Biracial identity: A study of the biracial experience with biracial college students

Evelyn Louise Galasso

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BIRACIAL IDENTITY: A STUDY OF THE BIRACIAL EXPERIENCE WITH BIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Evelyn Louise Galasso

June 2002
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine biracial identity, and the specific identity choices made by biracial individuals at the college level. In addition, this study explored the many factors that may be associated with the choice of a racial/biracial identity. This study’s research design included the use of a questionnaire developed by Rockquemore (1999). College students attending California State University, San Bernardino were solicited for participation through the cross-cultural center, selected university classes, and from enrolled social work students.

Results indicated that the majority of the sample identified as monoracial (with one race). Many of the participants stated that they experienced a racial/ethnic identity decision process, and the majority of them felt that this was a somewhat difficult and confusing process for them. Two predictor variables (physical identity and racial composition of present neighborhood) were reliable in distinguishing between monoracial and biracial identity choices. Furthermore, the group identifying as biracial reported a higher frequency of negative emotions experienced in childhood.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This is a topic that I am very passionate about. I hope that individuals who read this study will be open-minded about the biracial experience, the identity issues that can arise, and the different racial identity choices that are made as a result of being part of more than one racial/ethnic category.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The contents of Chapter One present an overview of the project. The problem statement, purpose of the study, and the significance of the project for social work are presented.

Problem Statement

In 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court in Loving v. Virginia declared, for the first time, that interracial marriages were legal. Until 1970 the United States had a "one drop of blood" law. This meant that biracial people of European and African parents were forced by law to identify racially as Black. Biracial people did not have the option to choose their identity for themselves. However, after this law was removed, multiracial persons began to assert their rights to choose an identity that did not force them to choose between their parents. This allowed biracial people to identify themselves in a way that was comfortable for them personally. Since 1970, the National Center for Health Statistics reports that the number of monoracial (person belonging to only one minority group) babies has grown at a rate of 15 percent, while the number of multiracial babies has increased by more than 260
percent. The biracial population continues to grow in this country, and according to the 1992 U.S. Census (as cited in Deters, 1997) the biracial birth rate was higher than the monoracial birth rate. In 1995, one in every six births in California was a child of mixed race (http://www.geocities.com/athens/oracle/1103/stats.html).

The year 2000 was the first year that the U.S. Census allowed people of more than one race to “mark all boxes that apply” in order to identify with their multiple races. This is a category that many people took advantage of, and 2.4% (about 6.8 million people) chose more than one race (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000). The inclusion of this option was advocated by Project Race, a non-profit organization that advocates for multiracial children and adults through education, community awareness, and legislation. The main goal of this organization is to get a multiracial classification on all school, employment, state, federal, local, census, and medical forms requiring racial data. In addition, they feel that biracial and multiracial people are still being forced to choose only one race, which forces biracial people to deny one parent’s race. They advocate that “multiracial” is important so children have an identity, a correct name for
who they are. The option "other" means different, a label that no person should have to bear.

Currently, there is little known about biracial individuals and their development of a racial identity, and the purpose of this study was to explore the unique issues and experiences involved in this process. Although racial identity development is a topic receiving increasing attention in the counseling literature, the study of racial identity development for biracial individuals remains scarce. In the past, the majority of the work in this area has focused on Black racial identity development, and many researchers (Jacobs, 1992; Poston, 1990; Wardle, 1991) feel that there needs to be a new model of racial identity development that addresses the unique experiences of biracial individuals. Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development, identity versus role confusion, is the developmental struggle that begins in adolescence. The question of "Who am I?" becomes very important at this stage, as adolescents seek to establish their identity and find values to guide their lives (as cited in Wood & Wood, 1996). Although Erikson's developmental tasks of the adolescent during the stage of identity formation are applicable to the multicultural and the monoracial individual, for the biracial individual,
there is the additional task of resolving conflict about their multiracial identity (as cited in Deters, 1997). Furthermore, Erikson recognized that "identity formation neither begins nor ends with adolescence: it is a lifelong development" (as cited in Wood & Wood, 1996).

According to Sebring (as cited in Herring, 1992), racial identity is the most widespread conflict encountered by biracial youth. Researchers have often suspected that biracial children are at risk for developing a variety of problems, such as racial identification issues, lowered self-esteem, difficulties in dealing with conflicting cultural demands, and feeling marginal in two cultures (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993). Wardle asserts that there exists a "culturally accepted notion that the interracial child must select the identity of one parent, usually the parent of color" (as cited in Kerwin et al., 1993, p. 221). The transition period of adolescence has been described as a particularly difficult time for the biracial individual (Kerwin et al., 1993), and many biracial individuals ask why they have to choose between their races when forming an identity. McRoy and Freeman (as cited in Kerwin et al., 1993) state that it may be especially difficult if they
are unable to discuss issues that arise with peers, parents, or both.

Most therapists and counselors have little knowledge of the process of identity development in this population, and expanded knowledge in this area is definitely needed. Wardle (1991) states that social workers encounter such children in foster care, adoptive care, schools, and caseloads. These children have been viewed as having the same identity as their minority parent, and the same needs as other minority children. The current attention has been focused on providing counseling services to ethnic minority children; however, most biracial children have received very little attention (Herring, 1992). Luckily, this attitude is changing, and social workers need to respond to these changes. Also, it is important for social workers to examine their own values regarding biracial marriages. Being aware of these issues will help social workers better assess and treat clients who might be struggling with identity issues due to the biracial conflicts that may be experienced when forming a personal identity.
Purpose of the Study

The particular individuals who were of interest in this study were biracial college students. Previous studies on biracial people have mainly focused on individuals from Black and White parents only. This study included students who are a mix of any two different races or ethnicities, for example, someone with one White and one Black parent, Black and Hispanic parents, or Hispanic and White parents. In addition, this study provided biracial individuals with an opportunity to talk about their experiences and difficulties associated with being a biracial person in today’s society. It is this researcher’s hopes that this study will bring awareness to an otherwise invisible population, one with unique experiences and identity choices.

Some researchers have suggested that after biracial youth leave their families and attend college, is perhaps the most important time for biracial people (Korgen, 1998; Twine, 1996). Korgen studied biracial individuals with one Black and one White parent. She examined two critical turning points in the lives of these biracial Americans: dating and college life. She states that when biracial Americans attend college, dating becomes more complicated. Biracial individuals are forced to “choose sides”, White
or Black. "On racially polarized college campuses across America, biracial students struggle to find a place for themselves. In most instances, the minority Black student body demands full allegiance. In their eyes, a biracial person, especially one who appears Black, should identify first and foremost with the African American community. In turn, their friends and their dates should come from the "Black student body". Many biracial students must act "Black", and in some cases, this means they must embrace a culture different from which they were raised. This may be quite a shock for biracial persons who have come from predominately White neighborhoods. In addition, Korgen (1998) interviewed biracial college students and found that there is a clear correlation between activism in race-related campus groups and whom biracial individuals date. Those who are active in a group such as the Black Student Union are much more likely to date African Americans than those who are not. Since few interracial groups exist on most college campuses, many biracial students seeking to identify with both sides of their heritage are left in a serious predicament.

Twine (1996) studied sixteen African-descent daughters of Asian-American and European-American mothers, who were culturally constructed as "White" girls prior to
puberty, only to later construct a non-White "Black" or "biracial" identity after moving to the Berkeley campus of the University of California. For all of these women, the Berkeley experience challenged their ideology of individualism to identify as White and middle-class, as they had prior to arriving to the Berkeley campus. They all experienced the heightened sense of the racial and ethnic consciousness that exists at Berkeley, and they felt pressured to recognize and claim a Black racial identity as part of their campus socialization process. Their allegiance was to be demonstrated in terms of dating preferences, participation in racially-based social clubs, professional, political, and academic organizations. With one exception, all of the women described a shift in their identity and their consciousness during the first two years in college. Most of these middle-class women had had very limited, if any, daily social contact with Blacks or other non-Whites prior to attending college, and many of the women interviewed stated that this experience was difficult and uncomfortable.

