IMPACT OF COLORISM: NARRATIVES OF BLACK/WHITE BIRACIAL WOMEN'S

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

SHAUNA HEMINGWAY HARRIS

(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

Utilizing a qualitative research approach, this research study sought to understand how colorism impacted identity negotiation of Black/White biracial females at predominately White institutions. Particular attention focused on peer groups and spaces on campus to provide further insight into how identity and sense of self were impacted. The following research questions guided this study:

1) How does colorism influence identity choice within the college setting?

2) How do Black/White biracial women negotiate their racial identities within the campus community?

3) What formal and informal support systems exist for Black/White biracial women at a predominately White institution?

Eleven college women ranging from the ages of 18-21 participated in this study from three predominately White institutions located in the southeastern region of the United States. Semi-structured interviews, a photo elicitation assignment and memo-writing were used as data collection methods to construct narratives outlining the participants' experiences. Five themes generated from the data: (a) impact of colorism on identity choice; (b) skin tone discrimination

through oppressive behavior; (c) identification through presentation; (d) validation of identity on campus; and e) impact of institutional climate.

The findings of this study suggest colorism is still a relevant topic, particularly for the experiences of racially-mixed women with a Black/White racial heritage. It is important for professionals to understand the factors impacting the experiences of Black/White biracial women, and how higher education institutions can meet the needs of this population. One way is to provide inclusive environments on campus through programmatic and service efforts. Secondly, collaborate with academic affairs to better create opportunities in the academic and co-curricular setting to engage in discourse about colorism and its influence on society. Additionally, conducting climate assessments around race and diversity can inform how campuses program and provide services for racially-mixed students. Revisiting multicultural educational training of staff and students in order to provide staff with the knowledge and tools to be cultural competent with working with multiracial students. Finally, theoretical models centered on multiracial identity development need to be revisited to provide current literature on how individuals come to a healthy sense of identity.

INDEX WORDS:     Colorism, Biracial College Women, Identity Negotiation, Predominantly
                 White Institutions, Narrative Analysis, Support Systems

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M.Ed., The University of South Carolina, 2007

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GA

2013

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August 2013

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my number one cheerleader; my mother, Linda Hemingway. Words cannot express how grateful I am to have you as my mother. God blessed me with such a wonderful and giving person. Your unconditional love and support throughout my life has been one of the greatest gifts I could have ever received. You believed in me, you challenged me, you cried with me, you laughed with me, and you cheered with me. Thank you for reminding me that no one can measure my tenacity. I love you always.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." ~Colossians 3:17*

I must first give thanks to my Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ. With him, I would not have made it through this journey called life. Thank you for providing protection, strength and wisdom to me.

My family has been the greatest support to me throughout this process. I cannot thank them enough for their love, prayers and encouraging words. To my grandmother, Louise Hemingway. Thank you for your unconditional love and prayers. You have been a solid rock to me, and I love you dearly for teaching me how to rely on God. "Baby, remember to take God wherever you go." Those words have remained with me at each stage of my life. To my husband, Jonathan Harris, God truly blessed me when he brought you into my life. Thank you for your love and support. Thank you for the Starbucks date to help me focus on "Queen D." Thank you for reminding me how far I have come. You truly are my best friend. To the man who loved me as his own. Who taught me to tie my shoes and ride my bike and danced with me at my wedding. Nathaniel Jordan, you are the best father I could have ever imagined. To Tony, Carolyn and Anthony Harris, thank you for welcoming into your hearts. Your prayers and love have definitely been a blessing. To Riley, thank you for staying up with me and keeping me company as I worked on this paper. To my late grandfather, Covel Hemingway, thank you for all you did to provide a loving home for me. I know you were with me every step of the way as you watched from above. I love you all!

Writing this dissertation has been one of the most rewarding and the most challenging. My committee members provided support and feedback and encouraged me to "get 'er done." To Dr. Diane Cooper, thank you for your support, your feedback and wisdom. I am truly grateful to have had you as my major professor. To Dr. Merrily Dunn, thank you for the talks and providing advice to me throughout my doctoral journey. To Dr. Roulston, thank you for serving as my methodologist, and helping me to make my research study stronger. Last, but not least, to Dr. Willie Banks. Thank you for continuing to serve on my committee from afar and providing encouraging words and feedback throughout this process. You all were a phenomenal team!

To the "Get Along Gang," Tamara Burke and Anthony Johnson, thank you for being such amazing friends. Tamara, thank you for listening and providing me with some amazing baked goods. I needed that sugary energy to keep me awake. Anthony, thank you for your prayers and advice. You both have been a blessing in my life.

To my sister circle who provided words of wisdom and support throughout this journey, I love you all. To Tiffany Davis, thank you for your texts, calls and tweets and reminding me to "keep swimming." To Adelma Stanford, thank you for being such a lovely sorority sister. I am truly blessed to have you in my life. To Tonya Baker, we made it! From the woods to coffee shop, we kept going until the end. To Cynthia Polk-Johnson and Erin Saddler, thank you for the calls and text. I appreciate you checking in and providing support. To Jessica Harris and Kia Gentles, who I have known since our days at Clemson, words cannot express how much you both mean to me. To Angela Jewell, thank you for your prayers and helping to keep me afloat. To Crystal Harvin and Krystal Walton, thank you for your calls and prayers from afar.

Finally, to three people who taught me the value of learning about the past and challenging me to critically think throughout my writing.  To Ms. Vivian Edwards, thank you for serving as my A.P. History teacher and challenging me to think beyond memorization.  To Dr. Henry Louis Suggs, thank you being such an inspirational professor and encouraging me to believe in my dreams.  To Dr. Paul Anderson, thank you for being such a great professor, and providing encouragement to me after I left your classroom. I have so much gratitude in my heart for you all!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

**My Story**

*What are you? What do your parents look like? Why is your hair so long? Are you Black? Are you White? Your skin is too light to be Black and too dark to be White, so what are you? These were questions I was asked over the years from my peers and even members from my extended family, but even at twenty-seven, I was still being asked questions like this and wondered when I would ever not have to answer those questions.*

*As I sat in the coffee shop working on my first assignment for my doctoral program, I reflected on my life. For the first time, I started to write my thoughts down on what it meant to be a biracial woman. I had thought about my racial identity before in my master's program as we discussed identity development theory, and one day I confided in a co-worker about some of the experiences I had growing up. It was at that moment in the coffee shop that I realized I wanted to tell a story; a story not only about me, but people like me.*

*As I reflected on my childhood and early adult years, I realized how cultural influences and people shaped my identity into being a Black woman. I grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood, attended a predominantly Black church, and associated with people who identified as Black. All these factors influenced how I thought, spoke, and behaved; however, one thing had always been missing, which I had never realized until I began writing my thoughts down in the coffee shop: I had never acknowledged my White racial heritage.*

*I wrote down my experiences growing up as a child, and remembered having feelings of not fitting in and isolation. I was faced with the aforementioned questions about my skin complexion, hair, and family because I did not look like other Black or White children in my school. My skin complexion was light, so light the children of color thought I was White, but the White children noticed the hint of color in my skin and knew I was not one of them. My nose was slender and my hair was long and dark brown. The children would always want to touch my hair and ask questions about why I looked the way I did and that I could not be one of them. I would ask my mother why were people so nosy and mean.*

*At a young age, my mother explained to me that I was both Black and White; I was biracial. My mother would constantly remind me of how beautiful I was and that it did not matter what people said. She said that God created me just the way He wanted me to be. I had a special relationship with my mother; something words could never describe. She was my cheerleader, confidante, mentor and best friend. I could be myself within the comfort of her love and home, even when the outside world was not as tolerating.*

*While I felt more comfortable with the Black culture due to my upbringing in the Black community and church, I also felt isolated during my adolescence and early adult years. I was called "high yella," "half-breed," and "red baby." At times, I would interact with women who had a dark skin complexion and would be surrounded with conversations on how "good" my hair was or how light-skinned women always "had it better" when trying to get jobs or relationships. I often thought, "What is good hair?". There were plenty of mornings I struggled to comb through my long hair or fought to get it to lay down without frizzles flying up from the top of my head. Not only did I experience interactions such as these from the Black community, but the White community also treated me differently. I dealt with more subtle discriminatory*

*behavior from the White community. I distinctly remember being told by a White peer in high school that I must have been accepted into my top college choice through affirmative action and Black people always received preferential treatment when it came to the college admissions process. I immediately lashed back saying it was my intellect and hard work in honors classes. Experiences like those often left me conflicted because I was both Black and White, and I felt like I was never "enough" in the eyes of the Black or White communities.*

*I never voiced my feelings of isolation, and I carried my hurt into college. When I stepped onto campus for the first time, I imagined all the new people I would meet. I envisioned not being forced to legitimize my identity and truly embrace both racial heritages. I thought to myself, college is where individuals become more aware of different ideas, beliefs, values and racial backgrounds, but what I quickly found out was that attending college presented different experiences of isolation.*

*As I continued to write my thoughts down, I reflected more on my college experiences. I remembered being the only person of color in a room full of white students who often would not speak, and when they did, it was because they inquired about music, movies or clothing styles they thought I would relate to. I began to gravitate to what was familiar, which was the Black culture. I surrounded myself with people and cultural organizations consisting primarily of Black people. I went to the Black student programs and continued to attend predominantly Black churches. I listened to rhythm and blues, hip-hop and jazz. Connecting to the Black culture on campus was comforting, and I identified as a Black woman. However, I still had not dealt with my internal struggle of being biracial, nor had I dealt with skin-tone discrimination.*

*I continued to write about the years after college. I had joined a historically Black sorority, and the Black Alumni organization; however, I realized there were still lingering*

*feelings of isolation. I had established some meaningful relationships with both White and Black people. Nevertheless, during lunch one day with one of my friends, something happened that caused me to re-evaluate my identity and relationships with others. I was sitting down having lunch one day listening to my friend discuss a new relationship with a guy she met. My friend was describing his physique and how fun he was to be around, but she said something that caused a hurt I had not felt since high school. She said, "I am not sure if I can date him. He is way too light. He is a 'light bright.'" I thought to myself, how could she say those words. His complexion was light, but seriously, a light bright? His complexion was darker than mine. Is that how she felt about lighter-skinned people? Was my friend covertly being discriminatory against individuals with a lighter complexion? I sat at the table not knowing what to say or how to react. I was in total shock. Someone I considered a confidante and friend made me feel uncomfortable, and I was at a loss for words.*

*Flash forward to the coffee shop. I placed my pen down and stopped writing. I listened to the music softly playing, inhaled the fresh aroma of coffee being ground and observed the people sitting having conversations, reading or just sitting enjoying their cup of Joe. I found myself in deep thought staring back at my notes and looking at my light skin reflecting in a distant mirror on the wall. At 27 years old, I realized I would never fit neatly into any racial categorization society prescribed. To many, I was a light-skinned Black woman. To others, I was Latina, or mixed with something. I felt called to do something, but I was not sure what to do. People would still have misconceptions and stereotype biracial people if I did not seek to educate them, but what would I say and how would I say it? People would still say derogatory names like "half-breed," "mixed-breed," "high yella," and "light bright" if I did not educate them on how these names are perceived as negative by biracial people. No longer would I*

*tolerate comments and names that were discriminatory. No longer would I allow people to say, "Girl, you know you are Black, deal with it." I would not let others define my identity. I was proud of whom I was, but deep inside, I wondered the reasons I never felt comfortable expressing my true self. The candle had been lit and my path was now illuminated to take me on a journey of self-exploration and research into the minds and experiences with identity negotiation and colorism of other biracial individuals.*

## Being Racially-Mixed in Today's Society

In a society where race is socially constructed to fit within prescribed categories, it is often difficult for biracial individuals to claim an identity because they do not fit neatly within the categorical box (Williams, 1999). Individuals from racially-mixed backgrounds often feel invisible or forgotten, and many are grouped into racial categories set forth by society (Hemingway, 2010). According to the 2010 U.S. Census data, nine million people identified with more than one racial group. This number means that the multiracial population in the United States is the most racially diverse it has ever been (Cheng & Lee, 2009).

This growing multiracial population is enrolling in institutions of higher education and has become more "visible and vocal as a group" (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012, p. 524) on college campuses (Roberts, 2003; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012). As more students from racially-mixed backgrounds enter the collegiate setting and become involved in student organizations, services and programs, there is a need for research to continue to be done on this population of students on college campuses (Wong & Buckner, 2008; Banks, 2008). Previous research on monoracial groups and their experiences within the collegiate environment is strong; however, there is

insufficient data on the experiences of biracial women attending predominantly White institutions (PWI).

Experiences for biracial students attending PWIs can be challenging as they transition to college and seek out social relationships and supportive spaces on campus (King, 2008). Biracial students often feel isolated and lonely, and are more likely to encounter disapproval and discrimination from society, particularly monoracial groups who often pressure biracial students to identify with a particular racial group (Cheng & Lee, 2009; Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008). Stepping onto a college campus that is likely to have student organizations and programs focused on historically underrepresented groups identifying with one racial heritage can be challenging for these students because there is not a comfortable space for them to engage with other biracial students (Museus, Yee, & Lambe, 2011). Additionally, individuals from racially-mixed backgrounds are often misrepresented, misunderstood and incorrectly categorized by faculty, staff and peers, which adds to feelings of isolation on campus (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012).

Biracial students are often challenged with comprehending their own identity and face pressures by their monoracial peers to conform and behave in ways reflective of one particular racial group (Hemingway, 2010). Biracial students on campus are often challenged by monoracial groups to legitimize their racial background, and face defining and redefining their identity throughout college (King, 2008; Renn, 2003). This population of students often feels pressured to fit into a racial categorization because society sees them as being of a particular monoracial group based on certain physical characteristics. Studies have also indicated biracial women are more prone than men to have their identity challenged by individuals from one racial group (Basu, 2007).

Researchers studying biracial student development propose that many biracial students feel monoracial groups do not acknowledge them on campus, which makes it challenging for biracial students to develop and integrate into the campus environment because their biracial identity is not readily obvious (Hemingway, 2010; Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008). Researchers have also concluded that many colleges and universities formulate assumptions about a person's identity based on their phenotype, which are the racial and/or ethnic features externally visible to society (Nishimura, 1998; Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; Hemingway, 2010).

As biracial students integrate into the campus environment, they often negotiate and validate their identity to fit within the culture and look for supportive environments to express their identities (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; King, 2011). However, many colleges and universities are not equipped with staff or have programs or spaces where these students can congregate. Such shortfalls can lead to negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and resentment because of students' discomfort to claim and display features of their racial identity (King, 2008; Stewart, 2008). These emotions are often stronger for biracial women who have historically been categorized into particular racial groups based on their physical characteristics and have been stigmatized by White and non-White groups (Storrs, 1999). Colorism, which is discriminatory behavior by people of color towards other people of color based on one's skin complexion, also impacts biracial students' identity negotiation, especially biracial females of a lighter complexion who feel they do not fit in with the monoracial communities of color (Kilson, 2001). Furthermore, skin tone stratification continues to affect biracial women, specifically those identifying as Black and White because of their external appearance (Rockquemore, 2002).

Racial discourse is a topic that continues to cause much debate in the United States (Banks, 2008). Racism and prejudice still exist and are a concern of many biracial and

multiracial individuals on campus (Museus, Yee, & Lambe, 2011). Colorism is also prevalent on campuses as physical differences are negotiated to indicate identification within group associations (Rockquemore, 2002). The literature on "college student culture depicts a dichotomous view of campus race relations" (Renn, 2004, p. 85), and college educators have a responsibility to acknowledge and support biracial students by fostering inclusive environments that allow them to fully integrate within the campus community (Museus, Yee, & Lambe, 2011).

Throughout U.S. history, children of racially-mixed groups have encountered societal degradation, and have faced more challenges being a biracial individual in the South (Korgen, 1998). Racial mixing, once known as miscegenation, has occurred in the United States since the institution of slavery (Khanna, 2011). "During the slave era, Southerners perceived race mixing even more harshly than that of their Northern counterparts" (Khanna, 2011, p. 27) fearing Black slaves would taint the purity of the White race (Khanna, 2011; Davis, 2001). As time progressed, laws such as the hypo-descent policy referred to as the "one-drop rule" were created to legally categorized and distinguish Blacks versus Whites (Davis, 2001). After the Civil War, Southerners sought new efforts to keep the color line between Blacks and White intact through Jim Crow segregation, which was based on *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a 1896 case that established the doctrine of separate but equal (Khanna, 2011; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). It was not until the landmark Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) that miscegenation laws were overturned, ending race-based legal restrictions on marriage (Chapmun-Huls, 2009).

The one-drop rule is still prevalent among racial discourse today (Banks, 2008). Society has continued to use the one-drop rule to categorized biracial individuals, even identifying President Barack Obama as the first Black president, even though he is biracial and has never denied he has a White mother and an African father (Chapmun-Huls, 2009). This use of the one-

drop rule presents hosts of challenges for biracial individuals, especially biracial women who have parents from both Black and White heritages (Korgen, 1998). These biracial individuals negotiate and seek to validate their identity within a society that continues to categorize them based on historical racial constructs (Williams, 1999). These challenges are more prevalent in the South, an area that has continued to struggle in the direction of advancing race relations (Banks, 2008).

Colorism continues to be an issue in the United States (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Colorism is a distinct phenomenon from race in that different color hues result in societal racial classification of individuals based on one's skin complexion (Hunter, 2007; Jones, 2000). Colorism is a concept that suggests that people of color evaluate and discriminate among other individuals of color, and centers on the premise of skin complexion (Kilson, 2001). Similar to racism, color differences are often used as a basis of discrimination (Jones, 2000). Like the one-drop rule, colorism's roots in the United States can be linked to slavery with the intermixing of White slave owners and Black slave women (Hunter, 2007; Rockquemore, 2002; Quiros & Araujo-Dawson, 2013). Over time, preferential treatment was given to slaves who had a lighter skin complexion over those who with a darker skin tone, which created generations of tension within the Black community (Rockquemore, 2002; Kilson, 2001; Hunter, 2007; Quiros & Araujo-Dawson, 2013). Individuals with a darker complexion symbolized a lower status and were treated more severely than their lighter counterparts (Rockquemore, 2002). Biracial individuals were caught between the dichotomous race divide during and after slavery due to their ambiguous phenotype, and throughout generations, people from racial mixed backgrounds continue to face challenges associated with identity negotiation and skin tone discrimination depending on their skin complexion (Quiros & Araujo-Dawson, 2013).

Examining the experiences of how biracial women on campuses choose to identify due to the influence of colorism on their identity and what additional factors influence their identity negotiation is imperative for higher education educators to understand because of needs such as connectedness to the campus culture and environment, social development and the ability to discuss and display a positive self-image of their identity (Renn, 2004; Tatum, 1997; Strange & Banning, 2001). Understanding colorism and identity negotiation will also help campuses better understand the complexities of colorism, skin color stratification, and racial discrimination within the social contexts of society and within the college community (Hunter, 2007; Quiros & Araujo-Dawson, 2013). Furthermore, understanding these students' experiences and examining how they negotiate their identity on campus is important for practitioners who work with these individuals "struggling to feel accepted in a society in which their culture is not the mainstream one" (Jourdan, 2006, p. 328).

## Statement of the Problem

The population of people identifying as biracial in the United States has vastly grown, and the number of biracial students attending college has increased (Wong & Buckner, 2008). Although research on biracial students has been helpful in understanding some of the unique characteristics of this population, there is still a lack of literature on the influence of colorism within the multiracial community, particularly on the experiences of Black/White biracial women attending PWIs in the South. Biracial women with a racially-mixed background of both Black and White racial heritages face varying challenges of integrating two cultures while trying to establish a sense of belonging (Bettez, 2010; Rockquemore, 2002). Additionally, these women face different challenges than other racially-mixed individuals due to the historical nature

of race relations in the South (Khanna, 2011). Understanding the impact of colorism on the identity negotiation Black/White biracial women is an important issue to examine and will educate student affairs professionals about the needs of this population within the campus community. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine how Black/White biracial women navigated the campus community through negotiation of their identity at predominantly White institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. Particular attention focused on the influence of colorism on identity for Black/White biracial women. Peer groups and spaces on campus were also studied to provide further insight into how identity and sense of self were impacted.

### Research Questions and Methodology

The following research questions were developed:

1)  How does colorism influence identity choice within the college setting?

2)  How do Black/White biracial women negotiate their racial identities within the campus community?

3)  What formal and informal support systems exist for Black/White biracial women at predominantly White institutions?

This study was conducted using a narrative analysis research approach. Narrative analysis considers stories about specific experiences as the unit of study (Merriam, 2002). According to Merriam (2002), the key to narrative analysis is the personal accounts of experiences as data. Capturing the stories of biracial college women provided in-depth insight into how they perceived the influence of colorism on their identity choice, and how they made meaning of their identity negotiation on campus. Furthermore, the stories outlined how each

woman navigated the campus for support systems and what perceptions the women had about how others on campus perceived their biracial identity.

Eleven Black/White biracial women from three PWIs in the southeastern region of the United States were selected for interviews.  Participants had to have a parent of White racial heritage and one parent of Black racial heritage.  Data collection methods for this research study included semi-structured interviews, a photo-elicitation component and memo-writing.  The interviews were designed to uncover how Black/White biracial women conceptualized colorism on their identity choice, and how they negotiated their identity choices within the campus setting. Interviews were conducted in two phases.  The first interview involved in-depth storied accounts of the participants' experiences with colorism and identity negotiation as a Black/White biracial woman.  The second interview focused on examining photos that were taken by each participant and discussing their reflective summaries.  Memo-writing was also used throughout the data collection and analysis process.

**Significance of the Study**

Biracial individuals are constantly interrogated about their racial heritage and often look for ways to validate their identity, which can lead to loneliness, frustration, and resentment of their own identity (Poston, 1990; Hemingway, 2010).  Such factors can influence the college experience for biracial students attending PWIs (Renn, 2004).  It is important for higher education institutions to understand and acknowledge the increasing population of biracial students on their campus and understand what happens to this population when they encounter the campus environment that perpetuates racial polarization (King, 2011; Renn, 2004). Particularly understanding how colorism impacts the experiences of Black/White biracial women

and how they negotiate their identity on campus will provide higher education professionals knowledge about how colorism manifests itself within the larger context of racial discrimination on a day-to-day basis (Hunter, 2007). Higher education leaders must ensure that the needs of this population are addressed through racial discourse among faculty, staff and students, student programs, and services (Renn, 2008; Museus, Yee, & Lamb, 2011). Through awareness and understanding, educators will be able to better assist biracial students with transitioning and integrating within the campus community.

## Theoretical Framework

Two biracial identity development models were used to provide a theoretical understanding of how racially-mixed individuals come to a sense of awareness about their racial identity. Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) stage model outlined how personal, societal, and environmental factors influence the developmental process for biracial individuals. This model recognizes the circumstances and resolution of self-concept for biracial people. The six stages include the following:

1) Pre-school: Biracial individual becomes aware of race at an early age due to the child's immediate social group, and the child recognizes differences and similarities of physical appearances;

2) Entry to School: Biracial individual has greater contact with social groups in school, and their sense of self is challenged through limited social communities of family and peers; may be asked to identify themselves according to a monoracial identity classification;

3) Pre-adolescence: Biracial individual experiences an increased awareness of social meanings attributed to skin complexion, ethnicity, phenotype, language and culture; awareness of difference between the parents becomes known;

4) Adolescence: Biracial individual is faced with societal pressures to identify with one social group, which may be strengthened by the expectations with the racial group of a parent of color;

5) College/Young Adulthood: Biracial individual continues to experience immersion or rejection in a monoracial group accompanied by a critical consciousness of the contexts in which race-related comments are made; advantages and disadvantages of being biracial become more distinct; and

6) Adulthood: Biracial identity is perceived as a lifelong process and the individual continues to explore biracial identity throughout their life; has an interest in race and culture including self-definitions of racial and cultural identities, which can be adjusted to various situations.

The Kerwin-Ponterotto Model (1995) provided a foundation to better understand identity negotiation and validation of biracial women with one Black parent and one White parent.

Renn (2004) has emerged as a leading scholar on individuals from racially-mixed backgrounds within the college setting. Her research on the notion of space and interaction of multiracial college students with their peers, their involvement with campus organizations and activities, and their academic work provided a framework for understanding how biracial women navigate and integrate into the campus community while constructing and reconstructing their identity. The patterns include the following:

1) Monoracial Identity: Individuals identify with one race;

2) Multiple Monoracial Identity: Individuals identify with more than one race;

3) Multiracial Identity: Individuals identify as biracial or multiracial;

4) Extra-Racial Identity: Individuals identify with no racial categories; and

5) Situational Identity: Individuals identify based on the situation.

Colorism was incorporated as a conceptual framework to further examine how skin complexion or phenotypical differences influenced racial identity choice and negotiation within the biracial women.

Wilder's (2008) grounded theory research study focused on the experiences of Black women. Her findings presented a starting theoretical framework to better understand colorism in

the 21st Century, and coined the term *everyday colorism*. This idea of everyday colorism was incorporated to understand how colorism influenced the daily lives of Black/White biracial women, and their sense of self in terms of identity choice and identity negotiation. Wilder (2008) suggested that everyday colorism is comprised of the following three elements:

1) Language: The everyday terminology and method of meaning attached to skin tone;

2) Internal Scripts: The socially constructed concepts, expectations, feelings and views women carry with them about skin tone; and

3) External Practices: The everyday mannerisms and actions enacted by women towards themselves and others built on their internalized beliefs about skin tone.

**Definition of Terms**

Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, and Love (1997) defined race as a social construct invented to artificially divide individuals into separate groups based on characteristics such as skin tone, ancestral heritage, ethnic classification, cultural affiliation, and cultural history. Despite the physical differences, all humans are similar in that they share 99.9 percent of their genetic material; therefore, racial categories are socially constructed (Khanna, 2011). The terms Black, White, biracial, multiracial and monoracial are used as socially constructed terms individuals use to define their racial heritage (Khanna, 2011). Additionally, the following definitions are included to enhance the understanding of this research study. Biracial and multiracial are used interchangeably throughout this study.

*Black* – Black refers to persons "with any black African lineage" (Khanna, 2011, p. 5).

*Monoracial* – Monoracial refers to persons who "claim a single racial heritage"

(Root, 1996, p. x).

*Biracial* – Biracial refers to first-generation offspring "whose parents are of two different socially designated racial groups" (Root, 1996, ix; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

*Multiracial* – Multiracial is a term referring to persons "who are of two or more racial heritages" (Root, 1996, p. xi; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

*Predominantly White Institution* – Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is defined as a higher education institution having historically a majority of its student population from White backgrounds (Banks, 2008).

*Colorism* – Colorism is defined as the allocation of privileges and disadvantages according to the lightness or darkness of an individual's skin complexion (Burke, 2008; Hunter, 2007).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

*"Defining myself, as opposed to being defined by others, is one of the most difficult challenges to*

*face." ~ Carol Mosely Braun*

**What is Race?**

**Historical Context of Race**

Race is socially constructed and has little meaning in human biology (Korgen 1998; Khanna, 2011). Humans are genetically similar to each other (Khanna, 2011). Racial categories were socially constructed in the United States to identify individuals based on their physical appearances (Khanna, 2011). Racial categories have changed over time, which indicates race is not as obvious and easily defined as members of society believe (Rockequemore & Brunsma, 2002; Khanna, 2011). Societies have also created and implemented arbitrary rules to categorize people in terms of race, which also indicates race is a socially constructed phenomenon (Khanna, 2011).

