

BIRACIAL STUDENT VOICES: EXPERIENCES AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

WILLIE L. BANKS, JR.

(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of biracial students with one parent of African American heritage attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) in the South. This study utilized a basic qualitative research design and was comprised of three phases: semi-structured individual interviews, responses to written prompts and a photo elicitation project. Twelve participants from two southern institutions participated in this study.

Through an analysis of data four themes emerged that encapsulated the experiences of the students in this study: 1) *The Search* - the pre-collegiate experience, 2) *Finding a Voice* – the collegiate experience, 3) *Breaking Free* – dealing with labels from society, and 4) *Here's Where I am for Now* – the evolving identity of biracial students.

These themes illustrated how complex and personal biracial student development can be. The biracial students in this study used their experiences with family and friends to define their identity. Once they reached college, their circle of friends, involvement in

student organizations, and finding safe spaces on campus all contributed to the students defining and redefining their biracial identity. These experiences all contributed to a generally positive experience for students in this study. Additionally, participants in this study were able to define their place in society as a biracial individual and what role society should or should not play in their identity choices. Results from this study showed that biracial identity was a complex process that started before college and that continued through college.

The findings in this study have implications for student affairs professionals. The implications include: understanding that biracial identity is complex and situational, programs and services for students of color are needed and can be beneficial for biracial students, spaces on campus need to be welcoming to all students and student affairs professionals need to structure and provide spaces that welcome and support all students, student affairs professionals need to be cognizant of the different experiences biracial students have from other students of color and will need to ensure that biracial students are provided with the options and choices provided to all students.

INDEX WORDS: African American, Biracial Student Development, Identity Development, Patterns of Multiracial Identity, Students of Color at Predominantly White Institutions

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INSTITUTIONS

by

WILLIE L. BANKS, JR.

BA, Mercer University, 1993

M.Ed., The University of Georgia, 1995

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by

WILLIE L. BANKS, JR.

Major Professor: Diane L. Cooper

Committee: Patricia Daugherty
Merrily Dunn
Kathy Roulston

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2008

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, MSGT. USAF (RET.) Willie L. Banks, Sr. and Mrs. Prasai M. Banks, my sister, Barbara H. Banks and my brother, Patrick M. Banks.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

United States (U.S.) census materials prior to 2000 permitted individuals to select their race from one of only five federally recognized racial categories: American-Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White (Renn, 2000; Renn & Lunceford, 2004). These categories did not allow multiracial individuals the ability to adequately identify their multiple identities. In 2000, the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) allowed individuals in the United States to select more than one race on census materials for the first time (Renn, 2000; Renn & Lunceford, 2004; Jourdan, 2006). This historic event for many multiracial individuals and families living within the United States was an acknowledgement of their presence in the U.S.

The 2000 census stated that 2.4% (approximately 6.8 million people) of the total U.S. population reported two or more races living within households (American Demographics, 2002; Wellner, 2002). A leading researcher in multiracial identity models, Renn (2000) reported that 6.8 million multiracial individuals lived within the U.S., 1% to 2% of that population composed of college individuals. This rapidly growing multiracial population is attending institutions of higher education, requiring the need for research reflecting the experiences of these students on college campuses (Jaschik, 2006; Jourdan, 2006; Wallace, 2004). These students have been on campus for a number of years; however, their voice has not been adequately represented within the literature (Talbot,

2008). Research on minority populations on college campuses has focused on monoracial ethnic categories (i.e., Asian, African American, and Hispanic) and not on the lives of multiracial individuals in higher education (Jourdan, 2006).

The number of interracial relationships has increased over the years; thus, the number of multiracial individuals being born within the U.S. has grown. It is not an easy task to simply define the ethnicities of students attending college (Lopez, 2003; Root, 1996). Multiracial individuals can encompass a number of ethnicities and heritages. Information provided from the 2000 census highlighted 15 combinations of two or more ethnicities within the U.S., which comprised 93.3% of the multiracial population (American Demographics, 2002). The number of individuals selecting three or more races was approximately 0.2% of the total U.S. population and 6.7% of the multiracial population (American Demographics, 2002).

For many institutions of higher education, multiracial individuals provide an interesting challenge and pose more questions than answers. Who comprises this population? What are the needs of this population? How can institutions provide resources and services to address the needs of this population? Unfortunately, there is not one answer to these critical questions. Just as multiracial individuals are complex and multilayered, so are their needs and experiences. Physical characteristics, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and family makeup and dynamics all play a role in the identity development of these students and ultimately their experiences on college campuses (Korgen, 1998; Renn, 2000; Renn & Lunceford, 2004; Wallace, 2001; Wallace, 2004; Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004).

Within the literature on multiracial individuals, Renn (1998) has emerged as the leading researcher on the experiences of these individuals within higher education. Renn conducted a number of studies examining multiracial identity on college campuses and through her research developed the Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity (2000). Renn's study (1998) originated as part of her doctoral dissertation and focused on the lives of twenty-four multiracial students attending three private institutions in the Northeast. Her research continued to evolve and eventually included 56 students from institutions including the Northeast and Midwest.

Through her research Renn identified that multiracial "students fall into two or more of these groups [patterns] by identifying situationally, according to social context" (Renn, 2004, p.67). The Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity consist of: 1) monoracial identity; 2) multiple monoracial identities; 3) multiracial identity; 4) extraracial identity and 5) situation identity.

Table 1

Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity

Pattern	Characteristics
Monoracial Identity	Identifies with one race (e.g., Black, White, Asian)
Multiple Monoracial Identity	Identifies with multiple identities (e.g., Black and White)
Multiracial Identity	Identifies as mixed, biracial or multiracial
Extraracial Identity	Does not to identify with ethnic/racial categories

Table 1 - Continued

Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity

Pattern	Characteristics
Situational Identity	Identity depends on the situation

Note. From “*Claiming space: The college experience of biracial and multiracial*

students on predominantly white campuses.” by K. A. Renn, 1998.

Multiracial student identity is fluid and it is not unusual to see students in one or more of the patterns. The five patterns are not linear and do not denote that multiracial students have to be in one pattern, master that pattern and then move to another pattern. The context of social settings plays a large role in where multiracial students identify within the Five Patterns and oftentimes where their identity changes over time. Renn’s (2004) Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity is significantly different from past minority identity theories that asserted a model of stage development, such as Poston (1990), Phinney (1990), Cross (1995) and Helms (1990). Renn’s patterns take into account that multiracial identity is not a sequential linear developmental process. Additionally, Renn’s Five Patterns supported the work conducted by Root (1996) and Wallace (2001) that pointed out that multiracial identity is complex and crosses various ethnicities and heritages.

A number of studies on multiracial individuals have been conducted in the Northeast, Midwest and Western United States where there are larger concentrated numbers of multiracial individuals. One geographic area that has not been heavily researched is the South. Renn (2004) in her findings on the Five Patterns of Multiracial

Identity encouraged further research on multiracial individuals in other geographic locations and on specific ethnic combinations. These two recommendations influenced my decision to investigate the lives of biracial students living in the South who have one parent of African American heritage in the South.

Race is still a topic that can bristle and spark much debate in the United States (Shang, 2008). Racism exists and race relations are a concern for many citizens within the U.S. Race relations in the U.S. can be “conceptualized with Blacks and Whites on opposite ends of a spectrum, and the literature on college student cultures depicts a dichotomous view of campus race relations” (Renn, 2004, p. 85). The idea of biracial individuals at times compounds an already sensitive issue. The South has many more obstacles to overcome when dealing with race relations. With the history of Jim Crow laws, the history of slavery and the notion of the “one-drop rule,” the South faces more of a challenge in dealing with race than other parts of the U.S. (Davis, 2001).

One of the factors that still persist in race relations in the South is the notion of the “one-drop rule.” Historically, this rule was developed “to maintain the perception of White racial purity and to deny mixed-race people access to privilege, including freedom from slavery” (Renn, 2004, 4). The one-drop rule is still present in the discussion of race relations today and thus presents a myriad of issues for biracial students who have a parent of African American heritage but do not solely identify as Black (Korgen, 1998).

I believed that the politics of race in the South influenced the experiences of minority students on college campuses. Biracial students who have one parent of African American heritage have a different experience from other biracial students with no African American heritage based on phenotype (Talbot, 2008). This is not to say that

biracial students with an African American heritage have an experience that is more significant than other biracial students. I believed their experiences are different based on the politics of race in the South. A biracial student with a White parent and an Asian parent has a different experience from a biracial student with an African American parent and an Asian parent. Part of the difference in experience can be attributed to the one-drop rule and physical differences such as skin or eye color (Talbot, 2008). Additionally, many biracial individuals can “pass” as their White counterparts and therefore have a different experience because they are not viewed as a minority or Black, but as part of the majority culture. Many biracial individuals with one parent of African American heritage are considered Black even if they self-identify as biracial (Davis, 2001; Talbot, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Biracial college students are a growing population within higher education (Jaschik, 2006; Shang, 2008). Their presence on college campuses provides an opportunity for institutions to address their specific needs (Shang, 2008). However, their experiences and needs are just as varied as the majority of students on college campuses. Research studies on biracial and multiracial students have been conducted at institutions in the northeast, midwest and western United States. There is a lack of research that specifically addresses the experiences of biracial students in the South. These biracial students with one parent of African American heritage have a different experience from other biracial students because of the history of race in the South. The purpose of this study was to examine how the experiences of self-identified biracial students, with one parent of African American heritage enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South, affect their identity.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, Renn's (2004) Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity served as the theoretical framework. Renn conducted a four phase study of fifty-six multiracial college students attending six different institutions of higher education in three geographic regions. Originally conceived as a study for her doctoral dissertation, the first and second phase of Renn's research focused on eight multiracial students in the northeastern United States at three private institutions (an Ivy League institution, Catholic University, and Liberal Arts College). The third phase of Renn's research focused on a rural university and a rural community college in the rural southern Midwest. The fourth and final phase of Renn's research focused on a Big Ten University in the industrial Northern Midwest. Renn utilized individual interviews, written responses, campus observations, archival research and focus groups to examine how multiracial students developed their racial identity.

Renn (2004) used Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Model (1995) as the basis for her research on multiracial student identity development. Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Model is based on the premise that identity is developed through the interactions of the person and the environment. The model "accounts for interactions among and between the various subenvironments an individual encounters...it provides a means to examine the dynamic, fluid nature of college life...constructing and reconstructing identities in relationship with others" (Renn, 2004, p.28). The use of Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Model provided Renn with a theoretical base to examine how multiracial student identity developed through interactions with the environment.

After conducting the four phases of research, Renn (2004) developed the Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity. The five patterns are: 1) monoracial identity; 2) multiple monoracial identity; 3) multiracial identity; 4) extraracial identity; and 5) situational identity. Multiracial students who hold a monoracial identity self-identify with one race (Black, Asian, and White). Students who self-identify with more than one monoracial identity (Black and White, Hispanic and Asian) are identified as having a multiple monoracial identity. Students who choose to not specifically identify their heritage but refer to themselves as mixed or biracial are identified as having a multiracial identity. Multiracial students who choose not to identify themselves based on U.S. racial categories or by any race are identified as having an extraracial identity. Students who choose their identity based on situational context are identified as having a situational identity.

Renn (2004) found that

these patterns are not exclusive, nor are they rigid or unchangeable. Students described periods in their lives when they were clearly in one pattern and other times when they were in different pattern or patterns. Patterns are by their nature neither exclusive nor permanent (p. 68).

The Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity provided a solid theoretical foundation for this study on biracial students with one parent of African American heritage at Predominantly White Institutions in the South. The Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity provided a guiding framework for designing the research questions and methodology, which are discussed in the next section.

Research Questions and Methodology

1. How do biracial students at Predominantly White Institutions in the South make meaning of their collegiate experiences as related to their identity?
2. How do the experiences of these students compare to those in Renn's study?

This study utilized a basic qualitative design method. Qualitative studies provide an opportunity to describe a phenomenon by gathering rich detail of events and happenings in a research setting. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people make meaning of their world around them at a particular time and place (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Research of this type provided an opportunity to explore factors that influenced the identity patterns of biracial students at PWIs in the South.

I replicated parts of Renn's (1998) dissertation for my study. Specifically, I used her interview protocol for individuals, as well as the written prompts from her study. Renn's study focused on three private elite institutions in the northeastern United States. This study was conducted at one public university and one private university in the southern United States.

In her initial study, Renn used eight students from each campus to comprise a total sample population of 24. In my study, an email letter was sent via the Multicultural Programs and Services offices to ten students on each campus, who identified as multiracial or biracial. The email asked for volunteers to participate in individual interviews and a photo elicitation project and to complete two written prompts. From the 20 emails sent to students I was able to recruit six students from each campus to participate in the study, for a total sample of twelve. Additionally, this study used only

biracial students with one parent of African American heritage, where Renn's study used biracial and multiracial students of varying ethnicities and heritages.

After selecting the sample for the study, I met with each participant to discuss the purpose of the study and review the consent form and structure of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to discuss their experience on their respective campuses and how they made meaning of their experience as it related to their identity. Participants completed two written prompts that addressed their racial identity and experiences on campus. Students participated in a photo elicitation exercise as part of this study. Participants were given a disposable camera to document how their environment affected their identity at a PWI in the South.

After each interview was transcribed I sent the transcriptions to each participant. This process is called a member check. The member checks provided an opportunity for participants to check for accuracy of transcribed interviews and to make any comments regarding the emergent themes.

As I collected data I simultaneously engaged in coding of data. This is one of the benefits of conducting qualitative research. Additionally, it was imperative to be aware of the context of the question and to follow up on any responses that may shed light on the phenomenon being studied. Using this technique helped me gain a better understanding of what the data meant.

Limitations of the Study

This research study focused on how biracial students with one parent of African American heritage made meaning of their collegiate experience as it related to their identity at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South. Because this qualitative

study focused on a specific sector (students with one parent of African American heritage) of biracial students at PWIs in the South, the findings from the study were not generalizable to other biracial students. Additionally, this study was geographically specific to the South. Findings from the study may not be generalizable to other institutions in other regions.

My experiences as a biracial student affairs professional working at a PWI in the South may be seen as a limitation in this study. However, my experiences as a biracial student who attended a PWI in the South for my undergraduate and graduate degrees provides me with a unique perspective to be the true instrument of data collection during this study. During the analysis stage of this study I utilized peers to review my coding and interpretation of the data. Through peer reviews I brought multiple viewpoints to my analysis of data to increase its validity and to ensure that my personal experiences did not taint the data.

Significance of the Study

The experience of biracial students on college campuses is an area that warranted research and the special attention of student affairs professionals. The needs of these students are varied, and more information that can be provided to student affairs professionals through research is needed. The needs of multiracial students with one parent of African American heritage are especially important, specifically those students who attend college in the South. These students face other challenges that are not common to other biracial students because of their heritage, and any information that can be garnered from this specific population will add to the growing literature on biracial students on college campuses. Additionally, providing information on multiracial

students in the South will augment the literature and research conducted by Renn (2004), Root (1996) and Wallace (2001) on multiracial students in other parts of the United States.

Definition of Terms

Having a clear set of definitions for use within a study provides clarity and understanding for readers of a study. The following definitions were provided with the goal of enhancing understanding of this study. Multiracial, biracial, and mixed-race may be used interchangeably throughout this study.

Biracial- Biracial refers to individuals with parents “from two different socially designated racial groups” (Root, 1996, ix).

Mixed-race- Mixed-race individuals are identified as individuals who have more than one heritage or ethnicity.

Monoracial- Monoracial refers to individuals who “claim a single racial heritage. It is also a system of racial classification that only recognizes one racial designation per person” (Root, 1996, x).

Multiracial – Multiracial is an encompassing term for individuals with more than two racial heritages. Because multiracial encompasses so many heritages, biracial is also included within multiracial (Root, 1996, xi)

Predominantly White Institution - Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is defined as an institution that has, traditionally or historically, a majority of its student population from White (European American) backgrounds.

Summary

Multiracial students are one of the fastest growing populations on college campuses. Based on the 2000 census report, Renn (2004) estimated that 1% to 2% percent of the total multiracial population (approximately 6.8 million) is comprised of college-aged multiracial individuals. With the increase in the number of multiracial students on campus, there needs to be more research conducted on these students. Research conducted by Renn (1999, 2000, 2003, 2004), Renn & Arnold (2003), Root (1996), Wallace (2001, 2004) and Wardle (2000) provided much-needed information on how multiracial students develop their identity and how culture and environments have a role in that process. However, further research is needed to address specific ethnic combinations of biracial students and in specific regions of the United States. Because of the unique view of race in the southern United States, I examined how the experiences of self-identified biracial students, with one parent of African American heritage enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South, affected their identity.

As an anchor for this study I used Renn's (2004) Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity, which situated multiracial students in one or more of five patterns in identifying their ethnicity: 1) monoracial identity; 2) multiple monoracial identity; 3) multiracial identity; 4) extraracial identity; and 5) situational identity. Finally, this study added to the growing literature on biracial students on college campuses and specifically addressed the experiences of students with one parent of African American heritage in the South.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of literature to help readers understand the context of this study within higher education and student affairs. The literature review focuses on five areas: race, biracial/multiracial identity development models, factors influencing racial identity choices, multiracial students at PWIs and recommendations from the research. This section provides current and historical information on the topic of biracial students on college campuses. Even though this is not an exhaustive review of all the literature on biracial students, this review provides an overview of the most relevant research and literature on my topic of study.