This study focused on the current identity choices made by biracial individuals, and examined the many factors that might be associated with their personal choices. Some of the independent variables examined
included: racial composition of present neighborhood, age, gender, cultural knowledge, race importance, talking about biracial identity with family, self-reported physical identity, ethnicity of childhood friends, exposure to minority culture, racial composition of schools attended while growing up, and skin color. In addition, participants were asked several questions that examined whether or not they experienced an identity decision process, and whether or not this is/was a difficult process for them. Although this project did not set out to test any specific hypothesis, the two research questions that guided this project were: 1.) "Do biracial individuals identify as multiracial/biracial, or do they identify with one parent's race as dominant over the other?" and 2.) "What are the salient factors associated with their decisions?"

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The results of this study are important because there are very few empirical studies that have been done with biracial people in the past. Due to the inclusion of the new multiple race census category, many people in this country are identifying themselves as multiracial/biracial, and it is very important that social
workers learn more about this growing population. For many people race is a very important part of their personal identity, and social workers can benefit from learning more about the biracial/multiracial experience. Furthermore, the results of this study can assist social workers in the assessment and treatment process with biracial clients who might have problems with the tasks involved in the development of a biracial/multiracial identity.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order to understand biracial identity development, it is first important to discuss personality and monoracial ethnic identity theories that have had an influence on the study of biracial identity development thus far. Stonequist (1937), in his study of personality and culture conflict with people of mixed racial ancestry, states that wherever there are cultural transitions and cultural conflicts there are marginal personalities. Chestang (1976, 1984) and Marcia (as cited in Archer, 1994) are addressed to help explain how a monoracial person might progress in the development of a racial/ethnic identity. Secondly, biracial theories from Poston (1990), Jacobs (1992), and Kich (as cited in Root, 1992) are discussed in order to gain a better understanding of the developmental stages that can occur when asserting a biracial identity. These theories are followed by some of the empirical research conducted with biracial individuals to date.
Stonequist (1937) states that the individual who, through migration, education, marriage, or some other influence, leaves one social group or culture without making a satisfactory adjustment to another finds himself on the margin of each but a member of neither. He is a “marginal man.” A marginal person is biologically or culturally from two or more races or cultures. Stonequist adhered to a negative perspective regarding the marginal person, and stated that a marginal individual is:

One who is poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds, one of which is often dominant over the other; within which membership is implicitly if not explicitly based upon birth or ancestry (race or nationality); and where exclusion removes the individual from a system of group relations. (1937, p. 8)

Furthermore, Stonequist (1937) says that a certain degree of personal maladjustment is inherent in the marginal situation, however, it varies among individuals and situations. At a minimum it consists of an inner strain and a feeling of isolation or not quite belonging. Ambivalence of attitude is at the core of those things that characterize the marginal man. The marginal situation
produces self-consciousness, and the individual is conscious of his different position between two cultures and his attention is repeatedly focused upon each group attitude and his relationship to it. This continual questioning of his racial status turns his attention upon himself to an excessive and maladaptive degree.

Monoracial Ethnic/Racial Identity

The Black Experience

Chestang (1976) focuses on the dilemma of living in two worlds and the duality that develops within the personality structure of a person when his membership in a certain group prohibits the fusion of his own unique identity with the larger society around him. Although Chestang studied Blacks, his concepts may be applied to any ethnic group having to negotiate a hostile environment. In his exploration of the "Black experience", he states that Blacks reside in two cultures at once, and that Blacks must integrate a "personal" and a "racial" identity in order to form a cohesive total identity. Racial identity refers to the identification with the alienation, social differentiation, and depreciation that people of the Black race experience in their contact with the wider society. For many Black individuals personal
identity transcends race. Chestang (1984) also states that many Blacks reject the stereotypic idea that Blacks can be defined and understood by their race alone. He also notes that the Black experience is complex, and that Black persons are seeking a fuller identity, one that reflects the multidimensional quality of their personal experience.

Adolescent Ethnic Identity

Marcia (as cited in Archer, 1994) proposed a framework that describes an adolescent’s ethnic identity as either diffuse, foreclosed, in moratorium, or achieved. Diffuse identity refers to a lack of exploration and commitment to an ethnic role. Adolescents with diffuse ethnic identification usually do not see their ethnicity as a central characteristic influencing their relationships, believe prejudice to be uncommon, and not believe their lives to be substantially different from their crossethnic peers. Foreclosed ethnic identity refers to the outright adoption by an adolescent of his or her parents’ values, attitudes, and behaviors. Adolescents who are actively exploring their identity but have not yet resolved their feelings, attitudes, and commitments to their ethnic roles are considered to be in moratorium. Lastly, the concept of achieved ethnic identity refers to the choice of an ethnic label (e.g., Hispanic, Latina,
Mexican), identification and selection of desired role models (i.e., mainstream, strongly ethnic, or bicultural), adoption of a set of attitudes toward one’s own and other ethnic groups, and demonstration of patterns of behavior consistent with these choices (e.g., language usage).

Biracial Identity Theories

The Biracial Identity Development Model

According to Poston (1990), racial identity development is one of the most important issues in counseling and cross-cultural psychology because it is related to numerous indicators of mental health in ethnic minorities. Poston has reviewed previous models of racial identity development, and he discusses their shortcomings when applied to biracial individuals. First, previous models imply that individuals might choose one group’s culture or values over another at different stages. Secondly, other models suggest that individuals might reject their minority identity and culture and then the dominant culture; however, biracial individuals might come from both of these groups. Third, these models do not allow for the integration of several group identities. Self-fulfillment according to these models is based on integrating one racial/ethnic identity and accepting
others, it does not recognize multiple ethnic identities. Fourth, all the models require some acceptance into the minority culture of origin; however, many biracial persons do not experience acceptance by parent cultures, minority or dominant. His proposed new model of racial identity has a life span focus, emphasizes the individual's need to value and integrate multiple cultures, and specifies the social, personal, and status factors important in this process. The five stages proposed by this model are:

1) Personal Identity - In this stage, individuals are often very young, and membership in any particular ethnic group is just becoming salient. The child will tend to have a sense of self that is somewhat independent of his or her ethnic background. This does not mean that the child is not aware of race and ethnicity.

2) Choice of Group Categorization - The individual at this stage is pushed to choose an identity, usually of one ethnic group. This can be a time of crisis and alienation for the individual. The primary choices probable at this stage are between identity with the majority or minority group. In the case of an individual whose ethnic background represents two minority groups, the
choice would be between these two groups. It would be unusual for an individual to choose a multiethnic identity, since this requires some level of knowledge of multiple cultures and a level of cognitive development beyond that which is characteristic of this age group (Unfortunately, Poston does not mention what age group falls into this stage).

3) **Enmeshment/Denial** - This stage is characterized by confusion and guilt at having to choose one identity that is not fully expressive of one’s background. In addition, individuals at this level often experience feelings of guilt, self-hatred, and lack of acceptance from one or more groups. Eventually the child must resolve the anger and guilt and learn to appreciate both parental cultures, or stay at this level.

4) **Appreciation** - At this stage, individuals begin to appreciate their multiple identity and broaden their reference group orientation. They might begin to learn about their racial/ethnic heritage and cultures, but they still tend to identify with one group. The choice of which group they tend to identify with is still
influenced by the factors outlined in the choice phase.

5) **Integration** - Individuals at this stage experience wholeness and integration. They tend to recognize and value all of their ethnic identities. At this level, individuals develop a secure, integrated identity.

This theory differs from other models because it emphasizes the individual's need to value and integrate multiple cultures, and it specifies the social, personal, and status factors important in this process. It also describes difficulties in identity development that are unique to the multiethnic individual. Lastly, it emphasizes that the development process in biracial individuals progresses, for most persons, in a healthy fashion.

**Identity Development in Biracial Children**

Jacobs (1992) has developed a three-stage developmental model that outlines identity development in Black-White, biracial children. He has identified four factors related to identity development in biracial children: 1) color constancy, 2) internalization of an interracial or biracial label, 3) racial ambivalence, and
4) perceptual distortions in self and family identifications.