Issues with racial categorization and racial mixing can be traced back to the early Colonial era of the United States with the institution of slavery, where many slave owners tried to keep the racial boundaries as distinct as possible between the White settlers and African slaves; however, relationships often arose between slave owners and slaves (Basu, 2007; Banks, 2008; Khanna, 2011). Additionally, during the colonial period, it was not uncommon for interracial relationships to occur between Africans slaves and indentured White servants (Bird, 2009; Khanna, 2011). Offspring resulted from many interracial relationships with children born

in a variety of color complexions; however, many biracial children were considered outcasts by their African and White relatives (Bird, 2009; Banks, 2008).

During slavery, particularly in the southern states, interracial mixing between Blacks and Whites was perceived more severely than their northern counterparts. Slavery was built on a strong white supremacist ideology and saw black people as inferior (Khanna, 2011). Many White individuals feared the purity of the White race would be tainted if racial mixing continued between Blacks and Whites (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Khanna, 2011). Slaves were treated in atrocious ways and stereotyped in order to dissuade racial mixing; however, interracial mixing continued throughout slavery and after the Civil War, even though it was viewed as morally detestable (Khanna, 2011).

In order to preserve the White race, laws were created and implemented to divide the color line and ban racial mixing. These laws were called anti-miscegenation laws. Virginia and Maryland were the first colonies to ban interracial sex and interracial marriage by law. Over time, more states would create such laws (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Khanna, 2011). These anti-miscegenation laws continued to be created as an effort to keep the Black and White races separate in the United States (Banks, 2008). It was not until *Loving v. State of Virginia* (1967) that anti-miscegenation laws were repealed and marriages between different races were legal. With anti-miscegenation laws repealed, the number of biracial children born in the United States increased (Basu, 2007). The U.S. Census predicts by the year 2050, the representative face of the United States will no longer be White due to more individuals identifying with more than one race (Basu, 2007). The next section outlines racial categorization construction.

**Racial Categorization Construction**

It is important to discuss how racially-mixed individuals are identified by society and how they self-identify (Chapman-Huls, 2009). In the latter part of the 19th century after the Civil War, individuals were categorized into socially constructed racial categories based on physical characteristics such as skin complexion and hair type (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). The appearance of biracial people is often ambiguous due to racial mixing; however, many children with White and Black parents were categorized with a variety of tests to validate their racial identity (Chapman-Huls, 2009).

One such notable test is the "one-drop rule," which stated any racially-mixed individual with Black blood would be classified as Black (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). The one-drop rule was rooted in slavery and established on political motivations to keep the color line between Black and Whites separate. The one-drop rule allowed for White slave owners to continue having economic assets with biracial children being racially identified as Black, and it allowed the color line to remain intact during Jim Crow segregation in the Southern states (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Historically, the United States has continued to follow the pattern established by the one-drop rule to define what it means to be Black in the United States, and has been accepted by White, Black and biracial individuals, especially in the South (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Banks, 2008; Shih & Sanchez, 2009; Khanna, 2011).

The crux of the societal debate surrounding racially-mixed individuals is that biracial people undermine the foundation of race and its social and political power (Chapman-Huls, 2009). Racial categorization does not capture the variability of multiracial identity creating tension for anyone who wishes to define unique characteristics of their racial individuality

(Chapmun-Huls, 2009).  It was not until 2000, that the U.S. Census provided an opportunity for multiracial people to identify with more than one race.  Prior to 2000, racially-mixed people could only identify with one race on the U.S. Census report (Shih & Sanchez, 2009).  Multiracial activist groups disputed that picking one racial category required multiracial individuals to deny a part of their racial heritage, and that it did not accurately reflect the changing demographics of the United States (Shih & Sanchez, 2009).  Meanwhile, there was opposition to create a separate multiracial category on the U.S. Census by prominent civil rights activists who contended that the numbers people who identified as Black in the United States would decrease causing the Black community to lose possibilities gained through affirmative action programs (Banks, 2008).  Eventually, a category was created for multiracial individuals to define their identities on the U.S. Census.  The next section will expand on literature pertaining to the identity development of biracial individuals.

## Biracial Identity Development Theories

Identity development for racially-mixed individuals explains how people identify their racial identity, what factors impact an individual's racial identity, and how their assertion of identity compares with societal perception of identity (Davis, 2009; Khanna, 2011; Kilson, 2001; Wijeyesinghe, 2001).  Multiracial individuals have the opportunity to self-disclose their race; however, how individuals choose to identify may be incongruent with how society labels them due to certain factors such skin color, hair type and physical features (Quihuiz, 2011).

Poston (1990) began the early research on racially-mixed individuals with a sequential, stage development model on the progression of one's identity and the identity choices individuals make regarding their racial heritage.  Poston believed previous models done on

monoracial identity development did not consider the unique intricacies and experiences of

biracial people.  He developed the Biracial Identity Development Model (1990), which consisted

of the following five stages:

1) Personal Identity: Describes how individuals at a young age base their identity of self-worth (learned and developed in the family);

2) Choice and group categorization: Describes how individuals are pressured to choose an identity (e.g., choosing a multicultural identity, choosing the identity of one of the parent's racial heritage);

3) Enmeshment/Denial: Describes an individual's experience of confusion, guilt, self-hatred and lack of acceptance at having to choose one identity not representative of both parents' racial heritage;

4) Appreciation: Occurs when individuals begin to appreciate their biracial identity and broaden their knowledge of both racial and ethnic heritage, but still identifying with one racial group; and

5) Integration: Occurs when individuals experience a sense of completeness and discover the value of all their racial and ethnic identities.

Root (1990) conducted research on biracial teens that were partially White.  Findings

from the study outlined how biracial teens entered a period of confusion and possibly a "dual

existence" (Root, 1990, p. 200) when they might appear accepted but believe they do not fit

within any social group.  Root (1990) also looked at how racism and discrimination may

negatively influence a positive decision of a person's biracial identity.  Root (1990) outlined the

following four potential approaches to dealing with the tensions associated with a biracial

identity:

1) Acceptance of the identity society assigns: Individuals accept the identity that society assigns them. Family and strong alliances with and acceptance by a racial group provide support;

2) Identification in both racial groups: Depending on the situation and societal support, biracial individual will sustain his or her identity and successfully navigate both or all racial groups;

3) Identification with a single racial group: The individual has decided to identify with one racial group independent from societal pressures; and

4) Identification as a new racial group: The individual moves fluidly across racial groups and develops strong relationships with other biracial individuals.

Additionally, Root (1990) proposed individuals may self-identify with more than one identity during the same time period or move across identities. Root's (1996) research presented a more fluid approach to identity development and suggested ways biracial individuals negotiate and reconstruct their racial identity in what she called "border crossings." Root (1996) described how individuals determine their "other" status through one of the four "border crossings." During the first border, individuals are grounded in both identity groups where they are able to have multiple perspectives at the same time. In the second border, individuals shift racial foreground and background identities to cross borders defined by race and ethnicity. In the third border, individuals decide to "sit on the border" and claim a neutral point to a multiracial identity. In the fourth border, individuals create a familial base in one identity while venturing into other identities from time to time. The next section will outline the concept on colorism and its influence on biracial identification.

## Colorism

Colorism is a concept that suggests people of color evaluate and discriminate other individuals of color centered on the premise of skin complexion (Kilson, 2001). The concept of colorism dates back to the institution of slavery (Kerr, 2005; Hunter, 2007; Russell et al., 1992). During slavery, light-skinned slaves were used for lighter labor, while dark-skinned slaves were used more for hard labor. It was not uncommon to see fairer skinned slaves working in the master's house and the darker skinned slaves doing manual labor in the fields (Kilson, 2001;

Kerr 2005). Additionally, Whites believed that the lighter slaves were the gentler, friendlier and smarter slaves. This perception of light-skinned individuals being more advantageous than dark-skinned created sources of contention between Blacks of different complexions, especially when light-skinned individuals tried to "pass" as White in order to gain access and privileges into White social clubs and schools (Kerr, 2005; Quihuiz, 2011). As time progressed, individuals in the Black community became preoccupied with trying to prove who had a Black or White identity (Davis, 1991). In addition to the one-drop rule used by whites, Blacks also were recruited by Whites and used as "spotters" in order to catch Blacks posing as White individuals (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Other tests involved examining the color of nail beds and hair roots to test an individual's "blackness," while also questioning one's racial identity. The "paper bag test" was another method used later in the 20th century, to distinguish light skin from dark skin and acceptance into certain social clubs (Kerr, 2005). The test involved taking a paper bag and placing it next to an individual's skin to determine if they were light enough to be accepted within the club (Kerr, 2005).

In a study conducted by Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992), the preoccupation with proving "blackness" spilled over into the Black community. Skin color, hair texture and physical features became the source of debates within the Black community between light-skinned and dark-skinned individuals, which resulted in discrimination of Blacks by Blacks and the creation of a caste system, especially against biracial women with a lighter complexion (Kilson, 2001; Kerr, 2005; Basu, 2007). The idea of questioning an individual's racial identity, which was mentioned earlier, still occurs on college and university campuses, especially in student organizations at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Studies conducted on multiracial students attending predominantly White institutions also indicate questioning occurs

within monoracial groups towards racially-mixed individuals wanting to affiliate with the

organization, such as a historically Black sorority (Jourdan, 2006; Kerr, 2005; Renn, 2008).

The deep-rooted history of colorism and its impact on the current racial organizational structure

in the United State is obvious in the way race is constructed (Quiros & Aruajo-Dawson, 2013).

The racial classification structure has changed over the years; however, despite the changes in

racial construction, colorism continues to remain a prevalent factor in how biracial individuals

choose and negotiate their identity within society and how the general public identifies biracial

people based on their skin complexion (Quiros & Araujo-Dawson, 2013; Korgen, 1998;

Chapman-Huls, 2009).  It is also important to note that colorism is not restricted to the

technicalities of racial boundaries.  In other words, colorism can be a form of inter-racism or

intra-racism, which makes identity choice and negotiation more challenging for racially-mixed

individuals (Bhattacharya, 2012; Quiros & Araujo-Dawson, 2013).  The concept of colorism has

served as one of the factors influencing how racially-mixed individuals negotiate their identity.

The following section provides an overview of additional factors influencing identity

development, identity choice and identity negotiation.

**Additional Factors Influencing Identity Development and Choice**

According to Tatum (1997), an individual's identity is influenced by individual

characteristics, historical factors, family dynamics, and social and political context.  Some

examples include the role of the family on identity formation, the community environment, peers

and physical features.

**Family.**  Previous literature suggests an array of factors influencing racial identity

development (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Talbot, 2008).  The role of the family is a

significant factor in identity development and choice (Jourdan, 2006). Interactions with immediate and extended family shape individuals' identities and influence how they interact with society outside the family. Additionally, how parents of multiracial children address issues of biraciality vary (Jourdan, 2006). There are parents who engaged in positive or negative conversations about their children's biraciality, or parents who did not discuss their children's biracial identity at all (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Basu, 2007, Talbot, 2008). Multiracial individuals often experience mixed messages from their parents and extended family about their racial identity, especially if children grew up in a single-parent household where one racial identity is not present (Jourdan, 2006). For instance, in Jourdan's (2006) study, some participants discussed how grandparents from an underrepresented population influenced their perceptions of their White racial heritage due to the grandparents' negative perceptions of White individuals. At times, biracial children from Black/White families would deny their White lineage if the parent from the underrepresented race experienced racism, discrimination, or rejection at any point in their life from members of the majority race (Basu, 2007). Views of identity are complicated even more if the biracial child is adopted into monoracial family or integrated into a family that does not represent either of that child's racial heritage (Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004). It is important to note how a multiracial person's family influences their identity; however, the community and environment an individual grows up in also impacts identity development in choice and how one negotiates their identity in society.

**Community.** The composition of the neighborhood and where an individual grows up influences their identification choice. Churches, schools and surrounding houses, whether diverse or segregated, impact identity (Basu, 2007). Rockquemore and Brunsma's (2002) research found that individuals living in a predominantly Black community identified with a

monoracial identity, while individuals living in a predominantly White community decided to choose a border identity because both Black and White identities were present.  Research has also indicated racially-mixed children from Black/White families attending ethnically diverse schools may possibly deny their White heritage and identify more with their Black lineage due to more exposure to the Black race (Basu, 2007).  While the composition of the community can play a significant factor in how one chooses to identify, the impact of social networks has also been shown to influence identity choice.

**Peers.**  According to Khanna (2011), racial identities are socially constructed through social interactions with others.  Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) indicated peers have a strong influence on racial identity development and identity choice among multiracial people.  Studies on multiracial adolescents found many students struggled with their identity, felt pressure from their peers to choose a racial affiliation, and experienced feelings of alienation and not fitting in, which influenced how they chose to identify (Jourdan, 2006; Basu, 2007).  From her study, Khanna (2011) found that biracial participants' daily interactions with people in their White social networks were perceived to be Black and experienced similar discriminatory treatment by Whites that their Black counterparts received.  On the other hand, biracial participants of her study indicated feeling more comfortable and accepted with their Black peers due to the one-drop rule classification of their identity; however, biracial women of the study felt more feelings of rejection from Black women because of their lighter complexion (Khanna, 2011).  Due to this push and pull of identity within social networks, multiracial individuals are constantly faced with challenges in how to identify in order to be affiliated with a particular group (Khanna, 2011; Renn, 2008).

**Phenotype**. As stated earlier, an individual's physical appearance has been used since the institution of slavery to define their racial identity (Kilson, 2001; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). With the one-drop rule and examinations of physical features such as the color of an individual's nailbed, facial structures and the paper bag test, multiracial people have continuously been faced with situations challenging their racial identity (Kilson, 2001; Renn, 2008; Khanna, 2011). In a study conducted by Talbot (2008), participants discussed the power of phenotype, especially skin color and hair textures. Participants indicated that how they identified changed over time, but it did not matter how they self-identified because others would still label their racial identity based on their physical characteristics (Talbot, 2008). Khanna (2011) also found that biracial individuals seek to manipulate their physical appearance in order to influence how others perceived their racial identity. If an individual's physical appearance was perceived to be Black, that person's racial identity was classified as Black. Standards of beauty was a major theme found in a study conducted by Kelch-Oliver and Leslie (2006) where Black/White biracial participants discussed the issues of body image and skin color in relation to attractiveness. The findings from the study indicated how participants felt biracial women of a lighter complexion were seen as more attractive and desirable than women with a darker complexion (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006). Biracial women from Khanna's (2011) study indicated they would "play around" with their hair, makeup and clothes in order to change their outward appearance towards others. "Techniques such as hair straightening, leaving the hair natural, coloring the hair, using skin creams to lighten one's skin color, or tanning were often used by biracial women to manage their racial identity" (Khanna, 2011, pp. 117-118). Additionally, biracial women tended to use these strategies more than biracial men to communicate their racial identity to others because biracial women often had their identities challenged more within the Black community,

especially by Black women; therefore, biracial women felt the need to validate their identities (Roberts, 2003). Phenotype, specifically an individual's skin complexion has remained an influential factor in racial group association (Khanna, 2011; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Russell et al., 1992) and continues to pose challenges to multiracial people attending PWIs (Renn, 2008).

**Institutional Environment.** Previous literature discusses the challenges of racially-mixed students finding their place within the institutional environment (Renn, 2008; Ozaki & Johnson, 2008). The college environment is instrumental in students' holistic development (Strange & Banning, 2001). Specifically, Strange and Banning (2001) discussed how constructed models of an environment concentrate on the subjective views and experiences of the individuals within that setting. In other words, how an individual views an environment can be viewed differently depending on the observer. Whether an individual is satisfied, comfortable, or attracted to a place is a function of how they perceive the environment (Strange & Banning, 2001). King (2008) also suggested how societal perception of multiracial students' racial identity presented challenges in how racially-mixed students navigate physical and social spaces in the college setting.

## Racially-Mixed Individuals at Predominantly White Institutions

Additionally, racially-mixed students attending predominantly White institutions are challenged with navigating the social and physical spaces of campus (Renn, 2003; 2008). It is often difficult for multiracial individuals to claim an identity in a society where people try to define who they are based on their physical appearances (Williams, 1999). According to Brown (2009), multiracial students in college may experience transitional issues such as social isolation

and adjustment. The experiences of multiracial individuals attending PWIs can be challenging as they attempt to find supportive spaces on campus and connect to social groups (King, 2008).

Multiracial students at predominantly White institutions often experience feelings of alienation and loneliness due to the inability to identify with a particular racial group (Jourdan, 2006; Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008). Furthermore, multiracial individuals are marginalized within the college setting due to racism from White students and resistance from Black students (Renn, 2008). The question as to whether someone is "black enough" continues to be an issue multiracial students face in order to gain acceptance into a certain student organization (Jourdan, 2006). Studies on biracial students often find that women face more discrimination from Black women because of the racial caste system ingrained in the Black community based on the concept of colorism (Basu, 2007).

Chapman-Huls (2009) conducted a study exploring how multiracial college women navigate the monoracial system of PWIs, and found that positive and negative experiences influenced their identity and their perceptions about race. Participants of her study discussed the lack of support by administrators and staff who work in the multicultural centers to address their needs. Participants indicated organization structures within the campus were not designed to meet the needs of biracial students, and focused more on students from monoracial groups. Furthermore, participants felt they did not fit into the campus culture, which increased the marginalization between biracial students and students from historically monoracial groups (Chapman-Huls, 2009).

**Recommendations from the Literature**

The review of the literature has shown that race is socially constructed and society has continued to impose limiting racial categories that allow biracial individuals to fully represent their racial heritages (Khanna, 2011). Throughout history, racial constructs have divided races, particularly between Black and White individuals in the southern United States. Additionally, racial mixing between Blacks and Whites created another divide between Blacks of lighter and darker complexion (Khanna, 2011; Rockquemore & Brunsa, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). These divides between races have been a significant issue for Black/White biracial females. This population has continued to experience feelings of marginalization between the Black and White cultures, more so from the Black community, and these women face similar challenges while in college (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006).

Racially-mixed people continue to navigate the campus community, answering the "What are you?" questions in order to validate their racial identity (Kilson, 2001; Renn, 2008). It is important for higher education administrators and staff working with biracial students to understand the needs of this population, particularly of Black/White biracial college women since there is little literature within higher education and student affairs focusing on these women. Nishimura (1998) recommended that college professionals take into consideration the many needs of racially-mixed students and that these exceed the scope of programs, services and student organizations focused solely on monoracial identity groups. Creating an inclusive environment supporting the needs of racially-mixed students will provide a community where Black/White biracial women can congregate with others who share similar backgrounds and interest.

Sands and Schuh (2004) investigated how the experiences of biracial students affected persistence at colleges and universities. They found that separate organizations and lack of programs and services for biracial students were issues. Sand and Schuh (2004) recommended colleges and universities increase racial categories on admission applications, create programs and services to meet the needs of biracial student development, and create a learning community specifically for first-year biracial students.

Strange and Banning (2001) discussed the concept of "display of self" and how the physical setting can be used to convey messages about individual and group ownership. Wong and Buckner (2008) discussed the importance of building community among racially-mixed students by having a formal space on campus with an assigned staff to work with programs and services designed for multiracial students. Additionally, Patton (2006) discussed how creating spaces, programs, and services to address the needs of multiracial students through established cultural centers would help to educate faculty, staff, and students about the issues racially-mixed students face.

As Tatum (1997) discussed,

> The need for safe space in which to construct a positive self-definition is important…space is created for resisting stereotypes and creating positive identities…even mature adults sometimes need to connect with someone who looks like them and shares the same experiences (p. 88).

Creating spaces, programs, and services to address the needs of multiracial students through established cultural centers will help to educate faculty, staff, and students about the issues racially-mixed students face and allow racially-mixed students to come together in a formal space to share ideas and interests with other students from two or more racial heritages.

(Patton, 2006). Specifically, creating an environment for biracial women to explore their feelings of marginality and associating with other biracial women is significant to understanding how they make meaning of their identities and belonging within society (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006; Bettez, 2010; King, 2011). Furthermore, having environments that allow open lines of communication for biracial women to discuss and explore their identity is critical for their sense of belonging and connecting to others on campus (King, 2011).

In summary, the literature demonstrates the need to create inclusive campus communities supporting the needs of biracial students and educating other campus constituents about biracial people through policy and procedural implementation, programs, and services. More racially-mixed women are entering the college community; many who come from a Black/White background. Therefore, studying the identity negotiation and validation of Black/White biracial females at PWIs and how they make meaning of their experiences is both timely and needed. Experiences cannot be separated from one's history. There are various factors influencing how one identifies and comes to belong in a racially defined society. Many biracial women undergo experiences like myself and continue to be faced with the questions, "What are you? Are you Black? Are you White?" Research on biracial college women will pave the way for a better understanding of their experiences, how they self-identify and identify to others, and how to best meet their needs on college campuses.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

*"There is still a social reality for race that we have yet to come to grips with. If you have a racial identity that does not neatly fit into this reality, how do you experience the world? How do others see you? How do you see yourself?" ~Dr. Kerry Ann Rockquemore*

**Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative research study explored how Black/White biracial women navigated campus communities through negotiation of their identities at predominantly White institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. Particular attention concentrated on the impact of colorism on identity for Black/White biracial women. Peer groups and spaces on campuses were also investigated to provide further insight into how these women's identities and senses of self were impacted. The following research questions guided the study:

1) How does colorism influence identity choice within the college setting?

2) How do Black/White biracial women negotiate their racial identities within the campus community?

3) What formal and informal support systems exist for Black/White biracial women at select predominantly White institutions?

This chapter focuses on the research design and methodological reasoning used to conduct this study. The following sections will be discussed: (a) epistemological stance; (b) design of the study; (c) research sites; (d) participant sample; (e) data collection; (f) data

analysis; (g) trustworthiness; (h) ethical considerations; (i) researcher subjectivity; and (h) ethical considerations.

## Epistemological Stance

Creswell (2007) defined a paradigm as a set of beliefs, philosophical assumptions, or epistemologies. A constructivist paradigmatic approach (often combined with interpretivism), is used in qualitative research to focus on understanding the world in which individuals dwell, and how they make meaning of their lived experiences. Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined a constructivist epistemology as one in which the researcher and participant are interactively connected so that the results are formed as the research study proceeds. Additionally, constructivism is the perception that all knowledge is dependent upon everyday human practices, which are constructed from the interactions between individuals and their worlds, then created and transmitted within a social context (Flick, 2006). Using a constructivist paradigm to understand the influence of colorism on identity negotiation of biracial women attending PWIs is significant to this research study because it supports the concept that the human world must be studied differently due to the multiple realities that individuals construct from their experiences and interactions with others, and that people construct their worldviews and lived experiences in different ways (Lincoln & Guba, 1990; Flick, 2006). It was important to allow the participants of this study the opportunity to construct meaning of their realities in order to gain a more truthful interpretation of their identity and lived experiences.

**Design of the Study**

A qualitative research approach was used for this study to examine the experiences of biracial college women in order to better understand how they negotiated their biracial identity within the college environment and what support systems existed on campus that assisted with integrating them into campus community.  Qualitative research examines a phenomenon in its natural environment (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2007).  Additionally, qualitative research allows an interpretive approach to understanding the world.  Qualitative research methods provide a distinctive lens to view the human experience (Creswell, 2007).  Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how individuals make meaning of their experiences at a particular place and time (Merriam, 2002).  Qualitative research is also descriptive and allows the researcher to collect thick, rich data from participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and how they make sense of their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).  Moreover, qualitative research acknowledges the role of the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998).

Narrative is one methodological approach to qualitative research.  According to narrative theory, humans comprehend their lives and experiences in a storied structure (Merriam, 2002).  The narrative method engages readers and comes in many shapes and sizes, stretching from "tightly bound stories" (Riessman, 2008, p. 23) to answer one particular question, or longer and extended stories created from numerous interviews that traverse chronological and geographic space (Riesmann, 2008). Narrative analysis is a form of qualitative research particularly suited for understanding an individual's experience through life stories with a particular focus on the actors, social places, periods of time and language used to covey the story (Riesmann, 2008). Furthermore, there is a specific focus on certain player in distinctive places at certain times

(Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis fits well with this research study, which focused on the storied experiences of Black/White biracial women currently in college.

The narrative approach to qualitative research analyzes participants' stories (Riessman, 2008). Particularly, how experiences are storied, who constructed the story, for what purpose the story was created, what cultural resources influenced the story as well as the succession of events in the story (Riessman, 1993, 2008). According to Merriam (2002), the crux of narrative analysis is using the first-person accounts of experiences and stories as data, and prompts the reader to think outside the surface of the text (Riesmann, 2008). I sought to obtain a deeper understanding of biracial college women's experiences at predominantly White institutions.

## Research Sites

Three predominantly White institutions located in the southeastern region of the United States were selected for this study. Each institution was given a pseudonym to further protect the identity of the participants. Descriptive information about each campus is listed below in Table 1.

Table 1

*Institutional Type for Site Selection*

| Institution (Pseudonym) | Cedar University | Ivy University | Nance University |
|---|---|---|---|
| Type | Four-Year Private Liberal Arts | Four-Year Private Research | Four-Year Public Research |
| Geographic Location | Large Metropolitan City | Large Metropolitan City | Small Urban City |

| Institution (Pseudonym) | Cedar University | Ivy University | Nance University |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Student Population | 1,053 | 13,893 | 34,519 |
| % Black Students | 21% | 10% | 7% |
| % White Students | 35% | 46% | 72% |
| % Asian | 3.3% | 16.8% | 9% |
| % Hispanic | 8.1% | 4.4% | 4.4% |
| % Native American/ Other Pacific Islander | .19% | .2% | .1% |
| % Multiracial | 1.9% | 1.3% | 2.2% |
| % Not Specified | 24% | 8.0% | 4.5% |

**Participant Sample**

According to Merriam (2002), it is essential to select participants that will provide an in-depth perspective about the phenomenon being examined for qualitative research. In order to gain a representative sample, purposeful sampling was used for this study. Creswell (2007) indicated purposeful sampling is used for qualitative research because participants will better inform the researcher of the phenomenon being studied. Recruitment emails were sent to prospective participants via departmental and student organization listservs by student affair professionals at each institutional site. The email included the research study purpose and involvement criteria (see Appendix A). Offices that assisted in recruiting students included: Housing and Residence Life; Multicultural Services and Programs; Civic Engagement; Greek

Life; and Student Leadership. Discussing colorism, identity choice and identity negotiation can be a sensitive subject for individuals. After obtaining permission to post information about the study in public places, recruitment flyers (see Appendix B) were also posted in the residence halls at Nance and Cedar University, and the student center at Ivy University. Outside of scholars who use the term colorism, it is not a term used in everyday language; therefore, I decided not to use the word colorism within the text of the flyer. I used terminology such as "skin complexion," "biracial," "Black," and "White" to attract more participants.