The first part of the literature review discusses race. This section is divided into three areas: a) historical context; b) one-drop rule; and c) the census and its impact on mix-raced individuals. The historical context section focused on the social construction of race and provides an overview of anti-miscegenation laws, interracial marriages and multiracial offspring classification. The second section is devoted to the one-drop rule and its role within discussions of race, historically and in present day America. Specific attention is paid to how the one-drop rule affects multiracial individuals. The census and its implications for multiracial individuals comprise the third section of the literature review on race. An overview of the census and its current status for classifying multiracial individuals is addressed. Additionally, statistical information on multiracial individuals living within the U.S. and regionally is presented.

The second part of the literature review is devoted to biracial/multiracial identity models. I focus on biracial identity models because most of the literature suggests that multiracial identity is fluid, complex and not sequential (Nishimura, 1998; Renn, 1999, 2000, 2003; Root, 1996; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wallace, 2001). Earlier ethnic identity models, such as Atkinson, Morten & Sue (1989), Cross (1995) and Phinney (1990, 1996), suggested that for individuals to become healthy, they must identify with the majority culture. Additionally, these models are sequential, stage development models that rely on an individual's mastering one stage before moving on to the next stage.

Poston's (1990) Biracial Identity Model is included in the literature review because it was one of the first models to specifically address biracial identity; however, the model has been criticized because it is a sequential, stage development model and does not fully address the complexities of multiracial individuals. Poston's model has a place within the literature review because it is one of the most cited and earliest works on biracial identity development.

The next part of the literature review focuses on the factors that influence racial identity choices. The final part of the literature review focuses on research conducted on minority/ethnic students at Predominantly White Institutions and recommendations from those studies on multiracial and biracial student populations. I selected studies that provide an overview of the types of research conducted on college students of color. Suen (1983), Loo and Rolison (1986) and Smith and Moore (2000) studied ethnic students on campus and examined feelings of closeness, alienation, academics and attrition. Their work provides insight into the lives of multiracial students on college campuses. These

studies provide a foundation for the study that I conducted on biracial students on a predominantly White campus. The research supports the notion that the environment at a PWI is not the same for all students, which means that minority students may have problems in developing their identity (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, Cooper, 2003).

Race

Historical Context

Race is a socially constructed category and oftentimes is misconstrued as a scientific, biological category (Davis, 1991; Root, 1992, 1996; Korgen, 1998; Nishimura, 1998; Williams, 1999; Root, 2000; Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004). The problems with race in the United States can be traced back to Colonial times, when Africans were brought to the U.S. as slaves for land owners (Davis, 1991; Root, 1992, 1996). Many of the European land owners made a concerted effort to keep the races as separate as possible. Even though many landowners were known to have relationships with their slaves, the relationships as well as their offspring were never publicly acknowledged. Many Whites felt that to keep their race pure, there could not be any mixing of the races. The offspring of those relationships at times were shunned by their White families, as well as their African families.

The need to keep the races separate and the White race pure led to the enactment of antimiscegenist laws. These laws made it illegal for men and women from different races to marry. These laws were enforced through much of the United States and were not repealed until 1967 (Root, 1996; Korgen, 1998; Nishimura, 1998; Renn, 2000; Renn & Lunceford 2003; Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004). The Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Loving v. State of Virginia* that the remaining fourteen states in the U.S. had to repeal

all antimiscegenist laws and allow marriages between different races to occur and be acknowledged (Root, 1996). In 2000, the state of Alabama was the last state to repeal laws banning interracial marriages (Cruz & Berson, 2001). With the antimiscegenist laws repealed, there was an increase in the number of interracial marriages within the U.S. and thus an increase in the number of multiracial children being born within the U.S. (Korgen, 1998; Nishimura, 1998; Wardle, 2000; Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004; Brackett, et. al, 2006).

Historically, offspring of these unions followed a rule that the children of interracial unions had to be identified by one race (Korgen, 1998). Many times that classification would be based on the mother's ethnicity. Root (1996) pointed out that "classification has largely followed rules of hypodescent (one-drop rule) in a society that subscribes to monoraciality" (p. xviii). Multiracial offspring of White slave owners were typically classified as Black, which increased the number of slave holdings for the owner. Root reported that until 1989, biracial offspring with a White parent were assigned the race of the non-White parent. Multiracial babies with two parents of color were assigned the race of the father. Since 1989, all infants born within the U.S. are assigned the race of their mothers (Root). Williams (1999) noted that:

racial identity is an individual's own choice. It is this concept that flies in the face of social constructions of race. The idea that individuals have a right to define their own experience, to create their own personal meaning, to frame their own identity, to claim an "I" that is uniquely their own, shakes up many people's most dearly held beliefs about race. Courage to claim one's own experience despite

resistance and judgment from others allows biracial people...to begin to forge an authentic self (p. 34).

The one-drop rule has continued to be a major factor in the discussions of race in the U.S. The next section addressed aspects of the one-drop rule and its impact on multiracial individuals.

One-drop Rule

What does it mean to be Black? That is the question that has faced many Americans for a number of years. From the time of slavery through the time of Jim Crow laws, many people and institutions decided that anyone with one drop of African blood was defined as Black (Davis, 1991). The rule emerged from the southern United States and was accepted by Blacks and Whites. Though the rule may not be prevalent in other parts of the U.S., in the South many people still used this as the benchmark to define what it meant to be Black in the U.S. For mixed-race people with African American heritage, this rule placed limitations and complications on defining their racial identity. By society's standards any mixed-race person with any type of African American heritage would be considered Black (Talbot, 2008).

The one-drop rule is unique in that it is most prevalent in the U.S. and has not extended to other nations in the world (Davis, 1991). In other parts of the world, what it means to be Black is not an issue as it is in the U.S. and oftentimes brings about more questions about how the U.S. views and treats race relations. Nishimura (1998) pointed out that "in North American society, race strongly influences how an individual is perceived by others, what community an individual identifies with and, to some extent, an individual's social relationships and how an individual perceives himself or herself"

(p. 46). Davis found that other ethnic minorities who can “pass as White” do not face as much scrutiny as other minority groups from African ancestry. There was a school of thought that focused on keeping the races pure, and any mixing of the races would be a threat to the White race and ultimately its power and influence within the U.S.

Leaders within the Black community found the notion of identifying as mixed-race and not African American to be a threat to the African American population (Davis, 1991; Thernstrom, 2000). Many leaders believed that if mixed-race people of African American heritage did not identify solely as African American and as partly White, then the amount of power, influence and opportunities for the African American community would decrease. The leaders of many civil rights organizations believed that there would be fewer affirmative action programs in colleges and universities, city government, and the business world. The notion of the one-drop rule is socially constructed just as race is and unfortunately has held a strong grip on race relations and what it meant to be Black in the United States. Renn and Lunceford (2003) pointed out that:

individuals who grew up when law or common practice dictated that anyone with any African American heritage, even a very small fraction, was classified as Black may still continue that classification or pass their views to family members; multiracial individuals may thus be influenced to identify in only a single monoracial category (p. 771).

Multiracial individuals are faced with a complex and unique situation when dealing with racial identification that is made more difficult when the one-drop rule is part of that discussion (Korgen, 1998). This is most evident in the way the U.S. counts

individuals through the U.S. census. The next section discusses the U.S. census and its attempts to count multiracial individuals in the U.S.

The Census and Mixed-Race Individuals

Renn and Lunceford (2003) reported that since the 18th century the census has counted individuals within the U.S. During the 1950's the census had three categories for individuals to identify themselves racially: White, Black and Other. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prompted the census bureau to collect "registration and voting information by race, color, and national origin" (p. 755). The information collected was used to monitor the integration of public schools and voting. During the 1970's the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) directed federal agencies to gather racial information based on four categories: White, Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native. By the 1980 census, the Asian/Pacific Islander category was broken down to include Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian and Samoan.

Until the 2000 census, mixed-race individuals did not have the opportunity to properly identify their heritages (Renn, 2000; Thernstrom, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Renn & Lunceford, 2003; Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004; Brackett, et. al., 2006). Mixed-race individuals could choose from one of the five federally mandated racial categories: White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaskan Native (Renn, 2000; Jourdan, 2003). Thernstrom (2000) reported that in the 1980 and 1990 census materials, individuals could identify up to three ancestries (i.e., German, Italian, and Irish); however, when it came to racially identifying oneself an individual had to choose from one of the five categories. There was no latitude in

choosing more than one race and it was assumed that the five racial categories were mutually exclusive.

Multiracial activists started a campaign to include a multiracial listing in the 2000 census as a way to properly count and acknowledge the number of multiracial individuals in the U.S. (Root, 1996; Kroger, 1998; Renn, 2000; Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004).

Activists sought the inclusion of a full multiracial category on the census but were met with much resistance from the African American community and civil rights leaders. The leaders of the African American community viewed the inclusion of a multiracial category as a way to diminish the number of African Americans in the U.S. and as a possible way to regulate and strip opportunities provided to many African Americans through affirmative action programs (Davis, 1991; Root, 1996; Thernstrom, 2000; Brackett, et al., 2006).

The OMB agreed to include a multiracial category and allow multiracial individuals to choose more than one race on census materials (Renn, 2000; Thernstrom, 2000). The 2000 census had a possible 126 combinations for multiracial individuals to choose from. Though civil rights groups lost the battle to not have this category included in the census, they were successful in lobbying the government to not count multiracial individuals in tabulating the population “for the purposes of the ‘civil rights monitoring and enforcement’ (i.e., to set quotas, goals, or targets in education, employment, and public contracting)” (Thernstrom, 2000, p. 3).

American Demographics (2002) reported from the 2000 census that 2.4% (approximately 7 million) of the U.S. population identified themselves as multiracial. The most common grouping within the multiracial category was “White and some other race”

(32%). This category is reported to be of Hispanic origin. The next group is “White and Native American” at 16%, followed by “White and Asian” with 12% and “White and Black” at 12%. Additionally, the census materials showed that multiracial individuals tend to be younger than those individuals who report one race. Of the total population within the U.S., only 26% are under the age of 18, while 42% of reported multiracial individuals are under the age of 18 (American Demographics).

Projections for the future found that the White population will see a shift in its position as the majority to a minority (American Demographics, 2002). The Hispanic population was estimated to be the fastest growing population within the United States. American Demographics (2002) reported that 70 million Americans self-identified as a race other than White. Thirty-six million people identified themselves as Black or as Black and another race. Twelve million Americans identified themselves as Asian or Asian and another race. Additionally, the number of multiracial individuals attending institutions of higher education was estimated to increase within the next ten years, based on the large percentage of individuals who identified as multiracial and are under the age of 25 (American Demographics, 2002).

Lopez (2003) reported that the South had the smallest percentage of individuals who self-identified with two or more races, while the Pacific West contained the largest percentages of mixed-race individuals. Lopez pointed out that the differences in the percentages can be attributed to the makeup of each region. Lopez highlighted the fact that on the West Coast there are larger populations of ethnic groups, thus increasing the possibility of the number of mixed-raced individuals, where the South is “primarily Black and White contexts” (p. 30).

Lopez (2003) posited that the racial classification of mixed-race individuals will continue to be complex and problematic. She noted that:

given the deep-rooted salience of the constructs of race and ethnicity in American culture, it is also unlikely that they (racial classifications) will soon disappear as ways of organizing and making sense of our social worlds. Therefore, if we are to continue collecting data about race and ethnicity, it is important to acknowledge multiplicity and give students and parents space to identify themselves and their children as being of mixed heritage, should they choose to do so, not only because the identifications may be more meaningful to them, but also because it will more accurately document the racial-ethnic diversity of our student population as we think about the impact of demographic context on how we educate and conduct research in the context of schools (p. 36).

Biracial Identity Development

After conducting a literature review on identity development I discovered a body of research specifically addressing the lives and experiences of biracial individuals. The research in its earliest form focused on biracial identity development as a linear stage development model. Poston's Biracial Identity Model (1990) dispelled the notion presented by earlier researchers (Cross, 1971; Morten, Atkinson & Sue, 1983; Stonequist, 1937) that biracial individuals have "marginal identities" (p.152). Poston's biracial identity model was based on previous research on biracial individuals and from groups that work with biracial individuals (Renn, 2008). Poston believed that biracial individuals go through five distinct stages within their identity development: a) personal identity; b) choice of group categorization; c) enmeshment/denial; d) appreciation; and e) integration.

In the personal identity phase of Poston's Biracial Identity Development Model (1990), individuals are typically young and are just becoming aware of their identity. Their identity is based on personal identity factors such as self-esteem and self-worth, which are developed through interactions with family. Poston noted that an individual in this phase "tends to have a sense of self that is somewhat independent of his or her ethnic background" (p.153). Individuals in the next stage, choice of group categorization, are pressed to choose an identity. They either identify as monoracial or adopt a multiracial identity, acknowledging both parents' heritage. Poston noted three factors that played a role in this decision: a) status factors- i.e., peer group and status of parents' background; b) social support factors, i.e., parent and family support and participation in activities of various cultures; and c) personal factors, i.e., physical characteristics, age, and politics. Poston asserted that 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" (p. 154).

The enmeshment/denial stage was characterized by individuals who felt guilt or confusion about having to choose one parent's heritage over the other parent's heritage. Individuals at this stage faced guilt and "self-hatred and a lack of acceptance from one or more groups" (p. 154). The support received from parents and community was integral in the individual's resolving the issues associated with this stage. The fourth stage, appreciation, found individuals beginning to appreciate their multiple heritages by learning and participating in relevant cultural activities. Poston noted that individuals in this stage still held a monoracial identity during this phase. The final stage, integration,

found individuals developing “wholeness and integration” (p.154) of their multiple identities.

Poston’s work, like that of other researchers, was a linear and stage development model (Talbot, 2008). One has to achieve the first level to move to the next level. Additionally, Poston’s model focused on personal factors that contributed to a biracial individual’s identity choice.

Unlike Poston’s work, other researchers found that biracial identity development was complex, multilayered and not sequential. In fact, most of the current research indicated that biracial individuals often identified in multiple patterns, borders or phases. Root (1996), Torres (1999), Renn (2000), Wallace (2001) and Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) all conducted research that found that biracial individuals identified with four to five patterns or phases when discussing their identity development.

These categories, patterns, borders or phases were uniform in that they all identified similar patterns in biracial identity development. One pattern was identifying solely with one race (monoracial identity); another pattern was identifying with both ethnicities (multiple monoracial identity). A third pattern or phase was choosing not to identify with any one or two races and instead choosing a multiracial or biracial identity. The most common category or pattern identified from the research focused on biracial students selecting their identity based on their social context. Another category identified by researchers focused on biracial individuals choosing not to identify with any of the racial categories and instead choosing to identify with the human race or a non-recognized category. The following section provided more information on these patterns, borders and bases.

Bases, Borders, Identities, Patterns & Quadrants

Bases

Through researching the lives of multiracial high school and college students, Kendra R. Wallace (2001) developed four bases which represented the lives of mixed-race students. Her exploratory study focused on how these students made sense of their identity in the context of home, family, school and community. The four bases represented were: a) home base/visitor's base; b) both feet in both worlds; c) life on the border; and d) shifting identity gears. Wallace developed and presented the stick figure visuals based on the data and the four bases identified through data generation.

The "home base/visitor's base" visual was represented by the individual's being "grounded mostly in one community of heritage, while interactions with the other community occur through occasional visits to this other 'base'" (Wallace, 2001, p. 121). Eleven out of the fifteen participants selected the home base/visitor's base as the visual that best represented how they viewed their racial identity. Many participants were grounded in a predominant ethnic community and had occasional interactions with other ethnic heritages. The research found that distance and opportunities to interact with other ethnic communities played a significant role in participants' choosing this visual.

The "both feet in both worlds" visual represented individuals who viewed their ethnic identity as being in both worlds and not split between the two worlds. Wallace (2001) found that this visual represented a more "holistic" (p. 125) and "utopian" (p. 127) view of multiracial ethnicity for participants.

The "life on the border" visual represented individuals who viewed "their own identity essentially mixed or multifaceted" (Wallace, 2001, p. 124). Participants who

chose this visual felt that they were in the middle or on the border, not in one or another community. Additionally, many participants chose this category based on how other individuals perceived their identity, not quite one ethnicity or another, but somewhere in the middle.

Participants who chose the “shifting identity gears” visual were characterized as shifting their identity based on a situational context. A majority of the participants described this visual as the best representation of their experiences. The participants who chose this visual also acknowledged that they had to “develop an awareness of the different cultural demands between their communities, including the mainstream” (Wallace, 2001, p. 128). Many of the participants struggled with having to switch identities based on a situation, and some actually found the entire process of having to select an ethnicity or category to be restrictive and counterproductive.

Wallace (2001) found that participants in her study picked one or at times two different visuals to represent how they viewed their identity. This aligns with other research conducted on multiracial students, which found multiracial identity to be fluid, non-linear, complex and flexible.

Borders

Root (1996) proposed four border crossings that encompassed how multiracial individuals negotiated and constructed their identity. The four borders included: a) both feet in both worlds; b) shifting of identities based on social contexts; c) sitting on the border; and d) creating a home camp. Root described each of these border identities and provided literature from her anthology to support the border identities.

