on appearance. A Black and Korean participant explained that most people saw him as African American. He said, "So, to a lot of people I just look Black, and so they don't even think about, oh, he's mixed." He initially took on this social designation and later in college became more concerned with learning about his Korean heritage, which contributed to his unequal blend.

Connection to family members, or the lack of connection, also impacted how attached participants felt to their heritages. For instance, one participant became more interested in her mother's Thai background after visiting her extended family in Canada, England, Australia, and Thailand. She said, "And I think that it really helped me a lot as far as like coming to terms or like understanding a lot of my mother's culture and just how it applied to me."

Overall, the participants' racial sense of self evolved over time as they matured and moved away from the predominantly White schools they had been attending. Exposure to more ethnic diversity in their environment introduced them to others with heritages common to their own and, thereby, expanded their identity from the one they adopted earlier in life. In this context they were able to learn about and explore more of their racial heritages.

These two participants represented different resolutions to their identity at the time of the interview. Jessica "meshed" her Thai and African-American heritages in a unique way. Melinda leaned clearly in the direction of her Hispanic heritage in spite of not wanting to "pick one side."

Jessica. Jessica was a 24-year-old, second-year graduate student who worked part time. Her mother was from Thailand and worked as a nurse. Her father was an African-American artist. Jessica identified herself as Thai (Asian) and African American. Jessica's phenotype was golden brown with fine features and wavy hair. Her parents were divorced when she was two. She was raised by her mother in a small, predominantly White, city northeast of Los Angeles and regularly visited her father, who lived in a small community east of Los Angeles. Jessica was the only child of both parents.

Jessica said she "always knew" that she was biracial and bicultural. She grew up in an almost exclusively White neighborhood. As a very young child, she wanted to look White. She asked her mother to "put powder all over me so I can be White." According to Jessica, other people usually assumed she was Black and she, therefore, saw herself as a Black girl who was also Thai. She said, "I think because everybody sees me as African American, I have to, in a way ever since I was little, I just already saw myself that way, too." Her appearance as biracial was more obvious to African Americans who questioned whether she was Ethiopian, Brazilian, or from the Caribbean.

After meeting her mother's family and visiting Thailand, she got a better sense of the culture and began to integrate it into her identity. "I knew the other side was there, but I didn't know how to fit it in, and then later on, I just meshed the two together." In high school she met people from Africa and the West Indies and she realized, "I'm diverse, too."

Jessica appeared comfortable with her racial identity. She started out more identified with her Black background and then added her Asian culture. Although she feels she has meshed the two races, she still is more Black-identified than Asian. She "highlights" her Thai or Asian side when she is with her mother's family, and her African-American side with her Black friends. Her unique blend is reflected in the fact that she identifies more with people from the West Indies and Africa, rather than with African Americans. She said, "Like a typical African-American community…the way they grew up is a lot different than me so I identify a lot more with like West Indians and Africans." She believed these friends were more similar to her in terms of customs, food preferences, and values than American Blacks.

Melinda. Melinda was a 20-year-old college student from an intact family. Her mother was born in Mexico and was a nurse at a major university. Her father was a mechanical engineer born in the United States of Japanese parents. Melinda identified herself as Hispanic and Asian. Her appearance was Hispanic, with Asian eyes, light skin, and long, straight hair. Melinda had two younger brothers, ages 9 and 14. The family lived in an ethnically diverse area of Los Angeles.

Melinda said from the time she could remember, "I always knew I was mixed. I didn't know what it meant to be mixed but I always knew my parents didn't look the same." Although Melinda saw herself as both races, she related most consistently to her Hispanic background, both socially and culturally. She was very close to her mother's family of six sisters and one brother, most of whom had children. At the time of the interview, Melinda was still very connected to her immediate and extended family. Her social life consisted of her mother's family, her boyfriend, who was Hispanic/Asian, and a few Hispanic girlfriends. Melinda spoke Spanish and the family celebrated Mexican traditions. Melinda felt it was a challenge growing up biracial. She said she looked mixed and, therefore, feels that race was an important part of her life. She was often asked whether she was Hawaiian.

Although Melinda did feel connected to her Japanese grandparents, she had not yet explored the Japanese part of her heritage. She remained more culturally identified as Hispanic. At the same time she asserted a public biracial designation.

Theme 2: Odd Man Out

This theme illustrates the participants' profound awareness of their differences from others, not only from friends and community members, but even from their own parents and

immediate family. The participants discussed their growing awareness of their difference from others as minorities in relation to the White community and as biracial individuals in relation to other minorities and their own family members as well. Some were particularly aware of how different they are from people portrayed in the media. This resulted in their feeling painfully unique as children and adolescents and left them vulnerable to comments from others. These differences impacted the individual's sense of belonging or "fitting in" to a peer group.

In addition to the awareness that they were different, the participants also suffered overt discrimination and social insults. Although this is a common experience for many minorities, it was experienced differently for the biracial participants because they had no family or community of people like them with which to relate.

All experienced a variety of discriminatory incidents as minorities and as biracial people, including name-calling and staring. Insults came not only from peers and strangers, but also in a few cases, from family members. How they were affected by being different and the societal discrimination changed as they matured and became more comfortable in multiethnic environments where they were able to find a social niche. As adults, they learned to respond more objectively.

All of the participants recognized from an early age that they did not look like their parents or their peers. As one young man said

> Well, I kind of always knew it because the color that I have is Black, so I always knew I was Black, and then my mom is Korean, so of course, you know, I put two and two together. So, I think I pretty much always knew that I was biracial.

For the five participants who grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods, their difference racially from those around them was very obvious. These differences took on a

social meaning when they began school. Six of the participants attended elementary schools with few minorities and often no other biracial children. As Jessica said, "I was definitely the odd girl out."

At times the difference was a simple self-observation. At other times it was others who raised the differences as an issue and a cause for rejection. Appearance, food, and music were areas mentioned by the participants as ways in which they were different from their peers. All participants discussed feeling unaccepted by peers of one or the other of their ethnic heritages, or the White community, at some point in their lives.

Ron discusses musical tastes among various ethnic groups, and how he, therefore, stood out as different:

> Black people think that they can only listen to rap music, you know, or...before rap music came along, you know if you were White, you listened to rock 'n roll, and if you were Black, you listened to R and B, you know. Or if you're White you also listened to country music or whatever. But, there was just no crossing, you know. I only listened to R and B, but only because that's all my dad had, you know. So that's what I grew up listening to. It wasn't till I got into high school that I started getting into rock 'n roll. And even then it was kind of weird because, yeah, I didn't know any other Black people that listened to rock 'n roll.

Music played a role in Jessica's awareness of her difference from African-American girls in high school. She explained

> ...then the other girls...they were like...I think born and raised African American, and they would look at me like, oh she acts white or she's not Black, or you know, because I didn't grow up around them so a lot of the stuff they would...like they would sing certain songs that I might not have heard or stuff like that. So, they would tease me that way.

The participants were aware of differences in food preferences from other groups as they were growing up. When invited to stay for dinner, one participant's friends reacted, "'Eeuw, what are you eating? Like what is that stuff?' They'd be poking at it, you know, like 'eeuw.'"

Although as a child Jessica identified racially more as African American, she noticed that she grew up "eating different...all this Thai food. After I got a little older, I realized that this food is not like everybody else." She did not like eating what her African-American friends enjoyed.

Since biracial persons' appearance may be ambiguous, people often question their racial identity. All of the participants recalled being asked, "What are you?" which was insulting depending on how the question was asked and by whom. All found this question offensive when they were approached by total strangers. Carmen described how being questioned felt to her, which was echoed to some extent by the other women as well. "I didn't want to stand out as different, and I hated the fact that...every day somebody'd be like, 'So where are you from?' or 'What are you? What are you?'" People tended to categorize them and make assumptions about their ethnic identity. As one woman said, "A lot of people thought I...you know, am Filipino, Hawaiian, anything but what I am."

Appearance was a big issue for all the women, especially in relation to White peers. Three of the women mentioned that not being reflected positively in the environment around them or in the media or magazines caused them to feel weird or ugly. Three mentioned a phase when they wished they could be White in order to feel a sense of belonging within the White community.

Hair textures and styles were mentioned by all of the participants as a difference between themselves and other groups. Ricky, who is Black and Korean, explained that others became aware that he was biracial or different than his Black friends because of his hair. Ricky says, "The thing that gives me away, I think, is the hair because usually Black people

don't have straight hair. And so, since my hair is pretty straight, you know, I think that kinda gives it away."

As a result of their differences, the participants often felt they didn't belong with any particular group, or were excluded by one or both racial heritages. As an example, Ron acknowledged not feeling a part of the African-American community. Regarding other Black men, "I don't think they necessarily accept me." Women, both White and Black, have told him he is not "Black enough." He said

> I know that some of them are attracted to me or they think that I'm cute or good-looking or whatever, but when I talk to them...with my demeanor, they're not interested anymore. In, fact, I had one girl in Ohio who broke up with me because I wasn't Black enough.

In another example, Annie, who was Latina and Chinese, did not feel accepted by Asians. Her friends have been mainly Latinos who, Annie feels, were "very much more accepting about me being biracial, bicultural, as opposed to Asians. I've...I think I've only had one Asian friend my entire life."

The participants at times felt excluded by the overt reactions of others to them. Name-calling was most common in early childhood. Melinda and Carmen were both called "mutt" by other children in elementary school. Jessica was called "Chunk-O-Bar" or "Hershey." Annie was called "Chink" and "Nipper" and "Plate Face" in elementary school.

Being stared at by strangers was another common experience among most of the participants. For example, Melinda found that going to a restaurant with her family could be very uncomfortable. "And so...you know...this is one thing that actually I feel very uncomfortable with. When we go out to dinner, and we're sitting at a table all together, and people just keep staring at us, and my mom and I always notice it."

In some cases the lack of acceptance came from family members. Annie was aware of differential treatment by her Chinese paternal grandmother and the extended family:

> And even [our own] family has alienated us. We went to a banquet, and it was everybody from the old country...they put my brother, me and my mom at a table next to the kitchen in the back. And we were family. And my dad and everybody else was up in front.

The "Odd Man Out" experience, that is, the constant, everyday awareness of difference from others, even their own families, caused participants to consider their racial and personal identity from an early age. Their responses to these situations changed over time from hurt to anger to intellectualization. In childhood the episodes of name-calling, insults, and staring were very hurtful. They moved from feeling hurt to being angry and eventually trying not to personalize the incidents. As they got older, the participants gained an intellectual perspective and evolved means of coping. They were able to attribute racist comments, stares, and questions to ignorance and insensitivity.

Carmen described the process that came with maturing that the others indicated as well:

> The thing is, I have to remember, and I remind myself, that other people didn't have the experience I had so they don't know it feels a certain way to be asked those questions. They, I mean, they have no idea, and that's because I'm unique in that sense that I had that experience. So, I mean I have to be more understanding of where other people are coming from.

Melinda has grown in her responses to discriminatory incidents as she has gotten older. She said

> I don't get angry because I've learned that people aren't always taught. So, it's not...I mean, I don't find that it's always their fault. ...I don't get angry anymore, though. I did at first... I just feel that why make myself mad over something that isn't even worth it. It's not worth getting myself all stressed about.

Attending a more diverse high school was a significant change for some of the participants. However, even in more ethnically diverse schools, there were few, if any, biracial students. In college, the awareness of differences from others became less of an issue. The participants felt more comfortable in the multiethnic environment of the university where they did not stand out as they had when they were younger in nearly all-White schools and communities. Living in an urban environment amongst other minorities in part mitigated feeling different. With maturity, the participants gained an appreciation of their differences and found a sense of belonging that did not necessarily depend on ethnicity.

The two representatives of this theme varied in the degree of difference and racism from others they experienced and how it affected them as they matured. Carol felt very different from those around her and did not achieve a sense of belonging until she reached adulthood. Ricky, on the other hand, was very comfortable in a multicultural environment and wonders how he will feel in the future when he leaves the protective environment of college.

Carol. Carol was a 31-year-old, aspiring singer and actress who worked at a residential treatment center for children. Her mother was Korean-born and her father was an African American whom Carol did not know. She was raised by her mother and stepfather, also African American. Carol had two older stepbrothers and one stepsister. The family moved to Washington State from Korea when Carol was five. They lived in a White neighborhood near the military base. Carol's phenotype was light-skinned black with wavy hair and slightly Asian eyes. She identified as Korean and Black.

