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# What Factors Influence the Racial Identity Development of Young Biracial Adults

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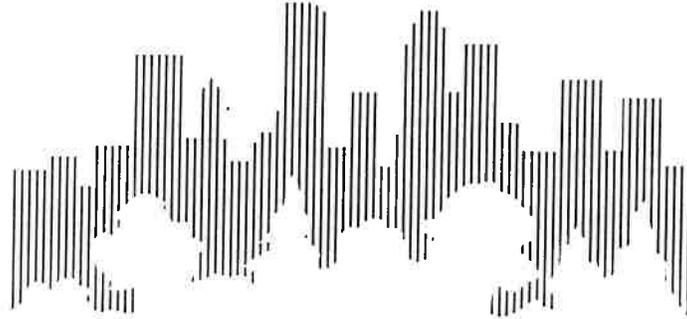


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C • O • L • L • E • G • E

## MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

Jerry S. Dieffenbach

**MSW**  
**Thesis**

What Factors Influence the Racial Identity  
Development of Young Biracial Adults

Thesis  
Dieffe

1998

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE THE RACIAL IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG BIRACIAL ADULTS

JERRY S. DIEFFENBACH

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of  
Master of Social Work

AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

1998

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

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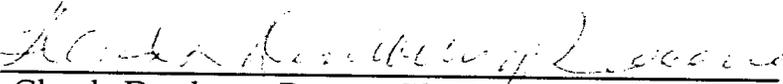
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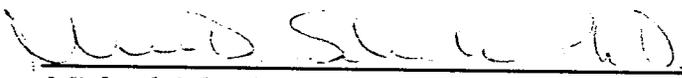
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## DEDICATION

To my lifelong partner

---Denise Dieffenbach---

for your undying patience, love, wisdom, and support you unselfishly provided to me while fulfilling one of my dreams and passions....

To my mother

---Barbara Dieffenbach---

who taught me to care about everyone, because it is the right thing to do. Your indomitable spirit of giving has made a lasting impression on my soul. Mom thanks for all of the encouragement and faith....

To my mother-in-law

---Harriet Anderson---

who taught me that through faith and family good things will come. Thank-you for all of your kind words and for accepting me into your family and treating me like your son.

To my father

--John Dieffenbach, Sr.--

who passed away in January of 1996. He taught me how to believe in my self and my future with positivity. Thank-you for believing in me and always being there for me. Our children would have benefited from knowing you in ways that I know I did, which I am thankful. You are truly missed....

Finally, to my entire family, friends of the family, and friends who have been so special to me in my life. I dedicate this project to you, as a token of appreciation for all of the support and encouragement you all have given me throughout the years. Also, I am appreciative that you are the people who will play a significant role in our future children's identity development. Thank-you and God bless you....

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## ABSTRACT

What Factors Influence the Racial Identity Development of Young Biracial Adults  
Jerry Scott Dieffenbach

This study explored biracial identity development and the key factors that influence the racial identity development of biracial young adults. In this study biracial is defined as having parents who are African-American and Euro-American. The study participants were fourteen biracial college students between the age of 18 and 26. Data for the study was collected using indepth individual interviews. Participants' perceptions of when their racial identity emerged and their current attitudes about being biracial in todays society was also examined.

The majority of participants reported that the right and opportunity of racial choice was a predominate issue that contributed to their racial identity development. Furthermore, the majority of respondents indicated that family, peers, and access to diverse communities were key elements that contributed to their racial identity development. The results of this study provide insight into the developmental stages of these participants' racial identity formation. Results of this study will provide social workers with an understanding of and insight into the main factors which influence the racial identity development process of bi or multi-racial children.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the purpose, the relevance and rationale of this study. In addition, this chapter reviews the definition, function, and explanation of the paradigm framework for racial identity development.

Biracial children are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. According to Gibbs and Moskowitz-Sweet (1991) the 1990 U. S. Census Bureau reported that there were over 1,000,000 biracial children born in the United States. In addition, there were some estimates of the number of biracial children that range between 600,000 and other estimates that range between 5,000,000, who are school aged in 1989 (Gibbs and Moskowitz-Sweet, 1991).

The significant amount of growth in the reported numbers of biracial children is very recent in the history of the United States. Prior to 1960 interracial marriages were illegal in all of the southern states that endorsed slavery. The civil rights movement initiated the 1967 Supreme Court decision, *Loving vs. Virginia*, which legalized interracial marriages. Brown (1995) stated that in 1989 the U. S. Census Bureau counted 65,000 black and white interracial marriages in 1970 and 218,000 in 1989. This growth represents an increase of 300% in less than 20 years (Brown, 1995, p. 126). Brown (1995) states that due to the significant increase in interracial marriages the understanding of "one of the most important developmental tasks faced by interracial children, the formation of a stable and clear racial identity, has become increasingly important" (Brown, 1995, p. 126).

The question of how interracial children develop a "stable and clear" racial identity has been minimally researched in the past decade. Brown (1995) and Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, and Harris (1993) all agree that specific and focused

study on racial identity development of biracial children and adults has been minimal due to the chronicled history of mixed African-American and Euro-American children/ adults being categorically identified as African-American by the the United States official census.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the key factors that influenced the racial identity development of young adults who are biracial. For the purposes of this study the study sample was focused on only African-American and Euro-American biracial children . A second goal of this study was to examine participants' perceptions of when their racial identity first developed and what influenced their racial identity as they matured.

Identity development of monoracial groups have been extensively conducted. Such as Cross' Black Racial Identity Development model and Helm's White Racial Identity Development model. However, few models of racial identity development that encompass the biracial experience exist. Theoretical framework for a biracial identity development model has just recently been mentioned in the literature. Poston's (1991) Biracial Identity Development model and Root's (1990) model for biracial identity development are the only two models created to assist in the understanding of the biracial identity development. Poston and Root both agree that biracial identity is a developmental process, which internal and external factors influence the individuals racial identity development.

### Rationale/Context of the Study

Even though Poston (1990) and Root (1993) have done some preliminary work on the racial identity development of biracial children the social work

literature is predominantly anecdotal and lacking in conceptual framework for this population. Insight and a theoretical basis is hard to discern in the body of literature, especially in the subject area of biracial identity development, as much of the literature is contributed to monoracial populations.

The concept of racial identity development has been around as early as the 1960's, which Cross (1968) began teaching about racial identity development and introduced the Black Racial Identity Development model. However, due to a bitter history between blacks and whites in this country the development and understanding of the biracial identity development process is still an area hardly understood. Kerwin, Ponterrotto, Jackson, and Harris (1993) and Brown (1995) have conducted qualitative studies that were focused on refuting some of the myths regarding biracial children, such as: a) biracial individuals, of African-American and Euro-American descent, would be conditioned, adapt, and automatically adopt the African-American culture; b) the only way a biracial child could have a positive racial identity would be to negate their Euro-American heritage, and; c) if the biracial child did not choose their African-American heritage over their Euro-American heritage then they were doomed to a lifetime of problems and racial identity conflict. Clearly, the literature and history of biracial children has ignored the ability of the biracial child to choose who they are, which signifies a major reason this study has been conducted.

While interracial children have become a very significant portion of the greater population in the United States, the stigma of racial mixing is still a taboo subject in America (Root, 1990). Root goes on to say that interracial marriages create "ambiguous" racial identities within their offspring. Combined with the societal refusal to view each race as equal biracial and multi-racial children / individuals are marginalized or in Root's terms "marginal people".

Root stated that “biracial individuals who do not have a clear racial reference group have little control over how they are viewed by society” (Root, 1990, p. 185). This study was developed to continue refuting the myths about biracial individuals and to gain a clearer understanding of what key factors influenced the racial identity of fourteen biracial adults, who are of African-American and Euro-American descent.

Finally, a predominant focus of this study is on the racial identity development of the respondents and the experiences, events, or people that influenced the development of their racial identity. Research in this area is sparse. However, a need for research regarding the biracial identity experience has increased due to the rising number of biracial children in the United States. The limited scope of research in the area of biracial identity development is heightened by the lack of understanding of what or why certain external factors influence this developmental process. The results of this study has the potential to generate information that will further the development of Poston’s (1991) or Root’s (1990) Biracial Identity Development models. Specifically, both Poston and Root suggest that empirical research must be completed in regards to testing each of the models stages and what influences biracial individuals within each stage.

#### Research Questions:

What are the key factors that influence the racial identity development of young biracial adults?

When did the majority of respondents realize and conceptualize that they were biracial?

What are the respondents current opinions and attitudes about being biracial in todays society?

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

The literature on racial identity development of biracial children is minimal. Hence the literature reviewed here is mainly related to general racial identity development definitions and theoretical framework or models, which explain racial identity. Also summarized the current trends and direction of studies in this area, as well as how are current research related to biracial identity development.

#### Historical Overview

Even though research in the area of racial identity development of biracial individuals is relatively new. The subject of interracial partnerships and marriage has existed in America since 1619. These marriages occurred between the first black and white European settlers. During this period race was not a basis for discrimination. Instead, prejudices were based on class differences versus race, creed, or color. The change occurred with the introduction of slavery in the 1800's (Logan, Freeman, and McRoy, 1991, p. 4.)

Prior to the 1980's there was very little research completed or attempted in the area of biracial children or interracial marriages. Attention to biracial children and interracial marriages is lacking in the social work literature. One main reason the sixties and seventies excluded this area of research was that interracial marriages were illegal until 1967. These laws were later challenged as unconstitutional (Eshelman, 1990)

The history between African-Americans and Caucasian Americans has been chronicled and has included racism, oppression, discrimination, violence, and slavery. Interracial marriages and their offspring have been politically and

categorically defined by this history of hate and racism between Blacks and Whites. This legacy gave rise to a number of myths related to interracial marriages and their offspring. Wardle (1992) identified myths pertaining to interracial marriages, parents, and children. First, people who marry someone from another racial or ethnic group are perverted in some way. Second, interracial marriages end up in divorce more often than other marriages. Third, biracial children have more social and psychological problems than other monoracial children. Fourth, minorities are more accepting of biracial children than are non-minorities. Fifth, the biracial nature of a child is an individual difference that was considered to be far greater than any other individual difference (e.g., handicaps, gender, gifted intellect).

The combined history of Blacks and Whites combined with the myths associated with biracial individuals is one reason why the study of the concept of racial identity development for biracial individuals is fundamentally important and significant.