Stage I  Pre-color constancy: Play and Experimentation with Color: Illustrates how a child does not typically have a racial label for self nor a sense of skin color constancy. A child’s use or understanding of skin color at this stage is nonevaluative. This stage is seen in children under 4 years of age. Low self-esteem and/or painful personal experience of racial prejudice can lead to avoidance of exploratory play with color or to precocious rageful evaluations by color in the young child who has not yet achieved color constancy.

Stage II  Post-color constancy: Biracial Label and Racial Ambivalence: Reflects a fuller understanding of the meaning of skin color. The child begins to learn that his or her own skin color will not change. The child also will typically have a racial label for self at this age. This stage can usually be identified in children who are 4-8.5 years old. During this stage, a child may also become ambivalent about his or her racial status. White preference and the rejection of
Blackness are very common during this phase. This ambivalence stage is important and necessary for the child, and this ambivalence generally diminishes across this stage. Children, whose parents do not give them a biracial label, may construct one on their own in an attempt to make sense out of having parents of two different races.

Stage III **Biracial Identity**: Is observed in children between 8 and 12 years of age. During this stage, the child learns that racial group membership is correlated with, but not determined by, skin color. It is determined instead by the heritage of the parents. Children learn that, for example, they are biracial because their father belongs to a social class of Black people and their mother belongs to a social class of White people. They understand that their parents' group membership, not color, defines them as biracial.

Jacobs (1992) has stressed that during Stage II of his model, it is especially important for parents to understand the importance of allowing the child's racial ambivalence. This ambivalence allows the child to continue
exploration of racial identity. If this ambivalence is suppressed, he or she will likely stop actively exploring his or her racial identity and feel that there is something inherently wrong with, or about, his or her racial status. Parents', and family, in general, play a crucial role in supporting their children's interest in exploring their racial identity. Furthermore, Jacobs suggests that a greater social recognition of a biracial identity would be supportive of self-esteem in biracial people. Lastly, Jacobs suggests that a multicultural environment is supportive of the development of a positive biracial identity in children.

The Developmental Process of Asserting a Biracial, Bicultural Identity

Kich (as cited in Root, 1992) has researched the experiences of biracial and bicultural people, and has developed a developmental model of biracial identity that may have applicability to all people of multiracial heritage. Kich proposes that there are three stages that biracial people go through in the development and continuing resolution of their biracial identity, they include:

1) An initial awareness of differentness and dissonance between self-perceptions and others'
perceptions of them (initially, 3 through 10 years of age)

2) A struggle for acceptance from others
   (initially, age 8 through late adolescence and young adulthood)

3) Acceptance of themselves as people with a biracial and bicultural identity [late adolescence throughout adulthood]

These stages describe a biracial person's transitions from a questionable, sometimes devalued sense of self to one where an interracial self-conception is highly valued and secure. The major developmental task for biracial people is to differentiate critically among others' interpretations of them, various pejorative labels and mislabels, and their own experiences and conceptions of themselves. Later integration and continuing expression of a biracial identity involve complex interplay among the dynamics of family, the community, and oneself. Cyclic reenactment of these stages emerges during later development, often with greater intensity and awareness.

Biracial Identity Research

Although in initial conceptual work researchers have attempted to describe the process of biracial identity
development (Jacobs, 1977; Kich, 1982; Poston, 1990) little empirical research exists describing those variables that are prominent in the development of racial identity in biracial individuals.

Teicher (1968) conducted one of the first formal studies concerning the special problems of children of interracial marriages, particularly studying the effects of "Negro-White" marriages on the development of personality and self-concept in the children, and the processes of their racial identification. He studied the daughters of Negro-White couples who physically resembled their Negro fathers rather than their White mothers. Identity formation was more problematic for them than for the sons of these couples. The assumptions at this time were that racial identification is more difficult for children whose parents are of different races, and that the presence of varying physical racial characteristics in a family complicates other kinds of identification processes as well. This study found that the search for identity is more difficult for the child of a Negro-White marriage than for a child of two Negro parents. For the mixed child, there is likely to be resentment of both parents, inability to identify with either, and resentment of siblings whose physical racial characteristics are
different. Resentment can occur toward both parents when the child feels like the parents are at fault for their identification conflict. The child may say something like, “Why couldn’t my parents be one color so I’d have no problem?” Siblings from “Negro-White” marriages may resent one another when one child has Negroid features and the other doesn’t. For example, a White looking brother who is trying to identify as White may see his Negro looking sister as a constant reminder of his Negro background, and a constant reminder of his own dilemma about being racially mixed.

Researchers Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, and Harris (1993) conducted a qualitative investigation with nine Black/White biracial children and their families. The study incorporated ethnographic analyses of semi-structured interviews with the children and their parents, and the purpose of the study was to uncover the important variables for those who are directly involved with biracial identity development. Major findings from this study tend to run counter to problems suspected in the counseling and related literature. In contrast to deficit models, participant children and adolescents did not appear to perceive themselves as “marginal” in two cultures. However, as discussed by the authors, there were
limitations to this study, including the nature of the sample. Those who agreed to participate in this study tended to be familiar with social science research, and these individuals may have been more comfortable talking about issues related to their children's racial identity. Furthermore, some parents appeared, on occasion, to be trying to present their child's or children's experiences in an overly positive light. This may have resulted from a desire to counteract the negative stereotypes and expectations society puts on persons who have more than one racial heritage.

Researchers Herman and Vidican (2001) have recently conducted statistical analyses examining questions about multi-racial adolescents. One of their goals was to develop methods of categorizing multi-racial youth. For example, the resulting categorization allowed them to make descriptive comparisons of the following sets of groups: multi-racial and mono-racial respondents, multi-racial individuals of different race mixes, and multi-racial respondents who make different forced mono-racial choices. Their sample was gathered from students in nine high schools in California and Wisconsin in 1987. The data assessed aspects of psychosocial development, interaction with parents, deviance, and school achievement. For the
development of the biracial categories, the authors relied on the "one drop rule" to put individuals into a biracial category. Their argument for using this rule was that since treatment by others contributes to identity, this was good enough reason to use it in their statistical analyses. The most common biracial category was that of "White-Hispanic", with thirty-three percent of the students fitting into this category. Despite the common perception that biracial individuals are Black and White, Black-White was the smallest part-White biracial category in the sample.

Milan and Keiley (2000) conducted empirical research using a nationally representative database (National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health) to compare functioning in biracial youth to White adolescents and other minority adolescents. Their results suggest that biracial/biethnic youth are a particularly vulnerable group in terms of self-reported delinquency, school problems, internalizing symptoms, and self-regard. As a group, they are also more likely to receive some form of psychological intervention. The authors looked at this problem from a social-constructionist framework, and offer several strategies based on narrative family therapy for working with biracial youngsters and their families. An
essential element of social constructionism is a focus on the influence of sociocultural factors on the individual. Mair (as cited in Milan & Keiley, 2000, p. 308) states that "We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are lived by the stories of our race and place". Many of the stories available to individuals are determined by the norms and goals of those with power, those in the dominant culture. Therefore, members of marginalized groups may construct narratives that do not reflect their preferred way of being in their world either because they adopt a story of the dominant culture or because they interpret their experiences as being in conflict with pervasive stories. Attending to external sociocultural messages is an important feature, at least in theory, of social-constructionist psychotherapies.

Collins (2000) conducted a qualitative study with a sample of 15 Japanese American adults, with ages ranging from 20 to 40 years. Based on this research, Collins proposed a model of ethnic identity development for biracial individuals, which is: The Biracial or Double Identity Model. Participants in this study stated that they wanted to share their experiences, and said that they wanted to be seen not as marginalized individuals, but rather to be acknowledged for their own identities. They
wanted others to know what it means to be involved in two worlds, and how it feels to be labeled something they felt they were not. Results showed a wide variation among individuals in the way identity development occurs, and that biracial identity is a dynamic and developing concept. Six of the participants ended up with a distinct positive biracial identity, and the rest were in the process of identity development. The participants also stated that it was an emotional and conflictual process that led to positive assertions of a biracial identity. Before reaching a positive biracial identity, nearly all of the participants experienced periods of confusion. Most of the participants asserted biracial identities gradually, through a process of racial identity development, consisting of the individual’s changing or maintaining certain reference group perspectives, identifications, and allegiances as they passed through a series of life experiences. Interestingly, only one participant was raised in an environment in which his being biracial was nurtured, and as a result, he had no confusion about his identity.