Carol recalled an incident as a young child in which she noticed that she differed

from those around her in the White community where she lived:

> When we had just moved out to Washington State and, um, we were looking for...we stopped to ask directions, and I ducked in, in the back of the seat...like I was like five years old, and I ducked down in the back like on the ground, and my mother noticed that. When they left the person they were talking to she asked me why I went down into the seat and I said it was "cause I don't think they like me." And my mother said, "Why would you say that?" And it was, "'cause you're...'cause I'm brown...'cause of the color of my skin."

Carol was close to her Korean mother and identified with her ethnically and culturally

as a child. Nevertheless, she did not experience a sense of fitting into the Korean community.

Since she did not speak Korean after age three, she felt out of place in the Korean church her

mother attended. She felt that the older Koreans pitied her:

> When I'm around Asians, I think they don't know how to take me. They...a lot of the elders would say "poor you, you're not full Korean." A lot of what I grew up with is just, "You're not Korean. We feel sorry for you 'cause you're half Korean..."

Carol attended primarily White schools. She recalled wanting to change her

appearance in order to fit in. She explained

> I had this obsession with magazines and identifying with like wanting to be like the blonde...the White girls and to feel more accepted in the crowd that I grew up in, and it was a majority White.

Carol was also very aware that she was not reflected positively by the media:

> And then, also, just the media...like TV, 'cause I loved watching TV, and it was predominantly...everything was White, and as long as I can remember, I, I could identify on TV how, like, if there was a Black person on TV, they usually played the bad person...they were identified as something they did wrong or, you know, they, they were the ones that were the scapegoat or...just something negative about as long as I can remember, I could identify that kind of situation.

She also recalled that in school she was "everybody's friend and not really clicking

with any certain group or race." Carol went on to say

I had people who are Black will say, you are not like us. ... the Black community would judge me, you know, they're like, why don't you stay with your own. And then the White people are, why don't you stay with your own.

The most difficult situation for Carol came from her own family. Carol described the discrimination she felt from her African-American stepfather and stepsiblings:

...My, my [step] sister would...um...call me "Brownie," but I only think because of his--the stepfather's influence of doing that, 'cause he would...he would degrade me in front of the other kids because they were lighter than me.

Carol was very hurt by the comments of her family and others. "I got upset...There was times that I used to take things on and internalize it and just be upset." In college Carol became what she calls more militant. "I became very, um...maybe angry, became very, uh offensive." As an adult, Carol attempted to respond "without feeling defensive or, um, losing myself or hating myself."

Carol found her social niche as an adult when she moved to more urban, multicultural environments. She made friends based on common interests and felt accepted. She said

I love L.A. because of the cultures here, the multi cultures and...I mean, there's more tolerance, there's more of an awareness or more people here. I mean, I just feel like you can either be by yourself and do what you need to do, or you can be with others that have similar tastes, interests, and, um...it's like you have choice here.

Ricky. Ricky was a 22-year-old college senior. His mother was born in Korea and his father was African American. Ricky identified himself as Black and Korean. His phenotype was Black with very slightly Asian-looking eyes and black, almost straight hair. He grew up in an ethnically diverse small town in Southern California near a military base. Ricky's parents divorced when he was three and a half, and he had no memory of his father. He grew up with a younger brother and an older sister, who was in law school at the time of the interview.

Ricky was aware of differences from his peers, but he did not feel that these differences were an obstacle to fitting in at school. He attributed his sense of belonging to growing up in a small, multiethnic community near a military base, where biracial people and minorities were common:

> For me, it wasn't, you know, a big deal for me to be biracial 'cause there was a lot of people that were pretty much mixed in my city. Maybe not double minority, but I mean there was a lot, you know. It was more than was just me that was mixed, so it wasn't a big deal.

He was well known in the community as an athlete and a good student. He leaned more toward his Black heritage and felt accepted by Black students. He said, "Me, I fit in pretty well. Black people pretty, uh, welcome me because of the fact that so little, you know, in the society, in general, so little Black people that you know, the more you can get the better 'cause there's always power in numbers."

In college Ricky became a leader in Black organizations. He did not feel he fit in with the other side of his heritage, however. He felt unconnected to the Korean students. He explained why he does not belong to any Korean organizations:

> 'Cause I don't feel like I fit in because, like I said, like all the Korean organizations are like basically people from overseas, and they all speak Korean, and they're just trying to find friends within themselves so that they, you know have a bond together. They have more interests together, more things like that so it's kinda hard to really talk to them.

Ricky said he did not experience much discrimination and did not take the views of others personally:

> I just...I just let the stereotypes bounce off me. I'm like, well, you know, that's a stereotype. You don't know me as a person, and that's fine, you know. You could say, you could think of me this way, but it's not really me so...

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Ricky became the co founder of HAPA, a biracial student organization at his university, where he felt he could express both sides of his heritage and meet with other biracial students.

He realized that his sense of belonging in his world may change when he graduates and starts working in unfamiliar situations:

> I'm pretty sure now that I'm getting older, I'm getting more and more situations where I don't know people. [At school] I've been involved with so many clubs and organizations, everybody knows me. So, you know, it's a comfort zone. Now I'm getting to a place in the actual, real world where I can't know everybody. So now, maybe, the issue's gonna be bigger for me…maybe I'll get some discrimination and maybe I won't.

Theme 3: I'm Not Just the Color of My Skin

During the interviews, the participants reflected what role race plays in their lives and on the resources they used to help them gain acceptance and to fit in with others. This theme describes how the participants utilized these various internal and external resources to deal with the vicissitudes of being biracial and a minority to help them consolidate a positive sense of self. The whole of their identity is greater than the sum of their racial parts. These resources included their relationship to family members, personal abilities and talents, and personal coping styles. Most were able to use these resources from an early age while others learned over time.

All of the participants mentioned at least some members of their families as a source of support in contradicting negative messages from the environment. Melinda felt her family was very supportive of her and taught her to deal with negative situations very assertively. She said

I trust my parents with all my heart, and I'll tell them anything. I've been brought up to say how I feel. It's like if anything ever happens where I'm out somewhere, you know, and someone says something to me, you know. I go home and tell my parents. If anyone says anything, you know, about my race, I go to my parents and tell them. And they'll tell me, oh you know, if that ever happens you should say something, you know. Say, "I didn't like that comment." Say, "That offended me. Don't say stuff like that around me."

She also felt very close to the extended families on both sides. Several of her aunts in her mother's family were also in racially mixed marriages.

The participants all had personal strengths and abilities that helped to sustain their self-esteem in the face of difficult situations. These strengths, such as athletic ability, educational achievement, and personal interests, allowed the participants to define themselves other than by race, and helped them to connect with others based on common interests. Their traits and abilities enabled the participants to achieve a sense of belonging and weather any negative situations they encountered. This was particularly important since they did not have a community like themselves with role models and support systems.

Four of the participants were in gifted programs in elementary school. Being seen as smart was positive for their self-esteem. Ron described

I know when I was in elementary school I was in GATE and MGM, you know, all of those supposedly superior intelligence kids. So, yeah, I was one of the smart kids in school. So I guess that defined me. That made me feel special because, you know, I was one of the smart kids.

Two participants were attending college on academic scholarships.

Special talents also were helpful in sustaining a sense of self. Ricky was an athlete and well known in the community as a football player. "Like everyone knew me because, you know, I played high school football. In my town high school football was everything." He also played basketball, baseball, and ran track.

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The participants saw personal qualities or strengths as helping them to achieve what they had in spite of obstacles. Ron and Ricky described examples of a personal quality, which was a part of their self-definition. Ricky saw himself as "focused" and independent. He explained about his not drinking with friends:

> I was always my own individual person. I mean, I hung out with people just because I like to be around people, I like to crack jokes, whatever, but when it came down to things that they like to do, I didn't like to do so, me if I don't like to do something, I'm not going to do it just because everybody else is doing it."

Ron felt the "perseverance" and "tenacity" he learned from his father were very instrumental in his success at building websites and developing his acting career.

Personal coping styles varied among the participants. The narratives explicitly and implicitly revealed their coping mechanisms. Humor, intellectualization, disavowal of feeling, and avoidance helped the participants deal with being biracial or cope with the tensions that they felt being different, being stared at, challenged or treated in a discriminatory fashion.

Humor was mentioned by four of the participants as one way that they coped with being biracial. Ricky described his use of humor to deal with Asian and Black stereotypes. He said he liked to "mix 'em around and just have fun with them." He gave an example of his humor:

> So I present my stereotype or a Korean stereotype or an Asian stereotype in general...like, you know, most Asians are short and most Black people are tall, so I say, I'm supposed to be 6'5", but because, you know, I'm Korean, I'm 5'10"...

Carol described herself as the "class clown." She liked to combine a Korean accent with a Black expression. "The way I tried to express, like, this discomfort of not knowing where I fit in, um, is when I would joke, and I'd say, 'Yo, wass up, Mom?' You know, I'd do the Ebonics with her."

At times the individual avoided the people with whom she felt uncomfortable. Jessica's style of handling negative situations was to be quiet or move away. "I really would just brush them off more...I'll just kind of remove myself and not engage as much as...if they're going to be negative or if they are looking at me in a certain way."

In some cases the individual used intellectualization about others' behavior in order to protect themselves. Melinda believed that

> People are just curious, but they give off the wrong impression when they look at you a certain way or when they say things. But, maybe it is just their curiosity. You know, I think they are trying to find out what you are, but they don't know how to find out. So, they make, you know, comments to you or they say stuff to you that sounds more racial.

Annie was an example of using her talents and personal traits to make friends. Carmen, on the other hand, was not able to use her considerable talents as a means of finding a comfortable niche for herself until she was an adult.

Annie. Annie felt she was very successful at using her abilities in order to feel good about herself and to make friends. Annie was in the GATE, the gifted program, in elementary school. Annie was talented in writing and drama. "It helped my popularity because I won a lot of writing contests. Um, when there were plays I always got the lead. I won poetry contests, spelling bees, math awards." She said that later her high school experience was "wonderful because I found a great outlet. I got into drama and I loved it. I felt my self-esteem went up."

Annie's mother was helpful to her in elementary school because of her involvement as a room mother. "[She] would coordinate all the functions, the holiday parties...And my

mom was a very loving person, and so my peers would want to be close to me just so that they could talk to my mom."

Her outgoing personality and sense of hospitality were traits Annie felt were important in her ability to connect with others. She invited friends to her home to share in the family traditions. "One of the things that made me really popular when I was growing up, people wanted to come over to my house for Christmas Eve because my grandmother on my father's side is an excellent cook. She cooks the best Chinese food."

Annie's personal style of coping is to confront the situation assertively. In elementary school her friends did not want to come for dinner because they believed her family ate cats and dogs since her father was Chinese. Annie assured them this was not the case and invited them for dinner to see for themselves. In another example, as an adult, Annie confronted the manager of a restaurant where the waitress was ignoring her and her fiancé. After receiving an apology, she informed the manager that they would not be returning to the restaurant.

Carmen. Carmen was a 20-year-old university sophomore from an intact family. Her mother was in public health from Peru and her father was a computer engineer from Southern India. Her parents met in the United States while attending the university on scholarship. Carmen identified as Peruvian (Hispanic) and Indian (Asian). She had medium brown skin and long, black hair. She had one younger brother.

Carmen had many strengths and abilities, but had a difficult time relying on them or her family to sustain her against the difficulties of being a minority and biracial in almost exclusively White schools and neighborhoods.

Carmen was very focused on being like the majority of her peers and on being

accepted. She said

> I didn't want to stand out anymore, you know. And, and it was really bad in that sense 'cause I stopped doing a lot of things that made me a better person, like I didn't want to play violin anymore. And the reason I didn't want to play violin was 'cause I think it was because I noticed a lot of kids in orchestra were not White...in orchestra it was like a lot of kids were Asian.

Carmen did not develop effective coping skills until she was an adult. Looking back

on childhood incidents, she is able to see the humor in them. She wished she could have been

more assertive at that time and was learning not to personalize the situations she encountered.

She began to take pride in her achievements and felt fortunate to be able to attend a large

university on an academic scholarship.

Theme 4: From Bicultural to Tricultural to Multicultural

The participants in this study were born into a bicultural home. As a result of growing

up in White neighborhoods or attending White schools, they were exposed to at least a triad

of cultures, those of their parents and the White community. By college they lived in more

multicultural environments and made connections with an ethnically diverse group of friends.