A total of thirteen students contacted me indicating their interest to participate in the study. I contacted each interested student and conducted a phone screening to verify the participant's eligibility (see Appendix C). To further explore the influence of colorism on identity choice and negotiation, eligible participants had to be biracial, with one parent of Black heritage and one parent of White heritage. Of the thirteen students, eleven were eligible to participate in the study. Participants' age ranged between 18 and 21 years. Additional demographic information was collected during the first interview to provide a better representation of the participants and is outlined below in Table 2. Participants were provided an open-ended option to describe their racial identity (see Appendix E). Some participants identified as biracial followed by additional information describing their ethnic identity, which is indicated in italics in Table 2. Upon completion of the phone screening, mutually agreeable times and locations in quiet spaces at the participants' campuses were confirmed for each interview meeting. Spaces were free from interruption and distraction as to not cause interference with the audio recording (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Table 2

*Descriptive Participant Demographic Information*

| Name | Racial Identity | Institution | Age | Classification | Regional Hometown Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Michelle | Biracial | Nance | 18 | Sophomore | Southeast |
| Tiffany | Biracial | Nance | 21 | Senior | Southeast |
| Victoria | Biracial | Nance | 21 | Senior | Southeast |
| Angie | Biracial | Nance | 20 | Sophomore | Southeast |
| Casey | Biracial | Ivy | 18 | Freshman | Midwest |
| Tyfany | Biracial *(Black)* | Ivy | 21 | Senior | Southeast |
| Misty | Biracial | Cedar | 19 | Freshman | Southeast |
| Savannah | Biracial | Cedar | 20 | Sophomore | Northwest |
| Beth | Biracial | Cedar | 19 | Sophomore | Southeast |
| Lily | Biracial *(Multiracial)* | Cedar | 19 | Sophomore | Northeast |
| D.D. | Biracial *(Black/Hispanic)* | Cedar | 21 | Senior | Mid-Atlantic |

Table 3

*Descriptive Participant Demographic Information of Parents*

| Name | Mother's Racial/Ethnic Identity | Father's Racial/Ethnic Identity | Parent's Marital Status | Reared by Mother/Father/ Both |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Michelle | White | Black | Never Married | Mother |
| Tiffany | White | Black | Never Married | Mother |
| Victoria | White | Black | Never Married | Mother |
| Angie | Black | White | Never Married | Mother |
| Casey | White | Black | Married | Both |
| Tyfany | White | Black | Never Married | Both |
| Misty | Black | White | Never Married | Mother |
| Savannah | Black | White | Married | Both |
| Beth | Black | White | Married | Both |
| Lily | Black Cuban/Chinese Jamaican | White/Black | Married | Both |
| D.D. | White/Hispanic | Black | Married | Both |

**Data Collection**

This study aimed to discover how colorism influenced identity negotiation for

Black/White biracial college woman and construct meaning of their experiences; therefore,

multiple data collection methods were used to generate stories for this study. Using multiple

methods allowed me to obtain thorough accounts and understanding of each participant's story.

"How we think about the qualitative interview has implications for how interviews are

structured, the kinds of questions posed, and how data are analyzed and represented" (Roulston,

2010, p. 51). Interviews are a common form of collecting stories in narrative research and can

range from very structured formats where the researcher has a set protocol for questions to less

structured formats, where the researcher has an interview protocol, but allows the participants to

also guide the interview (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Additionally, Cooper (2009) stated that conducting semi-structured interviews permits for

better flexibility when asking questions to participants' responses. Patton (2002) also described

how interviews yield direct quotes from individuals about their lived experiences, their

perceptions, knowledge, and emotions. From a narrative approach, Riessman (2008) discussed

conducting interviews with individuals to acquire more knowledge about a process. For this

study, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method for data collection in order to

generate stories from the participants.

Flick (2006) discussed how research questions should be formulated from clear ideas and

in a manner that clarifies what the participant is supposed to disclose during the interview. My

research questions and interview protocol (see Appendix F) were designed to explore the

influence of colorism on identity negotiation for Black/White biracial women within the campus

community at predominantly White institutions and understand how they made meaning of their

identity negotiation. Additionally, I wanted to understand how peer groups were constructed for

each participant, and how their peer groups on campus were similar or different prior to their

matriculation into college. Questions about institutional support systems were incorporated to

understand participants' perspectives on how their mixed raced heritage were supported and celebrated through institutional policies, programs, and services.

Photo elicitation was used as a supplemental data collection method to obtain additional information to enhance the stories of the experiences of Black/White biracial women attending PWIs. Photo elicitation is a method where pictures are taken by the researcher or research participants to guide or elicit rich, detailed accounts of a phenomenon (Frith & Harcourt, 2007). "Like spoken narratives, images contain theories based upon the image-makers' understanding about what they are looking at" (Riessman, 2010, p. 143). Harper (2002) discussed that pictures conjure up deeper components of an individual's consciousness than words. Photos are a form of documentary data, and can provide additional information supporting or challenging the interview data as well as supplying a much richer description of the phenomenon (Glesne, 2005). Additionally, photographs can produce data that is apparent to the participants, but not readily visible to the researcher conducting the study (Allen, 2011). Frith and Harcourt (2007) discussed how images capture information about different experiences and interactions as well as allow participants to be reflective about those day-to-day accounts. Furthermore, photo-elicitation allows participants to ask questions about their understanding and meaning of their pictures (Frith & Harcourt, 2007). Participants can also take pictures in settings where the researcher may not have access in order to provide additional information about the research (Allen, 2011). Photos were uses as a method to provide another perspective of how participants conceptualized their biracial identities.

Data collection began with the interview. Prior to the interview starting, participants reviewed and completed a consent form (see Appendix D). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two parts for each participant. The first interview consisted of each participant

detailing storied accounts of their experiences with colorism, identity negotiation as a Black/White biracial woman, and how they made meaning of those experiences. The interview protocol was used as a guide to keep interviews on track. In order to generate detailed stories for the narrative method of this study, I allowed for flexibility throughout the interview and asked probing questions to clarify responses and generate narratives and themes from the participants. Particularly, more in-depth probing questions about the influence of colorism on identity negotiation were incorporated as participants discussed their experiences. First-round interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. After the first interview, I reviewed the photo elicitation portion of the study and discussed the instruction guide (see Appendix G). Participants were instructed to use their camera phone or digital camera to take pictures of places or things that encapsulated their thoughts and feelings about their experiences as Black/White biracial women. Additionally, participants were asked to record their thoughts and feelings for each picture in a log that corresponded with the identified picture. Participants were also given the option of using a disposal camera that was provided if they did not have access to the aforementioned items. One of the thirteen students opted to have a disposable camera provided to her. She kept track of the pictures she took in a log and recorded her thoughts prior to returning the disposable camera back to me. She emailed her corresponding picture descriptions and reflective summary prior to the second interview meeting. Eight students emailed their pictures, descriptions and reflective summary together, and two students sent their pictures via text message to my phone followed with an email of their picture descriptions and reflective summary.

The second interview occurred one to two weeks after the first interview to give the participants time to take their pictures and record their thoughts. The interview involved the participant and me reviewing each photo using the interview protocol and reflective summaries

as a guide.  Participants discussed what each pictures symbolized for them, how they made meaning of each picture in context of their biracial identity, and what feelings were associated with each picture.  Like the first interview, I took additional notes and recorded non-verbal behavior of each participant.  The data generated from the pictures and reflective summaries were included in the data set for coding and analysis.

Roulston (2010) indicated an "essential preparatory step is to have the right equipment" (p. 103) when conducting interviews.  Each first and second interview was recorded with a digital recorder with the consent of the participant.  A recording program on my laptop called Garage Band was used as a secondary data collection method to the digital recorder.  Patton (2002) stated that taking notes during the interview can further help the researcher develop new questions as the interview evolves.  Notes can also serve as a backup in the event the recording devices malfunction.  I took notes during the interviews, which helped me obtain observations of emotional expressions and/or non-verbal communication not captured on the audio-recordings (Patton, 2002).

I engaged in memo-writing throughout the data collection phase.  Memo-writing is a process in which the researcher consecutively records his or her thoughts throughout the research process (Creswell, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Charmaz, 2006).  Memo-writing allowed me to reflect on my interactions with participants, my biases throughout the research process, and assessment of the methodology in addition to knowledge gained from data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).  Interviews were transcribed following each interview with the participants.  The photos, reflective summaries, and my memos were used to support information generated during data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Merriam (2002) described data analysis for qualitative research as the process of identifying recurring patterns to discover commonalities or contradictions among the research participants.  A paradigmatic approach was used to analyze and represent the participant's stories.  Polkinghorne (1995) described this type of analytic approach as a way to identify certain instances or commonalities across the data.  Riesmann (2008) discussed the content as the "exclusive focus" (p. 53).  Examining the content of each story and understanding what was said was integral in constructing the narratives.  Each transcript from the first and second interview was read and analyzed to uncover relevant codes from the content, which were used to organize the narratives into categorical areas to address the research questions.

Thematic coding was used to further develop refined themes from the data.  Using a thematic approach to further uncover themes allowed me to identify patterns across the research participants' stories (Riesmann, 2008).  Thematic coding is one of the most common approaches to analyze qualitative data where codes are applied to the data in order to generate themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).  I reviewed each transcript again using line-by-line open coding to organize, label, and analyze the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).  Merriam (2002) stated open coding is the process of "naming and organizing of phenomena through a close examination of the data" (p. 148) and where data is broken apart line-by-line and given a code to represent the concept.  First, transcript data was coded line-by-line to look for keywords and concepts.  Secondly, I re-read the transcripts and the data were re-coded from the initial codes to look for patterns.  Finally, the data were clustered into themes based on the patterns seen from the codes (Roulston, 2010).  The following themes were generated from the data: (a) skin tone discrimination through oppressive behavior; (b) identification through presentation; (c)

validation of identity through informal/formal spaces; d) curly vs. straight hair; and e) perspectives of institutional climate in supporting biracial identity.

I analyzed the photographs and reflective summaries from each participant. The images and meaning behind each picture were woven throughout each participant's narrative. This provided additional information about how participants made meaning of the influence of colorism on their identity choice, how they negotiated their identity on campus, and their perspectives of support systems on campus. Participants' non-verbal behaviors and additional reflective information gathered from memo-writing were included to enhance each story. Furthermore, I was able to capture and portray the larger representation of the participants' stories and answer the research questions.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research needs to demonstrate rigor and trustworthiness in order to portray findings in a credible way (Merriam, 2002; Roulston, 2010). Riessman (2008) discussed two critical components of validity in narrative research: the story told by the participant; and the analysis of the story told by the researcher. Qualitative researchers use the terms credibility, transferability, and dependability respectively to discuss issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research; therefore, these terms will be used for this study (Creswell, 2007). Credibility considers how precise the data are and how congruent the researcher's findings are with reality. In other words, how accurate are the data? Transferability is concerned with how the researcher's findings can be transferred to other people and situations. Dependability refers to the extent research results can be replicated to other studies (Creswell, 2007).

Several approaches were used to strengthen this research study. I used triangulation as a technique of checking the consistency of the data results through the use of various data methods (Roulston, 2010). Additionally, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained triangulation as the

process of confirming details and utilizing many sources to help develop a deeper understanding of the experience. I used individual interviews, photographs, and reflective summaries from the participants and memo-writing.

To ensure credibility, member checks were conducted in which participants were emailed a copy of the transcribed interview. Each participant was asked to review the data to check for accuracy and provide clarification of any information. Member checks are one of the most critical forms of credibility because a researcher is asking participants of the study to review the data collected on the participants (Creswell, 2007). Riessman (2008) also discussed the importance of coherence of the participant's narratives and the researcher's interpretation of the data as a component of trustworthiness in narrative research. In other words, is the researcher's analytic account persuasive, do accounts in the story flow together, and are there gaps, or inconsistencies with the data and what parts of the narrative link together with the theoretical framework (Riessman, 2008)? Once I constructed the narratives and analyzed each one, stories were emailed to each participant for review. It was important I obtained any additional feedback from each participant regarding my interpretation of the data and construction of each story based off the coded data. Having participants review their story to check for accuracy and inconsistencies further strengthened the research study.

Transferability was accomplished by providing detailed descriptions of the experiences shared by the participants. Providing rich, thick descriptions of the data, the reader is able to transfer information to other avenues in order to determine if the data is transferable to that setting. Incorporating multiple institutional sites, theoretical approaches, and data collection methods strengthened the transferability of this research study (Creswell, 2007).

Additionally, to ensure dependability, peer examinations were conducted.  Colleagues working in the higher education and student affairs field along with current doctoral students reviewed the data and served as an external check of the information.  Peer review of the data ensured that the researcher was being accurate about the meanings, methodology, and analysis of the data (Merriam, 2002).  Addressing my subjectivity as the researcher was also important to understand as a factor influencing this research study (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2007).

**Researcher Subjectivity**

I've been:

Accepted By Black And By White,

Rejected By White And By Black,

Integrated With Black And With White,

Alienated From White And From Black,

Praised And Complemented By Black And By White,

Insulted And Offended By White And By Black,

Loved By Black And By White,

Hated By White And By Black,

Paid Attention By Black And By White,

Ignored By White And By Black,

Pleased By Black And By White,

Angered By White And By Black,

Enlightened By Black And By White,

Frustrated By White And By Black,

Fascinated By Black And By White,

Bored By White And By Black,

Helped By White And By Black,

Hindered By Black And By White (sAbU, 1997)

Qualitative researchers serve as the primary instrument in qualitative research design, and have the opportunity to directly interact with the participants (Creswell, 2007; Peshkin, 1988). Qualitative researchers seek to obtain a better understanding of participants' experiences and awareness of their reality; however, it is crucial for qualitative researchers to recognize and define their own predispositions in order to reduce researcher bias within the design of the study (Creswell, 2007; Schuh, 2009; Peshkin, 1988). Reflecting on the interviews and recording my thoughts throughout the data collection and analysis part through memo-writing in addition to having my work peer reviewed aided in reducing bias throughout this study.

This research study focused on Black/White biracial women that attend a predominantly White institution in the South. My subjectivity is defined by my personal experiences as a Black/White biracial woman and one that attended a predominantly White institution for each of my educational degrees. Cultural influences and family shaped my identity as a Black women growing up. I lived in a predominantly Black community where my Black mother and maternal grandparents reared me. While I felt a sense of comfort within the Black community, I also felt discomfort due to my biracial background and light complexion of my skin. I was questioned about my family, skin tone and physical features; therefore, I constantly experienced feelings of not fitting in the community.

Growing up in the South was Black and White in regards to racial classification and identification, and I identified as a light-skinned Black woman the majority of my life. Throughout my life, I dealt with subtle and very overt discrimination within the Black and White communities because of my light complexion. I was not White or Black "enough" to feel at

home within either community.  After I began to explore my Black and White heritage more deeply, I wanted to learn more about identity negotiation and how skin tone discrimination influenced how biracial women negotiated their identity.

**Ethical Considerations**

Conducting qualitative studies puts the researcher in close contact with participants and their issues (Patton, 2002).  It is important I define my own biracial heritage and address the assumptions I have so the reader is aware of my perceptions and interpretations of the data for this study.  The assumptions and biases I have about Black/White biracial women include the following:

1) Biracial women have difficulty negotiating their identity and finding a sense of belonging within the student community at a predominantly White institution in the South;

2) colorism is more prevalent in the South due to the manifestations of race relations during and after slavery;

3) biracial women who have a lighter skin complexion experience colorism more so than Black/White females with a darker skin complexion;

4) biracial women experience skin tone discrimination more within the Black student community;

5) there are a lack of resources and support systems on campus to meet the needs of multiracial students and connect them with other students who share similar experiences; and

6) biracial women who grew up with one parent have a more defined identity with one race.

Throughout the formation of the research questions, data collection, and data analysis, perceptions and experiences I have lived as a biracial woman are embedded throughout this study. Patton (2002) suggested a concept called "empathetic neutrality" (p. 50) and indicated, "there is middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding" (p. 50). Empathetic neutrality may look as if it is an oxymoron since empathic describes how an individual portrays "understanding, interest and caring," (p. 53) towards others and neutrality depicts how one demonstrates being nonjudgmental. Neutrality is also helpful when the researcher is seeking to establish a non-biased relationship while also building rapport and trust with the participants. It is also important to note as a researcher, when using empathy and rapport to remember to meticulously examine the participants being studied and critically evaluate the data collected (Patton, 2002). This study required me to critically observe my own experiences as a biracial woman in order to fully understand the complexities of my own identity while conducting research on other biracial women. My capacity to traverse academic and cultural boundaries while establishing relationships with my participants was imperative to this study as I could not separate my being a biracial woman and practitioner in higher education and student affairs. It was my goal as a researcher to capture the experiences of other Black/White biracial women to gain a deeper understanding of how they conceptualized colorism as an influential factor on their identity negotiation, and how they made meaning of their collegiate experiences within the campus environment. Furthermore, I wanted to provide the higher education field with knowledge about Black/White biracial women, how they perceived themselves within the campus environment, and what they feel are the perceptions of others in order to educate the administrators and staff working in collegiate environments on the needs of this population.

Ensuring the privacy of participants was vital to the credibility of this study. Participants were provided the opportunity to create a pseudonym to protect their identity. While participants were asked to take photos of reflecting supportive and/or non-supportive spaces on campus, I used ethical judgment to the best of my ability to shield the identity of all stakeholders. Images were blurred out from photographs that contained identifiable information of individuals that did not provide consent to use their faces. Pseudonyms were also given for the names of each institution along with names for departments, buildings, offices, and student organizations on each respective campus to protect the anonymity of the participants.

**Organization of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to seek a deeper understanding of how Black/White biracial females navigated the campus community through their negotiation of their identity, and how colorism influenced their identity at predominantly White institutions. Peer groups and spaces on campuses that influenced aspects of identity and sense of self were examined. The subsequent chapters will provide an overview of each site selected for this study. The participant's narratives were grouped by institutional site. In order to provide context about participants' collegiate experiences, descriptive information about their formative years was included. An analysis of the participant's storied account is provided that considers how each participant's story align with the theoretical models of Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995), Renn (2004) and Wilder (2008). Lastly, I presented a summary of the core themes that were generated across narratives.

CHAPTER 4

NANCE UNIVERSITY

*"One day, our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skins or the shape of our eyes, or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings." ~ Thomas Franklin, 1983*

**Introduction**

The following narratives capture the experiences of Michelle, Tiffany, Vickie and Angie, who are students that attend Nance University.  A brief description of Nance University is provided to better understand the institutional setting.  In order to provide context about participants' collegiate experiences, descriptive information about their formative years was included along with detailed information about participants' college experiences, their perceptions of their experiences, and their perceptions of the support systems on campus. Images from the photo elicitation project are imbedded in the section of the narrative depicting the participants' perceptions of support systems and how they see their biracial identity within the context of support systems on campus.  An analysis of the participant's storied account is provided that considers how each participant's story aligns with the theoretical models.


**Description of Nance University**

Founded in the 18th Century, Nance University is a large, four-year, public research university located in a college town in the southeast. The student population consists of 34,519 students, which includes undergraduate, graduate and professional students.  Eighteen colleges and schools make up the academic unit of the institution.  Students who attend Nance are

academically competitive, with many of students coming from within the state.  Nance also offers a wide array of Division I sports, intercollegiate sports as well as over 600 student organizations.

## Michelle's Story

Michelle is an 18-year-old, sophomore, majoring in journalism at Nance University. Michelle has an outgoing and compassionate personality, and is highly involved in student organizations on campus.  She was born in the Northeast, but she moved with her family to a suburb near a major city in the Southeast when she was two years old.  Michelle was very excited to discuss her experiences as a biracial individual and could not wait to start sharing her thoughts.  She began her story talking about how she identifies as a biracial person.  She used a mixture of race and ethnicity to describe her parents.  She explained her identity only by race. As she described her racial identity, she laughed, and said:

> Whenever people ask me my race, or what my ethnic makeup is, I say my mother is White and my dad is Jamaican, even though I could say my mom is actually Irish, Italian and Canadian, and my dad is Black or Jamaican; however, I just always tell people that my mom is White and my dad is Black, and that I am White and Black.

Michelle is an only child.  Her parents never married, but have maintained a good relationship throughout her entire life.  She grew up primarily with her mother; however, her father has lived no more than 20 minutes away and has been a consistent presence in Michelle's life.  As she reflected on her experiences growing up as a child, she recalled how her mother and father's acceptance of racial diversity influenced her life as a biracial individual.  She always felt

accepted and comfortable with them, and talked about how they would praise her "outward experience." Even with her extended family on both her parents' sides, she has never felt like she was any different from anyone else. She explained:

> Despite my different skin color, I never felt ostracized or different when I was with them and they have always celebrated my mixed race. I never felt like I was experiencing something White or Black, it was just my life, but as I grew older, I realized there was a difference between the two cultures.

Michelle became aware of her racial identity at an early age and recalled experiences when she would shop or travel with her mother as the first instances of noticing how she was different from others. She also talked about her early experiences in school. She reflected and stated:

> My mom raised me. It was mostly just she and I for most of my life. When we would go out to eat, or when we would go on vacation to the mountains, people would stare at us because there was a White woman with a little brown skinned girl. It was around the time I started to go to elementary school that I noticed skin color. Even though I knew she was my mom, sometimes I got a little uncomfortable because I knew I had brown skin. I wondered if other kids thought that I was adopted. I remember one time that I told my mom I wished she has brown skin like dad and me, which really hurt her feelings. I will never forget that.

As she continued to reflect over her life, she talked about having good experiences growing up and was fortunate to attend diverse elementary and middle schools. During elementary and middle school, her peer groups consisted of White and Black people. She

recalled a time during middle school when she tried to fit in with her White peers by changing

her hair. "I put a perm in my hair, started to wear name brands associated more with the White

culture, you know like Abercrombie and Fitch. I also started listening to more pop and rock." At

times, her Black peers teased her for "acting White or listening to White music or speaking like a

White person." This frustrated Michelle, because she just wanted to fit in, and found it

challenging to assimilate within the White community because she had brown skin.

When she arrived at high school, she had more exposure to Black people because the

school consisted of predominantly Black students. Because she had not previously associated

much with her Black peers, Michelle decided to join several clubs and engaged in after school

sports in an effort to connect more with the Black student population. It was also during high

school that Michelle first encountered colorism. She vividly remembered a conversation with

her best friend "Tasha" who had a darker skin complexion. She said:

> Tasha and I talk about race often because she has felt that I have an advantage at
>
> times for being mixed race as opposed to fully Black. There was a point in high
>
> school where we shared the same friend group; it was she and I, and mostly
>
> African boys. She told me she felt like they treated me better than her because I
>
> was mixed and had lighter skin, even though they were African. They would
>
> tease her and call her a coon but would not call me names or treat me badly. It
>
> was not until later that I would hear my peers in college say I was yellow and had
>
> good hair.

At the time, Michelle did not understand why people of color would mistreat other people

of color, or why they would treat her differently because she had a lighter complexion. As she

continued throughout high school, she engaged in behavior and activities that tended to align

more with the Black community; however, she indicated she never felt pressured to conform or choose a racial identity until she arrived at college. She said:

> I did not have to make a choice until I got to college. When I arrived here to this predominantly White institution, I felt like I had to choose. I remember when I was in high school, I used to look at the statistics on the demographics, and saw 88% White, and 6% Black. Even though I grew up with a White mother and many of my friends were both Black and White throughout my childhood, the fact is, I felt like I was going to be lost and stick out like a sore thumb. I remember I cried to my mom, and told her they [White people] are going to make fun of my hair. They are going to make fun of the music I listen to. I am not sure why I only felt that way about the White students, but at that time, I did.

She arrived at Nance University thinking she would not fit in, and that the White population of students was going to judge her. She immediately sought out the Black community on campus because she felt as if the world saw her as Black with her brown skin tone. "When you look at me, you see kinky hair; you see brown skin and thick eyebrows, so if the world thinks I'm Black, then let me get in with the Black people." She candidly pointed out it was only in college that she felt as if everyone saw her as Black, and not biracial. She consistently felt pressure to identify more with the Black race because the Black community saw her as a light-skinned Black woman, and the White community just sees her as Black. During her freshmen year, she intentionally joined student organizations that consisted primarily of Black students such as the Black Affairs Council and the Black Academic Support Program; she attended all the Black student events and Black Greek Letter Organization activities. She listened to hip-hop and rap and only hung around Black people at lunch. She "secluded" herself

within the Black population because that is where she felt most comfortable; however, she still did not feel like she was Black enough to fit in. During the summer between her freshmen and sophomore years, she did some "soul searching" because she wanted to connect with people because of their character not because of their race. When she arrived back for her sophomore year, she decided to branch out and make new friends and try to connect more with the White community. She also joined a service sorority. When asked the reasons she decided to join the sorority over those groups that were historically White or Black, she stated she did not "feel Black or White enough" to join the other Greek organizations.

As she continued to talk about her experiences in college, Michelle often referred to her hair as a mechanism used to connect her to the Black and White communities on campus. She described her hair as one of the "most distinguishable factors" about her, and that she had a love/hate relationship with her hair. She indicated Black people have always said she had "good hair." She goes on to describe how she also prefers her hair to be straight rather than curly. She said:

> I feel more comfortable, confident and attractive when my hair is straightened. People assume I am biracial because I have big curly hair. I love my big curly hair because it makes me different, but I do not ever feel attractive when my hair is curly. Everyone around me has straight hair, both Black and White people. I don't know, I guess I feel prettier when it's straight because society tells us that long, straight hair [like White people] is preferable.

Since the conversation she had with "Tasha" in high school, there have only been two occasions on campus where Michelle felt like she was treated differently because of the color of her skin. She said:

I have been lucky that I have not had a lot of direct forms of discrimination because of how I look. I remember when I was working with my colleague and he constantly asked me what certain Black words mean or told me I am ratchet for listening to hip-hop, but then was shocked when I would listen to Taylor Swift. It's hurtful when he assumed stuff about me, and the sad thing is he is a Black guy. The other time I can remember is when a university police office gave me a ticket for jaywalking. What I could not wrap my head around was all the White students who had jaywalked or my friend who constantly gets away with driving under the influence when he is stopped. He is given a slap on the wrist and sent on his merry way. So, I have a Black guy saying things and looking at me crazy for acting White some days or Black some days, and a White officer giving me a ticket out of all the White students who just seem to get off. I am not sure what to make of it being a biracial person. One thing I do know is that it's frustrating.

## Michelle's Perceptions on Her Experiences

Michelle believed she has allowed colorism to influence her identity as a biracial woman, especially on campus. Despite her biracial background, she feels that society sees her as Black because of the color of her skin and has accepted or rejected her into certain racial communities. She consciously thinks about how her identity choice has flip-flopped throughout her life, and how she has constantly negotiated her biracial identity on campus through her peer groups, student organizations, music, and the way she wears her hair.