### General Racial Identity Development Theories and Definitions

McRoy and Freeman (1986) state that there are two processes involved in racial identity development, racial conception and racial evaluation. Racial conception, "is concerned with when and how the child learns to make racial distinctions at a conceptual level" (p. 165). Racial evaluation, "deals with when and how the child evaluates his or her membership in a racial group" (p. 165). McRoy & Freeman (1986) suggest two goals in assessment of racial identity development: 1) what specific factors are affecting the child's racial identity positively or negatively, and; 2) what specific support is present in the child's family, community, or school to help develop a positive biracial/racial identity.

Racial identity development is defined by Sue (1981) as; "pride in one's racial

and cultural identity". Sue (1981) also states that racial identity development is important for two main reasons: First, racial identity shapes an individual's attitude about them self, others in their racial or ethnic group, and individuals from the majority; and Secondly, it dispels the cultural conformity myth that all individuals from a particular minority group are the same, with the same attitudes, preferences, and perspective. These two aspects lead us to believe that there are multi-levels of identity development, and there are variances in attitudes and behaviors when there is movement between these different levels of racial identity development.

Identity development is a relatively new concept. Erik Erickson and William E. Cross, Jr., of Cornell University were the two theorist who originated the concept that identity can be influenced by race. Erickson's work began in the 1950's and Cross' work followed shortly thereafter in the 1960's. Erickson (1968) contributed the concept that racial identity development focuses on the unique issues and factors that one's ethnicity plays in the development of one's identity, which is only one aspect of identity.

Cross was the first major theorist for racial identity development. Cross (1971) conducted phenomenological research of the lives of Black Americans in the 1960's and blended it with the historical study of the lives of W. E. B. Du Bois and Malcolm X, which produced the Nigresence-Black Racial Identity Development Model. Nigresence means from Negro to Black.

Helms (1993) a major contributor to racial identity development research, introduced the White Identity Development Model. This model was based on the concept that most Caucasian individuals took culture for granted. The model is progression of awareness that there is racism, white dominance, and privilege. The final stage-internalization is an awareness of promoting and modeling a deeper interaction with different ethnicities.

The majority of the research and theoretical framework is found in the psychology and educational literature, which focuses on poor racial identity development of the individual, and is based on the deficit model of marginal identity development. Marginal identity development for biracial individuals was introduced by Stonequist (1937) and Morten and Atkinson (1983). The theory for both models is deficit oriented, since each predicts that an individual who is biracial will not form a solid identity.

### Marginal Identity Development

The underlying belief of marginal identity theory is that children who have two parents from different cultures could not possibly develop a significant identity due to the internal conflict and confusion of the biracial cultural dichotomy (Poston, 1990). In actuality the Marginal Identity Development model furthered the perception that children or adults who are biracial are lesser people than those people who are monoracial (Poston, 1990).

Stonequist's (1937) and Morten and Atkinson's (1983) models of marginal identity development further postulate that individuals who are biracial do not develop solid identities and are marginal at best. The Marginal Identity Development Models are based on a deficit approach that mirrors society's basic values and beliefs that people should not marry outside of their race. The theory driven by racism, perpetuates the belief that people who are biracial are less than monoracial individuals and cultures. Thus, a "marginal or other race" is being created (Poston, 1990, Bowles 1993, and Root 1990).

Root (1990, p. 204), defined marginality as; "a state created by society and not inherent in one's racial heritage. As long as the biracial person bases self-acceptance on complete social acceptance by any racial reference group, they will be marginal."

Freire(1970) speaks further about marginality; “marginality is not by choice, (the) marginal (person) has been expelled from and kept outside of the social system. Therefore, the solution to their problem is not to become beings inside of, but...(people)...freeing themselves; for, in reality, they are not marginal to the structure, but oppressed...(persons)...within it(Root, 1990, p. 204).

### Erickson’s Psychosocial Individual Identity Development Model

While this study focused on the racial identity development of young adults who are biracial, Erik Erickson’s Psychosocial Individual Identity Development model provides a theoretical basis for understanding the Black Racial Identity Development model, the White Racial Identity Development model, and the Biracial Identity Development model.

Identity development concepts have been important in social work practice perspectives since Erickson (1963) taught that the major task for adolescents is to develop an autonomous independent identity. Traditional identity development theory states that to successfully achieve adulthood the young person must establish a personal identity; establish autonomy and independence; relate to members of the same and other sex; and establish a sexual identity. Establishing a personal identity and autonomous self is a difficult and confusing time for most adolescents and according to Erickson particularly confusing for biracial children. Erickson’s model is based on the lifespan theory that individuals have and will pass through chronological stages of identity development. Erickson’s model consists of eight stages and they are as follows: 1) infancy-trust versus mistrust- first year of life; 2) early childhood-autonomy versus shame-ages 1 to 3; 3) preschool-initiative versus guilt-ages 3 to 6; 4) school-industry versus inferiority-ages 6 to 12; 5) adolescence-identity versus role confusion-ages 12 to 18, and; 6) young adulthood-

intimacy versus isolation-ages 18 to 35.

Children who are biracial have the task of developing a concept of self that is complicated by two parents who have two different ethnicities or cultures. Along with the societal pressure to identify with one parental ethnicity, this can cause emotional trauma, conflict, and stress. Mary A. Cunningham (1998) states in her paper: *A Positive Approach to Identity Formation of Biracial Children*, that in Erickson's (1968) book *Youth and Identity* he "relates ego identity and self esteem to racial identity....ambiguous messages about one's race may place a person at risk for developing what he referred to as a 'negative identity'" (Cunningham, 1998 p. 1/Oka, 1994, p. 3) The literature is pointing in the direction that identity development models could assist in pinpointing where these processes and dynamics happen. Therefore, we can learn when to begin earlier preventions when working with children who are biracial. Erickson's model is limited, in the area of biracial identity, due to being developed and focusing only on persons who are European-American.

### Black Racial Identity

Cross (1971) created the Black Racial Identity Development Model to help explain the developmental process that black individuals go through in developing their identity. There are five stages: 1) preencounter; 2) encounter; 3) immersion-emersion; 4) internalization, and; 5) internalization-commitment. Each stage is characterized by self-concept issues concerning race as well as congruent attitudes about Blacks and Whites as reference groups. Cross proposed that each stage had different implications for a person's feeling, thoughts, and behaviors regarding ones self-concept. In regards to reference groups, Cross makes the implication that the black individual makes complex choices depending on whether blacks or whites

will be their reference group, which is dependent on his or her stage of racial identity (Helms, 1993). Thus, the racial identity stage, in most cases, will influence who the black individual self identify's with, such as culture, peer group, and other shared experiences of the collective black culture and heritage.

Helms (1993) states that measurement of racial/cultural identity attitudes is relatively new in research. The theory explains that the stages of racial identity can be defined by various cognitive experiences, feelings, and behaviors with literally no exceptions. Measurement of racial identity attitudes have centered generally on various cognitive experiences and particular attitudes.

Currently, two attitudinal scales have been developed to operationalize the stages of racial identity in adolescent and adult study participants and samples. The two scales are Milliones' (1980) Development Inventory of Black Consciousness (DIBS) and Parham and Helm's (1981) Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B). (Helms, 1993).

Three assumptions are made in regards to the Racial Identity stages: 1) racial identity development is a "stage wise" process that can be assessed; 2) racial identity is "bi dimensional," i. e. a Black person holds combined attitudes about Blacks and Whites within their racial identity; 3) racial identity can be stable, but not necessarily permanent (Helms, 1993). An important aspect in the stage theories of identity is the idea that identity varies along a two-dimensional continuum. One dimension emphasizes attitudes that compose Euro-American culture and the other dimension emphasizes attitudes that compose Afro-American culture.

### The White Racial Identity Model

The White Racial Identity theory states that various forms of racism are so inherent in the White society/culture, that they inherently become part of White

individuals identity. Furthermore, a person who is White must overcome one or more of these fundamental racisms to start developing a healthy White racial identity. He must define himself as a racial being, who does not believe or depend on the perception of superiority of one racial group over another (Helms, 1993).

Helms defined a bi-phase process of White Identity development: 1) the abandonment of racism; and 2) the development of a nonracist white identity. Helms' White Racial Identity Development model consists of six stages of identity development that an individual who is white can pass through: 1) Contact; 2) Disintegration; 3) Reintegration; 4) Pseudo-Independence; 5) Imersion-Emersion; and 6) Autonomy.

The White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) was developed to assess attitudes related to the original five stages of White Racial Identity, which excludes Imersion/Emersion. The WRIAS is similar to the Black Identity Attitude scale and measures attitudes about other Whites, Whiteness, White culture attitudes, attitudes about Blacks, Blackness, and how the Black culture propels an individual's racial identity.

Few theories were developed to explain how Whites develop attitudes toward their racial group membership. Helms (1993) studied the belief system of how Caucasians feel and think about African-Americans. The purpose of the White Racial Identity study was: 1) to determine what White racial identity attitudes caused White participant's value orientations; 2) if so, which value orientations were predictable, and; 3) to determine which of Kluckholh and Strodetbeck's(1961) value-orientations characterized the sample of White participants separate of their racial/ethnic groups and background (Helms, 1993)

The results indicated that White racial identity attitudes were reflective of White Americans' cultural values and beliefs. Racial identity attitudes and value-

orientation alternatives, of the study participants, were reflective of various world views. Finally, the majority of participants were categorized in the lower stages of contact, disintegration, and reintegration stages or attitudes (Helms, 1993).

### Pros and Cons of the Monoracial Identity Models

The Racial Identity Development Model and other similar models are useful only for the individual within a specific racial or ethnic group. The older racial identity models presented by Cross's (1971) Model of Identity Development for African-Americans/Black Racial Identity Model, Morten and Atkinson's (1983) Minority Identity Development Model, and Stonequist's (1937) Model of Racial Marginality, perpetuate the problem of the bias in the current research of biracial children involved in counseling or treatment settings.

There are several limitations to these models of racial identity development when applied to biracial clientele. First, the models imply that individuals might want to choose one group culture or its values over another. Second, the models suggest that individuals might first reject the minority identity and culture rather than the dominant culture (Poston, 1990). Poston (1990) holds that some biracial people may want to integrate and identify with both cultures from both parents. Third, the older models do not allow for integration of several group identities. Self-fulfillment according to these models will be found when the individual integrates one racial or ethnic identity and moves towards accepting other racial or ethnic groups. Fourth, all the models require some acceptance into the minority culture of origin, especially within the immersion stage.