This theme also describes what benefits the participants felt they derived from the diversity

of their lives. Even though earlier in their lives the participants often felt like the "Odd Man

Out" and struggled to find a sense of belonging, they came to feel that there were benefits to

being biracial. As they looked back over their lives, the participants felt that being biracial

positively influenced who they were in spite of and maybe because of the difficulties. They

cited benefits as having access to more than one culture, being more open-minded and

accepting of differences, and having greater awareness and perspective.

Carmen stated her point of view that she is "tricultural," which is an apt expression for the experience of the other participants as well. "I have three cultures, you know. It's not really a biracial thing; it's like three: my American culture, my Indian culture, and my Hispanic culture. It's tricultural."

Carol described her view:

I feel like I have this understanding of...because I grew up in a White community... 'cause...because I am Black and people will identify me as Black...and they get the Asian. I'm like in the middle of it, and I feel like because I'm aware, like of all the dynamics that play around me...."

Two of the participants have traveled extensively. Jessica visited extended family on her mother's side who live in Canada, Australia, London, and Thailand. In college Jessica was a Spanish major and attended school in Spain for a year as part of her university program. Carmen visited family in Peru many times and India twice. She has also lived in several different areas of the country because of her father's work. The family has lived in Santa Monica, Virginia, and Alaska. They also lived in Australia for six months.

For several participants the diversity of cultures existed within their families. Several of Melinda's mother's sisters were in interracial marriages as well. "Her oldest sister was married to an Irish...my aunt, one of the youngest of my mother's sisters, was married to a Puerto Rican." Ron and Jessica had tricultural households. Ron's stepmother was Samoan. He says, "I knew more about Samoan culture than I did about the Japanese culture growing up." Jessica's father was married to a Mexican woman.

As these individuals moved into high school, college, graduate school, and work environments, their relationships became more multicultural. In some cases they sought diversity; in others it came to them. There was a shift from a primarily White reference group

to a multiplicity of social contacts with peers from a variety of social backgrounds. As a result, their friendships became diverse as well.

After moving to California, Carol developed many different friendships. "...and the friends I have here are of like almost every race. They're like...there's Latina, there's Black, there's White, there's just like...you know, Asian...it's like a rainbow that I have."

Being biracial influenced their personal growth and identity. As Annie said, "I think it's given me a richer life experience. It skyrocketed my growth." Carol said, "Um...it's being who I am, I've learned a lot. Like being, being Black and Korean, I'm sure I wouldn't have...I wouldn't have acquired a lot of these experiences and views, and so it made me who I am, and I like who I am."

They believed that being biracial and having diverse, often adverse, experiences made them more accepting and compassionate. Carmen reflected, "I guess the fact that I was always discriminated against, um, and that it was always hard for me to make friends has made me...empathize a lot with people when they don't have friends." Annie believed, "I think growing up being biracial and being part of an oppressed group has really let me be more sensitive to other oppressed groups."

Other participants believed themselves to be more open-minded and having fewer prejudices. Melinda said, "...like prejudice. I'm just ...I'm totally against it. I think it is so wrong." Carol indicated

> ...the justice of humankind...as long as I can remember, that was something that had always...that stuck with me to this day, that I can remember being that was something I struggled with growing up, like humankind and how everybody should be treated equal...

Their ability to be more open-minded also helped them to understand issues from various perspectives and willingness to learn about other cultures. As adults, most of the participants felt they could fit in and be comfortable with many different groups.

Annie found it an advantage to be able to draw on her different cultural roots:

> Another advantage...um...I would say just actually the ...just some of the cultural, um...like events. Like celebrating Chinese New year and, you know, being able to share that with people. I remember sharing that with peers, and they were so jealous of me 'cause I'd come to school with money, you know, celebrating the New Moon or, um...we did celebrate the Three Kings, Day of the Three Kings...which is coming up, and we did celebrate Christmas, Mexican style, the 24th, until midnight and be opening gifts at midnight. An um...so, in that respect it was different because I was able to draw on different cultural things.

Ricky enjoyed being exposed to both cultures, which he described in terms of food:

You know, Black people, we like Southern food, soul food, and fried food. Korean people like spicy food, kim chee, rice ...you know. So, it's a good mixture, and I get like I said I get some of the best of both worlds, you know. I like Southern food, I like Korean food, and I've got to taste both.

Three of the participants mentioned that the uniqueness of their appearance was an advantage in their lives. Carol said, "Luckily, I look the way I look. I'm pleased with the way I look, and it...getting into the acting...I'm commercial. I think that's a benefit."

These two participants incorporated different amounts of diversity into their lives and differed in the benefits they felt they have derived. At the time of the interview Melinda remained at home and close to her family and her Hispanic culture. She was attending a small multicultural junior college and was preparing to expand her world further in the next couple of years when she would attend a university. Ron had always related to a diverse group of people in his life and felt that being biracial has presented him with many advantages.

Melinda. Melinda was still living at home at the time of the interview. Her family and her boyfriend's family were her support and social network. She indicated that she spent time with her family, her boyfriend, or at work when she is not in school. Both sets of grandparents and her mother's sisters lived in the same community. She explained, "We all live in a little circle. So, I could go visit them at any time. I love that about my family. I am so close to all of them."

Although she was accepted at a major university, she has preferred to attend a junior college. She felt that during this time she has been "getting used to different age groups, different everything," and that the year after next she will be ready to "go off and move." Melinda stated that she still felt too young to be away from her family. "I'm very attached to my family. I've never really gone far from them."

Melinda believed race has played an important role in who she is. She found benefits to coping with adversity. "I think it's just what's made me who I am, because I had to, you know, deal with people saying things that I had to make myself feel comfortable with who I was." She continued that dealing with being called names and treated like an outsider is "what makes me stronger."

Ron. Ron was a 35-year-old, Japanese and African-American man with caramel skin, wavy hair, and Asian eyes. He worked as a computer programmer and was pursuing an acting career. Ron's mother was born in Japan. His father met her while stationed in Japan in the military. Ron's parents divorced when he was six years old. He then returned to the United States with his father, older brother, younger sister, and Samoan stepmother. While he was growing up, the family lived in predominantly White neighborhoods in Orange County.

Ron's friends from elementary school throughout his life were racially and ethnically very eclectic. He based his friendships on common interest rather than race. Although he grew up in a predominantly White community, his friends "weren't just all White." Ron said

> I remember I had Vietnamese friends, Japanese friends, Iranian friends... Yeah, you know, in Orange County it was very culturally diverse. Yeah, it didn't matter whatever their race or religion...I just didn't base my friendships on that. It was based more on what we enjoyed doing.

His roommates were White and he had friends from Korea, Venezuela, and Croatia. Ron dated a variety of different women--White, Filipino, and Hawaiian.

Ron believed that being biracial made him develop his "own identity outside of any cultural identity. Therefore, he saw the benefits as being more open and accepting of other people. Ron said he and his siblings "would always befriend the school loser." He reflected, "I guess because we knew we were so different that we never held that against anyone else." He believed that growing up without a "strong sense of nationalism" made him more accepting on a larger scale, as well:

> I don't have, um...a definite history that I can grab onto and, you know, I guess look back on, you know, or identify with. I just have me. So, all of these hatreds and these conflicts that, you know, are carried over from, you know, hundreds, even thousands of years back, I, I haven't...I can't comprehend that. I can be myself. I can accept anybody for who they are. And uh...I think, I think that's a benefit.

Ron also found that his appearance was an advantage in getting acting parts. "...Because I looked exotic, they needed people who looked exotic and who represented what, I guess, Steven Spielberg's image of the future was."

Introduction to the Narrative Summaries

This section of the analysis focuses on the richness of detail of each story to elaborate on the themes in the context of the individual's life and on a discussion of the coherence of

each participant's story. Individual narratives revealed the participant's process of growth and development of his/her subjective experience that was described in the themes.

Coherence of the narrative suggests that a comfortable resolution of the dual racial identity has been reached. Coherence was defined in terms of the narrative's consistency, tone, the congruence of content and affect, and the capacity for self-reflection. As stated in the review of the literature, a cohesive identity is essential to mental health. Many researchers believe that one's narrative is a reflection of one's identity.

Melinda's Story

Melinda was a 20-year-old, second-year college student who lived with her parents and younger brothers, ages 14 and 9. Melinda looked Hispanic, but had Asian eyes; light skin; long, straight hair; and was often mistaken for Hawaiian. Her mother was a Hispanic nurse who was born in Mexico. Her Japanese father was a mechanical engineer born in the United States of Japanese parents. As children, her parents lived across the street from each other in a working class, ethnically mixed neighborhood where the grandparents continued to live.

Coherence. Melinda's story is the least coherent story in this study. Throughout the interview there are a lot of inconsistencies, contradictions, and statements, which reveal her lack of self-reflection and inability to integrate her life experience into a cohesive story. In addition, Melinda's affect was often incongruent with what she was saying. Her tone throughout was light and she giggled often when she talked about painful experiences.

It was the researcher's impression that she was more distressed about her negative encounters with the world than she wanted to admit to herself. While hurt by racial comments, she needed to disavow her feelings to stay strong. She often said it was no big deal or it didn't bother her, but later admits, "It's really hard growing up in a world that doesn't know anything about it [being biracial]." This disavowal of her feelings left the listener confused.

It is interesting to note that someone who did not integrate her feelings with the content of the story was also unable to integrate her biracial identity to any extent. She seemed to have made no attempt to explore her Japanese culture.

Themes. Melinda exemplifies the more monoracial end of the theme "Unequal Blend." Although she says she identifies herself racially as Hispanic and Japanese, she is clearly more identified with her Hispanic cultural heritage and had not explored her Japanese heritage much less incorporate it into her internal sense of identity. She related primarily with her mother's family and Hispanic peers. Her best friend was Hispanic. "I was always with Hispanics, and I just always...I just felt comfortable with them. She dated mostly Hispanic men. Her boyfriend was also Hispanic and Asian; however, she believed him to be Hispanic when they met. She "never actually had Japanese food" and the family did not follow Japanese customs.

The only time she identified herself as Asian was on school applications because her mother insisted that Asians were seen as smarter. Melinda, however, was uncomfortable with this. She said, "I feel so uncomfortable having to pick one side and making these people think I'm only one. I'm like, I'm mixed."

While Melinda had significant exposure to both sides of the extended families, she spoke primarily of her mother's large family to whom she felt very close. She described her maternal grandfather as racist. At first, he refused to speak to Melinda's father, but eventually accepted that most of his daughters married interracially. Without describing how she or her family dealt with the racism, she said

> My [maternal] grandparents love me with all their hearts, you know, it's...and I think they just totally had to put the race aside, because it was either that, or [they] weren't going to have any grandchildren because all my cousins... almost all my cousins are mixed.

Her father's family, in contrast, had always been accepting of Melinda's mother, but Melinda did not talk in any detail about her father's family or explain why the families did not share holidays since they lived in such close proximity.

In regard to theme two, "Odd Man Out," Melinda appeared to downplay negative situations and avoid situations of having to fit in. Melinda reported that race was a very important part of her identity, but unlike some of the other participants in this study, she had not yet emotionally integrated her feelings about racial difference and her experiencing of racial discrimination, and she has not tried to fit in with other races.

She said she always knew that she was mixed, but it wasn't until the fourth grade that she realized that she was different. "I always knew I was mixed. I, you know, I wasn't really sure what...it meant to be, you know, mixed, but I always knew...my parents didn't look the same." Melinda attended a primarily White university elementary school for the first few years, and then transferred to a largely Hispanic Catholic school. "At first everyone looked at me funny and asked me what I was." She said that since she spoke Spanish, she eventually felt comfortable there.

In public high school she faced name-calling and discrimination. "When I started my freshman year at high school, and I remember people would tell me I was a mutt. They'd call me rice and beans." The Hispanic crowd "at first looked at me like you don't belong here. They'd make little comments." Lunchtime was particularly difficult. They did ultimately accept her, but after her freshman year, instead of dealing with the issues of being biracial and excluded, Melinda and her biracial boyfriend went off campus for lunch:

> You know, during lunches most of the time, we'd notice how everyone is separate, but we would always go off and, you know, you don't notice it as much. It didn't bother me. By the time I was a sophomore, I didn't care. I was allowed to go off. I didn't have to be there and find a group to sit with.

In terms of the third theme, "The Color of My Skin," Melinda always had excellent grades and was proud of her academic achievement. She relied most heavily on her family, however, for support and was in the process of developing her own strengths. Melinda believed her parents were instrumental in building self-esteem and dealing with the difficulties. They taught her tolerance and how to speak up for herself. Melinda stated:

> I trust my parents with all my heart, and I'll tell them anything, you know, like if anything happens at work, I go straight back home and I tell them. I have to, you know. It's just... I've been brought up to say how I feel. It's like if anything happens where I'm out somewhere, you know, and someone says something to me or, you know...I'll go home and I'll tell my parents.