Contrary to other researchers, who have developed time-specific stage theories, Collins (2000) found that biracial identity development did not appear to fall
within specific age groups. Rather, the participants moved through phases on the basis of their interactions with the environment, significant others, and life experiences. Furthermore, Collins (2000) suggests that the participants went through four phases in the development of their positive biracial identity, which include: Phase I, Questioning and Confusion; Phase II, Refusal and Suppression; Phase III, Infusion and Exploration; and Phase IV, Resolution and Acceptance.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, Rockquemore (1999) studied race and identity in 225 participants, all college students, with one Black and one White parent. Analysis of the data revealed that biracial people have multiple ways in which they understand their racial identity. Rockquemore's findings suggest the following four descriptive categories for the ways that mixed race individuals understand their biracialness:

1) Twenty-three percent chose a singular identity (in the singular understanding the individual's racial identity is either Black or White).

2) Approximately fifty-five percent chose a border identity (exclusively biracial, validated or un-validated).
3) Only four percent chose a protean option (ability to cross boundaries between Black, White, and biracial identities).

4) Slightly less than fourteen percent understood being biracial as a transcendent identity (denied any racial identity whatsoever).

Results also showed two important social processes that influenced individual choices: 1) social context, and 2) interactional validation (validation from the social world regarding the category of “biracial” as a self-understanding). These different self-understandings are grounded in differential experiences, varying biographies, and cross cutting cultural contexts. This study is very important because it is one of the largest samples of biracial people studied to date.

Hall (1980) studied ethnic identity of racially mixed people, gathered from a nonclinical population, in which she explored the lives of thirty Black-Japanese participants. Sixteen women and fourteen men participated, and their ages ranged from 18 to 32. Her study was both qualitative and quantitative. The results showed that 18 of the respondents chose a Black identity, and of the remaining 12, ten chose the category “other” (seven specifying a Black-Japanese identity), one chose a
Japanese identity, and one refused to identify himself in any category. Eighteen (sixty percent) of the respondents reported that they felt happy and lucky with their biracial lives. Hall’s investigation of the factors believed to influence ethnic identity, such as, ethnicity of neighborhood and friends, age, sex, generation of mother, knowledge of culture, political involvement, acceptance, and racial resemblance, found that some aspect of all the factors emerged as a contributor to ethnic identity. Sixty-six percent of those who experienced an ethnic identity decision process reported at least a little difficulty with this process. She also found that, as Stonequist (1937) hypothesized (about the marginal situation), some of the respondents reported that one of the negative points of being biracial was not being totally accepted by either group.

Clinical social worker Dorcas Bowles (1993), over the course of her clinical practice has worked with ten young adult children of mixed Black/White parentage. Four of her female clients, coming from backgrounds with Black mothers and White fathers, all self-identified as Black. In their homes there was a general agreement by both parents that the children would identify as Black on the basis that this is how the world would see and view them. This
decision was made without thinking about the psychological impact on the children, and as a result of this decision, feelings of shame and anxiety were evident in these young adult children. Many of these women felt disloyalty, not owning, as one young woman put it, "at least fifty percent of who I am." Treatment with each of these clients evidenced that their special needs and problems were very much related to their denial of part of their ethnicity. Bowles (1993) also stated that despite what ethnic group that one identified with, inevitably each young adult felt "marginalized" and unacceptable by either ethnic group.

In an exploratory study titled "Self-esteem and racial identity in transracial and inracial adoptees," McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, and Anderson (1982) found that there were no differences in overall self-esteem between the sampled transracially (adoption of children of one racial background by families of another racial background) and inracially (the adoptee and the adopting family are of the same race) adopted children. Self-esteem of the adoptees was as high as that reported among individuals in the general population. However, they did find that there appeared to be a difference in their sense of racial identity. In particular, racial identity seemed to be more of a problem for the Black children who were
being raised in White families. Factors found to influence this included: family’s nurturance of the child’s Black identity, the child’s access to Black role models, and peers in the community and in school. Children’s racial attitudes about themselves seem to be influenced by the attitudes and practices of the adoptive parents.

McRoy and Freeman (1986) examined many of the racial identity issues that children of Black and White parents must attempt to cope with. One question they asked was, “Will these children suffer from identity and adjustment conflicts that affect their functioning in school?” (p. 164). They found that racial identity problems are usually not among the presenting problems of the majority of the referrals of mixed-race children to school social workers. However, after further exploration, the social worker frequently finds that many of these mixed-race children are experiencing negative self-images and confused racial identities, although these problems were not identified initially. Their suggested intervention strategies are based on an ecological perspective, and an emphasis is placed on the linkage between the school, home, and community in assisting children to develop a positive racial self-concept. In addition, it is recommended that school social work interventions should include individual
counseling with the child, family counseling as needed, and group counseling as needed with students who have difficulties with a broad range of identity problems including racial dilemmas. Additional interventions can include classroom sessions, consultation with teachers, and collaboration with community organizations. Most importantly, the ability of parents of these children to discuss and value their child’s double heritage seems to be critical for helping the child to clarify and develop a positive racial identity.

Gibbs (1987), using an ego-psychology theoretical framework, studied the major conflicts and the coping mechanisms used in the development of biracial adolescents. In her analysis of 12 case studies of biracial youth, she discusses in detail the common defense mechanisms used by this group of teens and the central conflicts that arise for biracial adolescents. Three trends emerged after evaluating common defense mechanisms and coping strategies. First, those teens who assume a negative identity tend to exhibit more primitive defense mechanisms; for example, denial and acting out. Their coping strategies are more maladaptive and socially dysfunctional (e.g., sexual promiscuity, low school achievement). Second, those with negative self-concepts
usually identify with the deviant and most devalued stereotypes of their Black heritage. Third, those teens who identify with their White racial heritage tend to maintain an overt façade of adaptation to the majority culture, but experience some degree of identity confusion which comes with a high psychic cost. For example, they are more likely to be sexually and emotionally inhibited, overenmeshed in their families, and overachieving in school and community contexts.

Issues relating to social marginality were also found, and the basic question of all the teens was: "Where do I fit?" Although biracial children may have a close knit peer group in elementary school, they often experience social problems upon entering junior high or high school. During this phase of development, where conformity is expected and valued, biracial teens are often rejected by both majority and minority groups because they don't fit in terms of physical appearance, family background, and loyalty to a specific teen subculture. According to Gibbs, the major task for these adolescents is to integrate the dual identifications into a single identity that affirms the positive aspects of each heritage. In many of the cases looked at, there was
partial or complete failure to integrate both racial heritages into a cohesive sense of racial identity.

Summary

The literature important to this project was presented in Chapter Two. In addition, the literature supports the need to conduct further research in this area. Therefore, this project takes a necessary step in gaining insight of the biracial/multiracial experience.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Study Design

This research project was exploratory in nature. Its purpose was to investigate the biracial experience, and to look at the specific identity choices made by biracial participants. In addition, the many factors that seem to be associated with forming a biracial identity were explored. The personal information learned from this population will help social workers, counselors, and educators to better understand the personal experiences of biracial individuals. The goals of this research were to add to the small amount of current empirical knowledge of biracial people, and to better describe this population.

This study used a quantitative approach, and involved interpretive research. This approach was used because there is little known about biracial people, and how their life experiences differ, or are similar, in regards to negotiating the life task of forming a racial/ethnic identity. The research questions being explored included:

1.) "Do biracial individuals identify as multiracial/biracial, or do they identify with one
parent’s race as dominant over the other?” and 2.) “What are the salient factors associated with their decisions?”

Sampling

The sample for this study was comprised of forty-four biracial students enrolled at California State University, San Bernardino. The only criterion used for selection of participants was that the student’s parents had to be from any two different races. The participants came from a variety of mixed racial heritages. The sample included 20 Hispanic/White, 5 Black/White, 1 Filipino/Black, 4 Asian/White, 3 American Indian/White, 2 Asian/Hispanic, 1 East Indian/White, 1 American Indian/Black, 3 Hispanic/Black, 1 Black/Pakistani, and 1 Hispanic/Hawaiian.