### The Biracial Identity Development Model

The Multiracial Americans of Southern California, Personal Communication

(1988) and Gibbs (1987) state that many biracial persons do not experience acceptance by the minority or dominant parent culture, and often times experience higher rates of victimization by both the minority and dominant culture of the parents (Poston, 1990). The past theoretical framework, research and literature is clearly showing the great need for social work practitioners to initialize development of new biracial identity development models and research. Poston (1990) has made the boldest step in beginning the groundwork for a new biracial identity development model. Poston (1990) is very clear in stating his model for biracial identity development is a proposal and progressive. However, his work sheds some insight into the internal process that a biracial child goes through in developing or rejecting their dual identity. Poston adapted Biracial Identity model from Cross' (1971) racial identity model. Poston suggests that social workers view these stages as changes in attitudes in Cross's (1971) concept of the reference group.

Cross (1971) differentiated between personal identity (PI) and reference group orientation (RGO). Personal identity includes an individual's self-esteem, self-worth, and interpersonal competence, which are independent of racial categorization and RGO. Reference group orientation includes racial identity, racial esteem, and racial ideology. Cross' (1971) racial identity model was more concerned with attitudes and attached behaviors with the different attitudes within each stage of racial identity development for the black adolescent. Parham and Helms (1985) found that a correlation exists between PI and RGO. Certain racial identity attitudes (RGOs) were associated with some indicators of mental health (PIs) within different stages of the racial identity model. An example found was that "encounter" and "internalization" groups exhibited attitudes that were consistent with feelings of high self-esteem, competence, and low anxiety.

Poston (1990) captured these concepts and built the biracial identity

development model with the belief that the changes in the RGO attitudes could have the same impact for personal identity constructs, such as self-esteem or feelings of competence for biracial people (Poston, 1990).

Poston (1990) developed the model with five stages: 1) personal identity; 2) choice of group categorization; 3) enmeshment/denial; 4) appreciation, and; 5) integration.

The first stage biracial adolescents pass through is *personal identity*. The very young child will lean towards having a sense of self that is independent of their ethnic background. The RGO attitudes are not yet developed, and the PI's, or self-worth, self-esteem, and feelings of competence are fostered and learned from the family.

The second stage is *choice of group categorization*. The biracial child is pushed to choose an identity, which is usually one parental ethnic group. The young biracial person can experience feelings of alienation, internal conflict, and confusion.

Hall (1980) confirms that more than not biracial individuals believe that the government or society forced them into making a specific racial choice for acceptance into a peer group or family. Hall(1980) believes a biracial adolescent has two choices within this stage. First, the biracial child can choose a multicultural existence, which utilizes both parental cultures and ethnicities. Second, the biracial child can choose one parent's culture and ethnicity as dominant over the other parent's culture and ethnicity. She recommended three crucial factors that could affect the young person's choice. They are status factors, social support factors, and personal factors.

Status factors include the group status of each parental culture and heritage, ethnicity of the majority of neighbors, and ethnicity and influence of the peer group.

Social support factors include parental style, acceptance and activity in cultures of various groups, and familial acceptance. Personal factors include physical appearance, cultural knowledge, age, and individual personality differences. For example, a person with black and white parents might choose to identify as black based solely on personal status factors, such as physical features or being accepted by a black peer group. Cognitive or abstract thinking has not been fully developed at this stage, thus the child would not be able to conceive of a multi-ethnic perspective.

The third stage is *enmeshment/denial*. Confusion and guilt highlight this stage due to the young person feeling forced to choose one parental ethnic heritage over the other, which does not wholly express their identity. Associated feelings in this stage are guilt, self-hatred, and self-doubt. Sebring (1985) confirmed that when biracial children cannot identify with both parental cultures, the child can feel guilty and disloyal for rejecting one parent. Gibbs (1987) and Sebring (1985) suggest that these feelings of guilt and self-hatred must be resolved and that community resources could play a major role in assisting the young person in resolving these issues.

The fourth stage is *appreciation*. Individuals start to acknowledge and appreciate multiple cultures, and start to broaden their reference group orientations. The young person may begin to learn about their other parental culture group, and may begin to interact and participate in another ethnic group. However, they will still identify with one ethnic group.

The fifth stage is *integration*. Individuals in this stage begin to experience wholeness and begin to integrate both parental cultures, and other ethnic groups. At this point in the process biracial individuals develop a strong sense of self and they have a secure and integrated biracial identity (Poston, 1990). Poston's Biracial Identity Development Model stresses the biracial "individual's need to value and

integrate multiple cultures and it specifies the social, personal, and status factors important in this process" (p. 154).

### Biracial Identity Development Studies

Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, and Harris (1993) conducted a qualitative study, entitled *Racial Identity in Biracial Children*. They initiated their study in response to the sparse amount of research in the area of biracial identity development. The numerous empirical studies conducted concerning Black and White Racial identity models (e. g., Helms, 1990, Parham, 1989, and Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991) are poignantly contrasting. Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, and Harris were interested in studying racial identity development in biracial children. The study's outcome objective was to develop new practice models to combat conjectured beliefs that children who are biracial are at a higher risk for encountering personal problems, such as: a) cultural and racial identification issues; b) lowered self-esteem; c) difficulty in dealing with conflicting cultural demands; and, d) developing a marginal identity between two parental ethnicities/ cultures. They intended to: "(a) identify critical identity issues for Black/White biracial children and, (b) follow qualitative philosophy, and generate hypotheses for future qualitative and quantitative research" (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, and Harris, 1993, p. 222).

The study sample was first-generation offspring of one Black and one White biological parent. Findings from the children's and parents' interviews were inconsistent with what has been said historically about children who are biracial. For example the children in the study did not feel marginal. The majority of the children in the study did report an "increased sensitivity to the views, cultures, and values of both the Black and White communities, and perceived more

commonalities than differences between them”(p. 228). Finally, study results revealed that the majority of parents had a sound sense of their racial identity, and most of the parents considered their children to be both Black and White or biracial. All of the families reported no alienation from extended families, religious observance did not seem to be a major concern.

In contrast, to the findings of Kerwin, Ponterrotto, Jackson, and Harris (1993), Bowles (1993) found that study participants felt alienated and that they did not belong or feel accepted with either their Black or White peers. They reported great pleasure in seeing that they resembled someone in the family, even if they were a distant family member. Bowles suggested that a part of her clients identity/self was being forgotten. Her clients resemblance to a distant family member restores the forgotten other side of their self/identity.

From these results Bowles, determined that the “the inability to own both sides of one’s heritage impedes the construction of a solid sense of self....acceptance on one part at the expense of the other part does not appear to be an alternate psychological option, despite its pervasive political acceptance in our society”(p. 423). Furthermore, she concluded that the adolescent who is biracial has a sense of self which cannot be “firmly grounded” and the sense of self is incomplete, which begins a “developmental impasse” that hinders successful achievement of autonomy. If a child who is biracial cannot identify with one parent, this indicates that both parents’ culture/ethnicity cannot be integrated as part of the child’s self identity. The results could lead to feelings of shame, emotional isolation, and depression. Bowle’s conclusion called for further discussion, practice development, theory development, and research in the area of biracial identity development.

Brown (1991) examined the relationship among racial identity , conflict, and self-esteem in interracial young adults. This study refuted the perception that all

biracial individuals' identity development is always a conflictive experience, and that when the majority of biracial individuals reach adulthood they would identify as black. In fact, her study showed that most of the participants if given a choice would self identify as biracial/interracial. The reporting of emotional turmoil over being biracial was low, and it was shown that the respondents did not invest a lot of time or emotional energy in denying their biracial identity. In fact, the majority of the participants in Brown's study embraced their dual cultural identity, and they wished that others would as well.

### Summary

The literature suggests that biracial individuals have many road blocks to negotiating a dual racial identity. Current identity development models are dedicated to monoracial individuals. Poston (1990) and Root (1993) assert that empirically researching and testing identity models which are specifically directed toward biracial individuals is needed. In addition, this investigator was able to find only a few articles on biracial identity development or understanding of when biracial individuals actually conceptualize race and synthesize that they have parents from two different cultures. The societal belief appears to be that biracial individuals are supposed to exclusively identify with the minority parent. Furthermore, all personal problems stem from their dual racial identity.

The racial identity development models in the development of identity in monoracial individuals are important considerations. These models provide a framework which have guided our understanding of racial identity formation. The models as discussed in the literature review are however, limited in their ability to describe racial identity formation in biracial individuals.

The theoretical basis was drawn from Poston's (1990) Biracial Identity

Development model. The models suggests that biracial individuals pass through internal stages or processes while developing/accepting or rejecting their dual racial identity. Poston held that changes in the reference group orientation attitudes may impact the biracial individual's personal identity constructs, such as self-esteem or feelings of competence (Poston, 1990).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### Overview

The literature is inconclusive relative to the factors that influence the racial identity development of biracial adults. The primary purpose of this study was to identify the key factors that influence the racial identity development of young biracial adults, the second goal was to explore the participants' racial identity formation, and the third goal was to examine the attitudes and opinions of the participants. This chapter includes the research methodology, rationale, and the strengths and limitations of the study design.

#### Research Design Overview

This was a qualitative, explorative study using a semi-structured questionnaire. In-depth interviews were conducted with each individual respondent to elicit insight, experiences, and stories of young biracial adults regarding what has influenced their racial identity development. An attempt to get access to a large sample was sought through recruitment, such as word of mouth advertising, mailing of flyers, email advertising, advertisement in college and university newspapers, and referrals from respondents (Snow-ball Sampling). Questionnaire results were analyzed by tallying numbers and calculation of percentages.

#### Research Questions:

1. What are the key factors that influence the racial identity development of young biracial adults?
2. When did the majority of respondents realize and conceptualize that they were biracial?
3. What are the respondents current opinions and attitudes about being biracial in today's society?

## Conceptual and Operational Definitions

For the purposes of this study it is important to provide definitions of commonly used employed terms. Racial Identity Development as defined by Helms (1993) refers to a “sense of group or collective identity” based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group.” Racial identity theories examine psychological development on a racial perspective, and generally refers to a Black or White person’s identification or non-identification with the racial group that the individual assumes to share a racial heritage.

Biracial identity development as defined by Poston (1990) is the process when individuals pass through internal stages while developing/accepting or rejecting their dual racial identity. Poston held that changes in the reference group orientation attitudes could impact the biracial individual’s personal identity constructs, such as self-esteem or feelings of competence.