The first border identity, “both feet in both worlds”, took into account that multiracial individuals were able to recognize, merge and function within multiple worlds at the same time. The second border identity, “shifting of identities based on social contexts”, focused on individuals who were able to shift identity based on the context of the situation. “Sitting on the border”, the third border identity, focused on individuals who viewed themselves as multiracial and as “sitting on the border.” The final border, “creating a home camp”, focused on individuals who were able to settle within one camp and then make occasional visits to the other camp.

Identities

Rockquemore and Brunisma (2002) identified four categories in which biracial Black/White people see their identity: a) border identity; b) singular identity; c) a protean identity; and d) a transcendent identity. A border identity, as its name implies, found people identifying on the border of Black, White or a combination of the two identities. The border identity is the most cited identity pattern from research conducted on biracial individuals (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2002). The singular identity category is comprised of individuals who identified solely with one identity, either White or Black. The third category identified by Rockquemore and Brunisma (2002) is a protean identity. This category found individuals who identified as Black, White or biracial based on the context of their social interactions. The final category that emerged from their data was the transcendent identity, which was a category that is defined by individuals who chose not to identify with any race and view racial classifications as meaningless and socially constructed.

Patterns

Renn (2000) added to the growing literature on multiracial students by identifying five patterns of multiracial identity. Renn's study was comprised of three phases that started with twenty-four mixed-race students attending three private institutions in the northeastern United States. Renn furthered her study in 2004 by including thirty-two more multiracial students attending institutions in the midwestern United States. Using ethnographic and grounded theory techniques, Renn developed the Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity. The first pattern was monoracial identity, where individuals identified with one ethnicity ("I'm White"; "I'm Hispanic"). The second pattern identified was multiple monoracial identities, where individuals identified with more than one monoracial identity ("I'm White & I'm Black"; "I'm Asian and Hispanic"). Individuals who identified as mixed, multiracial or biracial held a multiracial identity, which was identified as pattern three. Individuals in pattern four who chose not to identify themselves by any designated race were considered to have an extraracial identity. Individuals who selected their race based on a situation were identified as having a situational identity, pattern five.

The Renn study (2000) found that multiracial students were influenced by "personal interactions with individuals and groups" (p.385). The five patterns were not linear or sequential. The patterns took into account how complex multiracial identity was for students and allowed them the opportunity to be in one or more pattern at the same time. Additionally, Renn found that the more comfortable multicultural students were with their identity, the easier it was for them to move between patterns. Students who interpreted the patterns as more rigid were less likely to move between the patterns.

Quadrants

Torres (1999) developed a bicultural model that found Hispanic college students could be in one of four orientations based on their acculturation and identity. The four quadrants included a bicultural orientation, Hispanic orientation, Anglo orientation, and marginal orientation. The model was developed by studying the relationship between 33 students' cultural orientation and where they scored on the Bicultural Orientation Model (BOM).

Torres (1999) found that Hispanic students who demonstrated high levels of acculturation and ethnic identity were placed within the bicultural orientation. Students were placed in the Anglo quadrant when they displayed a high level of acculturation and lower levels of ethnic identity. Students who displayed low levels of acculturation and high levels of ethnic identity were placed within the Hispanic quadrant. Torres placed students who displayed low levels of acculturation and ethnic identity within the marginal quadrant.

Though Torres' (1999) work focused on Hispanic college students, her work can be used with biracial and multiracial college students because of its focus on acculturation and ethnic identity. Additionally, Torres' Bicultural Orientation Model is very similar to other biracial/multiracial identity models that provided four to five identity patterns or phases that students experienced in dealing with their racial identity.

Factors Influencing Racial Identity Choices

The research indicated that there are many factors that influenced racial identity choices among biracial individuals. Among the most cited factors are familial context, Socioeconomic Status (SES), physical characteristics and situational context.

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) identified appearance, social networks, socialization factors (childhood and adult), and familial context as factors that influenced identity choices. Physical attributes such as skin color were found not to “predict identity choice...however, socially perceived appearance emerged as an important and influential factor in determining what racial identity was chosen” (p. 57). Social networks were found to influence the racial identity choice of biracial individuals. From their research, Rockquemore and Brunsma found that individuals with a predominantly Black network (family, neighborhood, etc.) identified with a singular identity. Individuals with a predominantly White network chose a border identity “because it [Black and White] is both available” (p. 58).

Socialization factors were an important factor in the development of biracial students. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) found that a family’s socialization of their children played a significant role in identity choices. Though family socialization was a major component of identity development, it was not the only factor. Adult socialization played an important role in the identity development of biracial students. The research found that negative experiences (i.e., discrimination) within socialization contexts had a negative effect on identity choices of biracial individuals. Rockquemore and Brunsma found that racial composition of the child and adult networks played a significant role in identity choices. They believed that because their respondents did not have a homogenous social network of biracial families within their networks, “interracial contact is a normative experience for interracial families and their biracial offspring” (p. 60).

Familial context was the last factor found to influence racial identity choices. The socioeconomic status of families was found to be an important factor in the selection of

racial identity. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) found that “family resources structure an individual’s social network by determining the parameters of social activity including neighborhoods and schools” (p. 60). They also found that religious participation was another important socializing factor.

Additionally, Nancy J. Nishimura (1998) investigated the challenges multiracial college students faced on college campuses. Three themes emerged from the study: a) race is an ever present issue; b) there can be a lack of empathy from loved ones; and c) multiracial identity development is a complex process. The first theme, “race is an ever present issue”, emerged from the participants who noted the lack of discussion regarding race in their families. Many participants shared their desire to have had more discussions regarding race in their family. Many of the messages shared from parents to their children focused on messages such as “color doesn’t matter, we’re just people” (p. 49). The participants noted that while the intention was meant from a loving place, many times they felt it was not a realistic perspective of society. Additionally, participants pointed out that their first encounter with racism happened outside of the family and in social settings, such as school.

The second theme, “lack of empathy from loved ones”, emerged from the participants in discussing their identity development as multiracial/biracial students. The participants acknowledged the developmental process involved in identifying their ethnicity; however, there was a general consensus that “most people, including their parents, do not know what it is like to be multiracial” (Nishimura, 1998, p. 49). The participants expressed a desire to have more personal role models who could “empathize” (p. 49) with their dilemma and provide some guidance.

The third theme that emerged focused on the complexity of multiracial identity development. Many of the participants stated that their identity moved from one phase to another based on the context of the situation. Their predominant racial identification was based on their home life, but once they left for college, many participants explored the other area of their ethnicity and at that point moved to a biracial or multiracial identity. The participants also discussed the difficulty with traditional ethnic support groups and the problems they faced when trying to join such groups. Many of the participants faced questions on why they wanted to join such a group. They believed that the questions were due to their physical characteristics which were not typical of that ethnic group. The participants also felt that at times they were “challenged to prove their ethnic membership” (Nishimura, 1998, p. 50). The participants felt that the SHADES, a support group comprised of bi and multiracial students, provided them with the needed encouragement and support to be comfortable with their choice to identify as biracial or multiracial.

Nishimura’s study provided counselors and student affairs professionals with information regarding the lives of multiracial students on college campuses. Nishimura (1998) recommended that college professionals must take into account the many needs of multiracial students and that multiracial/biracial student needs transcended programs and organizations that are focused on the Black/White experience. The participants also noted that traditional monoracial organizations can be a negative experience for multiracial students because they are often questioned about their motivation to join such an organization. Additionally, the participants pointed out that they did not want to isolate themselves from other individuals and that their support group was a safe place to find

comfort and solace. The participants felt that they were able to participate in other campus activities because of the support of other biracial/multiracial students on campus.

Multiracial Students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)

The research conducted on minority students at a PWI can be used to better understand the experiences of students of color. While there is not an abundant amount of literature focused primarily on biracial/multiracial students at PWIs, the research conducted on minority students at PWIs provided a framework for understanding the experiences of biracial/multiracial students.

Alienation at a PWI

Suen (1983) conducted a study on the relationship between alienation and attrition among Black students at a predominantly White medium-sized institution in the Midwest. Results from the study showed that Black students scored higher than White students on the University Alienation Scale (Burbach, 1972). Suen (1983) found that there was a statistically significant difference on the social estrangement subset. Additionally, Black students had a higher attrition rate (48%) than White students (20%). The data showed that there was a higher correlation between attrition and alienation among Black students than White students at the institution.

Suen (1983) concluded that “Black students felt more alienated within a predominantly White campus than did their White counterparts. The most important contributor to total score difference was their significantly higher level of social estrangement” (p. 120). Additionally, Suen found that Black students had a higher dropout rate than White students. The study indicated that alienation was related to Black student attrition and that Black students had a higher level of estrangement.

Research conducted by Loo and Rolison (1986) on minority students at a PWI focused on three areas: academic satisfaction and sociocultural alienation, the sociocultural alienation of minority students and how they differed from those of White students, and the similarities and differences in the attitudes between White and ethnic minority students. Six themes emerged that contributed to the body of literature on minority students at PWIs. The six themes that emerged included: a) sociocultural alienation; b) academic difficulties; c) thoughts of dropping out; d) academic satisfaction; e) university supportiveness/unsupportiveness of minorities; and f) attitudes regarding greater ethnic representation

The first theme, sociocultural alienation, emerged from interview data of the participants. The participants believed “minority students faced greater sociocultural difficulties on campus than White students did” (p. 64). The participants offered two reasons for this belief. One, the culture of the campus was dominated by White middle class values and minority students were expected to accept these values and reject their own. The second reason given was ethnic isolation of minority students on campus because they represented a small number of students on campus.

Academic difficulties emerged as the second theme from the data. The research showed that minority students felt that they faced greater difficulty in academics as opposed to White peers. Minority students believed that the difficulty originated from “less academic preparation in high school” (p. 65) than White counterparts. Additionally, White students in the sample were divided in their views that minority students faced the same academic difficulties or more academic difficulties on campus.

The third theme dealt with minority and White students' thoughts on dropping out of school. Loo and Rolison (1986) found that there was no difference between minority and White students on thoughts of dropping out; however, the reasons for dropping out were different. White students were more inclined to think about dropping out of school based on academic reasons, while minority students considered dropping out of school based on academic reasons and sociocultural alienation (lack of support or emotional dissatisfaction).

Academic satisfaction, the fourth theme, played a major role in why minority students did not drop out from school. Though minority students found sociocultural alienation as a major factor in their satisfaction, their satisfaction with the academic program (i.e., faculty response, quality of faculty and course offerings, etc.) of the university balanced out any negative feelings they had regarding sociocultural alienation. In general there was no difference between White and minority students regarding academic satisfaction.

The fifth theme that emerged was the university's supportiveness or unsupportiveness of minorities. White students in the study perceived the university to be supportive of minority students on campus, while minority students were split on their views of university supportiveness. Twenty-eight percent of the minority students felt that the university was supportive, while 39 percent felt the university was supportive and unsupportive and 33 percent of minority students felt the university was unsupportive (Loo & Rolison, 1986).

Attitudes regarding greater ethnic representation was the sixth theme that emerged from the data. Both White and minority students in the study supported the idea of

increasing ethnic diversity on campus. Seventy-one percent of the White students and 85 percent of the minority students in the study supported greater ethnic diversity on campus.

Loo and Rolison's (1986) study supported previous research conducted on minority students and found

that the academic alienation of many Black and Chicano students was due to poorer academic preparation in high school and the "culture shock" of encountering a class and culture distinctively different from their background.

The lower socioeconomic status and lower parental educational attainment of Black and Chicano students' families illuminate this problem (p. 72).

Additionally, their study provided additional research on minority students at PWIs.

Though their study focused on a small public institution, the themes that emerged can be used as a guide for other practitioners at similar types of institutions.

Alienation from Black Students

Smith and Moore (2000) conducted a study on the closeness of Black students at a predominantly White liberal arts institution. Their research focused on examining the closeness Black students felt towards other Black students on campus. Part of their research included biracial students and their feelings of closeness towards other Black students on campus.

Data analysis "indicated that closeness to other Black students was significantly correlated with race and ethnic identification and racial composition of friendship networks on campus" (p. 8). Smith and Moore (2000) found that biracial students had 80% lower odds of feeling closer to Black students when compared to monoracial

students in the study. The data also showed that biracial students had a higher percentage of extreme alienation from other Black students on campus. Biracial students also reported having poor or negative experiences with Black students. Additionally, 60% of biracial students in the study reported that they had little or no connection to the Black community versus 26% for monoracial students on campus. The same percentage (60%) reported that their friend network was composed of non-Black students. No biracial participants in the study reported having a majority of Black students as their friends.

The researchers concluded that biracial students felt higher levels of alienation from the Black community based on two factors: a) the need to acknowledge and embrace all aspects of their ethnicity; and b) that they did not fit into the Black community on campus. The in-depth interviews revealed that the biracial student participants embraced their multiple identities and that their family support structure played an important role in their self identification. Many of the participants noted that only acknowledging one parent was not what they felt comfortable with, and not acknowledging their full ethnic heritage was disrespectful to their other parent.

Additionally, biracial students felt that through their interactions with Black students on campus they were outsiders and did not share the same values, norms or attitudes. Many participants explained that because of their upbringing in an interracial family, their views on interracial friendship and dating differed from other Black students on campus. The research showed that monoracial students disapproved of interracial friendships by 14% and disapproved of interracial dating by 23% (Smith & Moore, 2000). Biracial students in the study did not disapprove of interracial friendships or dating.

Smith and Moore's (2000) study of closeness provided another lens to examine the experiences of minority students at PWIs. Additionally, their research provided much-needed information on the relationship multiracial students feel towards other ethnicities on campus and highlighted the dynamics of the White/Black biracial student on campus.

Recommendations from the Research

Renn (2000) offered three recommendations to institutions to enhance the experiences of multiracial students on campus. The first recommendation was to enhance the curricula to promote student identity development. Renn urged "educators to ground teaching and learning in students' experiences and lives" (p. 399). She believed that the through the use of the text, lectures and workshops on the experiences of mixed-race students, students of any ethnicity would be able to question and learn more about race and in particular the experiences of mixed-race students.

The second recommendation addressed the need to align the "curriculum and cocurriculum to support new ways of thinking about identity" (p. 399). Renn recommended institutions send "congruent messages" (p. 399) from all parts of the academy that support the examination of not only race but also gender, socioeconomic status and sexuality.

The third recommendation focused on peer cultures and how they promoted and encouraged the exploration and deconstruction of race. Renn (2000) asserted that "the ability to move freely between and among academic and social microsystems enhanced students' degree of exploration of multiple identity patterns, including the option not to identify along racial lines" (p. 400). Renn found that peer cultures offered the most

diversity within mixed-raced student identities. Institutions were encouraged to examine internal policies and procedures and to find creative ways of promoting boundary-crossing among peer groups. Some of the examples cited included attention to architectural design in developing spaces, policies in residence halls that do not allow students to keep the same room from year to year, and mixed class housing options. These recommendations were designed to promote interaction among and within different cultures and students.

Additionally, two recommendations for the design of minority programs emerged from Suen's (1983) study. First, programs should aim to reduce the feeling of alienation among Black students at White institutions. Suen recommended programs such as peer counseling and group activities to alleviate feelings of alienation. She believed that a reduction in feelings of social estrangement would help reduce the overall rate of alienation. The second recommendation focused on providing programs such as intensive orientation and career counseling to help improve the academic performance of students and thus decrease the attrition rate of Black students.

Summary

The literature on biracial and multiracial students has increased over the years, however, there is still a need for research to be conducted on this population of students within higher education. The key findings from this literature review highlighted the complex nature of biracial identity development. The work conducted by Root (1996), Torres (1999), Renn (2000), Wallace (2001) and Rocquemore and Brunsma (2002) found that that biracial individuals identified with four to five patterns, phases, borders or quadrants when discussing their identity. Additionally, the research pointed out that the

development for biracial individuals is continuous and highly personal. Many times, biracial individuals will identify with more than one pattern or phase and at times their placement is dictated by the social context of the situation.

Additionally, the research pointed out that family composition, the support system and safe spaces for biracial students affect their identity development. The literature indicated that in addition to the family structure, the socioeconomic status of the family and the environment where the students were raised played a significant role in the identification of biracial individuals.

The research also pointed out that additional investigation is needed on various racial combinations of biracial students as well as studies investigating the experiences of minority students attending predominantly White institutions. Like the study conducted by Smith and Moore (2000) the alienation of the students of color on predominantly White campuses will provide much needed information to student affairs professionals on the issues that face not only student of color, but also biracial individuals.

This chapter provided a literature review on the following areas: a) race; b) biracial/multiracial identity models; c) factors influencing the racial identity choices of multiracial students; and d) research and recommendations for practice on minority students at PWIs. This chapter provided supporting research and literature for my study and explained the scope of previous research conducted on multiracial and biracial students on campus. The next chapter discusses the research design of this study and how the literature on this topic informs the research design of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how the collegiate experiences of self-identified biracial students, with one parent of African American heritage enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South, affect their identity. Information was gathered from biracial students enrolled at two universities in the southern United States. This study replicated parts of Renn's (1998) study of multiracial individuals in the northeastern United States. This section focused on the design, sample selection, site of the research, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, bias and assumptions of the researcher, and limitations of the study.

Design

I pursued a qualitative research design for this study because this methodology provided the best opportunity to describe a phenomenon by gathering rich details of events and happenings within a research setting. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people make meaning of their world around them at a particular time and place (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Research of this type provided me with an opportunity to explore the experiences of biracial students at PWIs in the South and how those experiences affected their identity.