She said their advice for dealing with negative comments and rude questions was

> Oh, you know, if that ever happens, you should say something, you know, say "I didn't like that comment." Say "You know, that offended me. Don't say stuff like that around me." When people ask the "What are you?" respond, "Ask what nationality I am, and maybe you'll get the answer you're looking for."

Melinda tried not to internalize the negative situations that she encountered through a variety of coping strategies, predominantly intellectualization:

> I would get called names and stuff, you know, and it...it didn't bother me though. It never really...I never took it seriously because my parents always said, "Oh, you

know what, some people don't know any better." So, I felt better about myself because my parent... my parents you know taught me that. I might get called names. I might get, you know, my feelings hurt, but I have to learn that people just sometimes don't understand it, especially when we are that young, so it wasn't a big deal.

Melinda said that the use of racial humor at home helped her to cope, but the researcher had the sense that she continued to be hurt by racial comments and needed to disavow her feelings to stay strong. "My parents joke around a lot, you know. They make us feel comfortable with what we are... and who we are, like, my dad'll make jokes about Asians, you know, and he's Asian." She felt this joking helped to steel her against the negative encounters she might have. "I need people to joke with me about it, because if that one person comes and says something to me, I'm going to break down into tears, you know. Like, I need people to make comments, make funny comments about, you know, parts of my, my race."

Melinda said she boosted her self-image and protected herself against negative remarks by telling herself that she is beautiful. "I'm like, it's not being conceited. I'm giving myself my own self-confidence so I don't need anyone to do it for me."

Melinda believed there were benefits to being biracial. She believed she was stronger as a result of learning to deal with the negative incidents:

> I think it is a big part of me. I think...I think it's just what's made me who I am, because I had to, you know, deal with people saying things that I had to make myself comfortable with who I was. I think that's what made me the person I am 'cause I learned to do it. I learned what to say to people.

She also believed that being biracial makes her more accepting of differences.

Although she attended a multicultural school where she felt more comfortable, Melinda had not yet expanded her world beyond her family and her boyfriend of three years. She preferred to remain close to home. She was attending junior college at the time of the

interview and was preparing herself to move on to the university environment, which she said she was not quite ready for. Her goal was to be a pediatrician.

Ricky's Story

Ricky was a 22-year-old Black and Korean university senior with a Black father and Korean mother. He identifies primarily with his Black heritage and has had little difficulty with being biracial. His phenotype was Black with slightly Asian eyes. His Korean mother raised Ricky, his 25-year-old sister and 19-year-old brother in an ethnically diverse, small Southern California town near a military base. His Black father left the family when Ricky was about three and a half years old. Ricky does not remember him and he had no contact with extended family on either side. All of his mother's family lived in Korea, and he met only a few cousins on his father's side on one occasion. When Ricky was 13, his mother remarried a Black man who had retired from the military.

Coherence. Ricky's narrative is very coherent. He tells his story in a straightforward, consistent manner, which shows reflection on the past, present, and future. He believes that race has not been a major issue in his life so far, and he is able to explain why he thinks this is the case. "…For me personally, it wasn't a big deal for me to be biracial 'cause there was a lot of people that were pretty much mixed in my city." He also had the consistency of growing up in the same neighborhood in a small town with the same friends. "And the thing about coming from a small city…you grow up being little to being big so…it's not like you just meet them in high school." He was not called any racial slurs or subjected to any discrimination growing up. He attributes this to the neighborhood. "And like

I said, I mean, it's kinda hard, you know, to call somebody a name if you know him. You know, since everybody pretty much knew everybody because the town is so small."

Ricky's affect was congruent with the content of his narrative. When he spoke of liking to joke around about being biracial, his tone was light-hearted and laughing. Ricky is believable when he says that, "I think biracial's fun, personally. I mean, I really like it." His tone was confident throughout the interview. Ricky is able to perceive another's point of view.

Ricky clearly states that the fact that his multiracial environment was accepting of his biraciality made it easy for him for him to be biracial. Although we cannot make generalizations from Ricky's story, it does confirm the research on other biracial people that a multiracial environment is more conducive to developing an integrated identity.

Themes. In regard to theme one, "An Unequal Blend," Ricky stated that he was very comfortable with being biracial, yet he identified as primarily Black and clearly explained why this was so for him.

Ricky said he always knew he was biracial. "Well, I kind of always knew it because, uh, the skin color that I have is Black, so I always knew I was Black, and then my mom was Korean, so of course, you know, I put two and two together." Ricky felt that since he grew up in a small, ethnically mixed community where he attended school with the same people from kindergarten through high school being biracial, "...to me personally, it was no big deal. To my friends it wasn't a big deal. So growing up for me was really easy. They knew you since you were young. They know you've been mixed, and you know, so it's no big deal."

Ricky's peers in grade school and high school were mainly Black although some of his closest friends were also biracial.

> I kinda hung out with like the Black people just because I felt more, you know, like the Black people, more, uh…because I speak to them better because I don't speak Korean, so it's hard for me, you know.

Ricky was close to his small family. He went home periodically for holidays and weekends and kept in touch with his sister who was in law school in the East. He credited his mother and his sister for his desire to get good grades and stay out of trouble. He said, "It's always good to be with family." He hoped someday to go to Korea with his brother, sister, and mother to meet his mother's family.

His college friends were mainly Black. He finds he does not fit in with the Korean students:

> I…more of my interests are with Black people, like we like to play dominoes, like to go out, joke around, you know crack jokes, uh, play basketball. We speak the same language, you know… A lot of the Koreans are from Korea; they're from overseas, and they all speak Korean, and they just trying to…they're trying to find friends within themselves so that they're, you know…'cause they have a bond together, they have more interests together, more things like that so it's kinda hard to really talk to them, but I do have a couple of Korean friends that really…they're really cool people.

At the university, Ricky was involved in several Black student organizations. He helped found a student multiracial organization at the request of a biracial woman he met in a Korean class. He was interested in learning Korean, but found the language very difficult and time-consuming. He hoped to try at a later date.

In relation to theme two, "Odd Man Out," Ricky felt that fitting in with peers was not a problem for him. Ricky did not feel race was a difficult issue for him. He was not offended when asked, "What are you?" "I like it when people ask me because it shows that they're showing an interest in me. They're showing that they recognize it. I'm not just another

person in the crowd." He recognized that while race has not been a problematic issue in his life so far, he might encounter some discrimination in the wider world after he graduates. He also realized that he didn't get the questions and stares that other biracial people do because most people assumed that he is Black. "I don't mind it because, you know, you're viewed how you act. And since I, that's how I act a lot of times, you know, hanging out with Black people and talking...you know the quote unquote Ebonics..."

In relation to theme three, "I'm Not Just the Color of My Skin," Ricky had personal relationships, talents, and qualities that helped him to feel successful. Ricky's older sister was in law school and served as a role model for him growing up. He was an all-around athlete and had good grades throughout his schooling. He went to college on an academic scholarship. He described himself as independent and focused. Ricky exemplified the use of his talents and personal attributes to find a sense of belonging and self-esteem.

Ricky was a well-known, four-sport athlete in the community. "Like everyone knew me because, you know, I played high school football. And in my town high school football is everything."

Ricky was able to externalize any negative societal stereotypes he encountered. He said, "I just let the stereotypes just bounce off me. I'm just like, well, you know, that's a stereotype. You don't know me as a person, and that's fine, you know. You could say, you could think this way of me, but it's not really me so..." Ricky said that he is not offended when questioned about what he "is" or about being biracial. "So, how can I be mad at something they don't know, that they didn't grow up around. There's no books about it, there's no classes about it. So, if I don't tell them, who's gonna tell them? So I can't really get mad at them."

Ricky used humor as a way of deflecting stereotypes. Asian and Black stereotypes were his sources of humor. He said he liked to "mix 'em up around and just have fun with them." He gives an example of his humor. "So I present my stereotype or a Korean stereotype or an Asian stereotype in general...like, you know, most Asians are short and most Black people are tall, so I say, I'm supposed to be 6'5", but because, you know, I'm Korean, I'm 5'10"."

Ricky said he had always been focused on good grades and received a four-year academic scholarship to the university. He graduates in June and already has landed a job with a large accounting firm.

In relation to theme four, Ricky was always comfortable in a multicultural world. Ricky believed a major benefit of being biracial is that he was less judgmental. "You're a lot less judgmental of other people now that you're mixed because you're aware, you know, of two races." He saw similarities and differences between the two races and cultures and felt he had the best of both worlds.

Ron's Story

Ron is a 35-year-old, Japanese/Black man with caramel-colored skin, wavy hair, and Asian eyes. His Black father was retired from the military and worked as a real estate agent. His mother, whom the father met and married in Japan, was Japanese. Ron's parents divorced when he was six, and his father married a Samoan woman in Japan. This family, including Ron, his older brother, and younger sister, returned to the United States. Ron did not see his mother again for 27 years and then only briefly. He was raised in a predominantly

White, Orange County neighborhood. Ron was working as a computer programmer and pursuing an acting career at the time of the interview.

Coherence. There is a hole at the core of Ron's narrative. He speaks of the trauma of leaving his mother at an early age without emotion or recognition of consequences. His chaotic family history makes it difficult to sort out racial issues from family issues, and leads to an uneven account of his early life. He does not reflect on the past and does not seem to understand what impact these events had on him or his family.

Ron intellectualized the loss of his relationship with his mother at age six. Without emotion or reflection on the impact this could have on his life, Ron said, "We understood the situation, you know, that things didn't work out between them and they got divorced." Ron spoke Japanese until he was six, but no longer remembered the language or anything about the years he spent in Japan. The one exception was his memory of leaving Japan in a taxi with his mother and all of the children crying. For a brief moment he looked sad and then changed the subject. From a clinical point of view, this gap in his early memory might be explained as being caused by the loss of his mother.

The narrative of his adult life demonstrates more self-reflection and consistency. His tone becomes animated and excited when discussing his computer and acting careers. He described himself as persistent, which is evident in his description of the evolution of his education in computers and his subsequent interest in acting and writing.

Themes. Ron rejected identification with either heritage, although he sees himself more as Black, due to his father's influence. He had lost any connection to his Japanese

heritage at age six. Ron's way of dealing with this situation seemed to be to make race irrelevant. Since he couldn't fit himself into any labels, he made a big deal out of rejecting labels. When asked how he filled out the census he said, "I check all the races...'cause I think it's ridiculous to ask."

Ron preferred not to use racial labels, but if asked, he identified himself as Black and Japanese. He said he always knew he was different, "but, I never felt like I was out of place." Later he said, "I knew that I was different because, like I said, my entire life, people have always been coming up to me and asking me, 'What are you?'" Ron did not have a negative reaction to being questioned about his racial identity. He felt unique and special.

Ron felt his father instilled a strong sense of family pride and Black heritage. "I think my father had a lot to do with instilling a strong sense of who we were as a family unit, you know, as opposed to, um, identifying with any particular cultural group. I guess he did make us proud of our Black heritage, too, because he made sure that there was a lot of history books on Black culture." Ron had little sense of his Japanese heritage. His knowledge of Japanese culture came from reading Shogun as an adult. He felt he knew more about Samoan culture from his stepmother.

Ron talked about not fitting in relative to theme two, "Odd Man Out," in relation to his Black heritage. Ron noticed race was an issue in dating. Black women felt he was not Black enough. "I know some of them are attracted to me or they think that I'm cute or good-looking or whatever, but...when I talk to them with my demeanor...they're not interested anymore. In fact, I, one girl who broke up with me because I wasn't Black enough." He did not feel accepted by Black peers, perhaps because, as indicated, he did not change his manner of speaking or behaving around Black people. "I'm me all the time. But I think that's a

conscious decision that I made, you know 'cause I'm, I'm secure in who I am. I know it's weird sometimes because...you'll see like Black guys...I mean they don't ...I don't think they necessarily accept me."

In relation to theme three, "I'm Not Just the Color of My Skin," Ron was very proud of being, as he said, "one of the smart kids" in grade school.

Pride in his ability to adapt was an example of his coping style. He said

I don't have any strong convictions about anything...that's a personal philosophy of mine. I'm...did you hear about the saying about the, uh...in a tornado, a stop sign, a stiff stop sign will snap in a tornado, whereas a palm tree that can bend, you know...it just bends and it always, you know, come through though.