She acknowledged that she did try to assimilate in middle school to look more White by changing her hair style and dressing in clothing aligned more with the White culture. When she entered high school, which was a different demographic setting and consisted primarily of Black

students, she again assimilated to fit in with the Black population. She embraced her Black roots and listened to more hip-hop and rhythm and blues music. In college, identity shifting translated into joining student organizations and changing her image to fit in more with the Black community because of how she perceived others view her identity. She has a lot of pride about being biracial, but only feels she can celebrate her authentic self when she is not on campus:

> Being biracial is my favorite thing about myself, and it's kind of disappointing because I am equally Black and White. When I am not at school, I just view myself as me, when I am home, or with my mom or dad. Here [on campus] so many people challenge you to think about yourself, and I am disappointed there is such a boundary with my friend groups on campus. I feel like in elementary and high school, I never had to consciously forge relationships with any one type of person because of their race, but here I feel like I have to force relationships with non-Black people because I am only seen as Black. At the same time, I feel like I have to look a certain way, change my behavior or join certain groups to be accepted within the Black community. The only organization I have not felt this push and pull in is the service sorority I joined.

She acknowledged it was stereotypical of her to judge the campus community before arriving to college and think that the White students would make fun of her. She said, "I set up this defense mechanism. I judged and criticized others before they had a chance to judge me." She is more disappointed that she was not able to establish a connection with the White community. She felt that she shut off relationships that could have formed during her freshmen year because she immediately gravitated towards that Black student community. She also

believed her light brown skin complexion has prevented her from connecting more with her White peers because they only see her as Black, and she still struggles with that daily.

**Michelle's Perceptions on Support Systems**

Initially, when Michelle first arrived at Nance, she believed there was no real integration of the students on campus, which is why she felt pressured to choose the Black or White community. She said:

> I felt like I had to choose a side. I had to choose the Black or the White side, and I chose the Black side…it was like ok, well most of the groups I see here it's all of one thing. I was really disappointed, and I felt like there definitely needs to to be more integration at Nance. Now that I have tapped into some organizations, I see that it is there. I just have to seek it out.

Michelle reflected upon a picture she chose to describe her feelings and what it meant to be biracial at Nance (see Figure 1).

> There are four girls in this picture, one of them is Ethiopian, one is White, one is Romanian [I guess she is White] and then there is me. We are holding up the letters to the sorority. I don't feel White enough to join Pan-Hellenic Greek life, and I don't feel Black enough to join National Pan-Hellenic Greek life, so I joined a national service sorority, which is not geared towards any particular race. Here I can just be myself and not choose between any race. We are all sisters from different backgrounds, which in a sense reminds me of home in that I can just be myself; not just Black, not just White, but both.

*Figure 1.* Service sorority

Michelle does believe Nance has helped her explore more about her biracial identity through student organizations. "In ways, I think the school has helped me define my identity. There are a lot of organizations to tap into." Michelle has been a part of more monoracial organizations as well as groups that are open to diverse racial backgrounds that include Black and White people. She still feels there is segregation on campus when it comes to racial groups and is not sure how to make biracial people feel more included as a part of the bigger student population and not isolated into a certain racial group on campus. She said:

> I definitely feel there is segregation, and it's hard because if asked what would be done to make this school better, I really don't know. I think that it [race] is a social construct that is so real, as well as colorism, and it's in our society, especially in the South. In the South, everything is so Black and White, especially on this campus. There are times I wanted to be more of myself on campus, but there really is not a specific place I can just be me and celebrate both parts of me.

**Analysis of Michelle's Story**

In examining Michelle's story, it can easily be categorized into each of the theoretical frameworks. Michelle's identity development process aligns with several stages outlined by the Kerwin-Ponterotto Model (1995). She was aware of the differences in her skin tone at an early age due to the interactions with her immediate family and the public, thus aligning with the Pre-School stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). As Michelle became older and entered elementary school, she began to have more contact with peer groups, both consisting of White and Black people. As she finished elementary school and matriculated through middle school and high school, Michelle became more aware of the social meaning behind skin tone and culture and wanted to fit in with her peers. While she had Black friends in middle school, many of her friends were White. She acknowledged that she "did try to assimilate in middle school to look more white," by changing her hair style and dressing in clothing aligned more with the white culture. When she entered high school, which was a different demographic setting and consisted primarily of Black students, she again assimilated to fit in with the Black population. She embraced her Black roots and listened to more hip-hop and rhythm and blues music. Both experiences align with the Pre-adolescence Stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). Nevertheless, she did not feel pressured from either racial group to choose a side during her adolescence years, which is inconsistent with the Adolescence Stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). Her experiences in college strongly connect to the most current stage of her biracial development, the College/Young Adulthood Stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). She is a highly intelligent young woman, who recognizes race is a social construct. She is aware of how her experiences throughout her life have pushed and pulled at how she identifies and still faces challenges of

being biracial and immersing herself in the Black community on campus while feeling rejected by the White community.

Upon further analysis, Michelle's identity as a biracial individual supports Renn's (2004) pattern of Multiracial Identity. Throughout her life, Michelle negotiated her biracial identity through formal spaces, particularly through student groups on campus. While she would feel more comfortable and accepted with one race over another and at times altered her appearance or cultural behavior to have a stronger sense of belonging with either the Black or White community, she has always maintained that she is a biracial person – not just a Black or White individual.

Michelle is aware of how her phenotypical differences influenced how she has identified herself and how society perceives her identity. She acknowledged the fact Black and White people see her as a light-skinned Black woman. She is attuned to the fact that her darker-skinned peers perceive her as someone who has "good hair" and is treated better than them. These self-perceptions she has and how she altered her image aligns with Wilder's (2008) element of internal scripts and external scripts respectively. Exposure to name calling from her peers with a darker skin complexion matches Wilder's (2008) element of language.

**Tiffany's Story**

Tiffany is a 21-year old student at Nance University from a small rural town located in the Southeast. She is a bright and ambitious person majoring in pre-nursing, psychology and Spanish. Her father was absent most of her life leaving her to grow up with her mother and maternal grandmother. She does have half-siblings who are also biracial on their father's side. She dealt with both identity negotiation and colorism at a young age and described her

experiences with great detail and emotion. She described her racial identity as biracial; however, she acknowledged that her racial identity shifted over the years. She said:

> My identity kind of goes along with my experiences. Growing up in high school, I considered myself to be Caucasian, because I was raised by White mother and grandmother. I was teased a lot growing up from the people that I wanted to become friends with…like the White crowd would look at me and say 'Oh, she's Black' and exclude me a lot of times. With the Black crowd, I mean, there was a light-skin/dark-skin issue a lot of times and the dark-skinned girls would call me names, say that I was stuck up, and that I think I am all that, and I did not do anything to them. So, I kind of grew a stigma against them [the dark-skinned girls]. One time, someone mentioned one-drop. If you had one-drop, then you were Black, but I never felt that way a lot of times. So in terms of how I racially identified in the past, I internally identified as Caucasian, but things have shifted in the past couple of years, and now my identity is in a grey area. I say that because of recent conversations I had with my African American Religion professor, which caused me to reflect more about my Black identity. I think my father not being present, being outcast and teased built up this angst in me where I did not want to identify with any part of my Black side. My siblings know more about their Black history than I do because our father is present in their lives.

At an early age, during the time she was in elementary school, Tiffany felt she was different from everyone else because of the constant attention people gave her regarding her skin complexion and hair. She said:

I had the feeling that I always knew I was different…it was you know, people

were constantly putting their hands in my hair and saying how pretty I was, and

how I had a nice skin complexion.  There was no negative connotation with those

experiences, you know.  It was just…I could tell that I was different from others.

The more negative experiences started in middle school.  Middle school is hell for

everyone.

She laughed as she explained her transition to middle school, which is where she

experienced her heightened sense of her racial identity.  Middle school was different in the fact

that she felt like she was more distinguishable than her peers because of her biracial identity.

She was more aware of the differences in her hair and skin complexion from other students.  In

her mind, she identified White, but that is not how everyone else viewed her.  To others, she was

just another light-skinned Black girl.  She talked about how she felt discriminated against by her

peers.  She reflected on times where she was teased for being light skinned.  She also recalled

how someone in school teased her about her hair.  She said, "There was this boy in class who

made fun of me and said I looked like I had stuck my finger in a light socket."  Tiffany felt as if

she went through an identity crisis, where there were occasions she dressed like a tomboy by

wearing tank tops and cargo pants and hung out with White boys where she rode her bike, skated

with her rollerblades ad skateboard around the neighborhood.  She then switched to hanging out

more with her Black friends and she again mentioned how she was teased and called names such

as "snow bunny" from her Black peers because she had the lightest complexion among the

group.  When she hung around her Black friends, her White peers would question her behavior.

She said, "My White friends would tell me to stop trying so hard to be Black."  Tiffany felt

conflicted as a biracial person, because she was unsure of where she fit in.  These shifts in her

identity continued throughout high school, where she continued to negotiate her identity between

Black and White races.

When Tiffany arrived at Nance, she was a transfer student. She had a hard time

navigating the campus and finding a sense of belonging and felt as if she had missed

opportunities to establish social groups like many of her friends were able to construct during

their freshmen year. She explained that her racial identity continued to shift throughout college,

and that her most recent exploration in learning more about her Black heritage was what she

called a "journey to Black racial identity." During her African American Religion class, Tiffany

recalled a discussion about slavery, where she defended the practices that terrorized so many

Black people for hundreds of years. At the shock of her professor, he challenged her to examine

what would cause her to believe her notions. She explained that she felt the lack of her father's

presence and not really understanding her Black identity marred her perceptions of slavery.

Tiffany decided she wanted to know more about her father's side.

Of the 600 plus student organizations at Nance, Tiffany decided to use Black Greek

Letter Organizations as the driving force of her learning more about her Black identity. She

ended up joining a historically Black sorority to connect with the Black community. As she

continued on her journey of self-exploration, her identity was still challenged by others. She

talked about how she still felt pressured to choose the Black side over the White side and how

colorism is still very present in her life, even within her sorority. She said:

> I feel like I really don't have a choice but to choose because people just are not
>
> accepting or open unless they have had the same experiences that you have had,
>
> but I am biracial. No one has had to deal with discrimination the way I have.
>
> With my sorority friends, they laugh at me…you know, the jokes…'Oh, that is

your White side Tiffany,' and they laugh it off. I understand I still have a lot to learn about them and the Black culture, just as much as they have to learn about me and my mixed heritage. I welcome the 'What are you?' questions, because that provides me an opportunity to educate others about who I am.

When asked where she feels more comfortable concerning her peer groups, she laughs, and says, "my dog." She furthers explains her tug of war with her identity and the reactions she gets from her friends. She said:

It's really the mood I am. Sometimes I wake up and I just want to wear my all black, heavy eyeliner, listen to rock music all day, because that is what I did growing up [when I identified more with my White side]. I feel like I can flip-flop, but society tells me I can't. So when I wake up in the morning and want to dress like this, I get a negative reaction from my sorority sisters or my Black peers. I get a negative reaction like, 'Why are you being so fake?' My White friends accept me more and feel more comfortable around me because I am listening to rock and country. Then other days, I want to listen to hard core rap and get into that role, and that also plays into my race when it comes to my peer groups. People don't know what do with how I mix it up, and they just feel like I am fake. I have a hard a time mastering that because my sorority sisters have adverse reactions to my constant shifts. Validation is a huge issue in my life. Overall, I feel like I am a very confident person when it comes to my personality, but when it comes to my race, I need validation.

Tiffany's body language changed and the passion in her voice became very prominent when she continued to talk about how she has felt discriminated by her others because of her

skin complexion.  Colorism is not new to Tiffany.  She constantly has felt frustrated and wonders when she will not have to be subjected to the jokes, the looks and the name calling.  She said:

> Whether it is a joke from a friend to be taken lightly or with malice, it's a way to just pick at you because people feel a certain way.  I have been called 'snow bunny' among my friends here.  Whether they are jealous, angered or irritated, you can't just pinpoint someone and make all these assumptions about their identity and personality because of the way they look.  People always say I think I am all that, or I am a stuck up bitch, and I think I am better than them.  I don't look at people and think that I am all that.  People try to place me in a category because of how I look, which makes me uncomfortable.  I like the fact that I am biracial.  Some people think I have the best of both worlds by me having 'good skin' and 'good hair.'  They do not understand the emotional part of it.  I constantly think about how others perceive me and how I display myself to fit in like straightening my hair or listening to different kinds of music.

**Tiffany's Perceptions of Her Experiences**

Tiffany's maturity and understanding of her racial identity and colorism is evident in her articulation of her experiences.  She feels her development as a biracial person has been challenging when trying to enhance her awareness of both of her racial cultures and navigating the color lines.  Tiffany's perception on her experiences as a biracial person and the influence of skin color was summed up in a reflective essay she wrote.  She said:

> Being biracial has not been a cakewalk.  Although skin color should never define a person, I have permitted for my racial background to distort my emotions and mind at various stages in my life.  When I was a child, I did not have the

opportunity to experience what I consider to be two halves of my whole being because I was raised by my [White] mother and grandmother. I believe a person's individual development requires both mother and father, and in my case, both races. The absence of my father as an ancestral reference left me with a feeling of displacement. Throughout my life, I have tried to fill this void my engaging in activities and joining organizations to find a sense of belonging. Since I have been in college, I have connected more with the Black community in an attempt to uncover more about the Black culture because I did not feel accepted by the White students when I got here because of the color of my skin. Everything was and still is segregated here. When I want to celebrate one race over the other through my image, I continue to get looks and questions about my behavior. I am still in this grey area of where I feel I belong. I also have used language against others that has been used against me like also calling my sorority sister 'snow bunny.' We laugh about it, but then I have to think how she really feels because I know how I have felt when I was called that name.

**Tiffany's Perceptions of Support Systems**

Tiffany's perceptions about support systems on campus are mixed. She said, "The campus climate is very separate." She further explained, "People feel most comfortable with people who look like them and share similar experiences." She believes it is important for people to feel comfortable, and "it makes a world of difference" to the college experience. Since she arrived at Nance, Tiffany has felt more accepted and supported by the Black community, particularly through her involvement with her sorority.

*Figure 2.* Presentation to the campus

      She reflected on a picture of her and her sorority sisters on the night they presented themselves to campus (see Figure 2). For many new members in Black Greek Letter Organizations, they present themselves to the larger campus community in what is called a neophyte show. For Tiffany, this was a defining moment of validating her Black identity as a biracial person. She said, "Having Black sororities supported my identity. Having that place to go gives you a place to be comforted, and I feel like that's good." It sealed a bond that would forever tie Tiffany to a historically Black organization, where her Black heritage could be celebrated. She further said:

> I have a special bond with my sorority sisters. When I presented myself
> to campus, it was like I stepped away from the old and morphed into something
> new. That was the precipitous of my change. At that moment, I was forever
> connected to the sorority and the Black community. It was important for me to
> connect to the Black community because for so long I have not really embraced
> that part of me due to my relationship with my dad. I feel like I can celebrate that

side of me now, and learn more about the Black culture through my involvement

in the organization.

Tiffany has not felt a similar connection to the White community on campus. She felt the White students perceived her to be a light-skinned Black woman, with which she struggled. Tiffany further discussed the need for additional support for biracial people. She said:

The only place I feel like I am able to be a part of the entire campus community, and we all come together as one, is at the football games, and that is pretty sad. If there were a place for biracial people, I would not be having this issue of feeling pressured to pick a side. I would not know where to begin. There are all kinds of biracial. Although we have similar biracial issues, we all have different experiences. Someone who is Latina and White is not going to have the same experiences as someone who is Black and White. I mean forums are a good idea and place to start that comforts everyone and people are able to discuss their experiences as multiracial people.

**Analysis of Tiffany's Story**

Tiffany's story of understanding her racial identity and skin tone discrimination began at an early age, which constantly shaped and shifted her identity. Throughout Tiffany's story, she talked about her experiences in school and college with her peer groups. Tiffany never felt like she quite fit in with her Black or White peers because of how she looked. During elementary school, she began to become more aware of her differences due to comments made about her beauty and hair, which parallels Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Entry to School Stage. Tiffany's experiences in high school align with the Adolescence Stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995), where she began to feel increased pressure to conform and would shift back and forth

between White and Black communities and altered her image by changing the music she listened to and how she wore her clothes.  Because of how she altered her behavior and image, Tiffany's peers would indicate her behavior as not being authentic and "acting White" or "acting Black." Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) College/Young Adulthood Stage is relevant as Tiffany's constant struggle to define and redefine her identity through her involvement in student organizations on campus.  She has continued to experience acceptance and rejection within the Black and White communities on campus because of her identity.

Throughout Tiffany's life, she has struggled with her biracial identity.  Throughout her life and more recently in college, the cultural and societal influences on Tiffany's racial identity align with the Renn's (2004) Multiple Monoracial Identity Pattern.  Where Tiffany states she has a biracial identity, there have been periods in her life where her identity was more salient within the White community and more recently within the Black community on campus.  Specifically, on campus Tiffany feels more accepted and comfortable with the Black student population and has come to identify more with the Black community; whereas, previously, she identified as White throughout her formative years.

When analyzing her experiences with colorism, Tiffany explained the use of color terms used to degrade her and make her feel uncomfortable because of her light skin complexion.  She said, "I was called 'snow bunny' and 'light-skinned bitch.'"  This name calling aligns with Wilder's (2008) element of language as mechanism to attach negative connotation to skin tone. Furthermore, Tiffany's feelings about how society viewed her because of her skin tone translated into how she wore her hair or dressed.  Additionally, she harbored negative feelings towards her darker-skinned Black counterparts because of name calling and teasing of her light skin complexion.  In turn, Tiffany also recognized her own use of color terms such as calling her

light-skinned sorority sister "snow bunny." These perceptions about self and how others perceived her through her skin tone and the behavior attributed to these feelings align with Wilder's (2008) elements of internal scripts and external practices respectively.

### Victoria's Story

Victoria is an energetic young woman who has a bright smile lights up the room. She is a 21-year old political science major at Nance University. She is goal-oriented and has aspirations of going to law school to be a public defender. She grew up in a small urban city in the Southeast with her single mother. Vickie, as she likes to be called by her peers, is biracial but identifies as African American. Her mother is White and her father is Black. For the first six years of her life, Vickie grew up with her maternal grandparents. She said:

> My mom had me when she was very, very young. She got pregnant by an African American man, but my grandparents did not know they were dating. They also did not know she was pregnant until she was seven months along. After I was born, they gained custody of me because my mother was 15 at the time. So I grew up with my white grandparents until I was six years old.

At a young age, Vickie had difficulty understanding what her race was, and related it directly to her skin complexion. She said:

> I grew up in a small White community, and people would always ask me what I was. Of course, I was darker, even though I am fairly light. I was darker than my classmates and the people in my neighborhood, so I was labeled as black. I never said that I was biracial. I never considered myself to be mixed or biracial.

When she was about eight years old, Vickie's mother gained custody of her and they moved to a large metropolitan city about an hour away. When Vickie transferred to a predominantly Black, inner-city public school, she began to become aware that she looked different, yet similar to her classmates. She said:

> Up until that point, I never knew how different I was from people. Even though growing up with my grandparents, people considered me to be Black; I never considered myself Black. I considered myself to be White, but I would not say I was White. I mean, what little child goes around saying that. It was not until we moved, and I started attending the inner-city school that was 100% Black from the administrators to the students, that I realized I looked more like them than when I lived with my grandparents.

Vickie went on to explain that is was around the third grade when she started hearing the "What are you?" questions and was teased for being light skinned. Being subjected to questions and teasing would continue throughout her adolescence. While the teasing may have stopped, she still had to endure the questions, looks along with stereotypes and name calling, which continued in college. She said:

> You know, it was the little White girl jokes or you think you are better than us because your hair is curly…things like that. I would go home, and I would cry about being called White. I didn't like being called White. At that time I felt like being White wasn't a good thing. I definitely did not like being teased for being a White girl in an all-Black school. Those types of instances occurred a lot throughout my teen years. When I first got to the university people would ask me all the time what I was. They would ask if my mom was White, is my dad White,

because you can't just be Black. It may sound weird but it kind of depends on my hair. If I wear my hair curly, I get it a lot looks and questions, but it occurs more with Black people than it does with White people. Again, it would be 'You can't just be Black, because you are light skinned and your hair is nice.' In the Black community, there is a big disconnect between light-skinned and dark-skinned African American people, so I am stuck with having to deal with stereotypes because I am fair skinned. Like, I have been called high yellow. I've never felt like they [the White community] looked at me and wondered if I am White or Black. I feel like the White community does not care if I am light skinned. To them, I feel like if you are Black, you are Black, and they really don't care, and they move on.

As Vickie proceeded to discuss her collegiate experiences, she talked about switching when it came to her biracial identity. She said:

It's embarrassing to say, but I kind of have to switch. I know when to turn on Victoria, and when to switch it to Vickie. On campus, when I am with my Black friends or sorority sisters, I am Vickie. I can get excited and loud when I am with my friends. If I am in a professional setting like going into interviews at law school fairs on campus, I switch it up, and I become Victoria. I become more of a business professional. I don't wear my hair curly and I am more reserved. I have become very good at switching and mastering having to act White in certain situations. I am never Vickie around my colleagues at work, or even my grandparents.

**Victoria's Perceptions of Her Experiences**

Vickie explained how her experiences were significant in shaping her identity. She said:

I accept the fact that I am biracial, and I just accept it for what it is. I think if I

stayed where I was and not attended all-Black schools when I moved, and

attended the predominantly White school, my identity and perspectives would be

a lot different. For so long, I did not know who I was. I did not know who to

identify myself as when I was so young. I think it is unfair people have to go

through that. There is nothing I can do about my skin complexion. I have come

to grips with what I identify myself with and being comfortable in my own skin,

and as a African American woman. Being surrounded by people who look like

me gave me a sense of place, and that place is with the African American

community.

**Victoria's Perceptions of Support Systems**

Vickie described how she feels more comfortable with the Black community on campus.

She said, "When I am at the student center on campus, I'm with people who look like me."

She is also involved with programs and activities that are targeted for the Black student

population.

*Figure 3.* Student activities fair

One of the pictures Vickie chose to reflect on was a picture of her speaking to freshmen at the student activities fair (see Figure 3). Vickie's home is in the Black community and she loves to connect with other Black students and aid in their transition to Nance. She said:

> I love this picture because it shows my involvement as a Black leader on campus. This picture shows me talking to African American freshmen about the Black Academic Support Program. You know, I am more involved with the Black community on campus, which allows me to connect with other Black students. So anytime I get a chance to talk to prospective students or first-year students to tell them about the Black community, I will. I am biracial, but since people here see me as Black, that is where I spend most of my time, and yes, it is only one part of me, but that is where I feel most at home.

Vickie also joined a historically Black sorority and spends the majority of her time with her sorority sisters and her roommate, who is also her best friend and a Black woman. She chose

another picture (see Figure 4) to discuss her involvement in the sorority and how it represents her Black identity.  She said:

> My sorority also had a role in making me feel more accepted on campus.  This
>
> picture is at the Greek yard show [where the Black Greeks come to showcase their
>
> stepping and dancing routines] and I think this picture does a great job of showing
>
> who I identify myself with on campus.  It definitely evokes positive feelings, but
>
> also negative feelings because I am only displaying once side of my identity.  I
>
> would definitely say that being in my sorority had a major impact on learning
>
> more about who I am as an African American woman.  I also think this picture
>
> represents how divided the campus is.  There are not many White people in the
>
> photo, but that is how it is with most events on campus.



*Figure 4.* Spring yard show

Vickie further explained her thoughts on how she viewed the White community on campus.  She said:

As far as the White community, I don't think they care about us [Black people].

They know that we are here, but I don't think it's enough to make a difference.

It's so exclusive and separated. I think to a certain extent we make excuses for it.

That's why I am really not a part of the White community. I also think the fact

that we don't have a biracial organization goes to show that a lot of people don't

see it as relevant. I can't say that is anybody's fault but our own because no one

would start it but the biracial people on campus.

**Analysis of Victoria's Story**

After looking at Victoria's story in more depth, there was evidence to demonstrate a

strong relation to the four stages of Kerwin and Ponterott's model (1995). Victoria was aware of

her racial differences at an early age upon noticing the differences in her skin complexion

compared to her mother and maternal grandparents signifying the Pre-School Stage of the model

(Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). While society labeled her as Black, Victoria did not think she was

Black. It was not until she transferred to a predominantly Black school in third grade that her

sense of self was challenged through the form of questions and name calling, paralleling the

Entry to School Stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Pre-

adolescence and Adolescence Stages were prevalent during Victoria's school experiences in

middle school and high school respectively as her awareness and racial identity was further

strengthened through the influence of her social interactions with her peer groups. There was not

sufficient evidence to show that Victoria experienced the College/Young Adulthood Stage as her

identity and acceptance within the Black community is very strong (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

Her strong sense of self and identity within the Black community is consistent with Renn's (2004) Monoracial Identity Patttern.  Victoria has felt more connected and comfortable within the Black community on campus.  Evidence of her monoracial identity is seen through her high involvement within the Black community as a member and mentor in student organizations that primarily comprise Black students.

Victoria indicated she has been subjected to discriminatory behavior through name calling such as "high yellow" and "White girl," which aligns with Wilder's (2008) element of language.  She internalized these negative connotations attached to her light skin and felt that being White was bad, which fits into Wilder's (2008) concept of internal scripts and how women view themselves within the larger context of the issue of colorism.  Contrariwise, messages about hair and professionalism also influenced how Victoria presented herself to the White community paralleling Wilder's element of external practices.

## Angie's Story

Angie is a 20-year biology and pre-dentistry major at Nance.  Angie is a tall, slender young woman with brownish-green eyes who has a graceful demeanor.  She grew up in a small town in the Southeast with her mother.  Angie's mom is Black and her father is White.  Her parents divorced when Angie was young, but her mother later re-married a Black man.  Angie's biological father is still a constant factor in her life.  When asked to describe her racial identity, Angie indicated she identifies as biracial.  As Angie reflected on when she first was aware of her biracial identity, she said, "I don't remember a time where it's like hit me.  It's always just been who I am."

Growing up, Angie was questioned a lot about her racial makeup. Many of her friends perceived her to be Black. She said:

> They thought I was Black, like just a light-skinned Black person, until I told them I was biracial. They were like 'Oh, I didn't even know that.' In high school, and really throughout my whole life, people would just be like, 'You are mixed with something, but what is it?'

Angie has always kept a diverse group of friends ranging from many races and ethnicities. She describes her peer group on campus as multicultural. "I like to think I can just blend in with anybody. I try not to make it apparent that I'm Black or White." However, she further explains how her peers will tease her sometimes. She said:

> I hung with people who are like 'You are acting White,' 'You are acting Black,' I am like no – I'm just acting me. That has always been the biggest thing growing up its like you know, 'Why are you acting white today?' and 'Why are you acting Black?'; when it's just like chill, look, I'm just me. My White friends said 'Oh you can dance; that must be your Black side. Show us how to dance.' My Black friends would make fun of me and kind of put me down just because I was White. If they [my Black] friends saw me talking to a White person, they acted off towards me.