Students who were involved in this study were solicited through the cross-cultural center, the social work program, and selected California State University, San Bernardino classes. First, the researcher set up a table in front of the cross-cultural center in order to solicit participants for this project. Next, the researcher solicited participants from the social work program by putting letters in each student’s mail folder in the social work research lounge. In addition, sociology
students were solicited through their classes if the professors gave the researcher permission. The researcher picked sociology classes pertaining to race, because she thought that this might increase the chances of finding more biracial people. Lastly, psychology students were solicited by displaying a survey folder on the psychology department's research board, located on the first floor of the Jack H. Brown Hall building on campus. Psychology students who wanted to participate took a survey, and upon completion they received extra credit from their professors.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data collection started in November of 2001, and ended in March of 2002. The researcher collected data by distributing a questionnaire developed by Rockquemore (1999). Only a few alterations were made to the questionnaire in order to suit the needs of this study (e.g. the elimination of questions that would pertain to Black/White participants only). Permission to use and alter the questionnaire was granted by Dr. Rockquemore on May 30, 2001 (See Appendix F for the copy of the permission letter).
The questionnaire included questions pertaining to personal experiences and opinions about being biracial (see appendix E). The use of the questionnaire allowed the researcher to reach a large number of the biracial students at the university; however, a limitation of this method of data collection was a low return rate.

Procedures

After completing the questionnaire, the participants returned them to the researcher personally, or they turned them into the psychology peer counseling office where the researcher had a return file set up. Institutional Review Board approval and permission from the director of the cross-cultural center was granted before the questionnaires were distributed. It took participants approximately fifteen minutes to a half-hour to complete the questionnaire.

Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants was a primary concern and all efforts were made to ensure that they were protected. For the sake of protecting the participants’ anonymity when inputting the data, a numbering system was utilized (No participant names were used). Study participants were assumed to have
consented to participate in this study when they returned the completed questionnaire. Informed consents were attached to every questionnaire, and in the consent form, each participant was notified that participation was completely voluntary (See Appendices A & D). The participants were given a debriefing statement with the name of the researcher and the advisor, along with a phone number of where to contact the researcher if they had any questions concerning the study (See Appendix B).

Data Analysis

Univariate statistics were used to look at characteristics of the sample and to help describe the results. Frequencies were run in order to look at the percentages of participants who responded similarly on the questionnaire. In addition, frequency data was used to examine how many different multi/biracial categories emerged from the data.

The first research question was examined by using univariate statistics. The dependent variable of racial/ethnic identity was determined by examining how the participants’ chose to identify themselves on the cultural identity question in the questionnaire, for instance,
choosing either a biracial or monoracial (choosing only one race) identity.

In order to address the second research question, Independent t-Tests were run to test for significant mean differences between the monoracial and biracial identity groups on variables at the ordinal level of measurement. Chi-Squares were run to test for associations between the above groups and variables at the nominal and ordinal level of measurement.

Forward (likelihood-ratio) logistic regression was used to determine which independent variables (cultural knowledge, talking about being biracial with family, physical identity, race importance, skin color, age, gender, and racial composition of present neighborhood) were predictors of racial identity. The variables listed above were chosen because previous research has shown that they have been found to have a significant influence on racial/ethnic identity (Hall, 1980; Rockquemore, 1999). Missing data and univariate outliers were screened for, and preliminary linear regression was done in order to identify multivariate outliers using Mahalanobis Distance. Based upon the data screening, all assumptions necessary for using the analysis were considered to be met.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Presentation of the Findings

Demographic Characteristics

Appendix C shows the information on demographic variables of the sample. The majority of the sample was comprised of participants with Hispanic/White mixed racial origin, and female participants constituted more than half of the sample. The mean age of the participants was 26.8 (ranging from 18-47). Twenty-seven (63%) participants reported annual household incomes of $40,000 or above. Three participants stated that they belonged to a racial club or organization.

Responses to Key Issues Regarding Biracial Identity

Thirty-three (75%) of the participants think that it is a good idea that the U.S. Census has added a multicultural category to the racial classification system, and many (40.9%) believe that children of interracial marriages should not have to define themselves as any one race. Nineteen (43.2%) participants agreed that race has played a very important role in their personal identity, and twenty-nine (65.9%) stated that they are very happy being racially mixed.
Parent Socialization Variables

Thirty-two participants (72.7%) said that their parents did not try to shape their racial identity, and twelve (27.3%) stated that their parents did try to shape their racial identity. Seventeen (38.6%) participants in the sample stated that their mothers played more of a role in forming a racial identity. Six (13.6%) said that their father played more of a role with identity, nine (20.5%) stated that both parents played an equal role, and twelve (27.3%) said that neither parent played a role in identity with some race. Table 1 lists responses from the participants who identified as either monoracial or biracial regarding three of the parent socialization variables.

Identity Decision Process

Table 2 presents the results from the participants who responded to the racial/ethnic identity decision process questions. The participants were almost equally split in their responses to the question about having to choose a single race to identify with, and the majority said that they did not feel like they had to choose. The nineteen individuals who felt they had to choose a racial identity responded to the question about the age their decision process began, and the mean age was 11.79 years,
Table 1. Responses to Parent Socialization Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Talk openly in family about being biracial.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monoracial identity</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial identity</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cultural knowledge of minority parent’s racial group.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monoracial identity</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial identity</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Exposure to the values and beliefs of your minority parent’s culture.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monoracial identity</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial identity</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Variables 1 and 3: 1 = Never, 5 = Always
For cultural knowledge: 1 = None, 5 = Very knowledgeable.

with a mode and median of 12 years. In response to the question “Has your decision been made?”, seven (36.8%) participants stated that “No” their decision has not been made, and twelve (63.2%) stated “Yes”, that their decision has been made. When asked how stable this decision has been over the years, many of the participants (63.2%) stated it was very stable (N = 12). Lastly, the majority of the participants (52.6%) stated that the decision process is/was a “somewhat” difficult decision process,
and twelve participants (63.2%) stated that this was a confusing process at least some of the time.

Table 2. Participants who have Experienced a Racial/Ethnic Identity Decision Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Process Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Had to choose a single race to identify with.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Has your decision been made?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How stable has this decision been over the years?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is/was this a difficult decision process?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Did/do you ever feel confused about having to make a decision?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean age decision process began = 11.79 years; Mode and Median = 12.
Research Question One

The first research question asked whether or not biracial participants would identify as biracial/multiracial or identify with one parent’s race as dominant over the other (monoracially). After examining the participants’ answers on the cultural identity question, it was found that the majority of the participants identified as monoracial. Two participants were eliminated from the count, because they identified as “Other”; for example, one responded to the question with an “American” identity response and the other responded with “human” as a response. Twenty-three participants (55%) identified as monoracial (chose only one racial category) and nineteen (45%) chose the biracial option for this question.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked about the salient factors that might be associated with the decisions to identify as either biracial/multiracial or monoracial. Chi-square analyses revealed one variable (racial composition of present neighborhood) as approaching significance, with a significance of $p = .078$.

Results of the independent t-tests between the biracial participants who self-identified as monoracial
and those who identified as biracial revealed one significant result. There was a significant difference between the two groups on how they answered the question, "During your childhood did you ever experience negative emotions or stress that were related to being biracial (e.g. sadness, anger, etc.)?" The mean for the monoracial group was 1.82, and the mean for the biracial group was 2.44, with a $t = -2.032$ and a significance level of $p < .05$. It seems that the group identifying as biracial reported a significantly higher frequency of negative emotions experienced during childhood than did the group identifying as monoracial.

An analysis approaching significance was the one that addressed adolescent negative emotions related to being biracial. The mean for the monoracial group was 1.61, and the mean for the biracial group was 2.06, with a $t = -1.873$ and a significance level of $p = .069$.