Multiculturalism, as detailed in theme four, was always a part of Ron's life. He had friends of many nationalities and ethnicities from grade school on. He found benefits to being exotic and preferred to view his life apart from issues of race.

Annie's Story

Annie was a 27-year-old graduate student who also worked full time in a social service agency. She lived with her fiancé and four-year-old son. Annie looked Hispanic with brown, wavy hair. She identified herself as Latina and Chinese. Both her Mexican mother and Chinese father, a computer programmer, came to the United States from Mexico. The family lived in a predominantly White neighborhood.

Coherence. Annie's narrative is very consistent and coherent. She was aware of her feelings and expressed herself clearly and confidently. Her affect and the content of the narrative were congruent. She was clear about her identity as a Latina woman who is also Chinese and enjoys aspects of Chinese culture.

Growing up as a minority and as biracial was often painful for Annie. The fact that Annie could feel her own painful experiences in a personal way and see them as manifestations of racism attests to her strength and well-being. Her narrative reflects her growth in her ability to handle difficult situations and to feel good about herself and her direction in life.

Themes. Annie is another good example of the theme, "An Uneven Blend." She considered herself primarily Latina and incorporated the parts of her Chinese culture she liked. "Because I look more Latina and I speak Spanish fluently and I work with a highly dense population of Latinos, I always consider myself Latina and I always tell them I'm also Chinese." Annie's exposure to Chinese culture was limited since her father's family was not accepting of the marriage. Her Chinese grandmother did not accept Annie until she was an adult. Since both parents grew up in Mexico and spoke Spanish, Hispanic culture dominated their home life.

In relation to the theme "Odd Man Out," Annie was aware that her interracial family was very unusual in her community. She was able to make friends with the White and Hispanic children, but felt unaccepted by her Asian peers. "I think I've had only one Asian friend my entire life. So...mostly...my experience with other Asians has been very negative." She was comfortable with her Latino peers. "Latinos are very much more accepting about me being biracial, bicultural, as opposed to Asians."

Annie described a number of other uncomfortable and discriminatory experiences in her life. She attended predominantly White, middle-class schools where being either Latina or Chinese presented problems. Her first grade teacher Americanized her Chinese first name

because the teacher found it difficult to pronounce. In second and third grade, Annie went to a religious school where she "had my most painful memories. I was the only Asian person in the entire school. And, I was one of maybe 10 Latino kids." Her second-grade English teacher frequently corrected her English and "did it in a way that was humiliating, you know, in front of the whole class." Her parents moved her to public school after the third grade because they felt the private school was racist and Annie was clearly unhappy. The rest of her elementary school experience was more positive and she excelled in the gifted program.

Annie described feeling traumatized as a child by these experiences, but ultimately learned to stand up for herself assertively. Annie's high school experience was "wonderful because I found a great outlet. I got into drama." There was one difficult period during her freshman year when "the Asian gangs were fighting the Mexican gangs, and I became the butt of the school joke...that I was fighting myself."

As detailed in theme three, "I'm Not Just the Color of My Skin," Annie was able to utilize her abilities and personal characteristics to sustain her self-esteem. Annie's development of a positive sense of self in elementary school was enhanced by her academic accomplishments. She won poetry and writing contests. Her outgoing nature and sense of "hospitality" helped her make friends and find mentors. When word spread that her family ate cats and dogs because her father was Chinese, she invited a group of friends for a highly successful, traditional Chinese dinner, resulting in a significant popularity boost.

Annie was able to rely on her mother for support only up to a point. Her mother's strong personality was both a source of pride and embarrassment. On one hand, her mother was a room mother "who was a very loving person, and so my peers would want to be, you know, close to me just so that they could talk to my mom 'cause she was really good with

kids." On the other hand, her fierce temper sometimes embarrassed Annie, making her reluctant to turn to her mother for support. "My mom got into some verbal altercations...But she wasn't able to approach it in a way that, um, was respectable for an adult in my opinion. I've seen her get into scuffles. Um...so that was difficult."

In relation to theme four, Annie's world became more multicultural in college and graduate school. At the time of the interview she was living with her Latino boyfriend in an Asian community. She still had good friends from grade school who were Hispanic and White. She was entering a profession that deals with multicultural issues and people. In spite of the challenges she faced, Annie felt that there are benefits to being biracial. As she said, "Growing up biracial and being part of an oppressed group has really led me to be more sensitive to other oppressed groups." She enjoyed being able to blend both of her cultural backgrounds. "Like celebrating Chinese New Year and, you know, being able to share it with people."

Jessica's Story

Jessica was a 24-year-old graduate student. She was the only daughter of her Thai mother and Black father. Her phenotype was dark, golden brown, African-American-type hair. Her parents divorced when Jessica was two. Jessica was raised by her mother in a small, predominantly White, Los Angeles community. She visited her father on weekends. Jessica portrayed the development of a unique equal blend of her dual racial heritages.

Coherence. Jessica's narrative was clear and easy to follow. She told her story with little emotion, but did indicate when something distressed her. She seemed wary in the first

part of the interview, waiting for the researcher to lead her with questions. As the interview progressed, she became more forthcoming, offering greater detail and emotional content. It was the researcher's impression that this is how Jessica initially relates to new people as she assesses their reaction to her. It appears to be a protective coping style.

Jessica reflected openly on her life and explained her beliefs. Her narrative was consistent. She provided details that showed how she evolved from feeling like the "odd girl out" in the past to clearly feeling a sense of belonging to a very multiethnic group of friends. She was clear and confident about her professional direction, and well on her way toward achieving her goal.

Themes. Jessica appeared to be comfortable with herself and her racial identity as a unique blend of Thai and African-American cultures, as described in theme one.

As a younger child, Jessica believed that other people perceived her as Black, so that was how she perceived herself. "I think because everybody sees me as African American, I have to, in a way, ever since I was little, I just already saw myself that way too." She went on to say that being seen as African American "kind of influenced the way...I kind of went about making friends..."

Jessica attended a private, ethnically diverse high school. By the 10th grade she felt she was beginning to "mesh" her Thai and African-American backgrounds. She traveled to Thailand and other parts of the world with her mother to visit her mother's sisters and cousins. In her high school she met other Blacks from Africa and the West Indies. "So that's when I started learning that okay, so I'm diverse, too."

In relation to theme two, Jessica noticed as a young child that she differed from those around her, even in her own family. In visiting her father's home, Jessica realized that some customs differed between households. While visiting her father she saw people who looked like her, "but I just felt like, oh, I don't live like that, even though those people are just like me." At home with her mother they ate rice with meals, removed their shoes in the house, and there was a "very strong focus on education and, um, just discipline in general." Her father's house was more "laid back," and she was allowed to watch more television and to eat different foods.

Jessica was aware that she differed from other children in her predominantly White community. As a very young child, she asked her mother to "put powder all over me so I can be White." She was aware of differences in her hair texture as well as clothing styles, the music she liked, and the food her mother prepared. She said, "I was definitely the "odd girl out." Girls made comments about her hair and were afraid to touch it. She said, "I think the hair thing was a really big issue, because there were all these different hair styles that came out, and for the most part, I really couldn't get it...I didn't have the hair to do that, you know. So, that was always something I was concerned about."

She did not always feel accepted by the few other Black girls, however:

> The other girls they were like, I think, born and raised African American, and they would look at me like, oh, she acts White, or she's not Black or, you know, because I didn't grow up around them so a lot of the stuff they would...like they would sing certain songs that I might not have heard or stuff like that.

Jessica's interview contained several episodes of discrimination. As she grew older, Jessica learned to discern when being questioned about her hair or her ethnicity was innocent and when it was offensive. Initially, negative comments were hurtful to her. As she matured, she "would brush them off more." Her way of coping with negative situations was to

withdraw and intellectualize. During the interview she didn't directly say the incidents had made her angry, but her tone was angry when describing being scrutinized or discriminated against:

> I would just be like, wow, that's pretty sad that they look at it that way, or I'd just be like…that's so closed-minded, or they don't even know what they're talking about…or they're just being stereotypical…so I'd be upset in my head, I think. I would not think highly of them as far as like their acceptance level or just understanding.

In relation to theme four, Jessica's life exemplifies "From Bicultural to Tricultural to Multicultural." After attending a multicultural high school, her world expanded even more in college. Her second year was spent in Spain studying Spanish. She then returned to attend an international college in the Northeast.

In spite of unpleasant experiences, Jessica believed there were very definite benefits to being biracial. "I just think it definitely opens your mind to accepting different cultures. Just more accepting and able to understand." Jessica believes that being monoracial may be more confusing:

> …because when you're biracial you're forced to figure out what you are, because the way society is set up, you have to sit down and say, okay, where am I…what do I …what am I and where do I fit in here? And then you become aware a lot sooner than other people.

Carol's Story

Carol was a 31-year-old, Korean and Black woman. Her mother was born in Korea and her father is Black. Carol was raised by her mother and African-American stepfather, first in Korea and then in Washington State. She has two older stepbrothers and a younger stepsister, all of whom are Korean and Black. The family lived in a White neighborhood near a military base. Carol is light skinned with wavy hair and slightly Asian eyes.

<u>Coherence of the Narrative.</u> Carol's narrative clearly reflects the evolution of her racial identity. She was very aware of her feelings about the events of her life and she displayed congruence with the content of the story. Carol has given the process of her identity formation a lot of thought, which was demonstrated throughout her narrative. As she said, "I am a thinker and I really paid attention to the details growing up...like how I play a factor in every experience and every encounter."

Carol was soft-spoken and often did not speak in complete sentences. She left out words. Since she clearly described her identity development and that race was not an issue in friendships and that she was pleased with her appearance and being unique, perhaps her difficulty with communication was not related to coherence. It may reflect her tentativeness about her career and her ability to succeed in the world, which she talked about at the very end of the interview. Although she felt race was no longer a factor in fitting in, she wondered if race was a factor in the lack of her material success. She said, "What's not making me motivational? What is it that I fear? I am at a standstill, like I'm stumped...Is it because I still have not worked out being the ethnicity that I am?

<u>Themes.</u> In relation to theme one, Carol described the evolution of her racial identity from leaning toward one and then incorporating the other. Through her teen years Carol identified herself as Korean, which was at odds with her appearance as a light-skinned Black. She was close to her mother and felt comfortable with Korean culture:

> What I went through was saying I'm Korean, but then I have to adjust to the society telling me I'm Black because of the way I look on the outside, but I feel Korean. I like the culture. I've lived the culture...a lot of my mannerisms...I don't identify with being Black.

Carol is an example of how the social definition of her racial identification differed from her self-definition. Her racial identification was further complicated by a Black stepfather and Black/Korean stepsiblings, none of whom self-identified as Black. "I truly believe... like my stepfather, he played like he was White, like he tried to fit in in that area."

Growing up, Carol was most comfortable and connected with her Korean heritage and the White community. As a child she wanted to be White and blonde so that she would fit in. She said, "I had this obsession with magazines and wanting to be like blonde...to feel more accepted by the crowd I grew up in." At school she "hung out a lot with the popular crowd...but not necessarily outside of school."

In college Carol began exploring her Black identity:

> In college I used to seek that, um, affirmation. I used to seek it from Black people that
> I thought were really Black...to feel validated, like because that is what I look like on
> the outside, and I'm gonna have to be this, like identified as Black regardless if I
> think that I'm Korean."

After college Carol moved to California, where she became more comfortable with her Black heritage, "...then moving to San Francisco, and there was more of a Black, more cultural, had more cultural experience...the more you put yourself in the situation then you can learn."

Carol exemplifies dealing with the issues of being different and fitting in as described in the theme "Odd Man Out." She did not feel accepted by Blacks or Koreans. She was not "Black enough" for other Blacks. "...Then growing up...in most predominantly White...I had people who are Black will say, 'You're not like us.' ...They think you got an upper hand in White society." Older Koreans pitied her because she was not "full Korean." "I feel like sometimes I'm a mediator and I'm juggling everyone's interpretation of who I am and what I'm about when they do see me."

Carol experienced some discriminatory incidents. She was often asked, "What are you?" and felt objectified by being called exotic. The most painful incidents came from her stepfather, who she felt humiliated her in front of her siblings. "He would degrade me in front of the other kids because they were lighter than me." Carol described her reactions to the negative situations as initially internalizing and being upset through her teens, then responding with anger as she got older, and eventually trying to "respond to them without feeling defensive or losing myself, or hating myself."