As she thinks about her peer groups and where she feels most comfortable, she discussed having White friends on campus but has felt more a part of the Black community on campus; however, at times she feels like an outsider at the same time because of her skin complexion. She said:

I would have to say I feel more comfortable with my Black side, at first, and

within the Black community.  I feel like sometimes the Black girls don't accept

me.  There is the light-skinned/dark-skinned competition, so of course I get ribbed

in that light-skinned place so it's kind of hard to meet girls that are very like

accepting I guess.  But, I don't, I would definitely just say that I more identify

with the Black side.  I have no problem like with my White friends.  We will have

a good time, you know?  With the whole light-skin issue, it's just been harder

with you Black girls.  With guys, they see light skin and are like 'Oh my gosh!'

because they think I am pretty.  The dark-skinned girls wonder why I am I am

always getting everyone.  Sometimes, the dark-skinned girls think I am stuck up

and cocky.

Angie tries to present herself as a confident woman regardless of color.  Instead of

assimilating to fit in, she "strives to be a better woman of God."  She admitted there were times

when she was challenged with trying to determine where she definitely fits in.  She said:

Yeah, I definitely have always struggled with switching up and going to Black to

White.  My Black friends speak with more of an urban dialect, so when I am with

them, I will adjust my language, and then when I am with my White friends, I will

kind of straighten it up a bit, so I have definitely changed it up in the past.  I won't

deny it at all, but it's also kind of taught me like, it's not okay, you now I don't

need to do this.  It's just like peer pressure you know.  You just can't succumb to

that.  Most of the times, when I go out, I wear my hair straight versus when I am

at home, and it's curly, but that is more of a personal preference.  I've really

learned and like try my best to just be consistent with the way I look and talk with

everyone.  I don't want to change the way I am just to be able to get along with two different races.

**Angie's Perceptions of Her Experiences**

When thinking about her skin tone, colorism, and identity, she said:

It's definitely made me work harder to really push that I am biracial because I don't like being grouped in with one thing.  I don't ever want to limit my biracial identity to one thing, so I think just colorism itself, it's really made me strive to let people know that like, I am biracial, you know?  It's also not just a color thing; it's a cultural thing too.  It's hard, but I don't like the fact that it's here, you know; the whole debate because it's kind of dumb to me.  I guess there are a lot of [biracial] people in that gray area because society is so Black and White.  People say we live in a post-racial society, but that is complete BS.  It's so Black and White, and nobody ever looks in the middle.  It's frustrating to me.  When my friends used to say I was acting White or Black, I was very self-conscious.  It was really hard for me.  I have felt, and still do think people never understand what I am going through.  I remember one time I just broke down to my mom and told her everyone deals with their race, and the challenges that come with being Black or White…but I have to deal with stereotypes of both races.  I am Black.  I am White.  I accept both of them you know.  I don't like being placed into one category.  I want people to recognize me…that I am biracial, but they do not.  I get lumped with other light-skinned Black people, and sometimes I feel like that works against me because of the negative perceptions of others, like dark-skinned women and me getting more attention from guys or thinking that I am stuck up and all that.

**Angie's Perceptions of Support Systems**

Angie views the campus environment as very Black and White and does not feel it creates an environment that is inclusive of all diverse backgrounds, let alone individuals with racially-mixed backgrounds. She said:

> It's very White and Black. It's not really open to all cultures I would have to say. But it's like, it's very much Black and White, and I don't think it's my identity is spoken to at this university, but I also don't know how it would be, I guess. I think if anything to make things more multicultural. I would love to talk about biracial issues because it's not something you really talk about every single day. I often reflect when I am alone to really understand what it means to be biracial."
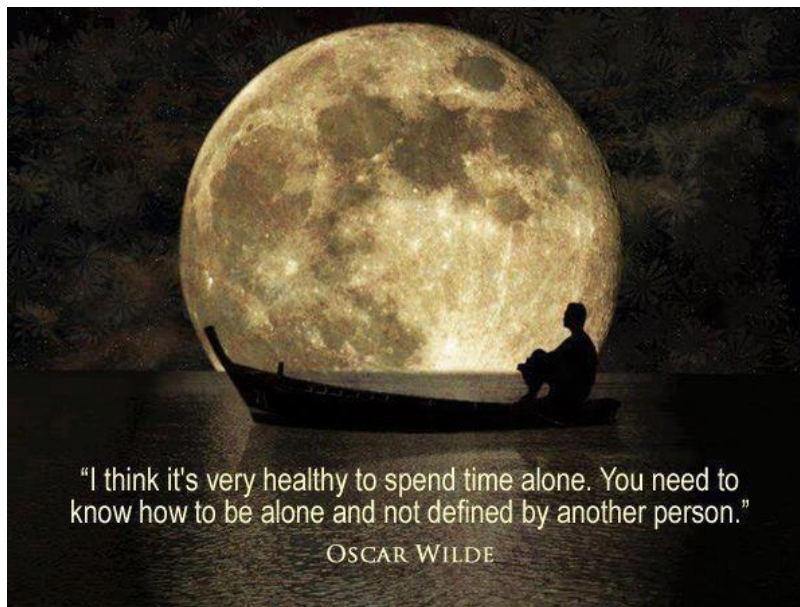


*Figure 5.* Oscar Wilde poster

Angie reflected upon a picture she chose to describe her feelings about being biracial and other's perceptions of her. She said:

> I love the poster and quote by Oscar Wilde (see Figure 5). To me, it symbolizes

my Black and White side with the contrast in the picture while also signifying not

letting others define you.  It just represents how others may try to put a label on

you because you look a certain way.  I spend a lot of time alone, which I think is

key to learning how to identify yourself.  Alone time is good because one can

reflect more and learn more about who they are.  Like with being Black and

White, I just have to really look at myself and who I am and not let others label

me.  I have accepted who I am, but it's still challenging when society just sees

you one way.

When looking for support systems, Angie spends a lot of her time at the student center in

addition to participating in volunteer work offered by campus organizations.  She said:

When I am on campus at the student center, I hang outside with the Black

students most of the time.  I mean I do have interactions with the White students

on campus, but that is mostly through class and service work with the campus

kitchen and my academic honors associations.

Angie has not necessarily felt rejected by the White students on campus, and has some

relationships with White individuals; however, she does not necessarily feel welcomed by the

White students because she is perceived to be Black.

**Analysis of Angie's Story**

After further examining Angie's story, there was no significant evidence to show she

went through the Pre-school, Entry to School and Pre-adolescence stages as indicated by Kerwin

and Ponterotto (1995).  Angie indicated being biracial has always been a part of who she was,

indicating Angie's perception about her skin complexion and race was not influenced by her

family or peers.  She indicated people always assumed she was mixed with something, but never

really asked her questions about her racial background until later in high school. Furthermore, Angie did not indicate feeling pressured from society to choose an identity, which is inconsistent with the Adolescence stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). While she would change how she spoke at times, she never spoke of consciously changing the way she presented herself. Additionally, Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) explained that biracial individuals continue to experience immersion and rejection in a monoracial group, which Angie did indicate. She described feeling comfortable within the Black community; however, she stated she did not feel accepted all the time by White community.

While Angie's connection to the Black community feels more comfortable to her, she firmly stated that she is a biracial person, and does not identify with only one race; therefore, affirming the Multiracial Identity Pattern formulated by Renn (2004). Both of Angie's parents remained constant in her life. Her mother and stepfather are both Black, which alludes to Angie's comfort within the Black community; however, the presence of her biological father reminds Angie of her biracial heritage, and Angie is proud of her biracial background.

Angie's experiences with skin tone discrimination have appeared periodically throughout her life. Since she has been in college, she has been exposed to instances of discrimination from dark-skinned women. Angie explained how her peers would say she acted Black or White to describe her behavior at times. She also alluded to the fact that dark-skinned women see her as a threat because she is pretty, and have called her stuck up and cocky. The use of these terms fall in line with Wilder's (2008) element of language as a way to use terminology attached to skin tone. Angie's internalization of discriminatory behavior towards her because of her light skin formulated ideas in her head that having a lighter complexion meant she was competing with individuals who have a darker complexion. Angie also discussed her self-consciousness about

her light skin and struggling with confusion about others' perceptions of her behavior as acting in alignment with a certain racial group. Wilder (2008) discussed these feelings and views about skin tone as internal scripts. There was insufficient data to support Wilder's (2008) element of external practices.

CHAPTER 5

CEDAR UNIVERSITY

*"People will stare. Make it worth their while" ~Harry Winston*

**Introduction**

The subsequent stories illustrate the experiences of Casey and Tyfany. These two women attend Cedar University. An overview of Cedar University is included. Each story illustrates the participants' experiences beginning with information about their developmental years prior to college. Information about their parents, awareness of racial identity, and experiences in school were incorporated in their stories. Particulars about the influence of colorism on participants' identity choice and how they negotiate the campus environment are presented followed by their perceptions of how colorism has impacted their life. The stories conclude with their perspectives on institutional support systems supported by pictures the participants took for the photo elicitation project. An analysis of the story is provided, which is situated within the theoretical framework.

**Description of Cedar University**

Cedar University is a small, private, liberal arts university that was founded in the 19th Century. The campus is located in an upscale neighborhood located within a large, southeastern, metropolitan city. The population at Cedar is a little over 1,000 students. There are approximately 55 student organizations offered on campus. Additionally, the institution provides 16 sports for Division III of the NCAA.

**Casey's Story**

Casey is an 18-year-old freshman, psychology major at Cedar University.  She has an outgoing personality, and always looks to find the positive in every situation.  Casey grew up with both her parents and two older brothers in the Midwest.  She described her identity in a comical way.  She said, "I would just say I am mixed.  I have a White mom and a Black dad; pretty basic."   She is very descriptive in her reflections and discussed how she learned at an early age what it meant to be biracial.  She said:

> When I was young, I had to bring forms home from school and they asked you to put your age, birthday, and race on the form, and like there are all these boxes, and you can only choose one race.  So one day, I went home and asked my mom, which one do I choose.  You know I was a little kid in elementary school, and I did not think about things like that.  So my mom told me to pick multiple choices because I had two races.  My parents were always sending positive messages about our biracial identity.  We never thought we were different.  It was just the norm.

Through her jovial demeanor, constant smiles and laughs, Casey talked about her experiences growing up and how she seemed to always look different to people.  She said, "Depending on what month it is, and how the suns hits me in the face depicts how people see me." She further said:

> For my entire life, I have been asked questions about my identity.  I have gotten pretty much everything.  I have had people walk up to me and just start speaking Spanish, and I have to say no, I am not Hispanic.  One time, some lady at a

festival asked me if I was Moroccan.  I was like, that is really specific, but I told

her no ma'am, I am not.

There were always looks or questions about Casey's identity; however, she never felt

pressured to choose one racial identity over the other.  She said:

> I mean it's kind of like obvious that I am not just one race.  Looking at me, I am
>
> light skinned, but I have like my dad's [Black] nose.  It's kind of like a toss-up.  I
>
> think that's why people guess just like out of the blue things about my race, but I
>
> never really had to choose.  I went to school with the same people, from preschool
>
> to high school.  It was a pretty small town, and everyone knew everybody else, so
>
> people knew my family and about me.  The majority of the people in my school
>
> were White, but I didn't feel like I stuck out because I grew up with these people.
>
> I just saw myself as another classmate, and that is how they looked at me as well.
>
> Since I have been in college, people may ask me what I am, but everyone on
>
> campus sees me as someone who is mixed.  I say mixed, because I am light
>
> skinned and my hair is a giveaway.

Casey has relationships with students from various different backgrounds in her role as a

student leader in several organizations; however, her main peer group consists of more Black

women.  She said:

> I think people are accepting of my biracial background because we are all very
>
> diverse here at Ivy.  I have never had a problem with being accepted where people
>
> make me feel like I do not fit in here.  That is one of the main reasons I chose to
>
> attend here – because of the diversity.  I wanted to be around people with different
>
> ethnicities and cultures.  It's nice because I don't stick out as a mixed girl.  People

here do not take a double glance because I don't look like everybody else. I think

we are past that in this society, or maybe just at this school.

Casey has always felt she has been able to be herself, especially in college. She said:

I don't really flip-flop like that. Sometimes, if I am with my friends, and I get

really energetic, I may not fully pronounce all my words, but it doesn't really

change depending on which friends I am with. Like my hair is curly. I have

straightened it just to try something new. Sometimes when I do that, I get

different reactions from people and questions about my race: 'Are you Italian?';

or 'Are you Central American?' My friends have even walked past me because

they did not recognize me. What is funny is when I am with my friends, and we

are listening to music, and a song comes on that I heard as a child, I might start

singing and dancing. My Black friends will start laughing and say that is the

White side coming out of you. It does not offend me. I just laugh about it.

Casey did mention that comments have been made towards her based on her skin

complexion, but she does not let it get to her and make her feel bad. She said:

There have been times when my friends make jokes about me not going out with

them because the guys will gravitate towards me because I am light skinned and

yellow. I laughed the first time I heard the world yellow to describe me because I

had never heard this term used like that before in my life. Though not often, there

have been rare occasions when people say rude things to me and call me names. I

have been called the n-word when I am with my Black friends. I just shrug it off,

because there are just mean people in the world.

**Casey's Perceptions on Her Experiences**

Casey's has not let society define her or be shaped by discriminatory behavior. Her

experiences throughout life have been generally positive. She said:

> I think I am pretty lucky. I come from a family that was open and accepting of my
>
> biracial identity. I have never thought of myself as someone coming from two
>
> different families. Like, I have a Black family, and a White family. They were
>
> just my family. I do think I have a stronger sense of my identity and pride about
>
> it because I had both parents in my life. If a biracial person only has one parent in
>
> their life, they are not really able to learn about both cultures and may tend to
>
> behave a certain way or lean towards one race over the other if they are only
>
> exposed to one part of who they are. I'm not sure if colorism has influenced my
>
> identity in any way. I definitely think there is a difference between my self-
>
> identity and how other people perceive me. I don't really think about my racial
>
> identity or the color of my skin unless someone brings it up. I'm just a person
>
> who happens to be Black and White – a mesh of both. That's what my DNA did.
>
> I have always just considered myself Casey, you know.

**Casey's Perceptions on Support Systems**

Casey's thoughts about Cedar University are positive when it comes to the campus

climate and supporting all races and ethnicities. She said:

> You know, there is a little bit of everything on this campus. The diversity on this
>
> campus has helped me to feel like I have an advantage and approach certain
>
> people because I have a standpoint that comes from two different sides. I am
>
> involved with several leadership groups on campus. I like to join things that are

interesting, and not because it supports a certain racial group, which Cedar

provides.  Like, I am a part of the Black Student Caucus, the Black and Gold

Club, and I am going to be an orientation leader.  I love Cedar because I never get

bored here.  There is always something going on for everyone.  I have never

really like deconstructed which side of me likes this or that because it's just an

inclusive place, and there are organizations and events that support all students in

the campus community.



*Figure 6.* Academic Hall

Casey reflected on a picture of Academic Hall (see Figure 6), a place where she takes

many of her classes.  She feels classes are one of the ways she gets to learn more about others

and teach others about her biracial background, especially in her psychology and sociology

classes.  She said:

This picture represents awareness and learning.  I also love learning about

different people, which I feel is supported in class discussions where individuals

can learn more about themselves but also other people.  I mean, I think in general

people assume, but just don't assume someone identifies a certain way because of

the color their skin.  When there are class discussions about race, I make it a point

to talk about my background.  I know people have made assumptions about my

race because of how I look, but with me talking about who I am and my racial

background, it helps with dispelling those stereotypes people have about biracial

people.

**Analysis of Casey's Story**

Casey has a unique story of her experiences.  Upon further analysis, Casey's initial

awareness of racial constructs was in elementary school when she had to complete a form, which

called for her to identify her race.  Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Entry to School Stage

suggests that Casey's initial confusion about choosing a racial category was her first introduction

to monoracial classification.  When Casey's mother instructed her to choose more than one racial

category on the form, Casey understood that she was both Black and White, and not just a single

race.  There was no significant evidence to show she fell into Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995)

Pre-adolescence stage because she indicated she did not feel like she "stuck out" when she was

in school around her friends.  Furthermore, both of Casey's parents were a factor in her life, and

she was aware of their racial differences during the Entry to School stage rather than the Pre-

adolescence Stage (Kerwin and Ponterotto, 1995).  Also inconsistent with Kerwin and

Ponterotto's (1995) Adolescence Stage, Casey indicated she had positive experiences growing up

and has always had pride about her biracial identity.  There was no indication Casey felt

pressured by society to identify with one group.  Lastly, there is insufficient data about Kerwin

and Ponterotto's (1995) College/Young Adulthood Stage to signify Casey experiencing

immersion or rejection in a monoracial group. Though aware of the positive and negative connotations of being a racially-mixed person, she discussed feeling accepted by her Black and White peers.

Renn's (2004) Multiracial Identity Pattern best describes Casey's biracial identity. Casey has always been proud of her biracial background. She attributed her strong sense of identity and pride to having both of her parents in her life. She further discussed how not having a parent in one's life could directly influence that person's identity because people only learn about one side of their racial heritage.

Language proved to be the only element suggested by Wilder (2008) that has played any role in Casey's life concerning everyday colorism. Casey's experiences with her Black friends indicated that she has been exposed to comments and name calling as a direct result of how other's perceived her skin complexion. Being called the "n-word" while Casey was with her Black friends suggested she was seen as a Black individual at that point in time. There have been other occasions where Casey's Black friends have also subjected her to discriminatory behavior by joking about her light skin when they go out together as a group. The use of the term "yellow" was used to describe her skin tone. While Casey had somewhat of a naïve perspective about her friends calling her yellow and jokes about it, their use of the term followed by their assumption that men would be more attracted to Casey's light skin suggest feelings of competition from her peers that men would like Casey more than them.

**Tyfany's Story**

Tyfany is a 21-year-old senior with a major in French at Cedar University. Tyfany has a very outgoing and robust personality. She grew up with her mother in a major city in the

Southeast. Her parents never married, and she did not know much about her father until she was older. Tyfany identified her parents both racially and ethnically. Racially, her mother is White, but is from Nicaragua. Her father is Black and from Haiti. Tyfany indicated she is biracial, but identifies more as Black.

Tyfany has been questioned frequently about her racial background, but loves her mixed heritage. Thus when people have asked about what she is, Tyfany will use that moment to tell them about her racial makeup. She said, "I take pride in the fact that I am mixed just because I have found in my experiences that it's made me relate to many different people better than others." Tyfany knew at a young age she did not look like the rest of her family and called herself the "black sheep" of the family because everyone else looked White. She said, "I am the only person in my family with dark skin." She also experienced identity shifting at an early age. She said:

> My mother raised me. I never really knew my father so I never claimed my Black
> side. When I went to high school, and I met my dad, and started having Black
> friends, I then started being Black too. I have always struggled between the two.
> Now, when people ask me, I say both, and I am proud to say it. For a long time, I
> did not have any pride. I had Hispanic pride because I grew up with my mother,
> but then when I found out about the other half [the Black side], I started
> embracing it and having pride about that part of me as well.

Tyfany explained that at times she thinks people feel she is naïve because she has not let issues of race or her biracial backgrounds bother her. She said:

> I grew up in a city that was very cultural with just all kinds of people. I grew up
> in a neighborhood that was predominantly Hispanics, but there were also Blacks

and Whites there also.  My family taught me not to take things to heart because

not everyone has cruel intentions.

There were periods in Tyfany's life where she did feel like she was being pressured to

affiliate with one racial group over the other.  She said:

> My middle school was divided between Blacks and Hispanics, and I always felt I
>
> was being pulled back and forth between both groups, but ultimately I identified
>
> with the more Hispanic students.  Then I went to high school, and I decided to be
>
> Black and hung around the Black students.  So, it's like I never made a clear
>
> choice, I guess.  Like being here at Cedar, which is located in a very diverse city
>
> where there are many Black people, I feel like I should be Black.  All my friends
>
> here are Black, but my friends back home are Hispanic.  Another time I have felt
>
> like I had to choose was when I had to fill out forms for college applications and
>
> scholarships.  I have check multiracial, but I have also just chosen Hispanic or
>
> Black.  When I applied to historically Black colleges, I would check I was
>
> Hispanic to increase my chances to receiving admittance.

As Tyfany thought about the influence of colorism on her identity, she talked about a skin

tone, hair, and relationships.  She said:

> Wow, I never really thought about it, but all my friends are light-skinned Black
>
> people.  Yeah, there is always an argument too (laughing).  I mean, I feel my
>
> friends are pretty diverse; maybe not racially, but they are all very different
>
> people.  I am the more controversial friend because I have been learning more
>
> about my Black side, so I always have these questions about the light-skinned
>
> versus dark-skinned complex.  I had never heard anything about colorism prior to

coming here. It's funny because I am brown skinned, people think I am Black. When we go out to eat at a restaurant serving soul food or a Black song comes on, and I ask about the food or music, my friends joke and laugh at me saying I am not Black. It used to bother me before, but it doesn't anymore. I just tell them, 'Hey guys, I'm Black, and I know it.' Then I think well maybe I am not. We do have conversations about hair; what is good hair and what is bad hair. We also talk about skin complexion, but like hair for instance. I like my hair to be straight, but my friends will tell me I have beautiful hair and not to straighten it. I don't like my hair curly. It just looks nappy like that. When my hair is straight though, I get more compliments, so I just like to keep it straight. Even down to relationships, like my boyfriend is light skinned, but I have dated Hispanics, and light-skinned to 'crispy' Blacks. Here on campus, the students always have these talks about being Black, you know, and I get so many different perspectives negative and positive ones, but I just remain positive. Like I am involved on campus, and I don't want people thinking I cannot get along with people, and I am just another Black girl sitting at the table in the cafeteria. I am biracial and just because I look Black does not mean I cannot connect to those who don't look like me and don't know everything about me just because they make assumptions about what they think I am because of the color of my skin.

She also recalled an incident that made her feel like she was being discriminated against because of her brown skin tone. She said:

During my freshman year, I was a cheerleader here at Cedar. The school is mostly White, but the cheerleading team was all Black girls. We went to another school

to cheer for the team, and there were two people that were saying all kind of mean things.  When we would cheer, they would say Black people couldn't spell and that Black girls are stupid.  I was so mad and ready to fight.  I thought to myself, I am not even all Black, but they could tell I was biracial, because my complexion is so brown.

**Tyfany's Perceptions of Her Experiences**

Tyfany reflected for a while as she pondered on the meaning of colorism in her life and how she has navigated identity through the color of her skin.  She said:

I think I have straddled that fence between light and dark.  At least that is what I tell myself when it comes to my skin tone.  I make jokes with my family and friends about how I get darker in the summer.  I hate getting darker in the summer.  I love my winter color; it's the perfect one.  So in that regard, the more I have learned about colorism, I see how it has played out in how I identify and how others see me.  You know, with the people who I have dated or my friend groups.  When I have appeared lighter, some of the people I had relationships with would instill little seeds in me about how my life would be if I were really dark, which is probably why I do not like getting dark in the summer.  I have always received more compliments when I appear lighter as well.  So I equate light skin with being better, and I know that is not right.  It is just like my friends.  Until now, I never really looked at their skin tone composition, and all of them are have a lighter complexion than I do.  So yes, I think this idea of colorism has influenced how I select my peer groups, but also how I see myself in my own family.  Because they are all White, I do not want to appear any darker than I

have to look.  I also feel like I do conform to how society wants me to look.

While I have received mixed messages about how to wear my hair, because

society says straight hair is better, and the fact that I do not get as much money

working when my hair is straight causes me to assimilate into the culture that

prefers straight hair, which is the White culture.  I start to really internalize it, and

think when my hair is curly or nappy looking, I am not cute enough.  I really wish

society would stop and allow people to be who they are.  It's tough sometimes

being biracial because I have these two sides, but I look Black.  It's a constant

battle sometimes.

**Tyfany's Perceptions of Support Systems**

Cedar's inclusive environment has allowed Tyfany to transition and become actively

involved on campus in ways where she feels connected to the campus as a whole.  She said:

This campus as a whole has supported my identity by having so many people

from diverse background.  We are a small school, but we have a good

representation about just about every culture.  This place reminds me so much of

home.  There are events, forums, and programs that discuss a variety of topics to

make everyone feel included and that they are celebrated.  It is definitely an

integrated campus.  The faculty and staff are really diverse, too.

*Figure 7*. Campus dining hall

Tyfany chose a picture of the campus dining hall to describe her connection to the campus and what that means for her biracial identity.  She said:

> I spend a lot of time mingling with my friends in the dining hall (see Figure 7), and quite often, I am with my Black friends there.  Right now, I feel a stronger connection to the Black community just because I have had the same group of friends since freshmen year, but I don't feel uncomfortable anywhere.  I am still learning about my Black identity and what that means for me, and everyday is a process, but I am glad that I have people on this campus and spaces to congregate that make me feel whole.  Even though I identify more as Black, I still can connect with both my racial sides and not have to choose between the two.  The dining hall is a place where everyone comes to hang out with their friends, and I can intermingle with both sides if I chose to do so.   Right now, I choose to hang out more with my Black friends.

**Analysis of Tyfany's Story**

Tyfany's identity awareness began within her family prior to going to school aligning with Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Pre-school stage, which says that children are aware of phenotypical similarities and differences in their immediate social groups. Tyfany discussed how she was the "black sheep" in her family and the only one who did not look White. The next significant stage relevant to Tyfany's experience was with Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Pre-adolescence stage where she felt began to compare herself to others in middle school as it related to the Black and Hispanic cultures and what that meant for how she identified. During middle school, Tyfany felt more connected to the Hispanic culture and identified as such. Her experiences in high school led to another identity shift, where she sensed external pressures to identify with the Black culture during the Adolescence stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). As she learned more about her Black heritage on her father's side, she started to align herself more with the Black community, which continued throughout college. Tyfany's immersion and acceptance within the Black community on campus and her awareness of other's perception of her racial classification is significant to the College/Young Adulthood stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). Particularly her understandings of being Black and the negative name calling members of the White community have subjected her to.

Tyfany's back and forth identity shifting throughout her life fits well with Renn's (2004) Situational Identity Pattern, suggesting that she identifies with one group or another based on her current situation. Tyfany mentioned identifying more with the Hispanic culture, and then to the Black culture because of the people she was around. Though she is proud of her biracial heritage, she does feel more comfortable with her Black peers.

All of the three elements of everyday colorsim presented by Wilder (2008) fit within Tyfany's experiences. Some of the language Tyfany used to describe herself and other people of color demonstrates how colorism has been influential in her life. Terms such a "black sheep" and "crispy" were used by Tyfany to describe herself and men of color that she has dated. To some extent, there appears to be some lack of comfort with her skin tone. Tyfany's comments about her winter color being her favorite and attracting the most compliments signals socially constructed impressions about how Tyfany sees herself compared to her light-skinned friends and White family members. She mentioned peers planting ideas in her head about what it would be like if she were dark skinned and not in a positive light, which in turn impacts how she views her complexion.

CHAPTER 6

IVY UNIVERSITY

*"Being biracial is sort of like being in a secret society." ~Halle Berry*

**Introduction**

The last sets of stories represent the experiences of Misty, Savannah, Beth and D.D., who

are students enrolled at Ivy University.  A background summary of Ivy University is provided.

Participants' stories begin with a detailed account of the experiences before going to college.

Details about the impact of colorism on participants' identity choice and how they negotiate the

campus community are included.  Participants' perceptions of how colorism has impacted their

experiences are presented, followed by their perspectives on institutional support systems, which

are supported by images from the photo elicitation component of the study.  An analysis of the

story wraps up each narrative, which is positioned within the theoretical framework.