Regression results (see Table 3) indicated two predictors (physical identity and racial composition of present neighborhood) that were statistically reliable in distinguishing between monoracial and biracial identity group choices ($-2$ Log Likelihood $= 39.894; \chi^2 (2) = 13.529, p < .001$). The model correctly classified 74.4% of the cases into either the monoracial or biracial identity
category. Wald statistics indicated that physical identity and racial composition of present neighborhood significantly predict identity choice. However, odds ratios Exp (B), indicated that the variable (racial composition of present neighborhood) was a better predictor of racial identity group choice. As the variable "racial composition of present neighborhood" increased by 1 unit, participants were over five times more likely to be classified as biracial.

Table 3. Regression Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Identity</td>
<td>-2.454</td>
<td>7.807</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Neighborhood</td>
<td>1.677</td>
<td>3.996</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>5.349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.737</td>
<td>1.104</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>2.090</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Findings

Question 1: "What ethnic/racial group do you identify with most closely?"

Table 4 lists the findings for the participants who answered this question. The majority (82.5%) of the participants felt closer to one race, and five (12.5%) noted that they were closest to both races equally.
Table 4. Racial/Ethnic Group Participants Identify With Most Closely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 2: “What experience influenced your racial/ethnic decision the most?”

Many of the participants stated that their families had a lot to do with the decision by exposing them to their minority cultures. In contrast, another participant noted that it was the lack of exposure to minority ethnic side, lack of total acceptance by minority side, and an overexposure to White people that led to her decision. One participant noted that it was the rejection by her White side of the family that had the most influence on her decision, and another stated that racial composition of school
(all White) had an influence. One person said that inclusion in sports had an influence on him (chose to identify as Black). Interestingly, two participants noted that they don’t feel like they “have to” choose a racial identity; for instance, one said, “I am me, a person”, and the other said, “I am just “other.”

Question 3: What are some of the bad points of being racially mixed?

Interestingly, several participants did not respond to this item or they wrote that they did not have any negative experiences. However, many others stated that one of the bad points is that other people try to identify them as only one race by placing them into one racial category (stereotyping). One participant stated that it was confusing to figure out where she belonged racially, and another said that he didn’t belong to either side of the family because he was either “too White” or “too dark.” Several participants stated that they felt rejected by both their races because they were mixed, which made them feel like an outsider. One participant
said, “It is difficult to incorporate aspects of a biracial heritage into daily life.”

Question 4: What are the good points of being racially mixed?

The majority of participants stated that they have learned to appreciate other cultures, and that they can be culturally sensitive towards other people from different races. Several other participants noted that they felt “unique” or “exotic” because they are racially mixed.

Question 5: Did you go through a period in your life when you felt like you had to choose a single race to identify with?

Many of the participants who identified with a single race said that they had to make this choice during their junior high and high school years. Many of the participants noted that their physical appearance was the reason for choosing one racial identity to identify with; for instance, one participant wrote, “I look White, my brother looks Spanish, and society sees me as White.” Another participant wrote, “When growing up with kids who were White, Black or
Asian, being both was not common, so I had to go with what I physically looked like."

Several other participants mentioned that they chose to identify as a minority because of better opportunities and benefits for minorities. One participant of Hispanic/Hawaiian heritage noted that she never used to mention her Hawaiian side when filling out forms, because the form said to check only one, so she chose Hispanic or "Other". Another participant stated that if a person is part Black, he or she should identify as Black.

Several more participants stated that school experiences had an influence on their decisions. One participant wrote, "When I got a lot older in high school, others made a big deal about it." Another wrote, "I felt like I had to 'claim' an ethnic group in school." One participant stated that in junior high school people start to stick with their own kind, so she had to choose, and another stated that school friendships influenced her, because race was one way to have a common or shared experience.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

The results of this project revealed that the majority of biracial/multiracial participants identified themselves monoracially (55% chose one race as dominant over the other). This result supports research findings from Hall’s (1980) study with Black-Japanese participants, in which she also found that the majority of her sample chose to identify with a single race. However, the results are in contrast to what Rockquemore (1999) found in her study. She found that more participants chose a biracial (border) identity than a singular identity (either Black or White). Interestingly, the results of this project revealed that, although nineteen participants racially identified as biracial, the majority of this group felt closer to one side of their racial/ethnic heritage.

There are numerous factors that could explain why the biracial participants in this sample chose to identify as either monoracial or biracial. However, statistical testing revealed that the predictor variables found to be significantly related to racial identity choice were physical identity and racial composition of present neighborhood. Qualitative data also supported this
finding. For example, many of the participants stated that they had made a racial/ethnic choice based on their physical appearance. In addition, this finding is consistent with previous research conducted in this area. For instance, Hall (1980) found that there was a significant relationship between neighborhood and friends, racial resemblance, and ethnic identity. Similarly, Rockquemore (1999) found that social context influences an individual’s ethnic identity choice.

Although the monoracial and biracial groups were not shown to be significantly different from each other on the parent socialization variables, it is interesting to note that the majority of the participants stated that their families had a lot to do with their decisions. When asked, “what influenced their racial/ethnic decision the most”, the majority of the participants stated that family had a lot to do with their decision by exposing them to their minority cultures. Exposure to minority culture seems to play a part in the decision; however, this may only be part of the reason for a certain racial/ethnic choice. It may also be that many of the variables play a combined role in the decision process, and they may be unique for each individual. Kich (as cited in Root, 1992) states that the integration and continuing expression of a biracial
identity involves a complex interplay among the dynamics of family, the community, and oneself.

Another important finding was the significant difference found between participants who identified as monoracial and those who identified as biracial on childhood negative emotions and stress related to being biracial. The group identifying as biracial reported a higher frequency of negative emotions. Although this is speculative, it seems possible that this difference might be related to a possibly easier adjustment for those who make a decision to identify with one race as opposed to both races equally. Future research might address the question, "Does identifying monoracially make it easier for biracial people to adjust in a society that still expects biracial people to choose one race to identify with?"

Furthermore, findings indicated that nineteen participants reported experiencing an ethnic identity decision process. The mean age this decision process began was 11.79 years (age ranged from 5 to 19), with a mode and median of 12. This indicates that the participants were negotiating this racial/ethnic identity decision process at a time that coincides with Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development: identity versus role confusion.
(as cited in Wood & Wood, 1996). Therefore, it seems likely that the participants were engaged in two identity processes at the same time. The majority of the participants stated that this was a "somewhat" as opposed to a "very" difficult and confusing process for them, which is supportive of past research (Hall, 1980). Because research with clinical samples has shown this decision process to be very difficult for biracial people, future research in this area could investigate the possible reasons for the difference between biracial individuals who seek treatment and those who do not.

Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations of this project should be acknowledged. First of all, this project was correlational, and does not rule out other interpretations. In addition, the current sample of college students could have been more comfortable with cultural diversity issues. As a result, they may have been more comfortable with their racial identities than other biracial people. Third, a small sample size was used, and it is plausible that using a larger sample may have found more diversity among the participants. A fourth limitation is that it was hard to determine if participants were
interpreting the questions in a similar manner. Finally, other factors not assessed (e.g., acculturation of parents) may be involved in forming a racial identity. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to a population beyond this sample. Despite these shortcomings, it is hoped that the findings are informative to social workers. More importantly, this project was initiated in order to raise consciousness of the biracial/multiracial experience, and to inspire additional research on this topic.

**Implications for Social Work**

In order to be culturally sensitive and effective in the field of social work, it is very important that social workers gain as much knowledge as possible about racially diverse groups of people in our society. Since it has been documented that the biracial/multiracial population is growing in this country, it is very important that social workers become aware of the racial identity issues associated with being a biracial/multiracial person.

It is important to note that many of the participants (43.2%) in this study stated that race has played a very important role in their personal identity. According to Wardle (1991), social workers encounter
biracial/multiracial children in foster care, adoptive care, schools, and in caseloads. Mistakenly, many of them are viewed as having the same identity as their minority parent. The present findings revealed that this is not necessarily the case for many biracial/multiracial individuals. Therefore, accurate assessment of racial identity is beneficial when treating and allocating services for this population. Hopefully, this knowledge will caution social workers against making inaccurate assumptions about a client’s racial identity based solely upon appearance.