In relation to theme three, "I'm Not Just the Color of My Skin," Carol was creative and athletic growing up. She had an outgoing personality at school and called herself the class clown. These talents and traits bolstered her self-esteem and helped her to cope with the challenges of being biracial and a minority. "A lot of my outlet was like music and isolating myself, writing." She used her humor to deflect tense situations involving race. An example of her humor was to combine stereotypes, "I'm Black and Korean so I say, 'What's a up?' ...like integrating that kind of humor."

Carol is comfortable living in the diverse environment of Los Angeles and made friendships based on common interests. She commented, "I grew up with White people so my comfort level is... but now I'm amongst all kinds of races so I've developed a level of feeling comfortable." She had a racially eclectic circle of friends. "There's Latina, there's Black, there's White...Asian...It's like a rainbow that I have."

Carol grew over the years to appreciate her differences and feels there are benefits to being biracial. "Of course, it took years getting here where I am now saying, yeah, I am exotic and I am marketable and I am unique. I am different." Carol also believed she has

learned a lot. She said, "I can see a lot more things than I think other people are aware that are around them."

Carmen's Story

Carmen was a 20-year-old college student. Her mother was born in Peru. Her father was born in Southern India. Her parents met while attending the university in the United States. Carmen's mother worked as a health educator and her father as a computer engineer. Carmen lived and attended schools in upper middle class White communities. She had light brown skin with long, dark brown hair.

Coherence. Carmen was very eager to talk about her experience of growing up biracial. She needed little prompting and often digressed into long episodes about her family and her experiences. She described her feelings and experiences vividly. Her narrative reflects her confusion as she explored her racial and cultural identity. Even though she was still exploring racial identity resolution, she was able to tell a coherent story of how she got to her current state. She explained the painful events of the past clearly and seemed to come to a new understanding of these events. At the time of the interview she was self-reflective and seemed to be reevaluating the past in light of her current understanding and had a clear direction for the future.

Themes. Carmen identified herself as Peruvian (Hispanic) and Indian (Asian). She spoke Spanish and leaned toward her Hispanic background. Her maternal grandmother lived with the family for periods of time while Carmen was growing up. Since her father gave up

much of his Indian culture when he came to the United States, Carmen did not feel as connected to her Indian background. "My whole life I thought of myself as Hispanic because of the fact that I speak Spanish. I mean, because my mom's really the one that raised me overall and my grandma. You know, my dad hasn't impacted me like culturally." She believed she would feel more Indian if she spoke the language. "I kinda feel like I'm just part Indian, like you know, like a fake Indian, you know, because I don't know any of my culture. I just look like it."

It was in college that Carmen began to think about her Indian heritage. "I'm definitely learning more about my culture 'cause there's so many Indian people around. So, I'm becoming more interested in it and hoping I'll become more educated about my culture."

Carmen felt very much like the "Odd Man Out" growing up. The dominant theme of Carmen's life growing up was her wish to blend in and to feel accepted. She encountered challenges to her identity from other children who insisted that she was Black in spite of her protestations that she was Hispanic and Indian. This caused her to be very distressed. She felt very different from the children with whom she went to school. "I was the only person in the whole school that wasn't White, and so I definitely stood out." She felt different from the other children because her mother put her hair in Peruvian braids, and the food she ate at home was a combination of Peruvian and Indian. Carmen believed that because she was different that she was a "weird, ugly-looking kid." She went through a phase between about 7 and 12 when she wished for blonde hair and blue eyes so that other children would accept her. She said, "I wanted to be White. I wanted to blend in. I didn't want to stand out as different, and I hated the fact that every day somebody'd be like, 'So, where are you from?'

Or 'What are you?'" Now that Carmen is at a multiethnic university in Los Angeles, she no longer stands out, which has made her more comfortable

In addition to feeling different, Carmen was called a "mutt" and "big nose" and suffered incidents of discrimination. Other children made fun of her name and her hair. As a child she often went home crying. As she got older, she went through what she called her "bitter stage." She reacted angrily. As she has matured, Carmen has been able to understand people's questions. "I have to remind myself that other people didn't have the experience I had so they don't know that it feels a certain way to be asked those questions...So, I mean I have to be more understanding of where other people are coming from."

Carmen had many talents and abilities. She was in gifted classes in school, played the violin and sang; however, she was not able to find her self-esteem in her academic achievement or her musical ability. Carmen reflected, "It feels kinda sad because...I rebelled against the violin because it represented being different, and I just didn't want to be different. I just wanted to be like regular...like I wanted to be a C student." She was not able to find a comfortable social niche.

Her mother tried to comfort her by telling her she was unique and exotic. Carmen "just wanted to be normal." She wanted to be invited to the other children's birthday parties. Her mother had enrolled her in classes after school, and Carmen wanted to be outside playing with the other children.

Although she couldn't use her inner resources in the past, she had begun to value her abilities and take pride in them at the time of the interview.

Carmen typified "From Bicultural to Tricultural to Multicultural." Carmen felt she was tricultural growing up. She explained that she was not just bicultural. As she said, "I

have three cultures, you know. It's not a biracial thing; it's like three: my American culture, my Indian culture, and my Hispanic culture." Carmen was exposed to a lot of diversity growing up. She traveled to Peru, India, and Australia. The family has lived in Santa Monica, Virginia, and Alaska. He closest friend in college was a half-Persian and half-Black. She joined HAPA, the multicultural association at her university, to meet other biracial people.

As she matured, she recognized some of the advantages of growing up biracial. She felt she has the capacity to empathize with others because of her own experience of being different. She believed it made her more aware of her own views and behaviors toward others. "It's helped me realize when I'm closed-minded I'm like, whoa, this is what other people...this is why other people feel this way." At the university Carmen did not stand out in the way she had when she was younger and she began to see some benefits to being different:

> That's when I started realizing how much I liked being different. Back home I stood out and people were like...and it attracted people to me. You, know people would come up to me and start conversations, and they could use that as an excuse to talk to me, and guys would come up. "Oh, you're really unique. You're exotic..."

Carmen was in a period of reflecting on her identity and trying to blend all three of her cultures. She explained, "I'm going through this whole like remodeling process of my belief system." She was planning to get back to the activities like playing the violin that she said "make me a better person."

Her plan was to go to graduate school to get her master's in public health.

Conclusion

In summary, the participants described a similar process of identity formation that progressed from emphasis on one aspect of their racial identity to an increased awareness of both aspects of their racial heritage as they began to encounter more diverse ethnic groups in their environment. Several of the participants began to explore the less dominant side of their heritage as they moved into more racially mixed environments, while others remained more culturally related to one heritage. The individuals progressed to different levels of integration depending on such factors as the environment where they grew up, family support, extended family involvement, exposure to racial diversity, and their own abilities and traits.

All of the participants stated that they were aware of the difference in appearance between their parents at an early age and that they were biracial. As they got older and interacted with peers in school, they became increasingly aware of the meaning of race in this society and how being both of minority cultures and biracial affected the various ways in which their experiences differed from others. Three of the women mentioned wishing to be White and blonde during childhood in order to fit in with the other children in their school. Whatever the degree of integration of their backgrounds, the process led to feeling more comfortable with difference and to more self-acceptance.

Throughout the process of identity formation, the participants used various coping strategies for dealing with their uniqueness and the responses of others. Most of the participants were able to use their abilities and strengths to maintain self-esteem in the face of adversity and to find ways to make friends. The whole of their identity formed in learning to cope with difference and discrimination as a sometimes daily part of their lives. In childhood and early teen years there was a tendency to internalize the name-calling and

stares. Society's response to them is what made them uncomfortable. As they got older, the participants were better able to understand the racial issues and not personalize incidents of discrimination or stereotyping. They reported a progression of responses from feeling hurt by the challenges to their identity or discriminatory events to anger and eventually an intellectual understanding of others' motives and lack of education.

All of the participants grew up dealing with the majority White culture to some extent in their neighborhoods or at school. In addition to their dual minority parental heritages, they incorporated the mainstream White culture, which was described by one participant as being "tricultural." Their relationships tended to be ethnically diverse. They viewed their biracial status as an advantage in many ways, making them more open-minded and accepting, compassionate, and giving them a broader world view. The majority of the problems they encountered were due to society's negative attitudes about race and to discomfort with their ambiguity. They felt more and more comfortable as they moved in more ethnically diverse circles where there was more choice in relationships and where being a minority was less of an issue. As adults they also became more appreciative of their uniqueness, and sometimes felt it to be an advantage.

Some of the narratives are consistent and coherent, while others have contradictions and a lack of congruence. Two of the participants whose narratives lack some coherent qualities also did not show any interest in exploring one of their heritages in spite of asserting a biracial designation. Identity resolution was not based on fixed equal amounts, but a working knowledge of both heritages. Coherence was based on the ability to talk about and reflect on one's identity and subjective experiences with consistency and congruence between affect and content.

The process of identity formation in these participants moved in the direction of increased comfort and self-acceptance with their biracial status, some having achieved this more than others. All of the participants are highly motivated toward achievement. They all have career goals, which they are actively seeking.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This chapter begins with an overview of the major themes from Chapter Four. This is followed by a discussion of the process of racial identity formation, which was derived from the individual narratives. The chapter also includes a discussion of the limitations of the study, ideas for future research, and the implications for social work.

The purpose of this study was to examine the subjective experience of growing up biracial. The researcher was interested in understanding identity formation from the point of view of the individual and what factors affected this process as revealed in the narrative. The researcher also wished to understand the impact of being biracial on one's relationships and personal identity. The researcher wanted to understand how these individuals integrated two different racial and cultural backgrounds and coped with the lack of social acceptance described in the literature. These narratives were analyzed twice, once to look at the form and coherence of individual narratives because a coherent narrative is reflective of internal cohesion, and the other to identify the common themes that emerged across the narratives. Starting with these questions in mind, the researcher asked each of the participants to tell his or her story of growing up as a biracial person in this society.

Four major themes were identified from the interview narratives, which described the participants' subjective experiences from early childhood to the time of the interview.

Taken as a whole, these themes tell us a lot about the process of identity formation for this group of subjects.

Theme 1: An Unequal Blend

An important aspect of biracial identity development is the integration of two heritages, which is essential for social functioning and psychological well-being. This theme described the participants' lived experience of their biracial identity as it formed over time, first leaning toward one and adding the other. The participants described themselves racially from an early age as biracial; however, they felt more of an affinity to one racial heritage and culture. As they were exposed to more diversity, some of the individuals achieved a greater integration of the two racial heritages and cultures; however, the blend was not equal. The amount of integration was not the issue. What was important was the participants' subjective comfort with the blend of their heritages and how they reached that blend. A variety of factors, including family and phenotype, influenced how the individuals thought about themselves; however, there was no clear pattern. They did not necessarily identify according to appearance, or who raised them, or along gender lines. Each person had a unique constellation of influences on their identity resolution.

The affinity for one heritage was in some cases based on the acceptance of the racial designation of others that was based on appearance. Jessica and Ricky identified with their Black heritage because others saw them as Black. Early in their lives they accepted the racial designation assigned to them in spite of being raised primarily by their Asian mothers. In the cases of Ricky and Jessica, the fact that the dominant culture in their home was Asian did not determine how they identified themselves; how others related to them because of appearance took precedence. As they got older, they became more interested in their Asian heritage and, as Jessica said, "meshed them together." By contrast, Carol, whose phenotype was more African American, identified herself culturally as Korean while growing up. She was very

connected to her Korean mother and felt unaccepted by her African American stepfather, who denied his own heritage. As an adult, Carol had more positive experiences with African Americans and wanted to explore that part of her identity since others viewed her as Black. As an adult, she has added her Black heritage to her self-concept.

Relationships to members of the respondent's immediate and extended family had an impact on the individual's connection to his or her racial heritages. Annie was chiefly related to her Hispanic background, although she enjoyed many aspects of Chinese cultural traditions. She chose to view herself as primarily Latina since the lack of acceptance by her Chinese extended family made it difficult for her to see herself as Chinese. The fact that her Chinese father grew up in Mexico and spoke Spanish also was influential in her feeling more related to her Hispanic background. Melinda was also more connected to her Hispanic background. She felt accepted by her Japanese grandparents, but was closer to her mother's large extended family. Holidays were celebrated with both families, but it appears that her mother's family was more connected to their Hispanic traditions and her Japanese relatives were more "Americanized." Carmen's father was eager to fit in as an American and, therefore, left behind much of his Indian culture. Her mother was still very identified as Hispanic culturally and religiously. Carmen learned Spanish, but her father saw no reason for her to learn Hindi. Carmen's maternal grandmother came to live with the family periodically. All of these factors influenced Carmen's primary identification as Hispanic. In college she became more interested in exploring her Indian culture and said she would like to learn Hindi.