Sample Selection

This study focused on the experiences of biracial students enrolled at PWIs in the South. I employed a purposeful sampling strategy to select participants for this study.

Purposeful sampling involved selecting a sample that would provide as much detail and description of the phenomena being studied as possible (Merriam, 2002). Participants in this study met the criteria of being a fulltime student at one of the two selected PWIs for this study. Additionally, participants identified as biracial and had one parent of African American heritage. I recruited twelve students through the use of an email solicitation letter (see Appendix A). The letter was sent via the Multicultural Programs and Services offices to ten students who identified as multiracial or biracial on each of the two campuses in this study. The email asked for volunteers to participate in individual interviews and a photo elicitation project and to complete two written prompts. From the initial email that was sent to the twenty students, six students from each campus agreed to participate in the study. The total sample for this study equaled twelve students.

Site Selections

I selected two institutions in the southern United States to conduct this study. These institutions are predominantly White institutions and were assigned pseudonyms for this study. Institution A, University of the State (UoS), was a public, large, four year primarily residential (L4/PR), highly undergraduate (HU) institution. Institution A had a balance of undergraduate and high graduate coexistence (Bal/HGC), and comprehensive doctoral programs (Carnegie Foundation, 2008). University of the State enrolled approximately 34,000 students on a yearly basis. The institution offered undergraduate and graduate degrees in a variety of disciplines. Tuition averaged \$6,030 for in-state students and over \$22,000 for out-of -state students. Seven percent the student population self-identified as African American, 2% as Hispanic, 77% as White, 6% as Pacific

Islander/Asian, .002% as American Indian, 2% as Multiracial, and 5% unreported or unknown.

Institution B, Private University of the South (PuS), was a private institution with an enrollment of over 12,000 students, with 6,700 students in the undergraduate college. Tuition for students averaged \$35,800. PuS was a majority undergraduate (MU), large, four year, highly residential campus (LR/HR). PuS was a primarily residential undergraduate (RU) institution and had comprehensive doctoral and medical programs (Carnegie Foundation, 2008). Ten percent of the student body identified as African American, .002% as American Indian, 18% as Asian, 3% as Hispanic, 8% as not reporting or unknown and 53% as Caucasian.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed for this study because of the position I held as a graduate student researcher and as a student affairs professional. The sample I used was undergraduate students at two PWIs in the South. Even though these students were not students with whom I normally interacted with in my capacity as an administrator, there was still a hierarchical structure in place. To ensure that the participants felt safe within this study I had conversations with each participant. The conversations informed them of the process for this research, ensured confidentiality, and explained the voluntary nature of this study. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Ethical Standards for Professional Responsibility and Competence (1992) guided this study. The standards hold professionals in the field of student affairs to a high standard of professional behavior. Additionally, as a professional I was expected to uphold high levels of professional competency and to accept the consequences of my actions.

Data Collection

Individual Interviews

After selecting the participants I met with each student to introduce myself and review the purpose of the study and consent form (see Appendix B). The participants were asked to fill out a participant information form (see Appendix C). Prior to the taped interviews, I disclosed my reasons for pursuing this study and discussed my own experiences as a biracial student who attended a PWI in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In disclosing my biracial identity, I wanted the participants to feel at ease with the subject matter being discussed. Additionally, I wanted the participants to provide as much information as possible to the interview questions being asked. With my disclosure as another biracial individual, I felt that the students were able to provide richer data for the study. I then conducted a semi-structured interview that addressed their experiences as biracial students at a PWI (see Appendix D). The time length for the interviews averaged 30-45 minutes. The interviews were taped and later transcribed. Pseudonyms were assigned to interviewees to ensure confidentiality. The taped interviews will be held for a period of one year after the interview and will then be destroyed.

Written Prompts

As part of the semi-structured interview I asked the participants to complete responses to two prompts that addressed their racial identity and their experiences at their institutions (see Appendix E). Participants were asked to submit their responses to the written prompts via email within seven days of the completion of the interviews. Out of the twelve participants, nine returned responses to the written prompts. The responses were added to the data set and coded with the transcribed interviews.

Photo Elicitation

Harper (2002) defined photo elicitation as the process of “inserting a photograph into a research interview” (p.13). After each individual interview I provided a disposable camera and a set of instructions (see Appendix F) to each participant to photograph his or her environment. The photo elicitation project required participants to take pictures of places, objects or things that affected their identity as a biracial student attending a Predominantly White Institution. Participants were instructed to not take pictures of people, as they have not consented to participate in this study and may endanger the confidential nature of the study. The participants were given a time frame of one week to take pictures of their environments and to return the camera in the prepaid postage envelope provided to them. I emailed participants their pictures and asked for them to provide an explanation of the picture and its significance.

Ten of the twelve participants in this study returned the cameras to me for development. After each camera was developed, the pictures were sent via email to each participant. The participants were then asked to explain the significance of the pictures and to return the pictures with their explanations to me within seven days. The data generated from the explanations and photos were then added to the data set for coding and analysis.

Memo-Writing

During the data collection phase of the study I engaged in memo-writing. Charmaz (2006) described memo-writing as the process of “writing successive memos throughout the research project” (p. 72). Memo-writing provided me the opportunity to examine the data as I collected it and to make notes of what themes emerged from within

the data. I reflected on the data collected and pondered other avenues I should take to answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected during the individual interviews, written responses to the prompts, and photographs, I utilized line by line coding of the data. Coding means “categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). Line by line coding allowed me to better understand the data collected and to look for emerging themes within the data that answered the research questions. During this phase of data analysis I looked for meaning within the data and also specific words given by the participants to use as codes. This type of coding is called “in vivo codes”. In vivo codes “help us to preserve participants’ meaning of their views and actions in the coding itself” (p. 55). After I analyzed all interview transcripts I developed a listing of operational definitions for the codes. I then grouped codes that were similar from the transcripts and developed emerging themes from the data.

I analyzed my notes from my memo-writing exercise to help me better understand the data and emerging themes. After conducting the analysis of data I examined all the codes and operational definitions and developed broader categories and themes. This exercise helped me sort through the data and categorize them into more manageable pieces of data. It is important to take the smaller codes and attempt to find themes that are threaded throughout the data. The emerging themes I discovered helped guide my final analysis of interview data and to answer the research questions of this study.

After analysis I used a matrix developed from Renn's (1998) study to decide where participants were within their identity development. I used the data collected from the interviews, written responses, and photo elicitation to guide my decisions on placement of each participant within the patterns.

Table 2

Placement of Participants within the Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity

Pattern	Participants
Monoracial Identity	Anya, Courtney, Kenny, Kyle
Multiracial Identity	Janay, Kendrya
Multiracial Identity	Alex, Katie, Kendrya, Fiona, Janay, Lindsay, Michelle
Extraracial Identity	Jonathan
Situational Identity	All Participants

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative researchers should seek validity and reliability of their studies for their readers and respective areas of study (Merriam, 2002). Ensuring validity and reliability requires researchers to implement numerous safeguards to ensure the study can withstand the scrutiny of critics and provide valuable information to the field of study.

I used triangulation to ensure validity of this study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described triangulation as the process of “verification of the facts” (p. 107) and using “many sources of data ... in a study rather than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena” (p. 107). I used individual interviews, written responses and photographs from participants for this study. Multiple data collection methods ensured internal validity of the study. Additionally, I used the process of member checks to ensure internal validity. As defined by Merriam (2002), member checks rely on participants in the study to respond and comment on the interpretation of the data that I have collected. If there is a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the data, member checking allowed me to correctly report the data collected.

Reliability “refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). To ensure reliability for this study I used two strategies: peer examination and an audit trail. A peer review required my peers to review and comment on the study, provide feedback, and point out any discrepancies and problems within the study. An audit trail “describes in detail how data were collected” (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). Providing a thorough audit trail required keeping detailed field notes, a research journal and descriptive details of the process of this study.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

This study is of personal interest to me because I identify as a biracial individual and have one parent of African American heritage. Additionally, my undergraduate and graduate work was done at Predominantly White Institutions in the South. Because this study revolved around multiracial/biracial students with one parent of African American heritage at PWIs in the South, it is very important for me as the researcher and primary

source of data collection to acknowledge that I have biases and assumptions associated with this study. These biases and assumptions include: 1) biracial students have a difficult time finding other students who understand the complex nature of being a biracial individual; 2) biracial/multiracial individuals who have one parent of African American heritage face a different set of obstacles from other multiracial or biracial students; 3) race in the South is a highly sensitive topic and many times is only seen in Black and White terms, making the entire notion of biracial/multiracial difficult to understand.

It was in my best interest as a researcher to be aware of my biases and assumptions and to acknowledge them prior to beginning this study. As the primary instrument for this study I needed to be able to recognize my biases and assumptions and how they affected the data and its analysis.

Summary

To answer the two research questions posed in this study, I found that a qualitative research design would be my best opportunity to gather data on the experiences of biracial students with one parent of African American heritage attending Predominantly White Institutions in the South. This study utilized a three part process of semi-structured individual interviews, responses to written prompts and photo elicitation. I found that the data gathered from the participants was rich in description and detail and provided me with the necessary information to present the data, and emergent themes which is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

SEARCHING, FINDING A VOICE, BREAKING FREE, AND HERE'S WHERE I AM FOR NOW

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of biracial students with one parent of African American heritage attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the South. I wanted to pursue this course of study because of my own experiences as a biracial student attending a PWI in the late 1980's and early 1990's. My experiences as a biracial student at a PWI in the South provided me with an opportunity to grow as a person and explore my own identity and where I fit within a higher education setting. Many times more questions were raised than answers were provided. Through those experiences I wanted to examine what biracial students were experiencing in this day and age.

Many changes in society have occurred since my time as an undergraduate, but I wondered if those changes have made an impact on the experiences of biracial students attending PWIs in the 21st century South. Additionally, I used Renn's (1998) Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity as the theoretical framework for this study. Two research questions guided the exploratory nature of this study.

1. How do biracial students at Predominantly White Institutions in the South make meaning of their collegiate experiences as related to their identity?
2. How do the experiences of these students compare to those in Renn's study?

To answer these research questions I used semi-structured individual interviews, responses to two written prompts, and a photo elicitation project to find out what type of experiences biracial students were having at PWIs. After coding data from the interviews, prompts and photo elicitation to the point of saturation I developed themes that answered the research questions presented. For this study, the point of saturation occurred within the first six interviews, however, to ensure the reliability of the data; interviews continued with the other six participants. Additionally, I sent my initial coding and themes to four peers for review to validate the emergent themes from the data.

This chapter highlighted the major themes that emerged from the data and provided a story on the experiences of biracial students with one parent of African American heritage who attend PWIs in the South. The themes highlighted in this chapter included the first theme entitled *The Search*, which included a discussion on family composition and environment, friends and identity. The second theme addressed participants *Finding a Voice* through their collegiate experience. This section included discussions of creating a circle friends, safe spaces, finding meaning through negative and positive experiences and finding and redefining their identity. *Breaking Free* is the third theme that addressed participants' breaking free from labels, society's rules, and boxes. To conclude this chapter, I presented the final theme *Here's Where I am for Now*, which examined the participants' views on identity and their collegiate experiences attending a PWI.

To fully understand the data and emergent themes of this study and to put into context the experiences of the participants, I provided a short biographical introduction of

the twelve participants which included, age, gender, and the ethnic makeup of their parents.

Participants

The participants at University of the South (UoS) included Michelle, who is a 21-year-old 4th year student. Her mother is African American and her father is Caucasian. Michelle's parents are divorced and she was raised primarily by her mother. Michelle is an out-of-state student and went to a predominantly White high school. Kendrya is a 19-year-old sophomore whose parents have been married for 25 years. Kendrya's mother is Filipino and her father is African American. Kendrya's father was in the military and the family spent 6 years in Japan prior to moving back to the United States. Kendrya attended high school in the southern US.

Katie is a 21-year-old junior who was raised by her Caucasian mother in the Midwest in predominantly White environments. Katie did not meet her African American father until she was 19 years old and moved to the South to attend college. Jonathan is a 22-year-old senior who was raised in different locations throughout the United States. His father is African American and a professor at UoS and his mother is Caucasian. They have been married for over 24 years. He was raised in a predominantly White county that borders the county housing the University of the State.

Fiona is a 21-year-old senior raised by her Caucasian mother in a suburb outside of the state capital. Fiona does not know who her father is and has never had any contact with him; the only information she has is that he is African American. Janay is a 21-year-old senior attending the University of the State. Janay's mother is Latina and her father is

African American, they have been together for 22 years and raised Janay in predominantly White environments.

The six participants from the Private University of the South (PuS) have varying backgrounds and histories. Alex is a 19 year old sophomore who was born in New York City and was raised primarily by her African American mother. Alex's father is Caucasian and after her parents divorced when she was younger, she and her mother moved to the southern US. Kyle and Courtney are twin 19-year-old brothers born in the midwestern United States to an African American mother and Italian/Native American father. Kyle and Courtney were raised primarily by their mother in a predominantly Black environment in the southern United States. Kyle and Courtney's parents never married.

Anya is a 21 year old senior who was born to parents who are both from Guyana, South America. Anya's mother is African American and Chinese and identifies as African American. Her parents have been together for over 36 years and raised their family in a variety of college towns. Lindsay is a 21 year old senior born to an African American mother and $\frac{3}{4}$ Caucasian and $\frac{1}{4}$ African American father. Her parents are divorced and Lindsay was raised primarily by her mother in a rural area in the northeastern United States. The final participant, Kenny, is a 21-year-old senior who was born to a Caucasian mother and African American father. Kenny does not know nor has he had any contact with his father. He was raised by his mother in the Pacific Northwest in predominantly White environments and attended a prestigious prep school in the Northeast prior to enrolling at PuS.

The participants chose to attend PuS and UoS for a variety of reasons. For some participants the cost of the institution was a factor and for others the closeness to home and family was a factor. Many of the participants chose their institution based on the academic reputation of the university and others based it on the institution's collegiate athletic program.

Table 3

Detailed Participant Information

Name	Age	Gender	Mother's Ethnicity	Father's Ethnicity	Marital Status	Institution
Michelle	21	Female	African American	Caucasian	Divorced	UoS
Kendrya	19	Female	Asian	African American	Married	UoS
Katie	21	Female	Caucasian	African American	Never Married	UoS
Jonathan	21	Male	Caucasian	African American	Married	UoS
Fiona	21	Female	Caucasian	African American	Never Married	UoS
Janay	21	Female	Latina	African American	Married	UoS
Alex	19	Female	African American	Caucasian	Divorced	PuS
Kyle	19	Male	African American	Italian/ Native American	Never Married	PuS

Table 2 - Continued

Detailed Participant Information

Name	Age	Gender	Mother's Ethnicity	Father's Ethnicity	Marital Status	Institution
Anya	21	Female	Chinese/ African American	South American	Married	PuS
Courtney	19	Male	African American	Italian/ Native American	Never Married	PuS
Lindsay	21	Female	African American	$\frac{3}{4}$ Caucasian $\frac{1}{4}$ African American	Divorced	PuS
Kenny	21	Male	Caucasian	African American	Never Married	PuS

Presentation of Data

To understand how biracial students at PWIs in the South made meaning of their collegiate experiences as they related to their identity, it was important to understand their journeys to their institutions of higher education. For many of the participants in the study, their pre-collegiate experiences and environments played a major role in their identity development. The themes *The Search*, *Finding a Voice*, *Breaking Free*, and *Here's Where I am for Now* are presented through the use of direct quotes from the interviews, written prompts and photographs. The themes overlapped and told a story that

mirrors the identity development of biracial students: it's continuous, it's intertwined, it's complicated and it's different for every person.

The Search

The Search for Family

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) found in their study that socialization factors such as family composition and environment were significant factors in the identity development of biracial children. Much like the participants in the Rockquemore and Brunsma study, participants in this study were affected by their family composition and environment. Participants in the study recalled experiences of realizing their differences at an early age whether they were raised in a single family household or in a two parent household.

Michelle, who grew up in a single family household raised by her African American mother, described an experience when she was 3 years old. Michelle said, "I think I said it best when I was 3. We had to say something about ourselves and I said 'my dad is White, my mom is Black, so that means I'm Gray.'" Similarly, Katie, who was raised by her Caucasian mother, stated "mostly it was me and my mom and I wanted to identify with my mom, because that's all I knew." Participants like Kendrya who grew up with her African American father and Filipino mother stated:

It's interesting because they [her parents] never made a big deal of my dad being Black or my mom being Filipino. It was never a surprise. My dad seems so modest, even when he goes in public and people stare and he doesn't care. And my mom is the same. It made me feel that if they don't care, why should I care?

Jonathan presented the following photo (Figure 1) and explanation on the influence of his family.



Figure 1: Representation of my Parents

This picture is my little representation of my parents. My dad is a really big guy and has always been into lifting weights and working out (hence the whey protein). My mom is also very active but is much healthier than my dad, and ever since I can remember she has taken Metamucil. She has passed this habit onto me. My parents are two different people but they've always made me feel comfortable being who I am.

These statements were typical of participants in the study and highlight how influential the family unit is in the identity development of biracial students.

Another factor discussed by many of the participants addressed the type of environment they were raised in. One participant spoke about her experience of growing up within a military family and having spent part of her childhood overseas. Kendrya

stated that “I’ve never been hugely African American oriented you could say. I was always raised around predominantly White schools, being in the military, there weren’t a lot of African Americans.” Kendrya submitted this photo (Figure 2) as a representation of her time in Japan.