Racial choice/consciousness as defined by Helms (1993) “refers to the awareness that (socialization due to) racial-group membership can influence one’s racial intrapsychic dynamics as well as interpersonal relationships”. Also, this concept refers to the process whereas a biracial individual encounters an innate independency or freedom by realizing the importance of the right to self define racially, rather than simply accepting being racially designated and defined by the community or society. In this study this process will be referred to as the participants’ racial awareness.

External factors is defined, by the context of the situation, whereas the biracial individuals family is technically an external factor that influences the biracial individuals racial identity, but in a positive and separate fashion. External factors that can have a negative and temporary impact on a biracial individuals racial identity is limited racial choice, being categorically defined by the society.

### Study Population:

This investigator recognized that there are many different combinations of multi-racial individuals residing in the United States. Furthermore, there are many descriptor words used to describe the racial heritage of individuals who have parents who are racially or ethnically diverse. For example: mulatto; mixed; bicultural; interracial; multi-racial; multi-ethnic, and; many others. For this study it was decided to utilize the term biracial when describing the population being studied. The population of interest in this study were individuals who are of mixed African-American and Euro-American descent, aged 18-26. There was no preselection of the ethnicity of the mother or father of the study sample participants. The fourteen participants for this study were either in college or working.

### Sample Procedures:

Recruitment for the study utilized several procedures to obtain the study sample. Participants were recruited for the study using "snow-ball sampling" (referrals from respondents) and advertising on campus wide emails, emails to student advisors at the University of Minnesota, and word of mouth. Each student who responded from Augsburg, and the University of Minnesota were asked to refer anyone who they knew would fit the study criteria and would be interested in the study.

Initially advertising efforts were futile. Seven college newspapers were contacted to advertise, however unsolicited advertisements were not accepted at any of the college newspapers. Thus, advertisement flyers were mailed to Student Activity or Multicultural Affairs offices of Hamline University, St. Thomas University, Macalester College, Concordia-St. Paul College, St. Catherines College, Minneapolis Community and Technical College, the University of Minnesota and

Augsburg College. One young woman from the University of Minnesota stated she saw the flyer, which she also was referred to the study by her advisor as well. Eight participants from the University of Minnesota responded by referral from their academic advisor. Access to multicultural advisor's email addresses were provided by the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

The initial participants for the study were found as the result of an announcement about the study during an Augsburg College Admissions Multicultural Student Recruiting meeting. As a result of the announcement two young women contacted this investigator and volunteered to participate in the study. These two young women identified three young men at Augsburg College who met the study criteria. All three men were contacted and agreed to participate in the study. The sixth participant from Augsburg College was referred to the study by one of the young men. She was contacted and agreed to participate in the study.

In total, 18 individuals responded, which 14 were interviewed and included in the results. None of the University of Minnesota students referred anyone to the study. All eighteen respondents were students from the University of Minnesota and Augsburg College.

Three other students, who were not interviewed, responded from the University of Minnesota per a referral from their advisor. One male, who after learning he would have to be interviewed in person decided not to participate and two young women did not meet the study criteria. The two young women both had fathers who were native of Africa. This study is specific to the experience and history related to the United States. One other young man from Augsburg College responded, he was referred to the study by one of the young men (respondent) from Augsburg, but due to conflicting schedules an interview was not ever scheduled.

After, each respondent initiated contact or expressed an interest in the study a phone screening ensured that each participant fit the study criterion, an interview time and place were scheduled. Interviews were scheduled within a day or two of the phone screening, thus due to time constraints, consent forms were signed by the participants prior to the interview (Appendix B). No direct benefits were offered to the participants in the form of monetary payment.

### Data Collection

The recommended procedures of Marshall and Rossman (1989) were used as the basis for collection of data. This method specifies using an open ended and semi structured interview schedule. (Appendix A) The open-ended questions in the interview were used to gain a greater understanding of the issues surrounding the participants' dual identity development. The interview questions also collected data related to demographics, racial identity, their perception of their racial identity formation, and their current attitudes regarding their racial identity development and opinions on being biracial in today's society. The participants had an opportunity to give crucial information regarding the social and political aspects and impact that biracial individuals have in today's society.

### Questionnaire

The interview questions examined racial identity and the key factors that influenced the participants' identity development and formation to further our understanding of the biracial experience.

The interview schedule consists of both structured and semi structured questions. (Appendix A) The questions were developed and adopted from Brown's (1991) Interracial Young Adults Questionnaire. Even though the questionnaire

included quantitative data, the emphasis of the interview and data was found within the open ended questions. The qualitative responses supplied in depth information to enhance the quantitative responses and data. Due to time restraints the questionnaire was not pretested, which potentially could have affected reliability and validity.

### Data Analysis

McCracken's (1988) five stages of analysis for qualitative interviews was utilized. These five stages include: 1) verbatim transcripts were produced, read, and reread; 2) common emerging themes and experiences were organized to merge the qualitative and quantitative data, which was accomplished by comparing and analyzing the transcripts by color highlighting the similar and contrasting themes, terminology, and experiences related to the participants biracial identity development; 3) the highlighted transcripts were transferred onto index cards; 4) these "data slices" were then further analyzed through rereading and identifying logical relationships; and, 5) transcripts were reviewed to confirm or disconfirm other emerging possibilities.

All quantitative data was sorted and analyzed through hand tabulation . Most of the structured questions were scaling questions, such as one (1) being very much and five (5) being not at all, or bivariate questions/choices, such as yes or no, or multi-variate questions/choices, such as African-America or Euro-American or biracial.

### Strengths and Limitations

The investigator's opinion is that the personal intimate nature of the interview process may have encouraged greater honesty in responses.

How cultural meaning emerges appears easier to identify through personal contact. The data collected through the combination of in-depth interviews and the semi structured provided some flexibility to gain insight into where more focused studies on biracial identity development could be initiated.

The budget and time restraints for this for this study limited the length of time need to acquire a larger and more diverse study sample. This data may not be generalizable to the entire population of biracial individuals, because of the sample size. Only a few of the many issues related to biracial identity development were explored. Thus, information about more research and unexplored issues may change interpretations of current data.

Bias may have been introduced because over half of the sample were referred by one academic advisor from the University of Minnesota. A better design might have provided equal numbers of students in the sample from each college in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area.

The questionnaire was not pretested. Therefore, the strength and accuracy of the instrument is not known.

Another potential limitation of this study is based on the results of the participants' recalling childhood memories of their personal experiences. Memory can often be distorted and influenced by the participants' current maturity level, frame of mind, or current reference group categorization.

A final limitation of the results could be the potential for the participants responses being affected, due to the fact that all of the interviews were conducted by this investigator, who is a white male. The effect upon the responses of the participants is unknown.

## Summary

This study is an explorative study, which utilized qualitative research methods. A total of fourteen biracial adults were interviewed using a semi structured interview schedule. The in-depth interviews provided personal experiences, characteristics, attitudes, and perceptions of the participants about their biracial identity.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of the Findings

#### Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The results are organized around the following themes identified from analysis of qualitative data described in chapter three. The themes are as follows: definition of self & race; racial designation; family and peer acceptance; shared commonality of being compelled to defend or be part of the "Black experience" ; racial formation in the elementary years; racial identification in different racial peer groups; differentiating between the rural and urban black or biracial youth; dating attitudes and experiences; and, 9) the right to choose racial definition.

#### Profile of the Study Participants

The data as indicated in Table 4.1 reveals the demographic profile of the study sample.

Table 4.1  
Profile of Study Participants

N=14	n	%
• Adopted by Euro-American Parents	2	14%
• Single Parented Home	6	43%
• Two Parented Home	6	43%
• # of Euro-American Mothers	14	100%
• # of African-American Fathers	14	100%
• Men	4	29%
• Female	10	71%

Fourteen adults were interviewed for this study, of this total, ten were female. All of the participants were students who reported they came from middle to upper middle class families and communities, and ages ranged between 18 and 26 years of age. In this sample all of the biological fathers were African-American and the biological mothers were Euro-American. Two of the respondents were adopted and raised by Euro-American parents, but their biological mother and father were African-American and Euro-American. Six participants grew up in the same household with their biological father and mother. Six of the participant's biological parents were divorced or never married. All six of these participants grew up with their mothers and two of these six participants knew of their fathers. One participant lived with his mother, but spent equitable time with his father and the other met his father and his extended family only once in his life.

Table 4.2 indicates that seven (50%) of the participants self identified themselves as black, six (43%) the participants self identified themselves as biracial, one (7%) self identified as other/ multi-ethnic, and none of the participants self identified as white. Three of the participants who identified themselves as biracial indicated that they are more comfortable in the white peer group and community, but do not deny that they are African-American.

Table 4.2

Racial Identification

N=14	n	%
Black	7	50%
Biracial	6	43%
Other	1	07%
White	0	

### Racial Identity Development

Six participants (43%) identified as biracial, and they all varied in how and when their racial identity developed. At one point in their development these six participants reported they self identified as black based on their experiences of being identified as black, purely by their skin color. These six participants commented that, upon reflection, these experiences were their first encounters of racism within their community or schools. Their attitudes were expressed essentially by this belief: 'well if I am going to be treated like I am black than I might as well be black.' They stated that even though these experiences impacted their racial identity it was only temporary. These six participants reported that later on in their identity development they were no longer comfortable self identifying as Black. As they matured they became more self aware of their dual ethnicities, thus accepting Biracial as a more accurate description of their racial identity. In addition, they also described that they interpreted these earlier experiences of being identified purely by their skin color as society forcing a racial identification upon them. They stated this was wrong and they described feelings of resentment.

Seven (50%) participants consistently identified as black throughout their life and racial identity development. They emphasized the feeling of shared oppression and comfort with black people within their peers, schools, family, and community. They used the word "experience" as their description of why and how they identify as black, which surpasses being identified by their skin color.

The following comments provides an example of this "experience", which this 26 year old student explains his reasoning for identifying as African-American and the differentiation of "experience" of being biracial:

*"I always knew I was black.....When I hear identify it's like what do you relate to or what is your experience, so for me identify means, if I*

*I was going to put myself into a group of people then African-American is where I would place myself. But, also I think there is another experience, which is biracial, African-American and Caucasian, which is in and of itself an experience, which African-American purely black, dark skinned people cannot identify with and Caucasian people cannot identify with having not lived that experience and it's completely different experience in and of itself.....*

Through this “experience” acceptance by peers was frequently mentioned throughout each interview. As can be seen in Table 4.3, five (36%) of the participants reported they felt more accepted or comfortable with their white extended family members. None of the participants felt solely comfortable with their black extended family members. However, nine (64%) of the participants reported no difference in acceptance of comfort with both sides of the family.