Ron was the only participant who saw himself as biracial without any strong identification to either of his heritages. Although he was more knowledgeable and aware of

his African-American heritage, Ron preferred to not use racial labels and felt his father instilled "a strong sense of who we were as a family unit…as opposed to identifying with any particular cultural group." He seemed very identified with the White culture that he grew up with. In his case the environment was a significant factor in his self-identification.

It appears that for some of the participants in this study it was possible to have ties simultaneously to more than one racial reference group. The participants displayed a similarity to Daniel's (1996) "integrative blended identity" in which individuals "reference themselves simultaneously in the black and white communities. They are aware of being both similar to and different from their black and white reference groups, but they may, at certain times and in certain circumstances, lean toward either a European American or African American orientation" (p. 136).

One participant, Carol, discussed her view that being of dual minority heritages differs from those who are of Black/White mixes. She felt she had more in common with other people of dual minority heritages, whatever the mix, than with those who were African American and White. She said, "With White and Black there is a struggle to identify themselves because the United States is Black and White…actually, fighting each other within themselves." She believed that those of dual minority heritages experienced less internal conflict. Carol also had difficulty relating to the issues and conflicts of Black and White biracial people that she met in bicultural seminars in college. Since the participants in this study are of minority heritages, the historical context of racial division between Blacks and Whites doesn't apply to them. This group of participants did not appear to be ambivalent or conflicted about their dual heritages during their teen years or switch from one identity to another for period of time. Their process was to lean toward one heritage earlier in their lives

and begin adding the other in their late teens or early adulthood. It appeared that for these participants a multicultural environment was more conducive to connecting with both their heritages and forming an integrated identity.

Biracial identification is highly subjective. This study illustrates that we cannot make assumptions about how an individual will identify him or herself based on environment, phenotype, or family factors. It is necessary to look at the complexity of factors in that individual's life in order to understand how he or she has arrived at his or her particular blend of racial/ethnic/cultural identity, which may change with time and exposure to a multicultural world.

Theme 2: Odd Man Out

This theme dealt with the issues of the participants feeling excluded by some groups or family members because of their difference from others and the discrimination directed at them as minorities and as biracial individuals. Their identity formation occurred in the context of these difficulties and the search for a sense of belonging, which is a large part of one's identity. The participants in this study are minorities in relation to the dominant White society and in relation to each of their minority heritages. They are also minorities among other biracial people who are mostly of White and Asian or Black and White mixed heritage. Even their own siblings differed from them in appearance or in choice of identification, in some cases. Ron's sister and brother identified themselves as Black. Carol's stepsiblings, who were also of Korean and Black heritages, seemed to identify themselves as Americans.

It was the experience of being different from other children particularly that propelled the participants into thinking about their racial identity and where they belonged. The

participants could not take their backgrounds for granted. Being called names, questioned about their identity and scrutinized caused them to consider who they were at an early age. Jessica said

> I think monoracial is more confusing at times because when you're biracial, you're forced to figure our what you are because of the way society is set up, you have to sit down and say, okay, where am I…where do I fit in here? And then you become aware a lot sooner than other people.

Several of the women mentioned that they were also very aware of how they differed from the women portrayed in magazines, on television, and in the movies. They were painfully aware that their hair or their features did not fit with mainstream standards of beauty. Three women talked about wanting to be White. Two of them specifically wanted to be blonde and blue-eyed. It is impossible to know from this study if they were reacting to being with mostly White children and wanted to be like them in order to fit in, or if this would have been a part of their identity development in another environment. For preteen and teenage girls fitting in means looking like the other girls. Women and young girls, in particular, are very concerned about appearance and perhaps more impacted by a lack of reflection in the media and by comments from others. The women tended to internalize the negative feedback, which affected their self worth. The women went through a period of feeling weird or ugly or unattractive. All of the women became more comfortable with and accepting of their appearance as they got older and lived in multicultural environments. As Carol, who had once wished to look White, said, "Luckily, I look the way I look. I'm pleased with the way I look."

There was a gender difference in how the awareness of difference affected the two men in the study. The two male participants were aware of being different, but seemingly it had little negative effect on them. While this is not enough of a sample to generalize from,

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the participants' experiences were consistent with observations made in other studies. Thompson (1999) found similar gender differences in her study of Black/White participants. "Thus male protective mechanisms were very effective. They seemed to automatically externalize difficulties and refused to let them impact their self concept" (p. 171). The men did not let what others thought affect them. Both men in the study reported that they experienced little difficulty with overt racism and discrimination. The men seemed to externalize any negative encounters or scrutiny they did have and did not let it affect their self-esteem. As Ricky said, "I just let stereotypes bounce off of me...You don't know me as a person...You could think this way of me, but it's not really me..."

Finding a group to belong to was a primary issue during elementary school and junior high and, in some cases, high school. Again, there was a gender difference. While both men felt excluded by one of their racial groups, they avoided thinking about this. Ricky and Ron were athletes, which automatically gave them a community with which to relate. The women all had friends, but didn't find their niche until high school or college. For Jessica this was in high school when she met African-American girls whose parents came from the West Indies and Africa. Annie found her sense of belonging in high school by participating in drama.

Everyone had the experience of not feeling accepted by some group. Annie did not feel accepted by Asians. All of those with Black heritage felt some criticism of their lack of "Blackness" either in speech or mannerisms or tastes. As Jessica reported, "I think [those who were] raised African American, they would look at me like, 'Oh, she acts White' or 'she's not Black.'"

All of the participants experienced some negative feedback from others in the form of discrimination, name-calling, questioning about their identity, or stares. These incidents were

the impetus to consider their racial identity. The "What are you?" question put them in a position of having to explain their background at an early age. How they responded to these incidents depended on their age at the time. The participants recalled incidents as young children that were hurtful and which took them by surprise. The most hurtful situations were rejection by a family member. Two of the participants had a grandparent described as racist and unaccepting of the parent's marriage. Another felt the discrimination from her stepfather and stepsiblings. As grade school children they were hurt, and they internalized the negative comments. Some of the participants felt that their parents did not always know how to help them counter name-calling or stares or provide opportunities where they would feel more accepted. According to the participants, the parents, who moved to predominantly White communities where their children would be one of only a few minorities and the only biracial children, did not seem to be aware of the impact this had on the child. In some cases the participants believed that the parent exacerbated the problem. One mother insisted that her daughter wear her hair in Peruvian braids at a time when the other girls no longer wore that style. Another participant described her mother's reaction to negative or discriminatory comments as being so volatile her daughter couldn't use her as a model for dealing with these situations. Several of the women color-coded the negative aspects of their relationship with their fathers, who they felt were controlling and emotionally unavailable, and, therefore, did not want to date men of their father's ethnicity.

It appears that being biracial was most difficult for these participants as children. Some of the difficulty and exclusion they experienced may have been due to living in White communities and attending predominantly White schools; however, they described some of

the worst incidents occurring with family members or other children of one of their heritages. In some cases the individual felt more accepted by White peers.

As adolescents they became angry and irritated by the comments and questions. A frequent response to the "What are you?" question was "I'm human." They expressed resentment at being asked. Eventually, the participants learned to see racism and discrimination as the other's ignorance or insecurity and either withdrew from the situation, used humor to diffuse it, or confronted the other assertively. Acceptance of one's difference and resilience against discrimination was part of the identity formation of these individuals; otherwise, they would remain stuck in the stages of hurt or anger.

Moving into more multicultural environments was important for developing greater comfort with their minority status and differences. Growing up in a multicultural community was an asset for Ricky, who felt he was one of many minorities and other biracial children in the community, although he and his siblings were the only Black and Korean mix. The other participants indicated they received less negative societal feedback as their peer group matured and they entered culturally diverse colleges. When they did receive negative reactions, they were able to not personalize the incident.

Theme 3: I'm Not Just the Color of My Skin

Personal characteristics, abilities, and coping styles were important factors in the participants' identity formation. The ability to use internal and external resources to counteract negative messages from the environment helped the individual to become more resilient and to develop a solid positive self-image. All of the participants had some family support, academic ability, personality traits, or special talents that eventually enabled them to

cope effectively without a feeling of belonging to a particular group, which is usually considered essential for well-being. Root (1994) equates identity with belonging. These participants had to develop their sense of self from an internal frame of reference, which was not race based, and in spite of not having a sense of belonging at times in their lives. Their self-concept developed based on inner resources and family support since they were not racially mirrored or sometimes accepted by others. The participants who were able to use these resources demonstrated a high degree of resilience. The one participant, Carmen, who was not able to use her inner resources as a bulwark against not fitting in, did suffer feelings of depression, isolation, anxiety, and anger described in the literature by Gibbs (1987), Bowles (1993), and Root (1994).

All of the participants had a least one parent who was seen as loving and supportive; however, they did not always comprehend the issues their children faced as indicated in the previous theme. Melinda's family was instrumental in teaching her about what she might encounter and helping her to deal with others assertively. Carol's mother and sister were very loving and supportive of her, but she was not able to discuss the problems she was encountering because she was biracial. Her mother saw her as Korean, and her sister denied the relevance of race in her life.

The participants developed coping styles based on their own temperaments and sources of self-esteem based on personal strengths. Humor was mentioned by several participants as a way to diffuse internal and external tensions about race and relate to others. Intelligence, athleticism, and an outgoing personality were all mentioned as ways of bolstering self-esteem and connecting to others.

Theme 4: From Bicultural to Tricultural to Multicultural

For the people in this study it was important to integrate more than just dual racial heritages in order form a cohesive identity. All the participants related to at least three cultures while growing up--their dual heritages and the White community. As adults, most of them lived in multicultural worlds with friends from many countries and ethnic backgrounds. They all continued to have relationships with some childhood friends.

All of the participants expressed feeling more comfortable in a multicultural environment where being different or unique was common. They found other minorities of at least one of their racial mixes with whom to identify and from whom to learn more about the culture.

Having grown up navigating at least three cultures made the participants able to adapt to many situations and feel comfortable with many different people. All of the participants described how being biracial and living with diverse cultures had significant benefits. The researcher noted that they seemed to have few barriers to social interaction with other cultures and had a broad range of friendships, which were not limited by race or ethnicity. The experience of being judged and discriminated against appears to have made these individuals more sensitive to others and accepting of differences among people. Because of their experience with diversity, several of the participants saw themselves as mediators or educators.

Summary of Identity Formation

The stories in this study described how the internal experience of the individual was impacted by such factors as language learned at home, appearance, gender, connection to

extended family, school and neighborhood community, personal traits, temperament, and talents. These factors are similar to those listed by Root (1998) in her Ecological Identity Model, which are significant in the identity formation of Asian Americans. It appears that this model is applicable to mixed-race individuals of dual minority heritages as well.

In this study identity development occurred within the context of growing up in White neighborhoods and attending White schools where there were few minorities and few, if any, other biracial students. Exposure to diverse racial heritages was limited for all but one participant until at least high school and usually occurred in college. Root (1998) describes the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement for those with half-White ancestry as a color-coding of class status. She states

> Whereas they grow up in multiracial families, they may grow up in a largely White community or attend a largely White school, or with the privileges associated with middle to upper middle class, which previously was almost exclusively reserved for White persons.

This may be a similar phenomenon for the families of these participants. Choices of neighborhood and schools may have been based on class rather than ethnicity.

The process of identity formation in this study was similar to Kerwin-Ponterottos's (1991) Biracial Identity Development Model and Kich's (1992) Biracial Identity Development model. These models take into account the complexity of the process and the influence of exposure to diverse racial heritages on the process, both of which played a large role on the identity formation of the participants in this study.

The participants became aware of their parents' difference at an early age, at about age four or five. Most stated that they had always known that they were biracial. In preschool they noticed the differences between themselves and other children. They felt these differences when they entered grade school. During this stage through preadolescence, the

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participants were very aware of their racial difference and concerned about acceptance. The degree to which they were able to weather this period seemed to depend on gender, temperament, and the environment, including family support.