**Description of Ivy University**

Ivy University is a four-year, private research university located in an affluent

neighborhood of a large metropolitan city in the Southeast.  Founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Ivy

offers undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees to over 13,000 students.  Nine academic

units comprise the institution.  Approximately 1% of the student population identifies with more

than one race.  Ivy offers 18 varsity sports for the NCAA Division III region and hundreds of

student groups.

**Misty's Story**

Misty is a 19-year-old, neuroscience and biological behavior freshman at Ivy University. She grew up with her mother in a large metropolitan city in the Southeast. Her mother is Black and her father is White. Her parents never married, and Misty had an estranged relationship with her father until she was a teenager in high school. She has a half-sister who is in her words, "fully Black," and a sister who is Cuban and Black. When someone asked Misty what she is, she proclaims, "I am human!" Misty is has always been offended by questions about her racial identity because it did not matter what she is. She said:

> I understand most people need to put you in a box of some sort in their mind, but it's annoying. White people ask me questions more so than Black people because of my complexion. Many White people think I am Hispanic, and most Black people think I am a light-skinned black person, but then I am not Black enough to be anything it seems.

Misty thought about the first time she felt that she was neither Black nor White. She said:

> I was in elementary school. I cannot remember what grade, but it was elementary school, and there was this boy I liked. He was White. I told him I liked him, and he said 'Oh, I like you too, but if you were White.' I was like 'Oh, ok.' I had to really think about who I was because I had never thought about the difference between White and Black prior to that incident.

Growing up, Misty always identified as Black, and even though she says she is biracial, she explains she still identifies mostly with Black. She said:

I have pretty much identified as African American all my life because I'm obviously not White-White. When I do try to explain to people about my racial background, I am always told if I have one drop of Black in me then I am Black, so I just said 'Ok, I am Black.' Like throughout school and here in college, I really only hung out with Black people. I don't hang out with many White people because I just do not identify with that side of myself. When I have tried to reach out to people on campus, I am not really accepted. It really has been challenging trying to fit in with the White community. Many people on campus think I am Black, and since I feel more connected with my Black friends here, that is what I go with.

Misty's experiences with colorism started in her family and have continued throughout her life and on campus. Out of all her siblings, she has the lightest skin complexion, which has been a source of contention between Misty and her sisters. She said:

My sister, who is all the way Black, was jealous, and said everyone treated me better because I was light skinned. For a while, she resented me a little because of my skin tone. I also remember a time when I was smaller and the other Black girls in the community would call me little White girl when I would walk home from school. As I think about it more, many darker-skinned girls really have not been accepting me throughout my life. Darker-skinned girls always think that I am better than them because I have good hair and light skin. There have been times when people just put their hands in my hair without asking me so they can feel the texture of it or determine if it is a weave. Many people have also told me that I am stuck up because I am light skinned. It takes people really getting to

know me to know that I am not stuck up and change their perceptions of me. Even with some of the dark-skinned guys that I have come in contact with tell me they do not like talking to light-skinned girls because we [light-skinned] girls think we are all that. I have even been told I am acting uppity because I do not use Ebonics when I am with my Black friends. When I straighten my hair, I am even more all that to my Black friends. When I was in high school, people would tease me because I got good grades and say I was a teacher's pet because I was light and thought I was all that. There are just a lot of stereotypes; I cannot keep up.

There have been times when Misty has altered the way she looks in order to feel more included with her peer groups. She said:

I have definitely changed the way my hair looks. Before I could straighten my hair, I would just wear my hair naturally curly, and it would look like a fluffy bush. When my hair looked like that, people would ask me what was wrong with me, and that my hair was ugly, and I did not look clean. I found out when I straightened my hair, I was more accepted. Mostly White people teased me for looking gross, but sometimes Black people would say things that were not nice also. I have been so frustrated at times with my hair that I put dreads in my hair. Why did I do that? Many people did not like that either, so I was like I cannot do anything right. So I just put it back straight.

## Misty's Perception of Her Experiences

Misty took about two minutes to ponder on her biracial status and how colorism has influenced her identity in any form. Her response came from a passionate voice. She said:

You know, I think biracial people like me are confused sometimes. Historically speaking, this idea of skin-tone discrimination came from slavery and has trickled down. If you had a lighter-skin tone, you were seen and treated better. So those of us who are light skinned and biracial, especially women, have a hard time trying to find a place to fit in and feel like we are included. Like I said, I have never felt like I was enough to truly fit into either the White or Black communities. There have been times people have treated me better than my friends who are dark skinned, so I get where this concept came from; however, I don't think I am any better than anyone else because my skin is light. I chose to identify more with the Black community because that is how people see me. It is not necessarily that the Black community always accepts me because I am not. I feel like White people are more covert with how they have treated me over the years, but the Black people are more straightforward and just say what is on their minds. It makes me feel weird and frustrated at the same time because it's silly to treat anyone differently because of the color of their skin. I have a hard time as it is being a person that comes from two races. People lump into one place that they think I should be. Like one drop of Black blood and you must be Black. I don't feel like I should be forced into any one group just by the color of my skin; however, it has just been easier to affiliate with the Black community, and it's my comfort zone because I am not accepted by the White community. I am proud of my biracial identity, and I wish I could celebrate it more and be accepted as a biracial person instead of a Black person.

**Misty's Perception of Support Systems**

When asked about how she feels the campus supports her racial identity, Misty discussed how she is put into one category because she is seen as Black. She said: "I feel like Ivy tries to support me, but through the African American community even though I know I belong to both. I think I am just placed where I look the most, which is Black."



*Figure 8.* The woman in the mirror

She reflected on a picture she took of a Picasso painting to describe her internal struggle with her biracial identity. She said:

> Sometimes, I imagine myself like the Picasso painting I saw in the museum. The picture represented a woman and her two halves. Kind of like this duality concept. The woman's actual self is the one that looks like the sun and her reflection in the mirror is her other side (see Figure 8). I see myself as biracial, both Black and White, but the world sees me as Black, and that is tough for me. On one hand, I see a biracial woman, but on the other hand, I see a light-skinned Black woman because that is how people perceive me. When I saw the painting,

the reflection of the women looked sad, which is how I feel sometimes on campus because I cannot just be my entire me. Connecting with the White community is difficult because all they see is a light-skinned Black face, but there is another side of me – my White race, which is not recognized or supported.

Misty further explains that she does not feel the cultural center supports her needs as a biracial person, but instead it supports her Black heritage. She said:

On campus, there is something called the Multicultural Office that helps to support students from different backgrounds, but sometimes I don't feel like going there because I really do not feel that office has had an impact on me. Like there are events for minority students to bring students together, but there is nothing where I can celebrate my biracial identity. I have attended some of the activities hosted by the Black sororities but not much else. I have even thought about joining a Black sorority, because I don't feel like I would be accepted in the White sorority. I have connected with some of the more community-based student groups that feel a little more inclusive, but that is about it. Like I said, I hang out mostly with my Black friends and attend Black events, like parties. I am not sure what the campus could do to make multiracial students feel more included in the campus community. It would need to be something that would bring them together and not just programs that are focused on one identity-based group because that again is forcing us to choose only one part of who we are. Maybe one thing that can happen is offering a day where a lot of people can just come and talk about their experiences as multiracial people.

**Analysis of Misty's Story**

Misty grew up with her Black mother for the majority of her life.  Her initial awareness of being different from others occurred when she was in elementary school when she described her encounter with the White boy she liked who subsequently rejected her because she was Black, thus aligning with Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Entry to School Stage. Misty's declaration that she always identified as Black because she was not "White-White" was significant in the fact that people saw her as Black and also because she had one-drop of Black blood in her; therefore, paralleling the Pre-adolescence stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).  Due to Misty's strong identification as Black, she did not feel pressured to choose an identity, which is insignificant with the Adolescence stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).  Misty's awareness of her acceptance in the Black community and rejection in the White community is consistent to what Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) suggest about individuals immersion and rejection within a monoracial group in the College/Young Adulthood stage.

The Monoracial Identity Pattern outlined by Renn (2004) is consistent with Misty's identification as a Black person. Misty grew up with her Black mother and has never felt comfortable within the White community.  Furthermore, when she has tried to fit in with the White community, especially on campus, she has not been accepted, which in turn further strengthens her identity further as a Black woman.

There have been several instances throughout Misty's life where she has encountered colorism.  As a young girl, there was tension between Misty and her dark-skinned sister, who always felt Misty was treated better than she was.  Additionally, Black girls in the neighborhood would call Misty a White girl because of her light complexion.   Looking White further implied that Misty was uppity and stuck up.  These negative stereotypes continued when Misty arrived to

college. The use of name calling as a discriminatory act aligns with Wilder's (2008) element of language as a method to attach meaning to one's skin color. Misty's perceptions or internal scripts about her skin color further influenced how she behaved, such as changing the style of her hair from curly to straight in order to fit in more; however, at times, having straight hair also brought negative stereotypes (Wilder, 2008). These mannerisms or external practices as Wilder (2008) suggests are a direct result of how Misty internalized her skin color from discriminatory behavior she endured from others, particularly Black females.

## Savannah's Story

Savannah is a 20-year-old, sophomore, majoring in anthropology and human biology at Ivy University. She grew up with both her parents in a major metropolitan city located in the Northwest. Her mother is Black and her father is White. Savannah has a quiet demeanor, but once she starts talking, she opens up and become slightly more extroverted. She loves to be outside and is involved with Ivy's Club Volleyball team and the Campus Outdoor Organization. Savannah describes her identity as biracial, but she identifies more with the White race.

Savannah grew up attending Catholic schools that had a majority White student population. At a young age, she knew she looked different than members of her family and some of her peers. She said:

> I mean, I definitely noticed that my maternal grandparents were Black, but I don't know that I really paid attention to the fact that I was necessarily different from them. Around middle school, I could definitely tell that I was different in the fact that I wasn't as dark as some of my Black peers, but then I also wasn't the same color as all the other [White] kids in my class. I am not sure I really ever thought

of myself as that different. My mom was a diversity coordinator, and she was

always positive about my biracial identity. My aunts on my mother's side always

told me that I have White girl hair (laughing), so I knew I was different in some

aspect.

As she grew up, Savannah would get more questions about her racial background from

people. She said:

I definitely always had people ask me like 'What are you?' I have been called

everything from Hawaiian to Hispanic. One time in high school, the only other

two Black girls in school came up to me and asked me if was I Black.

The questions are few and far between now, and since Savannah has arrived to college,

many of the students on campus do not question her because her skin is so fair, she looks White,

and that is where she feels more connected – the White community. She said:

The people here at Ivy probably just assume I am White. The small amount of

African American students here probably would not classify me within their

group because I do not look like them. My friends on campus are pretty diverse,

but that is because I met them through volleyball. There is one African American

girl, one Asian, and one who is Latina. As a whole, I just feel more comfortable

with the White students on campus because I look more like them. You know, I

tried to help out with a visitation program targeted at African American and

Latina students in the Multicultural Office, and I did help, but I did not feel

connected to the students. I hung out with some African American students on a

retreat one time, but then when we got back, we just drifted apart, so I just feel

more connected to the White students. I think growing up in the Northwest has

played a factor in why I identify more with White people.  Yeah, my mom is

Black, but we lived in an area that was mostly White.

Savannah continued to talk about her experiences and discussed occasions where she was subjected to small discriminatory behaviors.  She said:

In the Northwest, things are also very liberal there, and I really did not see any

racial prejudices, but here things in the South are different.  I went on this

camping trip hosted by Ivy, and this guy started telling a Black joke.  He was

White, and he did not know I was part Black.  He just assumed I was White.  I

told him, I was part Black, and he probably shouldn't go there.  Things like that

happen, and it hurts, because I'm sure if I had a darker-skin complexion, people

would not say Black jokes around me because they would see that I had Black in

me somewhere.

As she continued to reflect on her experiences, Savannah discussed times where she would change the way she looked to fit in.  She said:

I used to straighten my hair a lot more.  I guess I don't have what they call Black

hair, but yeah I would straighten it just because I felt more confident about

myself.  If I don't, it looks frizzy and I don't feel put together.  I really looked

White when my hair was straight.  Now, more of the girls [White girls] on

campus are starting to wear their hair curly, so I started to wear mine curly.  My

friends didn't recognize me when I would change my hair.  They would not say I

looked better or anything, they just said I looked different.  I am not sure what

they meant by that or if there was anything else embedded in their comments.

**Savannah's Perception of Her Experiences**

As she thought about colorism, she described it as more of an issue with the Black community because she really has not had to deal with it due to her fair complexion. She has never really felt like she had to choose an identity because she has always felt more connected to the White community because she looked White. She said:

> I really do not know if I have ever had to deal with skin-tone discrimination. I don't even look biracial. My skin is so light that I just look White. Maybe I am oblivious to it. Since I identify more as White, people just see me as White. I actually think it is kind of cool that people cannot figure out what I am. It's kind of funny to me. It's weird though, when I am around Black people, I feel more Black. I am not sure if that makes any sense, but I do. For instance, when I am around Black guys, I can hold conversations with them for hours. Not so much with Black girls though. I really cannot explain it. Maybe I should try to figure out why. On a daily basis though, I just choose to be White.

**Savannah's Perception of Support Systems**

Savannah's perception of support is somewhat divided. While she feels there is progress, she still feels more is needed to connect students from racially-mixed backgrounds. She reflected on a picture she took of a portion of a campus survey she took and discussed how it represented her ability to choose as a biracial person. Additionally, she felt the picture also had a deeper meaning when looking at how her needs are met as a biracial person.

**6.6 What is your ethnic background?** *Select all that apply.*

- ☑ White
- ☑ Black/African American
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan native
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

*Figure 9.* Campus survey

She said:

> I think the campus is trying to see how students identify in order to possibly do
>
> something. Like, with the campus survey (see Figure 9), I was able to choose
>
> more than one race, but what do they do with that information? I feel like the
>
> campus creates more division than unity. Even with the visitation program for the
>
> African American and Latina students. They are the targeted population. What
>
> about those who are biracial and may be a part of either those groups? Where do
>
> they fit in? Where is their support system? How do I get connected to others who
>
> are biracial? Sometimes, I really want to know if the university does anything
>
> with the campus survey besides wanting to see who is on campus because I am
>
> still trying to find my sense of belonging here.

She further talked about how she has tried to connect to others, but how it still poses to be

challenging. She said:

> During my freshmen year, I was a part of this email list for biracial students. It
>
> was for all biracial students, not just those who are Black and White. They would
>
> send out things about events, but it was you know, what is going on around

campus. I don't think that list exists anymore because I have not received anything lately. I also went on this retreat that was for all students of color, and it felt like there was a sense of community trying to be created, but for me, I am still trying to decide where I fit in most here on campus. Like I know I identify more with the White students, but it's a struggle when you are biracial; you feel like there is no home for you on campus. I just don't feel like they pay attention to the people who are in between, which is why I feel the way I do. There really needs to be some more awareness to the fact that there are not just students from one racial background. It would be nice to see something more formal, like a student group that was created specifically for people of mixed backgrounds or roundtable discussions for people like us to talk about our experiences.



*Figure 10*. Campus volleyball club

Savannah talked about how she uses volleyball to connect to students in general and what volleyball means to her. She looked at a picture she took from one her previous volleyball competitions and said:

> This is a picture of volleyball nationals last year (see Figure 10). So for me, I have had to overcome many obstacles with playing volleyball, but I never gave up. It's definitely taught me perseverance, which connects to my identity here at Ivy. I have had to overcome a lot with being biracial, much like with volleyball. Being a part of the volleyball team has connected me to other Ivy students in general, with no regard to race. It's allowed me to become a part of a community where I can at least engage with other students and come out of my shell. That can be challenging at times for me, but it feels good to be a part of something.

**Analysis of Savannah's Story**

Savannah grew up with both her parents, and became aware of her racial differences around middle school when she noticed her skin complexion was darker than her White counterparts but significantly lighter than the Black students in her school; therefore, supporting Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Pre-adolescence stage where individuals have an increased awareness of their skin tones. Savannah attended a predominantly White high school where she became increasingly more comfortable identifying with the White race. She did not feel pressured to choose one race over the other as Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Adolescence stage suggests; however, since she arrived to college, she has sensed a greater connection to the White community because she believes the campus community sees her as White and not Black. Her awareness and exposure to race-related remarks further support the College/Young Adulthood stage of the Kerwin-Ponterotto Model (1995).

Renn's (2004) Monoracial Identity Pattern best describes Savannah's identity development as a biracial individual. While she indicates she is biracial, she identifies with the White race as a result of how society perceives her and how she views herself.

There was not sufficient evidence to suggest that Savannah experienced elements of everyday colorism (Wilder, 2008). Savannah's perceptions about colorism situate the concept within the Black community. Since she does not see herself as Black nor does the Black community see her as a part of their community, she does not feel she has been subjected to discriminatoion as a direct result of her skin complexion.

**Beth's Story**

Beth is a 19-year-old, political science major at Ivy University. She grew up with both her parents in a small rural town located in the Southeast. She is a very intelligent, outgoing student who is involved in several student organizations on campus. Beth grew up with a diverse perspective about her racial identity, and identified herself as biracial. She said:

> I would describe myself as biracial; my mom is Black and my dad is White. I understand why some people may choose to identify with only one side, but my dad is very much a part of my life. My parents are married, and if I only said I was Black, then I would be denying half of my heritage.

When people question her about her racial background, Beth explained that does not bother her. She said:

> I have received those questions all my life. You know, when I am walking around with my parents, I've gotten some looks. People just stare. I grew up in a

small town that had Black and White people.  People generally assumed I was

biracial or sometimes they would think I was Latina.

Beth considers her awareness of her biracial identity a continuous process and mentioned

the first time she really thought about the color of her skin.  She said:

It's a process that has lasted a long time.  I would not say that it was any one

moment when I became aware of my identity, but several moments.  I remember

one time, when I was with my brother, who is my half-brother by my mom, and

we were probably around the age of five or six, he said to me that we are adopted.

I laughed, and I said no we are not.  We had this conversation about how we did

not look like mom or dad, and it took me a second, and I thought about how right

he was.  Like I knew we were the children of our parents, but we really did not

look like them.

Beth continued to reflect over her life and discussed how there were times she felt

different because of her skin tone and her hair.  She said:

You know in high school people would say little things about my hair, touching it

and asking questions about who my parents were because of how I looked.

During high school, I hung out more with people in my gifted classes.  Many of

them were White, and they really did not ask me questions.  I really did not start

tapping into my African American heritage until I came to college, and many

more African American people ask me questions about my skin and hair.

She often thought about how others perceived her because of her skin complexion and

how she presented herself to others.  She said:

In high school, because I hung out with more White kids, I listened to more Indie music and then some R&B. When I came to college, I started listening to rap. You know, coming to college put me more in touch with my African American heritage. I thought my listening to more Black music, reading more books by African American authors, and learning more about my African American heritage I could connect more with the Black students here. I don't know, for some reason I also think having a Black mother makes it easy sometimes to bond with other Black students here at Ivy. I went to schools that were pretty split down the middle when it came to the numbers of White and Black students. I don't know why it was different before, and I did not hang out with more Black kids. Sometimes when I have felt that I was being pushed into choosing my Black or White side, I would tend to go in the opposite direction and say well I am biracial. I am from two races, and I accept that. Sometimes in high school, people just assumed I was Black because of my brown skin, but I would never deny my father or his race. You know here [at Ivy], I have played around with how I speak. You know, I can turn on the White girl talk when I am speaking to professional people or my White friends. I can also turn it down and talk with more slang when I am with my Black friends. I have also changed my hair up some. I've straightened my hair because sometimes my White friends joke about my curly hair being all over the place. When I am in professional settings like interviews, I will straighten my hair. Other ways I have tried to connect more with the Black community here on campus is writing for the Black Star Magazine,

participating in Black student activism events, and taking classes in the African

American Studies department.

Going further to talk about how others have treated her because of her skin complexion, she talks about instances of micro-aggressions she experienced on campus. Micro-aggressions are deliberate or inadvertent verbal, environmental or behavioral indignities or insults towards individuals of color (Sue, 2010). She said:

> I have felt at times where I have stuck out in the White crowd when I have
>
> attended social events like parties at the White fraternity houses. There have been
>
> moments when I was standing outside a frat house for a bit longer than I should
>
> have, but again, I think it is because they see me as Black. There have been times
>
> where I would wear my hair curly, and people would say it looked a mess. I have
>
> been called names like "Oreo" because people say I act White, but I look Black.

**Beth's Perception of Her Experiences**

Beth really broke her experiences apart and analyzed them to think about the meaning of racism, colorism and how her racial identity was influenced. She said:

> I have really made a concerted effort not to choose between my racial identities.
>
> When it comes to my skin complexion, I don't think I am better than anyone else
>
> like some people tend to think about those with a lighter skin complexion. Even
>
> with my hair, my hair does not shape who I am, but I think because society has
>
> created these conceptions about what beauty is and what is acceptable to look
>
> professional so in some ways I have to conform to those ideals in order to get
>
> ahead. On campus, I do not feel a push or pull towards any race, but like I said,
>
> there are these micro-aggressions that surface that make it challenging to

negotiate my White and Black side. Colorism is more prevalent here in the South, and sometimes I do feel like an anomaly. I do feel kind of exotic with my skin tone and hair, but I never have made others feel they were not special because of how I looked. It is silly to me to define someone by the color of their skin. Like, I am in a place where I research more about my African American heritage, whereas before I may have preferred White over Black and vice versa because of the societal influences in my life, but goodness, I could never deny my father. I am comfortable in my skin and my identity.

## Beth's Perceptions of Support Systems

In regards to her thoughts on support systems, Beth said:

Ivy has not really supported my biracial identity. Like, there are no administrators that I know of who are biracial. I mean there are my professors who teach in the African American Studies Department where I am able to interact with faculty of color. The campus says it supports racial diversity, and I believe it is diverse in some respects, but not in a way where multiracial students feel supported.

*Figure 11.* Beth's hand

Beth believes people on campus see her as a Black woman and discussed her thoughts about what this means for her identity and support of her biraciality on campus in a picture she took of her hand. She said:

> I took a picture of my hand one day while working in the Black Star Magazine office. As I sat there, I looked down at my hand and thought about how others viewed me. My color is the first thing that defines me when someone sees me (see Figure 11). People often identify me as a Black woman, but that is not all of me. I know I have this ambiguous skin color. I am more than Black and more than White, but there is no place I can just celebrate me [as a biracial person] here on campus. On campus, I am just Black, and yes, I am involved with many things on here that have to deal with Black issues, but I feel like I am not being true to who I am at times. You know, representing my dad's side. There is the

Multicultural Office, and they have programs and services for students of color,

but nothing specifically for students who have a mixed heritage. I think because

people just see me as Black, and not biracial, I am put with all the other students

of color when it comes to what the Multicultural Office offers. I think some type

of program or space is needed for people like me, who are in the middle.

**Analysis of Beth's Story**

Beth grew up with both her parents, and was around the age of five or six when she first

noticed differences in her physical appearances. After having a conversation with her brother

about being adopted and not looking like their parents, Beth realized she did not resemble her

parents, which is consistent with Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Pre-school Stage. There was

not sufficient data to suggest Beth experienced Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Entry to School

Stage as she did not feel like she identified with a monoracial classification, nor did she feel her

identity was challenged by her peers. The majority of Beth's friends during middle and high

school were White. While Beth became more aware of the socially prescribed meanings

attached to skin tone as indicated in the Pre-adolescence Stage, she did not feel pressured by

Black or White people to conform to one group (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). The majority of

the people Beth grew up with knew her family, and knew she was biracial. Beth alluded to the

fact that people just knew and accepted her biraciality, which is inconsistent to Kerwin and

Ponterotto's (1995) Adolescence Stage, suggesting external pressures to assimilate with one

racial group. Beth's experiences in college have provided opportunities for her to become more

familiar with Black heritage. She has immersed herself within the Black culture and her African

American Studies classes to learn more about her Black lineage. She noticed a stronger

connection with the Black community on campus due to her involvement with Black student

organizations and academic classes, which supports Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) College/Young Adulthood Stage in some regard; however, she has still maintained relationships with her White friends.

Beth's acceptance and pride about her racially-mixed heritage supports Renn's (2004) Multiracial Identity Pattern. There have been times throughout Beth's life where she has connected to one group over the other, with the current connection being with the Black community. Despite this strong connection, Beth has accepted who she is and from where she came. She is devoted to both her parents, and affirms she would never deny any part of who she is as a biracial individual.

Beth's exposure to discriminatory behavior has periodically appeared throughout her life. She indicated she has been called names such as "Oreo," which supported Wilder's (2008) concept of language because the term "Oreo" had a negative connotation attached to it. Beth described how society has attached meanings to skin tone and what it means to be beautiful, thus influencing how she has viewed herself. Her internalization aligns with Wilder's (2008) internal scripts. She referred to looking "exotic," but did not enact oppressive behavior towards individuals because of her biracial background nor did she let constructed ideas about colorism define her sense of self thus demonstrating inconsistencies with Wilder's (2008) idea of external practices.

### Lily's Story

Lily is a 19-year-old, neuroscience and dance major at Ivy University. She grew up with her parents in the Northeast until she was a teenager and they moved south, where she spent the remainder of her teenage years growing up in a suburb outside a major city. Lily has a charming

and funny personality who loves to talk about her experiences, particularly those that concern race and multiraciality. When asked how she describes her racial identity, she explained she tells people she is "a banana." She further said:

> I know I am sarcastic, and if it is a stranger, then I don't know, it's different. I usually do not like to answer that question. I mean, I am mixed with so much, and I just don't like to answer one thing. People definitely like to make a game out of trying to figure out what my race is. I really throw people off when I wear my hair straight or curly because I look different when my hair is worn one way or the other. People on campus love to touch my hair and feel the texture of it.

Lily was a teenager when she was aware that she might be different from others. Up until that time, she had not felt any different from anyone else. She said:

> I was around the age of 14 when I started to become more aware of my racial identity. All my life when we lived up North, I had grown up with the same group of people, and we had no concept of race. Up North, people identify with their ethnic culture. So when my parents decided to move down here, people started asking me questions about what I was. I was so surprised because I had never been asked what I was. Students at my school would always ask me about my parents. Were they Black or were they White, you know. I got more of these questions from the Black students. I had grown up thinking they were just mom and dad, and nothing else. People would challenge me about wanting to know more about where I came from, so then I started thinking maybe I should do some searching.

Lily feels like she has always been pressured to choose an identity, even in college.  She said:

> There has always been a lot of pressure to choose, and there still is.  It was especially frustrating in high school because I was seen as the smart girl, and because my skin tone was darker, people labeled me as the smart Black girl in school.  I did not like being labeled at all.  I did not understand it, and I still do not.  I refused to be categorized.  I hate that kind of mentality – putting people in categories.  Here on campus, many Black people will come up to me before White people, especially Black girls.  Black girls will just come up to me and start a conversation because we share the same skin color, so navigating that has been interesting.