Figure 2: Basil

My dog, Basil we had him since I was in kindergarten. We couldn't take him to Japan with us, so for three years we lived without him. Every time I look at him he reminds me of those three lost years, but in a positive light he also reminds me of the knowledge I gained from living in Japan.

Kenny, who was raised in the Pacific Northwest by his Caucasian mother, discussed how growing up in a predominantly White city, influenced his identity. Kenny stated:

I would say when I was younger I would identify as Black, especially not having a father figure around. I naturally gravitated towards that. When I was younger I

didn't identify that strongly. When I got to freshman year of high school that's when all my friends, and it was all the Black kids at school I was over compensating, I was trying to put 3 doo rags on. It was that whole kind of thing to dive into that culture at that time. After that, I switched to a private school, because there were a lot of problems at the public school, race issues and academic issues. And at the private school there were only a few of us Black kids, I sort of started to form my own identity. I wasn't so constricted to what I was trying to do, as opposed to letting it go.

For Kenny, having an absent father was the impetus for him exploring Black culture and at times over compensating because of the absence of his father. Once Kenny reached a point of being more comfortable with himself and his identity, he started to explore and define his own identity. Additionally, it was during this time that he felt that he did not have to be "constricted" by the rules society had tried to impose on him.

Katie offered this picture (Figure 3) as a representation of her upbringing in the Midwest and her identity:



Figure 3: My Bedroom

The picture is of a shelf on my bookcase in my bedroom. It's representative of me because of the Chicago book, and the "faith" sign. Someone's room says a lot about them...mine is neat, not too cluttered, but personal. You can also see some of my books. "Half and Half" is a book about being biracial; I have African American classics, and modern pop culture books that have nothing to do with Black...a little bit of everything.

These statements speak to how the external environment can play a role in the development of identity for these participants. It is important to note that these students realized their differences from an early age. Many of the participants in this study were able to relate stories from their childhood of when they realized they were different from everyone else.

For many of these students their identity was tied to environmental factors like family composition and the environment where they were raised. As Kenny pointed out, he identified as Black because he did not have a father figure and he felt it was a natural for him to gravitate towards African American culture.

Additionally, participants noted that many of their families did not talk about race or their differences. Fiona stated:

I never, I don't think, race was never an issue when I was younger. I never even really established it, like I didn't know what the difference was; I just knew we were different. In elementary school I was called the "N" word and I had no idea what that even meant. And all the people around me were like "Oh, my god". So, I told the teacher, still not having any idea of what it meant and so I went and asked my mom and she was like "Oh, well" and that's when she kind of explained it. And I think that was the first time I ever realized that there was a difference. Since then, I would go to family things and all the family would still be there and we still talk to each other. And then I would see the difference a little bit more. I didn't identify myself really in any way when I was younger because I didn't know the difference, I didn't see the difference.

Many of the participants were left to figure out their differences and similarities on their own. Jonathan stated, “I feel that my parents talked about it more with each other than with us.”

The Search for Friends

Another important factor in the development of biracial students is their relationships with friends within their environment. Through the analysis of data it became apparent that for biracial students their friends were the ones who were part of their everyday environment. Janay, who grew up in a majority White environment, stated:

Growing up, my friends were majority White. I grew up where, because I didn’t sound like the rest of the Black kids and my best friends and friends that I hung out with were White, I was always called the country girl or things like that.

For Courtney, who went to a majority Black high school, his friends were from “different races.”

Some participants found that their friends never questioned their biracial identity and accepted them for who they were as a person. Other participants had much different experiences with their friendships. Jonathan recalled a story from his upbringing, where he realized his friend could not sleep over at his house because his friend’s parents did not agree with interracial marriage. Jonathan also recalled how he felt very disappointed and angry when he found out that his friend felt the same way.

Michelle, who grew up in a predominantly White environment, spoke of her dislike for the people she went to high school with. Michelle described them as “all spoiled rich White kids.” Growing up in a single parent household with an African

American mother, she found that she did not have much in common with the people that she went to school with and did not fit in. Michelle said, “I couldn’t sit with the Black kids because I was White and I couldn’t sit with the White kids because I wasn’t rich and I was Black.” Michelle went on to say that she formed her own circle of friends with the other two mixed people in her school.

For every Jonathan and Michelle story where their identity intersected with their friendships and they had negative experiences with friends, there were other stories on the opposite end of the spectrum. Lindsay, who grew up in a rural part of the Northeast, was rarely asked about her identity by her friends, and Alex, who grew up in a predominantly White environment, said “that it was never really a big deal, like it never came up.”

The Search for an Identity

Family, friends and environments played a role in the identity formation of the participants within this study. If there was one unifying theme throughout this study it was that these biracial students all knew they were different; the point at which they realized they were different varied from person to person and depended on the circumstances of their upbringing. But it was through their friends, family and their environment that they were able to form their identity. Kenny, who attended a prestigious prep school in the New England area, was one of a handful of students of color. It was during this time that he came to form his identity. Kenny stated:

And at the private school there were only a few of us Black kids I sort of started to form my own identity. I wasn’t so constricted to what I was trying to do, as opposed to letting it go. By the time I got to private school my life was pretty

much writing and basketball. It was still, you're still pigeonholed in a scenario like that, that's even fewer Black kids...I would definitely say it shaped my identity in terms of...I emphasized being Black especially because I'm mixed race, I didn't want there to be confusion like I didn't want to blend into the majority crowd and start to get lost in that and not seen as the minority crowd b/c I feel like those experiences shaped me and I didn't want them to be lost.

Like Kenny, other participants within the study talked about their experiences within their high schools and their identity. Katie spoke of her experience as a youngster taking standardized tests. She said, "When I was younger literally on standardized testing I would always check Caucasian, until probably sixth grade I checked Caucasian. In high school I always checked biracial, always."

Katie's quote illustrated the evolving nature of identity for biracial students. Growing up in predominantly White environments with her Caucasian mother, Katie wanted to be just like her mother. Checking the Caucasian box on standardized tests allowed her to identify with her mother. By high school she checked the biracial box because she understood the differences between her and other people. While she had not met her father at this point in her life, she knew that he was Black and a part of her. It was then that she started checking the biracial box.

Another aspect of identity development that was discussed by all the participants within this study dealt with physical characteristics. My participants described numerous instances of people telling them that they looked "exotic" or of being asked by strangers, "What are you?" Participants were used to being identified by a litany of ethnicities. Fiona described how her physical appearance seemed to confuse others:

A lot of people think I'm a light skinned Black, or Black or mixed. A lot of White people probably think I'm Black. I get a lot of Hawaiian, I get that a lot. One of my friends, who is Asian, we get brother and sister all the time. All the time.

Similarly, Kendrya related a story to me about her being asked by strangers if she were Hawaiian or Hispanic. I asked Kendrya how that made her feel and she responded by saying, "It just bothers me. If you don't know what I am, come up and ask me. Don't tell me what I am." This issue emerged repeatedly throughout the interviews, and for many of the participants Kendrya's statement of "Don't tell me what I am" summed up their feelings of being identified by their physical characteristics.

While physical characteristics caused confusion for some, the notion of acting "White" or "Black" emerged as another point of confusion for others when they interacted with biracial students. Janay admitted that during high school she did not have much to do with African Americans. She shared a story about her experiences with African American students during high school:

I had a girl that when she found out I was half Black/half Latina, she was like "No, no you have to be half White" and I'm like "Why?" and she was like "Because of the way you speak". So, it's one of those things where they really didn't understand who I was.

Alex shared a similar story about her interactions with African Americans at her school.

Alex reflected:

Like ever since I was, ever since I've gone to school it's been like in a mostly White like private school um, so like sometimes I feel like, my, like the way I act is more of like a White person than a Black person and so sometimes, sometimes I

feel a little awkward around the Black students, like African Americans, just 'cause I feel like I'm, I mean it's not because I'm shy, but just I don't know just like the way I speak and the way sometimes I act is different and so sometimes I feel a little awkward like I should be louder and more I don't know, it sounds stereotypical.... Sometimes it's easier for me to sit with like White, even though they are my friends like because we like met each other at school, sometimes it's easier, I'm not sure.

Kenny shared a story that was similar in nature, but his story dealt with his interactions with White students at his school.

Um, in middle and high school I identified as biracial. There were times, especially when I first started identifying as Black, I had a lot of White kids asking "Why are you acting like that, why are you talking like that" because kids that I had grown up with all through elementary school they had never seen me identify with my Black side at all, so they were taken aback because they get used to who you are. There were definite times I felt like the biracial kid, because I felt that I had to overcompensate to be seen as Black.

These stories are just a few examples of the complex nature of biracial student development. It is important to understand the background and experiences of these students to fully understand their collegiate experience.

Finding a Voice

The collegiate experience for participants in this study was where they found their voice. Their experiences in high school with their family and friends played a significant role in their development, but throughout the data I discovered that through their

collegiate experiences with friends, finding safe spaces on campus, and making meaning of positive and negative experiences, participants were able to redefine their identity.

Michelle reflected on the difference between her high school and college experience and stated:

In high school you see the first layer, you see the physical appearance. Whereas when you get to college, yeah you see someone and you're like "She looks like she could be mixed, that's cool. And she looks like she could be a lesbian, whatever." You learn that there are other layers to a person and you can't...like an onion you have to cut through one layer to get to another. You can't just approach someone and say "I believe you're African American and White, is that true?" You get to know a person before you ask those questions.

Kendrya explained to me in her written response that she has "greatly changed due to her new environment."

Finding a Circle of Friends

The biracial students in this study shared stories with me of how important it was to have a circle of friends to help with the adjustment to college. For many of the participants in the study, college was a chance to get away from their high school experiences and friends. Many of the participants at PuS and UoS discussed how they found a group of friends through student organizations and programs geared to acclimate students of color to the new institution. These student organizations allowed the participants to explore their identity and, for some, explore a side of their biracial identity that they had not been able to explore before. Alex stated:

I went to Crossroads before I came to school, it was like a pre-orientation event for, um, multicultural students, um, so I met a ton of people there. Like, very few White people um, but a lot of Blacks and Indian, well mostly Blacks, um Indians, like a few East Indian, um, Asians. Like, I got to meet a lot of people there um, but then like mostly so when I came to school it was good that I had those friends, but then like, I like to branch out and like meet everyone, so it's nice because I can always like go back to those friends.

Courtney spoke of his experience of joining an organization at PuS and how that organization has enabled him to find a group of friends.

I joined a step team, the Brotherhood of Afro-Centric Men (BAM), it first started out for mostly Black kids, but there are lots of other races in it. And I guess I have had a good experience with having a nice set of friends all around, the majority of them are Black and that's just how that goes.

Courtney also submitted this photo (Figure 4) that represents how important his affiliation with BAM is to his college experience.



Figure 4: BAM

This is a shirt for one of the organizations that I am involved with. It is called “The Brotherhood of Afro-Centric Men” (BAM). It is a volunteer organization and also has a step team that I am on. Although now it’s very diverse now it was started mainly for African Americans. I am seen as an African American in this organization.

Lindsay, who is light skinned, recalled a story of having difficulties finding friends at PuS at first because no one realized that she was Black and she was not included in the automatic group of Black students. Lindsay reflected on the experience:

There are so few Black students here that they form this automatic group freshmen year. But apparently, no one knew that I was Black so I wasn’t included in that and I wasn’t going to run up and be like “Hey, I’m one of you, let’s hang out.”

I followed up on this remark with a question of who were her friends when she came to school, especially since she did not have an automatic group of friends. Lindsay recalled

“girls from my hall. Which now I’m glad, because a lot of people are stuck in these racial cliques. I feel like I have friends from all different backgrounds and which now I’m glad I have that benefit.”

Michelle’s experience at the UoS was similar to other participants in the study, where she initially had some difficulty in finding a group of friends to connect with. However, once she found a group of students who understood her and her identity she was able to find her own way and find a circle of friends that understood who she was. Michelle stated:

But when I first got here it was hard, because I couldn’t relate to people the same way, because of my identity. They were like why do you have two parents of different ethnicities? And it’s not like I had a choice and said “Oh, I want those parents.” But as I got more comfortable on campus and more comfortable with the people and with people saying things like they are not supportive of interracial relationships, um I kind of made my own path and made it more comfortable and made it my second home.

Jonathan’s friends came from his work as a Resident Assistant (RA) in one of the residence halls at UoS. Jonathan said, “I’m friends with all different types of people. And being an RA you meet so many different types of people, that it’s hard to be friends with just one type of person.” His experience as an RA allowed him to develop closer relationships with other Black students on campus. Jonathan continued his story:

One year, I had a whole lot of Black residents; we were able to, the way you relate is different. When I was with my Black residents, we would be joking and teasing each other all the time. And it was a lot of fun. I had a blast; I think they

enjoyed it too. It was just a different way of relating. I think. If you were trying to relate with a White person like that, it's hard to verbalize. It seemed that there's more openness in that relationship, we joked about race all the time because they would be able to say stuff and I would be able to say stuff.

Participants like Janay, who is half Black and half Latina, spoke of her affiliation with a Latin sorority and how that organization provided her a place to find friends of similar interests and to immerse her into the Latin culture.

I'm in a Latin sorority. I do hang out; I've been introduced and immersed into that side of my culture [Latin]. As well as the Greek Life, I've immersed myself in the African American Greeks and those outside of the Greek world that are African Americans. Coming to the university, I was immersed in both of the cultures that I never really cared to look, because I never got the chance, people [African Americans] never gave me the chance to talk to them or hang out with them. And now I'm at a university, even though it's a majority White school I now have the chance to see both sides of who I am.

Kendrya, who is half Black and half Filipino, had similar sentiments to share about her experience with her Asian sorority. She said "coming to UoS got me more in touch with my Asian side because I got into an Asian sorority, that made me more Asian oriented."

Katie, who is half Caucasian and half Black, joined a historically Black sorority as a tribute to her African American side that she did not know about until she was 19 years old. She recalled her experience of submitting her letter of interest to the sorority and why it was important for her to join the organization.

Actually, in my letter of intent I talk about me being a member of [National Pan-Hellenic Sorority] is honoring my grandmother and grandfather and that part of my family, and I felt that for so long in my life I hadn't done anything to acknowledge that they were a part of my life and this was a step to saying this is part of me, that is my family, and I wanted to do something that they could be really proud of and to know that they influenced that part of my life. So it wasn't, people join sororities for a hundred, thousand of different reasons, but that was one of my major reasons and encouragements for joining [National Pan-Hellenic Sorority].

Some participants at PuS spoke of the involvement in a multicultural organization called All Mixed Up. This organization played an instrumental role in adjustment to college and finding a safe space. Lindsay spoke of her fondness for this organization; she said "there's a club on campus called All Mixed Up and there are different people and I like that." Kenny also spoke of his involvement with All Mixed Up. Initially, he was excited about the group but ended realizing the group did not fit within his views on race and being biracial. Kenny stated:

The group was called All Mixed Up and it was for bi and multiracial students who wanted to join and to discuss experiences. I don't know the focus that seemed to take or the view a lot of the students tend to have was exclusionary which I tried to steer clear of. There was a lot of talk of this of this side doesn't accept me and this side doesn't accept me so I'm my own person, so I'm going to create my own thing. For those people if that's the way they feel, I don't want to discredit their experience or not to do so, but for me...And it bothered me that people within the

group that wanted to separate themselves and create their own group and I feel like people in society faction themselves off enough. I want to have my own identity, but not place myself within that group.

Kenny's statement showed his struggle with other biracial students at his institution and within the student organization devoted to bi and multiracial individuals. Kenny described their views as "exclusionary" and for him as a biracial individual, the students attempt to separate themselves from other students of color was not a stance he agreed with. Kenny asserted his own identity by stating that he wanted to have his own identity and not one based on a group that wanted to separate themselves from other students of color.

Finding Safe Spaces

For participants in the study finding safe spaces on campus was another contributing factor in their adjustment to college. The participants shared stories of not only joining student organizations but of also finding spaces like the Black Hole and on-campus facilities that helped them feel safe on campus.

Kyle, who attends PuS, spoke of the Black Hole in their student center. The Black Hole is where many Black students on campus sit for meals in the student center. For many of the participants the Black Hole is a place for them to connect with friends and reinforce their identity. Kyle said the Black Hole makes him "feel more comfortable." Kyle said that because there are so few students of color, especially African Americans, on campus, the Black Hole provides a place for him to connect with others. He said "people are friendly. I think we realize that there's so few of us that we have to stick together." Kenny echoed similar sentiments about the Black Hole:

I love the Black Hole. People say what they will about it, I think it's great. A lot of kids like not usually Black kids but other kids subscribe to the self segregation speech. I don't buy it. I think its unity for me. It's a place for kids to get together and act a fool and kick it.

Kyle submitted the following photo (Figure 5) and explanation of the Black Hole.



Figure 5: The Black Hole

This cafeteria is referred to as “the Black Hole.” This is where “all the Black kids sit.” Sometimes people tend to define you by the people you most associate with. I often sit in the Black Hole, so I guess most people would simply view me as Black. But sometimes I sit in other places with friends that aren't Black and I sometimes wonder what people think then.