**Table 4.3**  
**Acceptance Per Black and White Family and Community**

N=14	n	%
• no difference in acceptance from either family side	9	64%
• more accepted by white extended family members:	5	36%
• more accepted by black extended family members	0	0
<hr/>		
• no difference in acceptance from either community	5	36%
• more accepted by a mixed community	4	29%
• more accepted by the white community	3	21%
• more accepted by the black community	2	14%

Five (36%) of the participants reported no difference in acceptance or comfort in a black, white, or mixed community. Four (29%) participants felt more accepted

and comfortable in a mixed community, three (21%) participants felt more accepted and comfortable by the white community, and two (14%) participants felt more accepted and comfortable with the black community.

Family and peers were the two most influential social factors that impacted the participants racial identity. As seen in Table 4.4, twenty-six percent of the responses of the participants indicated family was the most influential in their racial identity development. Participants responded to a basic Likert scale, which asked them to indicate factors that influenced their racial identity. Choices presented for this question were family, peers, society, skin color, racism, which 5 represented influenced my racial identity very much and a 1 represented that it did not influence my racial identity at all.

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Table 4.4  
The Factors that Most Influenced the Racial Identity Development of the Participants

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	Sum of Raw Score	%
• family scores	55	26%
• peer scores	48	22%
• society scores	45	21%
• skin color scores	33	15%
• racism scores	28	13%

---

Twenty-six percent of the responses of the participants indicated that family was the most influential factor that impacted their racial identity development. Furthermore, the majority of these participants reported that their family/parents is where they first learned that they had a choice to just be themselves and what their racial identity was to them.

Twenty-two percent of the responses of the participants indicated that peers were the most influential factor that impacted their racial identity development. The participants reported how the majority of their peer groups were mixed (black, white, and mixed peers). None of the participants indicated an exclusive peer group preference and were more comfortable with a diverse peer group, with the exception of four of the participants who lived in predominantly white communities.

A majority of the participants believed they were accepted in their peer group for their character rather than their skin color. Ten (71%) of the participants shared that they had a peer group that fundamentally accepted them for who they are, and did not identify them by the color of their skin. Table 4.5 indicates that when talking about racial mixture, within an individual's community, those who did not feel accepted by their peers lived in white communities and those who did feel accepted by their peers lived in mixed or all black communities.

Table 4.5  
Community Acceptance

N=14	n	%
	Felt More Accepted	
Black Communities	4	28%
White Communities	6	42%
Mixed Communities	4	28%

All fourteen participants said how important their peer group's acceptance was to them, but that their parents were the most important. All fourteen participants reported that their parents never suggested that they identify with one certain ethnicity. In fact, most of the participants recalled that the issue of being

biracial was simply not talked about, or consumed very much of the families time. The six (43%) participants who had both parents present in their home described an abundance of discussion regarding racial and ethnic issues in the society and government. These 43% and most of the other participants said they learned to appreciate both parental cultures from their parent(s). As one young woman explains:

*“Family is first, because, that is the first thing I think of when I think of my racial identity development. My mom has always been like*

*, that’s always been something that she has made us aware of and she taught us about. Probably that is why I said family impacts me the most.”*

#### Perceptions of Racial Identity Formation

As table 4.6 illustrates, five (36%) of the participants state the ages they believe they realized they had a racial identity was between 1 year old or the toddler years, two (14%) of the participants believed this happened between 3 and 4 years of age, three (21%) believed this happened between 5 and 6 years of age, 3 (21%) believed this happened between 7 and 8 years of age, and one (7%) believed this happened by 8 and 9 years of age.

Table 4.6  
Age of Perception of Racial Identity Formation

N=14	n	%
• 1 yr old	5	36%
• 3-4 yrs old	2	14%
• 5-6 yrs old	3	21%
• 7-8 yrs old	3	21%
• 8-9 yrs old	1	07%

Also, the majority of participants racial identity changed as they became older. During childhood the participants racial identity was quite wide spread between identifying as black, white, biracial or not sure. However, during adolescence and young adult-hood there identity was either black or biracial, which in this study there were more participants that self identified as biracial versus black.

### Current Attitudes About being Biracial

When asked what racial category each participant marks on demographic forms the responses of two participants seem to speak for the group:

*"it really depends on the form...African-American or none are the the categories I check, due to purely selfish reasons, such as more opportunity for money or I know that there is more opportunity in being a minority or person of color."*

*"It depends. I have that luxury I guess. It is a form for school or a job, it depends on the distinct situation of white/black or I'll mark biracial. I've never marked white, I've never done that."*

The first two questions are centered on what the participants checked on forms that ask for ethnicity and if the U. S. Government should add a new category for biracial individuals. Table 4.7, shows that four (29%) of the participants admitted that if they knew there was some advantage or payoff for marking African-American, such as access to financial aid or employment than they would definitely choose that option. If there was no payoff, such as a census form or something general, than they would mark down both African-American and Caucasian. Seven (50%) of the participants marked both black and white, four (29%) of the participants marked black if they knew they would benefit from that choice, two (14%) marked black consistently, and one (7%) marked other consistently.

Table 4.7  
 Racial Identification on Forms/New Biracial Category  
 on Census Forms

N=14	n	%
-both black & white:	7	(50%)
-black for selfish reasons:	4	(29%)
-black:	2	(14%)
-other(specify):	1	(7%)
-white	0	0

When asked if the U. S. Government should provide a new category for biracial individuals Table 4.8, indicates that seven (50%) of the participants reported yes, five (36%) of the participants reported no, and two (14%) of the participants were undecided. In addition, these responses speak for the majority of participants.

*Yes, definitely. Because it's becoming more and more common and they are going to have to come to the realization that it is something that is happening at a fairly rapid rate than in the past.*

*"Yes, because there are so many of us and it's on the rise and there is going to be a time in America where your not going to meet any pure white or pure black or pure anything. So, they need to start changing. They can't just have the same thing. Time changes and thing have to change. I also, remember my mom marked me down white for something to do with the bus....she marked me down white so that I could take the bus into the city. Technically she could get away with it. I saw her doing it and I said 'I am not white' "Yes you are."*

*"I would not vote for another classification of race. Because I don't know what race means to be honest with you. Then would we go ahead and say Norwegian or Swedish on the forms. I think that having another classification of biracial would do more harm than good in the whole scheme of things and I think the dividing rule that was used from the Romans on up or whatever is very racist and divisive."*

**Table 4.8**  
**Participant Opinion's on Need of New Biracial Category**

N=14	n	%
-yes	7	(50%)
-no	5	(36%)
-undecided	2	(14%)

Both qualitative and quantitative data suggest that the participants consistently identified as biracial in their social interactions. Table 4.9, shows that none of the participants identified as white, but in all peer groups they identify as biracial or black.

Responses regarding comfort and acceptance were again consistent. Table 4.10, indicates, the majority of participants were distributed equally.

**Table 4.9**  
**Ethnic Identification in Different Ethnic Peer Groups**

N=14	Racial Category	n	%
<b>In an all white peer group:</b>	<b>white</b>	<b>0</b>	
	<b>black</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>(36%)</b>
	<b>biracial</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>(64%)</b>
<b>In an all black peer group:</b>	<b>white</b>	<b>0</b>	
	<b>black</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>(36%)</b>
	<b>biracial</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>(64%)</b>
<b>In an all mixed peer group:</b>	<b>white</b>	<b>0</b>	
	<b>black</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>(29%)</b>
	<b>biracial</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>(71%)</b>

**Table 4.10**  
**Comfortableness within Different Ethnic Peer Groups**  
**I feel most comfortable in an all....**

<b>N=14</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>-mixed peer group</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>(43%)</b>
<b>-black peer group</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>(36%)</b>
<b>-white peer group</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(21%)</b>

A small sub-group (5) reported that they felt an obligation to identify as black in an all white peer group and in an all black peer group. However, one of these five would identify as mixed when interacting in an all mixed peer group. Interestingly, four of these individuals say they would still identify as black in an all mixed peer group, but admitted that they felt the most comfortable interacting with other biracial peers, due to the shared experience of being biracial. One young woman explained:

*I identify as black. I think I went through a stage where I wasn't sure what I should say or if I should explain myself, but now I just identify as black. If they want to know more, if they want to know why my skin is so light they can ask me. However, if I am specifically asked if I am biracial, which I have been approached several times. "Oh, are you mixed." I tell them yes, but usually it is other mixed people who approach me."*

One young man in the study explained his situation while interacting with peers in a mixed, black, or white peer group. His response appears to indicate a majority of participants' point of views:

*"I have to say mixed. I think now I am more comfortable with black peers. My answer is still mixed but it used to be that I was more comfortable with white peers. That's how it used to be. And now I think I feel more accepted as an African-American and not bringing me down of I feel like I have to come down. They would be more supportive of who I am as a*

*black person. However, I feel more accepted and comfortable with a mixed peer group."*

Participants were asked about dating behavior, specifically if race of their partner influenced their choice. Six (36%) of the participants chose both black and white equally as dating partners exclusively, four (29%) of the participants chose black dating partners, four (29%) of the participants chose to date only white partners, one (7%) of the participants chose biracial dating partners. Table 4.9, describes the results to this question and shows the primary and current choices of the participants.