She further described experiences on campus that made her stick out when she was with a certain group.  What she found interesting is she started to feel uncomfortable around groups of people consisting of one racial group.  She said:

> I am finding out that I feel more comfortable with people who do look like me.  I went to this party with my ex-roommate, and I noticed that I was the only dark person there.  I never thought I would be that person.  I have always been about no labels, no categorization, and I don't identify with any race; however, when I was stuck in the room with all White people, I did not feel comfortable.  I wanted to leave.  I will say I have never been in a situation when it was the complete opposite.

It was not until Lily was at Ivy that she started to been introduced more to colorism and the debate between light skin and dark skin and the way she was treated.  She said:

I remember being at work, and this guy at work telling me 'Oh, you think you are all that huh, because you are light skinned.' I thought, what is this dark-versus light-skin concept, and how do I play into that? I did not consider myself light like how most people see light skin. My complexion is more of a light brown. I was at a loss, and I did not know what to say. So I started asking questions about what he meant and he went on to explain the dark versus light debate, and talking about my hair, and how I had good hair. I have also been called names like mutt, yellow or chink.

The conversation about hair would turn into another discussion about different ways Lily would change the way she looked or behaved to fit in more. She said:

In high school, I would straighten my hair more with the flat iron, and my hair would be burnt to a crisp. Since I have been in college, I find myself changing up my image to fit in with the Black community. Like, I never wore my hair curly when I first got here, because I felt like I stuck out more, but then I kicked myself and stopped doing that because I felt like I was not being true to myself. It's funny because my friend Brooke tries to teach me how to be Black and tell me different words to use so I can be considered Black enough.

## Lily's Perception of Her Experiences

Lily's reflection on her experiences took her to a place of frustration. She said:

At that time, I was too young to put it into context, but thinking about it now, I can definitely say how people perceive another person's racial identity into such a Black and White thing is definitely more prominent in the South. Particularly with skin color, people are going to categorize me. They are going to label me

because of the color of my skin.  Because of that, I have gravitated more to the

Black community because I feel more comfortable there even though I identify

with more than one race.  I also feel like I have the subconscious pressure to

conform, like when I straighten my hair because of how society perceives straight

hair as better.  I mean, I will refuse to just be Black, but I do not feel like I live in

a society where I am able to just be my true multiracial self.

**Lily's Perception of Support Systems**

As she described her view on support systems, Lily proclaimed she does not like to see

things separated like it is on campus and does not like to support things focused on one particular
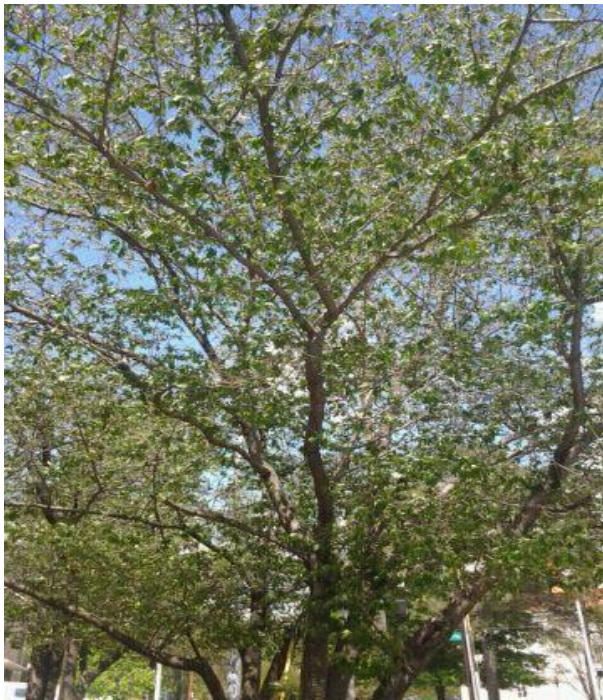
group just because they look a certain way.



*Figure 12.* Tree on campus

She took a picture of a tree on campus (see Figure 12) and formulated an analogy about

how trees represent life, and how she feels things should be on campus.  She said:

People are in essence like trees. We are all different in some way. We don't go around saying, look at that pretty redwood or pine, we just say look at that pretty tree, and I wish humans would take the same approach with human beings that aren't so unlike themselves. I am multiracial, and there are many things that make up who I am. I am not the smart Black girl. I am not the pretty light-skinned girl. Just like the tree, I am just Lily. I just wish we could all be one, and not separated at all.

Lily further said:

To be honest, I have not been the one to reach out to anything that does not support all cultures and just one group. For me, I joined a minority pre-med society, which is for all people of color, not just one group. I have also joined the equestrian team as a way to connect to other students. I feel like if I were to join a student organization for just one racial group, I would be categorizing myself. It would be nice to see something that was for everyone instead of creating more segregated groups just for students who identify as one race. My peer group on campus is very diverse, and we are of one student body. It would be nice if we could all just celebrate who we are as one instead of as separate entities.

**Analysis of Lily's Story**

Lily grew up not understanding racial constructs until she moved from the Northeast to the Southeast with her family. Lily was around the age of 14 when she first realized how different she looked from her peers. Lily's heightened consciousness of social meanings attributed to phenotype, culture and skin tone occurred past Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Pre-adolescence Stage. Instead, her increased awareness about racial constructs and physical

features occurred during Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Adolescence Stage, along with pressures to conform to one race, because Lily was seen as Black. She talked about how she was labeled as the smart Black girl, which she did not appreciate. In college, she perceived the campus saw her as Black and not multiracial. She discussed conversations she had with peers about skin complexion, hair, and the perceived advantages she had from being a multiracial individual. Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) College/Young Adulthood Stage fits nicely here as Lily further described her levels of comfort within the Black community versus the White population.

Lily's description of her racial identity best aligns with Renn's (2004) Multiracial Identity Pattern. Lily's pride about her racially-mixed background has been a significant factor throughout her life. Though at times she has felt pressure from society to assimilate with the Black community, which is the group she connects to, she affirms her multiracial identity.

Lily's experiences with colorism align neatly to all three elements of everyday colorism presented by Wilder (2008). Lily was called names that had a negative connotation attached to them. Terms such as mutt, chink, and yellow, were all words Lily mentioned in her story. She also internalized how she felt about her skin complexion and would subconsciously alter how she wore her hair to fit in more within the Black community. Lily also described how her friends are teaching her to be more Black by teaching her slang words used within the Black community.

### D.D.'s Story

D.D. is a 21-year-old, psychology major at Ivy University who grew up with her mother and father in a small city in the Mid-Atlantic. D.D. is a soft-spoken person with a shy personality. D.D. described her identity as biracial: Black and Hispanic. She indicated her

father is Black, and her mother is Hispanic, but looks White so often her mother will just say she is White. D.D. was aware of her racial identity at a young age because she knew she did not look like her half-siblings. She said, "They [my siblings] were fully Black because their mom was also Black like my dad." People would question her frequently about what she was, which was frustrating to her. She said:

> When I was younger, people would look at me and wonder what my racial background was. Many people have told D.D. she looks Middle-Eastern or White. They even thought I might be mixed with Black. At first, I took people questioning me as a threat to my sense of self. I did not know how to respond sometimes, and I would say that I was human, because I was offended. Now I am excited when people ask because it's been a journey for me to be able to, you know, have the confidence in knowing who I am and be able to respond in a way that's constructive for both me and them.

D.D. would even question her father about not looking like him and not having his skin complexion. She wrote a poem about growing up biracial and recited excerpts about how she felt. She said:

> 'Papa, am I Black?' I knew his answer would be yes, but I still did not believe him. I did not feel it. The world shook it's head, and the earth trembled when I returned the what are you with a color my skin could not produce no matter how much time I spent in the sun. He told me he saw it in the brown of my eyes, in the curl of my hair, and in the round of my nose. 'Papa am I Black?' I knew his answer would be yes, and I became angry. The world does not see it, and the earth trembles when I suggest it. I think I'm in the wrong race.

D.D. mentioned that establishing friendships has always been the most challenging for her. She attended a predominantly White schools growing up, and now it's the same environment in college. She said:

> I think the place where it has been most difficult for me and my biracial identity is in friendships. I went to school in a predominantly White school all throughout my life. When people would talk about Blacks or Hispanics, I did not know how to respond. I think that was the beginning of confusion for me, when people would say you know Black people do this, or you know making fun of rap music.

D.D. has felt conflicted at times with her racial identity and how to identify. She said:

> I think for a long time I did just see myself as kind of a White girl. I want to say maybe going into middle school and high school was when I started to identify more with my Black and Hispanic sides. It is a lot easier now for me at this age in college to be more open with my identity and sharing both sides of myself. One thing that happened to me was before I chose to come to Ivy is when I attended a program for students to come and stay for like a weekend that is for Hispanics and Blacks. I went, but as soon as I got there, I realized that it was very segregated. I kind of flirted back and forth between the groups because I did not know what side to choose.

When she reflected on how she presented herself to others, she found that she at times would straddle the fence when it came to her racial identity. She said:

> So like growing up, I listened to the Backstreet Boys, and N-Sync and 98 Degrees because most of my White friends were listening to that music.

I have curly hair, and that's always a topic that people like to talk about. I struggled a long time having curly hair because people would question me even more about my identity. Sometimes I would just straighten it so people would stop asking me questions and just look more White. It's kind of just been experimenting for me, which ways can I represent myself that is acceptable to myself and other people. Saying that I am Black does not always come across well, so I will assert that my dad is Black as a way to kind of be more accepted in the Black community. Also, when I am with my Black friends, I will change my dialect sometimes to fit in and speak with more slang.

D.D. spoke of discriminatory behavior she experienced growing up, but focused specifically on her experiences in college. She said:

I think I have experienced more subtle discrimination because of my skin tone, but it has happened. I remember one time my friend was working on a publication called Black Star Magazine, which is run by African American students, and he wanted me to come to a meeting with him. I didn't feel comfortable going because I did not feel the Black community saw me as Black, but I went anyway, and I was the only lighter-skinned person there. One of the people, who I think was like a writer, came up to me and jokingly said, 'Oh, did you want to write for us?' It really made me feel out of place because they did not see me as a part of their community. The same thing goes for all Black parties I attend. I just get looks like I do not belong. Things like this do not happen in the White community.

**D.D.'s Perception of Her Experiences**

D.D.'s perception of her experiences symbolizes an awakening for her. She said:

It has been difficult being biracial at times. Not knowing where to fit in or how to respond to questions. When I did respond in a defensive manner, people didn't understand why, but it was just a safety mechanism and guarding my emotions in a sense. It's been hard to find people who are like me and who understand. What I am coming to learn is that I represent something that a lot of people have trouble dealing with and understanding. So I am coming to terms with my identity so I can make it a positive experience for myself and for others who may question me. You know, I don't fit neatly into one place or another, and that is something I had to sort out myself. It's been eye-opening for me, and I am a lot more confident now and secure in my identity.

**D.D.'s Perception of Support Systems**

D.D. perceived the campus as diverse, and provided suggestions about meeting the needs of people who have a biracial or multiracial background. She said:

Ivy is pretty diverse. I think coming here has been really helpful in finding ways to understand my racial identity. I feel the campus tries to create inclusive communities like the programs offered by the Multicultural Affairs Office.

*Figure 13.* Essence magazine

She reflected on a picture she took during a visit to the Multicultural Affairs Office and how it reminded her that while she sees the campus as diverse, there is still no support system for people with racially-mixed backgrounds. D.D. sees the campus as exclusive and not supportive of her biracial identity. She said:

> It's funny; sometimes when I have gone in Multicultural Affairs Office, I see magazines targeted at specific groups, but there is nothing for biracial people (see Figure 13). I know it may seem trivial, but I think to myself, I am not sure if I would ever subscribed to a magazine like Essence because it does not necessarily cater to me. This magazine represents exclusivity to me, which is how I see campus at times. You know, the Black people in their group, and the White people in their group, but we [biracial people] have no group. I understand the reasons for having all Black magazines and Black student organizations, but it just feels so exclusive to me, and I wonder where our [biracial people] support system is.

Additionally, D.D. said:

> I entered college with the idea that this is a place where race and diversity is
> important and people are open to talking about it. I've had the opportunity to
> make Black, Hispanic, and White friends, and that's been very different for me,
> yet very good, I think. The campus has also had events that I think are starting to
> address the biracial community. For instance, a man who identified as biracial
> came on campus to give a talk about a book he wrote on his experiences as a
> biracial person. As far as other things the campus can do, I don't know. Maybe
> creating some type of group for biracial students may be an option where people
> who are like me can come together and talk about their issues and have like a
> support network and break down stereotypes and misconceptions people have
> about biracial people. For instance, like I have heard, Black people don't like
> nature, but I love being outside, and I am part Black. So things like that, just
> making people aware. It has always been an interest of mine to talk to other
> biracial people, and I would definitely be a part of something like that if it were
> created.

**Analysis of D.D.'s Story**

D.D.'s initial awareness of her racial identity occurred early during her childhood. She
discussed how she noticed her skin complexion differed from her fully-Black siblings and her
Black father, which aligns with Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Pre-school Stage. She further
described thinking she was White when she was younger because she attended predominantly
White schools growing up. She further indicated how she felt her sense of self felt challenged,
and her need to be defensive when she was younger. While D.D. did not feel pressured to

identify with one race when she was younger, the greater contact she had with White students led her to believe she was White, which parallels to certain components of the Entry to School Stage outlined by Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995). D.D. explained it was not until middle school and high school that she began to become more comfortable with her mixed-racial heritage. Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) Pre-adolescence Stage mirrors D.D.'s experiences with her realization of the differences in culture and skin tone as she described her varying taste in music. There was not sufficient information to indicate presence of the Adoloscence Stage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). Nevertheless, Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) College/Young Adulthood Stage is prevalent as D.D. described not feeling accepted or seen as a member of the Black community because of her light skin complexion, which caused D.D. to immerse herself more within the White population on campus.

Renn's (2004) Multiracial Identity Pattern aligns with D.D.'s racial identity. D.D. has a sense of pride about her biracial background and has become more accepting of who she is over time. Though she feels more accepted within the White community, and feels society perceives her to be White, she will not identify solely as White.

D.D.'s experiences with colorism have been more subtle. Her experiences at the Black Star Magazine meeting stood out for D.D. as she described being the only light-skinned person in the room. The use of language as a method of meaning prescribed to skin complexion did not surface in her story (Wilder, 2008). Internal scripts appeared as D.D. discussed her views about her skin complexion in relation to her siblings, her father, and the interactions she has had with her peers on campus (Wilder, 2008). Furthermore, there was not enough data to support the concept of external practices (Wilder, 2008).

**Summary**

The aforementioned stories in the previous chapters illustrated detailed narratives about participants' experiences at three distinctive institutions. Each of the women's experiences were unique and offered varying perspectives about the impact of colorism on their identity choices and their perceptions of support systems. Patterns were identified across all these stories that produced collective themes. The next chapter will present a summary of the core themes that were generated across narratives.

CHAPTER 7

IDENTIFICATION OF THEMES

*"No matter what you say, when someone asks you the question 'What are you?' and you say 'Black' and you look mixed, they're going to ask what you're mixed with. That's what always happens." ~Mariah Carey*

**Introduction**

After a comprehensive analysis of the participants' interview transcripts and the reflective notes taking during the memo-writing process, five themes generated from the narratives: (a) impact of colorism on identity choice; (b) skin tone discrimination through oppressive behavior; (c) identification through presentation; (d) validation of identity on campus; and e) impact of institutional climate. The impact of colorism was prevalent in how participants perceived themselves, how society viewed their identity, and through discriminatory treatment based on their skin complexion. Skin-tone discrimination manifested itself throughout in the form of color terms and covert and overt behavior. Participants also displayed their identity through the way in which they presented their language and alterations of their physical appearance in order to feel more accepted by the Black or White community. Additionally, the stories outlined how participants validated their identity through various social and academic settings on campus. Finally, participants discussed their perceptions of the campus climate and the influence of the college community on their biraciality.

**Impact of Colorism on Identity Choice**

Colorism was a central theme that presented itself throughout all of the narratives. Participants' perceptions of the impact of colorism were unique to their personal experiences as biracial, yet similar in various ways. In each case, the women explained how they were questioned about their racial identity because of the complexion of their skin, which proved to be frustrating for some of the women. The women discussed how society perceives their racial identity from the color of their skin, and how that impacted how they chose to identify. For example, Michelle, Vickie, Tyfany, Misty, Beth, and Lily, society viewed them as Black women because of the color of their skin. While they were accepting and have pride about their biracial identity, they identified more with the Black communities on campus. Particularly, Vickie, Tyfany, and Misty chose to identify as Black, while Michelle, Beth, and Lily chose to identify as biracial, but aligned themselves more with the Black community. Savannah and Danielle chose to identify as White because of their fair skin complexion, and they felt that society perceived them as White, which indicated the challenges they encountered when they attempted to connect to the Black community. Both women spoke of having a deeper connection to the White students on campus and did not feel readily welcomed by the Black students on campus because they were not seen as Black. Angie and Tiffany felt that skin color should not define who they are; however, they indicated having a sense of comfort in the Black community, and perceived people thought of them as light-skinned Black women. D.D. and Casey did not believe colorism played a significant role in how they chose to identify.

The findings from the narratives indicated that colorism is still an issue in society (Korgen, 1998; Kilson, 2011). Savannah and Lily both grew up in the Northwest and Northeast, respectively, and indicated how they never dealt with questions of their skin complexion prior to

enrolling in college in the South. Beth and Misty also discussed the historical significance of colorism, and how it has impacted race relations in the South, which they feel has affected how society sees them. While the use of the one-drop rule was historically used to identify and label someone as Black, it is still relevant in today's society, as indicated in Misty's narrative (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). The impact of colorism on these women's lives demonstrated that skin color influenced identity choice and how society continues to categorize individuals based on their skin tone (Korgen, 1998; Shih & Snachez, 2009).

## Skin Tone Discrimination Through Oppressive Behavior

Throughout each of their journeys, participants described being subjected to discriminatory behavior as a result of the color of their skin. Each participant described language as a form of discriminatory behavior. Name calling and phrases demeaning participants based on their skin complexion or hair were prevalent across stories. Beth, Vickie, Tyfany, Lily, and Casey indicated they were called names such as Oreo, White girl, the n-word, chink and yellow, respectively. They indicated that the names were used to degrade them because of their skin tone, which aligns with Wilder's (2008) research on everyday colorism and the use of language as a tool to demean someone because of their skin tone. Additionally, there was covert discriminatory behavior in how participants were treated through social arenas such as student organizations and social functions held by student led organizations, which were prevalent in the stories told by Beth, Tiffany, D.D., Angie, Michelle and Vickie. These discriminatory practices influenced participants' senses of self, their awareness of how they felt society perceived their racial identity through their skin tone, and how participants identified themselves. Peers carried out many of these discriminatory instances, and peers have a significant impact on a biracial

person's identity (Renn, 2008; Khanna, 2011). Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) along with Basu (2007) discussed how peers have a strong influence on an individual's identity and sense of self. The discriminatory behavior enacted on the women by members of their peer groups impacted how the women perceived themselves within the context of their skin color, which aligned with Wilder's (2008) element of internal scripts.

### Identification Through Self-Presentation

One of the central findings across all stories was how participants negotiated their identity in how they presented themselves to others. There were various mechanisms used to display one's identity to feel more accepted within the Black and White communities. For instance, how one wore her hair was a commonality across each story. Participants discussed having to negotiate wearing their hair curly or straight. Every participant indicated that straight hair was perceived better than curly hair, and many of them preferred wearing their hair straight rather than curly. Straight hair was equated with having good hair and seen as better in the eyes of society. Specifically, Savannah described changing her hair from curly to straight in order to be perceived as more confident. For Beth and Vickie, they straighten their hair to look more professional. For Michelle and Tyfany, they straightened their hair to look more beautiful. Curly hair was described as nappy and frizzy, which was noted in Tyfany and Savannah's stories. Misty indicated how her peers said she did not look clean when her hair was not straight; another described being told she looked a mess. However, Casey and D.D. indicated they preferred to wear their hair curly, which was for personal preference.

Language was also a tool to navigate between communities. Participants, such as Angie, Beth, and Vickie, discussed how they used slang words to fit in more with the Black community

and more proper use of the English vernacular or "talking White" when they were with their White peers or were in more professional settings. Music was also used as a gateway to connect more to a certain racial group, which was indicated in Tiffany, D.D, Michelle, Beth, and Casey's stories. For instance, participants described listening to hip-hop and rap to connect more to their Black peers, and they listened to rock, country, or pop to connect more to their White friends.

The women displayed their identity through language, altering their outward appearance, and music, which supports Wilder's (2008) element of external practices. In other words, the self-perceptions, or internal scripts, led to how the women chose display their identity to others. Furthermore, this theme also suggest that biracial women are still concerned with how others see them and will alter the way they look or speak in order to connect to others (Khanna, 2011).

## Validation of Identity on Campus

Roberts (2003) indicated biracial women often feel the need to validate their identities. The experiences of all of the women illustrate the need to belong and connect to others on campus. Connecting to others via social groups was significant for many of these women (King, 2008). This idea of feeling validated on campus emerged as a theme as each participant discussed how they felt more accepted and connected to a certain racial group through their involvement on campus.

Participants discussed different arenas to connect individually or collectively to the Black or White populations. Michelle, Tiffany, Vickie, and Beth discussed how they connected to the Black community through Black student organizations, campus events, as well as taking African American Studies courses as a gateway to becoming accepted by the Black population on campus. Specifically, Tiffany and Beth talked about taking the classes as a way to learn more

about their Black heritage.  For Michelle, she was surrounded by White people all of her life, and she wanted to embrace her Black culture more.  Vickie felt validated because many of her pre-college experiences were in a predominantly Black school.  Angie talked about socializing with her friends at the student center to connect and feel accepted by the Black community because she felt like people saw her as a light-skinned Black women, and she felt more connected in the Black community.  She also volunteered with campus community service organizations and academic organizations to connect to the White population.  Savannah used sports to connect and feel validated with the community as a whole because she was still searching for her sense of belonging with the Black and White student populations on campus.  Lily discussed becoming involved in more multicultural, student-led organizations so they would not have to feel as if they were choosing one racial identity over the other and still feel validated.  Michelle even joined a service sorority, which was inclusive of all racial backgrounds, because she did not want to feel pressured to choose between races.  Misty mentioned their social outlets consisted primarily of her Black friends, which is where she felt more accepted and validated within the Black community.

## Impact of Institutional Climate

Strange and Banning (2001) discussed the importance of the environment to the college students' holistic development.  Individuals' perceptions of the institutional setting impact their interaction with that environment (Strange & Banning, 2001).  Furthermore, navigating the campus in search of support systems can be challenging (Renn, 2003; 2008; King, 2008).  The participants' perceptions of support systems at their respective campus illustrate how significant the campus climate is when supporting an individual's identity.

Participants described their perceptions of support on campus, and an interesting pattern formed in that perspectives of institutional support varied for each site location. For the women enrolled at Nance University, each of them described the division between the Black and White student populations. The campus was seen as separate and divided. Women at Nance had mixed feelings about how the campus supported their biracial identity. All Nance participants described feeling connected only to their Black identities, and felt alienated from the White community. The participants at Nance did not feel the campus created an environment that was inclusive of their biracial identity and felt a push towards the Black community because they perceived others identified them as Black due to their skin complexion.

The two women enrolled at Cedar University described the campus as diverse and accepting of all student backgrounds, which made for an easier transition and connection to the larger campus community, not just the Black or White community. Both women described having greater connections with the Black community, but did not feel alienated by their White peers.

Women at Ivy University had mixed reactions to the campus environment. Three of the participants did not feel the campus supported their biracial identity. These three women felt more needed to be done from a programmatic standpoint to create more inclusive communities for racially-mixed students. One woman discussed how she did not want to be treated any differently, and the campus did not need to be divided any more to support another separate group. Only one participant felt the campus was diverse where she could learn more about both her racial heritages.

**Summary**

The descriptive information provided by the participants provided detailed narrative accounts of their experiences with colorism and the impact colorism had on their identity negotiation on campus.  Additionally, participants offered perceptions into support systems, how they made meaning of their identity, and support systems within the context of their respective institutional setting through the use of images.  The analysis of each story provided a theoretical understanding of participants' identity developments.  Five themes were generated from patterns across the narratives that provided further insight about the significance of colorism in present day, and how that is portrayed within the institutional setting.  The next chapter will provide implications for practices, study limitations, and considerations for future research.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

*"I Have the Right:*
      *Not to justify my existence in this world.*
      *Not to keep the races separate within me.*
      *Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.*
      *Not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical or ethnic*
      *ambiguity…"*
                    *~Root's Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage*

**Research Study Review**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to better understand how Black/White biracial women navigated the campus community through negotiation of their identity at predominantly White institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. Particular attention focused on the impact of colorism on identity for Black/White biracial women. Peer groups and spaces on campus were also examined to provide further insight into how identity and sense of self were impacted.

Eleven Black/White biracial college women ranging from the ages of 18-21 took part in this qualitative research study by completing semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in two parts in addition to participating in a photo elicitation project. The data collected from the participants were analyzed and formulated into narratives, which included storied information about their formative years, perceptions about their experiences with colorism, and their perspectives about support systems on campus. A critical analysis of each story imbedded in the theoretical framework followed each narrative.

**Assumptions**

I assumed that biracial women had difficulty negotiating their identity and finding a sense of belonging within the student community at predominantly White institutions in the South. While this was true for the majority of the women in the study, this was not true for all participants, such as Casey. Casey felt she did not have to negotiate her biracial identity at Cedar University. While most of her friends were Black, she did not felt pressured to associate with only Black people. Casey felt connected to all students. She also felt the campus community was inclusive and supported of her biracial identity. I also assumed that colorism was more prevalent in the South, which was true for the participants in this study. Participants that grew up in other regions of the county indicated they never dealt with issues of colorism until they came to the South. Participants who grew up in the South further discussed the prevalence of colorism in their everyday lives. I assumed Black/White biracial women with a lighter-skin complexion had greater experiences with colorism than biracial women with a darker-skin complexion; however, women with a light-brown skin complexion discussed similar encounters with skin-tone discrimination like their lighter skinned counterparts. Additionally, colorism was not isolated to the Black community. Women in this study noted discriminatory behavior as a result of their skin complexion from the Black and White communities. According to the findings of this study, there is still a lack of resources and support systems to meet the needs of multiracial students at some institutions. However, this was not representative across all institutions of this research study. For instance, some of the women at Nance discussed how the environment was not inclusive of their biracial identity. Two of the women at Ivy discussed how the multicultural office provided programming targeted at monoracial groups, but there was nothing in place for racially mixed students. The women at Cedar felt the campus was

supportive and they were able to connect to others through events and organizations.  Finally, I assumed that biracial women who grew up with one parent had a more defined identity with one race.  The findings from this study indicate this was not true for all the women.  Five of the women grew up with one parent.  Out of those five women, Misty was the only person that grew up with a Black parent and identified as Black.  Interestingly, the other four women grew up with their parent who identified as White; however, those women identified more with the Black race.  The remaining five women of this study grew up with both parents.  Two identified as White, and three identified more with the Black race or switched back and forth between races.  There were factors that influenced the identity choice of the women identifying with the Black race.  For example, the demographics of the high school population, peer groups and alienation from their White peers were factors of influence for the women who chose to identify as Black.  Skin complexion and peer groups were the most influential factor for the women that identified as White.