Unlike Kenny and Kyle, the Black Hole for some of the participants at PuS was seen as daunting and unwelcoming. Lindsay recalled a story from her freshman year where she felt hurt and not embraced by the African American community. She said:

I was really taken aback by that [not being embraced by the African American community] my freshman year, it hurt me. That, because there's a table in the

dining hall called the Black Hole and that's where are all the students of color sit and it's for the freshmen and it's like your automatic friends now. And I never felt like I could sit there. That bothered me. I mean I had my own friends to sit with, but it's the principle I guess.

I asked Lindsay why she felt that way and how did she cope with those feelings. She responded by saying:

I just didn't feel, in my looking back, it may have been very internal where I didn't feel that I was accepted and so. Like I said there aren't a lot of Black people here on campus, and when you pass each other when you're walking, you don't even have to know each other because you're Black and I'm Black, I'll say "Hey" sort of thing. But I would say "Hey" and they would look at me like I was crazy like "What does this girl want?"

Fiona, who attends UoS, provided photos (Figures 6, 7, 8) of spaces where she felt comfortable and safe and where she could explore her ethnicity.



Figure 6: UoS Hall

I included a picture of UoS Hall because it's where many cultural programs and organizations are located, specifically the NAACP. I was very involved with the NAACP for two years, and this is where we had many of our meetings and events. It was always a place for minorities and minority events for me. It's a place where I've always felt minorities were going to be accepted the most.



Figure 7: Theater

I included a picture of the Theatre from downtown because every time I've been there it has been for a Black event. I went there 3 times for to see [Black Dance Troupe], and also went once for [Black Dramatic Troupe] "Dreamgirls." Every time I went I was with my Black friends. It has always been a place where I could relate to the Black side of my ethnicity.

Additionally, Fiona submitted a photo of the stadium on the UoS campus where she felt was one of the few places on campus where your ethnicity didn't matter.

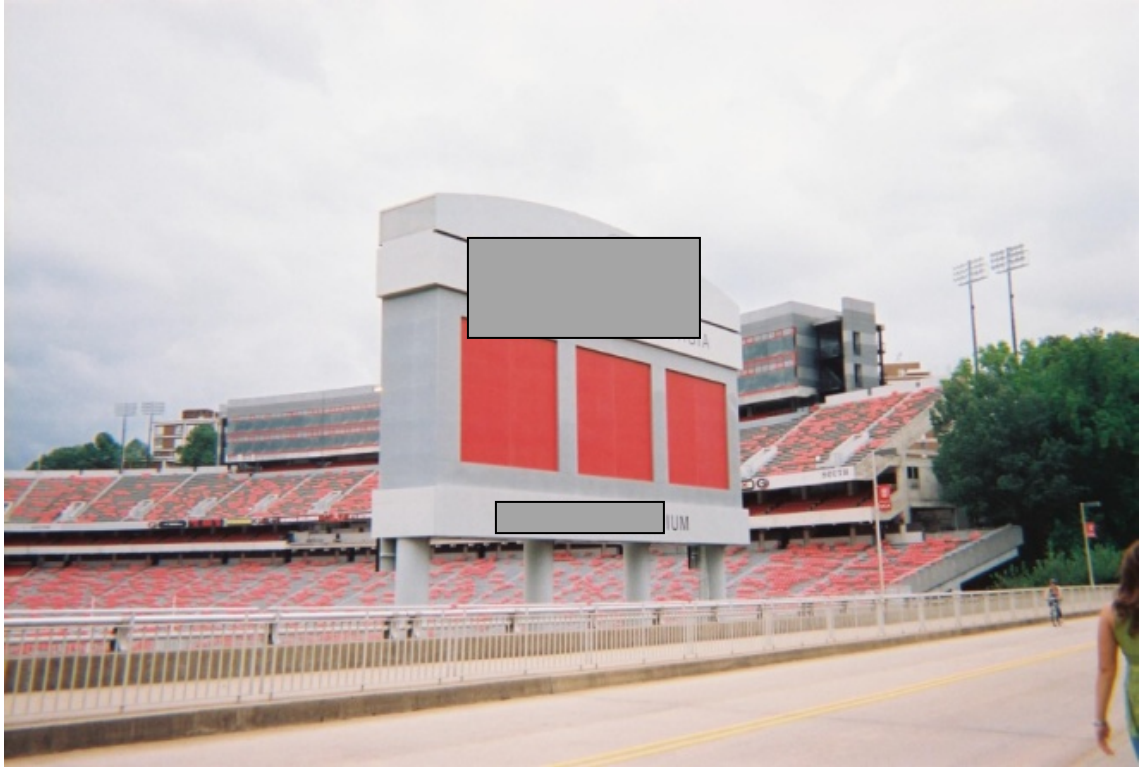


Figure 8: UoS Stadium

I included a picture of UoS Stadium because I feel like UoS football is one of the few events that really bring the whole university together. It doesn't matter if you're Black, White, red, green, mixed, or otherwise, everyone feels like they belong, at least in my opinion. People still tend to segregate but for the most part everyone is one big [UoS] nation.

Finding Meaning through Negative and Positive Experiences

Participants in this study experienced negative and positive experiences during their collegiate experiences. They faced questions regarding their ethnicity, which brought many questions about their identity. Participants related stories about their experiences and how they made meaning of those positive and negative experiences on campus. The positive and negative experiences shared during this study mainly focused on the participants' identity, faculty and staff relationships, and issues with fitting in.

The “one-drop rule” as Davis (1991) pointed out, referred to a rule that stated that anyone with one drop of Black blood is considered Black. For many biracial and multiracial individuals the one-drop rule has proven to be a source of many of the negative experiences on campus. Many within society choose to classify biracial students as Black even if they are only half Black. Kenny related a story of his experience at PuS and how many questioned his identity as a biracial student:

[The questions] I get a lot at PuS and outside is the trying to speak from a Black perspective, but you’re half White. I’m constantly getting questioned about why you don’t identify the other way. I’ve gotten that question all that time, since I was in high school. If you’re half Black and half White, and you call yourself Black why don’t you identify as White? I’ve been asked enough in the past couple of years that I’ve developed a set answer, I can accurately respond to the question. Essentially, it usually starts with a minor history lesson with Louisiana and the one-drop rule but then it delves into growing up I’ve never been looked at as a White person I’ve never felt solely like a White person, and when everyone else was saying that they don’t care what other people think, but your identity is reflected through other people in society, there’s really no way around that. That’s how I normally answer; I’ve never been seen as a White person, so I have never seen myself as a White person and yes I have a White mother, and I love my mother, she’s my hero, I love my family, I love my stepdad, they’re all great it’s just a different identity.

Kenny was able to articulate how he was able to deal with questions regarding his identity by discussing issues like the one-drop rule. Kenny was not the only student who

articulated how the one-drop rule was an issue with other students. Fiona explained her stance on her identity and how she used history and knowledge of the one drop rule to explain her identity to others who questioned her. Fiona stated:

Because I consider myself Black, and I also consider myself mixed but I don't consider myself White. And so, I see it as more of a physical, like what you see more than anything else. And I'm a history minor, so I always go back to the historical perspective of if I was born in the 1950's, even mixed, if I had survived, who would I be categorized with. And I would be with the Blacks. I would never be in the same room with the Whites. And so that's how I've always seen it. I call myself Black and I don't have a problem with other people calling me Black, but I guess I do have a problem with people calling me White. I don't have a problem with it; I just don't say that I am.

Kenny and Fiona, who are biracial, identified as Black because of their knowledge of the one-drop rule and its place in history.

Anya struggled with fitting in at PuS and had a difficult time finding others who would accept her for who she was. Her identity was not only an issue for Black students but also for White students. Anya said, "I didn't feel like I fit in, like socially because I was maybe like a little too different from everyone else." She continued by explaining her experiences with Black and White students on campus:

The Black girls didn't really want to hang out with me because you know because I was not quite Black enough... but the White girls I think they just did not know how to approach me because a lot of them had come from areas where they had a lot of Black friends so they would meet me at first and they'd be oh you're just

like me because you just are little darker skinned because you seem preppy and bouncy and they get to know me and they are like oh you really do like to talk about race and things like that things that make them really uncomfortable so about halfway through my freshman year I was like this is ridiculous.

Lindsay, who had a difficult time fitting in with other Black students on campus and did not have a good experience with the Black Hole, discussed how she was able to reach a place where she finally felt comfortable with sitting in this area. Lindsay reflected on the experience and said:

It was actually half way through my freshman year, I switched roommates for various reasons and my new roommate who I'm still really close with now, she was Black, and so we would go eat together and she was perfectly comfortable sitting there and so I kind of just went with her. And I felt like I had someone to vouch for me and they'll let me stay.

I asked Lindsay what she meant when she said that she had "someone to vouch" for her and she said, "Whatever validation they were looking for I thought she could provide it for me." Having validation was an important aspect for Lindsay and that validation that she was Black enough to sit in the Black Hole provided her with an opportunity to be understood by other students on campus.

Students also shared stories of how their identity influenced their interactions with faculty and staff. Kenny relayed one particular story where he challenged a professor's use of language during a class. Kenny stated:

I've had like a couple of issues with White teachers, and I wouldn't know whether to say that me being biracial or as opposed to me being a minority affected it. I

had one instance where I ended up dropping the class; it was a seminar on American politics/history. It was in an historical context, he was discussing the Fredrick Douglass narrative, but he used the “N” word, I was offended. He was a 40 year old White teacher and I didn’t want to hear that. And I went up to him after class and asked him, me being in this class and said me being Black and if you’re going to use that word could you substitute using the “N” word for me, would that be possible? And of course he being the intellectual and academic he wanted to justify it, and he tried to compare it to photos of lynching to justify it. And I was like I understand the use of the photos, but substitute the word; you could say “N word” instead of saying it. I just feel that academics try to put it in an analytical structure and act as if nothing is offensive anymore, because they’re looking at it from this perspective.

Fiona shared a similar experience that related to a class she was taking and how her identity became an issue within the classroom.

I had a southern history class. That’s a good experience I’ll tell you about that one. I was in a southern history class and it was all about the south and I was the only Black kid in the class, everybody else was White, all White. It was one of the most interesting experiences that I have ever had here. I remember one girl...we were talking about traditions. Because the teacher asked towards the beginning “Would your parents let you marry someone of the opposite race?” and for me again the opposite race is anything because I’m mixed, so there is no opposite and so, people were like, some were like “Oh no, my parents would never let me marry somebody of the opposite race” like it was a sin, and then she asked about

religion, “Would you marry someone of the opposite religion?” and it was like “No”. So then we got into traditions of the south, so this one girl she sat in the back of class...then the teacher was like “We’ll have the last comment” and the girl was like, she said “I was raised that if I I’m walking on the sidewalk and I see a Black person on the sidewalk coming towards me, I’ll cross the street and walk on the next sidewalk”. I have never turned around so hard in my chair in my life. I was like “No she didn’t”. It’s one thing if you want to say that. I know you see me sitting here. It’s kind of like; I very much identified myself as Black especially in that class and so for her to say that, I was like “No she didn’t say that, especially in front of my face”. Like I could not even, and the teacher saw me and I was not like “good” friends with the teacher but I talked to the teacher all the time outside of class, she saw me turn around in my seat. And we talked about it later and I was like, and she was like “I know you wanted to say something, but class was over.” I was like “I can’t believe she said that”. That was a very negative, awkward moment. Like people still think like this. It’s 2008 and maybe at the time it was 2007. I was just like people are still thinking that way. It’s this whole races can’t mix, this whole cross the street when you see someone, I was floored. I was thinking it was this small little classroom and this one person just said this, but I’m sure that there are people all across the south that think that. And I was just floored. I think if I had been at any other school, I don’t know I guess it just blew my mind because it’s like a different millennium, we’ve got new stuff going on. I still see the politics of race going on, but when she said that. I was stunned.

Kenny and Fiona, who are both light skinned and could pass for another race other than Black, had negative experiences within the classroom. These examples highlight how difficult it can be for biracial students in the classroom. While Kenny and Fiona, both viewed themselves as Black or a minority, other people within the classroom may not see them as a minority or identify them as Black and thus make comments that may be offensive.

Not all of the participants had negative experiences within the classroom or with faculty members. Kyle in particular pointed out how the staff of the OMPS treated him and made him feel important. Kyle stated, “I was just in the OMPS (Office of Multicultural Programs and Services) and there a real diverse and real nice group of people to hang out with and they are reassuring to be comfortable with who you are.” Lindsay reflected on her experience with a faculty member at PuS. She stated, “I can say with one professor in particular, when she found out I was Black, I don’t want to say that it brought me favors, but she treated me a little better and took me under her wings.”

Whether negative or positive, participants in the study encountered some interactions within the classroom or with faculty members that affected their identity. These interactions contributed to the overall development of the participants’ identity and experience at their institution.

Finding and Redefining an Identity

The collegiate experiences of participants helped in defining and redefining the identity of the participants in this study. Based on the data gathered from interviews, written responses and photos, I was able to place participants within Renn’s Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity (2000). The participants in this study were similar to Renn’s

participants in that their identity was influenced by many factors. The participants' identity changed depending on the situation (Situational Identity) in which they were in. When asked at the beginning of the interviews how they identified, the responses varied from a Monoracial identity (I'm Black, I'm White, etc.) to a Multiracial identity (I'm mixed, I'm biracial) to a Multiple Monoracial identity (I'm half Black, half Asian). Throughout the course of the interviews and in reviewing the written responses from the participants, their identity would change depending on the situation described or discussed.

Jonathan recalled how his identity shifted depending on the situation. He stated, "I pick and choose, like on applications. I use it [my identity] as a tool; some people are like that's wrong, but like for applying for colleges and stuff, I'm Black. Now, I'm more likely to put biracial or stuff."

The participants' identity was changing and continuous. While one situation dictated taking on a monoracial identity, another situation warranted taking on a multiracial identity. Additionally, it was not a clear cut decision for participants on what identity to choose. Many factors, including how people asked the participants about their ethnicity, affected their decisions. Lindsay offered this explanation:

At first, I thought it was really rude. Like people I didn't even know they were "What are you?" "What do you mean, what am I?" and then people would explain to me what they were asking, either I would say mixed or if it was someone that I cared about then I would sit down and explain everything that I have going on...It really depends on the tone in which it is asked. If it's just a like "Wow" then it's

whatever no big deal, then I explain it. But if it's said with a "tone" then I either ignore them or give them a look.

Breaking Free

The third theme that emerged from the data centered on the participants' breaking free from labels, society's rules, and the boxes that so many of them are put in based on their ethnicity. Breaking free is what I considered the best way to describe the participants' thoughts on their identity. The students have used their experiences during college to define and redefine their identity. They have reached a point in their development where they are able to take a stand and state who they are as individuals.

Breaking Free from Labels

Biracial, multiracial, Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian are all labels that participants in this study have heard and also been labeled as. The students in this study have heard that they were "exotic" or different or that all mixed babies were cute. For some it was not an issue because they have dealt with the questions for such a long time. Janay shared her thoughts on being labeled by others:

People look at you like you're something exotic. They're kind of like "Oooh, you're half Black, you're half Hispanic" and I'm like "It's really not that big a deal to me." I enjoy being of mixed culture, mixed race it's not that big to me.

Courtney shared his perspective on being labeled. He stated, "I still don't like to classify stuff like that, because I figure there's no way to, I think everybody's mixed, I think if you went down everyone's lineage you'd find another race, along most people."

Anya's written reflection on her ethnicity is the best example of how difficult and complex biracial identity is. Anya wrote:

People often assume that I want my ethnic background to be a significant part of my identity. While this is often true, I am very quick to point out that my ethnic background is more complex than my skin tone, and therefore my identity is not easily summed up by any one term.

Additionally, Anya shared her viewpoint on her ethnicity and how society labeled her.

I know it's also really hard when people expect you because you are biracial I guess to just know so much about the roots that you come from um, it's just really hard when people expect you to be like really adamant about like being identified a certain way and for me it's like you can't put a label on it because I mean you can, it's just not, it's never going to stick forever.

Kyle's written response also validated the feelings of other participants in this study. He stated:

Being asked what I'm mixed with is sometimes an awkward thing for me, but I guess I'm starting to get used to it. People are curious so I guess its best if I just tell them and hopefully they will accept me for who I am as a person and not for what I look most like or who I hang out with the most.

Breaking Free from Society's Rules

Participants in this study recalled many stories about society and its role in their identity development. For some participants there was a conscious decision to not follow society's rules. One example would be interracial dating. For the participants within this study, interracial dating was not a taboo subject for them, as it was for some of their friends. They dated people from other ethnicities and did not have an issue with it. Kyle submitted this photo (Figure 9) and explanation of his views on interracial dating:



Figure 9: Holding Hands

It's kind of hard to tell, but I'm holding hands with a White girl. Dating can sometimes be an issue being biracial. Most people date within their race. Well I'm biracial, so who am I "supposed" to date? Since I've grown up and mostly been around Black people most of my friends would consider me Black, and with that said they would expect me to date Black women. If I were to date someone other than Black it would be a problem with the Black females in the school (they have actually told my brother this). Since being at PuS I have associated with an Indian girl, a Black girl, and an Asian girl. I had no problem telling my Black friends I was with a Black girl, but I haven't told them about the Indian or the Asian girl.