In the literature on biracial development, adolescence is described as a time of ambivalence about racial identity. This is where this study diverged from those based on Black/White or Asian/White mixes. The participants in this study did not appear to be ambivalent or pressured to choose one identity over the other. Perhaps this is because they are of dual minority heritages and did not have the internal conflict of those who are White and a minority heritage, as one participant suggested. They did not appear to switch from one identity to another in different situations. Affiliation with one heritage continued to take precedence, but there was an increasing awareness of being biracial and bicultural. As the participants moved in to young adulthood, all but two of the participants began to explore and integrate different aspects of their heritages and began to gain more than one perspective. For most of the participants in this study, the developmental process progressed with maturation, time, and exposure to more diverse environments to a more blended and comfortable resolution to their racial and cultural identity. With expanded life experiences, many of the participants found being different could enhance their lives rather than be experienced as a detriment.

The problems of identity development described by earlier researchers (Gibbs, 1987; Gibbs & Mosowitz-Sweet, 1991; Bowles, 1993) were not evident among the participants at the time of the interview. They managed to develop strategies to overcome the difficulties, develop close connections, and have specific goals for the future. Four of the participants mentioned their concerns about belonging or fitting in in the future and wondered about what

barriers to opportunities they might encounter. It is important to remember that their identities will continue to form throughout the life-span.

Coherence of Identity

The development of a cohesive identity is considered important to well being. The way a person tells his or her story, that is, the coherence of the narrative is considered indicative of internal cohesion (Polkinghorne, 1987; Saari, 1991; McAdams, 1989; and others.) The participants in this study who have a coherent narrative have achieved a fairly integrated resolution to his or her biracial identity based on an affinity for one heritage and at least an exploration of the other. Polkinghorne says, "One's personal story or personal identity is a recollected self in which the more complete the story that is formed, the more integrated the self will be" (p. 106). The two participants whose narratives appeared less coherent were the two who also appeared to lack any integration of their dual heritages other than to assert that they were Black and Japanese or Hispanic and Japanese. Neither of these individuals had explored his/her Japanese heritage.

It is an assumption in narrative research that the ability to tell a coherent narrative is representative of cohesion of that aspect of the self. Narratives are not only a means of understanding identity, they may be a factor in developing a sense of cohesion regarding their dual heritages. Gergen and Gergen (1997) state, "In developing a self narrative the individual attempts to establish coherent connections among life events" (p. 162). It is the narrative that gives meaning and direction to one's life. It appears that most of the participants in this study were able to construct a coherent narrative that brought together the complexity and difficulties of their lives into a consistent story.

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Implications for Social Work

As social workers, we have an opportunity and an obligation to understand identity formation and promote a healthy sense of self in all those with whom we work. Social workers in all venues need to be sensitive to and knowledgeable about people of all ethnic backgrounds.

It is clear from this study that we cannot assume how any individual identifies him or herself internally based on external factors such as appearance, who raised them, or identification with the same sex parent. What people state publicly may not fully describe the internal experience of their racial and ethnic identity.

There are increasingly more and more biracial children. Since the social or family world of biracial children may create problems, school social workers, child therapists, and family therapists need to be aware of what kinds of reactions are normal and how to help biracial individuals deal productively with the problems they encounter. This study showed that hurt, anger, and internalization are normal reactions to being questioned, scrutinized, and excluded; and that developing a wider perspective and the use of externalization and intellectualization are adaptive tools to help biracial children deal with difference and discrimination.

As this study indicated, parents and teachers did not always know what the child experienced or how to help the child cope with life encounters affecting the sense of self. Since the most traumatic time for the participants in this study was in grade school, early intervention is very important. School social workers and clinicians can be alert to biracial children who are having difficulties and help them to cope positively by helping them to develop and build upon their strengths and abilities, which counterbalance the sense of not

belonging to a group. School social workers and clinicians need to meet with parents and educate them about the needs of their biracial children. Parental support and understanding is important for all children, but essential to biracial children of dual minority heritages. Since the family may be the only place the child can receive support for all aspects of his/her racial identity, parents need to provide opportunities for validation of both heritages. Since they are a minority in relation to everyone around them, these children may not know anyone else of their racial mix other than siblings.

It is also important to understand the effect of the media on all biracial children, but especially preadolescent and adolescent girls who look to the media for how they should be. It would also be important to make appropriate referrals to multiracial organizations, which will give the child and the family a community to which they can relate and find potential role models.

Clinicians in agencies and in private practice are likely to have biracial individuals on their caseload who have sought therapy for any number of reasons. It is imperative for therapists to know and understand the issues related to being biracial and where the person is in the process of his or her identity formation. This study indicates that it is possible for biracial people of dual minority heritages to develop a cohesive identity regardless of how they resolve the blend of their backgrounds. Resolution for the participants in this study did not necessarily mean integrating both racial heritages equally. Clinicians can facilitate this process by helping the client to explore their subjective experience of their racial identity and develop a coherent narrative about their dual heritages. As Polkinghorne suggests regarding psychotherapy, "Therapists can assist clients in the reconstruction of life narrative that have been too restrictive... Therapists can also serve to offer alternative narratives that more fully

incorporate a client's life events in a more coherent and powerful narrative" (1987, p. 182). It is important that the clinician validate the client's experience of biracial identity and be willing to explore all factors that affect this identity in order to help the client establish a cohesive sense of self. Making sense of their racial heritages may require developing a story, which accounts for the events of their lives, relationships with others, and their feelings regarding these events and people.

As stated earlier, clinicians need to beware of making assumptions about how individuals identify themselves, and explore the unique influences and factors in the individual's life. A comfortable identity resolution may take different forms. Helping them connect to support groups and multiracial organizations may be part of the process.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on seven biracial individuals of dual minority heritages using a narrative research approach. The narrative research methodology in which participants tell their story in their own words has limitations. This method did yield directly and indirectly clinically relevant information about the internal experience of being biracial. The limitation of this method is that some information may not have been gathered since the researcher did not probe for specific facts. For this study, how the participants told their story and what information they chose to reveal took precedence over answering specific questions. All the participants addressed all areas of interest to the researcher within the narrative at some point, but not in equal depth.

By looking at both the content and form of the narrative, the interviews produced a voluminous amount of data that was difficult to organize. The data was not ordered by

specific questions asked of all the participants in a specific order; therefore, the researcher needed to review the data many times to be able to bring conceptual order to the material.

The sample size was small, non-random, and ethnically diverse; therefore, generalizations to the overall population of biracial people cannot be made. This study described the experiences of growing up biracial for this group of participants who identified themselves as biracial. The experiences of those who are biracial but identify monoracially may also be substantially different.

It is possible that a different researcher with a different group of respondents might identify different themes. Analyzing the narratives is interpretive, and other researchers might interpret the data from this study differently. This researcher's clinical experience and reading on the topic provided the lens through which this material was interpreted. Another researcher with a different background also might analyze the data from a different perspective.

Only two men were involved in the study; therefore, it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the gender differences displayed by these participants.

The choice of the participants for the study was another limitation. This study included college students, graduate students, and college graduates who came from middle class, primarily well-educated, families. The majority lived in predominantly White neighborhoods during childhood. The participants in this study were strongly identified with the White community and socialized with White cultural values in addition to those of their parents. It is conceivable that people in other parts of the country living in different environments might have different experiences. People who grew up in minority

neighborhoods, who are less educated, or come from different economic circumstances may differ in how they identify themselves and the process of their identity formation.

Perhaps those individuals who have thought about these issues and achieved some degree of comfort with their identity were those who were willing to participate in the study.

Recommendations for Further Research

It would be important to look at the experiences of those who grew up in more diverse neighborhoods or in minority communities to see what effects different environments would have on the individual's identity formation and feelings about their racial identity.

Racial identity formation occurs in a sociopolitical context. Those who are younger than the participants in this study may encounter a different social world, which includes many more biracial and multiracial people. Future generations of biracial children will have more role models in their everyday lives and in the media. These social changes will hopefully have a positive effect on healthy biracial identity. Ideally, a longitudinal study of biracial children and young adults would provide fruitful information on identity formation as it occurs. The participants in this study have given a retrospective narrative of their lives that is neatly packaged.

It would be illuminating to interview these participants again either to follow up on issues and topics that were not attended to in any depth or to follow up on issues raised by other respondents. It would also be interesting to learn what effect doing the initial interview has on their perceptions and what thoughts and feelings it may have stimulated about their racial identity.

More research is needed to explore the use of narrative research for understanding identity and how the development of a coherent narrative affects one's sense of self. It is this researcher's hope that this study will stimulate more research in this area.

Conclusion

In summary, this study was undertaken to broaden our understanding of the experience of growing up biracial for people of dual minority heritages. Perhaps the most important finding of this study is that there is no one "biracial experience." These young people have had a variety of experiences and responses to being of dual minority heritages. They each have unique talents and abilities. They have achieved a resolution of their racial identity to this point based on a myriad of factors and influences.

The picture this study of biracial people presents is of intelligent, motivated individuals with close personal and family connections who are well on their way toward achieving their personal goals. These young people defy the myths and stereotypes that have existed about those of mixed race. They have overcome many challenges and described many benefits to be derived from being biracial. They feel they are more tolerant and nonjudgmental of others and move in a multicultural world with friends of varied backgrounds, nationalities, and ethnicities.

Appendixes

Appendix A

Introductory Letter

Susan Spiegel, LCSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker
300 So. Beverly Drive, Suite 312
Beverly Hills, California 90212
(310) 478-1386

November 26, 2000

Dear

I am writing to ask for your participation in a research study on the identity formation

of biracial individuals of dual minority heritages. I am interested in understanding your

experience as a biracial person and what role your racial identity has played in your sense of

self throughout your life.

This research study is in partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree and is being chaired

by Dr. Alexis Selwood of the California Institute for Clinical Social Work.

Participation would involve filling out a demographic questionnaire, which is

enclosed and approximately a one-and-a-half to two-hour interview, which will be audio

taped. As is consistent with research protocol, appropriate measures will be taken to protect

your confidentiality.

If you are willing to give your valuable time in this way, please complete the enclosed

pre-interview questionnaire and return it within 1 <u>week</u> in the self-addressed, stamped

envelop that is enclosed.

I want to sincerely thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Susan Spiegel, LCSW

Appendix B

Informed Consent

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

Informed Consent

I,_____, hereby consent to participate in the research project:

A Descriptive Study of Identity Formation of Biracial Individuals of Dual Minority Heritages

conducted by Susan Spiegel for the completion of her doctoral degree. This research project

has as its principal investigator, Dr. Alexis Selwood of CICSW.

I understand the procedures as follows:

1. I will fill out a brief demographic questionnaire.

2. An audio recording will be made of my interview with the researcher for the purposes of

   data analysis. The audio tape and research notes will be destroyed upon completion of the

   research.

3. I am aware that there is minimal potential risk for emotional discomfort involved in

   participating in this study. If this should occur, I will be able to contact the researcher

   who will make arrangements for me to receive professional help or consultation for a

   reasonable and limited time.

4. I understand that this study may be published and that confidentiality and my anonymity

   will be maintained. I will not be identified in any publication or presentation of the

   research project.

5. I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions, and that I may withdraw from the

   study at any time.

Date:_____ Signature:_____

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

What is the month and year you were born?_____

How does your mother identify herself racially?_____

Mother's occupation_____

How does your father identify himself racially? _____

Father's occupation_____

Parents' marital status:

        Married___
        Divorced___
        Remarried___

How do you identify yourself?_____

Do you have siblings? Brothers_____ Ages_____ Sisters_____ Ages_____

How do your siblings identify racially?_____

What is your present marital status?

_____Never married   _____Divorced
_____Married   _____Widowed
_____Separated   _____Remarried

What is your present employment status?
_____Employed full-time
_____Employed part-time
_____Unemployed
_____Student

How many years of education do you have?
High School_____
College_____
Graduate School_____
Other Training_____

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

The following is how I introduced my research interests:

I am interested in understanding your experience as a biracial person and what role your racial identity has played in your sense of self. First, I'll ask a few factual questions for background information. These questions include your age, gender, educational level, employment status, marital status, and race of each parent, and how you defined yourself on the Census 2000. I will then ask you to tell me the story you tell yourself about your racial identity from the time you were first aware of race as a child until now.

General questions the researcher kept in mind:

What have your experiences as a biracial person been?

I am interested in knowing how you feel being biracial has affected or has been affected by these areas of your life: family, school, occupation, and relationships.

How do you identify yourself racially in private/in public?

What determines how you will identify yourself?

What are the main differences of each of your racial heritages, for instance, regarding values, customs, and expectations?

How do you reconcile or cope with the differences?

How do you cope with the problems presented by society and racism?

What were the factors or incidents that influenced how you identify yourself?

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