## Themes

After further analysis of the narratives, five themes were generated from the data: (a) impact of colorism on identity choice; (b) skin tone discrimination through oppressive behavior; (c) identification through presentation; (d) validation of identity on campus; and e) impact of institutional climate.  Colorism was prevalent throughout the narratives in this study.  While colorism manifested itself throughout the participants' stories as they described experiences with stereotypes and discrimination, the influence of colorism on identity negotiation was prevalent for all participants with the exception of one (Casey), who did not feel colorism impacted how she chose to identify.  Casey had a strong sense of self and grew up with a strong understanding

of both her racial heritages.  Regardless of how society may have perceived her racial identity, she was confident and prideful about her biracial identity.  The remaining women in this study described the influence of colorism on their identity choice through thorough accounts of their experiences.

Participants described instances of discriminatory actions towards them based on their skin complexion.  The most prevalent form of skin-tone discrimination was derogatory name calling in which participants provided examples of names used to describe them within the context of their skin tone.  Negotiating one's identity through self-presentation involved participants providing examples of how they would alter their image or behavior to feel more accepted by the Black or White communities.  In each story, participants described how they validated their biracial identity on campus.  The women discussed joining student organizations, attending campus events and social gathering, and taking academic courses that aided in their identity validation.

Lastly, institutional climate proved to be a significant factor in supporting or hindering identity negotiation for the women of this study.  Each institutional setting demonstrated unique campus environments that the participants discussed.  The campus environment at Nance was perceived as polarized between the Black and White student populations.  Ivy's campus was seen as both inclusive and divided among the participants.  Cedar's campus environment presented the most inclusive environment for racially-mixed students out of the three sites.

## Study Limitations

There are several limitations for this research study.  First, this study examined the experiences of eleven individuals whose experiences as Black/White biracial women may not be

representative of the larger multiracial population and reduced generalizability to other racially-mixed groups such as, Black/Hispanic, Asian/White, or Black/Asian.

The sample size of this study is also a limitation in that there were only 11 participants for this study from three institutions, which limits generalizability to other Black/White biracial women. Having a larger sample size would yield additional results that would provide depth and understanding to the findings of this research study.

Additionally, concentrating on the impact of colorism on Black/White biracial women's identity negotiation can be considered a limitation of this study. While colorism can be one of the factors that influences how an individual identifies, it is not the only component. Factors such as family socialization, neighborhood influences, and media can also impact identity negotiation.

Another limitation of this study focused on the experiences of women, which limits generalizability of the impact of colorism for biracial men. Understanding how colorism influences identity negotiation of men and how that differs from women presents another perspective that was not captured in this research study.

Finally, the participants for this study all attended predominantly White institutions in the southeast region of the United States. The participants' experiences and perspectives are not representative to the experiences of Black/White biracial women attending historically Black colleges and universities, community colleges, or higher education institutions located in other regions of the United States. For example, conducting a similar study at a predominantly White institution in the northeast region of the United States may yield different findings for the experiences of Black/White biracial women.

**Implications for Practice**

Examining colorism within the context of racial identity negotiation of Black/White biracial women is a complex and a genuine concern for society that raises questions for higher education and student affairs professionals. First, the literature suggests that an individual's physical features are still relevant factors that elicit questions and debates about one's racial heritage, especially for biracial women (Kilson, 2001; Kerr, 2005; Basu, 2007). This study provided additional insight into the experiences of Black/White biracial women and how the women dealt with having their identity challenged based on phenotypical differences. In each case, participants offered context into how society perceived their racial identity based on their physical features and how their identity was challenged if their physical features did not assume those identifiers that are more prominent with a racial group.

Narrative examples further illustrated the significance of physical appearances and how individuals created a sense of self and identity. For example, Tyfany, Beth, Lily, and Michelle talked about how society perceived them to be Black because of the brown complexion of their skin, which at times, made it difficult to feel comfortable within the White community on campus. Savannah and D.D. mentioned how they felt more accepted within the White community on campus because they presumed society saw them as White due to their fair skin. Having such light skin and looking White prevented them from feeling accepted within the Black community on campus.

It is important for faculty and campus administrators to acknowledge the presence of racially-mixed students on their campus. Professionals need to be knowledgeable of the social and historical issues impacting the experiences of this population of students. In addition, professionals need to understand how campus communities are affected by the trends and

changes reflecting the increase in the number of racially-mixed students entering college (Wong & Buckner, 2008). Particularly, campuses need to understand that colorism is still a relevant discourse, not only in the Black community, but also for racially-mixed individuals that have a Black heritage. There is a continued need for faculty and staff to understand the issue of colorism and its relevance within higher education and student affairs on their respective campuses, and engage in meaningful discourse about how to best meet the needs of this population. Engaging in conversations about colorism will educate professionals about colorism and how it impacts a student's sense of self and connectedness to the college community.

The findings from this study also demonstrate a need for professionals to revisit theories pertaining to biracial identity development. Current research on biracial identity development suggested that individuals come to a positive sense of self regarding their racial identity; however, there were inconsistencies in this research study surrounding some of the participant's views on acceptance and pride about their racially-mixed heritage, and how they chose to identify. For instance, Tiffany indicated she accepted her biracial identity and was proud to be biracial, but indicated she flip-flopped periodically throughout her life with identifying as White or Black. Tyfany described herself as biracial, but identified more as Black; however, she indicated that she was proud of her biracial identity. Biracial identity development models need to be current and tested to determine what models need to be updated or what new models need to be created and tested based on the current literature and trends of today's multiracial student in college.

This study provides critical information that can lead to collaborative efforts between academic affairs and student affairs. Both entities can collaborate with each other to address curriculum issues about the historical significance of multiraciality in society and emerging

topics surrounding race and identity.  Creating opportunities within the academic and co-curricular agendas would provide intentional arenas to understand and discuss issues of colorism within the larger contact of race relations, specifically within the multiracial community.

Strange and Banning (2001) discussed how the institutional environment can impact one's experiences and how individual perspectives of the environment can vary.  The experiences for the participants of this study varied depending on the institutional setting.  The participants discussed their interactions with both Black and White peers on campus and provided insight into race relations and support systems on campus, which reinforced or hindered their biracial identity.   For instance, Victoria identified as an African American woman.  She indicated the campus community was divided between the Black and White students.  She had a stronger connection with the Black community on campus because she perceived society looked at her as a Black woman.  Many women, such as Michelle, Angie, Savannah, and Misty, felt their biracial identities were not supported.

Institutions of higher education need to be cognizant of their institutional cultures and understand what messages are being conveyed through the campus environment (Strange & Banning, 2001).  Conducting a campus climate assessment around race and inclusiveness is a tool that colleges and universities can implement in order to understand what students and staff are saying about the diversity, race, and inclusiveness on their campus.  The results from the assessment would in turn inform institutional practice surrounding the aforementioned issues.

Several of the women provided suggestions that would provide more awareness about multiracial issues and create a sense of community among racially-mixed students, which supports Sands and Schuh's (2004) and Wong and Buckner's (2008) literature in providing inclusive environments for racially-mixed students through programmatic and service efforts.

Savannah suggested creating a formal student organization. Tiffany offered that forums be held to discuss biracial issues, and Beth liked the idea of creating and implementing programs or providing services for racially-mixed students. It is important that campuses create inclusive communities that allow for racially-mixed students to come together to discuss their issues, celebrate, support each other, and educate others about what it means to be multiracial. It is crucial to this population of students' social development and success on campus.

According to previous research, biracial students tend to feel isolated and only partially accepted into racial groups consisting of students from one racial heritage (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008). Particularly, research indicated biracial students attending predominantly White institutions are constantly seeking out supportive communities and spaces on campus (King, 2008). While some participants of this study, such as Casey, did not feel alienated from either racial group, 10 of the 11 participants, such as Savannah and Misty, stated that they struggled to feel accepted by the Black and White communities, respectively, on their campus, which further supports the literature.

Additionally, participants, such as Michelle and Misty, discussed not feeling "enough" at times to fit into certain monoracial groups. Renn (2004) and Shang (2008) discussed the importance of student affairs professionals being cognizant of the issues multiracial students face, how they feel about themselves, and how inclusive communities can be created to foster a healthy sense of self. Nishimura (1998) discussed the importance of exceeding programs beyond those focused on monoracial groups and create programs and services that are inclusive for racially-mixed students. It is imperative that institutions of higher education revisit their programmatic and service efforts that pertain to diversity, inclusivity, and acceptance. Racially-mixed students need to feel a sense of place on campus, which means having programs,

workshops, and events for this population of students to come together with others that share similar experiences.

The literature suggests identity negotiation of Black/White biracial women is a continuous challenge due to the ambiguity of one's physical features that would categorize people in a racial group (Rockquemore, 2002; Storrs, 1999). Previous literature does not provide sufficient information in understanding mechanisms to validate one's identity, particularly of Black/White biracial women. The findings from this research provide further insight into understanding the ways in which Black/White biracial women validate their identity on campus, as well as data on how they display their image or behavior to seek acceptance within a racial group. For instance, Michelle and Victoria discussed joining all Black student organizations in order to assert their Black identities on campus. Beth and Tiffany enrolled in African American Studies classes to learn more about their Black heritages, but to also fit in with their Black peers. Each participant discussed methods by which they changed the way they wore their hair, how they spoke within certain professional and social settings and even to the music they listened to in order to feel accepted by their peers. Specifically, Beth, Victoria, and Angie discussed how they changed their vernacular in order to talk "more White" or "more Black" depending on what their present racial group. The narratives from this study imply that biracial identity is a process where acceptance and validation from a certain racial group is important to establish a positive sense of self.

Many of the women discussed the need for society to understand what it means to be biracial. Rodgers (1991) indicated the importance of having an in-depth knowledge of theory to serve as a prerequisite for understanding and putting theory into practice. Having knowledge about the different racial identity development models will educate and inform our practice for

working with racially-mixed students.  Pope, Reynolds and Mueller (2004) discussed how student affairs professionals need to have awareness, knowledge and skills to understand and address cultural issues of various groups.

Finally, professionals need to be mindful of their own assumptions, biases, and values while understanding the perspectives and beliefs of the students they work with on campus (Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2004).  The stories from this study indicated a need for campuses to re-examine multicultural training for staff and student leaders about different group identities. Equipping individuals with a theoretical understanding of racial identities along with knowledge about cultural competencies through intentional and informed training is imperative for establishing and implementing inclusive activities, student organizations, programs, and services on campus.  Such training is also beneficial for all racial identity groups in understanding micro-aggressions.  Beth mentioned experiencing micro-aggressions in her story.  For example, she mentioned how others would talk about her skin complexion and call her names.  This is particularly helpful for students and staff who were socialized in a monoracial cultural setting and may not have an understanding or familiarity with collaborating or socializing with racially-mixed individuals who bring with them a set of beliefs and values that may be similar or different from their own.

## Considerations for Further Research

While this study focused on the impact of colorism on Black/White biracial women's identity negotiation at PWIs in the southeast region of the United States, the broader findings suggest several recommendations for further research.

First, several themes generated from the data have implications for campuses across the country. For example, participants sought out spaces on campus to validate their biracial identity. It would be interesting for researchers to examine how Black/White biracial women validate their identity within other institutional settings, like a historically Black college or university. Further research could include a constant comparative analysis to examine the similarities and differences between PWIs and HBCUs.

This study focused on the experiences of biracial women. Future research could explore the impact of colorism between men and women. Understanding how men and women differ when negotiating their identity as a result of colorism would provide further insight into gender differences within the multiracial community.

Demographic information collected on the participants' parents provided interesting insight into how these women identified. For instance, Savannah grew up with both her parents. Her mother is Black and her father is White; however, she identifies more with the White community. Victoria grew up with her White mother, and identifies as African American. Misty was reared by her Black mother, and identifies as Black. Further research is warranted to investigate the influence of family composition on identity development and negotiation.

Additional studies could also look at regional influences in how one racially identifies. For instance, the majority of the participants grew up in the southeast region of the United States and identified as Black, White, or Biracial. Lily, who grew up in the Northeast, listed several ethnicities to further describe her identity. It would be fascinating to examine how racially-mixed individuals identified themselves across different geographic regions. There also needs to be a re-examination of biracial identity development models. Theoretical models need to be updated to fit within the context of current literature and trends related to racially-mixed

students.  Based on the findings from this study and the inconsistencies between biracial identity,

pride, and identity choice, further research needs to be conducted that focuses on a targeted

outcome of an individual's sound development of their biracial identity.

Further research on institutional policies should also be examined to understand how

colleges and universities recognize racially-mixed students on their campus.  Are students treated

as multiracial students, or considered a part of an aggregate monoracial community on campus?

Conducting research to better understand institutional perspectives and policies regarding

racially-mixed students would be interesting as this type of information can inform how

programs and services are created and implemented for identity-based groups.

## Conclusion

The findings from this research study provided new insight into understanding colorism

and how it influences identity negotiation for Black/White biracial women.  Particularly, the

results from this study add to the literature on biracial students and provide useful information

for higher education and student affairs professionals.  As the population of multiracial

individuals continues to rise, more research will need to be done to address the emerging trends

and issues this population faces.  These stories offer crucial information to better understand

Black/White biracial women as well as suggestions that can transfer to higher education and

student affairs.

The participants proved that colorism still exists and that it is a daily challenge for

biracial women who are caught between two racial worlds.  The broader findings further suggest

that colorism is still a subject that needs further examination within the multiracial community.

It remains important to address the issues surrounding skin tone differences and identity

negotiation of biracial individuals, and how those issues can be challenged and transformed within the context of racial identity.

Furthermore, these findings present an opportunity for professionals in the field to learn about this population of students, and understand how their respective students on their campuses are impacted by colorism. The stories provided by these women provided useful information that can assist campus administrators and staff with understanding the theoretical underpinnings of racially-mixed students, as well as knowledge about how to create inclusive communities for racially-mixed students. As a researcher in this field, this research study afforded me the opportunity to engage and learn from other biracial women as a collective group, but also as an individual. It reminded me how similar the experiences are, yet different in many ways.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS EMAIL SOLICATION

Dear Student:

I am doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Diane Cooper in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at The University of Georgia.  I invite you to participate in a research study entitled, "Impact of Colorism: Narratives of Black/White Biracial Women's' Identity Negotiation at Predominantly White Institutions." The purpose of this study is to understand how Black/White biracial women navigate the campus community through negotiation of their identity.  Particular attention will focus on the peer groups and spaces on campus that influence the aspect of identity for biracial women as well as exploring how skin complexion influences identity and sense of self. The findings from this research study may provide current and future higher education professionals at predominantly White institutions insight into creating more inclusive environments with spaces and people on campus to meet the needs of biracial women on their respective campuses.

If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be asked to take part in an audio-taped interview that will last approximately 60 minutes, take 5-10 photographs of images reflecting your identity and have a follow up audio-taped interview discussing the images you took, which will last approximately 60 minutes.  A $10 VISA gift card will be provided for participating in this research study, regardless if you complete the study or not.

Participants of this study must be a biracial female between the ages of 18-24 years old, with one parent having a Black racial identity and one parent having a White racial identity and currently enrolled in a predominantly White institution.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about this research study. You may contact me at sheming@uga.edu

**If you would like to participate, please send an e-mail to me as soon as possible.**  In the email, please include your contact phone number. I will call you to further discuss the details of the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.  Please keep this correspondence for your records.

Sincerely,

Shauna H. Harris

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT FLYER

# ½ Black + ½ White = 1 You

- Do you have one parent who is Black and one parent that is White?
- Are you a female college student between the ages of 18 and 24?
- Are you willing to talk about your experiences in college?

**If you answered yes to the questions above, please consider participating in this research study!**

## RESEARCH STUDY DETAILS

- This research studying is focusing on college-aged (18-24 years old) female biracial women who come from a Black/White racial lineage. The purpose of this study is to understand how Black/White biracial women navigate the campus community through negotiation of their identity. Particular attention will focus on the peer groups and spaces on campus that influence the aspect of identity for biracial women as well as exploring how skin complexion influences identity and sense of self.
- If you decide to be involved in this research study, you will be asked do the following:
  - o Participate in an audio-taped interview that will last approximately 60 minutes
  - o Take up to 10 photographs of various images reflecting your identity
  - o Participate in a follow-up audio-taped interview to discuss the photographs that will last approximately 60 minutes
  - o Disposable cameras will be provided to you upon request
- A $10 Visa Gift Card will be provided for participating, regardless if you complete the study

**If you are interested in being involved with this research study, please call us to get further information.**

**CONTACT INFORMATION**
**Shauna (Doctoral Student) – 843-655-0869**
**Diane (Principle Investigator) - 706-542-1812**

APPENDIX C

PROTOCOL FOR INITIAL PHONE SCREENING

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. As my email stated, my name is Shauna Harris.  I am conducting a research study for my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Diane Cooper in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia's College of Education.

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the identity negotiation of Black/White biracial females who attend predominantly White institutions.  We hope this information will provide awareness and knowledge about identity negotiation of Black/White biracial college women to faculty and staff working in higher education settings.

Additionally, as a result of your participation, you may come to a greater sense of awareness about your experiences as a Black/White biracial female within a predominantly White campus setting through the interview and reflective component of this study.  Discoveries of this nature may be healing or painful.  The potential for revealing painful discoveries is expected to rarely, if ever, to occur.  The degree of discomfort is expected to be minimal given the nature of the questions.

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will receive a $10 VISA gift card for your involvement, whether you complete the research study or not.

Do you think you might be interested in continuing with this study?  If so, I would like to ask you some questions to determine if you qualify for this study.  This should take less than 10 minutes of your time.

If you qualify for this study, you will be asked to meet with me for approximately a 60 minute interview which will be audio-taped; take 10 photographs of images reflecting your identity as a Black/White biracial female with a phone or digital camera you may already have or one provided to you; record your thoughts about each photo; meet with me for a follow up 60 minute interview to discuss the images you captured and reflective thoughts; review your interview transcripts; answer any follow-up questions that arrive throughout the research process, and review a draft copy of the research results.  Overall, I anticipate that you would spend between one-and-a-half hours to two hours of time in total assisting me with this research project.

If you do not qualify for this study, the information you provide me today will be stored electronically in a password-protected file in the researcher's computer files until all selected participants have been interviewed. At that time, all records of this conversation will be destroyed.  If you decide to withdraw from the research study, you can ask to have all of the

information that can be identified as yours returned to you, removed from the research records or destroyed.

There is a possibility that some of these questions may make you uncomfortable. If so, please let me know. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may also stop this conversation at any time. All information that I receive from you during this phone interview, including your name and any other identifiable information that can possibly identify you will be strictly confidential. Information received will be stored on a password protected computer on accessible by the researcher.

Do I have permission to ask you the screening questions?

**Screening Questions:**
- Do you attend a college or university? If yes, please name?
- What year are you in college?
- Are you between the ages of 18-24?
- Do you have one parent that is Black?
- Do you have one parent that is White?
- Are you willing to discuss your college experiences as a Black/White biracial female?

Thank you for answering my questions today. You [do/do not] qualify to participate in this research study.

[If qualified]
You quality for the study, so I would like to ask you some more questions regarding participation requirements of this study:

- Would you be willing to discuss your experiences as a Black/White biracial female in a personal, face-to-face 60 minute interview?
- Would you be willing to take 10 pictures using your own phone or digital camera or one provided by the researcher, reflecting your identity? Development cost of the pictures will be provided by the researcher.
- Would you be willing to discuss those developed pictures with me in a follow up, face-to-face 60 minute interview?
- Would you be willing, although not required, to review the transcripts of the interview and findings and make clarifications at a later date?

**Participant Information**
Thank you. I would like to now get a little more information about you and arrange a convenient place/time to meet to discuss the study and obtain your consent to participate. If you would like to choose a location for us to meet, we can do that, or I can arrange for a safe and secure location for us to meet at. Which would you prefer?

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Email:_____ Meeting Time:_____

Meeting Location: _____

Again, thank you so much for speaking with me today.  If you have any other questions regarding this study, please call me at 843-655-0969 or e-mail me at sheming@uga.edu.

If you have any questions or problems about your rights as a research participant, please call The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia at 706-542-3199.

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study titled, "Impact of Colorism: Narratives of Black/White Biracial Women's' Identity Negotiation at Predominantly  White Institutions," conducted by Shauna H. Harris from the University of Georgia, through the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, under the direction of Diane Cooper, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study is to understand how Black/White biracial women navigate the campus community through negotiation of their identity. Particular attention will focus on the peer groups and spaces on campus that influence the aspect of identity for biracial women as well as exploring how skin complexion influences identity and sense of self. The findings from this research study may provide current and future higher education professionals at predominantly White institutions insight into creating more inclusive environments with spaces and people on campus to meet the needs of biracial women on their respective campuses.

My participation is voluntary.  I can refuse to participate, stop participation at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.  If I decide to withdraw from this research study, the information that can be identified as mine will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless I make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If I volunteer to take part in this study:

1. I must be between the ages of 18-24.

2. I will be asked to participate in an audio-taped 60 minute interview.  If necessary, I may be contacted to clarify information or to answer additional questions pertaining to the study.

3. Take 5-10 photographs of images reflecting my identity.  A disposal camera will be provided to me upon request. Any images that contain identifiable information (i.e. images of faces), will be blurred out before any analysis takes place and will remained blurred out throughout the analysis and reporting of the research study.

4. I will be asked to reflect and record my thoughts, emotions or feelings about each photograph that describes my identity.

5. I will be asked to participate in a follow up audio-taped 60 minute interview to discuss the photographs.

6. I will be asked to review my research transcript and draft of narrative story to make sure all the information is accurate.

7. I may be asked to answer any follow up questions to ensure accuracy of information that is provided.

8. I may potentially come to a greater sense of understanding of my identity negotiation through this research study.  This revelation could potentially be helpful or painful to me.  Potential risks, discomforts or stresses are not expected; however, in the event I feel uncomfortable or that I experience heightened feelings that may need to be further discussed with a professional, I will be directed to the University of Georgia's Counseling and Psychiatric Services (706-542-2273).

9. If the researchers use any direct quotes from my interviews in any professional presentation or publications, the researchers will alter or delete any information that could identify the quotations as mine or be affiliated with my school or place of work. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission unless required by law. I will be asked to submit a pseudonym to protect my identity in any published results.

10. Information such as sex, age, years in college, racial heritage background, and major field of study may be included in the findings for demographic purposes.

11. I may elect not to answer any question during the interview without having to explain why.

12. All data will be securely stored in a password-protected file on a personal computer from January – August 2013.  After this research study is complete, all data containing individually-identifiable information will be destroyed by August 2013. Only photographs containing non-identifying information will be used for this research study.  Images of any faces will be blurred out.  No photographs will be used that could identify me will be used in any publication or presentation. The transcripts and other electronic files with non-identifiers will be kept for two years after the completion of this study, and then destroyed.

13. A $10 Visa Gift Card will be provided for participating, regardless if I complete the study

Through my participation in this study the larger society may benefit through a greater understanding of how I and other participants similar to me make meaning of our identity and experiences in college. Research participants will benefit from this study by reflecting on their experiences as a biracial female and what it means to negotiate their identity within the campus community at a predominantly  white institution. Additionally, participates may come to learn more about themselves as a biracial individual throughout the process.  This knowledge will help practitioners working with this population of individuals being studied to be as effective as educators and leaders with the campus community.

The researchers will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the study. Please contact the principle investigator, Dr. Diane Cooper at 706-542-1812 or Shauna H. Harris, co-researcher, at 843-655-0969 to answer any questions you have.

My signature below indicates that I understand the procedures described above.  My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.  I have also been given a copy of this form for my records.

_____        _____        _____
Name of Researcher                                      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, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT'S DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

1. Pseudonym _____

2. What is your racial identity? _____

3. Age _____

4. What is the racial identity of your mother? _____

5. What is the educational background of your mother?

   ☐ High School        ☐        Some College ☐ College        ☐        Advanced Degree

6. What is the racial identity of your father? _____

7. What is the education background of your father?

   ☐ High School        ☐        Some College ☐        College ☐        Advanced Degree

8. What is the education background of your father?

9. Were your reared by both your biological parents?    Yes      No

   If no, please describe below:
   ___     I was reared by my mother
   ___     I was reared by my father
   ___     I am adopted

10. What is your classification?
   ☐ Freshman             ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior        ☐ ☐ Senior

11. What is your major? _____

12. What is your hometown city and state? _____

13. List of student organizations you are involved in

   _____

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW # 1 PROTOCOL

First, I would like to take the time to thank you for participating in this interview. The purpose of this study is to understand how biracial women navigate the campus community through negotiation and validation of their identity. Particular attention will focus on the peer groups and spaces on campus that influence the aspect of identity development for biracial women as well as exploring how skin complexion influences identity and sense of self. The findings from this research study will allow me to gain a better understanding of how biracial women attending a predominantly White institution understand their biraciality, how they think others perceive their identity and how they negotiate their identity within the college community.

This interview will be approximately an hour. Everything discussed during this interview will be confidential. It is important you are comfortable throughout this interview. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, please let me know. As discussed in the consent form, you can stop this interview at any time. Additionally, if you have questions throughout this interview, please let me know. Do you have any questions, before we start?

1. How do you describe yourself?

2. When you think back over your life, describe the first time you were aware of your racial identity?

3. What messages, if any, did you receive from your parents and other family members about your biracial heritage?

4. Have you ever been asked the question, what are you? If so, how did that make you feel?

5. Have you ever had to make a choice on your identity to fit in with others? If so, how did that make you feel?

6. Describe your experiences with Black and White people in regards to your skin complexion.

7. Have you ever been racially discriminated against or stereotyped because of your skin color? If so, please describe.

8. Have you ever tried to present your identity differently at any time? Please explain?

9. How do you think others on campus racially identify you?

10. In what ways has this institution supported or not supported your racial identity?

11. How do you display your racial identity on campus?

12. How would you describe your peer groups on campus?

13. What student organizations have you identified most with?

14. Is there anything else you would you like to add that we have not discussed?

Photo Elicitation Questions

INTERVIEW # 2 PROTOCOL

For each picture, we will discuss the thoughts you recorded and what the image means to you.

1. What does this image symbolize for you?

2. Describe how this image has meaning for your identity?

3. Does this image invoke positive or negative feelings? If so, please describe.

4. Is there anything else you would you like to add that we have not discussed?

APPENDIX G

PHOTOGRAPHY INSTRUCTION GUIDE

Greetings,

   Thank you again for participating in this research study.  This portion of your participation involves taking 10 photographs of images using the camera on your phone.  If you do not have a camera on your phone, a disposable camera will be provided by me.  The following guidelines will assist you in taking photographs for this section of the research study.

- Take up to 10 photographs of images to reflect your identity

- Once photos have been developed, please record your thoughts, emotions and feelings with each corresponding picture

- Label pictures accordingly to match the written correspondence.

   If you use a disposable camera provided by me, please keep the camera in a safe location. After photographs have been taken, please contact me via phone.  A follow up interview will be scheduled with you to discuss the pictures.  If there is method you prefer to send the photographs, please let me know when we talk.   If you have any questions, please contact me at sheming@uga.edu or 843-655-0969.

Thank You,


Shauna H. Harris