While Kyle had issues with sharing whom he dated with his Black friends, other participants did not have an issue sharing their dating life with their friends. Janay shared the following written response on her experiences of dating as a biracial woman:

As silly as this may sound, I was aware this week of my biracial identity because of the guys that I was attracted to. Some of my Latino friends date Black guys or are attracted to Black and Latino guys. However, my roommates and I were sitting around watching TV when one of them saw a man that she thought was very attractive. Of course, this struck up a conversation about other guys that we thought were attractive, on top of what type of guys that we were attracted to. I knew I had a certain body type that I was attracted to. However, I was shocked to discover that I was mainly attracted to guys that are mixed. My roommates were the ones that brought this to my attention as I rattled off names. They of course said that this was because of my mixed background. This just made me more aware of my biracial identity because I guess subconsciously I am attracted to men who can relate to me background wise.

Additionally, students shared stories with me on their views of race and how society views them as biracial. Kenny shared with me how society shaped his identity.

Kenny stated:

When it comes down to it in society, a majority of society is going to look at you as a Black person you're going to have similar shared experiences...and my belief as well is that we are going to be better off as a culture if we focus on our similarities more than our differences and we're willing to work and stick together.

Kenny identified as Black and that identification came from what he sees as a necessity for the minority community to "stick together." Michelle shared a similar story of her initial views on how society dictated whom she should be friends with, but as she grew

more comfortable with herself, so did her comfort level with being friends with a variety of people.

I get along with everybody. Maybe before I didn't because I wasn't comfortable with myself and because society didn't have an open door policy like "Oh yeah, you can come hang out with us even though you don't look like us or have the same features as us." Now I can get along with anybody from any ethnicity, Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American.

Breaking Free from Boxes

The box for many biracial students represents dread and questions of, "How do you identify yourself?" The participants in this study shared the same dread and uneasiness. Near the end of each interview I presented each participant a scenario and asked him or her to respond. The scenario was that each participant was presented with a sheet of paper with nothing but boxes on that sheet of paper. I then asked the participants what they would check. The responses varied from very matter-of-fact responses like Kenny who said, "I usually check Black or African American." Kenny was not the only participant who immediately identified as African American. Other participants were quick to answer African American or other or biracial. Other participants asked for clarification and more information. These participants would usually pose a question back to me. For instance, a participant asked, "Is there a multiracial box?" or "What boxes are on the paper?" I always responded with "You tell me what boxes are on the paper." Lindsay made this statement about boxes:

I think that in America, there needs to be a box that accommodates you not being one race alone, so I would check the multiracial, biracial box. If it was an old school form like White, Black, yellow, then I would say Black.

Jonathan responded with an extraracial viewpoint, by identifying most with himself above any race or ethnicity. He stated “probably, Black, White, biracial, Jonathan. I’d pick Jonathan; it all depends on what you’re trying to gauge. If you’re asking who I most identify with, I’m myself. Nowadays, I put biracial a lot more than Black. I never put White.”

The most creative response came from Anya.

[In high school] I took each circle and filled in the amount that I thought I identified with so I put half Black and like a quarter Asian American and then like I put little slivers for all the other ones. I wish you could really fill them like that because I would, but usually I fill in Black because I definitely don’t identify White, like only White. I don’t think that anyone would ever put that label on me um, and I feel like culturally that’s probably just the one I identify with well it’s not even the one that I identify with, I think that’s the box that people would put me in and so that’s usually why I bubble in that one.

No matter the response, it was clear to me that the students navigated the boxes on their own terms and conditions. For some participants the box they checked was dictated by what society thought they should check. For other participants it depended on the situation and what information was being sought.

Here's Where I am for Now

This theme represented the participants' views on their identity and college experience at this point and time. Two specific areas that came through the data focused on the evolving identity of the participants and the next generation of biracial students.

The Evolving Identity

Data from this study presented a unique and compelling picture of the identity of biracial students at PuS and UoS. The participants within this study displayed an evolving identity that mirrored the identity development theories presented by Root (1996), Torres (1999), Renn (2000), Wallace (2001) and Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002). These theorists posited that multi and biracial students shifted between borders, boxes and patterns when dealing with their identity. The data in this study supported the notion that identity development for this group of students is fluid, non-linear, complex, flexible and very personal.

Katie, who grew up with her White mother and joined a historically Black sorority, shared her view on developing her identity.

They [friends] know what I've been through to come to that conclusion and I understand that that conclusion is not right for everybody. I would never tell another biracial student, male or female, that this is what you should do. I think that's a very personal, individual like "journey" for lack of a better word that you decide you make that final decision. But for me that is absolutely right, like my mom is so important in my life, if I checked African American, that's like a slap in the face to her as if she isn't a part of me. At the same time, my father, I cannot

deny that he's half of who I am, so I would never want to deny either one of those. And I know that I'm not just Black or not just White. I check other.

Additional data was presented by Michelle in the form of pictures (Figures 10 and 11) that represented her biracial identity and how it is on a spectrum between Black and White:

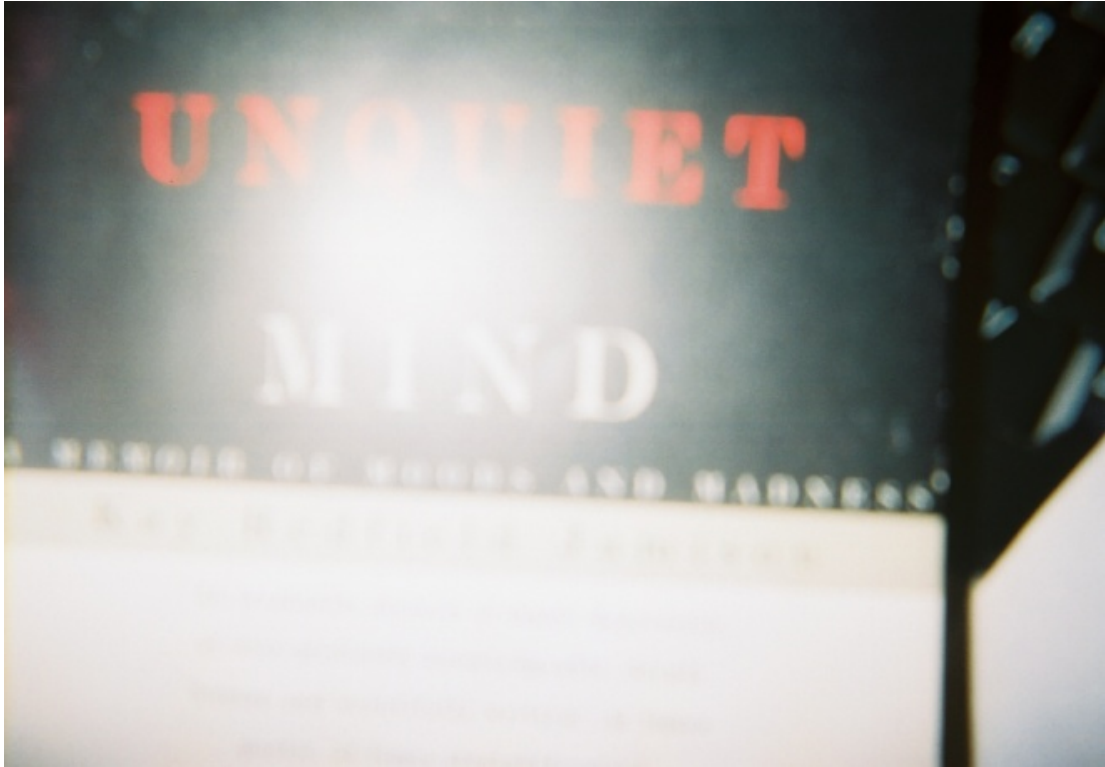


Figure 10: An Unquiet Mind

The title of the book is *Unquiet Mind* - and I feel like my mind is not quiet because I always have something to say, always defending my biracial identity. People say I'm just "Black" or "White" and I want to shout "I'M MIXED GET IT RIGHT!"



Figure 11: Camouflage

The camouflage bag has different shades of Black and White, which I feel represents the fact that I am on a spectrum of Black and Whiteness and that I'm in the "gray" area. Not totally Black and not totally White, and a fun play on words.

Katie also shared her views on identity and how it is on a spectrum for biracial students:

I think on the spectrum on the Black side and the White side, there's going to always be negative opinions about who you are, especially being biracial.

Obviously, there are Black people that don't accept you as Black, no matter what you say or do, you're not Black and vice versa for White people, but I know that some people in open discussion about what box do you check, they were like "Why would you check other? You don't even count as a statistic" or "You don't get the recognition of being Black, you might as well check Indian or Native

American.” I guess that’s the negative when your friends don’t understand where you’re coming from.

Kendrya, in one of her written responses, summed up the feelings of many biracial students and their evolving identity. She wrote, “because of being biracial, or even the fact that I’m not White, it means that because of being biracial I have kind of a handicap, in that I will always encounter people who embrace my differences and others that won’t be as accepting, that I’m still developing my opinions on being biracial, and that I will always be constantly thinking of my race when surrounded by others who aren’t like me.”

The Next Generation

Many of the participants in this study viewed their experiences as preparing the next generation of biracial students for the realities of the world. Some participants shared their hope for what the future holds for other biracial students. Michelle said, “we’re all going to be one race one day and I can’t wait. We’re all going to be green...Everyone’s mixed. You can’t deny it.” Other participants shared similar sentiments on their view of race and ethnicity for future generations. Michelle stated:

I feel like people from my cohort, my generation, people in their 20’s, born in the 80’s we have that mindset of you can be whoever you want to be and it’s fine.

But then there are people in my age group who are like “You’re dating someone of a different race, is that allowed?” And I’m like “I’m mixed. Does that matter?”

Love is love.

Janay’s statement summed up the feelings of many of the participants within the study. She stated:

I think that our generation is trying to be more diverse in bringing up the next generation in which mixed students will be looked at like as “Oh, hey” there won’t be a “What exactly are you?” It won’t be an exotic race.

For participants in the study, how they were perceived and labeled by others in society did not deter them from defining their biracial heritage. For many of the participants, the constant questions, speculation, and labels provided them with even more will power to express their ethnicity on their own terms. Additionally, the participants in this study were not fond of being labeled by others, but on some level have become used to it because they have faced them since they were younger.

The responses from Janay and Michelle are two examples of how this current generation of biracial students believes in the next generation of students to look past race and labels. As Michelle stated “we’re all mixed.”

Summary

Through the use of individual interviews, written responses, and photographs, the students in this study shared with me their experiences as biracial students attending a PWI. The students within this study entered college with a fairly strong sense of self and of their identity, however; much like biracial identity their identity shifted and changed based on the positive and negative experiences at their respective institutions.

Through the analysis of data, four themes emerged that encapsulated the experiences of the students in this study. The four themes that were addressed in this chapter included: *The Search*, *Finding a Voice*, *Breaking Free*, and *Here’s Where I am for Now*. The first theme, *The Search*, focused on the pre-collegiate experiences of the

participants and how family, friends and their environment shaped their identity prior to attending their institutions of higher education.

Finding a Voice was the second theme explored within this study and it focused on the collegiate experiences of the participants. This section focused on the circle of friends the students had on campus and how those friends impacted their identity development. It also focused on finding safe spaces on campus that encouraged their identity development. I also discussed how participants made meaning of the negative and positive experiences they faced on campus and how those experiences, coupled with their circle of friends and safe spaces on campus helped redefine their identity.

The third theme, *Breaking Free*, addressed the participants' notion of breaking free from labels, society's rules, and the boxes that seem to constrict and close in participants of this study. The final theme, *Here's Where I am for Now*, looked at the evolving identity of the participants and how many of the participants within this study viewed themselves as preparing the next generation of biracial students to be successful on college campuses.

The participants in this study provided rich, detailed descriptions of their experiences prior to attending their institution of higher education and also described through the use of pictures and written responses what those experiences meant to them as biracial individuals. The four themes provided me with a systematic way to present the data on the experiences of the participants within this study. Readers of this study must understand that for biracial students, their development is a continuous process which evolves over time, is a personal matter, and is influenced by friends, family and societal context.

The next chapter will provide more discussion on the findings of the study, as well as the implications for practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The biracial students in this study participated in a threefold experience which examined how they made meaning of their collegiate experience as it related to their identity. Through an interview process, written prompts, and photo elicitation, the twelve participants provided a generous amount of data about their experiences. Through the data analysis phase of this study, several themes emerged that spoke to the experiences of these biracial students attending PWIs in the southern United States.

This chapter will focus on my interpretation of the data and emergent themes. Additionally, sections of this chapter will focus on implications for practice, limitations to the study, and recommendations for future research.

As stated previously, I wanted to embark on this research because of my experience as a biracial student attending a PWI in the South. Growing up in a small southern town with an African American father and Asian mother, my experience was less than idyllic. I hoped for a better experience in college than the one I found during my high school years. While I loved my experience at my undergraduate institution, there were moments where I was asked, “What are you?” or was told on too many occasions that I was not “Black enough.” As an impressionable 17-year-old, I faced these situations sometimes by myself, not knowing whom to speak with or where to turn. All of those experiences led me to this point of wanting to find out what types of experience biracial students in the 21st century were having at PWIs in the South.

Analysis of Findings

Research question one focused on how biracial students at Predominantly White Institutions in the South made meaning of their collegiate experiences as related to their identity. This question was answered by examining the data from interviews, written prompts, and photographs. After analyzing the data, four themes emerged: a) the Search; b) Finding a Voice; c) Breaking Free and d) Here's Where I am for Now. These themes illustrated how complex and personal biracial student development can be.

The biracial students in this study used their experiences with family and friends to define their identity. Additionally, once they reached college their circle of friends, involvement in student organizations, and discovery of safe spaces on campus all contributed to the students' defining and redefining their biracial identity. This supported earlier work conducted by Korgen, (1998); Renn, (2000); Renn and Lunceford, (2004); Wallace, (2001, 2004) and Wardle and Cruz-Janzen, (2004). These experiences all contributed to a generally positive experience for students in this study. Additionally, participants in this study were able to define their place in society as biracial individuals and they decided what role society should or should not play in their identity choices. Overall, these students found that their identity was a complex process that started before college and has continued through college.

Research question two focused on the experiences of the students in this study and how they compared to those in Renn's study conducted in 1998. The participants in this study were similar to the participants in Renn's study in the way they identified with the Five Patterns of Multiracial Identity. Just as the participants in Renn's 1998 study, the participants in this study identified with one or more of the five patterns: a) monoracial

identity; b) multiple monoracial identity; c) multiracial identity; d) extraracial identity; or e) situational identity. As Renn pointed out in her study, students identified with one or more of the five patterns and in many cases the situation or context dictated their identification. Additionally, eight of Renn's participants identified with the extraracial identity category, where one deconstructs racial categories and chooses not to identify by any category. This study had only one participant identify with this category. The students in this study were similar to Renn's participants in that both groups of students had issues with fitting in and relied heavily on their circle of friends and families to deal with negative experiences around their identity.

The Overlap

As I started to analyze the data of the twelve participants of this study, I started to notice a trend. While each of their experiences is uniquely personal, there appeared to be a very strong sense of overlap in the experiences of the participants. Much like the biracial development theories of Root (1996), Torres (1999), Renn (2000), Wallace (2001) and Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002), I found the experiences of these participants to be complex, multilayered, continuous and personal.

One example of this overlap dealt with the participants' ethnicity. Students in this study were faced with questions from an early point in their lives that continued throughout high school and into college. Even the students who had reached a point of self actualization continued to be peppered with questions regarding their identity. Apparently the ethnicity of these students still piqued the curiosity of strangers and friends. The questions ranged from "What are you?" to "Are you mixed with something?" I found that the students in this study continued to deal with these questions

throughout their college years, and it had an impact on their experiences as biracial students. As these students moved through college, however, they were able to process the questions and adequately respond.

The data that was collected in this study supported the work of Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002). Rockquemore and Brunnsma found that socialization factors such as socioeconomic status, family composition, and social networks all played a significant role in the development of biracial student development. In this study it was quite evident that the participants were in fact influenced by their family composition, their experiences growing up, and the social networks in which they participated as youngsters. For the participants who grew up in single parent households as well as those who grew up in two parent households, the data showed that these students were significantly influenced by their family and surroundings.

Additionally, the data from this study supported the earlier work of Nishimura (1998). Nishimura's work focused on three themes: a) race is an ever present issue; b) there can be a lack of empathy from loved ones; and c) multiracial identity development is a complex process. Through the data analysis phase, I discovered that for biracial students in this study these three issues were encountered by all of them in some shape or form. One of the most important issues from Nishimura's work was that for biracial students, their first encounter with racism happened outside of the home. All of the participants in this study were able to recall stories from their childhood where they were faced with racism, which then prompted questions about their ethnicity and identity.

The following quote from Katie summed up the feelings of many of the participants in this study and provided an example of how continuous, individual, and complex the process of biracial identity is:

You can't just say that it's just the college experience. You have to look at it all. So much of it for me has to be with how I was raised and what I feel comfortable with and felt comfortable with my whole life. For me because I was raised with my White family for my whole life, I had to deliberately go towards Black culture. That didn't come natural to me and that was very difficult for me at first.