Consistently, the participants stated they dated the same ethnicity, which corresponds with how they responded earlier, in the interview, in regards to a certain ethnic group in their peer group, neighborhood, and extended family. One young man explains why he prefers dating other biracial women over any other ethnicity:

*"I dated two white girls and everyone else has been biracial, and I never fully dated a black woman...I think why I am more comfortable with biracial women is to do with beauty and the shared experience. I am more comfortable around someone who has had the same experience....Experience, I think that's the biggest thing is learning to identify and to be able to discuss these issues I have, which will most likely be with me for the rest of my life, with my partner. "*

Another participant explains her view on being biracial, identifying as black, and dating in today's world:

*"If I were a dark skinned black woman I would be pretty mad sometimes, because you've got all the black men dating, well not all of them, but some of them do date only light skinned women and some of them only date white women. That just takes more black men away from the pool of eligible black men, because there is less black men than there are black women. So, I guess I would be kind of upset."*

Finally, a senior student sums up his opinion about exclusively dating black women and his observations about interracial dating:

*“I guess that I could be with any race, but if you’re out to date a white woman you’ve got to really like them. If they really love each other I don’t have any disagreement with this. But in a way I think the thing is a lot of times when black men do date white women it’s always what the guy can get from her....but it’s like they don’t give a reason of why they don’t date black women. They think, they act like they are too hard and attitudinal. I think they (black men) don’t respect black women....It’s like some black men don’t give the black woman a chance, because they feel they know them and white women they can do whatever they want with them. That is why I won’t date them (white women). Black women are too tough on them (black men). They’re too tough on them (black men).”*

**Table 4.11**  
**Ethnic Preference for Dating**

N=14	Primary Choice		Currently	
	n	%	n	%
Black	4	(29%)	6	(43%)
White	4	(29%)	2	(14%)
Biracial	1	(7%)	1	(7%)
Both Black and White Equally	5	(36%)	5	(36%)

**Summary**

This study consisted of fourteen in-depth interviews. Fifty percent of the study sample identified as Black and forty-three percent identified as Biracial. Sixty-four percent of the participants stated there was no difference in family acceptance, which appears to be a trend. Racial identity development of the participants’ was most influenced by family and peers. The majority of participants stated that family and home was a safe place where they learned the importance of race, ethnicity, and culture interpersonally and in relation to politics and society.

Peers were important due to being accepted as a person and friend versus being viewed simply as a person of color. Self identification and definition resulted in independence and awareness.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

### Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, including the strengths and limitations of the research, implications for future research, and implications for social work practice with this population. In addition, included will be a discussion on how the findings compare to Poston's (1991) Biracial Identity Theory and a proposed paradigm shift for this study population.

### Key Factors:

The purpose of this research was to explore the key factors that influence the racial identity development of young biracial adults. Data for the study was collected by in-depth interviews with fourteen biracial adults. This study built on Brown's (1991) finding, which explained two main questions: 1) what influenced their decision the most in developing or not developing a dual cultural identity, and; 2) where in their racial identity development did these young adults form a dual cultural identity.

The results of this study showed a new insight in the aspect that both parents/family and peer acceptance provided a safe environment that allowed growth of who I am. The literature eludes to these external factors, but empirical evidence is lacking to a great extent as to what really influences the biracial individuals racial identity development. This smaller explorative study suggests that open discussion of the issues or race and ethnicity within the family and acceptance of the individual with the family, community, and with peers are the primary ingredients leading to a positive adjustment in the biracial adult.

A part of this positive adjustment was learned from an awareness of an

internal right to self define, which was passed on from their parents, family values, exposure to other ethnic cultures, and open dialogue in the home and peer group about diversity.

The majority of the participants described similar experiences that their individual identity development began at home, and the two most influential people in their lives were their parents, which is not unlike most people. According to these participants their racial identification was rarely a big concern or subject within their home or family. However, they mentioned that their parents taught them and their siblings the value of appreciating all ethnicities and cultures, which issues of race and ethnicity were discussed openly. However, all of these participants described experiences in the community that directly contrasted their experiences at home.

Each participant described that at one time or another in their childhood or adolescence that they believed they had been racially identified by the basis of their skin color. Resulting in the participant then identifying as Black. Seven of these participants stated that this was only a temporary racial identification. As these seven participants matured and became more racially aware of themselves they chose to identify as Biracial or bi-ethnic. They described how they recalled living at home and not being forced to racially identify and that they were an individual, a son or a daughter with individual talents. Thus, for these participants parents and family acceptance was crucial and impacted their racial identity in two different developmental stages of their lives. In addition, extended families played a role in the participants racial identity. For example one young woman, who lived her entire life in Western Minnesota, in a predominantly Euro-American rural area, stated frequent visits to Minneapolis to visit her father's side of the family was enough to feel accepted and embraced by her African-American ethnicity and

culture. Support from immediate and extended families appeared to validate most of the participants' ability to embrace their dual ethnicity and heritage.

It appeared that the values of the parents was dominate and eased the impact of experiences of racism or being racially defined by the community or government.

Each participant had access to a diverse peer group either in their neighborhood or school. Participants seemed to experience equal acceptance in Black, White, and mixed peer groups. Each of the participants who identified as Biracial described being more comfortable in a mixed peer group, due to identifying with their experience. However, they were equally comfortable with White friends and Black friends who accepted them for who they were, not what they were. The seven participants consistently identified as Black described similar experiences that Black peer acceptance was more influential in their racial identification. These seven participants described identifying with the "Black experience" and being emerged in the Black culture.

According to the findings of this study, Biracial identity development is a stage/developmental process. As these participants moved from the home, which represented safety, security, and acceptance, to the community they experienced strikingly contrasting acceptance of self. All of the participants' racial identity was impacted by experiences of being identified and or treated differently due to their skin color. However, as they continued to grow, mature, and were exposed to more diverse experiences the participants again evolved in their racial awareness. Some went back to their initial parental teachings of the internal right to self define, which was supported by a mixed peer comfortability and acceptance. The others emerged themselves into the Black culture and continued developing their identification with the "Black experience". Again, the Black peer group comfort and acceptance being extremely influential in their racial identity development.

Neither were wrong or right, but all of the participants described that through their immediate families, extended families, and peer groups they all felt and feel the permission to self define who they are individually and racially.

### Racial Identity Development:

All of the fourteen participants indicated that the negative aspects of their racial identity development were keenly impressed upon them by being treated differently by the community because of their skin color. This was true in the early stages of their racial identity development, which later was mitigated by acceptance of peers. Independence was encountered through self identification/ definition when faced with racist experiences, which helped spurred their racial identity development.

All fourteen of the participants reported that being identified by their skin color and automatically identified as African-American did not cause severe emotional trauma, nor was it the source of their life problems. More important to each participant was the opportunity to choose their racial identity regardless of the social environment.

Racial identity formation is a very obscure subject within the literature. The racial identity development models provide some information on when a child perceives that they are a different color, however they do not speak of the dynamics involved in an individual's conception of the idea that color means I am different. This concept is most often manifested as a result of social and political constructs derived from racism and prejudices. All of the participants shared that when they were very young (prior to elementary school) race was not ever an issue at home, at school, or in the neighborhood. Full understanding of these dynamics did not occur until early adulthood.

One young woman shared an example of the experience that all of the participants encountered.

*"I never thought about being any color, until a boy at my school came up to me and said 'you can't play with us because you are not white, you're black' and that is when I first realized that I was different and identified by my skin color".*

One area of the study proved to be a specific response to the influences of racial identity development of biracial individuals. A common theme the majority of participants shared was the dynamic of differentiating between African-American peers who were raised in urban areas, very diverse ethnically, versus the African-American peers who were raised in suburbia or rural areas, predominantly white communities. The majority of participants who identified as black or biracial reported a major difficulty, discomfort, or non-acceptance from the inner city or urban black youth. It is the opinion of this investigator that these dynamics have more socioeconomic and regional implications versus racial implications. All of the participants were middle to upper-middle class, whereas in areas where there is a high percent of impoverished families where certain values may exist that are different from middle class values.

The participants who solely identified as Black acknowledged an immersion into the Black culture such as, food, music, personality, diction in voice, slang, and dress, which means adopting some stereotypes. This can be related to Cross' Black Racial Identity Development Model, specifically the immersion-emersion stage. Cross (1971, 1978) defines immersion as "the person psychologically and physically, if possible, withdraws into Blackness and a Black world. He or she thinks, feels, and acts the way he or she believes "authentic" Blacks are supposed to, and judges and evaluates other Blacks on the basis of their conformance to these "idealistic" racial standards" (Helms, 1993).

The participants who did not identify as purely African-American, shared more about their individual accomplishments, their knowledge of different cultures, and more of an embracing of both cultures. This is indicative of Poston's Biracial Identity Development Model's second stage choice of group categorization. Within this stage Poston holds that the individual chooses either to exist by utilizing both parental cultures or by selecting one parental culture as dominant over the other. Status, social, and personal factors are very important and influential in this choice. Status factors include the group status of each parental culture and influence of the individual's peer group. Social factors include parental style, acceptance and activity in cultures of various groups, and familial acceptance. Personal factors include physical appearance, cultural knowledge, age/maturity, and personality differences (Poston, 1990). All of the participants spoke on these dynamics and would validate and fit into this stage. With an insight into the abandonment of buying into race and its political constructs, one young woman in the study shared:

*When I was being educated about who I was and what my possibilities were, what my capacities were, I had to be educated about all of those parts. So, when I was at Christmas dinner and we were having Lutefisk and Lephsa my grandpa was speaking Norwegian, that meant something to me as a person. It wasn't that he was this white man sitting at this table doing some stuff. He was Norwegian and there is an actual religious thing that it means. There are cultural things that it means, values it holds.....So, to say that I am white and black does not make sense, and for my parents it's not logical not to educate me about the truth of who I am and what that means other than outside of black and white."*

### Self Definition/Racial Awareness

This section will comment on how identification per skin color or physical features impacts these participants' racial choice.

The participants' experiences of being treated differently; like they are black,

then white, and thus they might as well be black has deep implications. As the participants expressed these experiences they described feelings of resentment. Caused by the combination of encountering racist notions and feeling forced to choose a pre-societal defined racial identification. Thus, half of the participants changed their racial choice as they matured. This would be consistent with Poston's third stage of enmeshment/denial. Confusion and guilt highlight this stage due to the young person feeling forced to choose one parental culture over the other.

When talking about individuals right to ethnically choose or self-define society dictates different rules than the family. These participants report that family did not emphasize racial identification as major priority for the family or for their children, although discussions centered around racism and learning about and appreciating cultural differences and heritages. These participants learned early in life that they had a racial identity and that their parents were from two different cultures. The home was a safe place to just be who you are in context of being a child. Racial designation only became an issue when peers or society forced the choice, or at times defined the choice for them.

Their racial choice really changed with what type of peer acceptance they received or didn't receive, which counters the societal belief that biracial individuals must identify with the minority parent. This is exemplary of the position held by Bowles (1993) and Poston (1991). Thus, they differentiate between family and society, which plays a role in the individual's self/racial identification.

Peers play a dual role in these participants racial identity development. First, some peers mirror society's belief that if you look black then you are black. Second, peers who were identified as friends who accepted these participants for who they were versus what they were, based on skin color or physical features, were instrumental in these participants readopting their parental teachings that you are

an individual first. Thus, as most of these participants matured they consistently identified as biracial.