Furthermore, this information may be especially useful for social workers working with children and adolescents, since this seems to be a time when more negative emotions may occur. Most importantly, this project has offered some insight into the biracial/multiracial experience. Hopefully social workers will use this information to become more culturally and racially sensitive in their fields of practice.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student in the Master of Social Work Program at California State University, San Bernardino, and I am currently working on a research project on the subject of biracial identity development. Like you, I am biracial, and I am very interested in how other biracial people experience their racial/ethnic identities.

The purpose of this study is to examine the biracial identity experience, and the specific racial/ethnic identity choices made by biracial people. Also, the factors that might influence these choices will be looked at. So, if you fit the criterion of having parents from two different races or ethnicities, please fill out this questionnaire. If you do not fit the criterion, but know someone else who does, please feel free to pass this questionnaire out to them.

This questionnaire should take about 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is very important and greatly appreciated. Also, it will be assumed that you have consented to participate in this study when you have returned your completed questionnaire.

There are no serious risks involved in answering this questionnaire, however, if you feel the need to discuss further the issues it raises, you can contact CSUSB Counseling Center for free counseling. You can make an appointment by calling (909) 880-5040.

I hope that this study will benefit biracial people in two ways. First, it will give biracial people an opportunity to talk about their attitudes and experiences associated with being biracial in today's society. Secondly, this study will bring awareness to the biracial experience, and will help professionals in the social work, counseling, and educational fields to understand better this group of people.

Any information you will be giving will be kept confidential. Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relations with CSUSB. The Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this study. If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact Dr. McCaslin at 880-5507.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. I look forward to receiving your responses.
APPENDIX B

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Participant Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this study. As stated in the informed consent form, the goal of this study was to look at the attitudes and experiences of biracial people. It is hoped that the results of this study will help gain an increased understanding of the biracial experience in today’s society. If you would like to obtain the results of this study, a copy will be available in the CSUSB library in the summer of 2002.

For questions, concerns, or comments concerning this study, you may contact Dr. McCaslin at 880-5507.

Counseling Resource

CSUSB Counseling Center provides free counseling to students.
Location: Student Health Center
(909) 880-5040

Support Groups for Multiracial Americans

1. Association of Multiethnic Americans: www.ameasite.org

2. Multiracial Americans of Southern California: Use any search engine to locate this organization on the Internet.
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 44)

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APPENDIX D
SOCIAL WORK STUDENT
SOLICITATION LETTER
APPENDIX E

BIRACIAL IDENTITY QUESTIONNAIRE
Biracial Identity Questionnaire

1. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (CIRCLE ONE)
   A. High School
   B. Associates Degree
   C. Bachelors Degree
   D. Masters Degree
   E. Ph.D.
   F. Other, please specify ______________________

2. What is the highest level of education you expect to complete? (CIRCLE ONE)
   A. High School
   B. Associates Degree
   C. Bachelors Degree
   D. Masters Degree
   E. Ph.D.
   F. Other, please specify ______________________

3. What is your current occupation? _______________________________

4. What is your age? ______

5. What is the city and state in which you were born? ________________

6. What is your gender? (circle one number below)
   1. Male
   2. Female

7. Were you adopted? (circle one number below)
   1. No
   2. Yes

8. Your parents are: (check only one)
   _____ Married
   _____ Divorced
   _____ Never married
9. What is your racial or ethnic origin?
   ____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
   ____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   ____ Black
   ____ Hispanic
   ____ White
   ____ Other Specify _______________________________________
   ____ Mixed Race (check all that apply below)
       ____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
       ____ Asian/Pacific Islander
       ____ Black
       ____ Hispanic
       ____ White
       ____ Other

10. What is your mother’s racial or ethnic origin?
    ____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
    ____ Asian/Pacific Islander
    ____ Black
    ____ Hispanic
    ____ White
    ____ Don’t Know
    ____ Other
    ____ Mixed Race (Check all that apply below)
        ____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
        ____ Asian/Pacific Islander
        ____ Black
        ____ Hispanic
        ____ White
        ____ Other

11. When you were growing up, what was your mother’s occupation?
    ____________________________________________________________
12. What is your father’s racial or ethnic origin?
   _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   _____ Black
   _____ Hispanic
   _____ White
   _____ Don’t know
   _____ Other ____________________________
      _____ Mixed Race (Check all that apply below)
         _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
         _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
         _____ Black
         _____ Hispanic
         _____ White
         _____ Other ____________________________

13. When you were growing up, what was your father’s occupation?

14. What is the approximate range of your annual household income? (If you are a full time student, please answer this item based on your family’s annual income)
   (   ) Less than $10,000   (   ) $10,000 - $19,000
   (   ) $20,000 - $29,000   (   ) $30,000 - $39,000
   (   ) $40,000 - $49,000   (   ) $50,000 - $75,000
   (   ) Over $75,000

15. The U.S. Census bureau has added a multicultural category to their racial classification system. Which of the following statements would best describe your opinion of this change. (CIRCLE ONE)
   A. I think it is a bad idea because it will separate biracial people from membership in other minority groups.
   B. I think it is a good idea because biracial people should have the opportunity to choose how they want to identify.
   C. I have no opinion.
16. Interracial marriages are currently on the rise in the United States. Which of the following statements best describes your opinion about the children of those unions: (circle one)
A. They are biracial, but should choose one race to identify themselves with.
B. They are biracial and should identify themselves that way.
C. They shouldn't have to define themselves as any one race.
D. They are biracial, but they should have a choice of how they may identify themselves.
E. Other ____________________________

17. Check the one that best describes your skin color.
   □ Black □ Dark Brown □ Medium Brown □ Light Brown □ Yellow □ Olive □ White

18. Your elementary school was mostly? (check one)
   □ White □ Black □ Hispanic □ Asian □ Integrated/Mixed

19. Your junior high was mostly? (check one)
   □ White □ Black □ Hispanic □ Asian □ Integrated/Mixed

20. Your high school was mostly? (check one)
   □ White □ Black □ Hispanic □ Asian □ Integrated/Mixed

21. What was the racial composition of your closest friends in grammar or elementary school? (check one)
   □ Mostly White □ Mostly Black □ Mostly Hispanic □ Mostly Asian □ Biracial/Mixed

22. What was the racial composition of your closest friends in junior high? (check one)
   □ Mostly White □ Mostly Black □ Mostly Hispanic □ Mostly Asian □ Biracial/Mixed
23. What was the racial composition of your closest friends in high school? (check one)
   - Mostly White
   - Mostly Hispanic
   - Biracial/Mixed
   - Mostly Black
   - Mostly Asian

24. What was the racial composition of your neighborhood while growing up? (check one)
   - Mostly White
   - Mostly Hispanic
   - Biracial/Mixed
   - Mostly Black
   - Mostly Asian

25. What is the racial composition of your present neighborhood? (check one)
   - Mostly White
   - Mostly Hispanic
   - Biracial/Mixed
   - Mostly Black
   - Mostly Asian

26. What is the racial composition of your church or place of worship? (check one)
   - Mostly White
   - Mostly Hispanic
   - Biracial/Mixed
   - Mostly Black
   - Mostly Asian

27. What is the racial composition of your present workplace? (check one)
   - Mostly White
   - Mostly Hispanic
   - Biracial/Mixed
   - Mostly Black
   - Mostly Asian

28. What is the racial composition of your closest friends today? (check one)
   - Mostly White
   - Mostly Hispanic
   - Biracial/Mixed
   - Mostly Black
   - Mostly Asian

29. What is the race of your current, or most recent, significant other (i.e., spouse, love interest, boy/girlfriend)? (check one)
   - American Indian/Alaskan Native
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - Black
   - Hispanic
   - White
   - Mixed/Biracial
   - Other ____________________
30. What was the primary language spoken in your home while you were growing up? (check one)
   ____ English               ____ Spanish
   ____ Other ______________________

31. What other languages were spoken? ______________________________

32. The contact you had with your mother’s family while growing up can be described as: (check one)
   ____ Frequent     ____ Infrequent      ____ No contact

33. The contact you had with your father’s family while growing up can be described as: (check one)
   ____ Frequent     ____ Infrequent      ____ No contact