The Collegiate Experience for 21st Century Biracial Students

As Katie pointed out in the preceding quote, it's not just the college experience that shapes and defines the identity of biracial students. To fully understand their experience you have to look at the totality of their experience, where they were raised, socioeconomic status, etc. When I started this study I had many preconceived notions of what types of experiences biracial students were having on college campuses. I believed that students would have a similar experience that I had in college. When I was in college I always felt out of place and felt that I never really fit into one place or with one group of people. I had to create my own circle of friends. As I continued the interviews and reviewed the written responses and photographs it became clear to me that while there were some participants who had similar experiences as mine, on the whole the students in this study recognized their differences and generally had a positive experience in college.

The data revealed that many of the biracial students in this study were able to build friendships with a variety of students. Many had built strong relationships with African American students. This finding does not support the work of Smith and Moore

(2000), which found an extremely high percentage of alienation between biracial students and African American students. The data in this study, however, found that a majority of the students described their relationships with African American student to be reaffirming and highly beneficial. Janay, who had negative experiences with African American students in high school, recalled her experiences with African American students at UoS.

I think I found Black kids that accept me for who I am. I don't have to sound a certain way, I was always told "You speak White. No, I speak right". That whole deal. They don't care that she sounds proper, they don't care that she has light skin, and they are like the same.

For many of these participants, being biracial or a student of color on a predominantly White campus was not an issue for them. In fact, they had become accustomed to it. Most of them did not think it was a major issue because they grew up in predominantly White environments, attended predominantly White schools, and had many friends who were White. These findings do not correlate with the research conducted by Suen (1983) and Loo and Rollison (1986). Suen's research focused on the alienation of Black students attending PWIs and found that Black students felt more alienated while attending a PWI as compared to their White counterparts.

Loo and Rollison's (1986) research focused on three areas: academic satisfaction and sociocultural alienation, the sociocultural alienation of minority students and how minority students differed from White students, and the similarities and differences in the attitudes of White and ethnic minority students. Their research found that minority students were less academically prepared, which led to sociocultural alienation on

campus. Additionally, the research found that there were higher instances of sociocultural alienation among minority students attending PWIs than among White students.

The biracial students in this study had a very relaxed attitude about being biracial on campus, which was a different experience from what I had during my undergraduate career. Where race for me was an ever present issue, participants in this study did not find it to be an issue. One participant explained in his written response:

Before this, I really hadn't thought much about my racial identity (in the recent past) and this has definitely brought it towards the forefront of my mind. I tend to not even think about it because I am very comfortable with myself. It also doesn't bother me when other people notice it either. I have come to accept that I am just a little bit different from the status quo, but I have come to take it as a good thing. Being involved in this research has helped me to realize that I have come a long way personally and that I do have something very interesting and unique to offer. I am very comfortable in my own skin and I would like to think that it is beginning to show.

I was taken aback by this comment. On one hand I was so surprised that this research project was the first time that he really thought about his racial identity. Secondly, I wondered if biracial students of this day and age really do not see their ethnicity as a major issue, which would lead me to believe that attitudes have changed and these students have benefited from growing up during a time where people are judged not because of their ethnicity or race but because of their character.

Though a majority of the experiences of biracial students in this study were positive, there were some negative experiences, but the students were able to make

meaning of those negative experiences. The negative experiences of the students in this study did not seem to affect their overall experience at their institution; rather, on the whole they uniformly seemed to enjoy and cherish their college experience.

Further review of the data revealed that students in this study enjoyed their biracial identity and some relished being different. They found that they were able to explore both sides of their ethnicity during college, which they were not able to do during high school. I found that the students in this study were able to establish themselves as individuals and many did not want to be confined by society's rules or expectations. Katie expressed her sentiments on being biracial:

I love being biracial. That's a big part of me. I haven't always been at that point in my life. But now that's where I am I love it, it's the best of both worlds. And it's a blessing and makes me stronger more open minded person

While some of the participants identified by society's standards, others felt that society's views were antiquated and out of date and established their own identity and rules. These students very much wanted a normal college experience, and for many, that is exactly what they have experienced. From their views on dating to affiliating with student groups, the participants in this study made their own rules and shaped their experiences to suit their needs. They want to be normal college students. As Jonathan stated, "I'm very much a normal college student."

Implications for Practice

Student affairs professionals working on college campuses have an opportunity to educate the university community on the lives of biracial students and their unique and personal experiences. While society may say that these biracial students should be

considered African American, the data from this study suggests that this is not the case for all biracial students with one parent of African American heritage. While some students identified with a monoracial identity, other participants identified with a multiple monoracial identity, extraracial identity or a multiracial identity.

It is important for student affairs professionals to be able to understand that biracial identity is complex and, at some point and time, situational (Nishimura, 1998; Renn, 1998, 2004). Because a student looks like a certain ethnic group does not mean that he or she will identify this way (Talbot, 2008). Professionals on college campuses will need to understand the differences among individuals and not automatically assume and stereotype people based on appearance.

As the data showed, programs and services for students of color are definitely needed and can be beneficial for biracial students. Organizations like PuS' All Mixed Up provided an outlet for biracial students to explore and find comfort with their identity. All Mixed Up is a student organization specifically geared towards bi and multiracial students. This organization provided biracial students in my study a safe place to make connections with other biracial students and further develop their identity. However, this organization did not meet the needs of all the biracial students in my study. As student affairs professionals we cannot assume that one program geared towards one group of students will meet all of the needs of every student within that population. Providing student organizations for bi and multicultural students supports the work of King (2008) that stated that these organizations are "exciting additions to the college campus" (p. 39) and "that brings students of color together to talk about issues of race and ethnicity" (p. 39).

Additionally, spaces on campus need to be welcoming to all students. Student affairs professionals need to structure and provide spaces that support all students and meet their unique needs (King, 2008). This finding is line with the findings from Renn's (1998) original study, and even ten years later the importance of space on campus for students is still evident.

Student affairs professionals will need to be cognizant of the different experiences of biracial students and other students of color. While it would be easy to assume that because a student with dark skin identifies as an African American, it would be detrimental to that student and ultimately the university community to group students together without taking into consideration their individual stories and differences. These students have historically been an overlooked population on campus (Jourdan, 2006) and with the demographics of the United States changing (American Demographics, 2002), it will be imperative for student affairs professionals to be on the forefront of advocating and being a voice for this group of students.

Furthermore, student affairs professionals will need to ensure that biracial students are provided with the options and choices provided to all students. Biracial students need to be afforded choices, and, ultimately, that is what they desire in their experiences. Professionals cannot make the mistake of assuming that because a person physically looks like a certain ethnic population that that person has had the same experiences as that group of students (Talbot, 2008). More than anything, biracial students do not want to be boxed in or told where or with whom they should affiliate (Talbot, 2008).

Limitations of the Study

I was able to gather a rich amount of data from the biracial students in this study, even though I was only able to include students from two institutions. Securing a third institution to participate in this study was quite difficult and finding students to participate proved to be a harder task than originally anticipated. Although the twelve students provided informative and insightful data on their experiences, their experiences are not generalizable to all biracial students.

Another limitation of this study was the inability to thoroughly examine the Northern vs. Southern aspects of being biracial. Initially, I believed that because of the location of this study there would be evidence of challenges in being biracial in the South. While there was some discussion surrounding the experiences of being biracial in the South, not all of the participants discussed this at great length. In fact, participants attending PuS were quick to dismiss their negative experience as having to do with the South, especially since a large portion of the student body of PuS comes from other parts of the country and not specifically the South. Only a few participants at the UoS discussed being biracial as it pertains to the South. Some of the participants were able to discuss the one-drop rule and its impact on their identity development, but on the whole it did not seem to be a major factor in their development.

In reviewing the data, I noticed that the depth of responses to the questions was significantly different for those participants who were juniors or seniors as opposed to those in their sophomore year. The responses from the sophomores were not as in depth and did not provide as much rich information as other participants in the study. Perhaps their experiences, their developmental level, and the length of time at their institutions

can explain the differences in the depth of responses between the underclass and upperclass students. Additionally, the responses in the data from men and women differed slightly. I found that upperclass women in the study were able to provide responses that were richer in detail than those of the men in the study. Thus, a limitation in this study is that since the participants were from various class standings and not one gender the findings cannot be generalizable to one classification of students or to one gender.

Additionally, the research focused on the experiences of biracial students with one parent of African American heritage. The data and findings from the research cannot be generalizable to other biracial students who may have parents from different ethnic backgrounds.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study examined the lives of biracial students with one parent of African American heritage who are attending PWIs in the southern United States. While this research provided a snapshot of the lives of twelve students in 2008, there are many opportunities to expand and conduct further research to add to the growing literature on biracial and multiracial students. The following recommendations are derived from my analysis of data and where I believe there are opportunities to further explore biracial students.

One recommendation is to explore the gender differences of biracial students attending PWIs in the South. Since this study had only four male participants and there is heightened interest in exploring the lives of men in the higher education setting, it would be advantageous to include the subpopulation of biracial men in future research.

Additionally, research based on the class standings of biracial students would provide additional information on the developmental levels of students based on class standing.

Renn (1998) focused her research on three private elite institutions in the Northeast, while this study focused on one public and one private institution in the South. It would be interesting to further explore the roles of public and private institutions in the development of biracial students. While both institutions in this study were predominantly White, exploring the type of institution would be useful for professionals who work with biracial students.

Being biracial in 2008 is very different than it was even 10 years ago. The students in this study seemed to be more comfortable with their identity than I remember ever being comfortable. I believe that the students in this study have been exposed to images and role models that outwardly identify as biracial which make it easier for them to adjust and be more comfortable with their identity. I believe the media may have a significant role in the comfort level of these students. A study exploring the media's impact on biracial student development would be one more piece in an already complex puzzle.

In 1998, Renn recommended further study of students of different ethnic combinations to add to the growing literature on biracial students. Based on this study and other literature on this topic, further examination of other racial combinations of biracial students is still needed and warranted.

Conclusion

Overall, I found that students in this study have had generally positive experiences at their respective institutions. Even when some of the students experienced

negative experiences, they were able to deconstruct those negative experiences in a positive manner and move on and not let that one experience taint their entire collegiate experience. In general, the students that participated in this study were more relaxed in their attitudes about being biracial in this day and age. One participant remarked that this was the first time he had really thought about his ethnicity as a biracial individual, it was a moment for me to reflect and to try to envision what it is like being a biracial student during the 21st century.

Additionally, I found that the students in this study used their experiences during college to explore one or both sides of their ethnicity. For some, it reinforced their belief in identifying with a monoracial identity and for others it provided them an opportunity to identify within a multiracial identity. For all of the participants their identity was sometimes based on the social context of a situation, which supports the earlier work of Renn (1998, 2000), Root (1996) and Wallace (2001).

The findings in this study reinforced my belief that biracial identity is a continuous, complicated, complex and personal process. While there were common themes among the participants, each person had a different type of experience as it related to their identity. As a researcher and professional within student affairs it reminded me of the importance of looking at each person as an individual. And though a student may physically look like a certain ethnic group, I have to remember that each student is different and I cannot generalize or stereotype one person with one specific group.

This study has provided useful information for student affairs professionals and has added to the growing literature on biracial students. There is much work to be done in

this area of student development as race continues to be a subject that is discussed, dissected, and sometimes overanalyzed and overlooked. As the United States has just elected a biracial man as the President of this nation, one could say that race does not matter. However, as the population of this nation continues to evolve and become more jumbled, it is imperative for the professionals working with college students to have a firm grasp of what types of students are attending our institutions and how we can better serve their needs.

Finally, as I was conducting research for this study I came across a poem on a website devoted to biracial individuals. The author of the following poem is unknown; however, I felt that this poem illustrated the feelings of many of the biracial students who participated in this study.

One piece of the puzzle, but the piece doesn't fit. People always wondering "What box is it from?" "If we paint it a lighter color and force it in place with all of their might, No one will know the difference." They'll make that piece fit in right.

One piece of the puzzle, but the puzzle doesn't match. Too many sharp edges, not enough smooth curves. Too much blue in a sea of red and white. Always half missing, not enough to fill the space. "It didn't come with the box. Just set it aside." They won't let this piece fit in right.

One piece of the puzzle, left forgotten on the floor. Picked up by too many hands, The edges worn and frayed. Too many tumbles to the floor. And stepped on accidentally too many times by too many feet. Somewhere there's a puzzle with a part missing. That needs this piece to be complete. (Anonymous, n.d.)

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APPENDIX A

Student Solicitation Email

Dear Student,

My name is Willie L. Banks, Jr. and I am a PhD. candidate in the College Student Affairs Administration program at the University of Georgia. As part of my requirements for graduation I will be conducting a study entitled "How the Experiences of Biracial Students at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South Affect their Identity". This study is under the direction of Dr. Diane L. Cooper in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia (706-542-1812).

Participation in this study is voluntary and as a participant you can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. You can ask to have all of the information about you returned, removed from the research records, or destroyed. As a participant you will be contributing information and knowledge to the areas of racial identity, minorities at PWIs, program development and student retention.

Additionally, this study hopes to provide useful information to college and university personnel on minority program development and biracial student development.

The study will consist of three parts: 1) an individual interview; 2) written responses and 3) a photography project. The interview and your participation in the study will be confidential. Interviews will be tape recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

If you are willing to participate please email at willieb@uga.edu at your earliest convenience to schedule an individual meeting. I will be visiting your school on _____ and _____ and would like to set up an interview at that time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Willie L. Banks, Jr.
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled “Biracial Student Voices: Experiences at Predominantly White Institutions” conducted by Willie L. Banks, Jr. from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia (706-207-8406) under the direction of Dr. Diane L. Cooper, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, University of Georgia (706-542-1812). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed. As a participant I will be contributing information and knowledge to the areas of racial identity, minorities at PWIs, program development and student retention. Additionally, this study hopes to provide useful information to college and university personnel on minority program development and biracial student development.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the experiences of self-identified biracial students, with one parent of African American heritage enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South, affect their identity.

There are no foreseen risks involved in participating in this project and my participation is voluntary.

An interview will be conducted focusing on my experiences at a PWI in the South as a biracial student, and how those experiences influence my identity. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and will be audio taped and later transcribed. I will be assigned a pseudonym for the interview process and for transcription purposes. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. I will have access to a transcript of the interview at all times and will be given the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy and to make corrections. The taped interviews will be destroyed one year after interviews are completed. Information about me or provided by me during the research, will not be shared with others without my written permission. I will also be asked to complete written responses to two prompts given to me by the researcher.

Additionally, I will be asked to participate in a photo elicitation project and a focus group. The photo elicitation project will involve me taking pictures of places, objects or things that affect my identity as a biracial student attending a predominantly white institution. I have been instructed to not take pictures of the people in my photographs, as they have not consented to participate in this study and may endanger the confidential

nature of this study. I have been given a time frame of one week to take pictures of my environment and to return the camera in the prepaid postage envelope provided to me by the researcher.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Willie L. Banks, Jr.
706-207-8406
willieb@uga.edu

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

“Biracial Student Voices: Experiences at Predominantly White Institutions”

Participant Information

Please complete the following information. To maintain confidentiality of participants, the following information will be kept separate from other study data in a secure location.

Name: _____ Year of Graduation: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Chosen pseudonym: _____

☐ I would like a summary of the final results of this research. An electronic copy will be sent after completion of the entire study.

Renn, (1998)

APPENDIX D

Individual Interview Protocol

Introduction

- welcome participant and introduce myself
- describe the study and its purpose
- present consent form and information form to participant for approval and signatures
- ask for permission to tape record the interview
- begin the interview by turning on the recorder and stating the date, time and pseudonym of participant

Background Information:

1. Tell me about your background and where you were raised?
2. Describe your family situation?
3. Why did you decide to attend this institution?
4. How do you describe yourself?

Experience at a PWI:

5. Describe your experiences since you have been at this institution.
6. How have those experiences influenced your racial identity?
7. How have those experiences influenced your relationships to other students, faculty and staff?
8. Are there other things you would like to share with me regarding your experiences as a biracial student at this institution?

Closing

- review the steps of the study
- inform participant about member checking the transcript
- thank the student for participating in the study

Renn, (1998)

APPENDIX E

Directions for Written Prompt

Please write a 1 to 2 page response to each of the following prompts. Your writing need not to be formal and should not consume excessive amounts of your time and energy. Feel free to be as brief or as lengthy as you like and to use whatever writing style is most comfortable for you.

Prompt A: First, describe something that happened to you in the past few days that related to your racial/ethnic identity. Then, tell me what the incident meant to you.

Prompt B: Write about a time since you came to _____ that you were aware of being biracial. Again, please tell me what the situation meant to you.

Please return your response to me by email to willieb@uga.edu. Thank you again for your participation.

Renn, (1998)

APPENDIX F

Directions for Photo Elicitation

The photo elicitation project will involve me taking pictures of places, objects or things that affect my identity as a biracial student attending a predominantly White institution. Please **do not** take pictures of people, as they have not consented to participate in this study and may endanger the confidential nature of this study. Pictures will be developed and included within the text of this study. The pictures will be kept for up to a year for research purposes and will then be destroyed, along with the negatives, after a year after the research study.

Take this camera and for the next week take pictures of your environment, life and day to day happenings that affect your life as a biracial student on your campus. After taking each picture think of why this image is important to you and how does it define your identity. Here are some extra instructions:

- This is your camera. Please keep it out of the sun.
- You will have one week (7 days) to complete this part of the study.
- Please return the camera to me in the prepaid envelope provided.
- After I develop the pictures I will email the pictures to you and ask you to provide explanations for each photograph.
- Please call (706-207-8406) or email (willieb@uga.edu) me with any questions
- Have fun!