The findings are at variance to the literature when discussing these dynamics, which the old myths and beliefs that if a biracial individual does not identify as black then they will have a highly conflictive racial identity development or be marginal in their racial identity development (Root, 1993) and (Brown, 1995). These participants believed that they should have the right to choose and identify racially, and not need to be limited or ethnically defined by the government or society. The participants who identify as African-American and biracial all resonated to this belief and stated that this dynamic contributed to their racial identity development. By providing independency and deeper racial awareness, which has been carried into their young adulthood.

Finally, these participants expressed the need for a new racial category that acknowledges and represents their right to choose their own racial identification. However, the majority still believe that racial categorization is simply wrong and an attempt to stratify and cause divisiveness between groups of people. The majority of the participants believe a new racial category will at least provide a valid and public forum to truly have a racial choice to self define ethnically, which would break all of the historical influences on their racial/ethnic choice.

### Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A strength of this study lies in the in-depth interviews. The participants' strength, determination, and wisdom has been an invaluable contribution to a highly neglected area of research. The data has provided some insight into the celebratory experience that was shared by the majority of the participants, and has provided a rich and honest look into the racial identity development, experiences, and factors that have impacted these participants.

A limitation would be found in the methodology of the study. All fourteen participants had biological fathers who were African-American and biological mothers who were Euro-American. This type of an over representation along with an over representation of ten (71%) females versus four (29%) men, and comparing half of the participants who grew up solely with their Euro-American mother and the other half of the participants growing up with an intact family household potentially refers to the fact that this study sample may not represent the larger study population's point of view.

Furthermore, the results may be skewed towards the values and norms of either parent culture. There was an over representation of women 10 (71%) versus four (29%) men; about 6 (42%) of the participants lived with their mothers, who were Euro-American; two (14%) of the participants were adopted and lived with Euro-American parents; and, 6 (42%) of the participants lived and were raised by their two parents. The sample's wide mixture and diversity of participants makes it difficult to generalize the results. Even though a homogeneous sample is acceptable in qualitative research, the study sample criteria should have been more comprehensive and explicit. However, due to time constraints a larger sample would have been desirable but unfathomable. Future studies might attempt to have a study sample with equal representation of participants who were raised by an

African-American or Euro-American parent.

Due to time restraints the questionnaire was not pretested. Therefore, the strength and accuracy of the instrument is not known. In addition, the content of the questionnaire contains emotionally loaded words, which are subject to differing interpretations from the participants.

Another limitation was discovered halfway through the interviewing. Initially, the terminology chosen for the target sample group was young biracial adults, which was chosen by the potentially biased investigator. In the midst of interviews, the limitation became very clear, which was to restrict the power and need to allow the participants to self identify and self define their complete ethnicity. In fact, this investigator's opinion became swayed; the term biracial is or could be viewed as another political construct and category. Race as a word has historical, societal, political, and oppressive meanings attached to it. The word biracial is a derivative of the word race. According to the participants of this study the words bicultural, multicultural, bi-ethnic, or multi-ethnic were truer reflective terms to their self definition.

### Conclusion

The marginality of bi-ethnic people has been the antiquated norm held by society. Root (1993) has held that unlike monoracial individuals, the bi-ethnic individual does not mean automatic acceptance by either parental ethnic reference group. This dilemma perpetuates the marginality of these individuals from either race.

The results of this study challenge the idea that all bi-ethnic individuals feel they must choose one parental ethnicity over the other. However, the results confirmed the dynamic of the participant's racial identity development as being a

process, which changes within maturational stages of the individual's lifetime. This study confirmed that there is much more to be done in this area of research, especially exploring each maturational stage of individuals who are bi-ethnic.

The participants of this study are individuals, who expressed a great knowledge and experience base of living within two worlds that are, still today, divided by the social and political constructs of race. Each participant expressed their belief that they have a special and unique opportunity to exist as an ethnic individual in a highly diverse nation and world. It became very clear within all of the interviews that these participants have not given into the norm of buying into the social and political norms of claiming one parental ethnicity over the other. The results could be viewed as a microcosmic representation of the views and position that more bi and multi-ethnic individuals are striving for in today's society. Finally, the participants of this study claimed their responsibility and knowledge of a drive to share their unique and special circumstance, and provided wonderful role modeling for all of us, which may teach us how to celebrate diversity and our own ethnic lineage and heritage.

### Implications for Future Research

The implications for future research in this area are plentiful and needed. This study concentrated on and gained insight into the factors that are consistent in the racial identity development of young biracial adults. In this study the transitional stages within the participants' racial identity development were heightened by a mixture of environmental and relational experiences, ie. the family and peers. Continued research in this area may want to continue focusing on biracial college students.

Future studies could continue building on these confirmations and more

explicitly study each developmental/ maturational stage of individuals who are bi-ethnic. Contrast studies could be done in the following areas to assist in the development of defining the vast scope of impacts on racial identity development: 1) a sample group who consist of individuals with African-American mothers and fathers who are Caucasion and a sample group who consist of individuals with African-American fathers and Caucasion mothers; 2) a sample group of bi-ethnic adults who grew up in the inner-city and a sample group of bi-ethnic adults who grew up in the rural or suburban area; 3) a sample group of bi-ethnic individuals who identify as African-American and a sample group of bi-ethnic individuals who identify or are more comfortable with the Caucasion culture and community, and; 4) a gender comparison could be done with a sample group of women who are bi-ethnic and a sample group of men who are bi-ethnic to explore the different attitudes and experiences of each gender.

All of the above studies could lead up to a testing and empirical validation of Poston's Biracial Identity Development model. Each of the racial identity development models have been empirically proven, and as the population becomes more ethnically plural, it makes sense that the Biracial Identity Model takes it's place with the rest of the racial identity developmental models.

### Implications for Social Workers

The intent of this study was to explore what influences the racial identity development within the biracial individual. Social work practitioners and researchers need to continue to learn more from children or adults who are biracial, specifically those individuals that have been successful in navigating the identity /racial identity developmental stages, and who are successful in integrating their two parental ethnicities/ cultures (Wardle, 1991).

Many researchers agree that more research, discussion, and instruction need to take place within the social work profession regarding biracial children and families, a conclusion supported by this research. A strong commitment must be made to include instruction regarding biracial children, families, and biracial identity development in the studies at the doctorate and graduate level in the field.

The sparse research, in biracial identity development shows that there is much more to be done in the area of biracial identity development. There needs to be further empirical study of the existing models. The research and forerunners in the area of biracial identity development recommend incorporating studies to include more biracial college students who are not involved in counseling as the focus of new research. As interracial children and families enter social work settings in growing numbers, social work practitioners must be prepared to provide biracial children and families with the appropriate support, counseling, skills, and referrals. At the very least, social workers should be aware of and sensitive to biracial identity issues, but need to not to focus only on these dynamics, but to work with the entire family as a system.

Like many researchers in the area of biracial identity development, this study has attempted to carry out the responsibilities of the few practitioners and theorists who have a passion and belief that biracial children should get a fare and equal chance to just be children and have the right to self identify themselves. Normal stages of identity should be allowed to run their course of development, and as helping professionals we can assist interracial families and children navigate them when needed.

Poston(1990), Gibbs (1987), Gibbs and Moskowitz-Sweet (1991) and Wardle (1991) hold that social work practitioners can and should make vast improvements in research and education regarding biracial populations in the schools, treatment

centers, and other social work settings. A move toward improving the situation would involve more in depth research being carried out by social workers, graduate students, doctoral students, and integrating the research with social work practice theories. This research and researcher concurs with these conclusions.

There is need for development and implementation of training and educational programs for the practitioner, graduate and doctoral students. One example could be to integrate the strengths perspective with biracial identity development models into a working practice approach for training interracial or transracial parents about the emphasis on certain external strengths within each stage of biracial identity development. With each stage of the model parents, teachers, and social workers could learn what the key strengths of each stage would be, when to facilitate them, and how to enhance them to assist the individual to self identify these strengths.

Current theoretical models and research perpetuate the idea that an individual who is biracial must choose one racial identity over another. Political pressure and society force biracial individuals to buy into the belief that if an individual has "one drop of African-American blood then they must be treated and identified as black" (Bowles, 1993). Furthermore, hesitation amongst social work practitioners to develop new working practices and counseling approaches with biracial individuals or interracial families, appears to exemplify this belief. Current racial identity development models could be interpreted as biased due to solely focusing on monoracial individuals. Thus, it is imperative that theoretical frameworks be developed and directed towards biracial identity development.

This research examined what influences the racial identity development of young biracial adults and explored what these participants' attitudes are about their racial identity formation within the context of a society that is obsessed by skin color

and political classifications. The body of literature lends itself to concentrating on racial identity development of monoracial individuals, and reinforces the need for more research in this area of biracial identity development and what impacts, impedes, and assists a positive racial identity formation and development.

Diversity and awareness of different ethnic cultures is a major commitment that the National Association of Social Workers has made. The commitment to serve diverse populations is one thing, but to learn to be sensitive and increase one's knowledge base is a commitment that all social workers must make on an ongoing and individual basis. We as social agents must pay attention to our individual bias and prejudices. The question must be asked: how many schools of social work include education on the multi-ethnic individual(s) or the dynamics involved in interracial families.

This study has shown the importance and dynamic developmental processes and influences on this racial identity process. More schools of social work need to include instruction and practicum experiences that deal with the issues and dynamics of bi/multi-ethnic individuals. Within individual agencies and host settings social workers might facilitate in-services and workshops in explaining the racial identity development models, specifically biracial identity development, the historical aspects of interracial dating and marriage, and diversity awareness training centering on working with this population.

Finally, while sample size limits the transfer of data beyond this study sample, participants choice may be a new paradigm for this population. Here lies a major find of this study. Even though this study did not set out to explore this topic it is significant. The literature has forgotten the biracial individual and experience in conceptual frameworks and empirical study. Thus, majority of the theory encompassing the biracial experience is skewed or based on monoracial populations

or paradigms, and are also based on racist stratification and notions. This study gives strength to the need to consider Poston's Biracial Identity Development Model, which is designed specifically for the biracial individual, experience, and biracial identity development.

### End Note

This study examined what has influenced the racial identity development of young adults who are biracial whose biological parents are African-American and Caucasian. Black and White Racial Identity Models have been extensively researched and developed, but these models exclude the biracial individual. This study explored the stories and experiences of fourteen biracial individuals, by conducting interviews with a semi structured interview. The richness of these interviews were invaluable in offering insight into the developmental process and negotiation between two ethnicities. The biracial developmental process is heightened by a society that puts an inordinate amount of emphasis on race.