34. In terms of physical appearance, whom do you resemble? (check one)
   ____ Mother         ____ Father         ____ Neither

35. To what extent did you feel accepted by your mother’s side of the family? (circle one number below)
   1. Not accepted at all
   2. Generally not accepted
   3. Sometimes accepted, sometimes not
   4. Generally accepted
   5. Extremely accepted

36. To what extent did you feel accepted by your father’s side of the family? (circle one number below)
   1. Not accepted at all
   2. Generally not accepted
   3. Sometimes accepted, sometimes not
   4. Generally accepted
   5. Extremely accepted

37. Did your parent(s) ever discuss personal experiences of discrimination based upon their race/ethnicity? (circle one number below)
   1. Never, or almost never
   2. Not very often
   3. Sometimes
   4. Most of the time
   5. Always, or almost always
38. Some parents attempt to influence their children’s dating partners. When you think about your own parents, how would you describe their involvement in your choice of dating partners?
(circle one letter below)
A. They never tried to influence my choice of dating partners.
B. They tried to influence my dating partners, but it had nothing to do with the person’s race.
C. They tried to influence my dating partners by urging me to date only within my race.
D. They forbid me from dating outside my race.
E. Other __________________________

39. Have you ever experienced personal discrimination or hostility because of your race?
(circle one number below)
1. Never, or almost never
2. Not very often
3. Sometimes
4. Most of the time
5. Always, or almost always

40. Have you ever experienced negative treatment because of your skin color or physical features?
(circle one number below)
1. Never, or almost never
2. Not very often
3. Sometimes
4. Most of the time
5. Always, or almost always

41. Do you belong to any race-specific organizations or clubs?
(circle one number below)
1. No
2. Yes: Please specify_________________________________________

42. How much cultural knowledge do you have of your minority parent’s racial/ethnic group?
(circle one number below)
1. None
2. Not very much
3. Some
4. Moderate amount
5. Very Knowledgeable
Individuals have many different types of identities. How would you describe your identity in the following contexts?

43. I consider my social identity as: (check one)
   _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   _____ Black                        _____ Hispanic
   _____ White                        _____ Mixed/Biracial
   _____ Other

44. I consider my political identity as: (check one)
   _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   _____ Black                        _____ Hispanic
   _____ White                        _____ Mixed/Biracial
   _____ Other

45. I consider my cultural identity as: (check one)
   _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   _____ Black                        _____ Hispanic
   _____ White                        _____ Mixed/Biracial
   _____ Other

46. I consider my physical identity as: (check one)
   _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   _____ Black                        _____ Hispanic
   _____ White                        _____ Mixed/Biracial
   _____ Other

47. On forms I identify myself as: (check one)
   _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   _____ Black                        _____ Hispanic
   _____ White                        _____ Mixed/Biracial
   _____ Other

48. Did you talk openly in your family about being biracial? (circle one number below)
   1. Never, or almost never
   2. Not very often
   3. Sometimes
   4. Most of the time
   5. Always, or almost always
49. Did your parents try to directly shape your racial identity? (circle one number below)
1. No
2. Yes

50. If yes, which racial identity did they encourage you to adopt?
   _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   _____ Black                             _____ Hispanic
   _____ White                             _____ Mixed/Biracial
   _____ Other __________________________

51. Who would you say played more of a role in your identification with some race? (check one)
   ( ) Mother
   ( ) Father
   ( ) Both equally
   ( ) Neither

52. To what extent did you feel that you were exposed to the values and beliefs of your minority parent's culture? (circle one number below)
   1. Never, or almost never
   2. Not very much
   3. Sometimes
   4. Most of the time
   5. Always, or almost always

53. What group of people would you say you feel most comfortable around? (circle one letter below)
   A. I am most comfortable with Blacks
   B. I am most comfortable with Whites
   C. I am most comfortable with Hispanics
   D. I am most comfortable with Asian/Pacific Islanders
   E. I am most comfortable with American Indians/Alaskan Natives
   F. I am most comfortable with Biracial or Multi-ethnic people
   G. I am most comfortable in diverse groups with people of varying races and ethnicities.
   H. Race is not the most important factor that determines my comfort level
54. During your childhood, to what degree have you experienced negative treatment because you have parents of different races? (circle one number below)
   1. Not at all
   2. Not very much
   3. Somewhat
   4. Very much
   5. Extremely

55. Did you go through a period in your life when you felt like you had to choose a single race to identify with? (circle one number below)
   0. No
   1. Yes: Please explain:

56. At what age did this decision process begin? _______________________

57. Has your decision been made? (circle one number below)
   0. No
   1. Yes- What Age? ______

58. How stable has this decision been over the years? (circle one number below)
   1. Not at all stable
   2. Not very much
   3. Somewhat
   4. Very stable
   5. Extremely stable

59. Is/was this a difficult decision process? (circle one number below)
   1. Not at all
   2. Not very much
   3. Somewhat
   4. Very
   5. Extremely

60. Do you think that “single raced” people have to go through an “ethnic identity decision” or is this something that only happens to racially mixed people? (check one)
   ( ) Also happens to single raced people
   ( ) Only happens to racially mixed people
61. What experience(s) influenced your racial/ethnic identity decision the most?

62. Did/do you ever feel confused about having to make a racial/ethnic identity decision? (circle one number below)
   1. Never, or almost never
   2. Not very often
   3. Sometimes
   4. Most of the time
   5. Always, or almost always

63. During your childhood did you ever experience negative emotions that were related to being biracial (e.g. sadness, anger, etc.) or stress? (circle one number below)
   1. Never
   2. Rarely
   3. Occasionally
   4. Frequently
   5. Very Frequently

64. During your adolescence, how much was being biracial related to negative emotions or stress? (circle one number below)
   1. Never
   2. Rarely
   3. Occasionally
   4. Frequently
   5. Very Frequently

65. During your adulthood, how much is being biracial related to negative emotions or stress? (circle one number below)
   1. Never
   2. Rarely
   3. Occasionally
   4. Frequently
   5. Very Frequently
66. Do you consider yourself lucky or unlucky for being racially mixed? (circle one number below)
   1. Very Unlucky
   2. Unlucky
   3. Somewhat lucky
   4. A little lucky
   5. Very lucky

67. Are you happy being racially mixed? (circle one number below)
   1. Very Unhappy
   2. Unhappy
   3. Somewhat happy
   4. A little happy
   5. Very happy

68. What are some of the bad points of being racially mixed?

69. What are some of the good points of being racially mixed?

70. What ethnic or racial group do you identify with most closely? ________

71. Race has played an important role in my personal identity? (circle one number below)
   1. Strongly disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Neither agree or disagree
   4. Agree
   5. Strongly Agree

It is very difficult to record many aspects of the biracial experience in a survey. Therefore, would you be willing to be contacted for a brief interview? ( ) Yes ( ) No

If yes, please provide the following contact information.

Name: ________________________________
Phone number: __________________________

Thank you for your participation.
APPENDIX F

PERMISSION LETTER
Evelyn Galasso  
Department of Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino CA 92407-2397

Dear Evelyn,

Thanks for your recent inquiry about the use of items from the Survey of Biracial Experiences. This letter is to provide you with written authorization to use any items that you deem appropriate from the survey. Good luck in your future work and please forward me a copy of your finished thesis.

Sincerely,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore  
Assistant Professor of Family Studies  
University of Connecticut  
College of Human Development and Family Studies  
348 Mansfield Road  
Storrs CT 06269
APPENDIX G

THE BILL OF RIGHTS FOR
RACIALLY MIXED PEOPLE
The Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People

I Have the Right...

• Not to justify my existence in this world.
• Not to keep the races separate within me.
• Not to be responsible for people’s discomfort with my physical ambiguity.
• Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.

I Have the Right...

• To identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify.
• To identify myself differently from how my parents identify me.
• To identify myself differently from my brothers and sisters.
• To identify myself differently in different situations.

I Have the Right...

• To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial.
• To change my identity over my lifetime—and more than once.
• To have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people.
• To freely choose whom I befriend and love.

(Maria P. Root, Ph.D., 1992)
REFERENCES


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