Negotiating a balance between two ethnicities that is antedated by a long and bitter history of struggle and oppression between Blacks and Whites in America, which has its roots in slavery in the 1800's. The stories that the respondents offered were given in a resolute manner and with much enthusiasm and pride. Meeting the participants and listening to their stories and life experiences was a humbling and powerful experience, which will impact my approach and practice as a social work practitioner. These individuals proudly and diligently participated in an attempt to share a little bit of their experiences and reality, and responded with exuberance to share in a topic that reflects their being/life in a world that is driven and obsessed with identification by color. They all unanimously invalidated the sparse literature and prejudices of individuals within our society by making

comment on the fact that no one never talks about or acknowledges the biracial experience. The findings within this study reflect society's insensitivity, denial, and automatic racial identification and classification of the biracial individual by skin color.

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# Appendix A

## Semi Structured Interview Questionnaire

IRB#: 97-43-02

Interview #:

(1)

Factors That Influence Young Biracial Adults Racial Identity Development

**Introduction:** I am Jerry Dieffenbach, and you have agreed to participate in this study. I would like to start out by saying thank-you for taking the time to participate and contribute to an area of research that has been neglected grossly. Remember, you can refuse to answer any questions and you can withdraw from this study at anytime.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Career Status (employed or student): \_\_\_\_\_

Parents income status (lower, middle, or upper): \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

If married what is the ethnicity of your significant other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the ethnicity of your father: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the ethnicity of your mother: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents marital status while living with your family: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you adopted? If so, please, indicate the ethnicity of your adoptive parents: \_\_\_\_\_

Besides your parents and siblings, who lived with you and your family in your parents home?

(2)

## Semistructured Interview Schedule

### I. Racial Identity Development:

1. What Ethnicity do you self identify with?

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> African-American | <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biracial         | <input type="checkbox"/> undecided |

a. Explain why you made this choice.

b. What specific events assisted you in making this choice?

(3)

I. Racial Identity Development/Cont:

- c. Which of the following do you feel most influenced your racial identity development? Please, prioritize (1-6).  
\_\_\_ skin color \_\_\_ family \_\_\_ peers \_\_\_ society \_\_\_ racism \_\_\_ nothing
- d. How and Why?

3. Did your parents suggest a certain identity?

- mother
- father
- both
- neither

- a. What ethnicity did your mother suggest that you identify with?
- b. What ethnicity did your father suggest that you identify with?
- c. What did your siblings suggest that you identify with?
- d. Have you encouraged others to identify you as this ethnicity?. Explain.

(4)

I. Racial Identity Development/Cont:

4. How accepted (welcomed or comfortable) do you feel by your extended family members who are black/ extended members who are white?

- more accepted by black extended family members
- more accepted by white extended family members
- no difference in acceptance
- undecided

a. Is there anything you wish to add?

5. What was the racial make up of your neighborhood(s)?

- predominantly Black
- predominantly White
- mixed
- other

a. Explain how this impacted your racial identity development?

6. What was the racial make up of your school(s)?

- predominantly Black
- predominantly White
- mixed
- other

a. Explain how this impacted your racial identity development?

(5)

**I. Racial Identity Development/Cont:**

7. How accepted (welcome/ comfortable) do you feel in a community that is mostly black, white, or mixed?

- more accepted by a black community
- more accepted by a white community
- more accepted by a mixed community
- no difference in acceptance between a mixed, black or white community
- undecided

**II. Perceptions of Racial Identity Formation:**

1. How old were you in when you first realized that your parents were not the same ethnicity?

a. How did you feel about it?

b. Explain.

(6)

II. Perceptions of Racial Identity Formation/Cont:

2. Do you believe that you identified with one parent more than the other?

- yes
- no

a. explain.

3. What ethnicity did you identify during the following periods of your life?

-childhood

- black
- white
- biracial
- other
- not sure

-adolescence

- black
- white
- biracial
- other
- not sure

-young adulthood

- black
- white
- biracial
- other
- not sure

a. Explain.

(7)

**III. Current Attitudes about Biracial/Racial Identity Development (evolution):**

1. What ethnicity do you mark when filling out forms that ask for your ethnicity?

- black
- white
- other (specify)
- both black and white

a. Explain.

2. Do you believe the U. S. Census Bureau should add a new category for individuals who are biracial?

- yes
- no
- undecided

a. Explain.

(8)

**III. Current Attitudes about Biracial/Racial Identity Development/Cont:**

3. Does your reference group change when you interact with different ethnic peer groups?

- in an all white peer group I identify as white
- in an all white peer group I identify as biracial
- in an all white peer group I identify as black
  
- in an all black peer group I identify as black
- in an all black peer group I identify as white
- in an all black peer group I identify as biracial
  
- in both black and white peer groups I identify as biracial
- in both black and white peer groups I identify as black
- in both black and white peer groups I identify as white

a. Explain.

(9)

**III. Current Attitudes about Biracial/Racial Identity Development/Cont:**

4. Currently, do you feel the most comfortable in a all white, black, or mixed peer group?

- I feel most comfortable in an all black peer group
- I feel most comfortable in an all white peer group
- I feel most comfortable in a mixed peer group

a. Explain.

5. If you had knowledge that "anyone with a drop of black blood is considered black" within the context of American society, would this influence how you see yourself in terms of ethnicity?

- not at all
- somewhat
- to a large extent
- not sure

a. Explain.

(12)

**III. Current Attitudes about Biracial/Racial Identity Development/Cont:**

11. Of the following who would you rule out as a future spouse or partner?

- someone who is African-American
- someone who is Caucasian
- someone who is biracial
- not sure

a. Explain.

12. Any miscellaneous comments or thoughts?

# Appendix B

## Consent Form

Dear

I am writing to say thank-you for volunteering to participate in this study, The Factors that Influence Young Biracial Adults Racial Identity Development. The indirect benefits to you are getting a chance to offer your personal, first hand, experience and knowledge to a very neglected subject. Your insights into this subject is highly valued and appreciated, not just for the completion of this study, but to initiate even further and more expansive studies into biracial identity development issues. The goal is that this study and future studies will continue to educate, reeducate in some cases, families, educators, counselors, psychologists, social workers, communities, and individuals how to deal with biracial identity development issues in a better and more effective way.

Your interview is scheduled for: Thursday, March 27, 1998.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask that you do the following things:

- participate in a personal interview, which will consist of semistructured open-ended questions
- refer anyone you may know who is biracial and interested in participating in this study

The interview should only take 1.0 hours of your time, and time and place for the interview to be conducted is negotiable.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being Involved in this Study:**

By signing this consent form you are agreeing to participate in this study without any direct benefit to you, ie. reimbursement in the form of money or any other monetary benefit. However, this study will hopefully, initiate future and more expansive studies on dual identity development in biracial and multi-racial individuals.

By signing this consent form you understand that personal questions will be asked of you in regard to you, your family, peer group, and community, which may ellicit recall of past emotional trauma. You also confirm that you have received a list of resources of counselors, support groups, and programs that serve biracial families and individuals.

**REMINDER: THIS IS A VOLUNTARY STUDY**, and by signing this consent form you understand that at any point of your participation you **MAY BACK OUT** or **REFUSE** to answer any questions during thier personal interview if you so will. You understand that you may back out or refuse to answer any question during the

Consent Letter/Cont:

interview without any ramification or coercion to answer them.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any event that this study or a report of this study is published, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file, which only I will have access to these records. By August 18th all study data, such as audio tapes and interview notes will be destroyed.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Jerry S. Dieffenbach. You may ask any questions you have at any point in the study. If you have questions, you may contact me at:

- (612)330-1770 or (612)944-5984
- dieffenb@augsborg.edu
- Professor Glenda Dewberry-Rooney: Thesis Advisor: (612)330-1338

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I understand that I may ask questions and refuse to answer any questions that may be asked of me at anytime in the study. I consent to participate in this study. I understand that I am 18 years or older and do not need parent or guardian signature of consent.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

In closing, I would like to suggest and invite you to talk to your friends and acquaintances regarding this study, and feel free to give them my phone number to contact me. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or any information I have enclosed, please do not hesitate to contact me anytime. I will be looking forward to meeting with you.

Jerry S. Dieffenbach  
M. S. W. Student  
Augsburg College  
W-(612)330-1770  
dieffenb@augsborg.edu

# Appendix C

## Internal Review Board Letter

irb memo approved

DATE: March 3, 1998

TO: Jerry Dieffenbach. BSW  
CD 143

FROM: Michael Schock, Ph.D.  
Chair  
Institutional Review Board  
612-330-1725 or FAX 612-330-1493  
E-mail: schock@augsborg.edu

RE: Your IRB Application

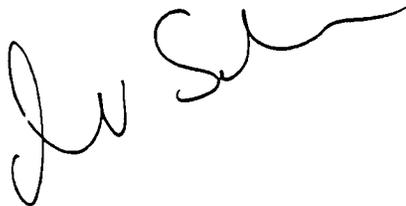
Your project has been reviewed and approved without condition.  
Your IRB approval number is 97-43-02 .

This number should appear on consent forms and letters to research subjects.

It is customary to pass on to you comments or recommendations made by the reviewer. In this proposal the reviewer recommended that this be pretested.

If there are substantive changes to your project which change your procedures regarding the use of human subjects, you should report them to me by phone (612-330-1725) or in writing so that they may be reviewed for possible increased risk.

Copy: Thesis advisor



(10)

**III. Current Attitudes about Biracial/Racial Identity Development/Cont:**

6. If there were no societal pressures, what ethnicity would you self identify as?

- black
- white
- biracial

a. Explain.

7. For the most part what ethnicity group have you dated?

- black
- white
- biracial
- both black and white equally
- other people of color

a. What has influenced this choice?

b. Has this dynamic changed in time?

**III. Current Attitudes about Biracial/Racial Identity Development/Cont:**

8. For the most part, currently, what ethnicity group do you date?

- black
- white
- biracial
- both black and white equally
- other people of color

a. Explain.

10. If you chose one parental ethnicity over the other, has this impacted your relationship with the parent that was excluded?

- not at all
- somewhat
- to a large extent
- not sure

a. How has this relationship been impacted, and what part does this parent play in your life and racial identity development?



